AIGA

design
point of view
research
initiative

Design POV:
An In-Depth Look at
the Design Industry Now

*Being a Designer, Design Pathways, and
Market Intelligence | 2021*

Introduction

> Design is not only **essential to our profession** but also the **greater community and society**.
>
> **Bennie F. Johnson |**
> AIGA Executive Director

In this new chapter of AIGA's Design POV, we are sharing information on the design marketplace. One of the main reasons we wanted to dive deeper into this information is that in order to shape the future, we need to better understand our current situation.

I want to talk about one insight that has come from our research—every designer has the possibility to be a business. That is important in our market intelligence discussion because we know that four out of 10 designers have more than one source of income. In this report, we look at income as more than pay, taking a broader view to help our community better understand the landscape. This information is also helping to guide us in providing resources that will help designers succeed. We want designers to have all the information they need to advance their careers and knowing the value of their work is important to advancing design.

There are more than two million jobs in the design field and the pandemic has changed the way many designers work. While we know that certain areas are growing, we also know that change is still to come in not only how designers work but in the work they do.

When we talk about adaptability, it is this shift in how designers work and the type of work they do that will require designers to continue being open to change and to continue to sharpen skills to stay competitive. We are learning more with each new report and we are pleased to be working with the community to share these findings and to understand the needs of designers and the Design community.

Create boldly,

Bennie F. Johnson | AIGA Executive Director

Being a Designer

*Insights around what it means to be a designer*

Being a Designer
Insights around what it means to be a designer

Designers often need to explain what they do to others, even to their family members.[1] Articulating what Design is and the meaning of being a designer is important to help advance the field and connect such a diverse community. Per AIGA, "Designers distinguish businesses from their competitors in the marketplace through innovative approaches to branding, the comprehensive design of messages, products, and services that express the character of a company and define its relationships with consumers."[2]

Aiming to go beyond defining what Design is, we asked the community to describe in their own words "What it means to be a designer?" Some of the words that appeared frequently were: **problem(s); solve(r/ing)/solution; visual(ly); creative/create/make; communicate(ion)/message/information; think(ing); better/new/change/ help/need(s); people/audience/world; ideas; skills/ability/process**.

In the AIGA Design POV research initiative, we probed deeper and learned that designers articulate what it means to be a designer primarily through three main lenses:

- **Skillset** ("Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/ storyteller.")
- **Mindset** ("To be a designer is more so a way of thinking than doing.")
- **Impactset** ("Force for change, progress, and good.")
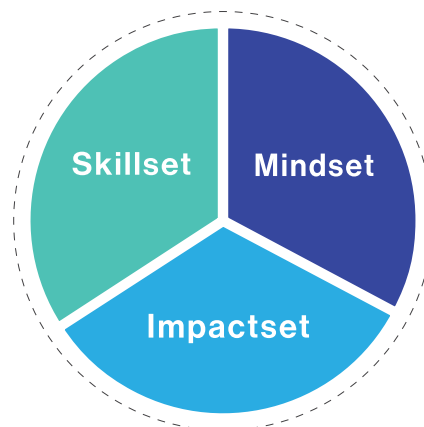
Gerry McGovern, Chief Creative Officer at Land Rover, highlights that Design is a "catalyst for change and has the ability to transform business whilst enriching people's lives." He also highlights that "designers think differently."[3] Figure 1 highlights the multiple ways respondents described what it means to be a designer.[4]
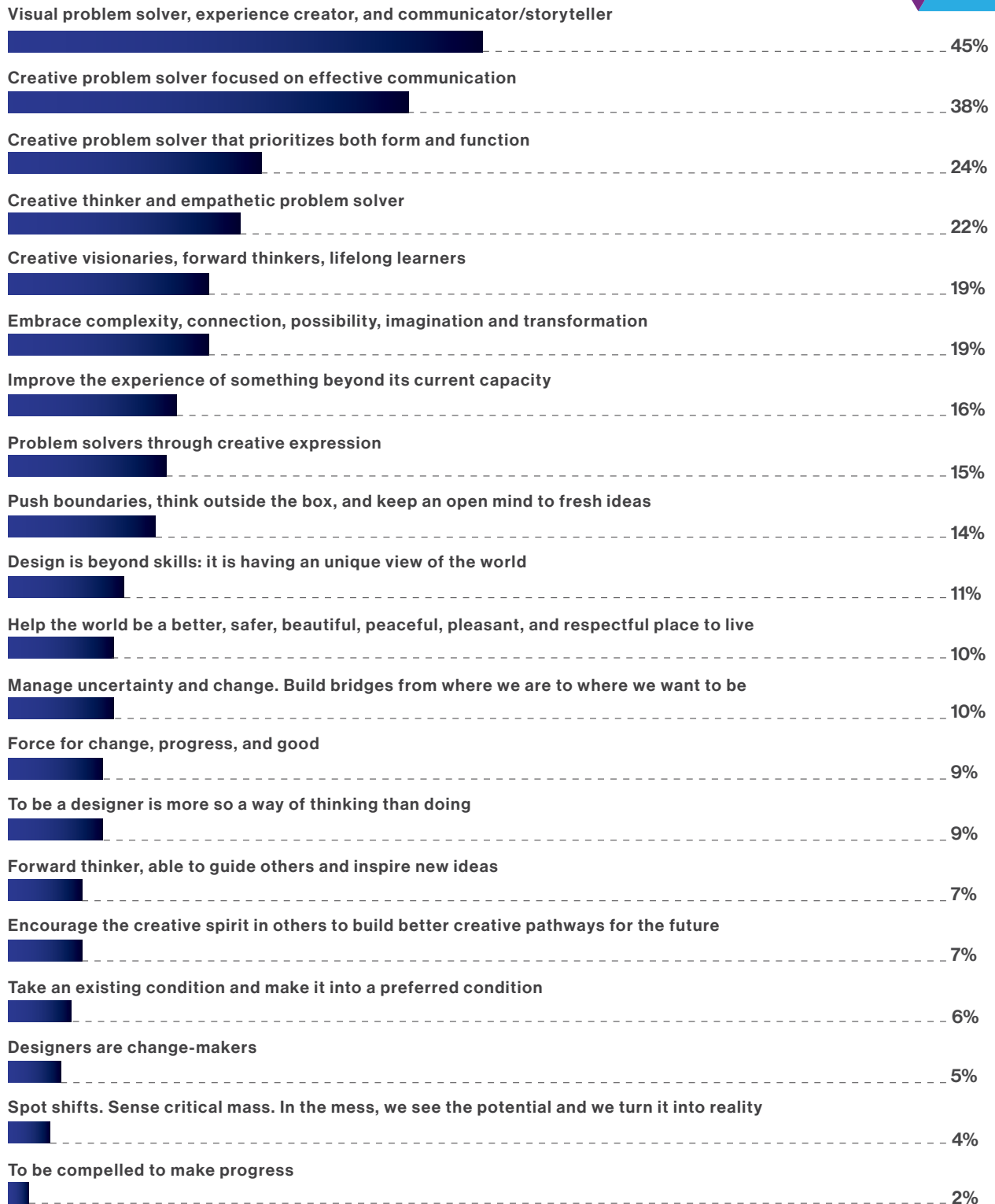

[1] https://medium.com
[2] https://www.aiga.org/what-is-design
[3] https://www.adobe.com
[4] Analysis of 600+ narratives and confirmation via survey research.

Figure 1: What Does It Mean to be a Designer?

Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller

45%

Creative problem solver focused on effective communication

38%

Creative problem solver that prioritizes both form and function

24%

Creative thinker and empathetic problem solver

22%

Creative visionaries, forward thinkers, lifelong learners

19%

Embrace complexity, connection, possibility, imagination and transformation

19%

Improve the experience of something beyond its current capacity

16%

Problem solvers through creative expression

15%

Push boundaries, think outside the box, and keep an open mind to fresh ideas

14%

Design is beyond skills: it is having an unique view of the world

11%

Help the world be a better, safer, beautiful, peaceful, pleasant, and respectful place to live

10%

Manage uncertainty and change. Build bridges from where we are to where we want to be

10%

Force for change, progress, and good

9%

To be a designer is more so a way of thinking than doing

9%

Forward thinker, able to guide others and inspire new ideas

7%

Encourage the creative spirit in others to build better creative pathways for the future

7%

Take an existing condition and make it into a preferred condition

6%

Designers are change-makers

5%

Spot shifts. Sense critical mass. In the mess, we see the potential and we turn it into reality

4%

To be compelled to make progress

2%

The meaning of being a designer varies based on the type of designer one is and their career level. For example, as shown in Figure 2, C-level designers and strategic designers are more likely to emphasize the mindset and impactset components in their description of what it means to be a designer ("Creative visionaries, forward thinkers, lifelong learners."; "Embrace complexity, connection, possibility, imagination, and transformation."). Graphic designers and UX designers are more likely to focus on the skillset component ("Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller."; "Creative problem solver that prioritizes both form and function.").

Figure 2: What Does It Mean to be a Designer? (By Job Title)

	C-Level	Strategic Designer	Graphic Designer	UX Designer
#1	Creative visionaries, forward thinkers, lifelong learners	Embrace complexity, connection, possibility, imagination, and transformation	Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller	Creative problem solver that prioritizes both form and function
#2	Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller	Manage uncertainty and change Build bridges from where we are to where we want to be	Creative problem solver focused on effective communication	Visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller
#3	Embrace complexity, connection, possibility, imagination, and transformation Manage uncertainty and change Build bridges from where we are to where we want to be	Force for change, progress, and good	Creative problem solver that prioritizes both form and function	Creative thinker and empathetic problem solver

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Insights to Action

What does it mean to be a designer? Take a few moments and walk through this exercise to visualize your design pathway.

