

Build an Economy That Works for Latinos

The strength of the American economy is increasingly linked to the strength of the Latino workforce. Despite a depressed job market, the Latino labor force has grown every quarter since the beginning of 2009 while the labor force overall has fluctuated widely. By 2050, one in three working Americans will be Latino.

Yet Latinos today face major barriers to employment in good jobs. Federal job creation efforts have been slow to reach Latino communities, in which 13% of workers are unemployed. Meanwhile, investments in workforce development systems struggle to meet the needs of Latino adults seeking to improve their education and skills for the jobs of the future. Congress should focus on the following policies to improve employment opportunities for Latinos:

Support regional economic strategies to foster business growth and job creation. Even in the depths of the recession, industries such as health care and energy thrived at the regional level due to coordinated public and private investments to spur innovation and business growth. Policies that support the core elements of an economic “ecosystem”—physical infrastructure, research and development, and a skilled workforce—can help businesses create jobs and communities maintain a competitive edge. The federal government should foster regional economic growth in low-income communities through business incentives tied to funding for workforce development and local hiring.

Invest in adult education and workforce development to tackle America’s skills crisis. With so many Americans out of work, it is reprehensible that U.S. businesses cannot find qualified workers to fill job openings. Yet millions of working adults, including Latinos, lack the skills and education needed to meet the demands of 21st-century employers. In order to close this skills gap, Congress should protect funding for programs to help low-skilled and limited-English-proficient adults prepare for jobs in the short term and gain the necessary skills to pursue the postsecondary education and training needed for the jobs of tomorrow.

Target funding for transportation and infrastructure projects toward high-need communities. Our inadequate, outdated, and underfunded transportation systems are keeping too many Americans—including many Latinos—from fully connecting and contributing to the national economy. Well-planned investments in infrastructure, from improving roads and bridges to upgrading the nation’s electric grid, can rebuild America’s physical and digital highways and create jobs. Congress should prioritize projects that connect affordable housing to businesses and modernize outdated transportation systems in low-income communities.

Involve community-based organizations at every stage of economic development. Nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) are intimately familiar with the unique needs of local populations. CBOs provide customized, accessible, and culturally and linguistically appropriate services to fill needs left unmet by private and government institutions. Congress should incentivize and encourage partnerships between CBOs, business, labor, community colleges, and other entities to work together to improve employment prospects for low-wage and underserved workers.

For more information, contact:

Catherine Singley, Senior Policy Analyst, NCLR, at csingley@nclr.org or

Emma Oppenheim, Workforce Development Manager, NCLR, at eoppenheim@nclr.org