

The AIGA logo consists of the word "AIGA" in a white, serif font, centered within a teal square. The background of the entire page is a dark blue with a pattern of overlapping, colorful geometric shapes in shades of teal, red, orange, yellow, green, and pink, creating a dynamic, abstract composition.

AIGA

design  
point of view  
research  
initiative

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

*2021 | Full Report*



Our long-term vision has become more ambitious—to **empower designers to be a force for business change with actionable insights.**

**Bennie F. Johnson** |  
AIGA Executive Director

## Design Forward

AIGA is committed to enhancing designers' relevance, leadership, and opportunities for success. One of the greatest challenges comes in finding ways to inspire and guide those inside and outside the profession to understand how valuable the character, training, and experience of designers can be in solving complex problems and bringing positive change to society.

The AIGA Design Point of View (POV)<sup>™</sup> Research Initiative is evolving to honor the profession as well as inspire and serve as a force for change within the Design community. We are moving beyond the U.S. to include more than 100 other countries, past numbers to include stories, to transform a single annual event into a catalyst for ongoing conversations, and to create an open approach to knowledge by incorporating research from several new sources and from multiple disciplines.

The goal remains the same: to provide a deep understanding of Design and the people who engage with it, to reveal the underlying challenges of the profession, guide future impact, and influence policy and decision making. Our long-term vision has become more ambitious—to empower designers to be a force for business change with actionable insights.

By engaging in such an initiative, AIGA will increase access to knowledge and involve the broader community interested in joining the conversation and taking it further through research collaborations. This will benefit the individual designer as student, professional, educator, business owner, and creative change leader.

The AIGA Design POV can provide insights into current topics impacting the Design community and create resources that can be used to better understand needs and create a more desirable future. And the body of knowledge gleaned from our ongoing research efforts will proactively position the Design community in a place of thought leadership and innovation, especially around the future of the Design profession. Enjoy the reading, and anticipate the future we can build together to be a force for change.

**Create boldly,**

## Executive Summary

The Design industry continues to transform and COVID-19 has exponentially accelerated the pace of change.

- 01 The movement to internalize Design teams in-house and the concentration of Design continued with the augmented focus on short-term survival, productivity, and competitiveness.
- 02 Artificial Intelligence and the democratization of Design with low-cost cloud-based DIY solutions are coming faster than expected and apparently also benefited from the crisis.
- 03 To remain competitive, designers are being asked to anticipate, adapt, up-skill, re-skill, and be even more creative and bold while also productive and fast.

We are humbled to share in this report the findings of our first AIGA Design POV which had more than 5K+ participants in 100+ countries. Subsequent pages reflect the highlights of our findings.

<sup>^</sup> 2,251 fully completed + 3,186 partially completed = 5,437 total participants in 103 countries. 2.2% response rate and margin of error of +/-2%. Survey conducted from December 3, 2020 to January 10, 2021.

# 5,437

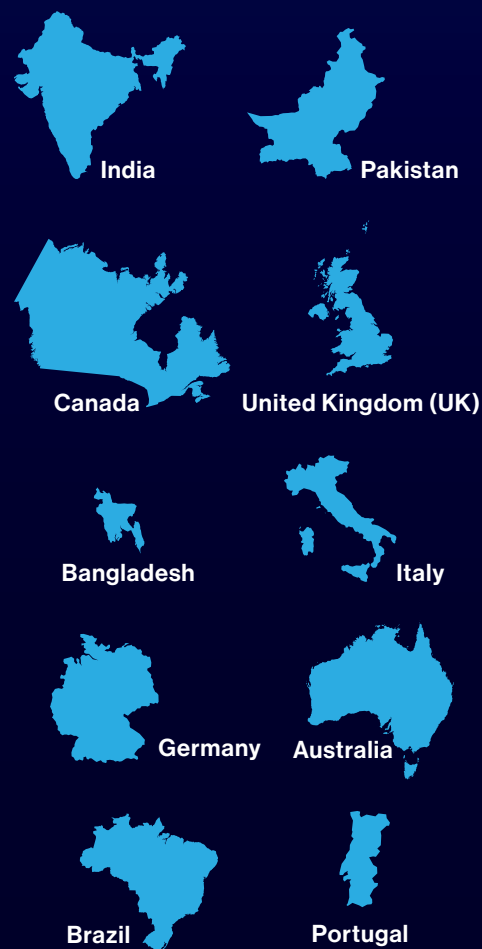
Total Number of Participants  
More Than 100 Countries<sup>^</sup>

# 82.6%

Participants  
United States of America

# 17.4%

Outside of the USA Participants  
Top 10 Countries



# Market Reset

## *Time to lead change and show value*

COVID-19 caused the marketplace to reset and its impact on the Design community was uneven. The new challenges presented by COVID-19 were focused around work (e.g., “finding work”; “keeping work”; “balancing work”) or adaptability (e.g., “adapting to change”; “staying connected, motivated, positive, creative”; “pivoting”). Many more Design

professionals are now temporarily unemployed (6 percent vs. < 1 percent in 2019); four out of ten professionals had their income negatively impacted, and about one out of five respondents are struggling to stay afloat or even considering moving out of the profession. However, some are busier than before and have grown their practices during this crisis.

Talent and optimism have never been more important as the level of competitiveness and uncertainty continue to accelerate. It is a good time for Design to lead the future, and six out of ten respondents believe Design has a role to play in helping us emerge stronger from the crisis.



Companies now have no choice but to change.”

**Oonie Chase** | Executive Director, IDEO



### Highlights

- 01 Talent has never been more important than now.
- 02 Design has a unique opportunity to lead change and show its value.
- 03 Develop a plan to best position yourself for the future.

# Future Forward

## Anticipate and create future change

It is time to be future forward. According to the Design community, new technologies such as AI/machine learning (49 percent), Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality (38 percent), collaborative Design software (33 percent), online behavior tracking/modeling (28 percent), and telepresence/virtual workplaces (25 percent)

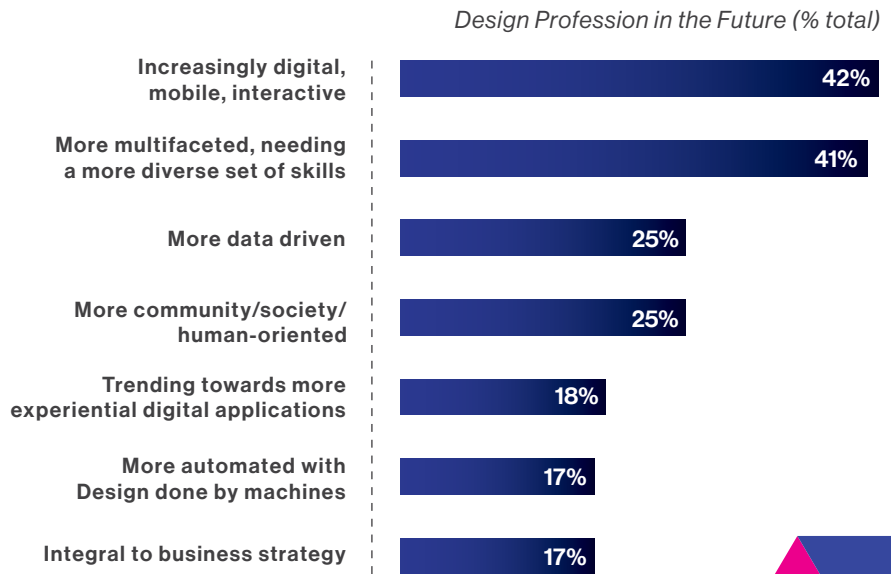
are the top emerging trends that will potentially have the largest impact on the profession. Designers also see their profession changing in the future: 42 percent believe it will be increasingly digital, mobile, interactive; 41 percent think it will be multifaceted, needing a more diverse set of skills; 25 percent feel Design will be more

data driven; 25 percent believe it will be more community/society/human-oriented; 18 percent see Design trending towards more experiential digital applications; 17 percent think it will be more automated with some Design done by machines; and 17 percent believe Design will be integral to business strategy.



Design needs to be in larger and increasingly consequential environmental, societal, and economic conversations.”

**Brian Collins** |  
Chief Creative Officer,  
COLLINS, SF & NYC



### Highlights

- 01 Being future forward is paramount in helping to shape what is next.
- 02 Being future forward starts with being aware of the broader context and trends.
- 03 Creating future change requires being proactive, disruptive, patient, and adaptable.

# Lifelong Learning

## A new look at professional competencies

Lifelong learning is critical in Design. Communication skills (written, verbal, listening, asking questions) ranked highest (4.74 on a scale of 1-not important to 5-very important) in terms of future importance for the Design profession, followed closely by adaptability (to tech/social change) and complex problem solving.

Adaptability has never been more critical and is where the profession perceives its most significant competency gap. To stay current, designers learn new skills on-the-job (71 percent), look at other people's work (66 percent); leverage YouTube tutorials (62 percent); find online training opportunities (57 percent); and

attend conferences/workshops (54 percent). We will introduce later the first prototype of the **AIGA Design Professional Competency Model™** with the most common competencies required in job posts. We are excited to continue improving this model through ongoing conversations with the Design community.



If you don't keep up, you get pushed out. You need to learn and evolve skill sets. There is a focus on being multi-disciplinary and adaptable."

**Gradwell Sears** |  
Executive Creative Officer,  
MediaMonks

Adaptability has never been more critical and is where the profession perceives its most significant competency gap.

Top 5 Future Competencies and Major Competency Gaps

Future Competencies		vs	Competency Gaps	
01	Communication skills			Adaptability (to tech/social change)
02	Adaptability (to tech/social change)			Relationship management
03	Complex problem solving			Business acumen
04	Collaboration skills			Presentation skills
05	Relationship management			Complex problem solving

### Highlights

- 01 Never stop learning.
- 02 Focus not only on strengths but also aim to minimize potential gaps.
- 03 Proactively create a learning plan.

# Design Leads

## Leading through Design

Design leads people and organizations. However, leadership in the Design profession is not always easy. The key leadership challenges experienced while leading designers are around: creating stronger concepts/Design solutions (32 percent); attention to details (27 percent); time management (20 percent); productivity management (19 percent); and aligning the team around a vision (18 percent). Creating cultures that allow for better workplaces for designers is also another important aspect of leadership in the profession.

To help in that regard, we developed an initial framework of the **AIGA Better Workplaces for Designers™** which revealed that the top ways to create better workplaces for designers is to build cultures where people: feel valued/respected/heard; have fair pay/benefits; have healthy work-life balance; have opportunities to grow, use skills/abilities, learn new skills; feel safe to be their trueselves and empowered to make decisions. Design maturity is not at the same level in every company with about one out of four employed repondents strongly agreeing that Design

is a strategic driver in their organizations. Respondents that said Design is a strategic driver in their organization were more likely to say they felt good about their organization's financial future, the loyalty of their customers, and being satisfied with their work situation.

To help track progress over time and empower designers to be a force for change, we created the **AIGA Design Forward™** index that is composed of: 1. Strategic Execution; 2. Talent Brand; 3. Total Impact. The overall score for this year was 6.9 out of 10.



At the highest level, everyone should be able to express themselves and create spaces where people want to be. We want people to be engaged.”

**Nijel Taylor** | Design Director,  
Siegel + Gale

### Highlights

- 01 Create high performing cultures and better workplaces for designers.
- 02 Learn with those who have positioned Design as a strategic driver in their organizations.
- 03 Measure how you are moving Design forward in your organization.

# Design Pathways

## From early inspiration to ongoing development

Design pathways are multifaceted, multiple, and nonlinear. Artistic appreciation (53 percent always loved drawing, painting, illustrating, or creating), creative spirit (33 percent said the creative bug was always there), and perceived talent (31 percent always felt they could do great creative work) are the most common sources of inspiration for individuals to become (or want to become) a designer.

Networking and relationship building are important to enter and advance in the profession, with 42 percent of respondents

saying that building relationships/networking was what helped them land their first Design jobs. Being persistent (41 percent), working hard (38 percent), doing internships (29 percent), freelance work (21 percent), and having mentors (20 percent) also helped with the professional journey. We heard in conversations and through survey responses that varied work arrangements are best suited to a particular goal. For example, in-house Design positions are best for those looking for work-life balance and job security.

Becoming an educator is a goal for those who want to influence the future of Design and bring positive change to the world. Creative freedom and doing great work can be most likely achieved as freelancers/permalancers. Owning a small business is more likely to fit the needs of those who want to learn about Design as a business and be empowered to make decisions. Agencies are perceived as ideal to start/advance a career, join creative cultures, and collaborate on a global scale.



The best way [to land a first job] is to build relationships and get to know different types of people.”

**Sue Walsh** |  
Principal, Design,  
SYPartners

### GOALS

Freelance/Permalance	<b>Creative freedom/do great work/be all I can be</b>
Educator	<b>Influence the future of Design/bring positive change to the world</b>
In-House	<b>Better job security/work-life balance</b>
Small Business Owner	<b>Learn about Design as a business/ be empowered to make decisions</b>
Agency	<b>Start/advance Design career join a more creative culture/ collaborate on a global scale</b>

### Highlights

- 01 Be mindful of your goals and how they change along your career journey.
- 02 Plan your steps based on what you are looking for.
- 03 Never stop building relationships/networks.



# Being a Designer

## Insights around being a designer

Being a designer is articulated by the community through three main lenses: a **Skillset** (“visual problem solver, experience creator, and communicator/storyteller.”); a **Mindset** (“to be a designer is more so a way

of thinking than doing.”); an **Outcome**–or **Impactset** as we are calling it (“force for change, progress, and good.”). Solving problems, seeing the impact of the work, being part of the creative community, bringing

positive change to society, and challenging oneself to be better is what designers like most about their profession. Many join professional organizations that represent Design, such as AIGA.



### ■ What it means to be a designer as articulated by the Design community

#### Highlights

- 01 Focus on what it means to be a designer.
- 02 Connect with the Design community on meaning.
- 03 Let your impact define what Design is.



Design is the third pillar of human inquiry—flanked by the Sciences and Humanities. As such, we should call it ‘the Designs.’ The Sciences ask, ‘What is fact?’ The Humanities ask, ‘What is important?’ The Designs ask, ‘What is desirable?’ All Design practices, in their own ways, aim to bridge the chasm, separating where we are and where we want to be.”

**Leland Maschmeyer** |  
Former Chief Brand Officer,  
Chobani

# Creative Communities

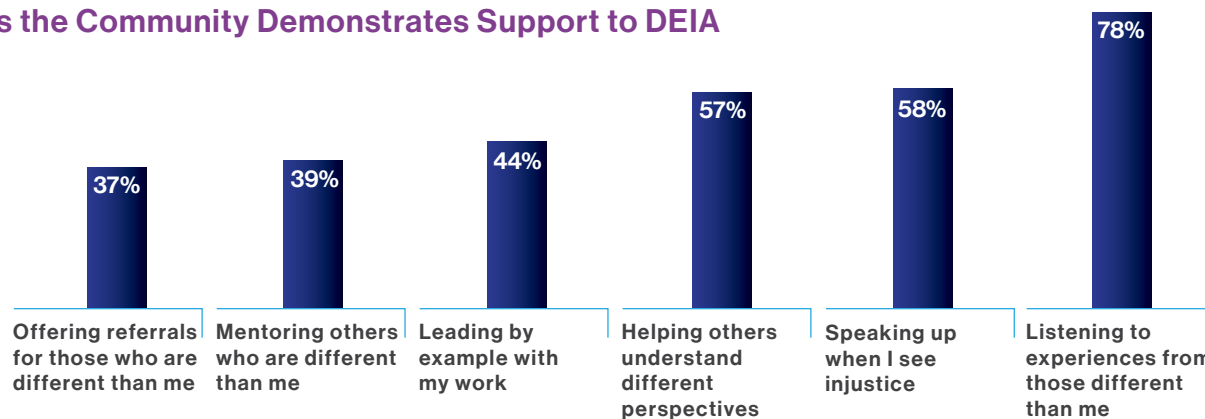
## Advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

Creative communities are vibrant and diverse in multiple ways. Designers work in multiple industries, in multiple roles, have multiple skills, and have higher representation of certain groups in the community (e.g., women, younger professionals, LGBTQIA+, Asian Americans, persons with a disability) than in the overall population. However, there is much more to be done in regards to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA). Some of the dilemmas presented:

underrepresentation in leadership positions; potential pay gaps; overall underrepresentation of certain groups in the profession (e.g., Blacks/African Americans; Hispanics/Latinx; older professionals; Veterans/Military families); and other specific dilemmas by group. The top challenges faced by underrepresented groups when entering the Design profession are: (1) lack of networks/access to people; (2) financial barriers; and (3) lack of support. The community

shared ways they are letting their actions speak by demonstrating support for DEIA initiatives. The most common are: listening to experiences from those different than oneself (78 percent); speaking up when seeing injustice (58 percent); helping others understand different perspectives (57 percent); leading by example with one's own work (44 percent); mentoring others who are different than oneself (39 percent); offering referrals to those who are different than oneself (37 percent).

### Ways the Community Demonstrates Support to DEIA



How do we make people feel welcome and how do we get their perspective; because it is valuable and it will make us more creative, it can help a company be more profitable. It brings a richness to humanity when people participate and feel empowered. People have left bitter and broken because they could sit at the table but were not allowed to speak.”

**Carlos Estrada** | Senior Art Director,  
Community Catalyst & Public Speaker

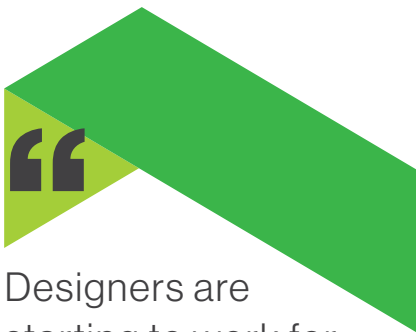
# Market Intelligence

## *Intrinsic value of designers' professional craft*

Every designer is a potential business. Based on our research, four out of ten designers have two or more sources of income. And those who have more than one income can add 26 percent more to their highest income on average. In-house professionals are less likely to do work outside of their main employment and freelance work is the most common added

work arrangement for those who have a second source of income. For those with three different work arrangements, the most common are: a) In-house/Freelance/Small Business Owner; b) In-house/Freelance/Educator; c) Educator/Small Business Owner/Freelance. The most common benefits available (for those with benefits) are: 1) medical insurance;

2) paid time off (vacation, sick, holidays), dental insurance, vision insurance, and remote work options. Of those who responded, 21 percent mentioned support for professional memberships as a benefit currently available. In the following pages, we present detailed tables with the **AIGA Market Intelligence™** on income levels by most common positions.



Designers are starting to work for multiple organizations at the same time, working in more than one job.”

**Santiago Felippelli** |  
Owner, Bridger Conway



### 4 out of 10

designers have two or more sources of income [respondents with income from more than one type of work arrangement].

**26%** increase to their highest income on average [respondents with more than one source of income].

### Highlights

- 01 Contrary to many other professions, your professional craft has an intrinsic value.
- 02 Develop your entrepreneurial spirit.
- 03 Celebrate that every designer is a potential business by proactively learning about business.

# Value of Design

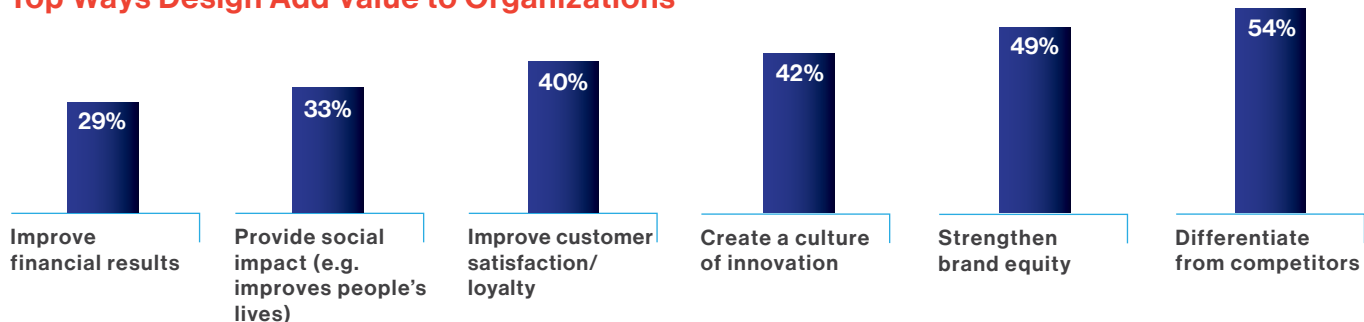
## Bringing strategic value to organizations

One point that resonated clearly in this research is that Design is essential to organizations. The community believes strongly that Design adds value to organizations through differentiation, strengthening brand equity, creating a culture of innovation, improving customer satisfaction/loyalty, providing social impact, and improving financial results. There is still great opportunity to help promote

the value of Design and advance the profession in organizations. According to the community, the most senior designer is still more likely to report to different levels (Chief/VP/Director/Manager) within marketing and communications departments. Even among Fortune 100 World's Most Admired Companies, we estimated that Chief Design Officers (or equivalents) are only publicly listed as part of

the top executive level in about 15 percent of cases. There is still a long journey ahead for Design to earn respect and a place at the executive table. For example, designers are more than five times less likely than human resources and finance professionals to be listed as part of the executive level on the 100 world's most admired companies.

### Top Ways Design Add Value to Organizations



“Designers need a seat at the table from the very beginning. Smart companies and agencies are doing that. It’s shifting dramatically and quickly but that simply was not the case in the past. The role of the designer can’t be an afterthought.”

**Alison Gragnano** | Executive Creative Director, The New School

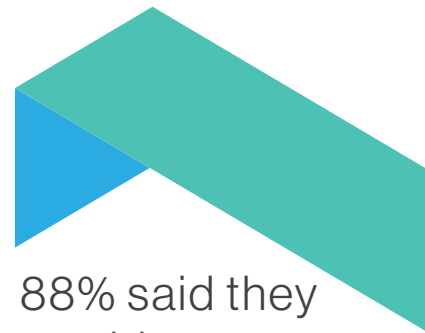
### Highlights

- 01 There is still a long journey ahead for Design to earn respect and a place at the executive table.
- 02 Measure your impact and earn respect with big and bold wins.
- 03 Contribute to building better businesses.

# Design for Positive Impact

## Points of view shared by the community

Design for Positive Impact is important for the human centric Design community. The Design community continues to inspire and impress with its social conscience as approximately one out of two designers say they have volunteered their skills to help their communities during this trying time (AIGA Design Pulse Check, May 2020). Designers are also willing to pass on a particular job based on their values. In a recent survey conducted by The Creative Group and AIGA, 88 percent of designers currently employed (and 56 percent of those unemployed) would not accept a job with a company whose values did not match their own. As designers think about the future, they believe the community should have a Point of View (a position the profession stands for) about: advancing DEIA; creating standards for the Design profession; advocating for Design; strengthening the Design community; advancing Design education/learning; being a force for change; advancing purposeful/ethical business practices; supporting freelancers, solopreneurs and small businesses; promoting sustainability/environmental responsibility.



88% said they would not accept an attractive job offer with a company whose values did not match their own.

From a recent survey of 500+ creative professionals conducted in October 2020 by **The Creative Group and AIGA**.



### Highlights

- 01 Advance Design.
- 02 Participate in the community.
- 03 Join your professional association.

The Design community continues to inspire and impress with its social conscience.

# Market Reset

*Time to lead change and show value*

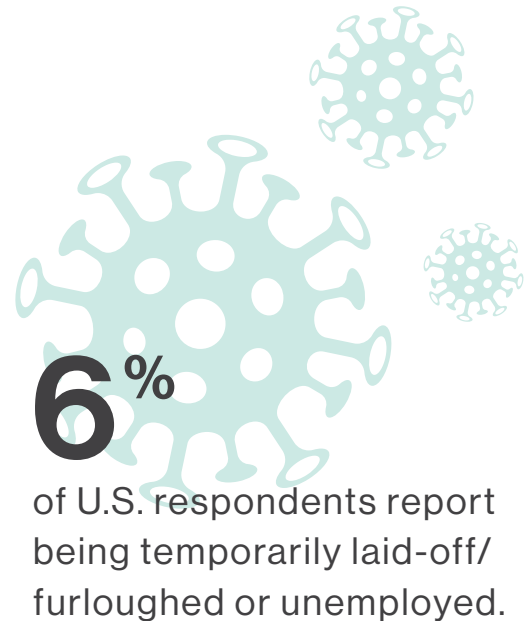
# Market Reset

## *Time to lead change and show value*

The pandemic has accelerated the transformation in the marketplace and imposed numerous challenges to the Design community. These challenges coalesced around these themes<sup>1</sup>:

- **Work-related** (e.g., “finding work”; “keeping work”; “staying afloat”; “working from home/remotely”; “balancing work”) and
- **Adaptive-related** (e.g., “adapting to change”; “staying connected, flexible, positive, motivated, sane, creative”; “learning new skills”; “adapting offers/services”; “pivoting to digital”)

In the 2019 AIGA Design Census, less than one percent of the Design community in the U.S. reported not working for involuntary reasons. Currently, about six percent of U.S. respondents report being temporarily laid-off/furloughed or unemployed (Table 1).