What does it mean to be a designer? Try answering visually.

What makes Design unique compared to other disciplines/professions?

How to help others, outside of Design or interested in entering the profession, understand what it means to be a designer and the value of Design?

Design Pathways

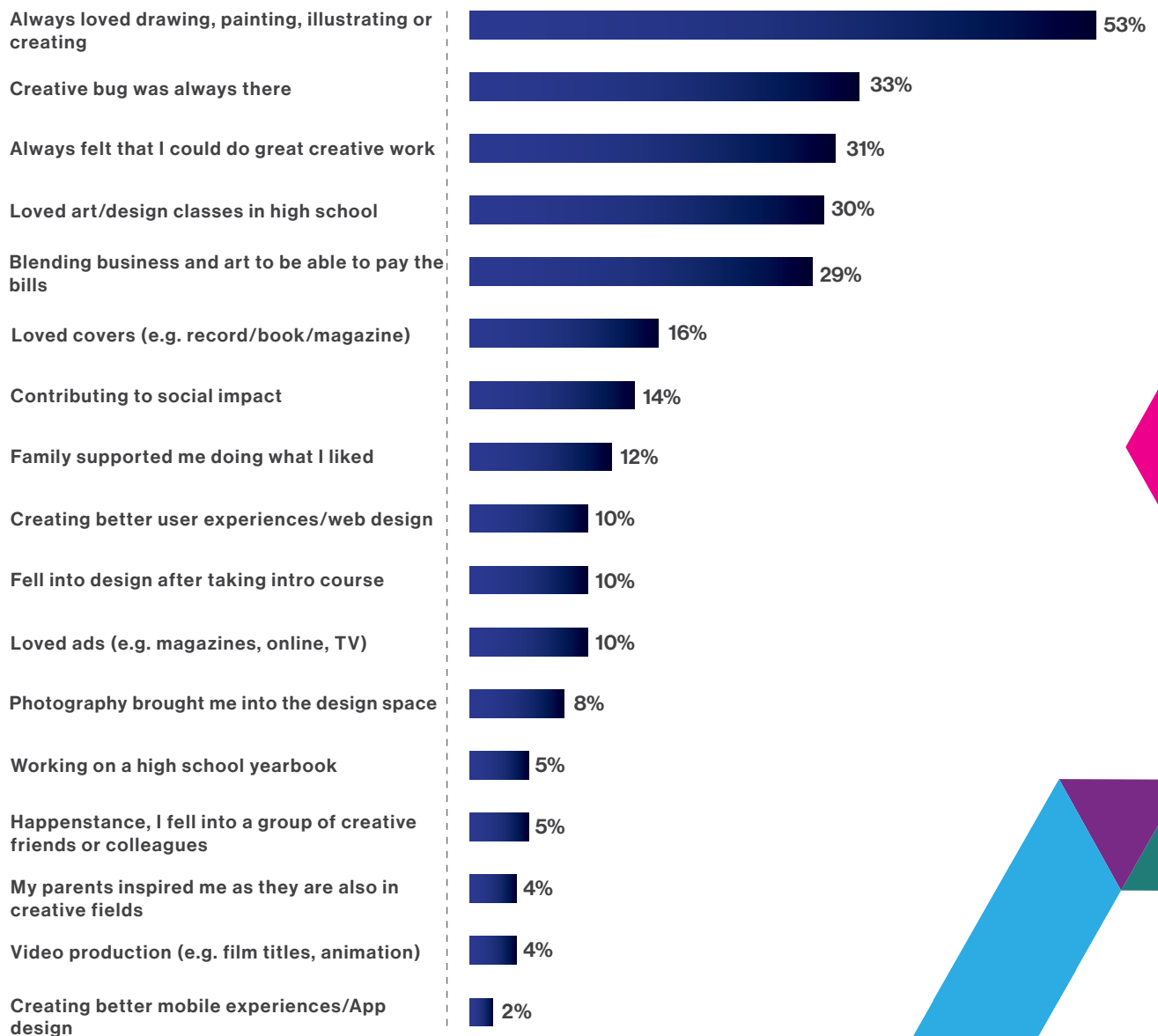*From early inspiration to ongoing development*

Design Pathways
From early inspiration to ongoing development

Artistic appreciation (e.g., love drawing, painting, illustrating, or creating), creative spirit, and perceived talent are often the most common sources of inspiration for individuals to become (or want to become) a designer (Figure 3). The inspiration often occurs early on in life within family settings and/or schools. It can also manifest itself a bit later in life after other paths have been explored.

Figure 3: Inspiration to Become (Or Want to Become) a Designer

Inspiration	Percentage
Always loved drawing, painting, illustrating or creating	53%
Creative bug was always there	33%
Always felt that I could do great creative work	31%
Loved art/design classes in high school	30%
Blending business and art to be able to pay the bills	29%
Loved covers (e.g. record/book/magazine)	16%
Contributing to social impact	14%
Family supported me doing what I liked	12%
Creating better user experiences/web design	10%
Fell into design after taking intro course	10%
Loved ads (e.g. magazines, online, TV)	10%
Photography brought me into the design space	8%
Working on a high school yearbook	5%
Happenstance, I fell into a group of creative friends or colleagues	5%
My parents inspired me as they are also in creative fields	4%
Video production (e.g. film titles, animation)	4%
Creating better mobile experiences/App design	2%

We also want to share responses from our AIGA Design POV respondents in regard to their inspiration to become (or want to become) a designer.

"I've always been able to draw, illustrate, and create. Artistic talent is what drew me to the field of Design. I consider it an inherited talent; my mom was a painter. I was always drawing and was taught Design in high school. It was always part of my life."

Peter Viento |
Director Head of Creative Services, Global Marketing, Citibank

"I always loved drawing and painting. I was lucky to have the support of the art faculty in high school. A teacher told my parents that I could do this for a living—and I had support from teachers along the way."

Meaghan Dee |
Associate Professor, Virginia Tech

"Loved problem solving."	"The field spoke to my love of creativity and technology."
"Always loved finding/ generating new solutions to common problems."	"Career counselor suggested it as a major."
"Making a difference."	"Started my career in my father's printing press and gradually got drawn to Design as a tool for communication + expression + engagement."
"Middle school newsletter design team."	"I get bored easily and enjoy the variety. I also enjoy continuing to learn and Design promotes that."
"Wanted a career that involved artistic expression and business."	"I had super supportive teachers and counselors in high school that encouraged me to pursue Communications Arts."
"To give visual form to my writing and storytelling."	"Interested in entrepreneurship."
"Allowed me to work from home and raise kids, and now care for aging parents."	"Desire to help people and organizations form and achieve goals."

"Quickest way to start earning enough money to live on my own."

"Wanted to make video games, which led me to Design."

"Anime."

"Creating software."

"Experienced poor UX and knew I could design better."

"Making the world a better place for everyone."

"My dad wanted to be a designer but never had the chance."
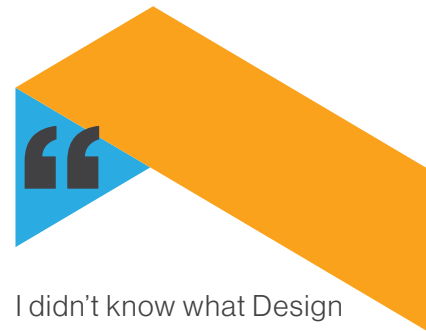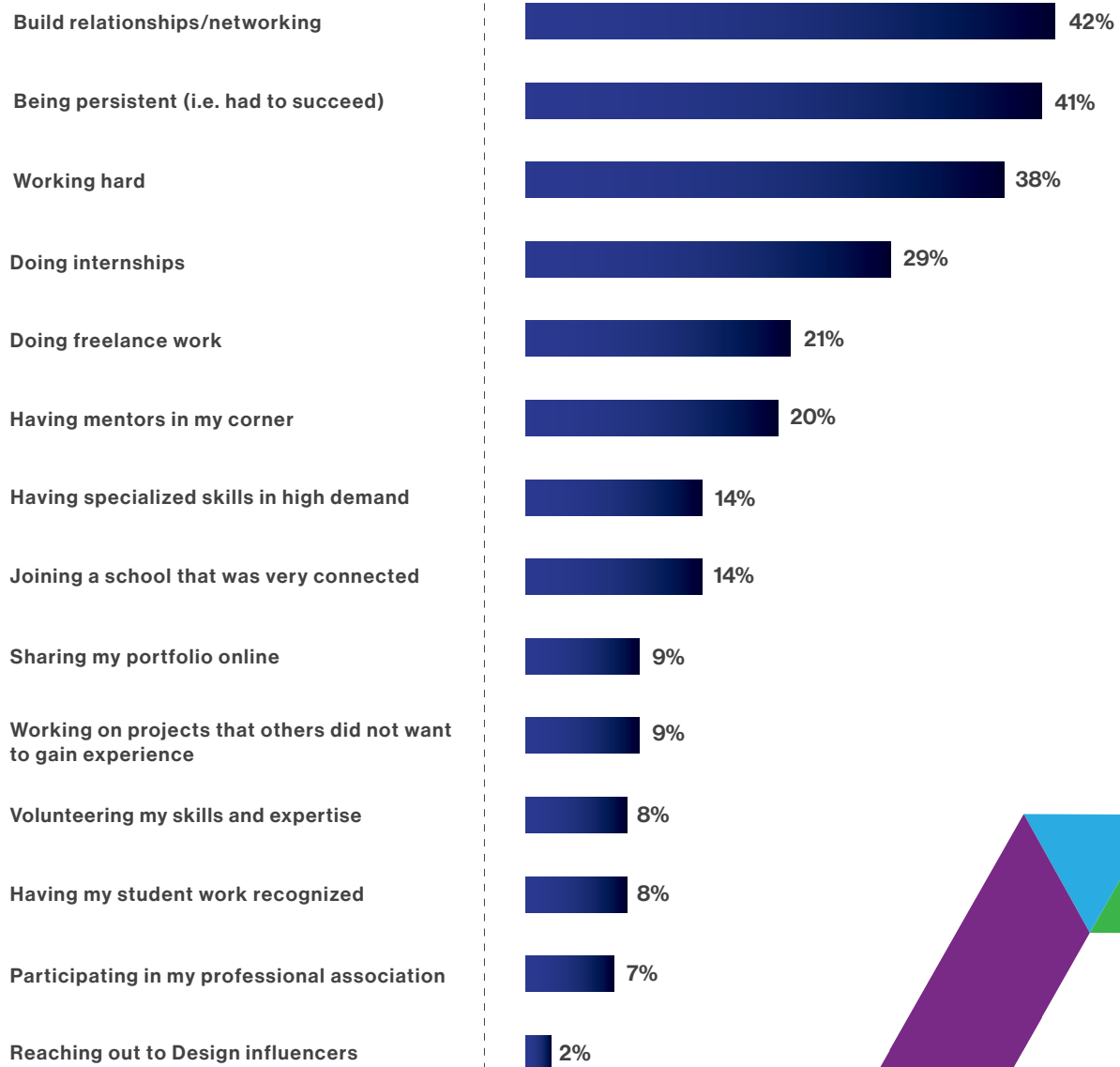
"I didn't know what Design was until high school. I knew I loved studying the artwork in my father's music collection, and I loved to draw. Graphic design became a clear option for me when I worked on my high school yearbook; that's when I finally understood what it was and decided to explore the possibility."

