

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA  
ONE HUNDRED NINTH LEGISLATURE  
FIRST SESSION

**LEGISLATIVE BILL 94**

Introduced by McKinney, 11.

Read first time January 10, 2025

Committee: Business and Labor

- 1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to job training; to amend section 81-407,
- 2 Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska; to adopt the Digital Skills
- 3 Empowerment Act; to change the use of the Workforce Development
- 4 Program Cash Fund; to provide an operative date; and to repeal the
- 5 original section.
- 6 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1           **Section 1.** Sections 1 to 7 of this act shall be known and may be  
2 cited as the Digital Skills Empowerment Act.

3           **Sec. 2.** (1) The Legislature finds that:

4           (a) Digital skills are essential in the modern workforce, and  
5 technology-related fields often offer higher wages and job security;

6           (b) Communities in qualified census tracts in Nebraska, particularly  
7 in areas like North Omaha, face barriers to accessing digital education  
8 and training due to economic, infrastructural, and educational  
9 disparities;

10           (c) Equipping residents of such communities with digital skills will  
11 increase employment opportunities, reduce income inequality, and  
12 stimulate local economies; and

13           (d) Equipping residents returning from prison from such communities  
14 with digital skills will increase employment opportunities, reduce income  
15 inequality, stimulate local economies, and reduce recidivism in local  
16 jails and penal institutions.

17           (2) The purpose of the Digital Skills Empowerment Act is to:

18           (a) Provide accessible, affordable digital skills training and  
19 certification for residents of qualified census tracts in Nebraska;

20           (b) Foster community-based digital apprenticeship programs;

21           (c) Increase employment in digital trades for communities in  
22 qualified census tracts across Nebraska; and

23           (d) Develop sustainable, ongoing support systems for workforce  
24 development and career progression in technology-related fields.

25           **Sec. 3.** For purposes of the Digital Skills Empowerment Act:

26           (1) Local educational institution means a community center, a  
27 community college, a school as defined in section 79-101, or a vocational  
28 institution;

29           (2) Low-income individual means an individual with a household  
30 income between one hundred and two hundred percent of the federal poverty  
31 level; and

1       (3) Qualified census tract means a qualified census tract as defined  
2 in 26 U.S.C. 42(d)(5)(B)(ii)(I), as such section existed on January 1,  
3 2025.

4       **Sec. 4.** (1) The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the  
5 Department of Economic Development, shall:

6       (a) Establish a grant program to provide grants to local educational  
7 institutions within qualified census tracts and nonprofits to develop and  
8 operate digital skills training centers which are to be located within  
9 qualified census tracts to provide access to digital skills training to  
10 individuals that may lead to digital skills certification. The total  
11 amount of grant funds awarded pursuant to this subdivision shall not  
12 exceed twenty million dollars per fiscal year; and

13       (b) Establish a grant program to provide grants to cover tuition,  
14 learning materials, transportation, necessary equipment, and child care  
15 for low-income individuals to access a digital skills training center and  
16 receive training leading to a digital skills certification. The total  
17 amount of grant funds awarded pursuant to this subdivision shall not  
18 exceed twenty million dollars per fiscal year.

19       (2)(a) A local educational institution or nonprofit may apply to the  
20 Department of Labor for a grant pursuant to subdivision (1)(a) of this  
21 section in a manner prescribed by the department and shall include with  
22 such application:

23       (i) The name of the applicant and a contact person for such  
24 application;

25       (ii) Information regarding the applicant's qualification as a local  
26 educational institution or nonprofit;

27       (iii) The planned location of the digital skills training center;

28       (iv) The type of digital skills training, courses, and certification  
29 to be available at such center;

30       (v) The amount of funding requested, how such funding is to be used,  
31 and, if applicable, how such funding use may help individuals returning

1 to such community from jail or prison; and

2 (vi) Any other information the department may require.

3 (b) If the funds available for grants in any year are insufficient  
4 to provide grants to all eligible applicants described in subdivision (2)  
5 (a) of this subsection, the department shall establish priorities to  
6 award such grants.

7 (3)(a) An individual may apply to the Department of Labor for a  
8 grant pursuant to subdivision (1)(b) of this section in a manner  
9 prescribed by the department and shall include with such application:

10 (i) The name of the applicant;

11 (ii) Information regarding the applicant's status as a low-income  
12 individual;

13 (iii) The digital skills training center the individual plans to  
14 attend;

15 (iv) The amount of funding requested, how such funding is to be  
16 used, and, if applicable, how such funding use may help individuals  
17 returning to such community from jail or prison; and

18 (v) Any other information the department may require.

