America Forward's Transition Policy Brief: "Imagine What's Possible"

In June 2024, **America Forward**, the nonpartisan policy initiative of the venture philanthropy firm **New Profit**, launched ***Imagine What's Possible***, our 2024 campaign paper outlining a comprehensive, actionable policy roadmap for the next Administration and Congress. Grounded in the expertise of our 100+ Coalition members, the paper provides policymakers with strategies to enhance America's education system, expand economic prosperity, and safeguard democracy for future generations.

As the 2024 election approaches, we are excited to build upon the ideas in Imagine What's Possible and share this transition team policy brief. This document offers clear, actionable policy recommendations for the next Administration and Congress to implement and address our country's most pressing social and economic issues.

Invest in the Infrastructure of Social Innovation

Social entrepreneurs work every day to create, test, and scale innovative solutions that improve outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. However, outdated government funding structures often hinder rather than accelerate this innovation. Now is the time to learn from past efforts and translate promising pilots into long-term policy reforms. We urge the next Administration and Congress to:

1. Invest in Federal Evidence Funds

- **Expand federal evidence funds that support practitioner-led innovation, learning, and scaling of high-impact social programs** across multiple policy domains, such as preK-12 education and public health. Since 2009, federal policymakers have allocated over $10 billion to programs like the Social Innovation Fund and Education Innovation and Research. These funds have demonstrated outsized impacts, offering larger grants to evidence-backed strategies while supporting promising early-stage innovations. As highlighted in America Forward's 2023 report, expanding and refining these funds is critical to driving innovation and scaling effective programs.[1]

2. Sustain and Expand Innovative Financing Structures

- Expand financing structures like the **Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPPRA)**, which rewards measurable improvements in people's lives. Launched in 2018 with a $100 million demonstration program, SIPPRA is a transformative shift in federal investment, focusing on locally driven, cost-effective programs. With the Treasury Department set to announce the second round of SIPPRA awards, we urge the next Administration to build on lessons learned and advocate for the program's expansion.

1 See https://www.americaforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/America-Forward-Unlocking-Innovation-in-Evidence-Funds-October-2023.pdf

3. Increase Accessibility and Expand Federal Data Linkages

- Improve federal data systems to support program improvement, coordination, and transparency. Building on the 2018 **Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act**, the next Administration and Congress should clarify the authority to leverage administrative data across policy areas, enabling access for non-governmental organizations. Key initiatives include fully funding the **National Secure Data Service pilot** created by the CHIPS and Sciences Act and enhancing the National Directory of New Hires for WIOA-aligned TANF outcome measures[2] and the creation of a Secure Query Service at the Internal Revenue Service.[3]

4. Streamline Federal Grants and Contracting Processes

- Simplify and improve federal grant and procurement processes, which often favor organizations with expertise in completing grant applications rather than those with the most innovative, impactful programs. The next Administration should launch a **new interagency effort** focused on outcomes, transparency, and fairness in federal contracting and grants, building on recent progress.

5. Eliminate Credential-Based Barriers

- The next Administration and Congress should continue bipartisan efforts to remove credential-based barriers in federal hiring and contracting, promoting skills-based hiring that prioritizes experience and opens opportunities for all. Specifically, we urge the new Administration to build on executive orders under the past two administrations as well as bipartisan efforts around the country[4] supporting skills-based hiring for federal employees and work to eliminate similar barriers for federal contractors, ensuring opportunities are based on skills and experience, not just formal credentials.

6. Strengthen Public Engagement and Elevate Community Voices

- We propose that within the first hundred days, the Administration publish an executive order focused on strengthening public engagement and elevating community voices in federal policy development and implementation. Too often, these policy processes have been inaccessible to the people who will be most affected by changes to social programs and have failed to leverage these leaders crucial first-hand expertise. America Forward's partnership with 100+ community-focused organizations nationwide has shown us the critical value of these stakeholders' perspectives.