Terrence Moline |
Creator + Owner,
African American Graphic Designers

Networking and relationships are key to enter and advance in the Design field. 42 percent of respondents said that building relationships/networking was what helped them land their first job in Design. Being persistent, working hard, doing internships and freelance work also helped (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Factors that Helped Land Designers Their First Job in Design

Factor	Percentage
Build relationships/networking	42%
Being persistent (i.e. had to succeed)	41%
Working hard	38%
Doing internships	29%
Doing freelance work	21%
Having mentors in my corner	20%
Having specialized skills in high demand	14%
Joining a school that was very connected	14%
Sharing my portfolio online	9%
Working on projects that others did not want to gain experience	9%
Volunteering my skills and expertise	8%
Having my student work recognized	8%
Participating in my professional association	7%
Reaching out to Design influencers	2%

Designers in early steps of their career lifecycle were more likely to acknowledge doing internships and being persistent as important factors to land their first job in Design than building relationships/networking (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Factors that Helped Land Designers Their First Job in Design (By Career Lifecycle)

	Entry-Level	Mid-Level	Senior-Level
#1	Doing internships	Building relationships/ networking	Building relationships/ networking
#2	Being persistent (i.e., had to succeed)	Being persistent (i.e., had to succeed)	Working hard
#3	Building relationships/ networking	Doing internships	Being persistent (i.e., had to succeed)
#4	Working hard	Working hard	Doing internships
#5	Having mentors in my corner	Having mentors in my corner	Doing freelance work

"I wanted to make my college experience pay off. I felt like I had to succeed. I leveraged every opportunity I could and made a point to meet the Design rock stars I admired and reached out to them to talk. That helped me land a good job. I had the right opportunities and had people in my corner cheering for me. I learned a lot about strategy and project management which has now paid off in helping to be a better leader."

Nijel Taylor |
Design Director, Siegel+Gale

We also want to share responses from our AIGA Design POV respondents about what helped them land their first design job.

> "
> The best way [to land a first job] is to build relationships and personal networks."

Sue Walsh |
Principal of Design,
SYPartners

> "
> I started out working for small businesses and startups, a lot of side projects in school. I moved to working with small businesses with a boutique creative branding consultancy firm and a lot of freelance Design."

Lisa Moran |
Designer, Educator,
Program Provider

"Constantly developing new skills and using my own time to learn on and off the job."

"Always study other work and keep up with the Design field trends/happenings."

"Becoming multi-skilled."

"Sharing work to Instagram– first agency job found my account and got hired from there."

"Willing to take entry level work (stepping stone)."

"Luck (right place at right time)."

"Had the courage to reach out/ cold call to find a summer job in the Design industry."

"Project management and coding skills."

"Doing work no one else was doing at the time, at least locally."

"Portfolio review at school."

"Starting small/ working for a small firm to start."	"Never thinking I was too good to work a low wage starting out."	"Working for myself."	"Degree from prestigious art school."
"Early skill development in web design and coding before it was really taught in most Design schools."	"Being as helpful as possible and having a great attitude no matter what they gave me to do."	"Having a portfolio with a unique POV."	"Interviewing well."
"Timing and being in the right place at the right time, being patient."	"Using a job placement service."	"Building social media standing/ identity."	"Having a strong portfolio."
"Organizing student conferences/events; landing internships at professor's studios because she liked a project I did in her class."	"Being open to moving."	"Doing campus Design jobs while in school."	"Receiving career building tips in college (i.e., creating a LinkedIn presence, creating a resume, reviewing portfolios)."
"Knowing how to share my work in a way that would resonate with my potential employer."	"Taking a less than perfect job just to get my foot in the door."	"Working outside the industry to gain skills that were complimentary to Design work (program management, administration, etc.)."	"Service industry soft skills."

Design careers are diverse by nature and there is no one single pathway. To help designers focus their careers based on their professional goals, Table 1 presents the best work arrangement identified by the Design community for several potential professional goals.

Table 1: Ideal Employment Arrangement Per Professional Goal

Goal	In-House	Agency	Small Business Owner	Freelance/ Permanlance	Educator
Creative freedom	7%	16%	29%	39%	9%
Influence the future of Design	7%	35%	7%	5%	46%
Work life balance	47%	5%	9%	28%	11%
Job security	68%	12%	5%	3%	12%
Bring positive change to the world	8%	16%	23%	7%	46%
Start Design career	27%	37%	5%	28%	3%
Advance Design career	17%	57%	14%	10%	2%
Join a more creative culture	6%	67%	11%	11%	5%
Become known in the profession	4%	53%	22%	16%	5%
Learn about Design as a business	10%	28%	48%	11%	3%
Make more money as a Designer	30%	37%	16%	16%	1%
Collaborate on a global scale	20%	59%	3%	11%	7%
Do great work/ Be all I can be	8%	20%	32%	35%	5%
Be empowered to make decisions	10%	5%	58%	24%	3%

Solving problems, seeing the impact of their work, being part of the creative community, bringing positive change to society, and challenging themselves to be better is what designers like most about their profession (Figure 6).

Figure 6: What Designers Like Most About Profession

Solving problems
34%

Seeing the impact of my work
16%

Being part of the creative community
8%

Bringing positive change to society
8%

Challenging myself to be better
8%

Being empowered to think different
7%

Making money with my work
5%

Inspiring people
4%

Learning from diverse perspectives
4%

Other
4%

Getting the job done
2%

An important challenge for new designers in the industry is to be aware of how and why mentorships can be valuable to emerging designers:

"

As designers, those first jobs are not always exciting, and we need to help students see past the editing of PowerPoint slides. The biggest problem is helping them navigate idealistic work to practical work. Mentorship is important in those early years in helping designers see the impact of their work."

Virginia Patterson |
Assistant Professor,
Department of Art & Design,
California State University, Fresno

Independent of where designers are in their career lifecycles, solving problems and seeing the impact of their work are what they like most about their profession. Entry and mid-level designers tend to like the challenge of challenging themselves to be better and being part of the creative community more than senior designers, who like bringing more positive change to society and being empowered to think differently (Figure 7).

Figure 7: What Designers Like Most About the Profession (By Career Lifecycle)

Entry-Level	Solving problems	Seeing the impact of my work	Being part of the creative community	Challenging myself to be better	Bringing positive change to society
Mid-Level	Solving problems	Seeing the impact of my work	Challenging myself to be better	Being part of the creative community	Making money with my work
Senior-Level	Solving problems	Seeing the impact of my work	Bringing positive change to society	Being empowered to think differently	Being part of the creative community

Legend:
- Solving problems
- Seeing the impact of my work
- Being part of the creative community
- Challenging myself to be better
- Bringing positive change to society
- Making money with my work
- Being empowered to think differently

Insights to Action

Plan your design journey and never stop building relationships/networks.
Check out AIGA.org and EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org for inspiration and resources.

Career Lifecycle	List your professional goals	List how you plan to reach your goals	List organizations you aspire to work with (or for)	Define your plan to build relationships/networks with the organizations you identified
Early Career				
Mid-Career				
Senior-Career				

Market Intelligence

Intrinsic value of designers' professional craft

Market Intelligence: Pay/Income + Benefits

Intrinsic value of designers' professional craft

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there are more than two million jobs for Design professionals in the U.S.[5] Among the official BLS numbers, software design (i.e., software developers, quality assurance analysts, and testers), graphic design, and web designers (i.e., web developers and digital designers) are the largest groups in terms of design professionals who are employed. If we consider that there are more than 22 million subscribers to Adobe Creative cloud globally[6,7], the overall global creative community (including adjacent professions that use Design's body of knowledge) is much larger.

Software design (up 22 percent), web design (up 8 percent) and special effects artists/animators (up 8 percent) are the only professions within Design expected to grow in employment between 2019 to 2029. The most significant decline in job outlook is predicted for desktop publishers (down 19 percent). The shift in job trends will most likely require designers to continue being adaptable and sharpening their skills to stay competitive as well as to re-skill to move to new professions within Design (Table 2).

