

The Resource Gap

Insights on Young Professionals'
Critical Career Decisions

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In today's world of endless options and information, it's easy to assume that young adults feel empowered about their futures. But our research tells a different story—one where too many are overwhelmed, underprepared, and disconnected from the opportunities that could change their lives.

- One in four young adults can't find a job in the career they want to pursue.
- Nearly two-thirds are still unsure about the direction they're heading.
- Almost half say they feel unsupported or isolated in figuring it out.

This journey is even harder for young adults who aren't pursuing a four-year degree. Jobs are changing faster than ever, and many career paths today don't follow the traditional mold. But the information and support needed to navigate these options often doesn't exist (or reaches students too late).

What some employers perceive to be a gap in talent's abilities is actually a gap in resources.

We're working to close it. Tallo is a one-stop-shop where young people can explore careers, learn and earn credentials that employers value, and ultimately get hired. We're a career co-pilot that guides early talent through what can be a confusing, fragmented process and turning it into a clear, personalized journey from exploration and learning to employment.

The earlier we reach young people, the better. [Our research shows](#) 70% of early talent decide on their future employers while still in high school or early college, yet many are left to navigate the next steps alone.

This report is a wake-up call—and an opportunity. Young adults aren't waiting for someone to hand them a plan—they're searching, exploring, and hoping to find clarity. Smart employers aren't waiting for talent to be "job-ready"—they're showing up early, building trust, and leading them there. Those are the employers who will win the next generation of talent.

If we want to build a future where people are seen for their skills and potential, and employers can access the talent they need, we can't afford to wait.

Let's get to work.



Allison Danielsen
CEO, Tallo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young adults face complex challenges as they navigate today’s labor market. Despite an increasing amount of career resources and information available online, this talent group is grappling with [mounting financial concerns](#), [large-scale underemployment](#) and a changing job landscape - like [GenAI making some entry-level skills \(and jobs\) obsolete](#). As the declining population [exacerbates the talent shortage](#), employers can’t afford to dismiss an entire generation of workers because they seemingly lack “[job-ready skills](#).” Rather, employers will have to make a concerted effort to understand this talent segment so they can intervene with [critical career navigation support](#) and influence early on to connect young talent to in-demand careers.

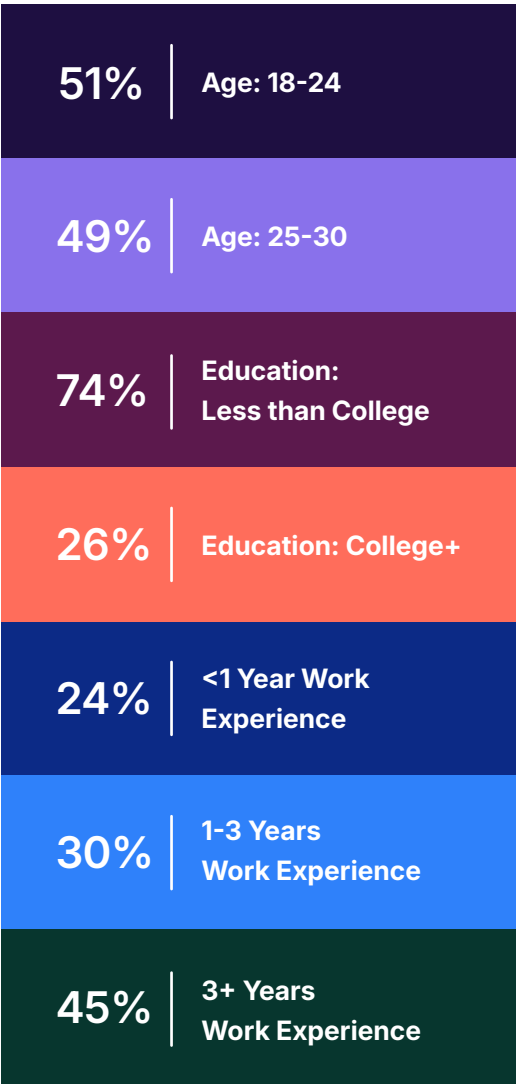
This report examines the experience in the labor market of early talent. Tallo surveyed more than 2,000 young adults aged 18 to 30 years old to better understand where they stand in their career journeys, the barriers in their way, and the values that drive them in achieving their career goals. This “early talent” segment covers a 12-year difference spanning two generations and many different talent profiles: from high school graduates, to college students, to entry-level workers, to professionals with up to a decade of experience under their belts.