---

2 See https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/06/28/2024-13865/temporary-assistance-for-needy-families-work-outcomes-measures

3 See https://conference.nber.org/conf_papers/f194317.pdf

4 See https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-07-01/pdf/2020-14337.pdf; https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/06/25/executive-order-on-diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce/; https://opportunityatwork.org/stars-policy-project/

Ensure Economic Mobility for all Americans

The demand for workers continues to grow nationwide, yet millions of people –especially from historically overlooked communities –still face systemic barriers to economic mobility. To address these challenges and provide sustainable solutions, the next Administration and Congress should:

1. Reauthorize and Modernize Workforce Laws:

- **Reauthorize WIOA:** Prioritize the reauthorization and modernization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), by making key investments in evidence-based strategies through a new Workforce Development Innovation Fund, as proposed in the **Better Jobs Through Evidence and Innovation Act**. WIOA reauthorization should also incorporate essential system-wide reforms that shift from a compliance-based regime to an inclusive, outcomes-focused approach; strengthen transparency and data-driven decision-making across the system by investing in data infrastructure; and reduce barriers for high-impact community-based providers to participate in WIOA.
- **Enhance SNAP E&T Programs:** Ensure that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs prioritize evidence-based, inclusive, and innovative practices. Reauthorize the Farm Bill to incorporate critical reforms such as the RESET for America's Future Act and SNAP E&T Data and Technical Assistance Act (DATA).
- **Modernize TANF:** Build on recent bipartisan efforts to improve data and outcomes in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, ensuring the program addresses persistent inequities.
- **Expand Perkins CTE:** Reauthorize and expand investment in the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act to fund high-quality, responsive career and technical education programs and encourage practitioner-led innovation to build the evidence base.

2. Invest in Innovation and Outcomes-Focused, Evidence-Based Solutions:

- **Launch a National Evidence Fund:** DOL should establish an evidence fund modeled after the Department of Education's Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program to encourage innovative, evidence-based strategies in national programs.
- **Strengthen Support for Evidence-Based Approaches:** The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) must strengthen technical assistance to state and local workforce boards, as well as private providers ensuring they can understand and implement the current evidence base, leveraging a strong start in the DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR).
- **Clarify Pay-for-Performance Guidance:** DOL should issue clear, updated guidance on how workforce boards can utilize pay-for-performance strategies[5] to achieve longer-term workforce outcomes, addressing confusion caused by past WIOA guidance.[6]

3. Strengthen Workforce Data Infrastructure.

The lack of reliable and comprehensive workforce data – covering training programs, education outcomes, and long-term employment – severely limits decision-making for job seekers and policymakers alike. This fragmented data ecosystem undermines efforts to improve workforce development. We urge the next Administration to prioritize the recommendations from America Forward, the Data Quality Campaign, and over a dozen national organizations and take immediate administrative action to reform the nation's workforce data infrastructure. Key steps include:

- **Issue Clear Guidance on Data Linkage:** The next Administration should issue guidance clarifying states' ability to link workforce and education data, facilitating better coordination and decision-making.
- **Leverage National Data Sources:** Strengthen the workforce data ecosystem using national resources like the National Directory of New Hires to supplement and enhance state-level data.
- **Improve Reporting on Training Providers:** Enhance transparency and accountability by improving national reporting on eligible training providers through platforms like TrainingProviderResults.gov.

4. Revitalize the Job Corps program*:*

- **Sectoral Strategies Demonstration:** Leverage the Secretary of Labor's statutory authority to launch a Job Corps sectoral strategies demonstration under Section 156 of WIOA. While Job Corps accounts for about a third of WIOA funding each year, rigorous evidence suggests the program is not as effective as it could be.[7] However, extensive research shows sectoral programs can drive long-term improvements in economic mobility through high-quality education and training, comprehensive support, strong employer connections, and by providing a direct pathway to high-value credentials in a more cost-effective manner.[8] We recommend allocating $100 million for a five-year, rigorously evaluated initiative engaging multiple providers and sectors to provide targeted, high-impact education and training for participants.

Increase Early Learning Resources with a Focus on Performance and Results

Research shows that children's experiences in their first five years profoundly shape their future opportunities. Across the country, innovative programs have demonstrated the critical role quality, culturally relevant early learning programs play in improving outcomes for children in under-resourced communities. However, while the federal government has long supported programs like **Head Start** and the **Child Care and Development Block Grant**, more investment is needed to ensure the development of young children. We urge the next Administration and Congress to:

1. Focus on Performance and Streamline Implementation

- **Reduce red tape in Head Start** by simplifying processes and incentivizing providers to collaborate with families and community organizations toward common goals. The federal government should adopt policies that tie resources directly to outcomes, ensuring early learning programs are effectively meeting the needs of children and families.

2. Build a Strong Early Educator Workforce

- The next Administration and Congress should invest in creative approaches to early educator preparation and credentialing, such as utilizing **Federal Work Study** funding and national service opportunities. Increasing compensation, professional development, and growth opportunities for early educators is essential to building a high-quality workforce capable of delivering impactful early childhood education.

