

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE BY FOSTERING DIGITAL LITERACY



At BMC, we're committed to making sure that the [Autonomous Digital Enterprise](#)—our vision of the future state of business—includes everyone. The key to that is digital literacy, which is a part of our BMC Cares mandate to inspire and empower our workforce to invest in people and enrich communities across the globe and help advance a more equitable world.

As of [January 2021](#), there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide, which equates to 59.5 percent of the global population. But online doesn't necessarily mean digitally literate and increasingly, that's a must-have to enter the business world. Organizations such as the [Lila Poonawalla Foundation \(LPF\)](#) are working to help improve digital literacy for girls who come from an economically challenged background. BMC is a proud supporter of the India-based nonprofit public charitable trust that promotes education for girls and empowers young women with merit- and need-based scholarships and skill-building and training programs.

Digital literacy and upskilling

Digital illiteracy isn't exclusive to underdeveloped countries. It's an issue even in the U.S., a nation with one of the deepest online footprints and richest education systems. According to the recent National Skills Coalition study, [The New Landscape of Digital Literacy](#), 31 percent of U.S. workers across all industries lack digital skills—13 percent say they have no skills and 18 percent say they have limited skills.

Digital literacy is integral not just for getting good jobs, but also maximizing earning potential once you're in the door. The study found that 57 percent of workers with no digital skills are in the lowest half of earnings, and 47 percent with limited skills fall into that category.

Building digital literacy includes developing “hard” and “soft” skills—or upskilling—to grow the next-generation workforce for our global economy. In an [article for the 2020 World Economic Forum Annual Meeting](#), PwC global chairman Robert E. Moritz explained upskilling this way, “For some, upskilling means learning how to code and leveraging and scaling technologies. For others, it’s about understanding what technology can do and how it can drive innovation. It’s also about much more than hard skills like learning new digital tools and competencies. The soft skills—leadership, adaptability, how to translate feedback into measurable change—are what make the short-term skills training more long-lasting and transformative.”

A recent World Economic Forum report in collaboration with PwC, [Upskilling for Shared Prosperity](#), added transferable skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and self-management to that list. The report found that if skills gaps are closed by 2028, it would add \$6.5 trillion to the global GDP by 2030, and if the gaps were closed by 2030, it would add \$5 trillion by that same year. The report also estimates upskilling could create 5.3 million net new jobs globally.

Opportunities for growth in India

India is a country where a majority of its population is online, with approximately 560 million users, yet the most recent [National Family Health Survey](#) found that over 60 percent of women in 12 states and Union territories have never used the internet. And that’s despite 48 to 90 percent of women owning a mobile phone, which reinforces the idea that access to technology doesn’t equate the ability to use it.

That inequality for Indian women extends to the white-collar workforce, too. According to the United Nations Development Program’s [Human Development Indicators](#), just [26.9 percent](#) of women enrolled in university are focused on science, technology, engineering, and math programs, and only [20 percent](#) of women participate in the organized labor force while [76 percent](#) are informally employed in roles that are manual, low-paying, and offer little to no benefits or opportunities for growth.

Becoming a steward for change

The Lila Poonawalla Foundation (LPF) is working to correct that. Since its inception in 1995 by Mrs. Lila Poonawalla (recipient of the Padma Shri in 1989) and Mr. Firoz Poonawalla, LPF has transformed the lives of over 10,900 girls and their 75,000-plus family members. BMC has been a proud corporate partner of the foundation since 2014, supporting girls age 17 to 22 from families with incomes less than USD \$4,500 who are pursuing a Bachelor of Engineering degree. The scholarships cover tuition, housing, books, and ancillary costs.

LPF teaches essential, technical, and functional skills and gives ample exposure to its scholarship awardees in a range of industries. LPF also assists its girls with internships and placement opportunities, so they can pursue the professional career of their choice. Over 98 percent of the girls enrolled in the program complete their courses, with 95 percent participating in at least three skill-building and training programs annually. Over 65 percent of the program’s graduates secure jobs within the first year of course completion, with an average 15 to 20 percent pursuing post-graduate education and 5 percent pursuing a career in the civil services.

Over 63 girls have been sponsored by BMC, and we are currently employing four program graduates. This year, BMC India donated 50 refurbished laptops and is sponsoring 12 students.

Conclusion

By fostering digital literacy and supporting groups like the Lila Poonawalla Foundation, and others striving to bridge the digital literacy gap ([Fundacion Llamada Solidaria](#), [Raspberry Pi Foundation](#), [Black Girls Code](#), [Learning Equality](#), [TechBridge Girls](#) and [Nexleaf](#)), we all have the power to invest in the women who will become the technology and business professionals and leaders of tomorrow.