The goal in publishing this report is to help bridge the gap between young adults and career opportunities. This insight into how (and when) to connect with early talent will enable employers to offer critical information and opportunities as early talent makes career-related decisions and forms perceptions.

ABOUT TALLO

Tallo is the trusted guide that bridges the gap between early talent and opportunity. Since 2012, Tallo has empowered nearly 2 million young people (13-30) to connect with hundreds of employers, training programs, and post-secondary providers across the country. The platform connects early talent to opportunities that lead to thriving careers, while providing employers with access to talent and insights that inform early-talent strategies that resonate and yield results. These connections have a meaningful impact on local communities and help our nation prepare the next generation of talent for evolving workforce demands. For more information, visit www.tallo.com.

Survey Respondent Breakdown



¹ James Tapper, “Gen Z and young millennials battling ‘negative wealth’ as debt burden grows,” The Guardian, April 5, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/apr/05/gen-z-and-young-millennials-battling-negative-wealth-as-debt-burden-grows>. ² Burning Glass Institute and Strada Institute for the Future of Work, Talent Disrupted: Underemployment, College Graduates, and the Way Forward, 2024, <https://www.strada.org/reports/talent-disrupted>. ³ Joseph Fuller, Matt Sigelman, and Michael Fenlon, How Gen AI could change the value of expertise, Harvard Business Review, <https://hbr.org/2025/03/how-gen-ai-could-change-the-value-of-expertise?ab=HP-hero-featured-1>. ⁴ Carroll, T., How a declining U.S. population will impact work, Fast Company, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91041704/declining-population-impact-workforce>. ⁵ Heubeck, E. (2023, December 20). Gen Z lacks job-readiness skills, survey shows. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/gen-z-lacks-job-readiness-skills-survey-shows/2023/12>. ⁶ Fuller, J. B., McKittrick, K., Seibel, S., Wilson, C., Dash, V., & Epstein, A. (2023, November 29). Unlocking economic prosperity: Career navigation in a time of rapid change. Harvard Kennedy School Project on Workforce. <https://www.pw.hks.harvard.edu/post/career-navigation>

CONFIDENCE + EXPLORATION

We asked respondents to reflect on how confident they are in terms of their career goals (how certain they are of the career they want to pursue) and how much exploration they have done already (how much they think about their future career paths).

Some of the responses were not surprising. For example, those who know exactly what career they want to pursue have thought a lot about their future career paths. Inversely, those who said they have no idea what career they want to pursue had not done much exploration either.

Interestingly, collectively nearly two-thirds (62%) of respondents are at least somewhat undecided in their future career plans, reporting that they either:

- a. have **some idea** of which career they want to pursue
- b. **know the career area** they want to work in but **not the specific career or job**
- c. have **no idea** what career they want to pursue

Which best describes where you are in terms of your future career goals?



I know exactly what career I want to pursue



I have some idea of which career I want to pursue



I know the career area I want to work in but not the specific career or job



I have no idea what career I would like to pursue

EMPLOYER INSIGHT

More than half of talent (54%) is actively exploring and thinking about their future career paths, but are not yet decided on a specific job or field. Employers should invest time and resources to connect with this talent group early on, as they have not yet decided on a career path and could be open to new opportunities and fields.



“

1 in 4 young adults are struggling to find a job in the initial career they want to pursue.”

1 in 4 adults between 18 and 30 say they are struggling to find a job in the initial career they intended to pursue, while slightly fewer say they are already in their intended career.