19 (b) If the funds available for grants in any year are insufficient  
20 to provide grants to all eligible applicants described in subdivision (3)  
21 (a) of this subsection, the department shall establish priorities to  
22 award such grants.

23 **Sec. 5.** (1) The Department of Labor, in collaboration with the  
24 Department of Economic Development, with input from the technology  
25 industry, shall develop standardized, industry-aligned curricula for use  
26 in digital skills training centers that include:

27 (a) Core digital skills; and

28 (b)(i) Special tracks for certain skills that include, but are not  
29 limited to, web development, cloud computing, and digital marketing; and

30 (ii) Fast-track bootcamp programs to teach specialized skills in a  
31 short timeframe. Digital skills training centers shall provide both

1 virtual and in-person options of fast-track bootcamp programs to better  
2 accommodate participants.

3 (2) The Department of Economic Development shall encourage  
4 partnerships with Nebraska-based technology firms and national technology  
5 companies to:

6 (a) Provide input on curricula design;

7 (b) Offer guest lectures, mentorship, and hands-on training  
8 opportunities at digital skills training centers; and

9 (c) Facilitate access to industry-standard tools and software at  
10 digital skills training centers.

11 **Sec. 6.** (1) The Department of Labor shall establish a grant program  
12 to provide grants to technology companies or businesses in Nebraska to  
13 establish paid apprenticeships in digital trades.

14 (2) An apprenticeship provided pursuant to this section shall offer  
15 direct, hands-on experience in a technology related role such as a junior  
16 developer, data analyst, or cybersecurity assistant. Such apprenticeship  
17 program shall include assisting an apprentice with developing a resume,  
18 preparing for interviews, and connecting with technology employers.

19 (3)(a) A technology company or business may apply to the department  
20 in a manner prescribed by the department for a grant to hire a paid  
21 apprentice or apprentices in a technology related role. The total amount  
22 of grant funds awarded pursuant to this subsection shall not exceed ten  
23 million dollars per fiscal year. Such application shall include:

24 (i) The name of the company or business and a contact person;

25 (ii) Information regarding the qualification as a technology company  
26 or business;

27 (iii) The location of the apprenticeship program;

28 (iv) The type of apprenticeship that shall be available as part of  
29 the grant;

30 (v) The amount of funding requested, how such funding is to be used,  
31 and, if applicable, how such funding may help individuals returning to

1 such community from jail or prison; and

2 (vi) Any other information the department may require.

3 (b) If the funds available for grants provided pursuant to this  
4 section in any year are insufficient to provide grants to all eligible  
5 applicants, the department shall establish priorities to award such  
6 grants.

7 (4) The Department of Labor shall:

8 (a) Partner with technology companies and businesses receiving a  
9 grant pursuant to this section to help apprentices progress from entry-  
10 level positions to mid-level and senior-level positions within such  
11 company or business or in the technology industry;

12 (b) Partner with employers in Nebraska in the technology field to  
13 provide information to individuals interested in the technology industry  
14 related to job fairs, networking events, and apprenticeships; and

15 (c) Develop a network of contacts to provide apprentices and others  
16 interested in the technology industry with job opportunities, promotion  
17 guidance, and continued training resources.

18 **Sec. 7.** It is the intent of the Legislature to appropriate fifty  
19 million dollars from the Workforce Development Program Cash Fund to the  
20 Department of Labor for fiscal year 2025-26 and each fiscal year  
21 thereafter to provide grants pursuant to the Digital Skills Empowerment  
22 Act.

23 **Sec. 8.** Section 81-407, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, is  
24 amended to read:

25 81-407 The Workforce Development Program Cash Fund is hereby  
26 created. The fund shall consist of transfers authorized by the  
27 Legislature. The Department of Labor shall administer the fund to provide  
28 workforce development grants and grants pursuant to the Digital Skills  
29 Empowerment Act. Any money in the fund available for investment shall be  
30 invested by the state investment officer pursuant to the Nebraska Capital  
31 Expansion Act and the Nebraska State Funds Investment Act.

1           **Sec. 9.** This act becomes operative on January 1, 2026.

2           **Sec. 10.** Original section 81-407, Reissue Revised Statutes of  
3 Nebraska, is repealed.