



Business Leaders United (BLU) 2012 Washington Fly-In:
Ensuring the Future of Industry-Led Skills Programs

We are calling on a select group of employers to come to Washington, DC in October 2012 to convince federal policymakers—Congress, federal agencies, and the Obama and Romney Presidential campaigns—of the necessity of a bi-partisan solution to the skills gap that continues to hamper company growth and re-employment in our communities.

The networks of employers that have come together under the umbrella of **Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnerships** have established a 5-point platform to guide our nation's policymakers toward what they must do to help close America's skills gap:

1. **Invest More in Skills:** We believe there is a role for government to fund those effective employer-led workforce initiatives that can demonstrate success.
2. **Target Industry Credentials:** As employers, we need skilled employees and industry-recognized credentials help us determine if applicants have those skills.
3. **Expand Sector Partnerships:** Good things happen when employers from a similar industry come together to address common workforce problems.
4. **Support Institutional Partnerships:** Community colleges and other training schools help us as employers when we help design the program.
5. **Accelerate Hires through OJT:** We know that on-the-job training works because we, the employers, make it work and it usually turns into a full-time job.

Within the context of this framework, BLU employers and partners have in the past proposed specific policy changes or sought specific commitments from policymakers, based on debates about skills issues on the table in Congress or with the Administration. BLU participants believe that in October 2012 there will be significant debate in Washington that will directly impact the scale and quality of workforce training programs in this country. To that end, BLU members will be coming to DC this fall with a clear agenda.

Maintaining a National Investment in Skills, Guided by Local Industry Leaders

Between now and the end of 2012, Washington policymakers will be embroiled in a highly charged debate over how to reduce the federal deficit. Some are advocating this be achieved through a combined approach of revenue increases and spending reductions. Others are proposing to close the gap solely through spending cuts—whether they be shared across defense and non-defense programs, or wrought solely from entitlement programs and discretionary investments in things like workforce training.

While the exact nature of these cuts is unspecified, indications are that there is a real chance that spending cuts will be disproportionately targeted at workforce development programs. Some argue that these cuts make sense because federally funded skills training is unnecessary (only employers should pay for the training of workers), ineffective (few training programs meet industry needs) or wasteful (we have too many programs). These cuts could effectively eliminate training slots for thousands of workers, even though we already have 3.5 million jobs that are going unfilled, in part, because employers cannot find candidates with the right skills.

For employers who have benefitted from the use of public resources to develop effective partnerships with a variety of organizations to meet current workforce needs, abandoning public investments in workforce skills at this time makes little sense—particularly when our international competitors are doubling down on their workforce's education. If U.S. employers are willing to put in the time to help community colleges, training providers, and workforce investment boards develop industry-targeted training strategies that are putting local people into good-paying skilled jobs, then the federal government should reciprocate by investing in those efforts and in holding all parties accountable for their outcomes.

To that end, BLU employers are calling on Congress and the two presidential campaigns to:

- **Reconsider wholesale across-the-board cuts to workforce training programs**, and at least restore skills funding to its pre-recession levels;
- **Increase the number of workers trained with these federal dollars** by reauthorizing, on a bipartisan basis, the Workforce Investment Act and related skills programs with a new requirement that states and localities *increase the percentage of funds spent on job-directed basic skills and technical training*, in order to prepare more workers for waiting skilled jobs; and
- **Include the kind of effective practices called for in the BLU platform**—a greater focus on industry-recognized credential attainment, expansion of sector partnership strategies, greater support for employer partnerships with colleges and local service providers, and accelerated hiring through on-the-job training—in future proposals to be developed by the Obama Administration or the Romney Administration, as well as the 113th Congress, for introduction in early 2013.