

Google to give \$1 billion to nonprofits and help Americans get jobs in the new economy

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Google will invest \$1 billion over the next five years in nonprofit organizations helping people adjust to the changing nature of work, the largest philanthropic pledge to date from the Internet giant.

The announcement of the national digital skills initiative, made by Google CEO Sundar Pichai in Pittsburgh, Pa. Thursday, is a tacit

acknowledgment from one of the world's most valuable companies that it bears some responsibility for rapid advances in technology that are radically reshaping industries and eliminating jobs in the U.S. and around the world.

Pichai's pitstop in an old industrial hub that has reinvented itself as a technology and robotics center is the first on a "Grow with Google Tour." The tour that will crisscross the country will work with libraries and community organizations to provide career advice and training. It heads next to Indianapolis in November.

"The nature of work is fundamentally changing. And that is shifting the link between education, training and opportunity," Pichai said in prepared remarks at Google's offices in Pittsburgh. "One-third of jobs in 2020 will require skills that aren't common today. It's a big problem."

Google will make grants in its three core areas: education, economic opportunity and inclusion. Already in the last few months, it has handed out \$100 million of the \$1 billion to nonprofits, according to Pichai.

The largest single grant—\$10 million, the largest Google's ever made—is going to Goodwill, which is creating the Goodwill Digital Career Accelerator. Over the next three years Goodwill, a major player in workforce development, aims to provide 1 million people with access to digital skills and career opportunities. Pichai says 1,000 Google employees will be available for career coaching.

In all, Google employees will donate 1 million volunteer hours to assist organizations like Goodwill trying to close the gap between the education and skills of the American workforce and the new demands of the 21st century workplace, Pichai said.

The announcements which drew praise from state and local politicians

including Pennsylvania governor Tom Wolf come as Google scrambles to respond to revelations that accounts linked to the Russian government used its advertising system to interfere with the presidential election.

Google is embroiled in a growing number of other controversies, from a Labor Department investigation and a lawsuit by former employees allege systemic pay discrimination to the proliferation of misinformation in search results and extremist content on YouTube. As the controversies have multiplied, so too have calls for Washington to regulate Google because of its massive scale and global reach.

"This isn't the first time we've seen massive, market-creating and labor market-disrupting companies try to address growing public pressure and possible regulatory limits in this way. But it often has been individual corporate titans who've gotten into philanthropy—Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller—as a way to rehabilitate their own images, tarnished by anxiety about the size of their companies and treatment of workers," said Margaret O'Mara, a history professor at the University of Washington. "What's interesting here is what this signals about how Google's future business ambitions. It is betting that its next era will be one not of search and apps but of devices and labor market interventions."

Google's not alone fending off critics. A recent headline in tech news outlet TechCrunch read: "Dear Silicon Valley: America's fallen out of love with you."

The tech industry, once a shiny symbol of American innovation and pride, has found itself on the defensive after the election of Donald Trump, which telegraphed the deepening disillusionment of everyday Americans who have watched the gains of the economic recovery pass them by.

While whole communities in the nation's heartland have fallen into economic decline, the tech industry, clustered in vibrant coastal hubs like San Francisco and New York, has grown wealthy off new developments that are disrupting how Americans live and work.

The pace of that innovation is quickening. For years tech companies could not deliver on promises of hyper-intelligent machines capable of performing human tasks. Now the technology is catching up to the aspirations.

In recent years, Google and other companies have made long strides, from self-driving cars that whisk you to your destination to digital assistants who answer your questions. This new wave of automation that aids consumers in their everyday lives has a dark side: It's killing off traditional jobs and stranding workers, still struggling after the recession, who are unprepared for the shift.

Google, says O'Mara, will have "undeniably disruptive impacts on the jobs people do and the skills they need for them."

In the 1960s when computer-aided automation worried the nation, presidential and congressional commissions and government agencies tackled the challenge.

"Now it's the private sector. And even though \$1 billion sounds like a lot, it is a small number compared to government education programs or, for that matter, the balance sheets of large tech companies," O'Mara said.

When Pichai came to the United States from his native India 24 years ago, it was the first time he had been on a plane. Pittsburgh was the first city he saw. Though Pittsburgh was moored to its early 20th century roots as a steel town, Carnegie Mellon University was already propelling the city into the future.

"As a new arrival, I was homesick but struck by something new: the sense of optimism," he said. "I remain a technology optimist."

Pichai envisions that transformation for Pittsburgh as a blueprint for the country to make the transition to a new industrial era. On Thursday, Pichai detailed other programs Google is undertaking.

- Grow with Google is a free online program to help Americans secure the skills they need to get a job or grow their business. Job seekers, business owners and teachers can learn the basics of working with tech, from spreadsheets to email, get training and certificates through [google.com/grow](https://www.google.com/grow). Google says it has rolled it out to 27,000 middle and high school students and now plans to expand it to community colleges and vocational programs.

- In January, Google will launch an IT certificate program developed with online education provider Coursera that includes hands-on labs to prepare people for jobs in eight to 12 months and then connects graduates with potential employers. Google will sponsor 2,600 full scholarships through nonprofit organizations.

- Working with Udacity, Google is creating the Google Developer Scholarship Challenge. The top 10% of applicants who enroll in Google developer courses will receive scholarships.

- Google will give away 20,000 vouchers to get G Suite certification.

"We don't have all the answers. The people closest to the problem are usually the people closest to the solution," Pichai said. "We want to help them reach it sooner."

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