I am progressing towards the career I want to pursue



I am struggling to find a job in the initial career I want to pursue.



I am already in the career that I want to pursue.

EMPLOYER INSIGHT

As 25% of respondents are struggling to find a job in the initial career they want to pursue, employers should ask themselves: How can I alleviate or remove barriers in order to help talent connect with my company's job opportunities?



When breaking down the respondents by group, we found that certain talent subsets were more likely to say that they were struggling to find a job in the initial career that they wanted to pursue:

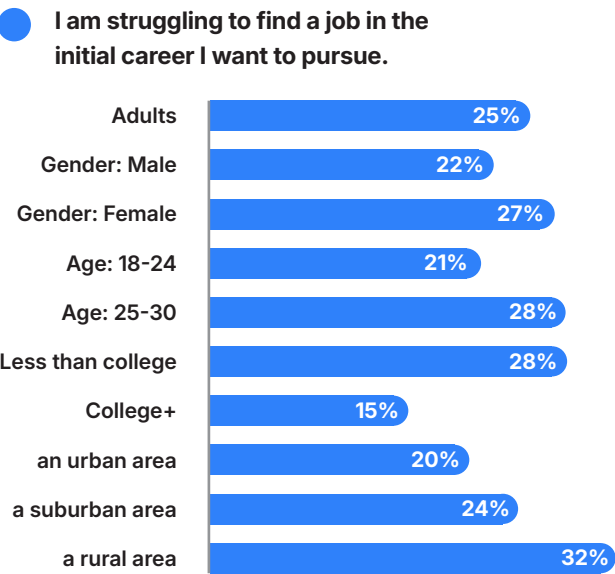
32% | Talent living in a rural area

28% | Talent without a college degree

28% | Talent ages 25-30

27% | Female talent and male talent (22%)

Adults with less than a college degree are 13-points more likely than those with a degree to be struggling to find a job in their intended career. Similarly, rural adults are 12-points more likely than urban adults to be experiencing this struggle.



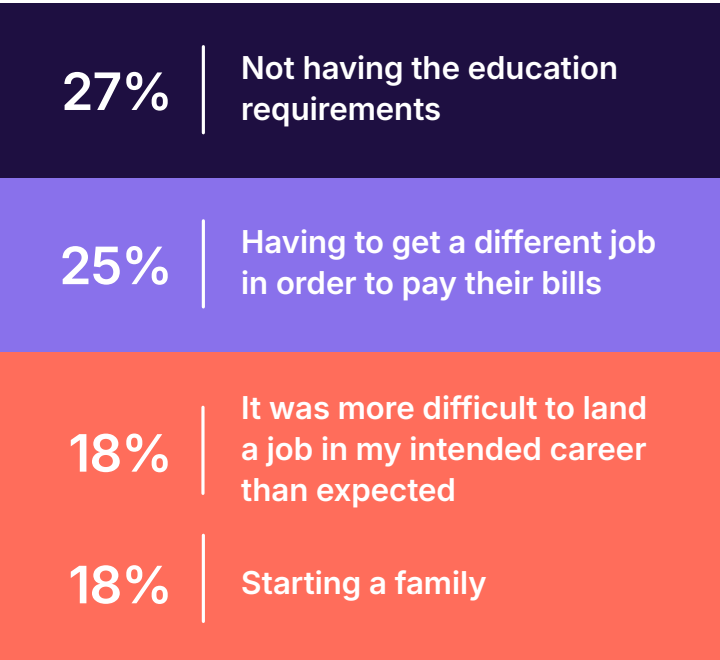
To understand whether education played a role in satisfying career outcomes, we asked respondents: “Are you currently in the career you intended to be in after completing your education?” Nearly two-thirds (62%) said no.

“Almost 2 in 3 young adults are not yet in the career that they intended to be in after completing their education. Meaning that education alone does not directly translate to career achievement.”

So what barriers might be in the way of these talent groups seeking a job in their desired career field?