**Table 1: Accelerated marketplace changes– 2021 unique U.S. responses % total highlights**

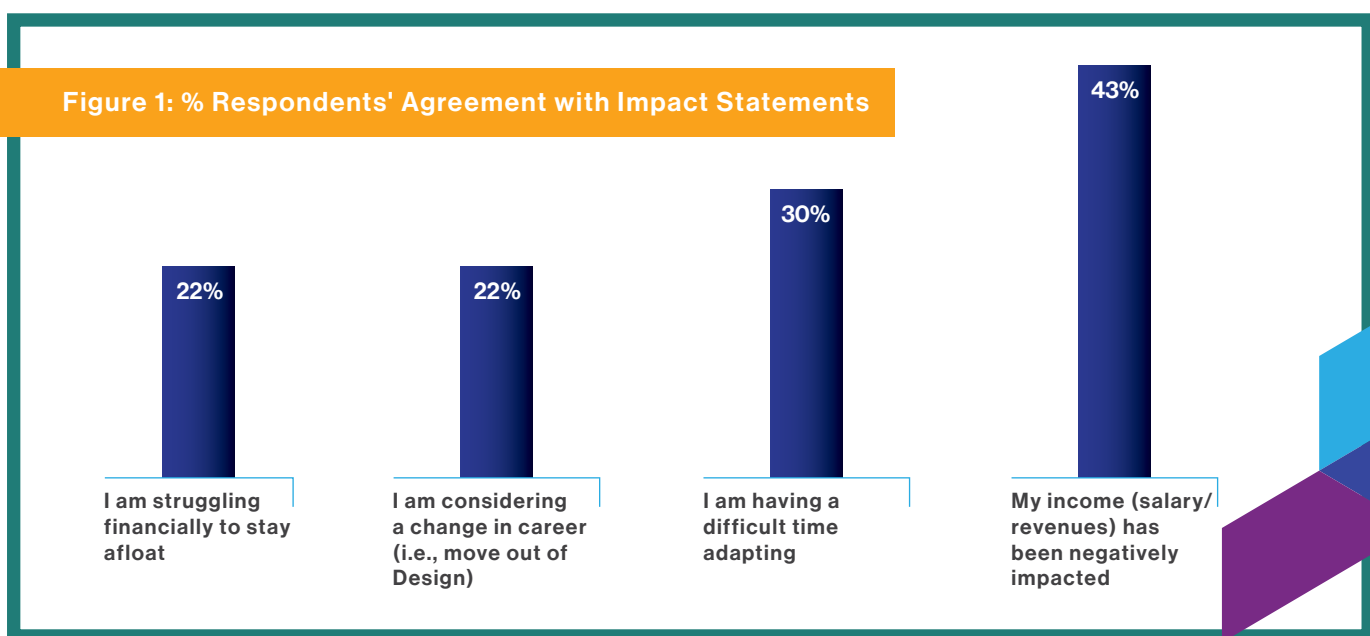
	2019 <sup>2</sup>	2021 <sup>3</sup>
<b>% Unemployed</b>	1%	<b>6%</b>
<b>% Employed agency</b>	28%	<b>14%</b>
<b>% Self-employed/small business owner/freelancer</b>	18%	<b>24%</b>
<b>% Employed (in-house, not-for-profit, government)</b>	42%	<b>43%</b>

<sup>1</sup> AIGA Design Pulse Survey, May 2020

<sup>2</sup> AIGA Design Census, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Question changed in 2021 to reflect designers' multiple roles. For better comparison with 2019, we considered only U.S. responses, normalized the results for unique responses and validated using the AIGA Pulse survey results.

The pandemic also created a new set of first-time entrepreneurs who had no choice but to adapt to keep working.<sup>4</sup> In the Design community, for example, many more individuals self-identified as small business owners or freelancers (24 percent vs. 18 percent in 2019). The movement of internalization and consolidation of Design also accelerated.<sup>5</sup> Agencies/consultancies were affected by the pandemic to a greater degree as they had to compete for tighter budgets and hiring freezes within organizations; and they also observed a significant decrease of designers working in agencies/consultancies (14 percent vs. 28 percent in 2019). The low cost of cloud-based DIY solutions also seem to have benefited from the crisis.<sup>6,7,8</sup>



Overall, approximately four out of ten Design professionals had their income negatively impacted; 30 percent experienced a difficult time adapting; 22 percent struggled to stay afloat; and 22 percent considered moving out of Design (Figure 1). The pandemic's impact on Design professionals was not equally distributed (Figure 2). Designers who were temporarily unemployed, freelancers, small business owners, students, and older professionals felt the most negative impact in terms of income. Designers who were temporarily unemployed and students were more likely to grapple with strategies to stay afloat and have a difficult time adapting. Some industries (e.g., logistics, streaming services, online retailing, supermarkets, online education, etc.) have grown

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-the-covid-economy-laid-off-employees-become-new-entrepreneurs-11605716565>

<sup>5</sup> <https://design.co/design-in-tech-report-2019-no-track/#17>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexkonrad/2020/06/22/canva-new-funding-6-billion-valuation/?sh=477c8be51c95>

<sup>7</sup> <https://hackernoon.com/canva-gains-10-million-new-users-in-2020-q3-interview-vt1j3ebp>

<sup>8</sup> <https://news.adobe.com/news/news-details/2020/>



significantly during the pandemic while others (e.g., airlines, restaurants, leisure, and hospitality) were hardest hit.<sup>9,10,11,12,13</sup> In the Design world, overall, in-house designers in corporations were the least likely to struggle financially to stay afloat and the least likely to have a difficult time adapting. Some disciplines within

Design also were less impacted than others and UX/UI Designers were less likely to report they have had income negatively impacted. Some in the Design profession thrived during the crisis and approximately one out of two respondents said they were satisfied with their current work situation.

**Figure 2:  
Uneven Impact**

	<b>More likely to report they have had income negatively impacted</b>	<b>Less likely to report they have had income negatively impacted</b>
<b>Employment type</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-employed/Small business owners</li> <li>• Freelancers</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-house designers</li> <li>• Designers working in government organizations</li> </ul>
<b>Design experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designers with 20+ years of experience</li> <li>• Designers with &lt; 1 year experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designers with one to nine years of experience</li> </ul>
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older professionals (42 was the average age of respondents more likely to report they have been impacted)<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Younger professionals (39 was the average age of respondents less likely to report they have been impacted)</li> </ul>
<b>Job type/ design proficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graphic Design</li> <li>• Packaging Design</li> <li>• Type Design</li> <li>• Print Design</li> <li>• Art Direction</li> <li>• Environmental Design</li> <li>• Photography</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UX/UI Design</li> <li>• Experience Design</li> <li>• Interaction Design</li> <li>• AR/VR Design</li> <li>• AI/Algorithm Design</li> <li>• Service Design</li> <li>• Data Science</li> </ul>
<b>Industry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel, hospitality, and leisure</li> <li>• Associations, events &amp; trade shows</li> <li>• Clothing/textile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology and software</li> <li>• Insurance</li> <li>• Government</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ibisworld.com/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/>

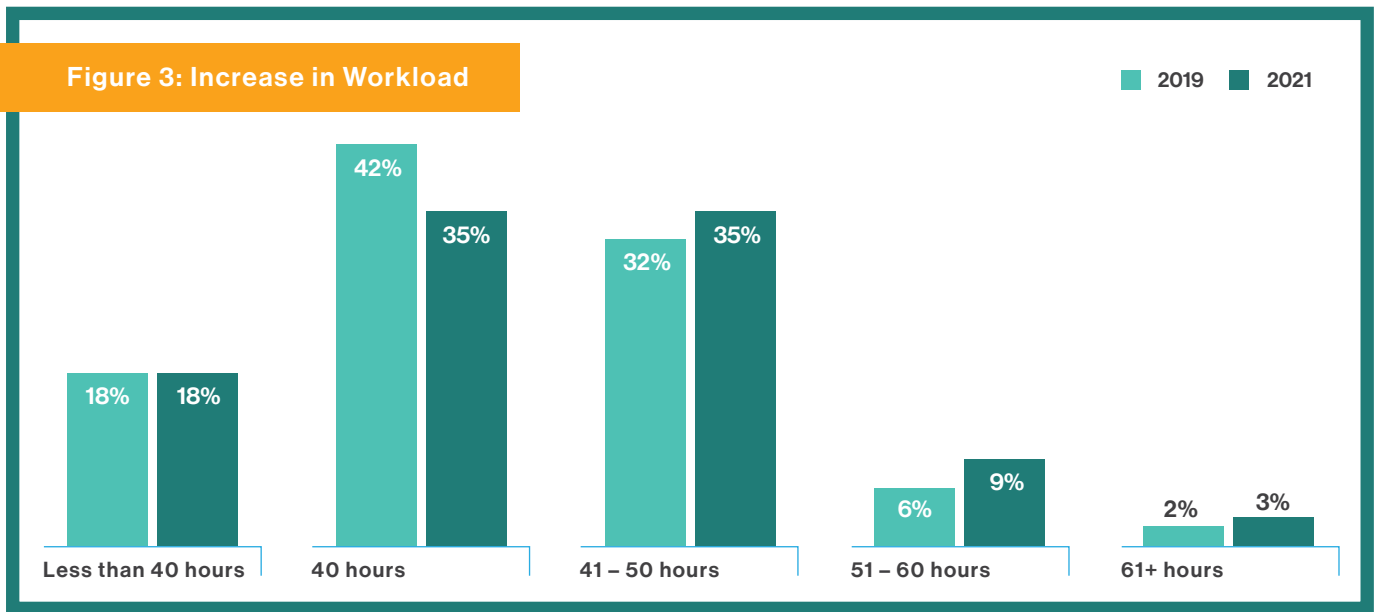
<sup>11</sup> <https://researchfdi.com/industries-that-saw-growth-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/>

<sup>14</sup> Professionals with 40 years or more were 22% more likely to report they have had income negatively impacted than those with less than 40 years.

Balancing work was another work-related adaptability challenge cited by those that remained active. Overall, we observed an increase in workload as compared to 2019 (47 percent working 41 hours or more per week vs. 40 percent previously). According to [Cella In-House Creative Industry Report \(2021\)](#), the work increased for in-house teams primarily due to COVID-19 response support; reset of marketing or communications strategies/messages; and the rapid shift to digital commerce/business.



There was also some positive data in the midst of this crisis that reflected designers' deeper values and showed how this industry is adapting. For example, there was evidence to suggest that the Design community is leveraging the moment to learn new skills and also volunteering their skills to help their communities. In a pulse check conducted in May 2020, we found that six out of ten designers decided to learn new skills such as animation/motion graphics/3D, UX/UI/XD, illustration, coding/HTML, video, Adobe After Effects, digital marketing, management/business/leadership, and SEO/social media. Others noted that they learned to cook, bake, sew, garden, use video/collaboration tools, and teach online. Furthermore, in a survey of 500+ creative professionals conducted by The Creative Group and AIGA in October 2020, about six out of ten working designers agreed that their work-life balance had improved without a commute.

COVID has reset behaviors, transformed industries, and redefined what it means to be adaptive. People are online more, and digitalization has accelerated.

It is said that creativity not only survives tough times, but is nourished by it, and that it is exactly such ingenuity that will allow creatives to emerge stronger from this crisis.<sup>15</sup> The Design community seems to have this optimistic mindset with six out of ten respondents saying they believed that Design would help them emerge stronger from this crisis. Students were the most optimistic about Design's role in the recovery from this crisis, with nearly eight out of ten students agreeing that Design would help them emerge stronger.



**60%** believed that Design would help them emerge stronger from this crisis.

COVID has reset behaviors, transformed industries, and redefined what it means to be adaptive. People are online more, and digitalization has accelerated. According to an article by McKinsey & Company, in about 90 days, we jumped ten years forward with e-commerce replacing physical channels.<sup>16</sup> And, as highlighted by one of the respondents of AIGA's Pulse Survey (May 2020), "It is a time to think and be future forward." The economic rebound will come,<sup>17</sup> and it is definitely a time for the Design community to be a force for change.

### A Note on Optimism

Optimism is even more critical during trying times. We want to share a quick summary from the book "Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life" by Martin E. P. Seligman, Ph.D. We invite designers to reflect on how they describe optimism and to reflect on why it matters for the profession, and primarily in the current context. Individuals' explanatory styles—their way of explaining good or bad events—is what distinguishes optimism from pessimism. In the chart below are three dimensions of explanatory style and how they vary based on the nature of the event for optimists and pessimists.

Dimensions of Explanatory Style	Good Event		Bad Event	
	Optimistic	Pessimistic	Optimistic	Pessimistic
<b>Permanence</b>	Permanent	Temporary	Temporary	Permanent
<b>Pervasiveness</b>	Universal	Specific	Specific	Universal
<b>Personalization</b>	Internal	External	External	Internal

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.adobe.com>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com>



# Insights to Action

Designers are champions of complex problem solving. There is no better time than now to exercise such skills. Try using the SWOT (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats) matrix below to establish your action plan for 2021.

<p><b>List Your [Company] Name Here</b></p>	<p><b>List Opportunities</b></p>	<p><b>List Threats</b></p>	<p><b>Action Plan</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prioritize actions.</li> <li>2. Define time frame for prioritized actions.</li> <li>3. Implement a plan.</li> <li>4. Learn in action.</li> </ol>
<p><b>List Strengths</b></p>	<p>List actions to leverage strengths that optimize opportunities</p>	<p>List actions to leverage strengths [or mitigate] challenges</p>	
<p><b>List Weaknesses</b></p>	<p>List actions to minimize weaknesses to optimize opportunities</p>	<p>List actions to minimize weaknesses to minimize [or mitigate] challenges</p>	

# Future Forward

*Anticipate and create future change*

# Future Forward

## *Anticipate and create future change*

Being cognizant of the future and emerging trends has never been more critical for the Design community. As noted by Ben Williams, R/GA Global Chief Experience Officer, "Design is built around the future...things that are better for the world."<sup>18</sup>

According to the New York Times Bestseller "The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable," the future will be increasingly less predictable and most discoveries will rely less on top-down planning, but instead on tinkering creatively and trying to collect as many Black Swan opportunities as possible.

[AIGA Design Futures](#), for example, aims to help the community anticipate what is next. In 2017, the association identified the following seven trends in Design practices that have long arcs and significance for the future of designers' work and education.

<b>Complex problems</b>	<b>As complexity increases, designers must master methods long required in other fields.</b>
<b>Aggregation and curation</b>	<b>Aggregation can enhance experiences but limits exposure to information, challenging designers to implement new communication strategies.</b>
<b>Bridging digital and physical experiences</b>	<b>As users transition across devices, environments, and activities, designers must diversify interaction and minimize the gaps within user experience.</b>
<b>Core values matter</b>	<b>Models of Design practice have expanded, leading to a need for new strategies and metrics for measuring Design's impact.</b>
<b>Resilient organizations</b>	<b>Success today requires an unparalleled understanding of innovation and the ability to respond flexibly to change.</b>
<b>Making sense in the data economy</b>	<b>New technologies offer new Design tools and materials. They also change the Design process and the roles designers play in it.</b>
<b>Accountability for anticipating Design outcomes</b>	<b>Designers must justify their research and adapt their methods to conform to rigorous standards expected of other business activities.</b>

<sup>18</sup> Fireside Chat with Bennie Johnson, AIGA Executive Director, in November 2020 available at <https://podcasts.apple.com/>

More recent trends from other respected organizations (see resources section for more) highlight a greater need for adaptability:



- Acceleration of digital transformations (e.g., shopping, entertainment, learning)<sup>19, 20</sup>
- Potential impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other cognitive technologies (e.g., machine learning, natural language processing, speech recognition, robotics) in the Design profession<sup>21, 22, 23</sup>
- Total experience, combining multi-experience, customer experience, employee experience, and user experience<sup>24</sup>
- Purposeful businesses, going beyond profits and expected to have a more active role in solving societal challenges<sup>25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33</sup>
- Aging population with amplified global inequalities<sup>34</sup>
- Rise of work from home changing organizations and how people spend their time and reimagine their homes<sup>35, 36, 37, 38</sup>
- Asia shifting global economic power (e.g., China expected to surpass the U.S. before 2030)<sup>29</sup>
- DIY Innovation: empowering people's creativity<sup>39</sup>
- Mindful shoppers with organizations helping consumers make more conscious purchasing decisions<sup>40</sup>
- Design for all with no one left behind<sup>41, 42</sup>
- Regeneration rising as the new sustainability<sup>43</sup>
- Trust gaps (e.g., institutions, organizations, brands, leaders, information)<sup>44</sup>
- Diversity/Inclusion/Equity/Accessibility enabling growth<sup>25, 45</sup>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com>

<sup>21</sup> <https://design.co>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.gartner.com>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/interactive/fjord-trends>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.accenture.com>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.bain.com>

<sup>28</sup> <https://home.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/xx/pdf/2020/09/kpmg-2020-ceo-outlook.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.mintel.com/global-consumer-trends>

<sup>30</sup> <https://go.euromonitor.com>

<sup>31</sup> <https://id.iit.edu/lead-with-purpose/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.edelman.com>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com>

<sup>36</sup> <https://hbr.org/2020/05/3-behavioral-trends-that-will-reshape-our-post-covid-world>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.zenithmedia.co.uk>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.economist.com>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.accenture.com>

<sup>40</sup> <http://info.trendwatching.com>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net>

<sup>42</sup> <https://unsdg.un.org>

<sup>43</sup> <https://intelligence.wundermanthompson.com>

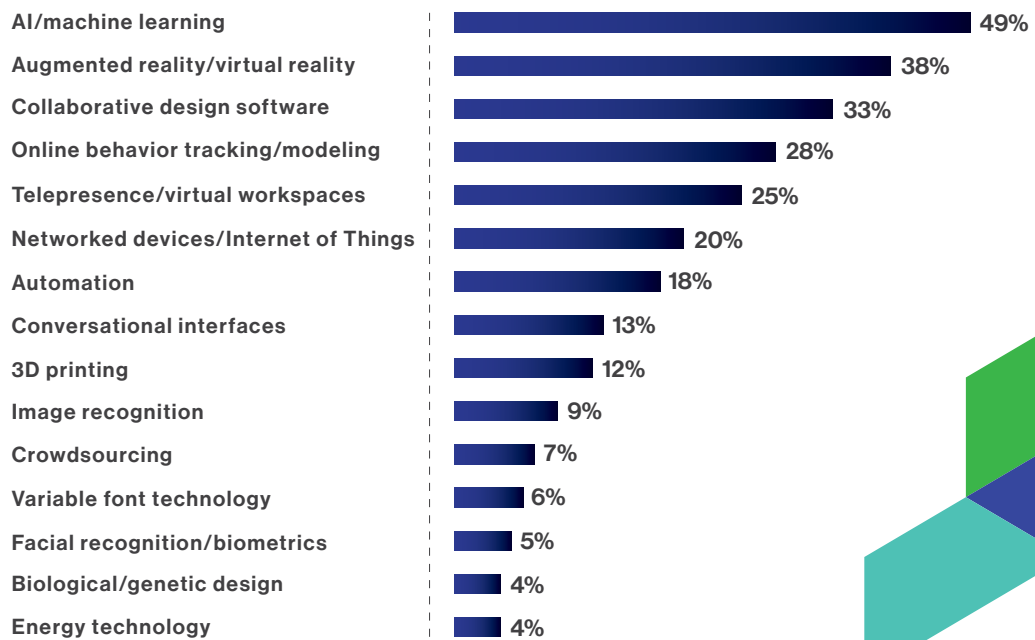
<sup>44</sup> <https://www.edelman.com>

<sup>45</sup> <https://eyeondesign.aiga.org>

Economical, technological, environmental, legal, political, and societal changes are often key drivers of local, national, and global changes. The Design community identified the top emerging trends as potentially having the biggest impact on the profession (Figure 4):

- AI/machine learning
- Augmented reality/virtual reality
- Collaborative design software
- Online behavior tracking/modelling
- Telepresence/virtual workspaces
- Networked devices/Internet of Things

**Figure 4: % Emerging Trends or Technologies with Biggest Impact on Design (% total)**

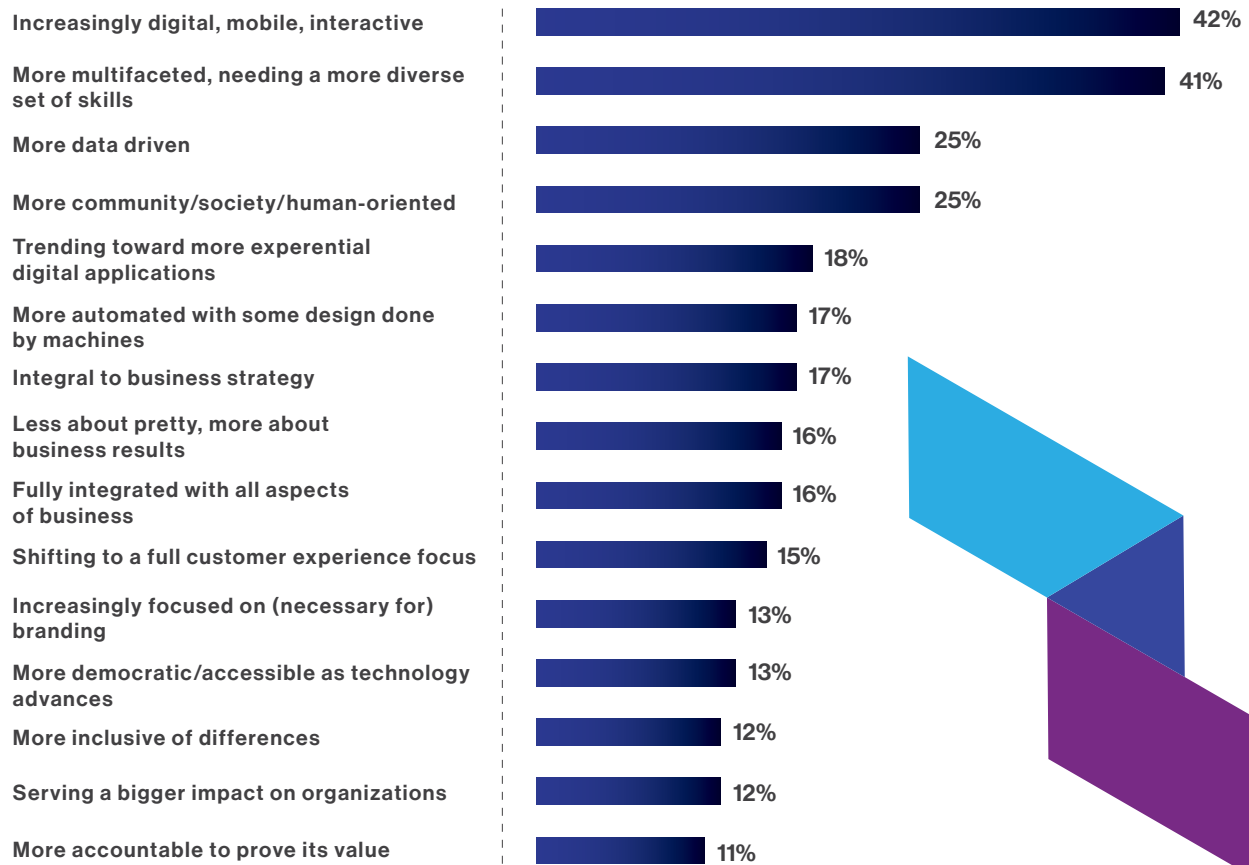




The community also sees the Design profession becoming (Figure 5):

- Increasingly digital, mobile, interactive
- Multifaceted, needing a more diverse set of skills
- More data driven
- More community/society/human-oriented
- More automated with some Design done by machines
- Integral to business strategy
- Less about pretty, more about business results
- Fully integrated with all aspects of business
- Shifting to a full customer experience focus
- Increasingly focused on branding
- More democratic/accessible as technology advances
- More inclusive of differences
- Serving a bigger impact on organizations
- More accountable to prove its value

**Figure 5: Design Profession in the Future (% total)**



The perception of the future of the Design profession varies based on employment status. In-house designers are more likely than educators to see the industry becoming increasingly digital/mobile/interactive, more data driven, more about business results, integral to business strategy and all aspects of business (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Design Profession in the Future—Top Responses by Employment Status**

	<b>In-house Designers</b>	v.s.	<b>Educators</b>
<b>#1</b>	Increasingly digital, mobile, interactive		More multifaceted, needing a more diverse set of skills
<b>#2</b>	More multifaceted, needing a more diverse set of skills		More community/society/human-oriented
<b>#3</b>	More data driven		Increasingly digital, mobile, interactive
<b>#4</b>	Less about pretty, more about business results		More data driven
<b>#5</b>	Trending towards more experiential digital applications		More automated with some Design done by machines
<b>#6</b>	Integral to business strategy		Trending towards more experiential digital applications
<b>#7</b>	Fully integrated in all aspects of business		Less about pretty, more about business results

Some additional insights from our interviews on future needs and trends:



“We need to help people understand how to run a business. Having the tools and the know-how for running a business are important skills.”

**Joe Stitzlein** |  
Co-Founder, Executive Creative Director, Stitzlein Studio



“Design needs to be in larger and increasingly consequential environmental, societal, and economic conversations.”

**Brian Collins** |  
Chief Creative Officer, COLLINS, SF & NYC



“I see a trend where designers are trying to be more business oriented.”

**Kendall (Kay) Uwaibi** | Creative Director, Brand experience and storytelling, Learning design and technology, The Park Ave Company

### A Note on Adaptability

*“Adaptability enforces creativity, and creativity is adaptability.”*<sup>^</sup>

Pearl Zhu

While being cognizant of future possibilities is important, being adaptable is even more important. Adaptability means one is able to quickly respond to changing trends, innovation, destabilization, industry shifts, and so forth. This ability to adjust makes an individual nimble and that is important because most industries are in some state of flux.<sup>46</sup> The need for adaptability has increased and adaptable people do the following: experiment, see opportunities where others see failures, are resourceful, think ahead, don't whine, talk to themselves, don't blame others, don't claim fame, are curious and open minded, see systems, and stay current.<sup>47</sup> Changing one's thought process, taking risks, encouraging others to be open minded, and embracing learning are a few ways to develop adaptability.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> <https://drexel.edu>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.forbes.com>

<sup>^</sup> From Pearl Zhu's book "100 Creativity Ingredients: Everyone's Playbook to Unlock Creativity"



# Insights to Action

According to management expert Peter Drucker, “*The best way to predict the future is to create it.*” Below are a few questions to help you reflect on the themes in the Future Forward chapter.

