

MAKING THE CASE

USA

Case Studies on Inclusive Economic Development



Lindsay Bain, Iris Bernheim, Hughes Ntwari,
Ragini Sharma, Eryn Young

munkschool
OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS & PUBLIC POLICY



October 28, 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 Background

1.1 Context.....	4
------------------	---

2.0 Built for All: Applied

2.1 Pillar One: Equitable Access to Resources and Opportunities	6
2.2 Pillar Two: A Level Playing Field for Work and Competition	7
2.3 Pillar Three: Collective Stewardship of Shared Resources for Future Generations.....	8
2.4. Conclusion.....	9

3.0 References

3.1 References	11
----------------------	----

1.0

Background



1.1 Context

The U.S. has one of the largest and most advanced economies in the world. Its market economy is highly developed; by nominal GDP, it is the largest in the world. The U.S. has had a thriving technology and innovation sector, with companies like Apple, Google, and Verizon leading the way. Nonetheless, it must contend with widening wealth gaps between the wealthiest and the rest of the population as well as rising income inequality. Wealth ownership is skewed, with much being concentrated in the hands of a small minority of the population. By the 1990s, the United States had surpassed all industrial societies in the extent of inequality of family wealth (Krueger & Perri, 2003).

For several reasons, the United States has become increasingly interested in creating a more egalitarian economic environment. Lowering inequality can promote economic stability and lessen the likelihood of financial crises, but addressing economic and income inequalities is also seen as an issue of social justice and fairness (Krueger & Perri, 2003). One consequence of a rapidly changing global economy is the displacement of workers from obsolete industries. It is important to protect the economically vulnerable through programs that equip them with new skills and training. As businesses pursue cost savings through automation, some jobs are increasingly becoming obsolete.

Verizon's "Skill Forward" Program

According to Verizon Communications, "One-third of workers don't have the foundational digital skills to enter today's jobs" (Verizon, n.d.-b). In response, Verizon has launched its "Skill Forward" program, which aims to provide tuition-free, technical, and professional pathways across in-demand industry sectors (ibid). This ambitious objective is part of Verizon's responsible business plan for economic and social advancement; preparing half a million workers for jobs of the future by 2030, as well as partnering with digital learning platform edX, to accelerate digital inclusion nationwide. The following sections will discuss Verizon's initiatives with respect to the three pillars of Built for All.



2.0

Built For All: Applied



2.1 Pillar One: Equitable Access to Resources and Opportunities

The Built for All pillar most relevant to Verizon's Skill Forward approach in the US is pillar one: **equitable access to resources and opportunities**. This pillar seeks to ensure that social barriers are dismantled by optimizing the accessibility of factors necessary to achieve prosperity. By pledging \$44 million to upskill 500,000 employees for desirable technology careers by 2030, Verizon, in partnership with edX, is actively contributing to preparing workers for jobs of the future (Verizon, n.d.-b).

This objective directly aligns with pillar one outcomes, such as:

- proliferating meaningful education and training,
- expanding digital access and literacy through free courses,
- fostering the development of in-demand skills for high-attrition roles,
- encouraging collaboration across industries, and
- calling for change by increasing human capital, and thus, worker leverage in the labour market, which creates pathways for a revitalized middle class.

Strengths

Much can be learned from Verizon's innovative and worker-focused program, Skill Forward, most notably the widespread inclusivity and long-term success metrics.

Firstly, by eradicating the potential for financial and geographic restrictions, a much broader demographic of America's labour force can benefit. Also, offering diverse training courses is a key strength to capture an array of crucial technology roles sought out for by modern jobs.

Secondly, Verizon's commitment to acquiring further education, internship placements, and/or full-time employment for at least 50% of graduates within 3 months of course completion (Verizon, n.d.-a) sets a measurable standard for success. This standard will act as a key driver to the sustainability and efficacy of Verizon's Skill Forward program, along with other present and future labour reskilling efforts.