Table 2: Employment Outlook and Pay by Selected BLS Design Occupations

| Occupation	# of Jobs (2019)	2019–2029 % Growth	Median Pay	Per Hour Pay
Graphic Design	281,500	-4%	$53,380	$25.66
Art Direction	99,100	-2%	$97,270	$46.77
Web Developers & Digital Designers	174,300	+8%	$77,200	$37.12
Software Developers, Quality Assurance Analysts & Testers	1,469,200	+22%	$110,140	$52.95
Desktop Publishers	10,400	-19%	$47,560	$22.86
Industrial Designers	42,200	-4%	$71,640	$34.44
Special Effects Artists & Animators	67,500	+4%	$77,700	$37.36
Total	2,144,200	N/A	N/A	N/A

[5] www.bls.gov/ooh/ (Limitations apply due to BLS taxonomy. Not included fashion designers; interior designers). Considered similar occupations identified on AIGA Design Futures.

[6] Adobe creative cloud estimated 12 million+ subscribers in 2017

[7] prodesigntools.com/number-of-creative-cloud-subscribers.html

A unique characteristic of the Design industry is that every designer is a potential business. About four out of 10 designers have more than one source of income (Figure 8). In-house professionals are less likely to have more than one source of income, and freelance work is the most common added work arrangement. For those with three different work arrangements, the most common are: a) In-House/Freelancer/Small Business Owner; b) In-House/Freelancer/Educator; c) Educator/Small Business Owner/Freelancer. The trend to take on multiple work arrangements may have accelerated during the pandemic with more people working from home. As noted by Santiago Felippelli, Owner, Bridger Conway, "Designers are starting to work for multiple organizations at the same time; [they are] working in more than one job."

Figure 8: Every Designer is Potentially a Business (# Of Sources of Income)

One Source	Two Sources	3+ Sources
58%	34%	8%
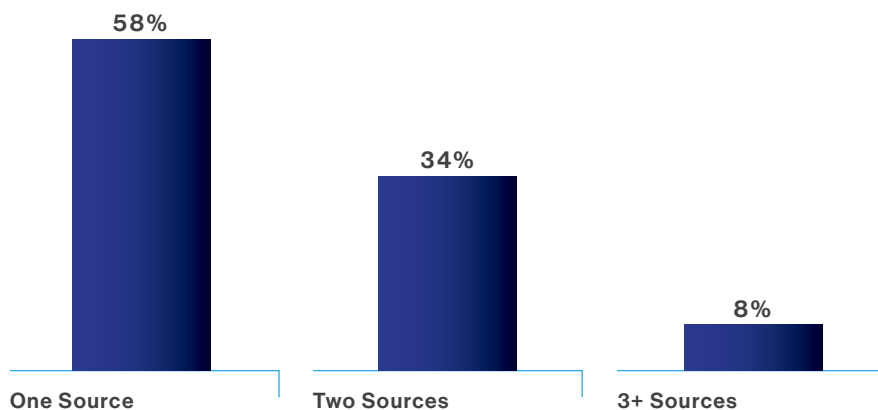
Approximately 6 out of 10 designers either have more than one source of income or need to "market and sell their services" for a living as freelancers, permalancers, or self-employed/small business owners. If we consider that even designers who work in-house (e.g., corporation, non-profit, government) or for an agency/consultancy also have internal (or external) clients and need to approach their work as a business (e.g., budget, vendor management, client management, marketing, sales), we could extrapolate and say that every designer is a business.

On average, designers with more than one source of income increase their annual income by 26 percent. In the U.S., designers' average annual income (pre-tax) is $89,566, median income is $75,000, with 25th percentile at $53,000 and 75% percentile at $100,000.

To help understand the tables, a percentile is a score below which a given percentage of scores in its frequency distribution falls or a score at or below which a given percentage falls. For example, the 50th percentile (median) is the score at or below which 50% of the scores in the distribution may be found.

Total income varies based on several factors, and in the following Figures, 9 to 17, we highlight these factors which include: **location, job/role level, highest education achieved, number of hours worked, design work experience, size of organization, type of design proficiencies, and industry(ies) of practice.** "Work is no longer a place," said Scott Cawood, CEO of WorldatWork, an association of total rewards professionals. "With remote working requests continuing to emerge and surprise leaders, companies are re-evaluating how to create cohesive, consistent and fair geographic pay policies."[8]

Figure 9: Location Impact on Overall Income

25th Percentile   Median   75th Percentile

U.S. Northeast
- $58,000
- $80,000
- $110,000

U.S. Midwest
- $50,000
- $69,750
- $90,000

U.S. South
- $50,000
- $72,000
- $100,000

U.S. West
- $60,750
- $85,000
- $120,000

Outside of U.S.
- $26,125
- $50,000
- $80,500
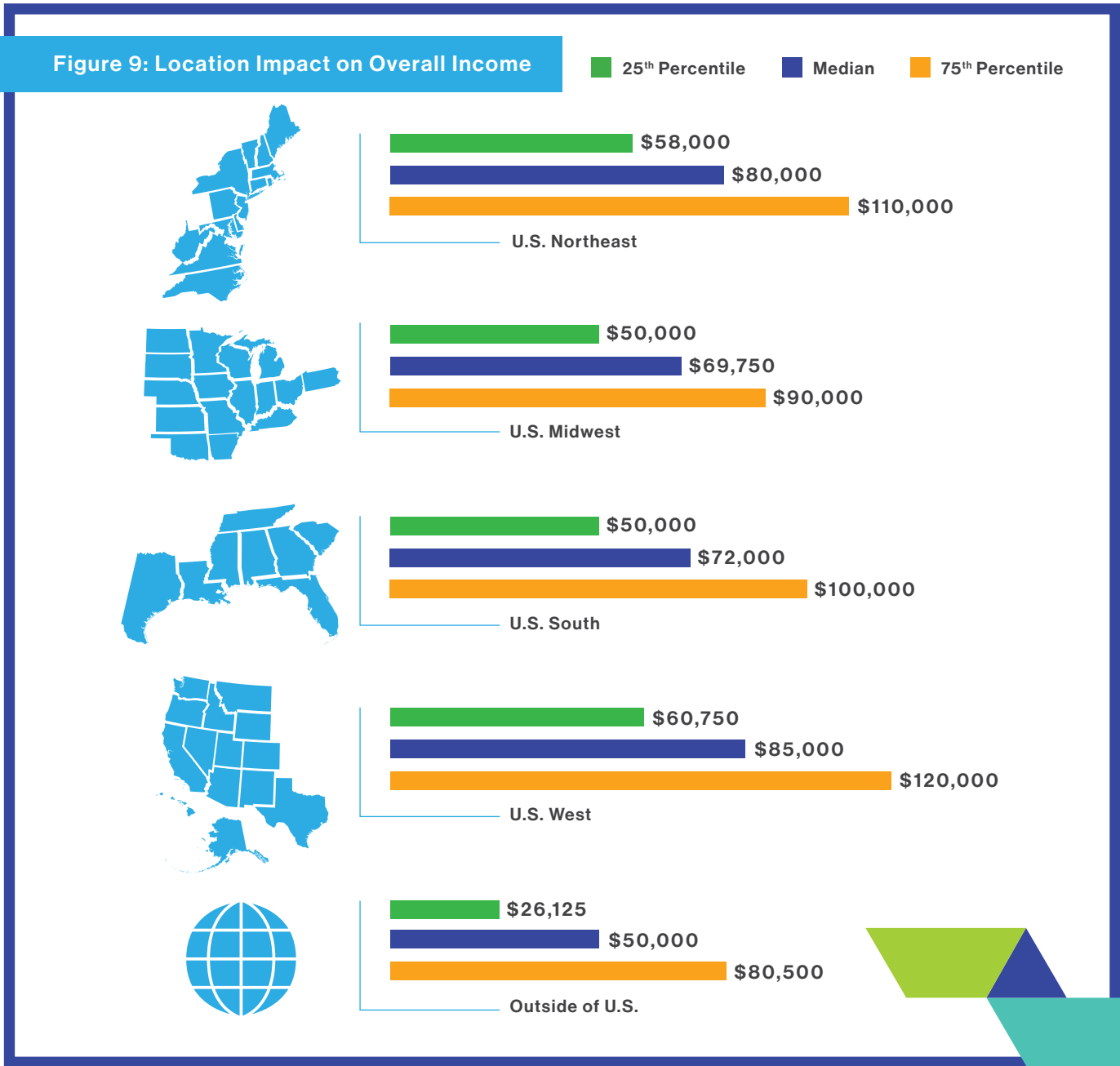
Figure 10: States with Highest Median Total Annual Income[9]

25th Percentile   **Median**   **75th Percentile**

State	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile
California	$72,000	$98,000	$144,000
New Jersey	$59,500	$96,500	$135,500
DC	$68,000	$90,000	$103,910
New York	$65,000	$85,000	$120,000
Oregon	$50,000	$83,000	$118,000
Maryland	$60,900	$80,500	$112,250
Texas	$57,750	$80,000	$110,750
Georgia	$53,625	$80,000	$100,000
Virginia	$59,450	$79,250	$101,250
Arizona	$55,500	$78,000	$90,000
Washington	$58,750	$76,000	$101,250
Minnesota	$53,000	$75,000	$95,000
Massachusetts	$51,525	$75,000	$105,000
Illinois	$58,000	$75,000	$108,500
Colorado	$60,000	$75,000	$100,000
Pennsylvania	$54,250	$70,000	$96,000
Michigan	$54,750	$68,725	$92,750
North Carolina	$51,500	$66,500	$93,750
Missouri	$49,575	$65,000	$100,000
Ohio	$46,000	$60,000	$85,000
Florida	$44,000	$60,000	$83,500

[9] Only included states with 25 or more responses.

