Bridging Workers’ Digital Skill Gaps through Libraries

Webinar for the Public Library Association

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock
October 21, 2021
Our vision

- Jobs that require skills training are the backbone of our economy.

- National Skills Coalition fights for a national commitment to inclusive, high-quality skills training so that more people have access to a better life, and more local businesses see sustained growth.
Our networks

NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

National Network
State Network
Business Leaders
Grassroots/Workers
The pandemic brought home a new reality for business and community leaders:
Everyone needs digital skills.
Libraries have long been at the forefront of building digital skills.
New research can help librarians identify strategies to meet today’s patron needs.
Across every industry, digital transformations are occurring.
People need both *foundational* and *occupational* digital skills.
Let’s get a sense of the baseline.
About this data:

• Data you’re about to see comes from rigorous assessment called PIAAC
• Organized by OECD and conducted in US by IES of the US Department of Education before the Covid-19 pandemic
• US workers ages 16-64
• Employed at the time of survey
Foundational skill needs are widespread

Nearly one-third of America's workers lack digital skills
Many workers who lack digital literacy have jobs that require substantive computer skills.

- Among Workers with **No** Digital Skills:
  - 38% Moderate or complex computer skills needed for current job
  - 62% Straightforward computer skills needed for current job

- Among Workers with **Limited** Digital Skills:
  - 43% Moderate or complex computer skills needed for current job
  - 57% Straightforward computer skills needed for current job

People often have *fragmented knowledge*

- **Definition:** Comfortable with certain tasks, unfamiliar with others
- Digital skills *aren’t* binary
- Don’t underestimate people’s ingenuity and expertise
- Avoid assumptions about who lacks digital skills and why
- Engage people in identifying which interventions can help them make bridges between the skills they have and the skills they need
Younger workers are not immune to digital skill gaps

**NO DIGITAL SKILLS**

- 16-24: 8%
- 25-34: 17%
- 35-44: 20%
- 45-54: 29%
- 55-64: 26%

**LIMITED DIGITAL SKILLS**

- 16-24: 11%
- 25-34: 18%
- 35-44: 21%
- 45-54: 29%
- 55-64: 21%

A plurality of workers with digital skill gaps are white

Structural racism affects every aspect of digital inclusion and equity.
Structural factors that hinder skill-building for people of color can include:

- Unavailability of broadband access
- Lack of device access
- Under-resourced public institutions (schools, libraries)
- Low income
- Irregular or unstable employment
HALF OF BLACK WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS

MORE THAN HALF OF LATINO WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS


- 32% NO DIGITAL SKILLS
- 25% LIMITED DIGITAL SKILLS
- 26% PROFICIENT DIGITAL SKILLS
- 17% ADVANCED DIGITAL SKILLS
ONE-THIRD OF ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER WORKERS NEED DIGITAL SKILLS

- 36% PROFICIENT DIGITAL SKILLS
- 26% LIMITED DIGITAL SKILLS
- 10% NO DIGITAL SKILLS
- 28% ADVANCED DIGITAL SKILLS

And we don’t even have digital skills data for other key subgroups:

• Indigenous/Native people
• Disaggregated AAPI data
• State or local level by race/ethnicity
Inequities carry heavy costs

• Lack of **broadband**: consequences for safety

• Lack of own, updated **device**: consequences for privacy and access

• Lack of stable **housing**: reliance on libraries and public spaces (cut off by pandemic)

• Lack of digital **skills**: consequences for employment and income
What should libraries do?
1. Talk with your adult education partners about integrating digital skills in GED/ESL classes.

Resource: https://edtech.worlded.org/
2. Ask your local workforce board or Chamber about in-demand occupational digital skills.
3. Tap into resources from digital inclusion advocates.

Resource: www.digitalinclusion.org
4. Stress-test any digital skills credentials or badges you are offering.

Resource: tinyurl.com/QualityNDC
5. Educate policymakers about the need to invest in digital skills & remedy inequities.
But most importantly: Honor your patrons' ingenuity.

Let’s talk!
Contact

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock
Senior Fellow
215-285-2860 (mobile)
amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org
The New Landscape of Digital Literacy

How workers’ uneven digital skills affect economic mobility and business competitiveness, and what policymakers can do about it.

Full charts and graphs in this data report: https://tinyurl.com/NewLandscapeDL
How we are defining “No” digital skills:

• Workers who failed to meet one or more of 3 baseline criteria to even take the full digital skills assessment:
  1. Prior computer use
  2. Willingness to take the computer-based assessment
  3. Ability to complete 4 out of 6 very basic computer tasks, such as using a mouse or highlighting text on screen
How we are defining “Limited” digital skills:

• Workers who can complete simple digital tasks with a generic interface and just a few simple steps

• For example, sorting e-mails that respond to an event invitation into different folders
What works to build occupational digital skills:

- **Partnerships** between educational institutions and employers
- **Contextualized** and integrated learning
- **Rapid prototyping** of new programs

More details in the full report: [www.tinyurl.com/BoostingDL](http://www.tinyurl.com/BoostingDL)
Other NSC publications

- **Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy** (6-page fact sheet with details on English learners)

- **Amplifying Impact** (brief on combining English language learning and digital skills)

- **10 State Policy Recommendations** for Digital Inclusion