WHAT’S IN THE WAY

We asked adults who are not currently in their intended career why they are not in a job related to their desired career path. Excluding the 29% of respondents who are still actively trying to land a job in their intended career path, the top reasons given for not having their intended job are:



Meanwhile, concerns about accumulating student loan debt and meeting costs of living are the two biggest barriers for young adults when navigating their career path.

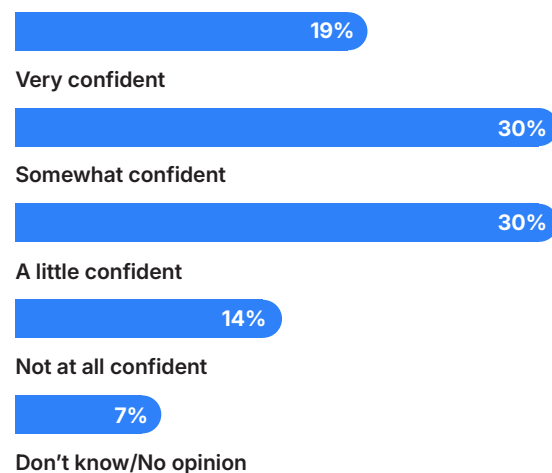
What are the biggest challenges or barriers you have faced in navigating your career path so far? Select all that apply.



The following three highest responses (lack of career goals; lack of mentorship or guidance; limited access to career information or resources) suggest a lack of support and/or a lack of access to accurate career information.

When asked, "How confident are you with your current skill set and experience that you can get a job in the career path you want to pursue?" only 19% of respondents said that they were very confident.

How confident are you with your current skill set and experience that you can get a job in the career path you want to pursue?



The clear misalignment between talent's skills and experience and how confident they are that those skills are sufficient to help them get a job in their desired career path underlines the importance of connecting early talent to work experiences to help them gain the skills they need to succeed.

EMPLOYER INSIGHT

While some of the listed factors above are out of employers' control, such as starting a family, there are some findings that employers can heed when crafting recruitment strategies:



"I did not have the education requirements":

Assess whether the education and/or degree requirements listed on your job postings are truly needed, or whether a specific skill set would satisfy the requirements for someone to do the job well. [Research by Opportunity@Work](#) reveals that when employers "tear the paper ceiling," they can tap into a larger talent pool (including 70+ million STARs - workers Skilled Through Alternative Routes).



"It was more difficult to land a job than I expected":

This barrier is tied to either insufficient career information or a lack of career exploration opportunities. In order to help young adults form realistic expectations and take the necessary steps to excel in their career paths, employers should get in front of talent as early as possible to provide them with accurate information on their industry, career opportunities, and education/qualification requirements.



"It would be too expensive to pursue my intended career":

This reason also suggests an alignment issue, as it implies that talent might have originally thought the education requirements for their intended career path were more affordable. When sharing information on your company or industry with young adults or students, be sure to discuss the education requirements as well (whether that entails a four-year degree, certificates, work experience, etc). Additionally, let young adults and students know if your company offers tuition reimbursement or assistance, as this would be a compelling benefit for this talent group.

⁶ Opportunity@Work. (2025). State of the Postsecondary Career Pathways 2025 Report. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/677c-2459dcf44df291d3ed9b/680858f0b67628364306b06b_SOPC%202025%20Report_final_042225.pdf

Case Study:

Early exposure to career information makes a difference.

"I discovered Tallo while searching for resources...and it became a source of inspiration for my journey. Seeing other students and professionals in STEM inspired me to believe in my own potential. Tallo provided the tools and exposure I needed to navigate my path as a first-generation medical student... My journey was far from traditional, but it taught me so much about resilience, determination, and self-reflection. I want other students to know that setbacks don't define you. It's how you rise from them that matters most."

Dr. Ndiya Emeaba, MD



By understanding what motivates and resonates most with young adults as they make decisions regarding their career paths, employers can attract (and retain) 18-30-year-old talent with greater intention and accuracy. What's more, if early enough in the decision-making process, employers can provide early talent with the types of information, opportunities, and resources that could impact perceptions of entire industries or inspire them as they select a career path.