**#1. Identify the economic, political, societal, legal, environmental, and technological trends in your industry(ies).**

	Political	Economical	Societal	Techological	Legal	Environmental
Local						
National						
Global						

**#2. Brainstorm opportunities you see for you and/or your organization.**

**#3. What can you do to anticipate these trends?**

**#4. How can you remain adaptable?**



# Lifelong Learning

*A new look at professional competencies*

# Lifelong Learning

## A new look at professional competencies

Lifelong learning is important for every profession. For the Design community it is a critical success factor as highlighted by a few individuals we interviewed:



If you don't keep up, you get pushed out. You need to learn and evolve skill sets. There is a focus on being multi-disciplinary and adaptable."

**Gradwell Sears** |  
Executive Creative Director,  
MediaMonks



I never focused on being successful. I focused on making myself smarter and learning about everything."

**Leland Maschmeyer** |  
Former Chief Brand Officer,  
Chobani



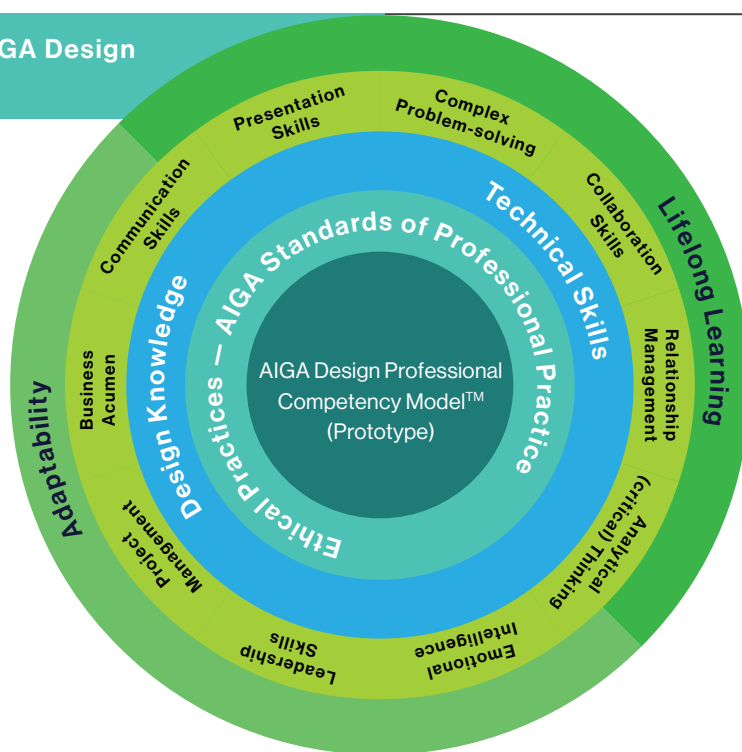
I've always been big about embracing discomfort. Learning something new and staying brave. You need to be good at not getting comfortable. No regrets. Keep learning."

**Joe Stitzlein** |  
Executive Creative Director,  
Stitzlein Studio

**Figure 7: First Iteration (Prototype) of AIGA Design Professional Competency Model™**

To better understand the most important competencies for Design professionals for the future, and to start moving towards crafting an **AIGA Design Professional Competency Model™** (Figure 7), we analyzed hundreds of job posts for designers of multiple levels and different postings. This exercise revealed the 13 most common requirements for Design professionals, not counting ethical practices, which should be a minimum standard (Table 2).

We plan to continue evolving this model with the overall goal of advancing standards for the profession.



**Table 2: Competencies Most Frequently Mentioned in Job Posts for Designers**

#1	<b>Design knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate a command of the Design fundamentals and excellent conceptual skills</li> <li>• Master of Design principles with ability to execute compelling concepts and innovative designs</li> <li>• Thorough knowledge of the creative Design process</li> </ul>
#2	<b>Technical skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Superb ability in one or more industry-standard software applications</li> <li>• Professional-level mastery of industry-standard Design software and tools</li> <li>• Comfortable with HTML/CSS</li> </ul>
#3	<b>Communication (written, verbal, listening, asking questions) skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent communication skills (written, verbal, listening, asking questions)</li> <li>• Exceptional verbal, written, and interpersonal communications skills for working with internal and external teams</li> <li>• A strategic business writer, engaging storyteller, clear communicator, and polished presenter</li> </ul>
#4	<b>Adaptability (to tech/ social change)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Able to quickly respond to changing trends, innovation, destabilization, industry shifts, and so forth</li> <li>• Perpetual curiosity; dedicated to continuous learning and staying up-to-date on emerging technologies, techniques, trends, and philosophies</li> <li>• Not afraid of constant change and open to try new things with a commitment to keeping up with the latest industry best practices</li> </ul>
#5	<b>Project management (including Agile Project Management)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to take ownership of projects from concept through to completion</li> <li>• Ability to manage expectations, set deadlines and follow up on projects with a strong sense of urgency (i.e., strong time management skills)</li> <li>• Handle multiple projects (multitasking) and high volume of work</li> </ul>
#6	<b>Presentation skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidently and effectively present to all audiences</li> <li>• Natural presenters who explain work clearly and confidently to internal teams, leadership, and clients</li> <li>• Exceptional presentation skills with the ability to clearly and articulately explain your rationale and evoke excitement with recommendations</li> </ul>

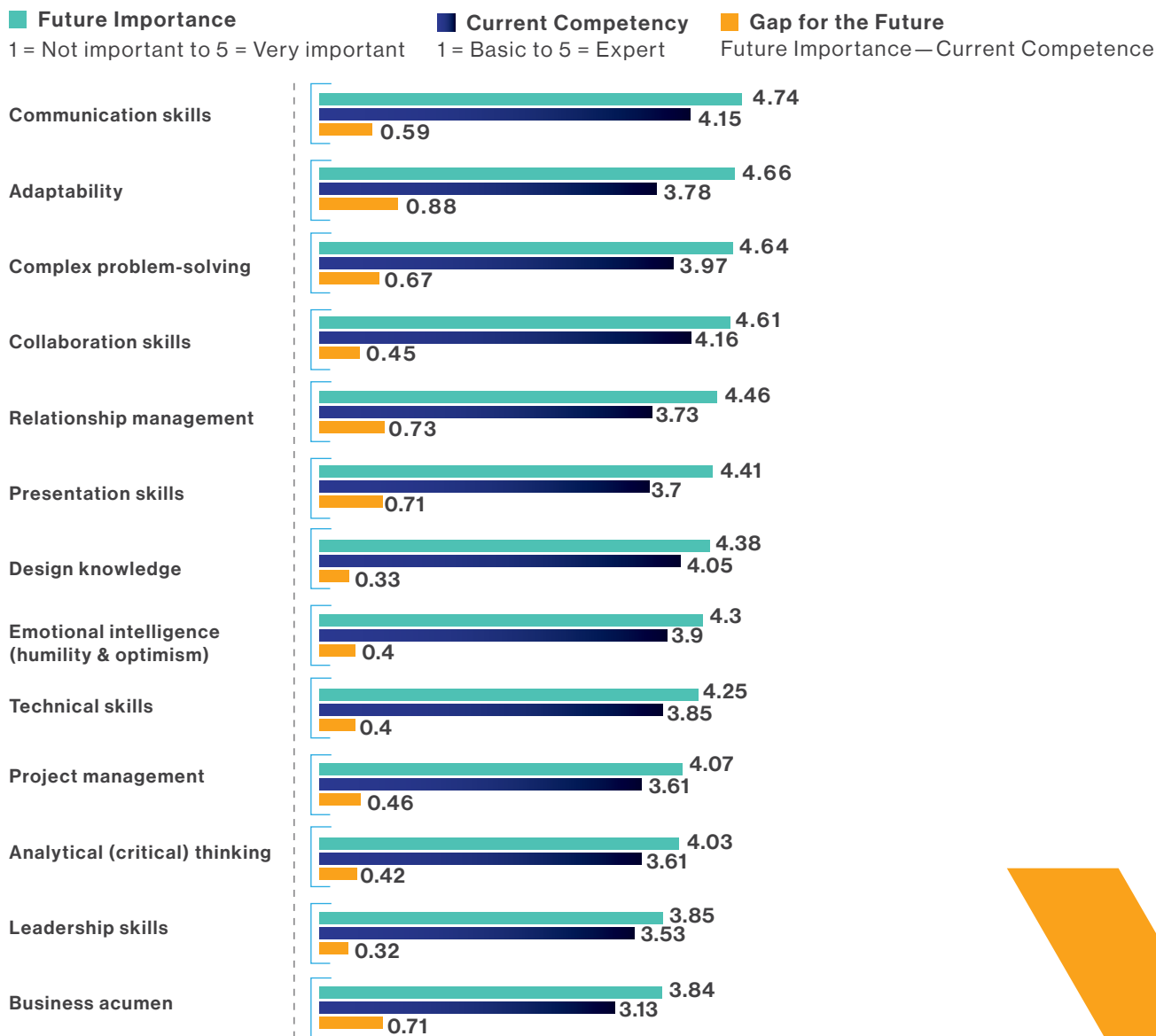
#7	<b>Collaboration skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to work both independently and collaboratively (in partnership) with numerous internal and external teams</li> <li>• Team player willing to jump in whenever and wherever needed</li> <li>• Create a collaborative work environment between all departments and demonstrate ability to positively handle conflicts</li> </ul>
#8	<b>Relationship management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Track record of building and maintaining solid relationships</li> <li>• Strong relationship building skills</li> <li>• A commitment to building positive relationships with all</li> </ul>
#9	<b>Leadership skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong leadership skills; demonstrated experience achieving results in a team-based environment</li> <li>• Inspirational leader who people love to work with and for; can recognize, attract, nurture, inspire, and retain talent</li> <li>• Values-driven and inclusive, committed to doing the right thing and being respectful to everyone</li> </ul>
#10	<b>Business acumen</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrated business acumen</li> <li>• Drive strategic business and planning processes</li> <li>• Excellent business and financial judgment</li> </ul>
#11	<b>Complex problem-solving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to break down complex problems into consumable and relevant pieces for others</li> <li>• Uses rigorous logic and methods to solve difficult problems with effective solutions</li> <li>• You love turning people's big, vague ideas into action</li> </ul>
#12	<b>Analytical (critical) thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical thinking with ability to apply, analyze, synthesize and/or evaluate information gathered</li> <li>• Experience with user research, quantitative and qualitative testing</li> <li>• Extensive experience using analytics and data analysis to inform practice and drive outcomes</li> </ul>
#13	<b>Emotional intelligence (e.g. humility, optimism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Egoless attitude that welcomes constructive criticism, outside opinions and other feedback to improve; humble enough to always listen and learn from users, clients, and teammates</li> <li>• A positive attitude ("What if / Why not" mindset), and respect for others</li> <li>• Maintain a positive, optimistic, enthusiastic and energetic demeanor to help foster an upbeat working environment</li> </ul>



Communication skills (written, verbal, listening, asking questions) ranked highest (4.74 out of 1-not important to 5-very important) in terms of future importance for the Design community, followed closely by adaptability (to tech/social change) and complex problem solving (Figure 8).

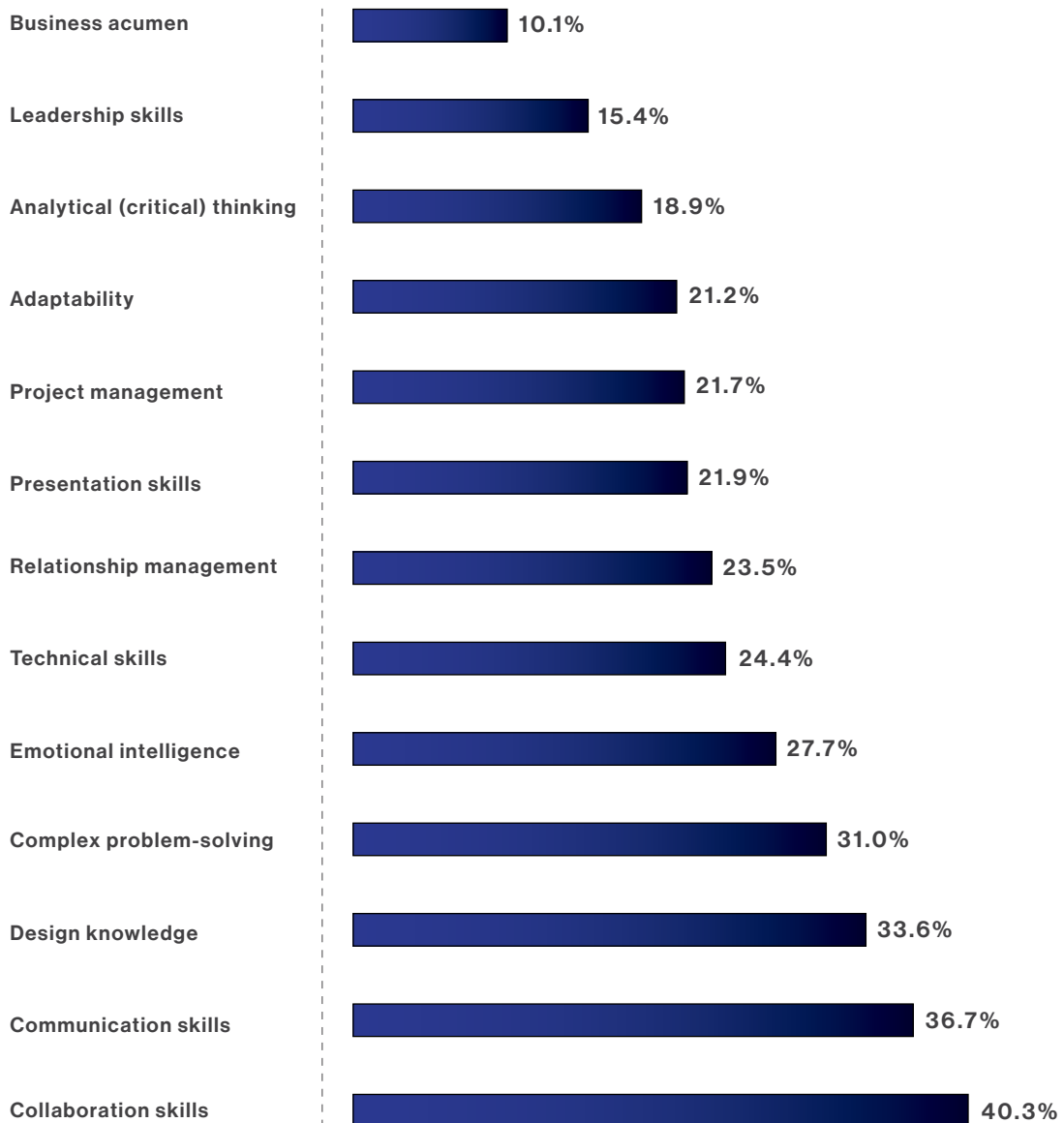
Communication skills are a critical component for building trust and promoting the value of Design during uncertain times and designers—as well as many other professional groups—had to adapt their communication styles due to the new context brought about by the global pandemic. It is important to highlight that the “soft skills” (e.g., communication, adaptability, complex problem solving, collaboration, relationship management, and presentation skills) were deemed more important for the future than Design knowledge.

**Figure 8: Future Importance, Current Competence, and Competence Gap for the Future**

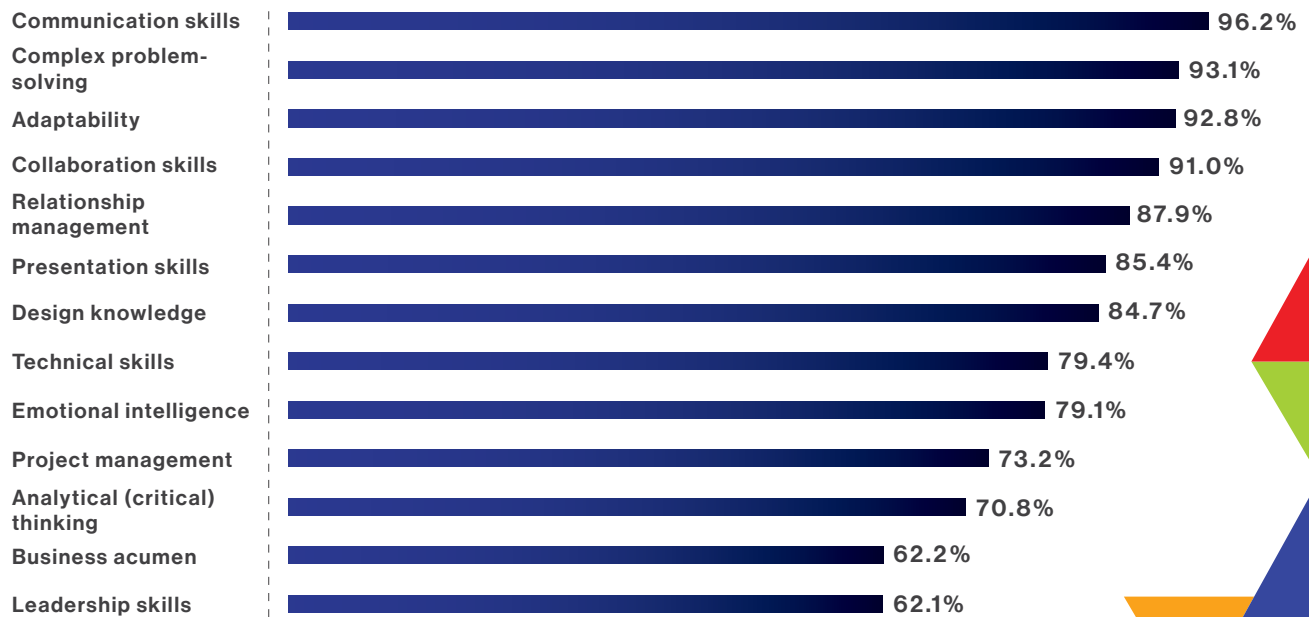


When comparing future importance with self-reported current competence, adaptability (to tech/social change) had the highest competence gap, followed by relationship management, business acumen, presentation skills, and complex problem-solving. Figure 9 presents the 13 competencies in terms of current self-assessment of expertise and Figure 10 highlights the future importance of these competencies as perceived by the Design community.

**Figure 9: Self-Assessment of Current Expertise (% who considered themselves experts)**



**Figure 10: Self-Assessment of Future Importance (% who considered the competency important or very important for the future)**



There are several factors that come into play when looking at skills and adaptability in the workplace. In our research, we noted that Design leaders, who led teams of five or more individuals, were more likely to identify leadership skills and business acumen as more important in the future than those without leadership responsibilities. On the other hand, those without leadership responsibilities were more likely to identify technical skills as more important in the future than those with five or more people under their purview.

The developmental needs also vary during a designer’s career journey and employment status. For example, adaptability did not seem to be a major competency gap for entry level/junior designers but instead business acumen, project management, and complex problem solving were the top competency gaps for them. Executives identified adaptability, technical skills, and communication skills as their top gaps. Small business owners, freelancers, educators, and students were more likely to identify business acumen among their top three competency gaps.

The self-perception of importance and current competence can also be different than the expectations of peers, hiring managers, clients, and the marketplace. As noted from one of our interviewees, Meena Khalili, Assistant Professor, Studio Art + Design, School of Visual Art and Design, University of South Carolina, “Designers who can speak in a boardroom and collaboratively solve problems in an agile environment are increasingly in demand.”

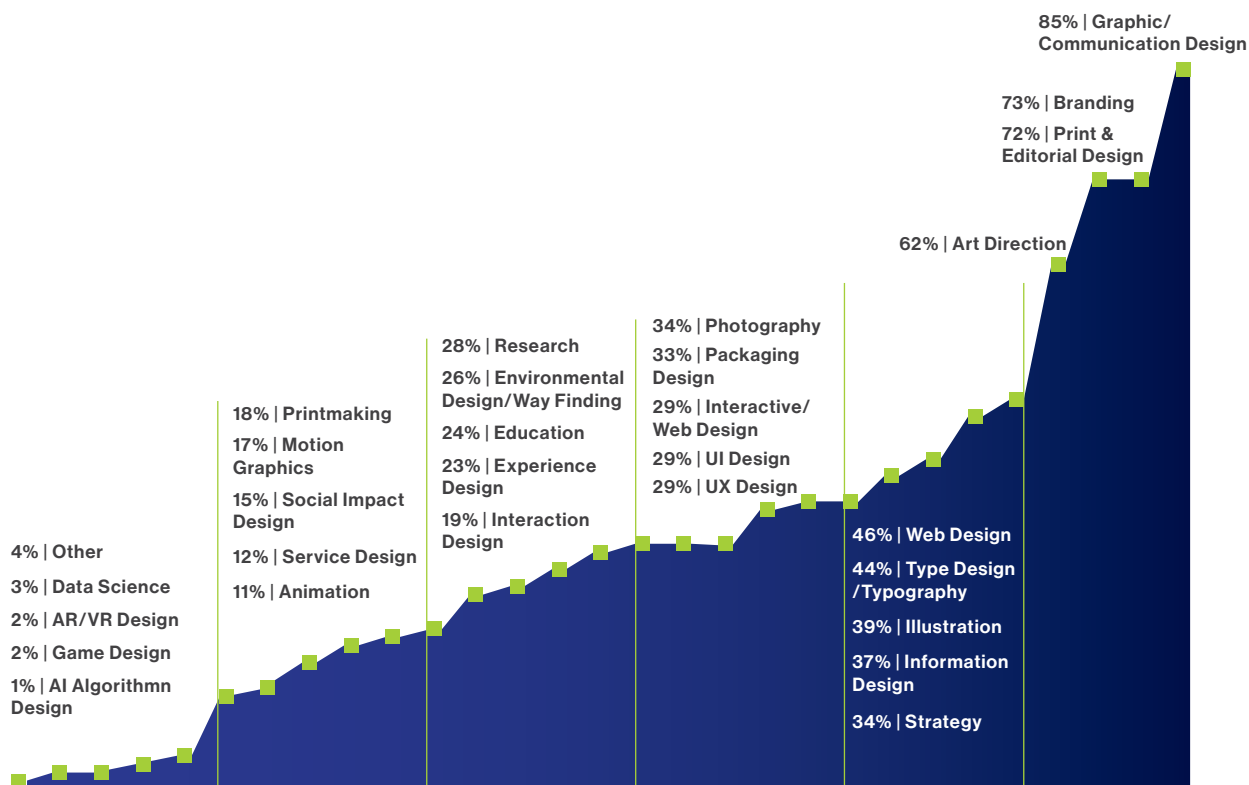
And from Santiago Felippelli, Owner, Bridger Conway, “Designers are coming to this new ‘multidisciplinary’ place and need much better education in terms of critical thinking.”

Balancing self-perception and outside requirements are critical, and can always be pursued by reaching out to others within organizations, outside of Design, and asking for insights and mentorship.

Embracing lifelong learning, a mindset and proxy for adaptability, is critical for the Design community and almost nine out of ten respondents reported having achieved a bachelor, master or doctorate degree (i.e., almost three times more than the overall U.S. adult population). Furthermore, in an AIGA pulse survey, conducted in May 2020 among the AIGA community, we also found that nearly six out of ten designers decided to learn something new due to the pandemic.