Figure 11: Job/Role Level Impact on Overall Income

Legend: 25th Percentile, Median, 75th Percentile

- Entry: $37,000 / $48,000 / $60,000
- Mid: $52,000 / $66,575 / $87,000
- Manager: $71,500 / $85,500 / $120,000
- Director: $80,000 / $100,000 / $135,000
- Executive: $100,000 / $159,500 / $237,750
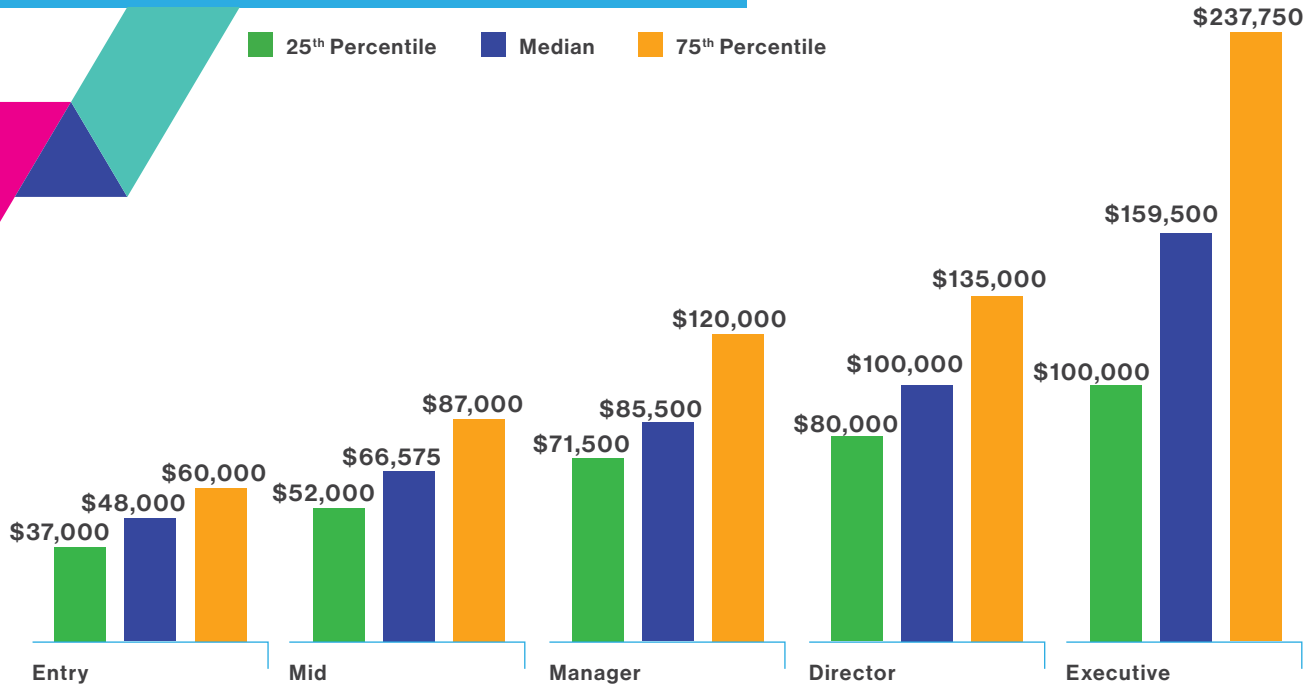
Figure 12: Highest Education Completed Impact on Overall Income

Legend: 25th Percentile, Median, 75th Percentile

- < Bachelor's degree (e.g. High School, Technical, Associate): $44,025 / $69,750 / $98,500
- Bachelor's degree: $52,000 / $70,850 / $100,000
- > Bachelor's degree (e.g. Master/Doctorate): $60,000 / $80,000 / $111,500
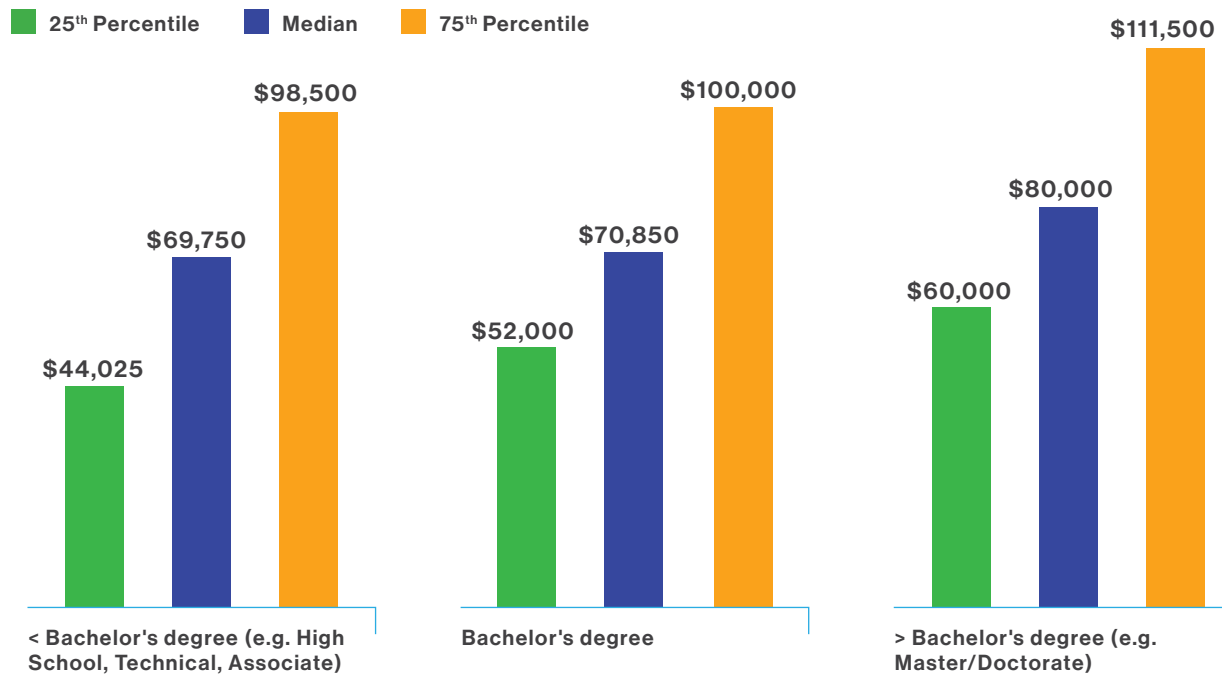
Figure 13: Number of Hours Worked Impact on Overall Income

■ 25th Percentile   ■ Median   ■ 75th Percentile

Hours	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile
< 40h week	$25,850	$50,000	$80,000
40h week	$50,000	$70,000	$94,000
41–50h week	$60,090	$85,000	$115,000
51–60h week	$66,100	$90,500	$131,500
61h+ week	$75,500	$112,000	$180,000
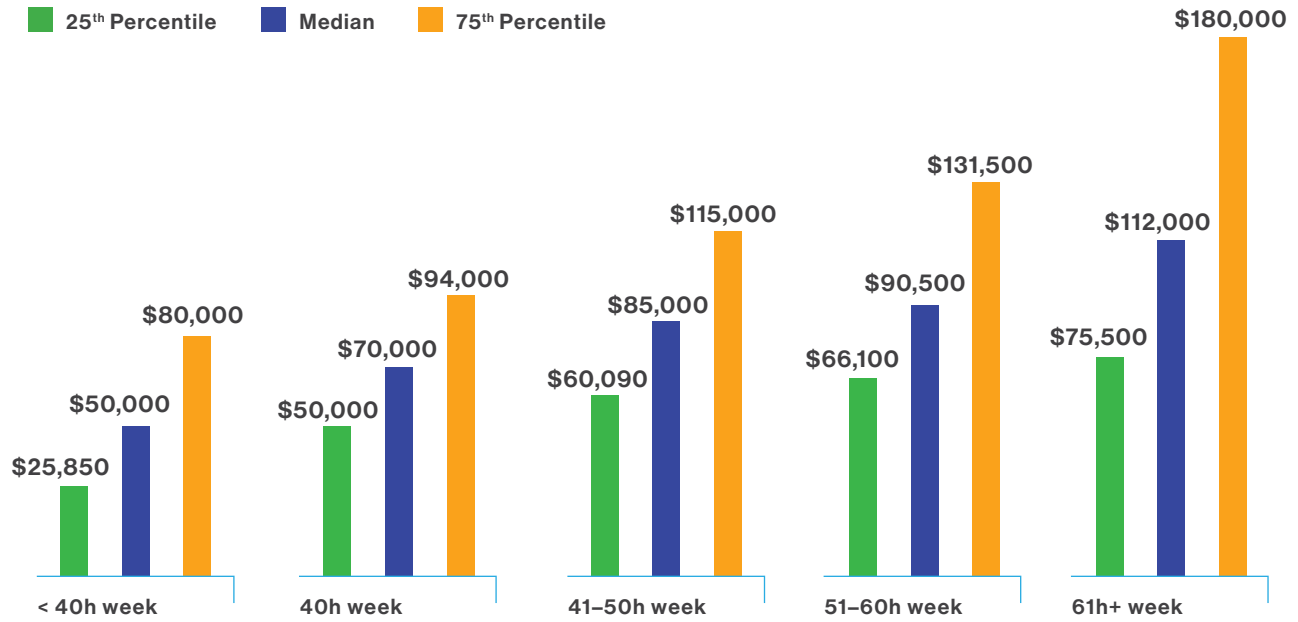
Figure 14: Design Experience Impact on Overall Income

