

UTAH CAN MEET ITS THRIVING DEMAND FOR WORKERS BY INVESTING IN UNTAPPED LABOR

A growing population and record-low unemployment means that Utah businesses of all sizes are eager to find skilled workers. [New research](#) on the demand for digital skills illustrates how trailblazing state initiatives such as Talent Ready Utah and other workforce and education investments can be further strengthened to pay off for workers and businesses alike. The data can also help to inform Utah's upcoming State Digital Equity Plan, which will form the roadmap for millions of dollars in new federal funding over the next five years.

Importantly, targeting these investments can also ensure that workers who have previously been un- or under-employed can contribute to their fullest and highest abilities. Making sure that rural residents, veterans, and workers of color can access the same upskilling opportunities as their peers is especially important given Utah's demographics. For example, one out of four younger (ages twenty-five to thirty-four) Utah workers are people of color, a notably larger percentage than the one in five workers ages thirty-five to sixty-four and a sign of the state's evolving workforce.

EVERY INDUSTRY IN UTAH IS SEEKING WORKERS WITH TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

A [new study](#) from National Skills Coalition in collaboration with the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta confirms an urgent trend: Across all industries, businesses in Utah overwhelmingly need workers with technology skills. The study examined a massive dataset of online job postings from 2021 and found that



91 PERCENT OF ADS PLACED BY UTAH COMPANIES CALLED FOR APPLICANTS TO HAVE DIGITAL SKILLS.

Utah was one of the top ten states in the country in the percentage of "Help Wanted" ads seeking workers with digital skills.¹

Fully 91 percent of ads placed by Utah companies called for applicants to have digital skills, or skills that were very likely to be digital. These included both **foundational** digital skills (such as familiarity with office software like Google Docs or Microsoft Word) and **industry-specific** digital skills (such as familiarity with Procore construction management software or SAP Enterprise Resource Planning software).

Technology skills are in high demand for positions at every level – including new entrants to the workforce and workers with a high school diploma or associate degree, in addition to those in more senior roles.

"People hear the phrase digital skills and think we're only talking about high-end software engineering occupations. But essential workers in industries like construction, transportation, manufacturing, financial services, retail, and healthcare all need technology skills for economic mobility. In a tight labor market, Utah needs every potential worker ready to go – and that means equipping people of all backgrounds with the necessary digital skills and digital literacy needed for success," says Vic Hockett, Associate Commissioner of Talent Ready Utah.

A NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY: This report uses "digital skills" and "technology skills" interchangeably.



WORKERS ARE EAGER TO BUILD THEIR SKILLS, BUT OFTEN ENCOUNTER BARRIERS

Interviews with Utah workers in essential industries revealed that many workers are excited to build their digital skills. Often they can immediately imagine how having better skills would help them do their current job more efficiently, aid them in getting promoted, or equip them to move into to a new industry that presents better opportunities.

Overall, workers reported that participating in upskilling programs gave them a greater sense of agency and purpose in pursuing their career aspirations. But workers have uneven access to upskilling opportunities, with some reporting success and others expressing frustration with barriers they encountered.

For example, transportation can be a barrier for rural residents seeking to participate in in-person training, while lack of high-speed internet access can be a challenge for workers seeking online training. Workers who need to build their foundational skills in reading, math, or spoken English sometimes face an unnecessary barrier of remedial classes, rather than having access to training programs that follow the best practice of integrating foundational skills such as English language learning with digital and other technical skills training.²

WHAT KIND OF DIGITAL SKILLS ARE MOST IN DEMAND?

Across all industries in Utah there is a powerful demand for **foundational** skills such as general computer literacy and common office software such as Microsoft Office. This includes essential industries such as construction, utilities, and logistics/warehousing that may not always be thought of as requiring technology skills.

More **specialized** technology skill needs differ by industry. In the healthcare sector, demand is high for expertise in electronic health records software. In the manufacturing sector, Utah businesses are looking for workers who have expertise with Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. And in retail, companies want experience with point-of-sale technologies and e-commerce.

UTAH CAN TARGET ITS WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS TO TAP INTO UNDER-UTILIZED TALENT

To meet the demand for workers with technology skills and ensure that all potential workers are prepared to succeed in the digital economy, Utah should act now. **State leaders can target existing workforce and education investments as well as new federal dollars to reflect best practices in tackling the digital skill divide and closing racial and other equity gaps.**³ This includes:

- ▶ Investing in both foundational and industry-specific digital skills;
- ▶ Using integrated models that teach digital skills in the context of broader technical skills training;
- ▶ Improving collaboration among employers, higher education institutions, and workforce development providers; and
- ▶ Strengthening the capacity of nonprofit organizations serving communities of color to provide or connect jobseekers to high-quality workforce development services.

ENDNOTES

1 Fifty-one percent (51) percent of Utah job ads required a definitely digital skill, while 91 percent required a definitely or likely digital skill. Only eight other states or territories had a higher percentage of ads seeking definitely digital skills. For more details, see the full report: *Closing the Digital Skill Divide: The Payoff for Workers, Business, and the Economy* (National Skills Coalition, 2023.)

2 For more on integrated models, see *Better Together* (National Skills Coalition, 2018) and *Amplifying Impact* (National Skills Coalition, 2020).

3 For a longer discussion of these issues, see *Data Book: Diversity in Utah: Race, Ethnicity, and Sex*. (Gardner Policy Institute, University of Utah, 2021) and *The Roadmap to Racial Equity: An Imperative for Workforce Advocates* (National Skills Coalition, 2020.)