The most popular major or focus of study: Graphic/Communication Design (40 percent) and Art/Design (32 percent). Figure 11 highlights the areas designers are currently proficient in. The areas designers would most like to develop in 2021 were: animation and motion graphics; UX/UI Design and research; and brand Design.<sup>48</sup>

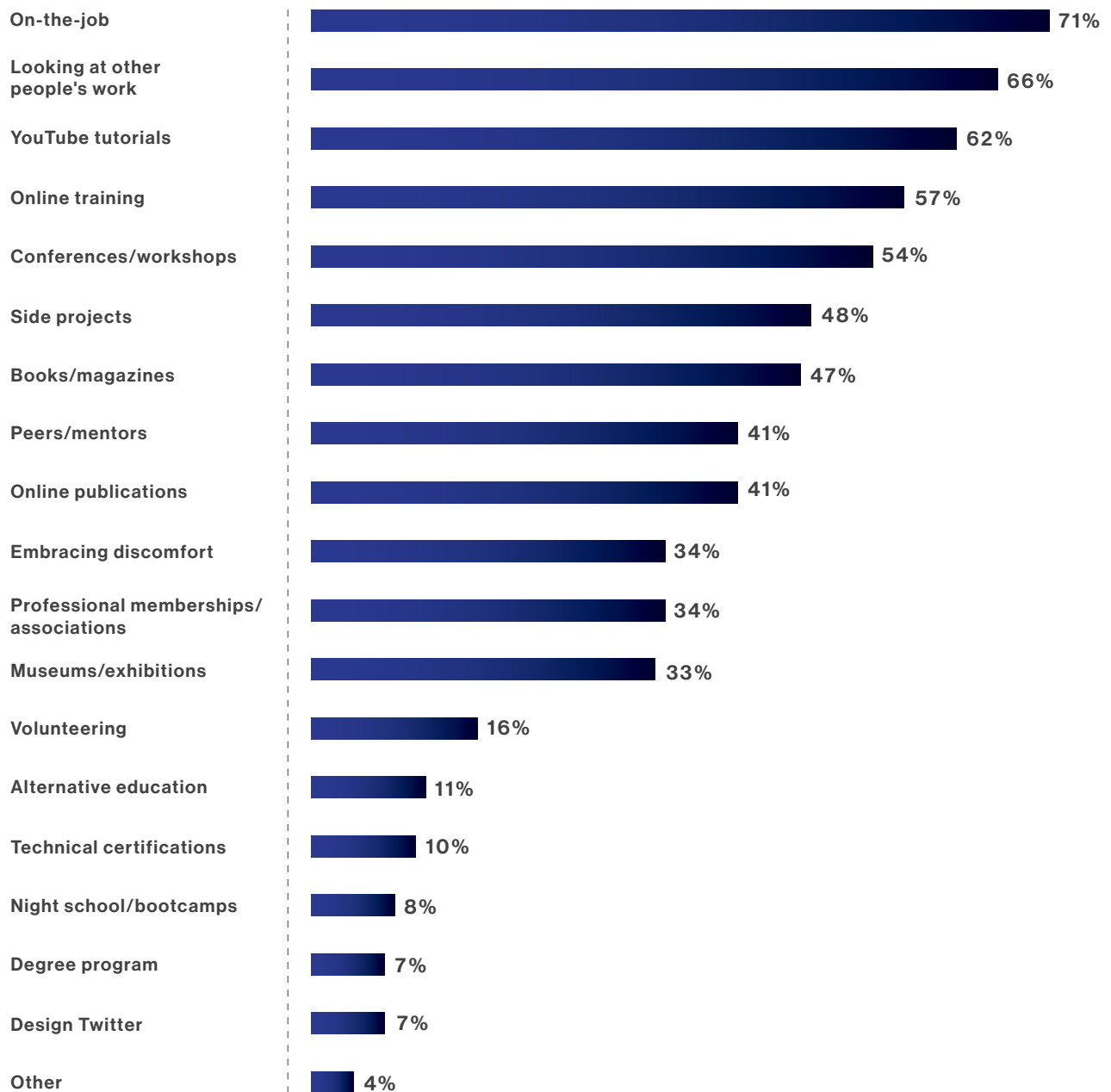
**Figure 11: Design Discipline(s) Currently Proficient in (% total)**



<sup>48</sup> Survey with 600+ creative professionals by The Creative Group and AIGA conducted in Oct. 2020.

As a professional craft, designers tend to learn new skills to keep current primarily: on the job, looking at other people’s work; via YouTube tutorials; online training; and conferences/workshops. (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Top Ways Designers Learn New Skills to Keep Current**





## Insights to Action

Embrace lifelong learning and use the framework below to help identify your learning goals.

<b>List your strongest competencies (what you think you are good at).</b>	<b>List your weakest competencies (what you think you can improve at).</b>
<b>Ask for feedback. List what your peers, mentors, and executives see as your strongest competencies.</b>	<b>Ask for feedback. List what your peers, mentors, and executives see as your opportunities for development.</b>
<b>Develop your learning plan. For example: I will do X to learn Y by date Z.</b>	

# Design Leads

*Leading through Design*

# Design Leads

## Leading through Design

Design leads organizations. Not surprisingly, in the last decade, we have seen the ascendance of the Chief Design Officer (CDO), Chief Experience Officer (CXO), and Chief Creative Officer (CCO) and leading organizations have appointed at least one individual with this title to their leadership teams.<sup>49,50</sup> The CDO (or equivalent title) focuses on transformation of the user experience, of the Design team, and of the organization itself.<sup>51,52</sup> And, the CDO's understanding of businesses is key for Design to lead in such transformations.<sup>53</sup>

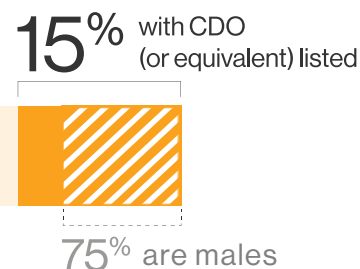
However, not all organizations have a CDO who reports directly to the CEO. Overall, 20 percent of designers indicated that the most senior designer reported to the CEO/President, with the majority (30 percent) reporting to different levels (e.g., Chief, VP, Director, Manager) within marketing/communications. Another common reporting structure was senior designers reporting to the Art/Creative/Design position (e.g., Art Director) or Head of Products. We estimate that only about 15 percent of the top 100 Fortune World's Most Admired Companies have a

publicly listed CDO (or equivalent) at the executive level with 75 percent of them being males.<sup>54,55</sup>

There is still a long journey ahead for designers to earn respect and a place at the executive table. For example, designers are more than five times less likely than human resources and finance professionals to be listed as part of the executive level on the 100 world's most admired companies.

Not having a CDO in the organization structure doesn't necessarily mean that Design is not a strategic driver for the organization. When speaking with a VP of Design in a known Design organization, we learned that, contrary to our expectations, they did not have a CDO at the executive level where all the Design functions reported into. Instead, there were multiple ecosystems within the organization and Design reported into each one. Despite Design being a strategic driver within this organization, there were no designers at the executive level. In short, Design was at the table but a designer was not, which aligns with our overall findings.

## Fortune Top 100 World's Most Admired Companies



<sup>49</sup> <https://www.fastcompany.com>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/>

<sup>52</sup> <https://boltgroup.com/chief-design-officer>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk>

<sup>54</sup> <https://fortune.com/worlds-most-admired-companies/>

<sup>55</sup> Only accounted for when a CDO (or equivalent) was publicly cited within the executive body on the company website



Design talent is critical, and the quality of the work environment affects talent engagement, retention, and the level of creativity and innovation in groups and organizations.<sup>56,57</sup> This is the reason employers want leaders who enable positive, inclusive, and unified workplace cultures, motivate and engage teams, and increase productivity.<sup>58</sup> But leading creative people, like designers, is not always easy. Some say that each person who works with a designer should go visit 'planet listen'.<sup>59</sup> To help organizations that want to create better workplaces

for designers we created the **AIGA Better Workplaces for Designers™** assessment. We found 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 (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: AIGA Better Workplaces for Designers™**



<sup>56</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/>

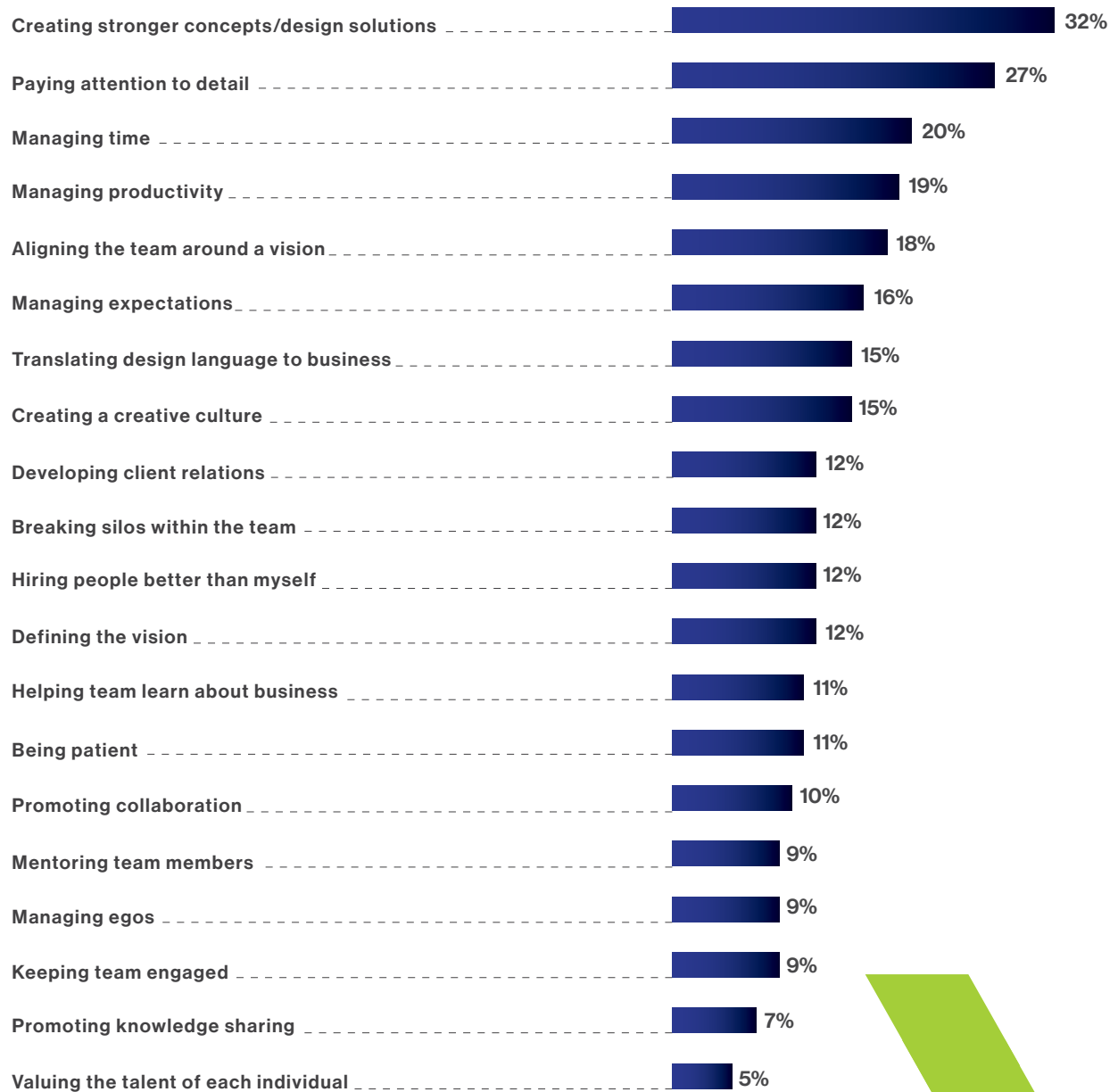
<sup>57</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://design.co/design-in-tech-report-2019-no-track/#10>

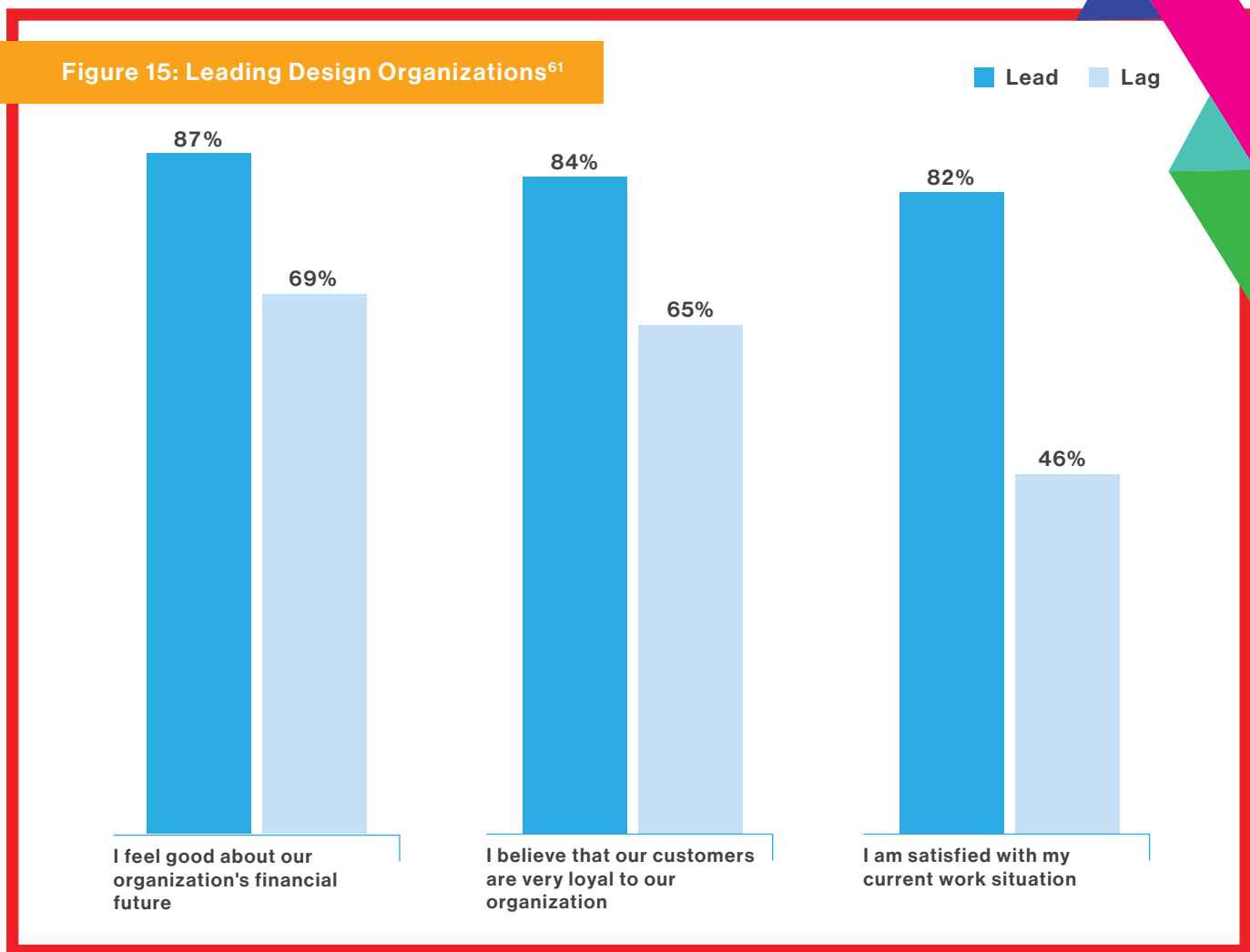
Leadership roles bring new challenges for designers. Design leaders shared that the key challenges of leading designers were related to having the team create stronger concepts/Design solutions, attention to details, time and productivity management, and aligning the team around a vision (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Key Challenges Leading Designers**



Design's strategic contribution varies among organizations. Respondents in leading Design organizations were more likely than respondents in lagging organizations to feel good about their organization's financial future; they also believed that their customers were very loyal and were satisfied with their current work situations (Figure 15).<sup>60</sup> About one out of four of our employed respondents self-identified as being part of leading Design organizations. In addition, leading Design organizations were more likely to be in industries such as: technology/software, marketing/advertising, education, banking/financial services, and not-for-profit.

Figure 15: Leading Design Organizations<sup>61</sup>



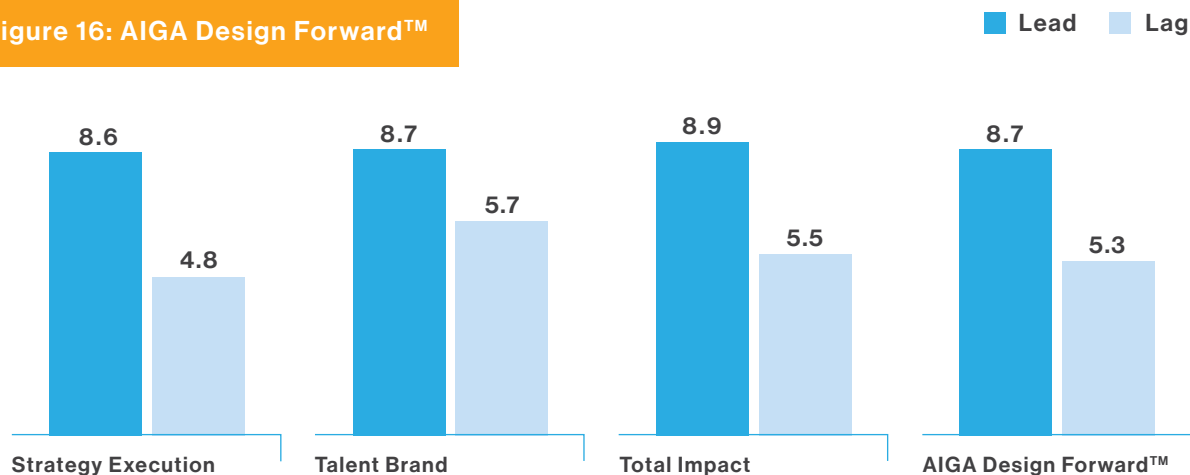
<sup>60</sup> Leading: Strongly agree (9 or 10) that Design is a strategic driver in their organizations. Lagging: Strongly disagree (1 to 6) that Design is a strategic driver in their organizations.

<sup>61</sup> Figure 3 includes only respondents employed at a corporation/in-house.

To help track progress over time and serve as an instrument to empower designers to be a force for change, we created an index called **AIGA Design Forward™** that is composed of: 1. Strategic Execution; 2. Talent Brand; 3. Total Impact. Figure 16 presents our index for leading and lagging organizations. Our overall index was 6.9 out of 10.



Figure 16: AIGA Design Forward™



Leading organizations were more likely to:

- See the Design team as a strategic business partner;
- Have Design working closely with senior management to implement organizational strategies;
- See Design's involvement as essential in all major business activities;
- Embed Design in the C-Suite;
- Have a Design team that knows how to speak the language of business;
- Have a method for measuring Design's impact;
- Nurture top Design talent;
- Treat employees with respect;
- Value diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility;
- Encourage discussion of racial justice issues;
- Have Design professionals trained in business;
- Bring Design to the table early in the process instead of at the end to make things pretty;
- Continually listen to customers;
- Seamlessly integrate total customer experiences;
- Encourage testing of early prototypes;
- Care about social impact beyond its financial results;
- Integrate Design with other functions.



**Figure 17: What Separates Leading and Lagging Organizations**

		Lead	Lag
<b>Strategic Execution</b>	Design works closely with senior management to implement organizational strategies	9.3	4.9
	Our organization sees the Design team as strategic business partners	9.3	4.6
	Our Design team knows how to speak the language of business	8.3	5.9
	Our organization embeds Design in the C-Suite	9.3	5.1
	Design involvement is essential in all major business activities	8.9	4.7
	Our organization has a method (e.g. design scorecard) for measuring Design's impact	6.6	3.3
<b>Talent Brand</b>	Our organization treats employees with respect	9.5	7.1
	Our organization values diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility	8.8	6.9
	Design has achieved a level of respect that is comparable with other organization departments	9.3	4.7
	Our organization encourages discussion of racial justice issues	8.3	6.4
	Our organization nurtures top Design talent	8.8	4.4
	Our organization has Design professionals trained in business	7.8	4.8
<b>Total Impact</b>	Our organization integrates Design with other functions	9.0	5.2
	Our organization brings Design early on to the table instead of at the end to make things pretty	9.2	4.1
	Our organization continually listens to its customers	9.1	6.7
	Our organization seamlessly integrates total (physical, service, and digital) customer experiences	8.7	5.2
	Our organization cares about its social impact beyond its financial results	8.6	6.2
	Our organization encourages testing of early prototypes with customers	8.5	5.6

Design leaders interviewed over the last year shared their insights on the importance of Design talent and better workplaces for creatives.



Working with the best makes you better, it makes you learn, it makes the work infinitely better. We need to hire dance partners that make us better.”

**Joe Stitzlein |**  
Co-Founder, Executive Creative Director, Stitzlein Studio



A company’s values and virtues are important, so they must value their people too.”

**Gradwell Sears |**  
Global Executive Creative Officer, Media Monks



At the highest level, everyone should be able to express themselves and create spaces where people want to be. We want people to be engaged.”

**Nijel Taylor |**  
Design Director, Seigel+Gale



We need to make sure there are conditions that allow designers to design well. The best condition is a culture that allows for designers to make the best work possible—a culture that is nurturing, challenging and inspirational.”

**Sue Walsh |**  
Principal of Design, SYPartners



Only hire people better than you. It will be a challenge to manage—you will need enormous understanding, patience, and, most of all, you'll need to be endlessly forgiving as you will be humbled everyday. But you'll foster a team that will always be learning.”

**Brian Collins |**  
Chief Creative Officer, COLLINS, SF & NYC



You need to hire talent that's better than you.”

**Noreen Nax Naroo-Pucci |**  
Freelance Designer, previously at Calvin Klein & Under Armor



## Insights to Action

Assess your organization's (or client's) current state, desired state, and develop an action plan to advance Design as a strategic driver. Check out [AIGA.org](http://AIGA.org) and [EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org](http://EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org) for inspiration and resources.

Area	Current State	Desired State	Action Plan
<p><b>Strategic Execution</b></p>			
<p><b>Talent Brand</b></p>			
<p><b>Total Impact</b></p>			

# Design Pathways

*From early inspiration to ongoing development*

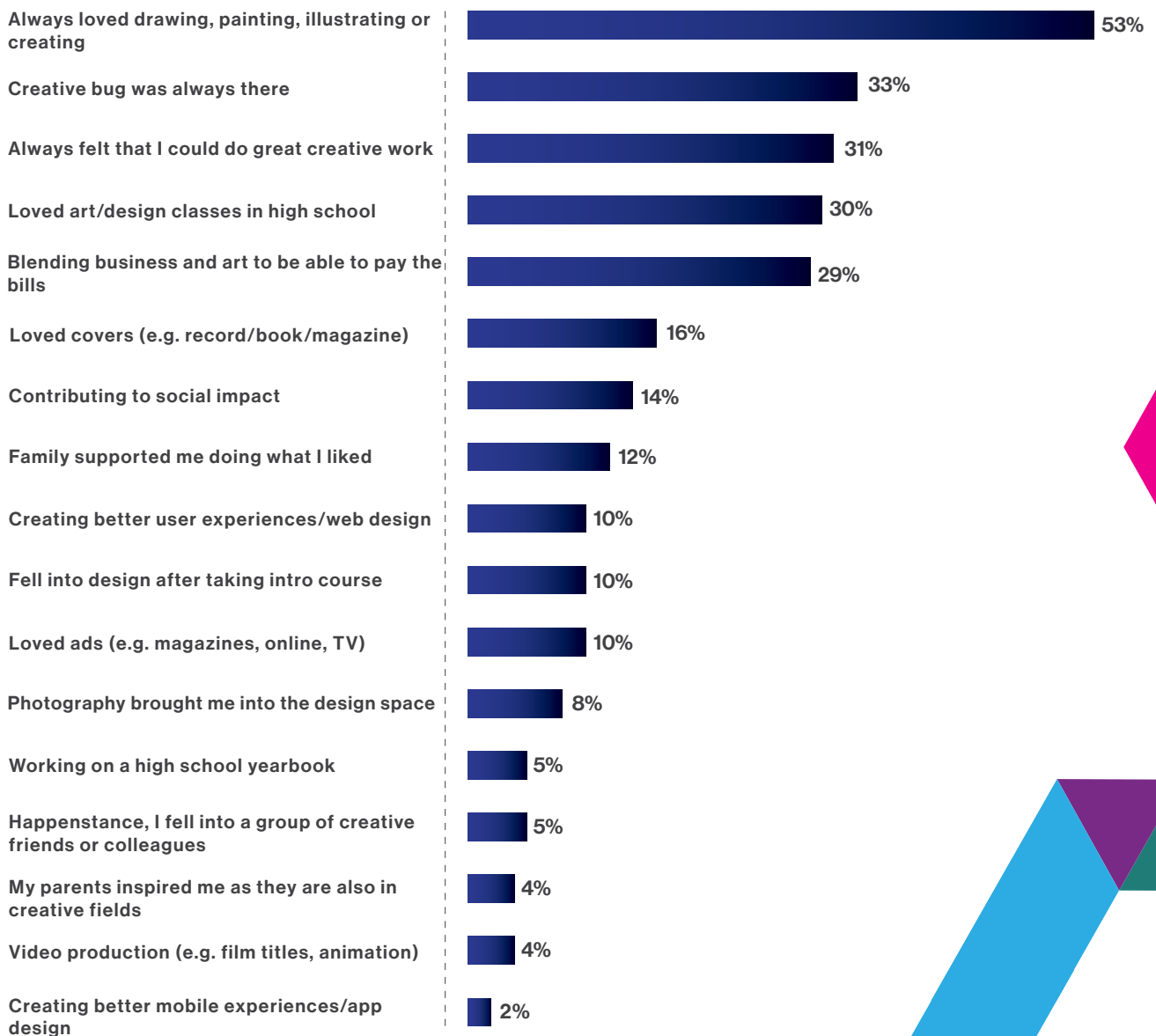


# Design Pathways

## 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 18). 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 18: Inspiration to Become (Or Want to Become) a Designer**



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

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

**“Quickest way to start earning enough money to live on my own.”**

**“Wanted to make video games, which led me to Design.”**

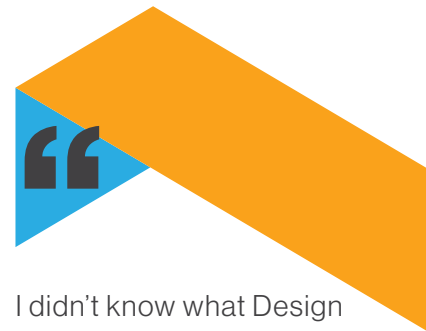
**“Anime.”**

**“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.”**



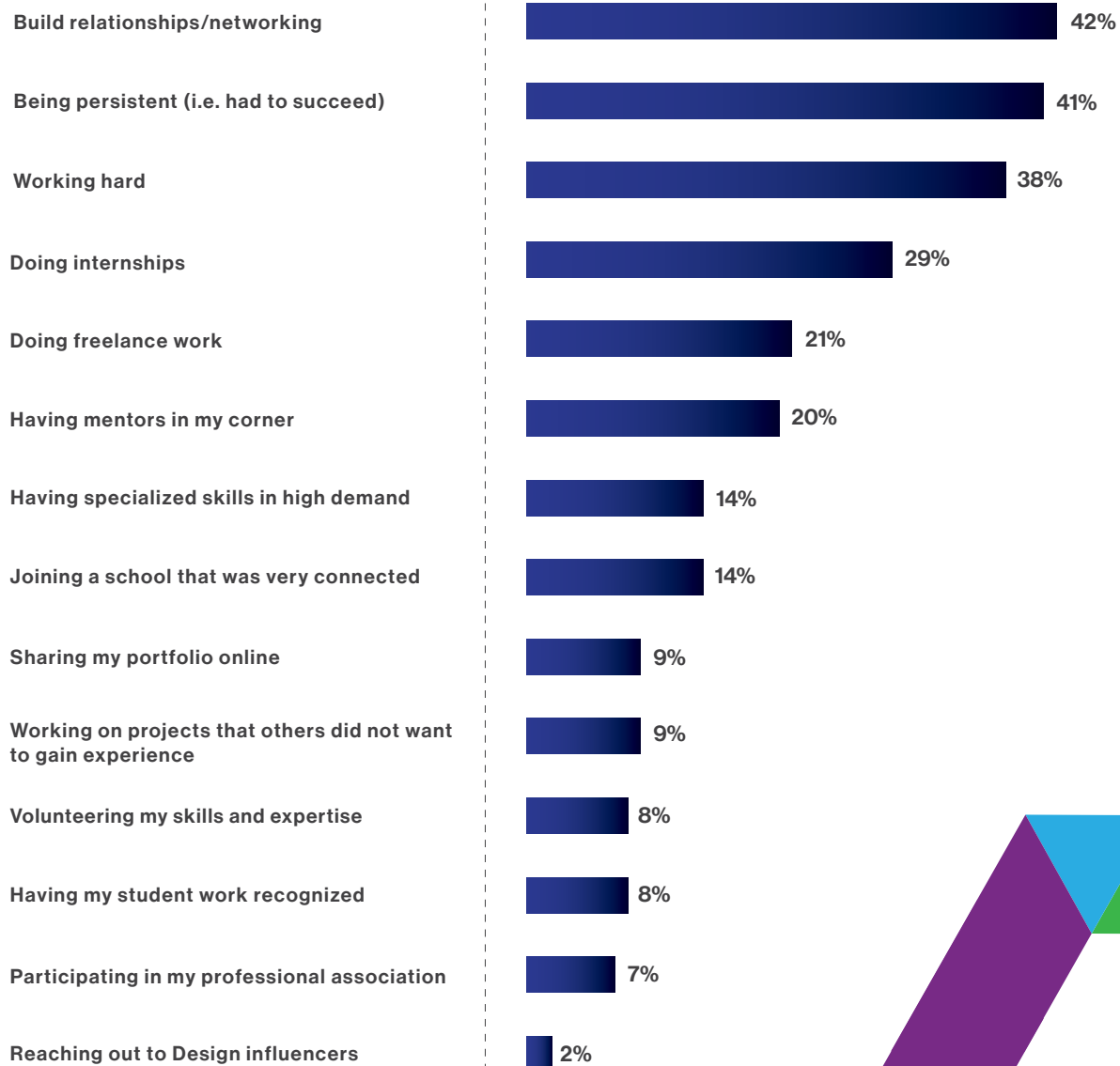
I didn't know what Design was until high school. I knew I loved studying the artwork in my father's music collection, and I loved to draw. Graphic design became a clear option for me when I worked on my high school yearbook; that's when I finally understood what it was and decided to explore the possibility."