■ 25th Percentile   ■ Median   ■ 75th Percentile

Experience	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile
< 1 year	$25,000	$40,000	$60,000
1–4 years	$37,250	$51,000	$68,000
5–9 years	$50,000	$65,000	$87,000
10+ years	$60,000	$85,000	$120,000
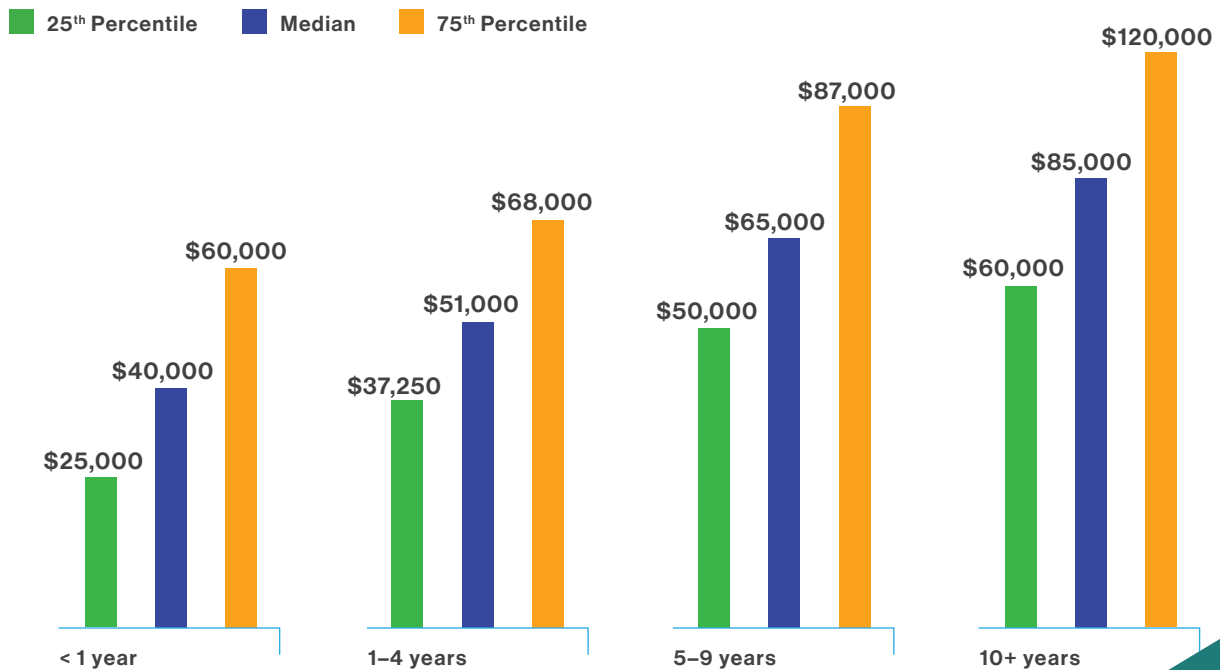
Figure 15: Organization Size Impact on Overall Income

■ 25th Percentile ■ Median ■ 75th Percentile

500 or less employees
- $50,000 (25th Percentile)
- $70,200 (Median)
- $100,000 (75th Percentile)

500+ employees
- $67,500 (25th Percentile)
- $90,000 (Median)
- $125,000 (75th Percentile)

Figure 16: Multi-Proficiency (with Digital Expertise or Not) Impact on Overall Income

■ 25th Percentile ■ Median ■ 75th Percentile
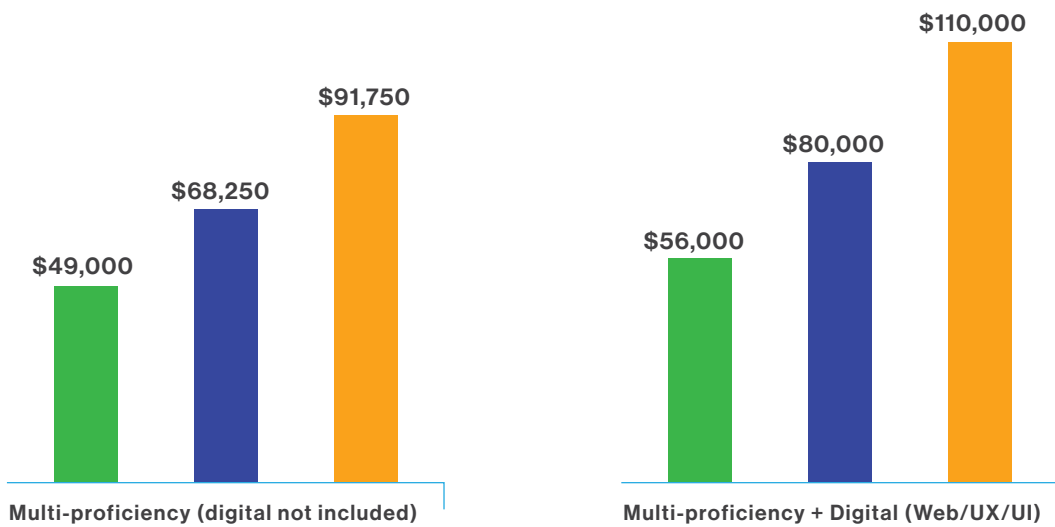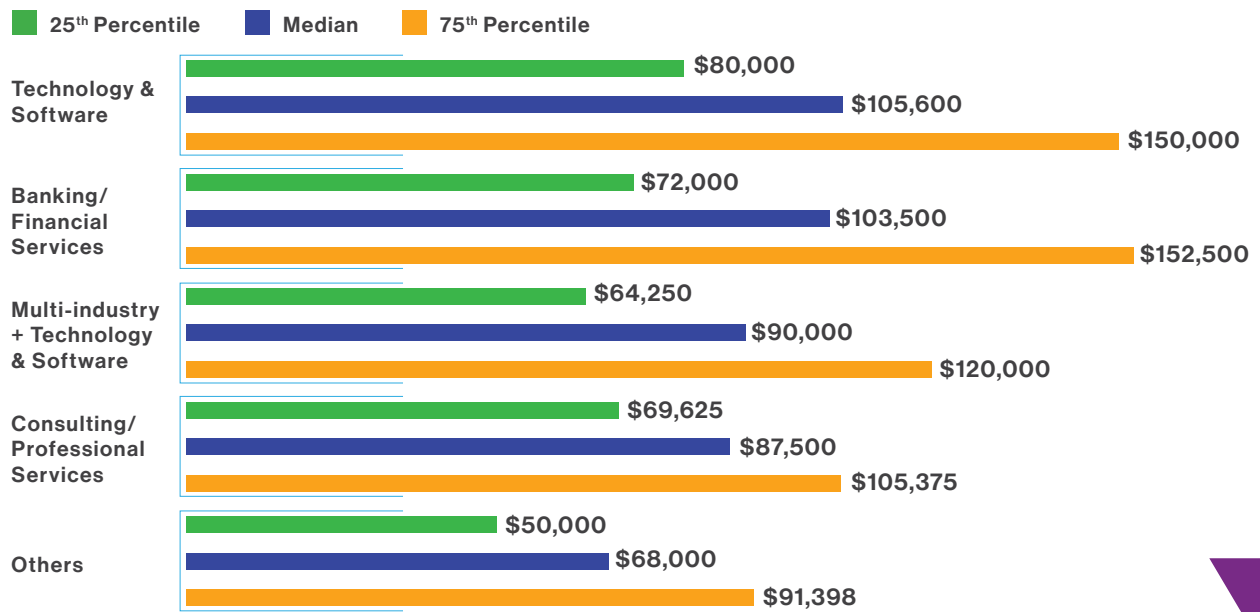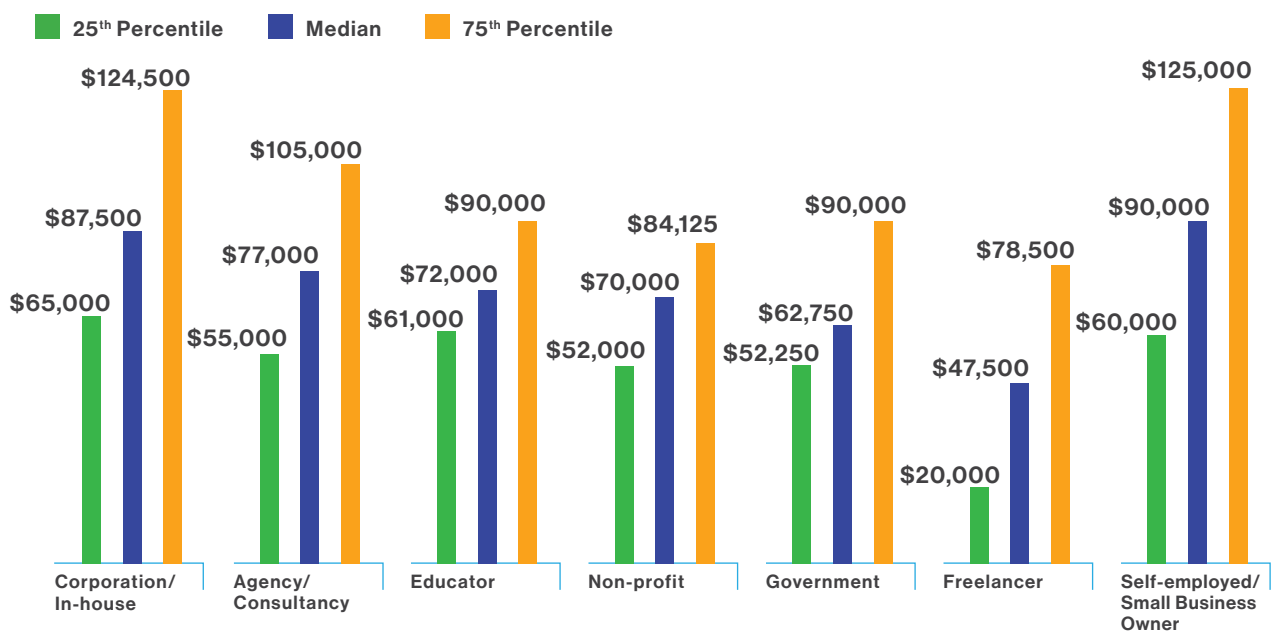
Multi-proficiency (digital not included)
- $49,000 (25th Percentile)
- $68,250 (Median)
- $91,750 (75th Percentile)