---

5 See https://americaforward.medium.com/incentivizing-outcomes-how-the-new-wioa-reauthorization-bill-could-better-serve-diverse-working-53cd78039252

6 See https://results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WIOA-PFP-DOL-TEGL-Recommendations-1.pdf

7 See https://www.jstor.org/stable/26723967

8 See https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/Evidence-Review_Sectoral-Employment_2222022_0.pdf

3. Promote Innovative Early Childhood Investments

- **Support research, data collection, and systems improvements** to identify the most effective ways to meet the needs of diverse subgroups. By investing in innovation, policymakers can drive the development of early learning programs that are responsive to the unique needs of children from different backgrounds and communities.

Invest in Whole Learner Education and Mental Health Supports

Research shows student success relies on engaging learning experiences, safe environments, and strong relationships between students, educators, and families. America Forward Coalition members have proposed a new, innovative "whole-learner" approach to help schools use evidence-based practices to transform education. Simultaneously, innovators are developing solutions to address schools' rising mental health challenges and the shortage of behavioral health professionals. We urge the next Administration and Congress to:

1. Pass the Whole Learner Act

- The **Whole Learner Act** would expand evidence-based practices through a competitive grant program, fostering high-quality partnerships and school-wide systems that support a whole-learner approach to education. This includes mental health support, teacher training, and active family engagement.
- We also urge the new administration to highlight existing funding and technical assistance that can be used to support a whole learner approach to education, particularly the way funds can be blended and braided across funding silos.

2. Support the Youth Mental Health Corps

- America Forward, in partnership with AmeriCorps, the Schultz Family Foundation, and Pinterest, has launched the **Youth Mental Health Corps**. This initiative brings together federal, state, and local agencies, philanthropic organizations, corporate partners, schools, and nonprofits to pilot a national service program. This program provides a pathway into behavioral health careers by engaging over 500 young adults as mental health navigators in schools and community organizations across 11 states. With policymakers' support, the Youth Mental Health Corps can be scaled to transform mental health support in schools nationwide. We urge the new administration to support the YMHC and consider additional ways to increase on ramps to the behavioral health field so that there are enough mental health professionals to support student mental health.

3. Provide additional resources to address post-pandemic learning loss

- The effects of the pandemic on students are ongoing, even as the funding to help students recover and address unfinished learning is ending. It will take a continued multi-sector approach to address the lingering effects of the pandemic, particularly for low-income students. We urge the new administration to provide additional resources to school and non-profit organizations to ensure that students have the supports and evidence-based programs they need to thrive. One example at the state level is the new Maryland Partnership for Proven Programs, which is an innovative public-philanthropic collaboration which provides matched funding to scale up education programs that have been proven to work.

Focus on Outcomes in Higher Education

Innovative organizations have created inclusive, evidence-based strategies to make higher education accessible to all young people. These strategies help students identify postsecondary options early, navigate complex financial aid, and utilize wraparound supports to overcome barriers. Most importantly, they pave the way for career success through transformative experiences and advising during and after college.

These programs can expand their impact if federal funds prioritize evidence-based strategies that address students' needs rather than focusing solely on institutional funding. We urge the next Administration and Congress to:

1. Increase Investment in Postsecondary Student Success Grants

- This new evidence-based, competitive grant program fosters the development, evaluation, and scaling of postsecondary student success strategies to help students complete their credentials and achieve long-term career success. We urge the next Administration and Congress to ensure that non-governmental organizations, which have played a central role in scaling evidence-based strategies, are eligible for participation and that the program is implemented effectively.

2. Expand Federal Student Aid

- We call on the next Administration and Congress to expand **Pell Grants** to support high-quality, short-term, career-focused programs, making critical training more accessible to millions. As Congress deliberates on bipartisan proposals for **short-term or Workforce Pell Grants**, the administration should push for a solution that emphasizes strong outcomes measures and builds the infrastructure for standardized, relevant data accessible to stakeholders.

3. Increase Access to Postsecondary Navigation Services

- Beginning in middle school, students need access to high-quality career pathway guidance and opportunities for early postsecondary experiences. In addition to expanded investment, we call on the next Administration and Congress to prioritize fixing the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** system and ensure the past year's missteps–which likely harmed college enrollment and success for millions of students– can never happen again.

4. Ensure Access to High-Quality, Actionable Data

- Students and their advisors need robust, accessible data to make informed choices about postsecondary programs and financing. We encourage continued efforts to improve data availability through the College Scorecard and similar tools to better guide students toward success in the next Administration and Congress.