WHAT DRIVES EARLY TALENT? Motivators & Aspirations

To better understand what matters most to this talent group, we asked respondents which of the following identities best describes them when it comes to their goals and aspirations.

When it comes to your goals and aspirations, which of the following identities best describes you?



EMPLOYER INSIGHT

These results tell us that most young adults aren't chasing accolades or job titles simply for the sake of being "successful." What motivates this talent group is actually quite simple.

They have strong work ethics, but at the end of the day, most young adults want:

- To make enough money to comfortably provide for their families
- To enjoy what they do

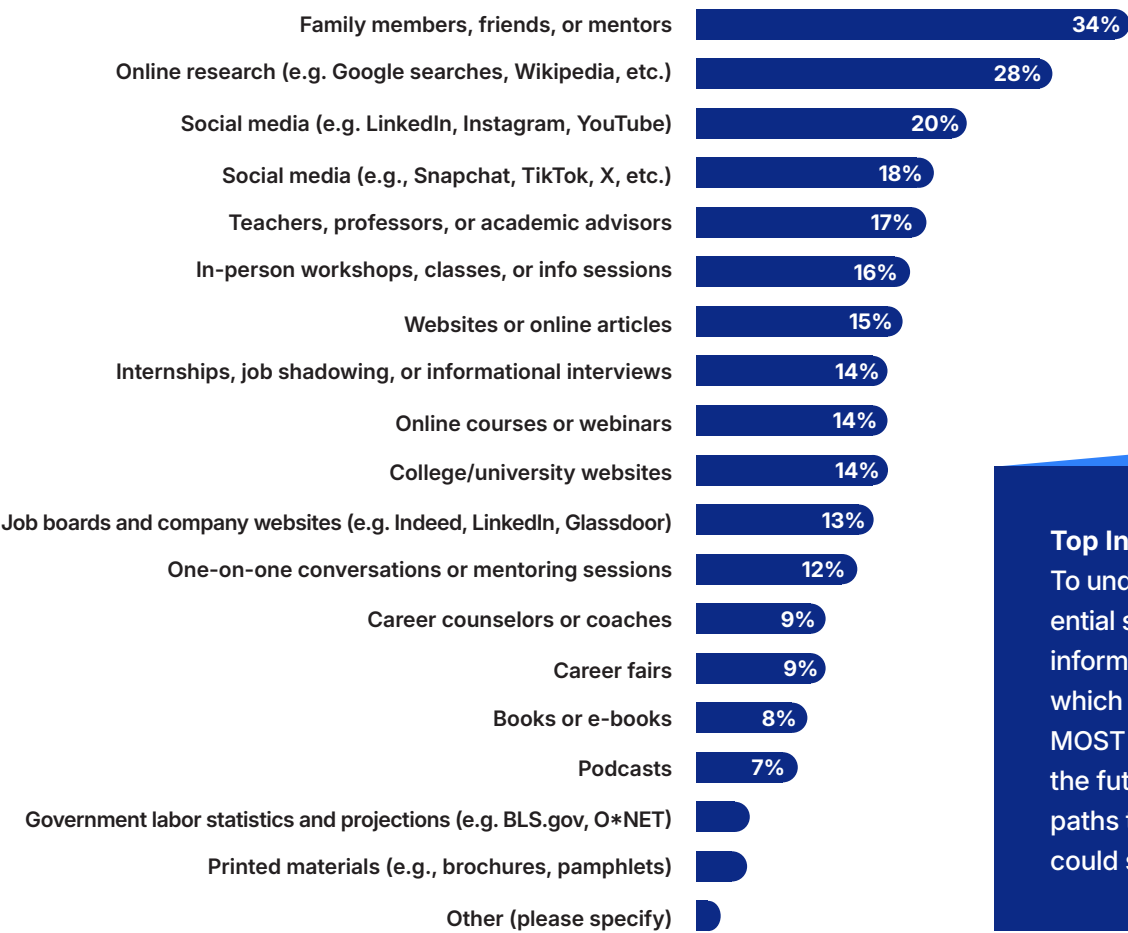
By leading with competitive salaries and driving home how certain industries or job opportunities align with talent's passions, employers have a better chance of appealing to young adults.