2.2 Pillar Two: A Level Playing Field for Work and Competition

Strenghts

Verizon's Skill Forward Program further advances the goals of pillar two of the Built for All framework by helping workers to develop the necessary skills for the jobs of tomorrow. By partnering with the education sector, the program promotes a level playing field for work and competition in two ways.

First, the program advances the narrowing of the skills gap between workers. Facilitating access to courses offers a chance of upskilling for vulnerable workers whose jobs might become automated in the future. The program has a strong digital aspect and puts forward the development of digital skills through IT courses. The program is further highly personalized, enabling workers to acquire new productive skills. Hence, it effectively contributes to the reduction of the skills gap between workers, and specifically digital capabilities, thus preparing them for the jobs of the future.

Second, the program is designed to effectively reduce barriers that discriminated communities face in finding and keeping work. By narrowing the skills gap between workers, it opens a chance for horizontal and vertical mobility for low-skill workers. On the other hand, by targeting to place at least 50% of those who complete the program via internships, part-time or full-time opportunities (Verizon n.d.-b), the program actively offers low-skilled workers job opportunities. The program advances the goal of reducing barriers for Black, Hispanic, and Asian communities. Indeed, most low-skill work and jobs vulnerable to automatization are completed by these communities in the U.S. (MIT, 2021). By being free and providing courses in Spanish, the program also ensures that barriers to education are reduced for discriminated communities (Verizon n.d.-b).

Opportunities for Improvements

One limitation is that while the program is designed to help the digitalization of low-skill workers, its very nature requires them to be, to some extent, already digitally literate. While some classes are organized in person, most of them are online which limits its accessibility for those who do not have a good access to the internet and those who are not digitally literate (ibid.).

2.3 Pillar Three: Collective Stewardship of Shared Resources for Future Generations

Strengths

The Built for All framework's third pillar, "Collective stewardship of shared resources for future generations," focuses on collaboratively preserving and enhancing shared resources for future generations (Franco et al. 2020). Verizon's Skill Forward program demonstrates a shift from a singular focus on immediate profits to a broader, long-term vision by investing in upskilling and reskilling its workforce. This aligns with pillar three by ensuring that human capital, a shared resource, is nurtured and preserved. Verizon is acknowledging the importance of human capital and ensuring that both existing and future generations are well-equipped to navigate the digital future (edX & Verizon n.d.). This signals that they recognize the value of their employees and their responsibility towards them, transcending short-term business gains and investing in shared resources (knowledge, skills, and infrastructure) to ensure sustainable value for future generations (ibid.). By investing in training for the existing and next generation of workers, Verizon is ensuring that the workforce remains competitive, adaptable, and ready to face future challenges (edX & Verizon n.d.; Verizon n.d.-b).

While the Skill Forward program primarily targets workforce development, its emphasis on digital proficiency indirectly supports the move towards a more sustainable future. Digitization can play a crucial role in environmental stewardship by optimizing processes, reducing waste, and promoting efficiencies. Moreover, by partnering with edX, Verizon is ensuring equitable access to quality education and resources, aligning with the ideal of making sure that "all places and future generations benefit from well-maintained public infrastructure" (Franco et al. 2020; edX & Verizon n.d.). By collaborating with educational platforms, Verizon is leveraging and adding to a shared pool of educational resources available for the public, which provides the potential for a broader reach (Verizon n.d.-b; edX & Verizon n.d.). This resonates with the idea that sectors should "align long-term R&D efforts to solve complex societal challenges" (Franco et al. 2020). While the current focus on digital skills is commendable, there is a significant opportunity for the program to branch out to other emergent fields (e.g., renewables, green energy, and climate change could address another recommended outcome in the framework). With its digital framework, the program also has the potential to expand and tap into diverse international markets. Engaging industry experts in curriculum design could further refine the program while ensuring content remains up to date with industry requirements and innovation.

In essence, Verizon's Skill Forward program is not merely a training initiative; it is a manifestation of the commitment to stewarding shared resources with a vision for the future. They are championing collective stewardship by investing in their people, fostering collaborations, and ensuring actions today pave the way for a more inclusive and sustainable tomorrow.