---

**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 19).

**Figure 19: Factors that Helped Land Designers Their First Job in Design**



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 20).

**Figure 20: 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.”

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

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 3 presents the best work arrangement identified by the Design community for several potential professional goals.

**Table 3: Ideal Employment Arrangement Per Professional Goal**

Goal	In-House	Agency	Small Business Owner	Freelance/Permalance	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 21).

**Figure 21: What Designers Like Most About Profession**



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 22).

**Figure 22: What Designers Like Most About the Profession (By Career Lifecycle)**





# Insights to Action

Plan your design journey and never stop building relationships/networks.  
 Check out [AIGA.org](http://AIGA.org) and [EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org](http://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				

# Being a Designer

*Insights around what it means to be a designer*

# Being a Designer

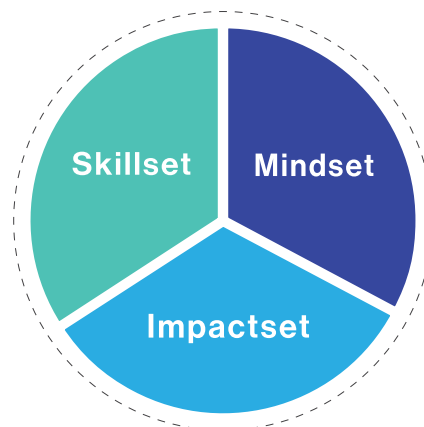
## *Insights around being a designer*

Designers often need to explain what they do to others, even to their family members.<sup>62</sup> 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.”<sup>63</sup>

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.”<sup>64</sup> Figure 23 highlights the multiple ways respondents described what it means to be a designer.<sup>65</sup>



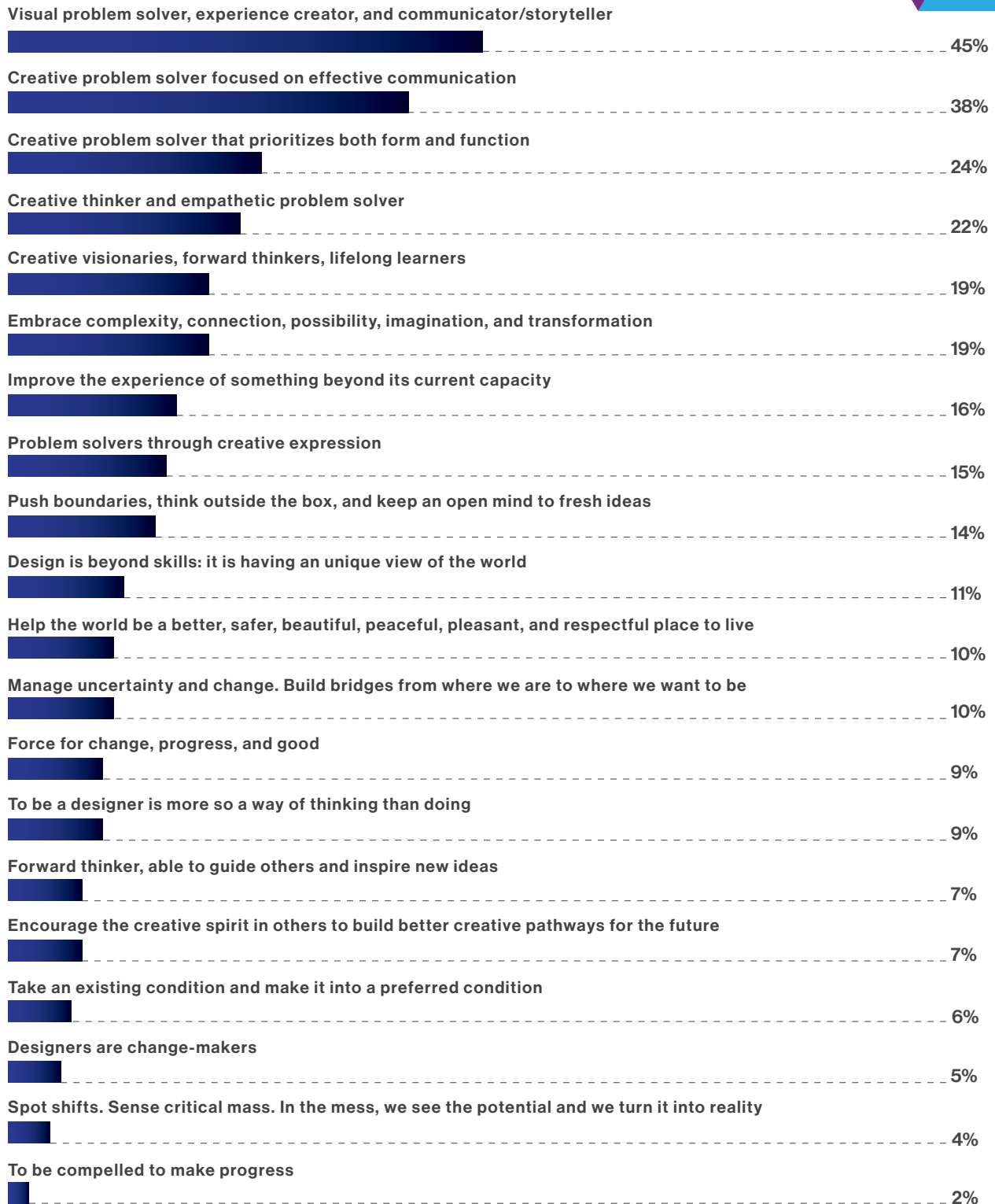
<sup>62</sup> <https://medium.com>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.aiga.org/what-is-design>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.adobe.com>

<sup>65</sup> Analysis of 600+ narratives and confirmation via survey research

**Figure 23: What Does It Mean to be a Designer?**



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 24, 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 24: 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



# 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.**

Blank area for visual response to the question: What does it mean to be a designer?

**What makes Design unique compared to other disciplines/professions?**

Blank area for visual response to the question: 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?**

Blank area for visual response to the question: 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?

# Creative Communities

*Advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility*



# Creative Communities

## *Advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility*

If broadly defined, the Design community is, in many ways, very diverse. For example, if we start with the broadest category, type of work, designers work in multiple industries (from education to technology to media) (Figure 25) in multiple roles (from graphic designer to UX designer to product designer). The creative community also encompasses many other disciplines and professions beyond Design.<sup>66</sup>

Some communities index higher in representation in the profession as compared to the overall population (e.g., Asian/Asian Americans; women; young professionals). Also, the LGBTQIA+ community is more represented in the profession as compared to the overall population, with 15.7 percent of U.S. respondents self-identifying as LGBTQIA+ in the current study.<sup>67,68,69</sup> The same occurs for persons with a disability.

What we have seen in our primary research, and is also shown in secondary research as well, is that diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) continue to present dilemmas and need to be more clearly defined and broadly discussed to give voice to all communities. These challenges are related to underrepresentation (and potential pay gaps) within the profession (overall and in more senior/executive roles).<sup>70</sup> For example, in the U.S., the Design community under indexes on Black/African Americans (4.9 percent vs. 12.6 percent in the labor force<sup>71,72</sup>), Hispanics/Latinxs (9.0 percent vs. 18.0 percent<sup>73</sup>) and Veterans (1.5 percent vs. 5.6 percent<sup>74</sup>). Moreover, another issue that arose in our conversations was around age.

In the AIGA Design POV, 38 was the median age in our sample vs. 42 in the labor force<sup>75</sup>. Those reporting being unemployed were more likely to have self-identified as female, people over 40 years of age, persons with a disability, LGBTQIA+, and underrepresented groups such as Blacks/African Americans and Hispanics/Latinxs. It was also noted that senior and executive positions were less likely to be diverse in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity.

There are other important challenges to address as well since representation is just the tip of the iceberg. For example, for the overall (not Design specific) LGBTQIA+ population, the workplace challenges can include all of the following: coming out; discrimination; microaggressions; and isolation.<sup>76</sup> Asian Americans in the U.S. (not Design specific either) have been increasingly victims of racism and discrimination since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>77,78,79</sup> For Black designers, Tasha Lutfi, Principal Design Director at Microsoft shared in a talk last year that DEIA primary challenges were: lack of role models; lack of mentors; no awareness; and no career support.<sup>80</sup> Figure 25 highlights our findings related to the top challenges faced by underrepresented groups when entering the Design profession: 1. lack of networks/access to people; 2. lack of support; 3. financial barriers.

<sup>66</sup> Adobe creative cloud is estimated to have 12 million+ subscribers

<sup>67</sup> <https://assets.website-files.com/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://www.cnn.com>

<sup>69</sup> <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/black-creatives>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://datausa.io/profile/soc/designers>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/>

<sup>74</sup> Under index in Veterans per <https://www.bls.gov/>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/median-age-labor-force.htm>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://secureservercdn.net/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://stopaapihate.org/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.cnn.com>

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.adobe.com>

Figure 25: What Industry/Industries Do You Currently Work In (or with)?

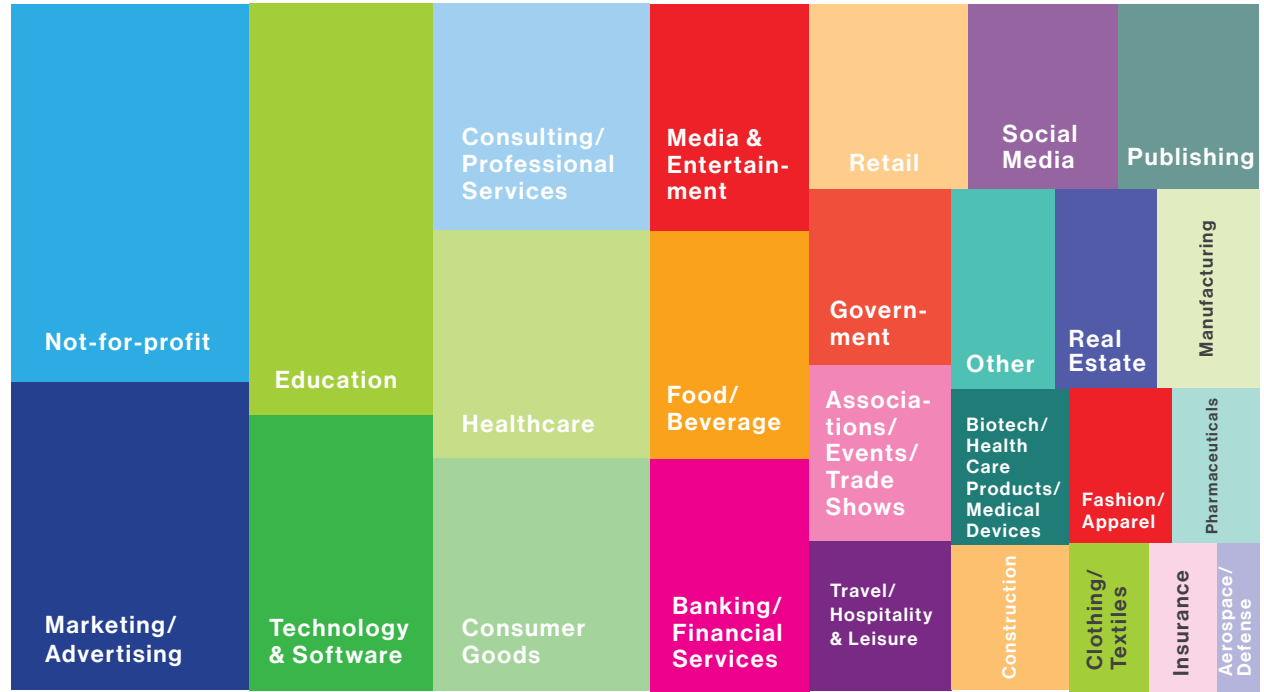
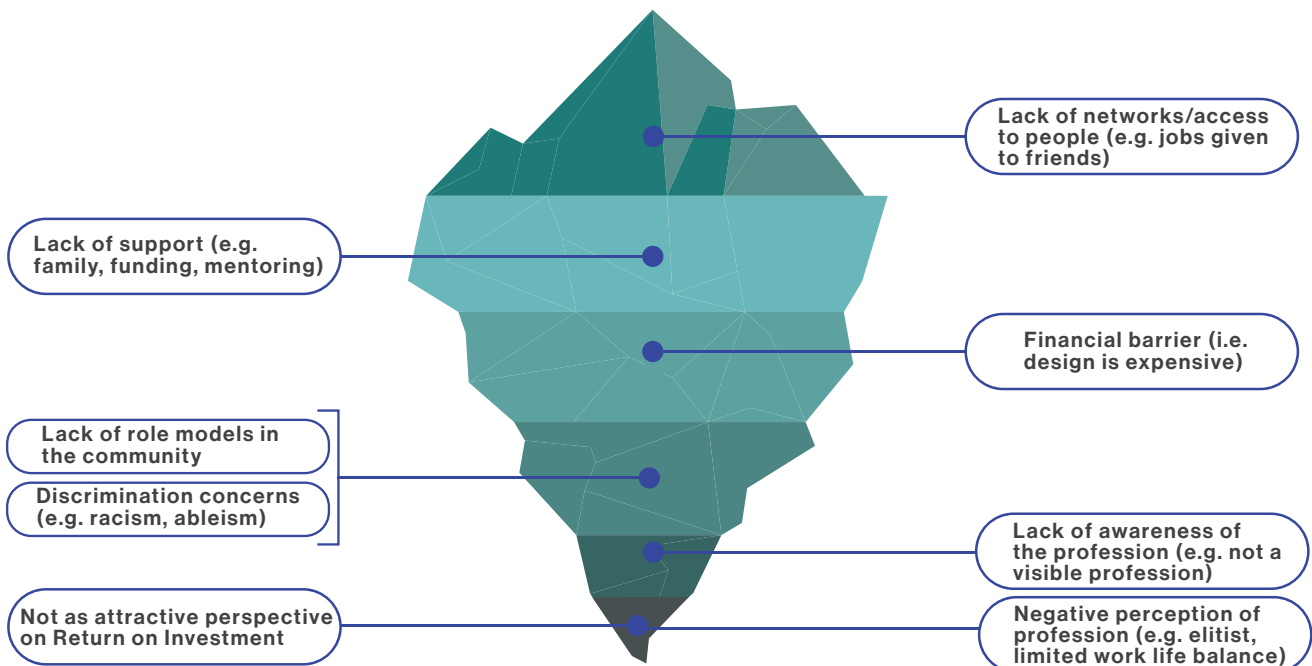


Figure 26: Challenges Faced by Underrepresented Groups When Entering Design



Here's what we heard from focus group participants in the AIGA Design POV interviews that reinforce the challenges faced by community members and those uncovered in our data.

■ Gender

■ Age

■ Disability

■ Ethnicity

“

Men get promoted faster and are seen as more competent than a younger woman even if they don't have more experience. Also, women with families are not given the same opportunities. Family isn't a consideration for men as it is for women.”

**Anonymous** |

a participant of a 2020 AIGA Design POV focus group

“

The nature of how advertising agencies work isn't always conducive to having a family. Agencies aren't built around providing balance to their talent. I honestly struggled a lot. I had little kids and wanted to work like crazy during the day and get home, and some of my colleagues didn't always understand that kind of pull.”

**Alison Gragnano** |

Executive Creative Director, The New School

“

It's basically a white industry. In terms of gender, there is more representation of women throughout but not in leadership positions. It's complicated to understand how we got to this point. For some, I don't think it's a lack of desire. There are other reasons.”

**Anonymous** |

a participant of a 2020 AIGA Design POV focus group



Design today is nearly unrecognizable compared to three even two decades ago. Seismic changes in technology, methodology and workplace culture have created a generational divide among designers. I have seen too many older designers who were giants in the design profession in the past that are struggling today because they did not evolve their expertise to digital media. To be fair, I've also seen too many younger designers that are achieving a fraction of their potential because they're missing out on a mastery of design fundamentals (typography, conceptual thinking, craft, etc.) I think this is due to that older generation being absent from design departments today. This need for continuous professional development to maintain relevance is just as important today—for the young and old alike.”

---

**Gus Granger** |  
Client Engagement Partner at VSA Partners



Disabled designers are written out of the narrative because their humanity is not fully recognized by the field. Disabled bodies are measured against biased standards of how productive a person can be. Impairment is regarded as invaluable experience and disabled designers are not valued for what they can bring to a discussion or a process. The labor of disabled individuals is often seen through a lens of accommodation instead of being considered for the insight disabled folks can bring to a process or product or project. There is also a long history of shame and stigma.”

---

**Jeff Kasper** |  
Assistant Professor and Undergraduate Program Director,  
College of Humanities and Fine Arts, Department of Art, University of Massachusetts Amherst

“

When we don't see people of color then students may not see [Design] as a place they'll be welcome. We know there's a problem with diversity.”

---

**Gaby Hernández** |  
Endowed Associate Professor of Graphic Design,  
University of Arkansas

“

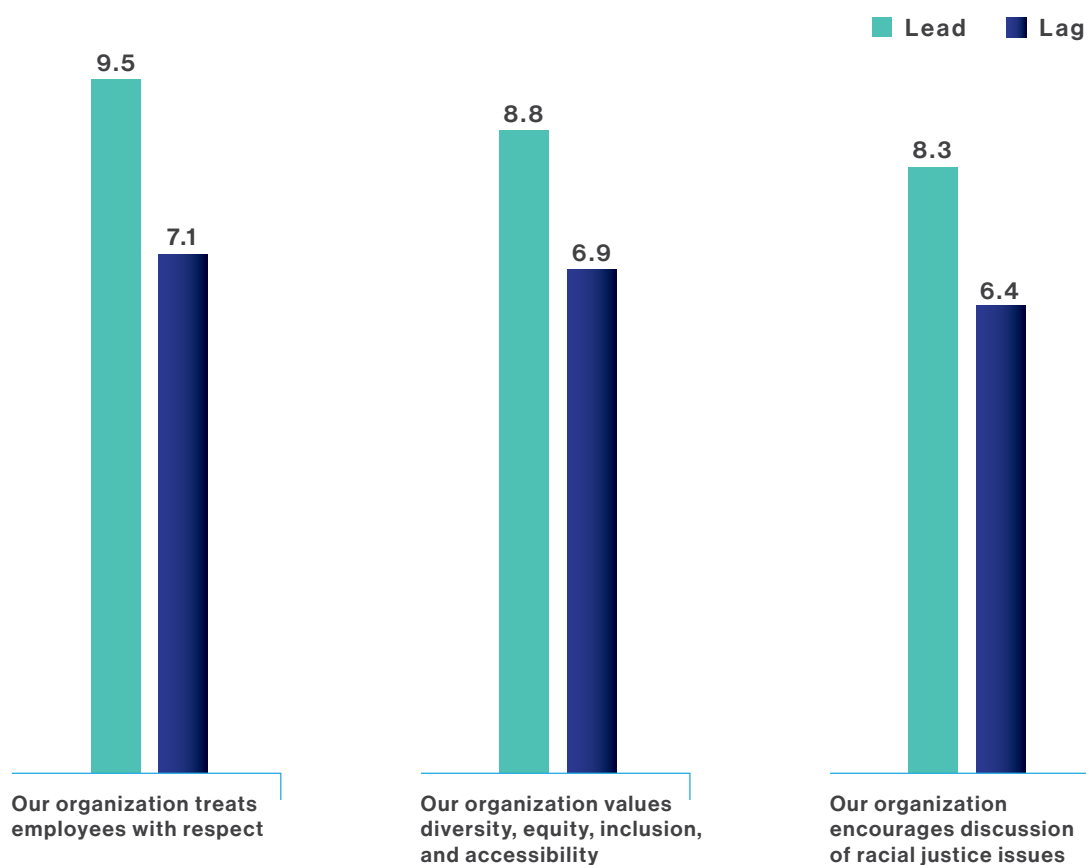
There's not a lot of us [African American/Blacks] being represented. There is a lack of support, mentorships, and resources. Costs for subscriptions may keep some students from learning industry-standard software.”

---

**Lisa Moran** |  
Designer, Educator

As shared in the Design Leads chapter of the AIGA Design POV, it is important to remember that as measured by the **AIGA Design Forward™** leading organizations where Design is perceived as a strategic driver are more likely than laggards to: 1. Treat employees with respect; 2. Value diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and 3. Encourage discussions of racial justice issues (Figure 27).

**Figure 27: Leading Design Organizations More Likely to Be Mature in their DEIA Efforts**

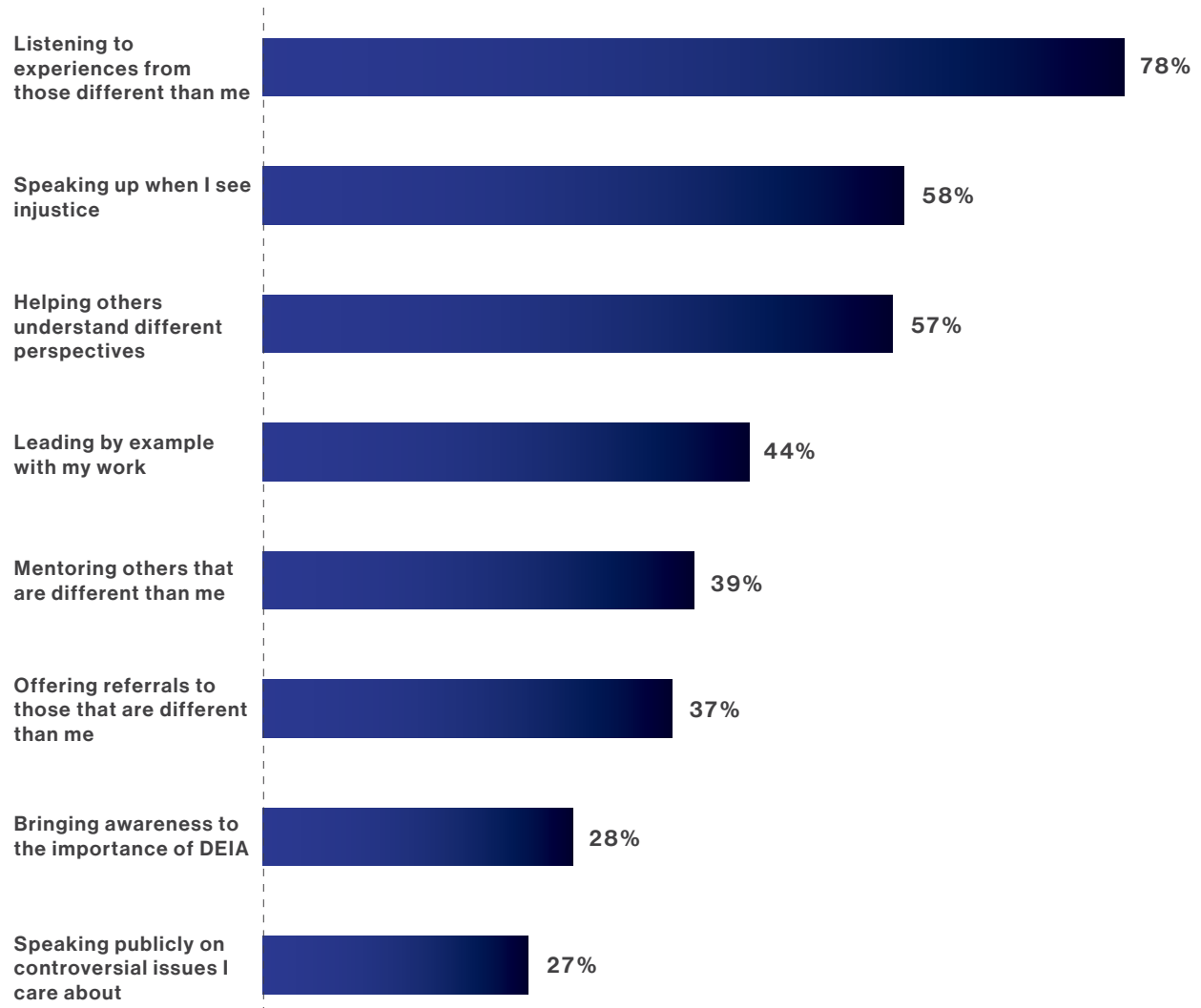


Another important thing to remember (also shared in the Design Leads chapter of the AIGA Design POV) is that according to **AIGA Better Workplaces for Designers™**, the number one way organizations can create better workplaces for designers is to build cultures where people feel valued, respected, and heard.