Schools and employers can also take this information when working with high school students on career exploration by helping young talent understand how their passions could translate to career-focused skills.

When asked **who** influences young adults the most as they explore possible education and career paths, the top-five answers were:

- Friends (61%)
- Parents/guardians (55%)
- Relatives (40%)
- People on social media (20%)
- Mentors (19%)

Most helpful information sources as young adults pursue future education and career paths:



Top Information Sources
To understand the most influential sources of support and information, we asked talent which information sources are MOST helpful as they pursue the future education and career paths they want (respondents could select up to three).

BREAKING THROUGH TO TALENT

We also asked respondents what specific content or information they find most beneficial or helpful when exploring future career paths.

Some of the most frequently mentioned sources of information included online resources like Google, YouTube, job boards and other social media platforms. Interestingly, some respondents said industry publications, podcasts, and utilizing AI, though those sources were mentioned less frequently.

INFORMATION SOURCES



Regarding the most helpful **career content and experiences**, educational information (i.e. course requirements, certifications), specific career path information (i.e. market demand, emerging fields), and factors like compensation and workplace culture were common themes.

Hands-on experiences (i.e. job shadowing, internships), support systems, and influential relationships (i.e. encouragement and guidance from parents and counselors) were noteworthy responses as well.



ACCORDING TO EARLY TALENT...

“

Detailed job descriptions and industry insights, such as required skills, typical responsibilities, and potential career growth, are most beneficial when exploring future career paths.”

“

The most helpful information is from people who are working where I want to and advice they can give you.”

“

I find employment websites the most helpful. Websites like Indeed offer ways to mainstream job searching and information.”

As family members, friends, mentors, teachers, and advisors were named in the top-five influential sources of support and information, it's not surprising that support plays a large role in young adults' career success.

86%

of young adults **already in their intended career path** said that they have enough or more than enough resources to help them with their career options.

62%

of young adults **not yet in their intended career path** said that they have enough or more than enough resources to help them with their career options

The majority of respondents in their intended career (73%) also reported that they feel supported and encouraged as they explore the steps needed to pursue the career they want, as opposed to only 45% of respondents who are not in their intended career.

These results demonstrate a relationship between ample career resources and support, and whether that respondent is in their intended career.

Case Study:

Early talent is hungry for community and new opportunities.

"Tallo is my go-to community for scholarships, schools, colleges, businesses, and other students... Multiple businesses have contacted me through Tallo to provide opportunities that otherwise would have gone unbeknownst to me. I have been able to work with and attend events from these businesses that have helped me learn new things and helped me keep up to date with what is happening in the business world."

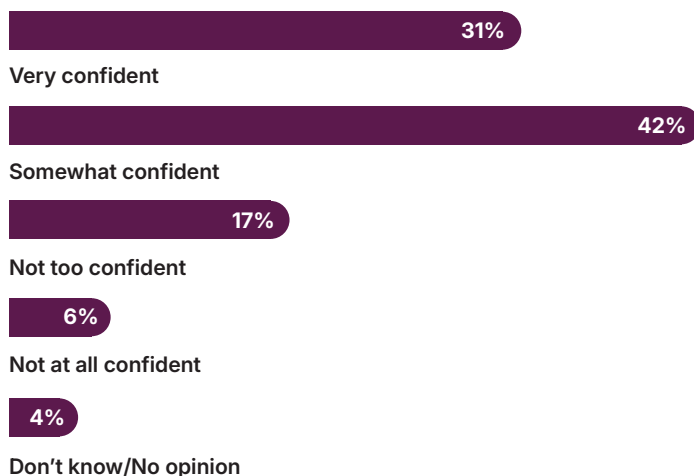
Levi L., High School Senior, Mountain Home School (Idaho)

When asked how well-supported respondents feel as they explore the steps needed to pursue the career they want, a significant 43% said they feel either isolated and lacking support, or unsure of where to find support.