2.4 Conclusion

Equity is fundamental for sustainable development and inclusive growth in all economies. As nations grapple with striking disparities, innovative initiatives like Verizon's Skill Forward program are crucial to address this problem. The Built for All framework lays out an ambitious pathway for inclusive growth, and Verizon's Skill Forward program aligns well with Mastercard's mission by offering training and skill development opportunities to everyone. The program not only uplifts individuals but also helps create an economy that is more balanced and collaborative.

Moreover, with the constant evolution of technology and digitization, the U.S. job market is bound to change, and thus, the importance of initiatives like Skill Forward is clear. The emergence of new sectors and industries introduces new skills that can be made accessible through adaptable educational platforms like Verizon's Skill Forward. This futuristic program not only prepares individuals for higher-paying careers today, but also for long-lasting and fulfilling careers by offering technology-relevant training.

While the goals of this program are transparent, it is essential that we assess whether the desired outcomes are being achieved. Verizon has yet to publish comprehensive outcomes of Skill Forward as the program is quite new; however, there are many individual success cases highlighted on Verizon's website. Also, though the digital nature of Verizon's Skill Forward program promises flexibility for a wider audience, it is important to acknowledge the digital divide that prevents some individuals from leveraging such initiatives. Future iterations originated by any organization should seek to expand in-person course offerings where remote learning is not conducive, and diversify the scope of applicable technology careers that graduates will have gained the capacity to pursue. Therefore, Verizon's US-based Skill Forward initiative is an exemplary embodiment of all pillars of the Built for All framework, which, with improvements, is well poised to become one of the best practices for modernized labour needs in an increasingly polarized economic landscape.

3.0

References



3.1 References

edX LLC & Verizon. (n.d.) "edX Verizon Skill Forward." Verizon Skill Forward.
<https://partnerships.edx.org/verizon>.

Franco, A., Humes, M., Ivey, R., Shapiro, W., & Vogel, D. (2020). A global framework for building inclusive economies. Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth & Centre for Public Impact.
<https://built4all.org/>

Krueger, D., & Perri, F. (2003). On the Welfare Consequences of the Increase in Inequality in the United States. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w9993>

Silver, A., Kalloch, S. and Ton, Z. (2021). A Background Note on "Unskilled" Jobs in the United States – Past, Present, and Future. MIT Sloan School.
https://mitsloan.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2021-11/MBA-Employment-Report-2021-2022_2.pdf.

Verizon. (n.d.-a). Skilling the next generation of workers, re-skilling the digital workforce. Edison Alliance. <https://www.edisonalliance.org/impact-verizon-skill-forward>.

Verizon. (n.d.-b). Upskilling and Reskilling Programs for Digital Skill Training.
<https://www.verizon.com/about/responsibility/human-prosperity/reskilling-program>.

Photo 1: Hope2Women (2025). Earn a free College-Level Certificate with Verizon Skill Forward.
<https://hope2women.org/earn-a-free-college-level-certificate-with-verizon-skill-forward/>;
picture retrieved from: <https://hope2women.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Verizon-Skill-Forward.png>

Photo 2: Verizon. (n.d.). Upskilling and Reskilling Programs for Digital Skill Training.
<https://www.verizon.com/about/responsibility/human-prosperity/reskilling-program>

Photo 3: Verizon (n.d.) Upskilling and Reskilling Programs for Digital Skill Training.
<https://www.verizon.com/about/responsibility/human-prosperity/reskilling-program>

Photo 4: Verizon. (n.d.). Skilling the next generation of workers, re-skilling the digital workforce. Edison Alliance. Accessed on November 24, 2025. <https://www.edisonalliance.org/impact-verizon-skill-forward>.

Photo 5: Verizon. (n.d.). Upskilling and Reskilling Programs for Digital Skill Training.
<https://www.verizon.com/about/responsibility/human-prosperity/reskilling-program>