Actions speak louder than words and simple gestures of respect, like listening to the experiences of those different from oneself, speaking up when seeing injustice, helping others understand different perspectives, leading by example with their own work, and mentoring others who are different than oneself can help.

To help inspire the community, below are what respondents noted they do to demonstrate their support of DEIA (Figure 28).

**Figure 28: Ways the Community Demonstrates Support of DEIA**



By implementing DEIA practices, organizations can be a force for change, be more attractive to talent, and advance their Design leadership. Figure 29 presents the most valued DEIA actions for organizations, according to the community we surveyed.

**Figure 29: Most Valued DEIA Practices of Organizations**

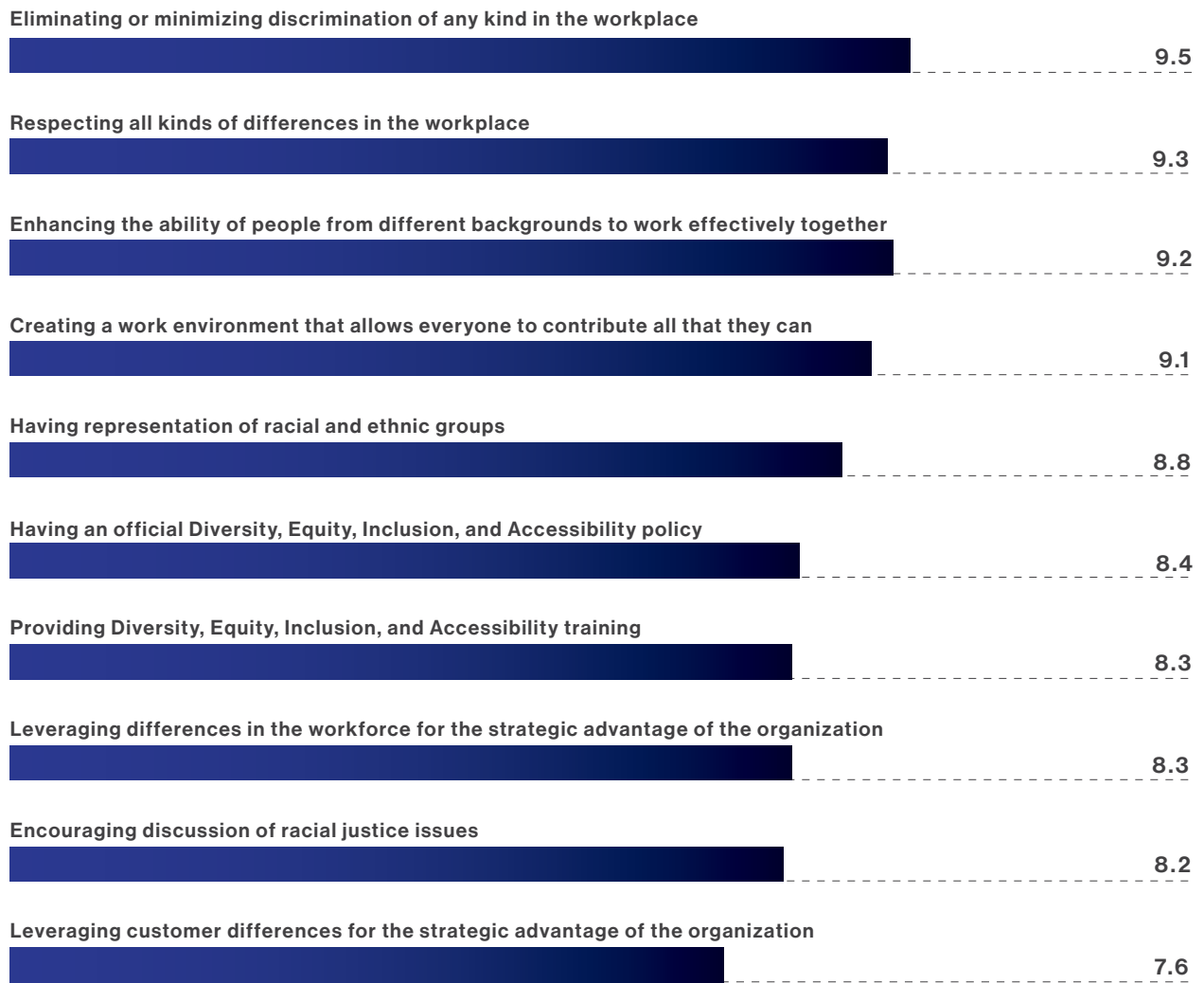




Table 4 and Figures 30 to 39 below present the main characteristics of the Design community. Demographic factors are dynamic and should be viewed as a point in time. Due to limitations from current and past research methodology, we do not recommend that the data below be compared with previous years' data to highlight change (or degree of change). Instead, the findings should be compared to the overall population (as done below) to identify opportunities, inform strategic direction, and continue improving towards a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible marketplace for all.

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

	Overall Respondents	U.S. Only Respondents
<b>Gender</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>60.6% Female</li> <li>35.6% Male</li> <li>3.8% Other<sup>^</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>61.3% Female</li> <li>35.0% Male</li> <li>3.7% Other</li> </ul>
<b>LGBTQIA+</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15.4%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15.7%</li> </ul>
<b>Race/Ethnicity<sup>81</sup></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>78.8% White</li> <li>9.2% Hispanic/Latinx</li> <li>4.9% Black/African-American</li> <li>10.2% Asian-American</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80% White</li> <li>9.0% Hispanic/Latinx</li> <li>4.9% Black/African-American</li> <li>9.5% Asian-American</li> </ul>
<b>Active Military/Veteran/Military Spouse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.4%</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.5%</li> </ul>
<b>Persons with a Disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17.0% (primarily cognitive)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16.6% (primarily cognitive)</li> </ul>
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40.3 Average</li> <li>38 Median</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40.5 Average</li> <li>38 Median</li> </ul>

<sup>81</sup> Sum > 100% since the question was multi-select.

<sup>^</sup>e.g., non-binary, gender nonconforming, gender fluid, gender questioning, transgender, agender, bigender

Figure 30: Who is Designing in the U.S.? % Women in Design

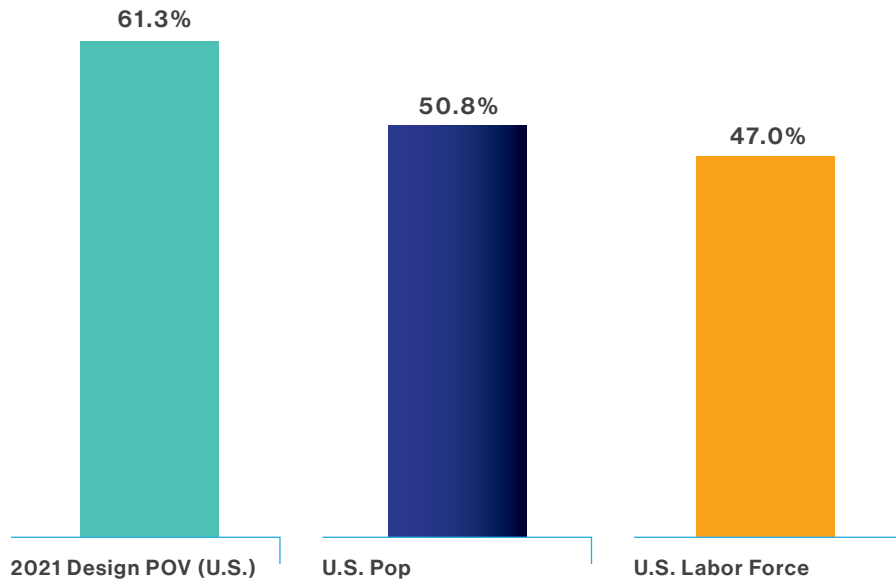
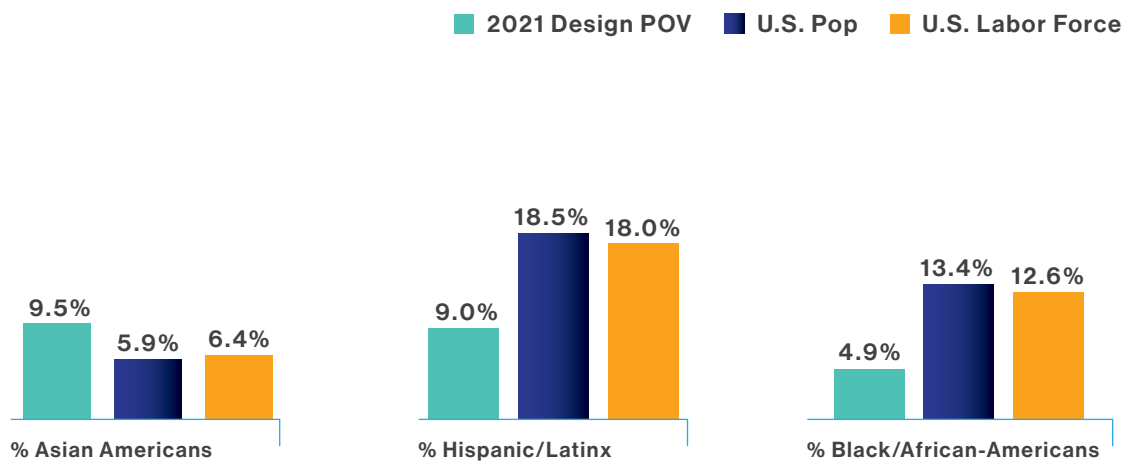


Figure 31: Who is Designing in the U.S.? % Asian-American, Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African-American\*



\*Per 2020 U.S. Census just released the percentage of the U.S. population self-identified as Black/African American alone or in combination with another race group represented 14.2% of the total population. Asian American alone or in combination comprised 7.2%. Hispanic/Latinx represented 18.7%. (Source: <https://www.census.gov>).

Figure 32: Who is Designing in the U.S.? Median Age

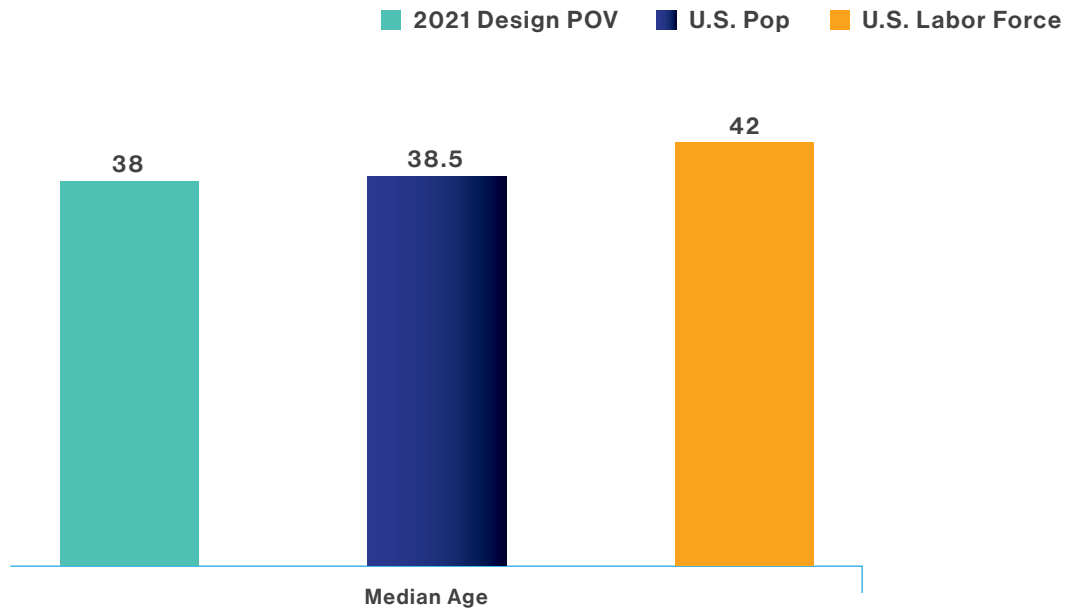


Figure 33: Who is Designing in the U.S.? Years as a Designer

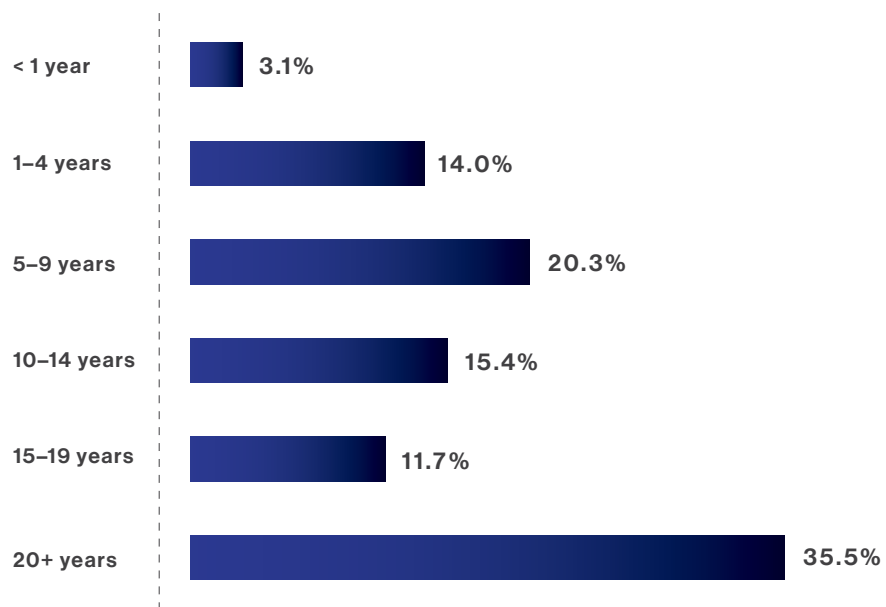


Figure 34: Who is Designing in the U.S.? % Self-Identified as LGBTQIA+

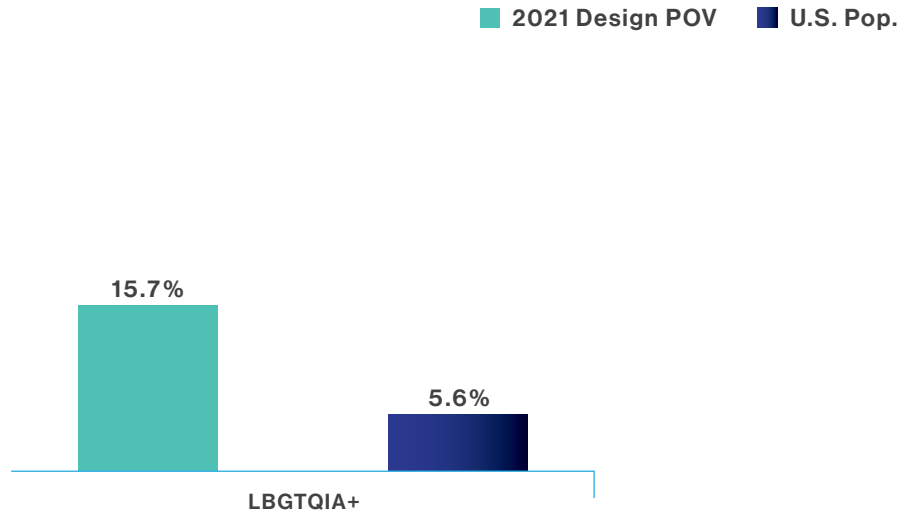


Figure 35: Who is Designing in the U.S.? By Military Status

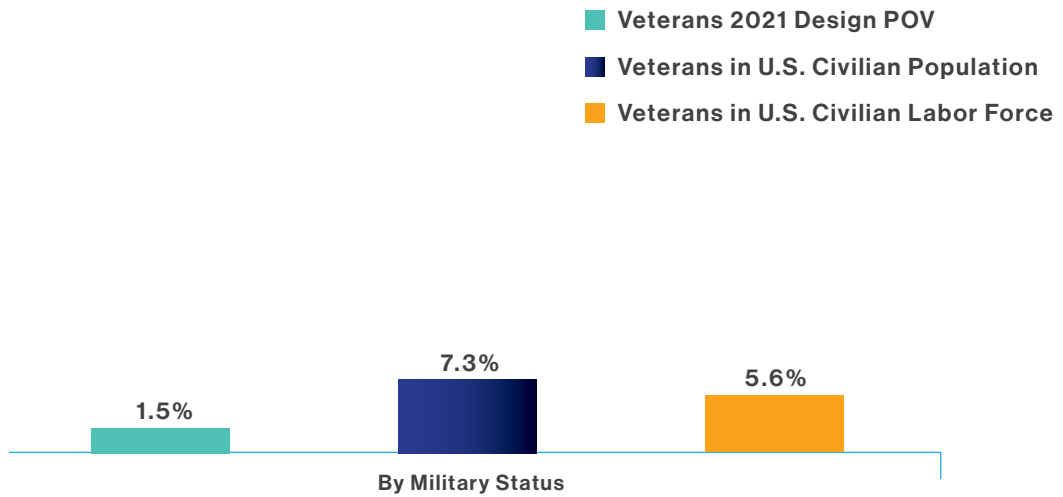


Figure 36: Who is Designing in the U.S.? % Self-Identified as Persons with a Disability

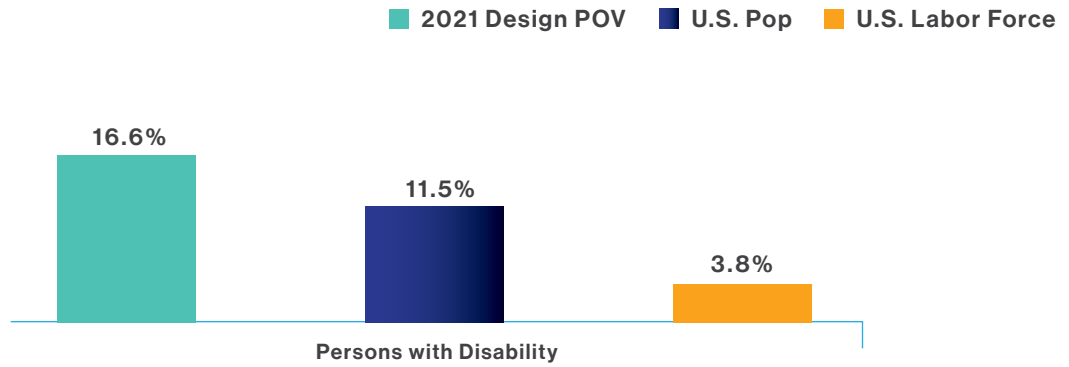
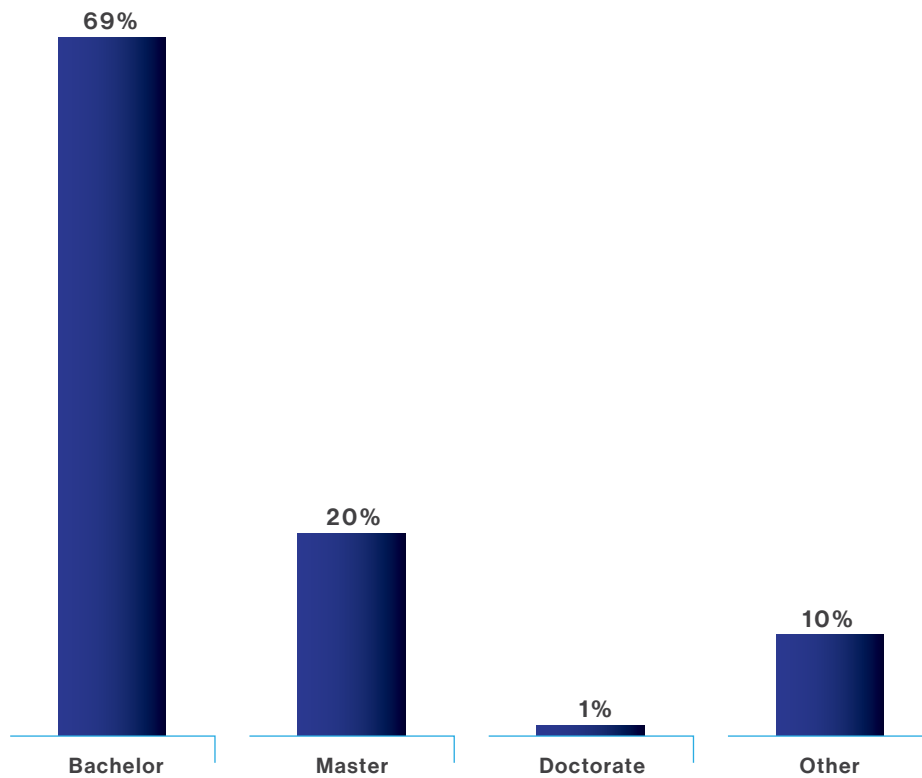
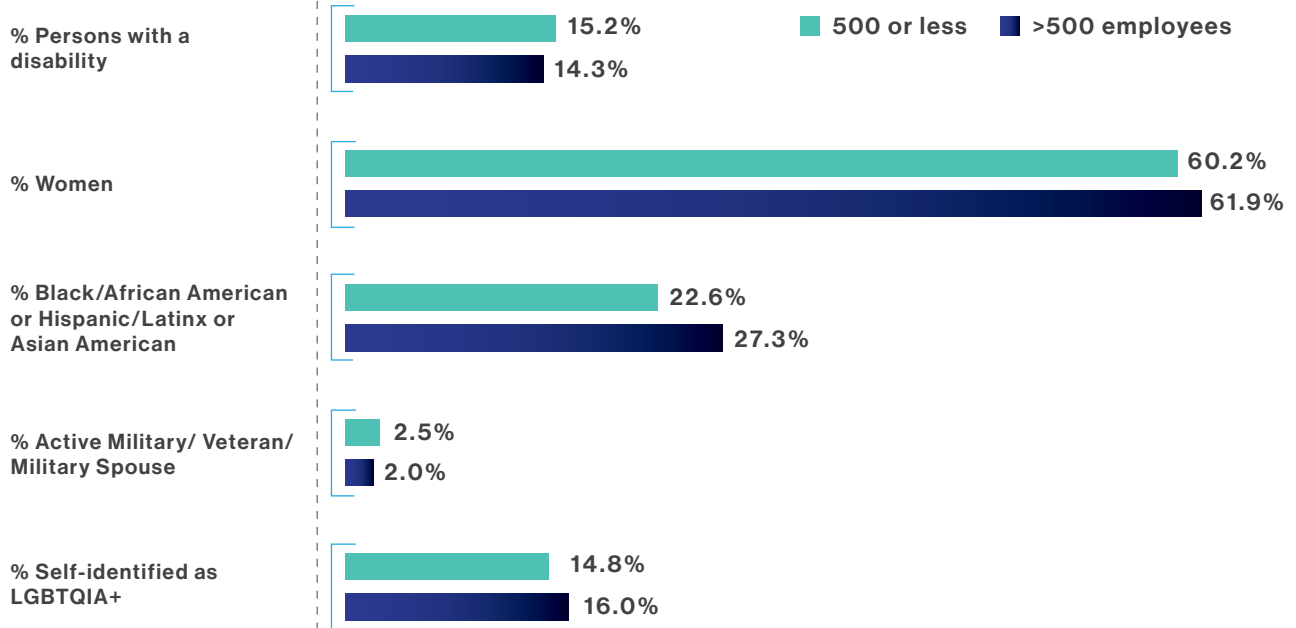