STEPS TO SUCCESS

When asked how confident respondents were that they knew the steps needed to continue on the education and career path that they want to pursue, only 31% of young adults said they were very confident.

How confident are you, if at all, that you know the steps you need to take to continue on the education and career path you want to pursue?



EMPLOYER INSIGHT

Providing current employees (and future candidates) with clear career pathways and the steps needed to get there (such as continued education, number of years of experience, certain milestones, etc.) goes a long way with young adults in building their confidence that they are progressing toward their career goals.

Working with talent even earlier in the career exploration process—such as in high school and/or college—can increase their awareness of steps needed to progress toward career goals (and therefore instilling confidence).

Case Study:

BAE Systems fosters early STEM talent for internships.

BAE Systems has partnered with Tallo since 2019 to identify and engage with early talent throughout their educational journey. Tallo's platform helps the company know when to connect with students at key milestones to offer relevant internships.

"Being able to stay connected with [early talent] and have a mechanism to remind them about their time in the program with BAE Systems and then promote our open intern roles as soon as they became eligible for them has been really useful for us to be able to see the return on investment for those pipeline programs that we run."

Laurel Walleston Skiff, Early Career Programs & Partnerships, BAE Systems, Inc.

Conclusion:

3 Early Talent Takeaways



1

There is an alignment between access to career information and exploration opportunities, and talent landing a job in their intended career path. More than 3 in 5 young adults said that they are not in the career that they intended to be in after completing their education. Of those adults, 27% said that the reason is because they don't have the education requirements, and 25% said that they had to get another job to pay their bills. These numbers lead us to wonder whether there is a misalignment— are some students completing their education only to learn that they don't have the requirements for the job they intended to obtain? Or potentially that the job does not pay as much as originally thought?



2

Employers should feel empowered to meet young adults where they are. We know that this talent pool puts a lot of stock into family and friends, online research, and social media when learning about education and career pathways. In fact, all of those aforementioned sources were ranked by respondents as more helpful than teachers, professors, and academic advisors. If there are specific skills that employers want to see more of in young adults, they should connect with talent where they are to present information on specific industries, career pathways, and qualifications needed. Conversations with students make a lasting impact into their careers... and a lasting impact for your early-talent recruitment strategy.



3

As barriers mount, employers miss out on talent. Young adults' top goals included making enough money to lead comfortable lives for their families and spending time doing what they love. Yet, the top barriers included fear of accumulating debt through further education, financial stress, lack of career goals, and a lack of mentorship or guidance. Earlier career navigation is the lifevest in this scenario. By providing talent with career resources and opportunities, employers and educators can help talent craft career goals, map out the steps needed to get there, and base decisions around practical needs, such as salary expectations. While career navigation and work-based learning might not be able to tackle barriers like tuition costs, it can help ensure that time and resources invested in higher education or training programs offer reliable return on investment.

Tallo worked with Morning Consult, a global decision intelligence company, to survey young adults ages 18-30 in order to gain foundational and actionable insights. Tallo developed a research strategy and survey questions based on our existing insights about the young adult market and career navigation space.

Morning Consult distributed the survey and gathered insights from a representative sample of 2,054 young adults ages 18-30 in June 2024. The data was weighted to approximate a target sample based on age, gender, race, educational attainment, work experience, and region. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of plus or minus two percentage points.

ABOUT TALLO

Tallo is a free digital career co-pilot that moves individuals age 13-30 from career uncertainty to confident action, providing the tools and connections for lasting success. With nearly 2 million users, Tallo helps individuals discover and explore career options, learn and earn valuable credentials, and ultimately, connect directly with employers to get a job that helps them build a better life. Tallo provides the tools for every step of the journey. Learn more at

www.tallo.com

