Despite our desire for life to return to normal quickly, we will be living with the virus for some time, even under the best scenarios. Here are three insights into how to improve employment during this time.

First, this is an ideal time for rebuilding our infrastructure. This is a priority on my list in a recent column about how to structure a new `New Deal'. Updating infrastructure helps increase employment, while also building for the new economy. This involves rebuilding roads, airports, and water and power supplies. It can be done with a greener economy in mind: repairing and extending public transportation systems and improving pedestrian and bicycle access in urban areas, as well as investing in greener power sources, storage and delivery. There is no better time for this than when these systems are seeing lower-than-usual usage.

Second, keeping the virus at bay while opening businesses requires greater social distancing and spreading people out. One way to do that is to spread out hours so that fewer people are present at any time across the spectrum of our production: schools, shops, offices, factories, and warehouses. Spreading out hours requires more days of the week and longer hours where any particular place is open, which generally translates into more workers overall. As everyone's work timing is rearranged, there is less need for everything to be operating on the same clock, and a greater advantage to having everything open for longer hours and for more staggered schedules. This will not be free: it will be a financial burden for companies that are already experiencing reduced demand and strained finances. It also involves higher costs to schools, and state and local governments whose budgets that are already under pressure from unexpected virus-related costs and falling tax revenues. Thus, it will require federal funding.

Third, many lost jobs won't be coming back. The virus has accelerated the closing of businesses that were already on a downward trend. There is no better time for acquiring new skills than when unemployed; and younger workers will be better off tooling up for the new economy that will emerge from the ashes of the old one. However, many don't have the savings to finance their education. Thus, this requires substantial injections of financing and aid for education and re-skilling. This is an opportunity to widen the availability of student loans that are repaid in the least onerous manner: as a percentage of future earnings (a feature of some existing federal programs), instead of via fixed payments that drag people down when they don't quickly land steady, high-paying jobs.

It is not a time to wait for the economy to pick up on its own – we will be hit again as recurring waves and shutdowns continue to ripple through the economy. People will be cautious in spending money for some time, businesses cannot simply return to normal crowds, and some jobs will never be coming back. We can take each of these into account via stimulus spending: hiring people for a big push on rebuilding infrastructure, aid for businesses who hire in order to stretch their hours, and by financing workers acquiring new skills for the future. We need timely efforts and

cooperation from government and businesses to put our unemployed back to work in the short and long run.

Matthew O. Jackson is a professor of economics at Stanford University and an external faculty member of the Santa Fe Institute. He is the author of The Human Network