Dear Mr. Goldberg:

As one of the planners for Kentucky's first ever state plan, I have seen first-hand how important access to digital skill training data is to improve our communities. As a result, I am writing in support of the National Skills Coalition's responsive sensitivity to this issue supported by the information below.

The NTIA Internet Use Survey is a unique and invaluable source of data about US residents' digital access and adoption.[1] The federal government is the sole source of statistically representative, rigorous information on this topic, which is of profound importance to workers, businesses, and other stakeholders. No other data collection effort or vendor even comes close.

For this reason, it is crucial to ensure that the next iteration of the survey responds to critical shifts in the US economy and labor market that have been underway since the survey was last carried out in 2021. In the past several years, the world has changed dramatically. In particular, the continuing Covid pandemic has rapidly created new digital skill demands: Parents suddenly need digital skills to oversee their children's K-12 education, elders and rural residents need skills to receive vital telehealth services, and workers of every age need skills to stay employed as their jobs transform to require new technology skills and capacities.

Indeed, research from National Skills Coalition has documented that 92 percent of jobs now require digital skills. Significantly, this demand is just as high for entry-level jobs – those that require a high school diploma or just 0-2 years of experience – as it is for more white-collar occupations.[2] This massive transformation in the US labor market has profound implications for individuals of all backgrounds, including those named as "covered populations" under the federal Digital Equity Act. In particular, being able to identify where there are significant digital skills barriers and needs within US communities is absolutely vital to targeting investments and interventions, and ultimately to ensuring that people have the skills they need to survive and flourish.

But data gathering on digital skills has not kept up. Neither the federal government nor states, localities, or the private sector have been gathering the type of baseline information about Americans' digital skills that is vital to informing workforce and education policies, including billions of dollars of investment that will flow to states over the next five years thanks to the

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. While data on high-speed internet access and digital devices is of course crucial, we urge NTIA to ensure that the 2023 iteration of the Internet Use Survey also captures specific, focused data on digital skills.

To that end, I support the National Skills Coalition's recommendations:

- **Support NTIA's proposal to ask respondents about specific tasks they may carry out using digital technologies (pages 7-9 of the [proposed questions](#)). This is a useful proxy measure to help gauge whether people are (or are not) equipped to use computers and other digital tools to accomplish key activities of daily life, including those that are vital to health, well-being, and economic stability.**

- **Strongly recommend that NTIA add 3 questions pertaining to education and employment. The survey already (appropriately) includes three targeted questions focused on health. Economic stability is equally crucial to individuals' and families' well-being, and for that reason we think it is well worth adding a handful of targeted questions on that topic. We propose specific questions below:**

  - **Education/workforce Q1: In the past 12 months, have difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills stopped you from applying for a job offer or promotion? (YES/NO)**
  - **Education/workforce Q2: In the past 12 months, has there been a work task or responsibility that you were unable to complete because of difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills? (YES/NO)**
  - **Education/workforce Q3: In the past 12 months, has there been an educational or learning opportunity that you were not able to participate in because of difficulties in using a computer or other technology that requires digital skills? (YES/NO)**

(If there is room in the survey, they suggested asking an additional set of three questions, similar to the three above except focusing on "problems with internet access." But rest assured, the community recognizes that NTIA is juggling many competing demands for data, and we recommend the above questions as the highest priority.)

- I strongly recommend that NTIA add a question probing who people turn to when they do not know how to do a digital task. See example below.
  - **Question: Thinking of the most recent time that you needed help using a computer or another digital device (such as a smartphone) to complete a task, where did you turn to for help? (CHOOSE ONE)**
    - **I figured it out by myself**
    - **Online tutorials or videos**
    - **Friend or family member**
    - **Co-worker or supervisor**
    - **Community institution such as a school, library, or religious organization**
    - **Business help desk (such as Best Buy's Geek Squad or Apple's Genius Bar)**
    - **Other (record verbatim answer)**
    - **Don't know/I can't remember needing help**

I appreciate NTIA's careful attention to these important issues and stand ready to discuss any of the recommendations in more detail at your convenience. Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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[1] Also referred to as the Current Population Survey (CPS) Computer and Internet Use Supplement.

[2] *Closing the Digital Skill Divide* (National Skills Coalition, 2023).