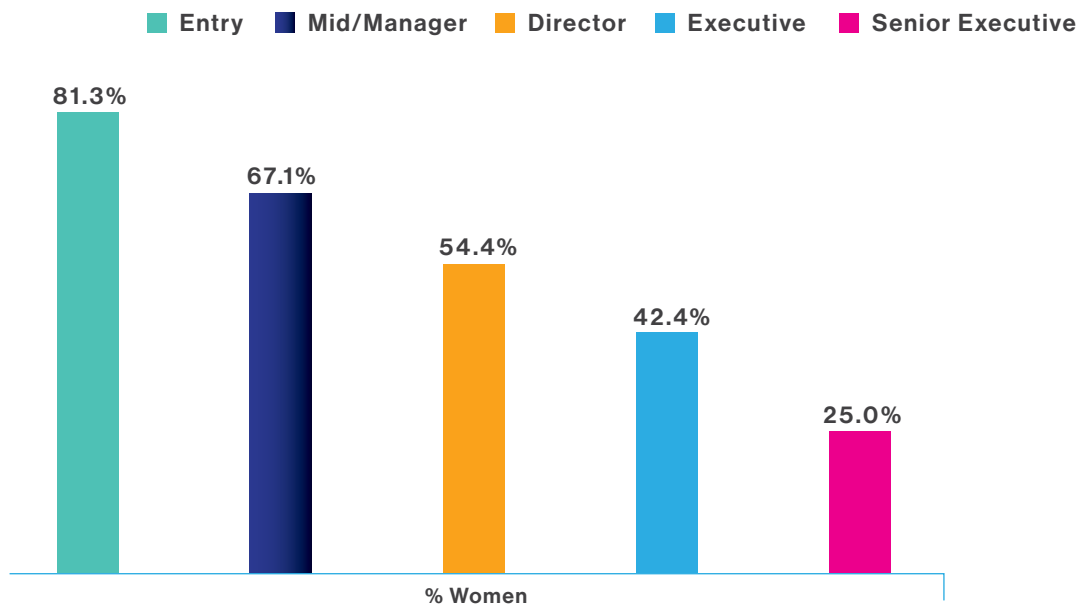
Figure 37: Who is Designing in the U.S.? Distribution of Respondents by Highest Educational Degree



**Figure 38: Who is Designing? Larger Employers (>500 employees) Compared to Smaller Employers (500 or less) (representation of certain demographic characteristics)**



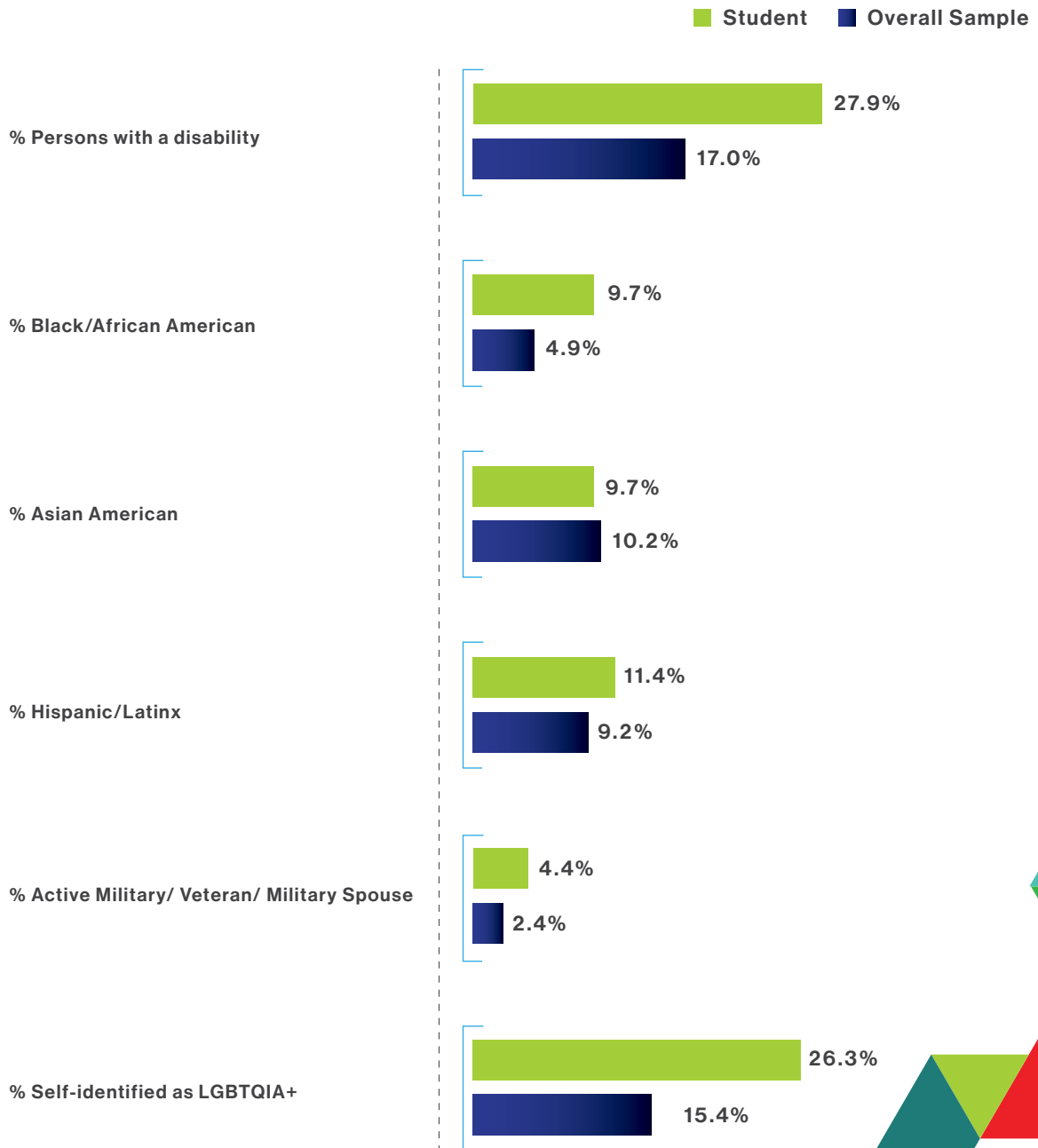
**Figure 39\*: Who is Designing? % Women By Career Lifecycle**



\*Estimate based on % women represented among top 100 Fortune World's Most Admired Companies with a publicly listed Chief Design Officer (or equivalent) at the executive level.

Considering that, in the long run, students are a proxy of what is to come and could end up representing the future makeup of the profession, one could hypothesize that the profession will become more diverse in the future, as highlighted in Figure 40 below.

**Figure 40: Who will be Designing? Profile of Students vs. Overall Sample**



**Creative Communities—Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**

**TOP HIGHLIGHTS**

#1	Diversity, equity, and inclusion needs to be defined and thought of more broadly, incorporating, for example, accessibility, belonging, and other values.
#2	Design communities are diverse and vibrant in multiple ways with various skills, industries, pathways, and higher representation of certain groups in the community (e.g., women; LGBTQIA+; persons with a disability; Asian Americans; younger professionals) than in the overall population.
#3	More should be done to address DEIA dilemmas such as overall underrepresentation (including potential pay gaps) of certain groups in the profession and at leadership positions.
#4	Building cultures where people feel valued, respected, and heard is the number one way organizations can create better workplaces for designers.
#5	Eliminating or minimizing discrimination of any kind in the workplace is the leading DEIA practice that organizations should employ that would be most valued by the community.
#6	Leading Design organizations are more likely to: treat employees with respect, value DEIA, and encourage discussions of racial justice issues.
#7	Lack of networks/access to people is the main challenge faced by underrepresented groups when entering the Design profession.
#8	Designers are letting their actions speak loudly as it relates to DEIA by listening to experiences of those different from oneself, speaking up when seeing injustice, and helping others understand different perspectives.
#9	DEIA is a complex challenge that goes beyond the Design profession and we encourage the community to fully explore the facts and discussion around this topic and use their complex problem solving skills to systematically impact society more broadly.





# Insights to Action

Please use the space below to reflect on the challenges faced in the community and the goals we should strive toward to create a more inclusive community for all.

**In which ways is the Design community diverse? Try defining diversity more broadly and inclusively.**

Empty response area for the first question.

**What are the key DEIA challenges that the community faces? Again, try defining the challenges broadly and inclusively.**

Empty response area for the second question.

**How can you demonstrate your support to DEIA? Create concrete goals and an action plan.**

Empty response area for the third question.

# Market Intelligence

*Intrinsic value of designers' professional craft*

## Income + Benefits

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), there are more than two million jobs for Design professionals in the U.S.<sup>82</sup> 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<sup>83,84</sup>, 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 5).

**Table 5: 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
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,144,200</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>N/A</b>

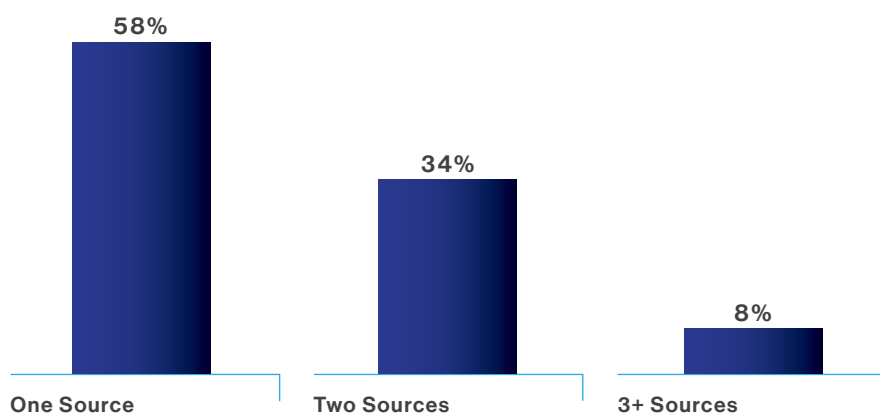
<sup>82</sup> [www.bls.gov/ooh/](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/) (Limitations apply due to BLS taxonomy. Not included fashion designers; interior designers). Considered similar occupations identified on AIGA Design Futures.

<sup>83</sup> Adobe creative cloud estimated 12 million+ subscribers in 2017

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.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 ten designers have more than one source of income (Figure 41). 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 41: Every Designer is Potentially a Business (# Of Sources of Income)**



Approximately six out of ten 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, not-for-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.

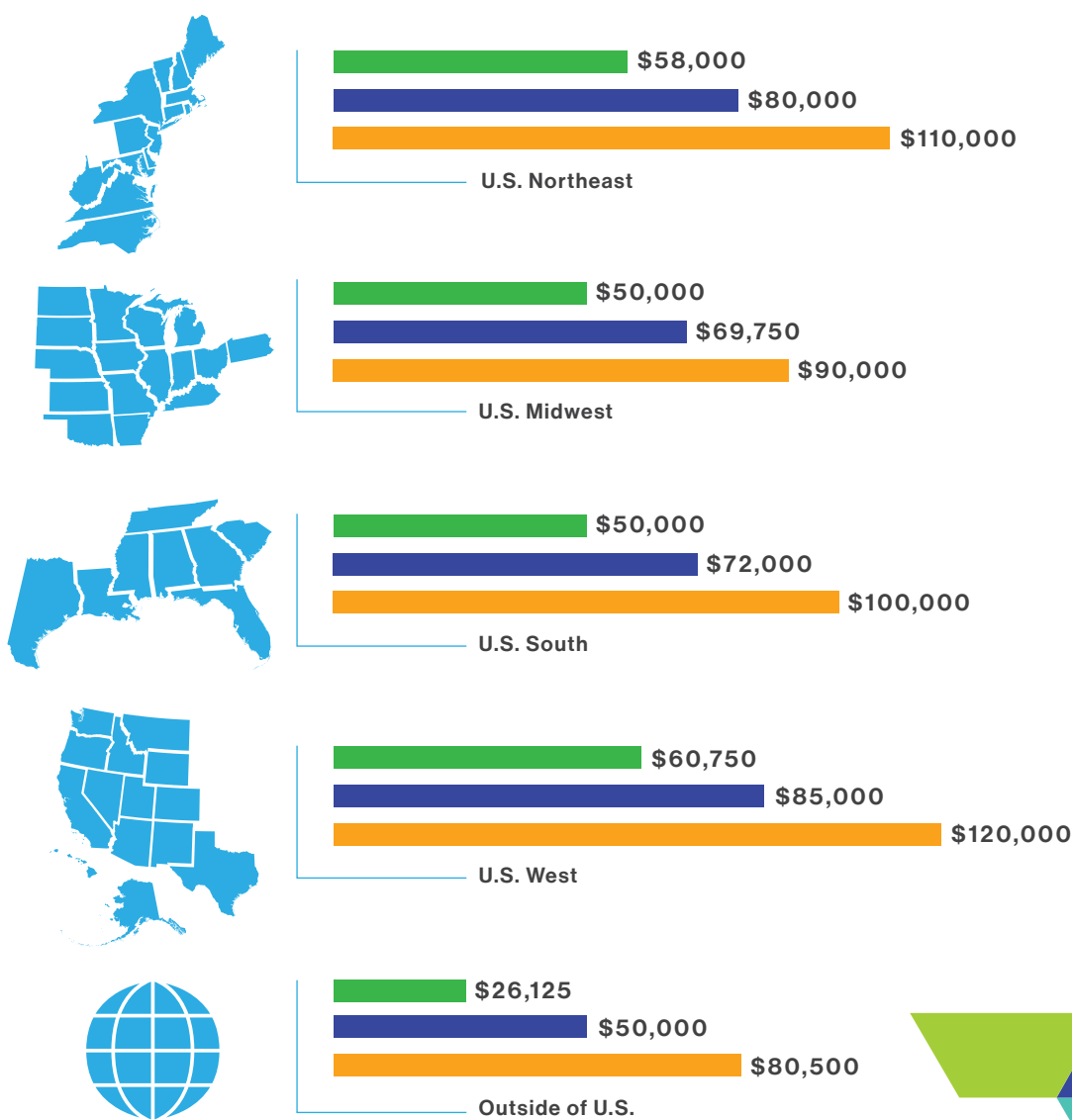
On average, designers with more than one source of income increase their annual income by 26 percent. In the U.S., designers’ average annual income (pre-tax) is \$89,566, median income is \$75,000, with 25th percentile at \$53,000 and 75 percentile at \$100,000.

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 percent of the scores in the distribution may be found.

Total income varies based on several factors, and in the following Figures, 42 to 50, 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."<sup>85</sup>

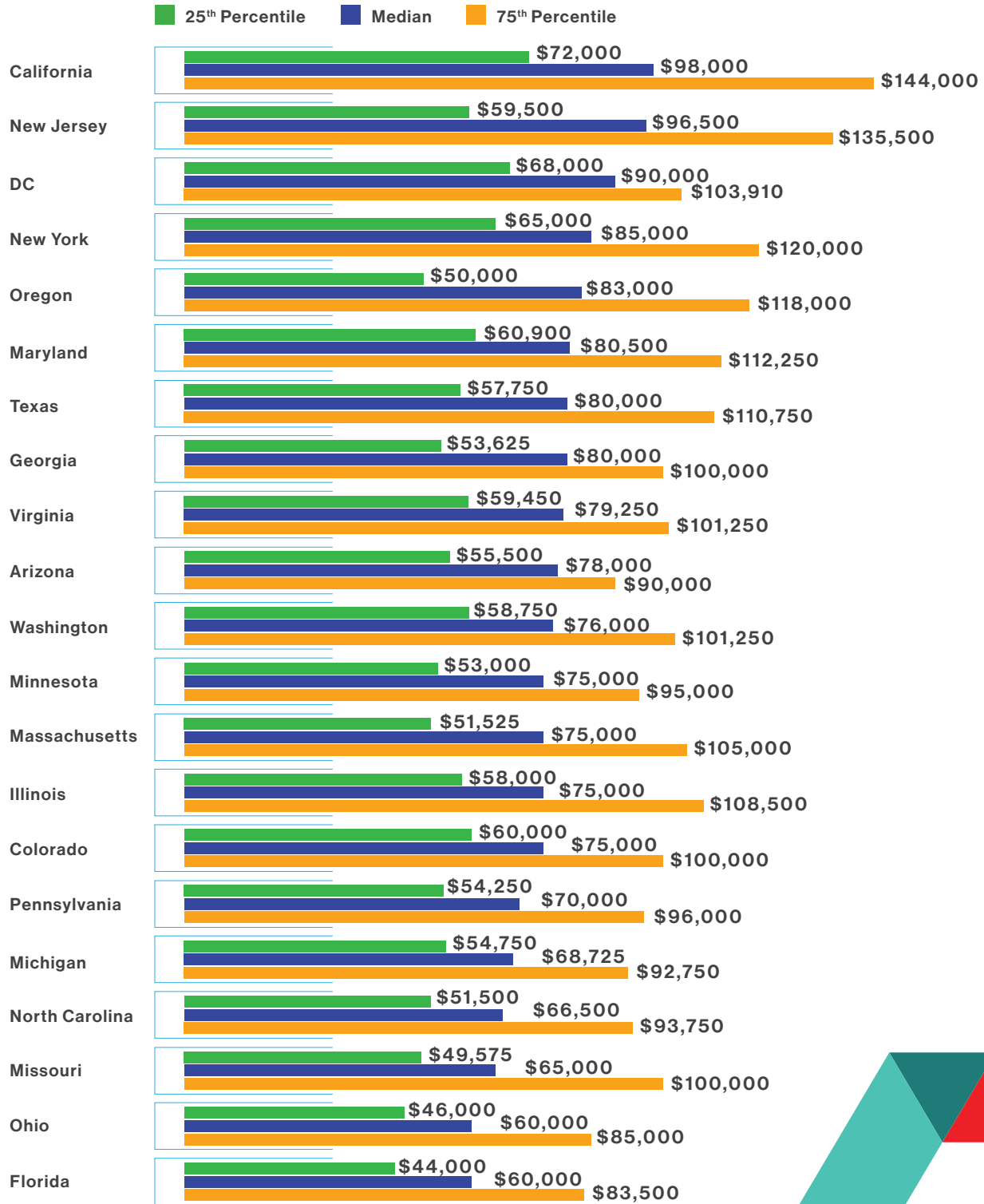
Figure 42: Location Impact on Overall Income

25<sup>th</sup> Percentile    Median    75<sup>th</sup> Percentile



<sup>85</sup> <https://www.worldatwork.org>

Figure 43: States with Highest Median Total Annual Income<sup>86</sup>



<sup>86</sup> Only included states with 25 or more responses.