Multi-proficiency + Digital (Web/UX/UI)
- $56,000 (25th Percentile)
- $80,000 (Median)
- $110,000 (75th Percentile)

Figure 17: Industry Impact on Overall Income[10]

Legend: 25th Percentile (green), Median (blue), 75th Percentile (orange)

Technology & Software
- 25th Percentile: $80,000
- Median: $105,600
- 75th Percentile: $150,000

Banking/ Financial Services
- 25th Percentile: $72,000
- Median: $103,500
- 75th Percentile: $152,500

Multi-industry + Technology & Software
- 25th Percentile: $64,250
- Median: $90,000
- 75th Percentile: $120,000

Consulting/ Professional Services
- 25th Percentile: $69,625
- Median: $87,500
- 75th Percentile: $105,375

Others
- 25th Percentile: $50,000
- Median: $68,000
- 75th Percentile: $91,398

Total income also varies based on employment and job type. Figures 18 and 19 present the total salary/pay for designers with one single source of income.[11]

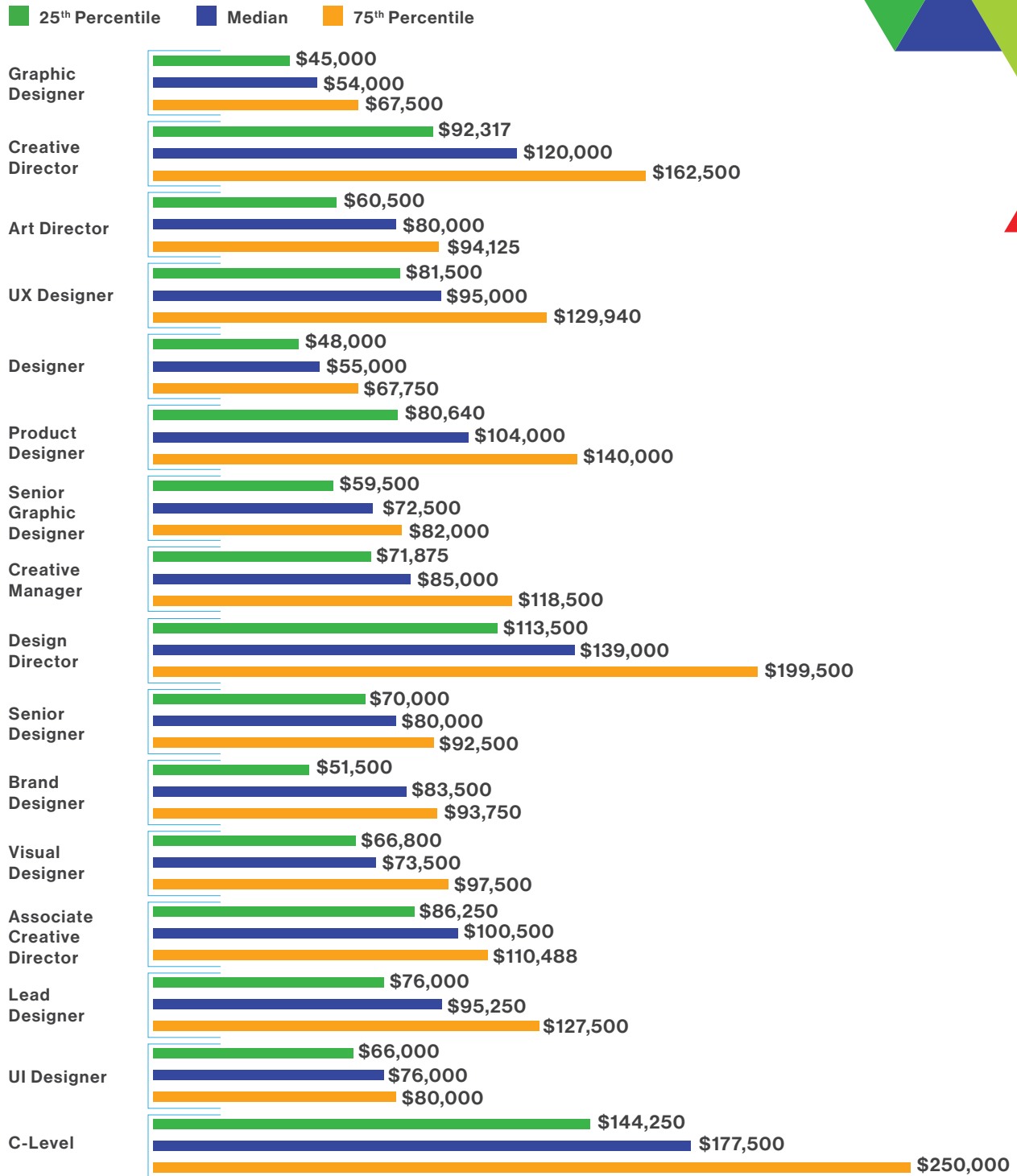## Figure 18: Employment Type Impact on Overall Pay/Salary[12]

Legend: 25th Percentile (green), Median (blue), 75th Percentile (orange)

Corporation/ In-house
- 25th Percentile: $65,000
- Median: $87,500
- 75th Percentile: $124,500

Agency/ Consultancy
- 25th Percentile: $55,000
- Median: $77,000
- 75th Percentile: $105,000

Educator
- 25th Percentile: $61,000
- Median: $72,000
- 75th Percentile: $90,000

Non-profit
- 25th Percentile: $52,000
- Median: $70,000
- 75th Percentile: $84,125

Government
- 25th Percentile: $52,250
- Median: $62,750
- 75th Percentile: $90,000

Freelancer
- 25th Percentile: $20,000
- Median: $47,500
- 75th Percentile: $78,500

Self-employed/ Small Business Owner
- 25th Percentile: $60,000
- Median: $90,000
- 75th Percentile: $125,000

[10] Only included states with 25 or more responses.

[11] Income = Pay = Salary for designers with only one source of reported annual income.

[12] Only considered one source of income.

Figure 19: Total Annual Income (Pre-tax) By Job Title[13]

■ 25th Percentile　■ Median　■ 75th Percentile

Graphic Designer
- $45,000
- $54,000
- $67,500

Creative Director
- $92,317
- $120,000
- $162,500

Art Director
- $60,500
- $80,000
- $94,125

UX Designer
- $81,500
- $95,000
- $129,940

Designer
- $48,000
- $55,000
- $67,750

Product Designer
- $80,640
- $104,000
- $140,000

Senior Graphic Designer
- $59,500
- $72,500
- $82,000

Creative Manager
- $71,875
- $85,000
- $118,500

Design Director
- $113,500
- $139,000
- $199,500

Senior Designer
- $70,000
- $80,000
- $92,500

Brand Designer
- $51,500
- $83,500
- $93,750

Visual Designer
- $66,800
- $73,500
- $97,500

Associate Creative Director
- $86,250
- $100,500
- $110,488

Lead Designer
- $76,000
- $95,250
- $127,500

UI Designer
- $66,000
- $76,000
- $80,000

C-Level
- $144,250
- $177,500
- $250,000

[13] Only analyzed positions with more than 10 records and one source of income.

As we see above, there are many factors (beyond the ones highlighted) that can impact income. Any comparative analysis based on demographic variables or other groupings should take these factors into account. With this in mind, we present below in Table 3 the impact of selected demographic factors on overall income, along with a brief explanation of some of the main causes for the differences.

Table 3: Impact of Demographic Factors on Total Income

Factor	Median Annual Income	Notes
Gender[14]	$82,000 Males $70,000 Females $62,000 Other (e.g., agender, gender nonconforming, transgender, non-binary)	• Males were more likely to report being in higher level positions (e.g., 53% self-identified as managers or above as compared to 38% females and 22% other genders) • Males were more likely to report working longer hours (e.g., 57% males working 41 or more hours as compared to 42% females and 40% other genders) • Males were more likely to report having digital proficiency such as UX/UI (e.g., 63% as compared to 46% of females and 31% other genders)
Persons with a Disability	$66,750 Yes (self-identified as a person with a disability) $75,000 No (did not self-identify as a person with a disability)	• Persons without a self-reported disability were more likely to report being in higher level positions (e.g., 44% managers or above as compared to 33% with a reported disability) • Persons without a self-reported disability also more likely to report having design digital proficiency such as UX/UI (e.g., 63% as compared to 56% with a reported disability)
Ethnicity/ Race	$85,000 Asian Americans $74,750 White $70,000 Hispanic, Latinx $69,000 Black/African American	• Respondents with Asian American ethnicity were more likely to report having digital proficiency such as UX/UI (e.g.,65% as compared to 56% of other groups) and at least two times more likely to work on the Technology and Software industry.
Sexual Orientation	$65,000 LGBTQIA+ $75,000 Not reported	• Persons who did not identify as LGBTQIA+ were more likely to report being in higher level positions (45% managers or above as compared to 33% who did identify as LGBTQIA+)

14 Consider checking Netflix's Explained | Why Women Are Paid Less

![AIGA]

