

# GUILD

## What U.S. Workers Want from Education



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WM employee and  
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## Introduction

The future of work is shifting under our feet, and workers want more. According to IBM, roughly 120 million<sup>1</sup> workers need additional training or education to remain competitive in light of AI and automation in the coming years. Given the impact of COVID-19, this number is likely greater today. However, workers don't feel equipped for what's to come: 76% of workers say they don't have the skills to be successful in the future of work, yet 28% are working to acquire those skills<sup>2</sup>.

Working adult learners make up 40%<sup>3</sup> of higher education students in the U.S., but they've long been left behind by a system that's failed to understand what they need—and want—out of their education. What they need—and how to achieve it—is the focus of Guild's work. This report provides a quick snapshot into who they are and what they really want out of their education so that all leaders focused on the future of learning and work can ensure this population is set up for success.

## Who are working adult learners?

Working adult learners are significantly more likely than traditional college students to<sup>4</sup>:



be older,  
most are 25+  
years old



have caretaking  
responsibilities



work full time or  
more than full time  
(>40 hrs/wk)



have been out of  
school longer, many  
for 5 or more years

Working adult learners are more often motivated to build on existing skills to advance their careers. They place a high value on the following when it comes to their education:

1

Online learning

4

Ways to accelerate time to completion

(e.g., credit for training)

2

Flexible schedules

5

Utilizing supports like coaching and advising

3

Self-paced learning

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**U.S. workers struggle to return to school because of the cost—but see the value of education in advancing their careers and ultimately improving their financial situation<sup>5</sup>.**

**47%**

of workers cite the cost of education as a challenge they have faced when furthering their education, and **40% worry about student loan debt**

**51%**

of all workers report experiencing disruptions to their job in the past year (e.g., reduced hours, overtime, furloughs, or layoffs)

**2/3**

of workers believe **additional education** will help improve their financial situation

## Motivators for getting more education

Learners Guild supports want more than a degree, they want opportunity and career advancement<sup>6</sup>.

The #1 reason that Guild learners cite for pursuing education is career advancement:



Other reasons are also closely related to career advancement: increased earnings and personal growth (both 63%). Many learners think about their primary goal in terms of how career advancement can unlock greater personal opportunity: beyond wage growth, they are looking for things like a more predictable schedule, more stability, and being an inspiration to family members.



Program completion is still important—many learners associate it with:

- 1) gaining the full set of desired skills
- 2) reaching a personal goal of committing to and accomplishing something

For most learners, though, completion is not the ultimate end goal but the means to an end. Therefore, we think it's essential that outcomes must include both completion as well as career and economic mobility.

## What they desire out of their next job

**~50%**

of learners are driven by internal career advancement

**1 in 4**

learners expect to have a new title in the next 12 months

## In searching for their next role, learners most desire<sup>7</sup>:

1. Opportunities for growth (83%)
2. Higher pay (78%)
3. Long-term stability (73%)

## Guild’s framework for measuring outcomes

At Guild, we assess institutions based on a holistic set of outcomes. We think it’s important to take a lens of the “return” on education to the learner - both maximizing returns in terms of career mobility as well as decreasing barriers to access.

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>CAREER MOBILITY</b></p> <p>Are learners achieving career advancement through increased promotion rate and salary increase?</p>	<p><b>2</b></p> <p><b>ATTAINMENT</b></p> <p>Are learners progressing through and completing programs, and gaining skills and competencies?</p>
<p><b>3</b></p> <p><b>SATISFACTION</b></p> <p>Would learners recommend their program?</p>	<p><b>4</b></p> <p><b>EQUITY</b></p> <p>How do these outcomes break down by student background, including race/ethnicity, prior education level, gender?</p>

For an individual learner, success could mean completing a program, or it could be getting a promotion or role change—so we think about a measurement strategy that looks holistically at **success and access**. For example, in an analysis of one **sample employer partner**, we found that Guild learners experienced increased earnings not only upon completing their program, but **as early as within six months of starting their program**.

	Guild learners	Non-engaged peers
chance of promotion* within six months of enrollment	25%	7%
received a promotion* by two years after enrolling	45%	11%

\*This corresponded to an average earnings increase of \$16,000.



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## Sources

- 1 [IBM Report on Closing the Skills Gap](#)
- 2 [Salesforce Digital Skills Index](#)
- 3 [National Center for Education Statistics](#)
- 4 Public online survey conducted by Guild with 868 workers across the U.S. who were either enrolled in a university program or planning to enroll within the next year (April 2021)
- 5 Public online survey conducted by Guild with 1,902 workers across the U.S. (January 2022)
- 6 Online survey conducted by Guild with 617 Guild members who had recently submitted applications to university programs (June 2021)
- 7 Online survey conducted by Guild with 573 Guild members ranging from recent applicants to graduates (February 2022)



Guild was designed to reskill your workforce for the jobs of the future through education. Our learning marketplace enables career pathways for every employee, increasing retention and driving talent development, while supporting critical DE&I efforts. To learn more, visit [guildeducation.com](https://guildeducation.com).

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