Restore Our Democracy and Strengthen Civic Participation

Young people and the next generation of leaders face the immense challenge of restoring American democracy. National service, primarily funded through **AmeriCorps**, is vital in providing essential community services, preparing individuals for diverse career paths, and fostering unity among people from various backgrounds. By leveraging national service, policymakers can enhance civic engagement, cultivate future leaders, and address critical challenges in under-resourced schools and communities while strengthening democracy and the social fabric. To ensure that young people and the next generation of leaders are civically prepared, informed, and engaged, the next Administration and Congress should:

1. Pass the Bipartisan Civics Secures Democracy Act

- America Forward calls on the next Congress to pass the **Bipartisan Civics Secures Democracy Act**. This Act represents a historic investment in civics education, supporting states and school districts in delivering high-quality civics instruction. It aims to significantly increase the number of young people prepared to become knowledgeable voters and active civic participants. Additionally, it provides teachers with the professional development they need to facilitate productive conversations, fostering a generation of civic-minded students who care about their communities and the future of democracy.

2. Create a new White House Office of Civic Participation

- Restoring democracy requires public-spirited leadership across all levels of government. A **White House Office of Civic Participation** within the Executive Office of the President should be established to lead this effort. By focusing on fair elections, broad civic engagement, and national service, this office would spearhead a national call to action, propose policies, coordinate federal agency work, and engage leaders across government and the nonprofit sector to advance these goals.

3. Fully Fund AmeriCorps

- We urge the next Congress to fully fund AmeriCorps, including its summer and semester of service programs. AmeriCorps provides financial support for higher education or loan repayment and offers valuable work experience and career pathways for young people and those in transition. By equipping members with practical skills and instilling a spirit of service, AmeriCorps helps fill critical positions in fields like teaching, nonprofit work, emergency management, healthcare, and other service-focused areas. The program also delivers reliable full-time support to nonprofits, schools, and workplaces, strengthening communities and fostering a more resilient, thriving nation.

4. Address Barriers to Participation in National Service

- The new Congress should revise legislatively mandated criminal background checks for programs like AmeriCorps and enhance recruitment efforts to ensure equitable access to national service for underrepresented individuals.

5. Strengthen Connections Between National Service, Education, and Economic Mobility

- The new Congress should prioritize AmeriCorps funding for programs that provide participants with clear pathways to valuable credentials, particularly in fields like climate resilience and conservation. The next Congress should also expand service opportunities through the Federal Work Study program, recruit AmeriCorps members into teaching positions, and increase transparency around corps member workforce outcomes.

In Summary

The upcoming transition presents a crucial opportunity to move beyond hyper-partisanship and legislative gridlock, restore trust in our institutions, and make meaningful progress for communities nationwide. By prioritizing the voices of proximate leaders – those who understand the needs of their communities and are ready to serve – we can create space at the policy table for innovative solutions that drive real, lasting change.

About Us

New Profit believes in the transformative power of people to drive progress and equity across the United States. For over 25 years, we have supported over 250 high-impact, breakthrough social innovators committed to expanding opportunity for all. By backing visionary leaders who achieve measurable results, New Profit is pivotal in strengthening communities. We also work to dismantle the barriers that prevent these leaders from accessing the philanthropic capital needed to scale their impact.

America Forward recognizes the power of bringing together proximate leaders and leveraging collective advocacy to shape federal policies and drive resources toward innovative, effective solutions to our nation's most pressing social challenges. The America Forward Coalition includes over 100 social innovation organizations operating in all 50 states and over 15,000 communities nationwide.

For more than 15 years, we've worked together to share insights from communities and advocate for public policies that promote fairness and focus on meaningful outcomes for students, workers, families, and communities. Our efforts have secured nearly $2 billion in federal funding for scalable, evidence-based reforms and advanced critical policies to improve education, expand economic mobility, and strengthen our democracy.

Additionally, America Forward's Advocacy Institute offers training sessions for our Coalition organizations to help members become better, bolder advocates. These sessions supported America Forward Coalition members in building their policy and advocacy capacity. In 2024, our trainings focused on elevating proximate voices in advocacy and leveraging communications for the 2024 election.

Together, New Profit and America Forward are imagining a future where the best solutions guide larger-scale investments, continually improving and expanding through policy support to ensure everyone can achieve their full potential.

CONTACT US

For additional information or to discuss any of America Forward's recommendations in more detail, please feel free to reach out to:

Anthony Covell, Manager of Government Affairs
Anthony_Covell@newprofit.org

Chase Sackett, Policy Director
chase_sackett@newprofit.org

Heather Rieman, Director of Advocacy
heather_rieman@newprofit.org

Jessica Crawford, Field Leadership Partner
jessica_crawford@newprofit.org

America FORWARD
an initiative of NEWPROFIT