AIGA Design POV Research Initiative: 2021 | *Being a Designer, Design Pathways, and Market Intelligence* | AIGA.org/DesignPOV

Receiving fair pay/benefits matters to the community. As we shared previously on Design Leads and Value of Design, we found using AIGA Better Workplaces for Designers™ assessment that the top ways to create better workplaces for designers is to build cultures where people: feel valued/respected/heard; receive fair pay/benefits; are encouraged to have a healthy work-life balance; are presented with opportunities to grow, use existing skills/abilities, and learn new skills; feel safe to be their true selves; and are empowered to make decisions. It is important for both employers and employees to have data on market intelligence, including pay and benefits.
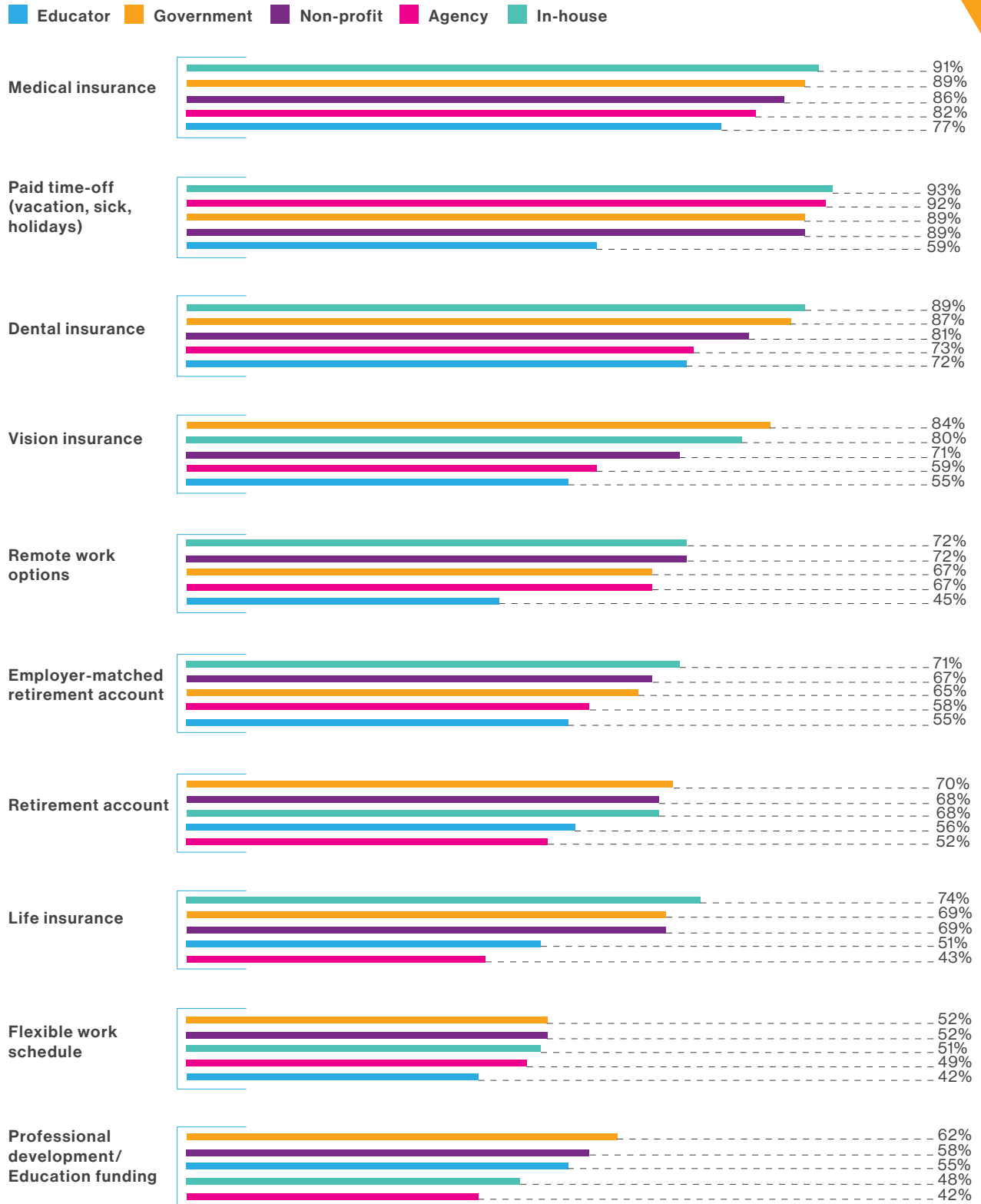
Considering the significant number of self-employed professionals in Design, a substantial percentage of design professionals do not receive benefits from an employer, pay their own benefits or have access to benefits through a partner. Figure 20 presents the top 10 benefits that the Design community currently has access to via employment in corporations, non-profit organizations, government, agencies, or as educators.

Benefits offered vary by employment types. For example, designers employed by corporations (in-house) were more likely than others to report having access to profit sharing/stock options, matching employee charitable contributions, and paid time off for volunteer activities; and approximately one out of three of respondents reported having such benefits. Those employed by the government, non-profit organizations or as educators, were more likely to report having access to professional development/education funding.

It is important for both employers and employees to have data on market intelligence, including pay and benefits.

Figure 20: Most Common Benefits Currently Available

Legend: ■ Educator ■ Government ■ Non-profit ■ Agency ■ In-house

Medical insurance
- In-house: 91%
- Government: 89%
- Non-profit: 86%
- Agency: 82%
- Educator: 77%

Paid time-off (vacation, sick, holidays)
- In-house: 93%
- Agency: 92%
- Government: 89%
- Non-profit: 89%
- Educator: 59%

Dental insurance
- In-house: 89%
- Government: 87%
- Non-profit: 81%
- Agency: 73%
- Educator: 72%

Vision insurance
- Government: 84%
- In-house: 80%
- Non-profit: 71%
- Agency: 59%
- Educator: 55%

Remote work options
- In-house: 72%
- Non-profit: 72%
- Government: 67%
- Agency: 67%
- Educator: 45%

Employer-matched retirement account
- In-house: 71%
- Non-profit: 67%
- Government: 65%
- Agency: 58%
- Educator: 55%

Retirement account
- Government: 70%
- Non-profit: 68%
- In-house: 68%
- Educator: 56%
- Agency: 52%

Life insurance
- In-house: 74%
- Government: 69%
- Non-profit: 69%
- Educator: 51%
- Agency: 43%

Flexible work schedule
- Government: 52%
- Non-profit: 52%
- In-house: 51%
- Agency: 49%
- Educator: 42%

Professional development/ Education funding
- Government: 62%
- Non-profit: 58%
- Educator: 55%
- In-house: 48%
- Agency: 42%

Insights to Action

Being proactive in relation to one's career is often recommended. Consider the exercise below to plan your next career steps. Check out AIGA.org and EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org for inspiration and resources.

Determine your goals for the next three to five years.

Establish your action plan to get there.

Resources

- AIGA.org
- AIGA Jobs
- AIGA Eye on Design
- AIGA Design POV Executive Summary
- AIGA Design POV - Market Reset and Future Forward
- AIGA Design POV - Design Leads and Value of Design
- Vitamin Talent Salary Guide
- The Creative Group Salary Guide
- BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook
- Glassdoor
- The Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing & Ethical Guidelines
- Data USA
- Netflix Explained Why Women Are Paid Less?
- Cella Salary Guide
- SHRM
- World at Work

Methodology

Design POV Research

We used an exploratory, sequential, mixed methods approach by virtually interviewing approximately 30 members of the Design community including a diverse random sampling of participants as well as several AIGA volunteer leaders, followed by a quantitative online research survey conducted between December 3, 2020 and January 10, 2021. The survey responses were anonymous, no incentives were offered for completion, and 5,437 individuals participated (2,251 fully; 3,186 partially) for an overall response rate of 2.2%. The overall margin of error of the survey was +/- 2% at 95% confidence level.

Mixed methods research approaches integrate qualitative and quantitative data in order to minimize the weakness of each of these methods alone.[†] Secondary research was also analyzed, including data from official government agencies, AIGA databases, hundreds of job posts for Design professionals at many levels, previous research from AIGA, annual reports/ websites from the top 100 Fortune World's Most Admired Companies, and many other multidisciplinary sources. The main limitations of the study are related to: the self-reporting nature of responses, the individual level of analysis (i.e., there could be different individuals from the same organization), and the limited information available on the total Design population in the U.S. and abroad to allow for the representation analysis of our current sample.

> Mixed methods research approaches integrate qualitative and quantitative data in order to minimize the weakness of each of these methods alone.[†]

[†] Creswell, J. W. (2014). Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. SAGE Publications.

What's Coming Next...

In the next chapter of AIGA's Design POV:

We will look at the makeup of the creative community, with insights into how we can advance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We will examine thoughts around the value of lifelong learning, and finally, delve into the positive impact of Design.

The full Design POV will be released in conjunction with AIGA's 2021 Design Conference this fall.

The next few months hold infinite possibilities for conversations and discoveries, and we hope you will join us in discussion.

Executive Summary

Market Reset

Future Forward

Lifelong Learning

Design Pathways

Being a Designer

Design Leads

Creative Communities

Annual Design Conference

Design for Positive Impact

Value of Design

Market Intelligence

Acknowledgments

The Design POV was made possible thanks to all the participants in our research and the support of PepsiCo.

We are also thankful to those who contributed their time and expertise by kindly sharing their insights with us in interviews or online focus groups over the last year to help make the Design POV a robust report.

AIGA, the professional association for design, advances design as a professional craft, strategic advantage, and vital cultural force. From content that defines the global practice to events that connect and catalyze, we work to enhance the value and deepen the impact of design across all disciplines on business, society, and our collective future.

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