Figure 44: Job/Role Level Impact on Overall Income

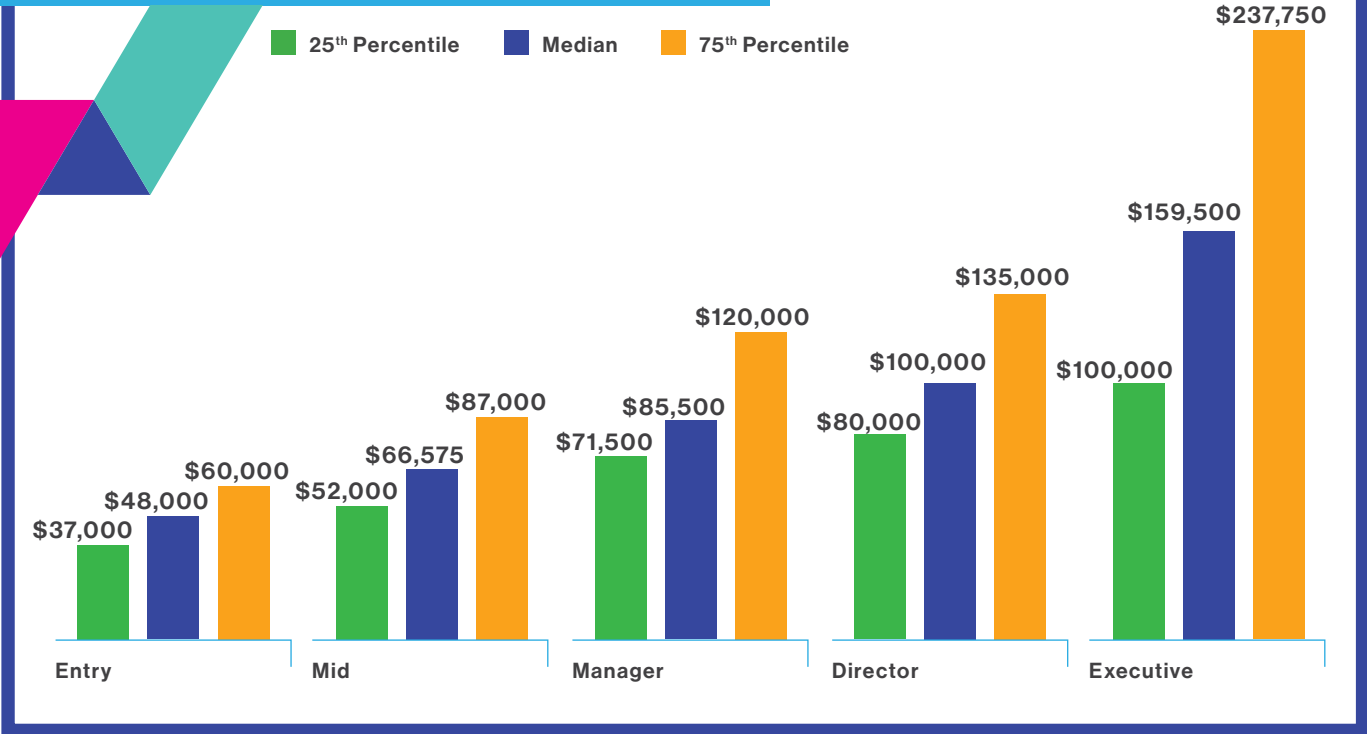


Figure 45: Highest Education Completed Impact on Overall Income

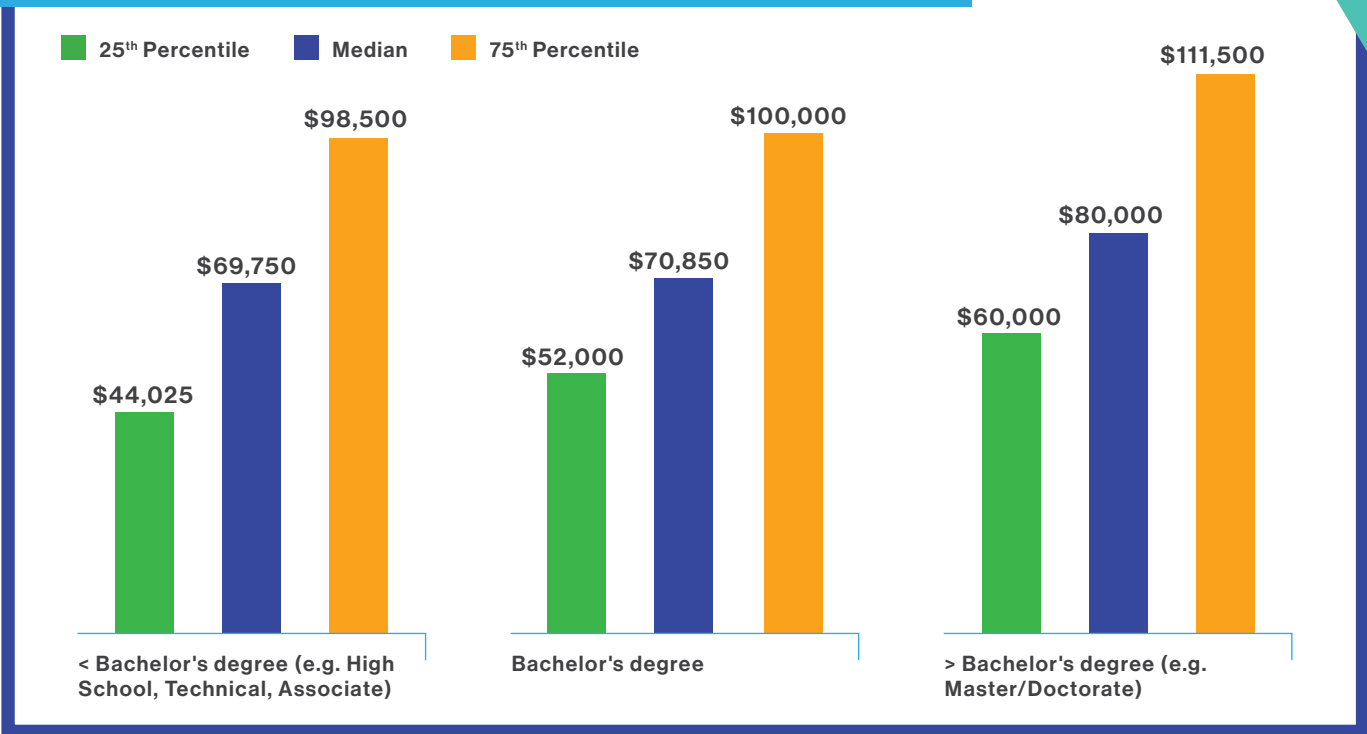


Figure 46: Number of Hours Worked Impact on Overall Income

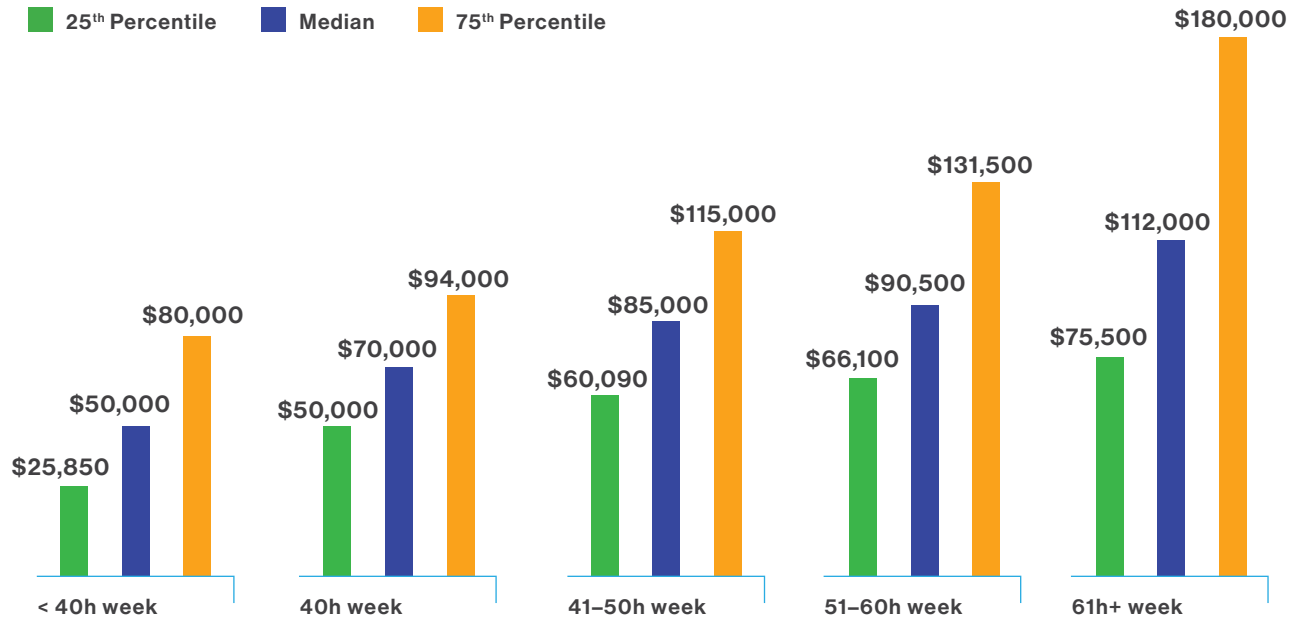


Figure 47: Design Experience Impact on Overall Income

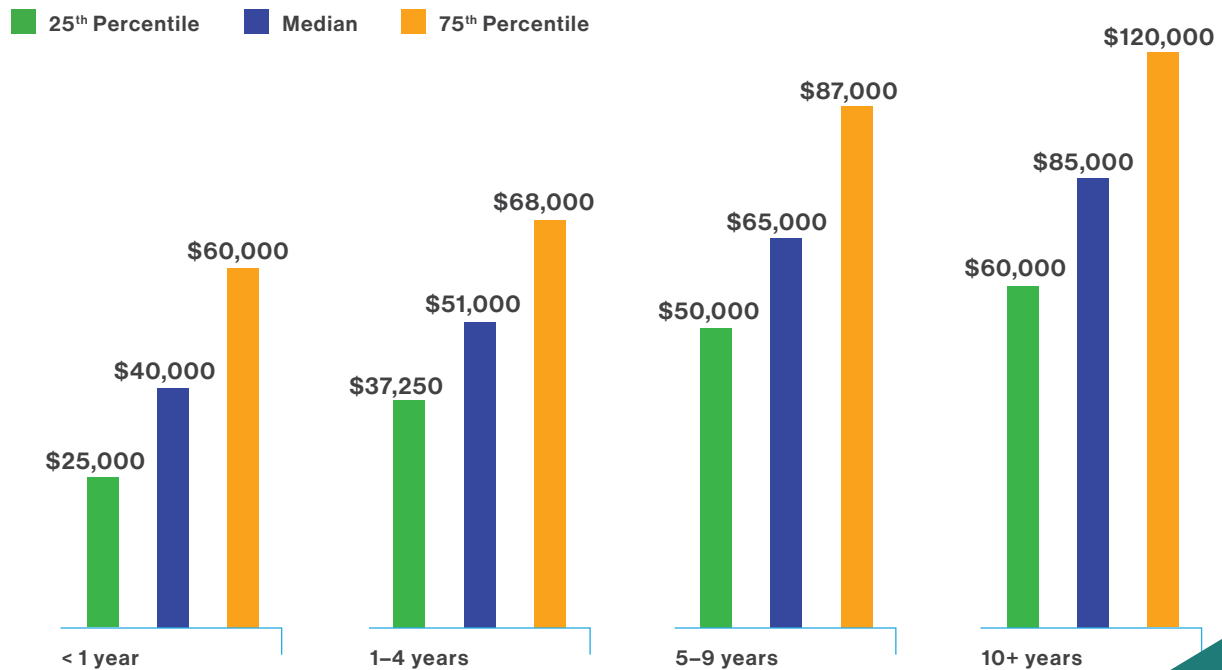




Figure 48: Organization Size Impact on Overall Income

25<sup>th</sup> Percentile    Median    75<sup>th</sup> Percentile

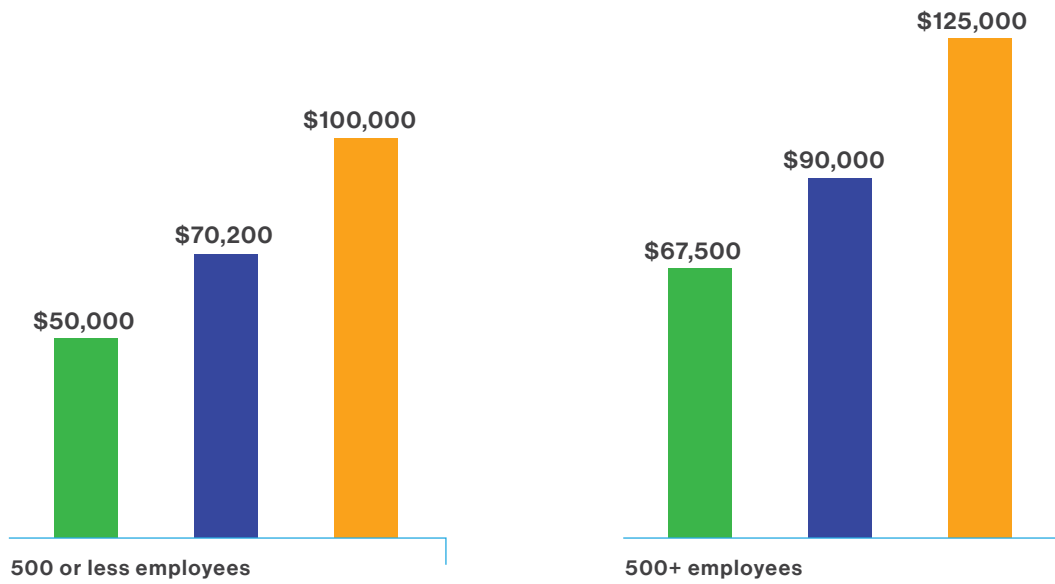


Figure 49: Multi-Proficiency (with Digital Expertise or Not) Impact on Overall Income

25<sup>th</sup> Percentile    Median    75<sup>th</sup> Percentile

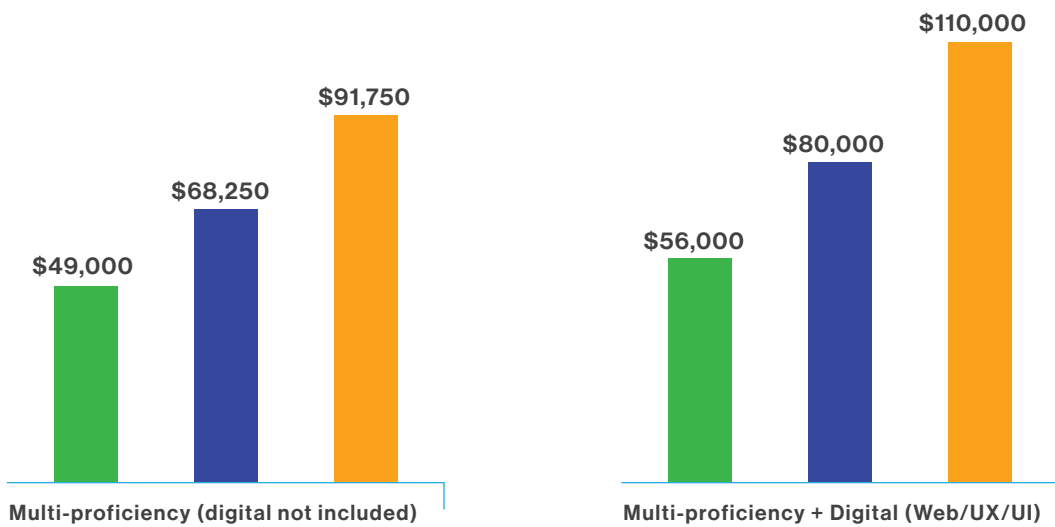
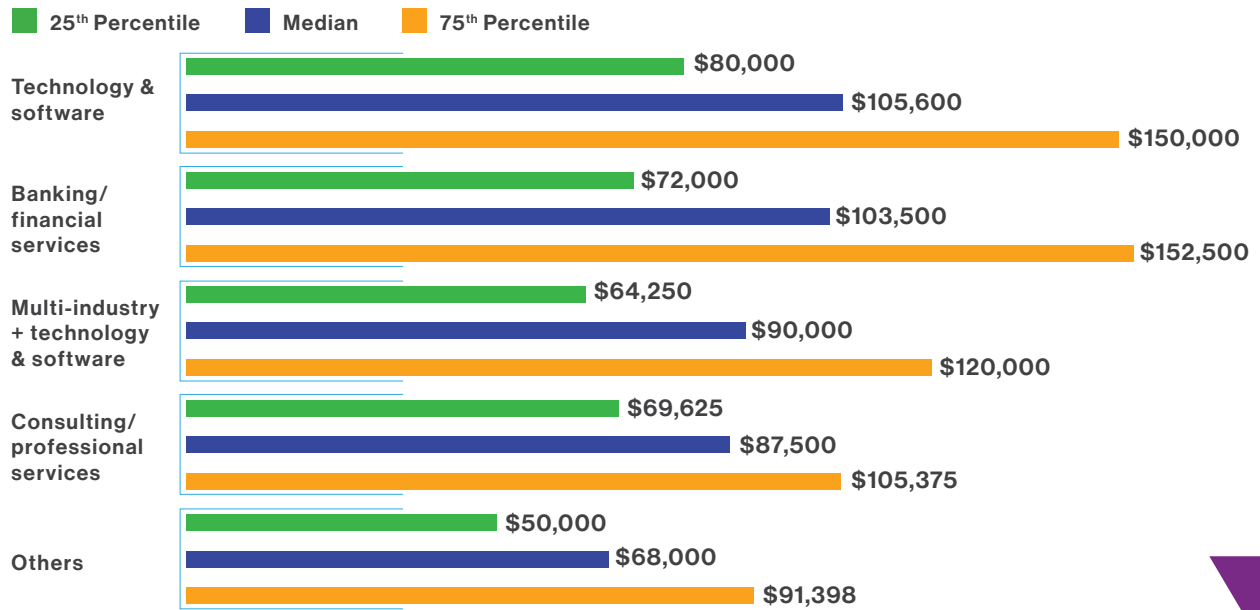
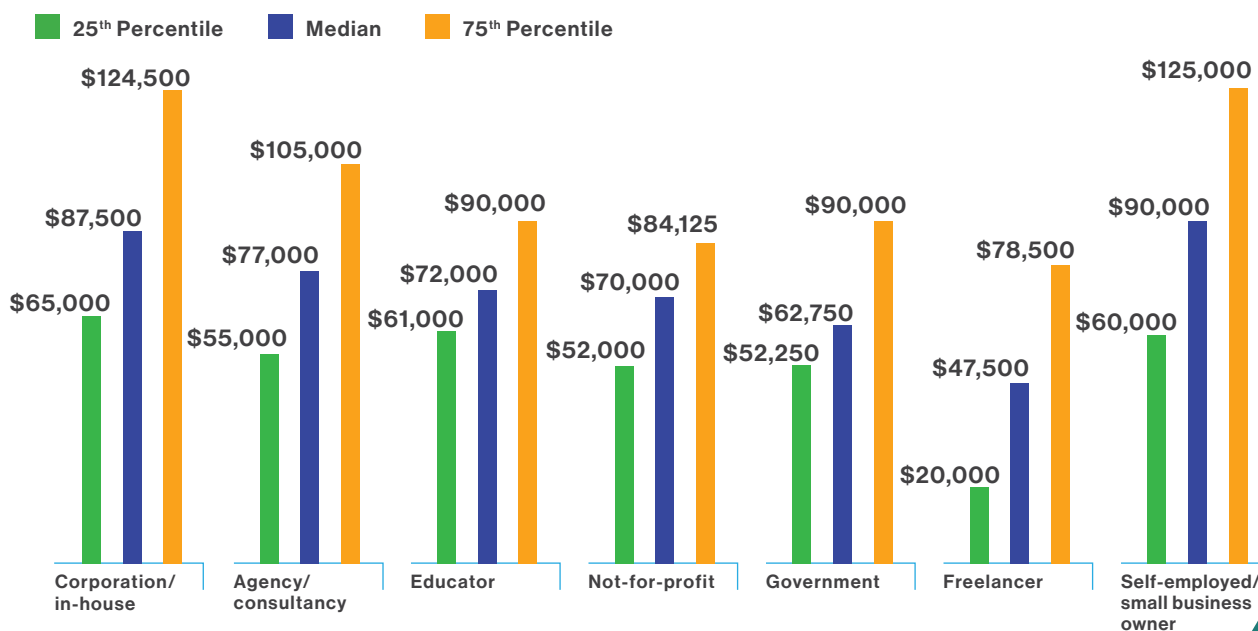


Figure 50: Industry Impact on Overall Income<sup>87</sup>



Total income also varies based on employment and job type. Figures 51 and 52 present the total salary/pay for designers with one single source of income.<sup>88</sup>

Figure 51: Employment Type Impact on Overall Pay/Salary<sup>89</sup>

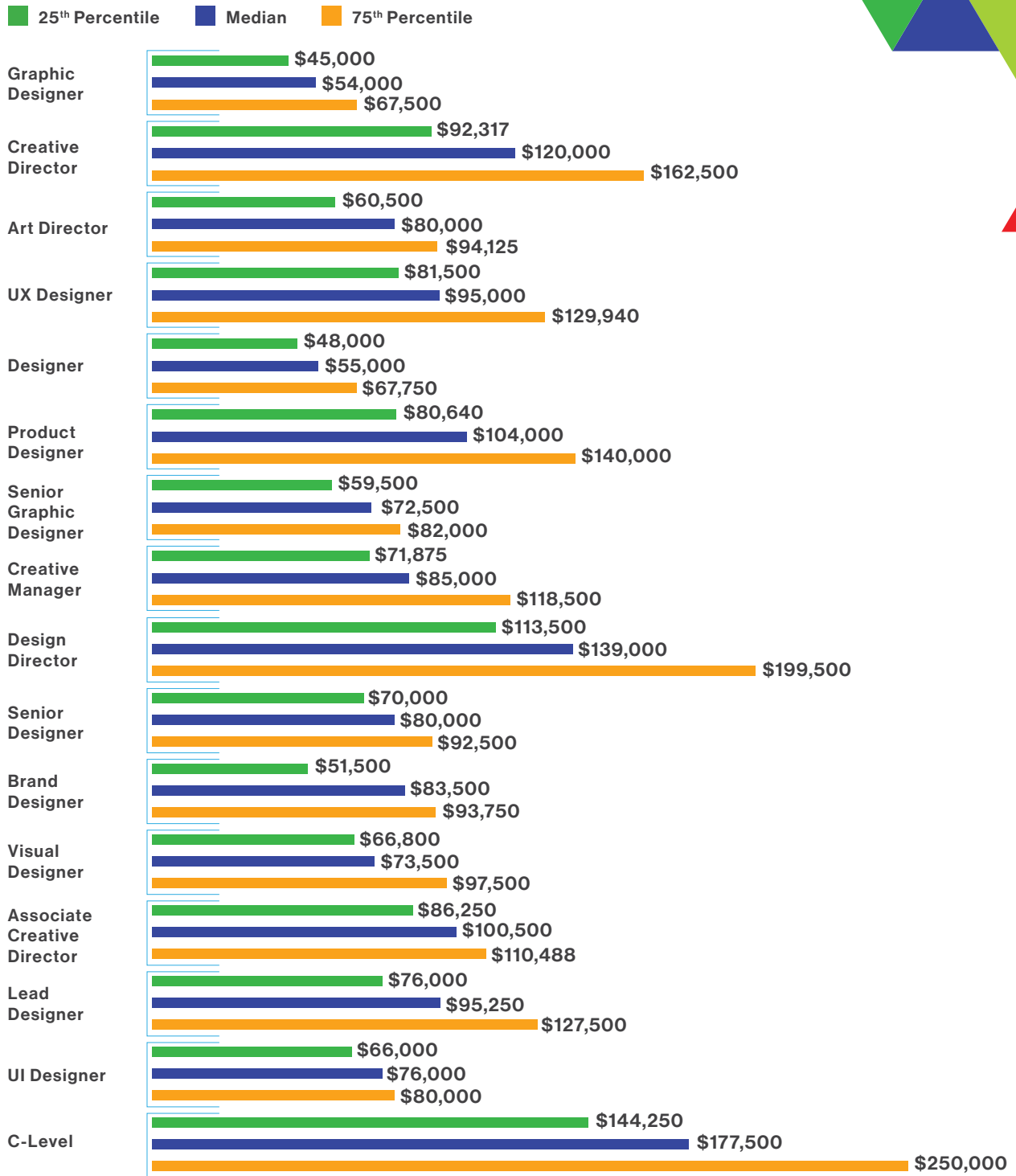


<sup>87</sup> Only included states with 25 or more responses.

<sup>89</sup> Only considered one source of income.

<sup>88</sup> Income = Pay = Salary for designers with only one source of reported annual income.

Figure 52: Total Annual Income (Pre-tax) By Job Title<sup>90</sup>



<sup>90</sup> 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 6 the impact of selected demographic factors on overall income, along with a brief explanation of some of the main causes for the differences.

**Table 6: Impact of Demographic Factors on Total Income**

Factor	Median Annual Income	Notes
<b>Gender<sup>91</sup></b>	\$82,000 Males \$70,000 Females \$62,000 Other (e.g., agender, gender nonconforming, transgender, non-binary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)</li> <li>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)</li> <li>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)</li> </ul>
<b>Persons with a Disability</b>	\$66,750 Yes (self-identified as a person with a disability) \$75,000 No (did not self-identify as a person with a disability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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)</li> <li>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)</li> </ul>
<b>Ethnicity/ Race</b>	\$85,000 Asian Americans \$74,750 White \$70,000 Hispanic, Latinx \$69,000 Black/African American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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 in the technology and software industry</li> </ul>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	\$65,000 LGBTQIA+ \$75,000 Not reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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+)</li> </ul>

<sup>91</sup> Consider checking Netflix's Explained | Why Women Are Paid Less

Receiving fair pay/benefits matters to the community. As we shared previously in the Design Leads and Value of Design chapters, 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.

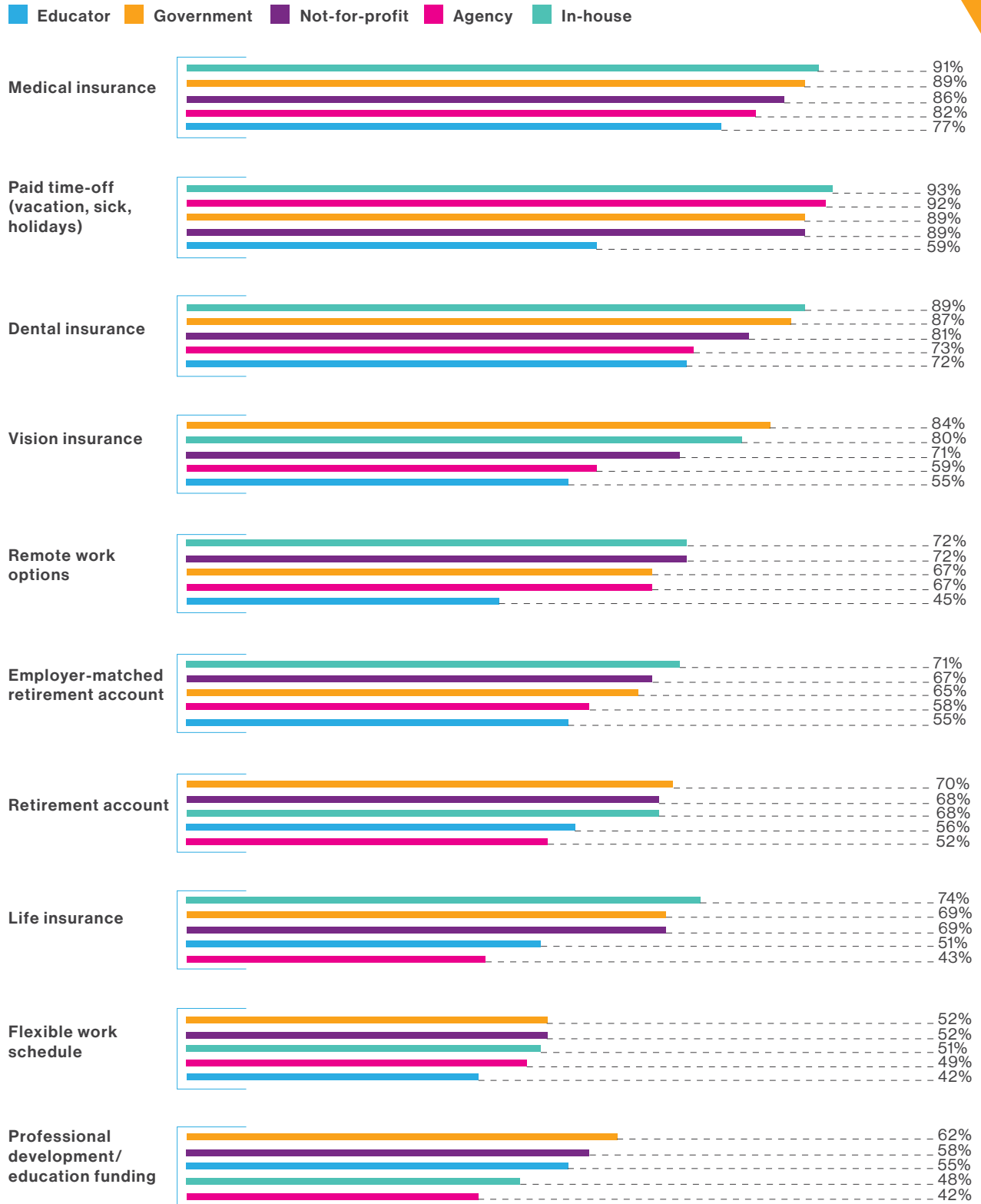
Considering the significant number of self-employed professionals in Design, a substantial percentage of design professionals do not receive benefits from an employer, pay their own benefits or have access to benefits through a partner. Figure 53 presents the top ten benefits that the Design community currently has access to via employment in corporations, not-for-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, not-for-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 53: Most Common Benefits Currently Available





## 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](https://www.aiga.org) and [EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org](https://www.aiga.org/eyeon) for inspiration and resources.

**Determine your goals for the next three to five years.**

**Establish your action plan to get there.**



# Value of Design

*Bringing strategic value to organizations*



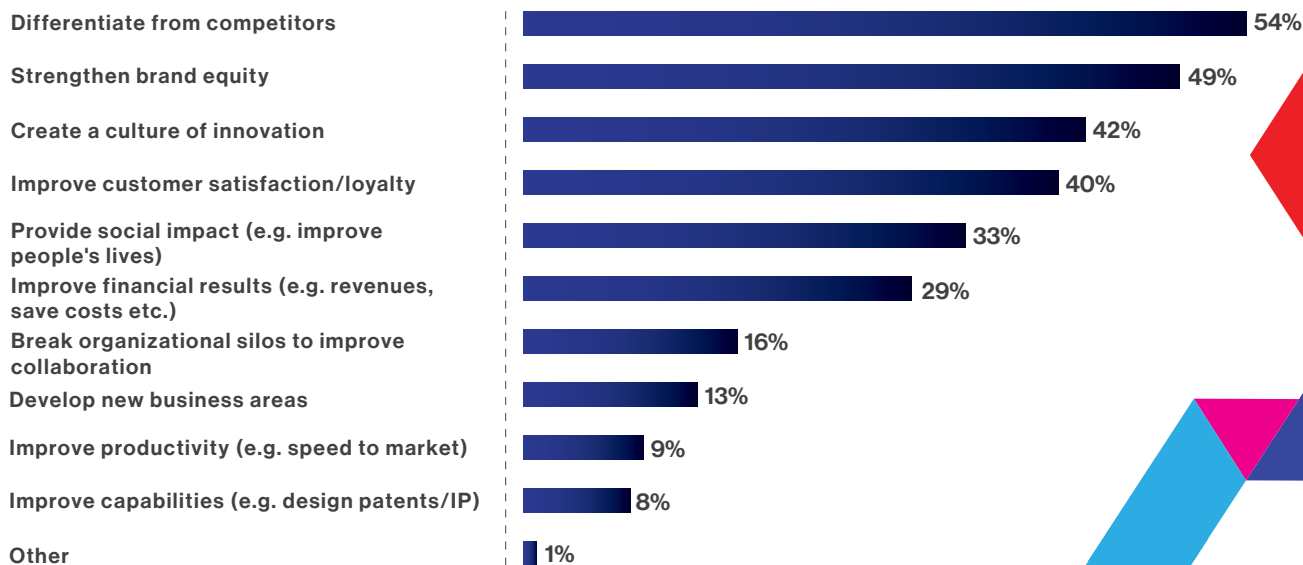
# Value of Design

## Bringing strategic value to organizations

Design is essential to organizations,<sup>92</sup> and much has been written about the strategic value that Design can add.<sup>93</sup> Great Design can change lives, communities, and organizations for the better.<sup>94</sup> However, articulating the value of Design can be challenging.<sup>95</sup> The complexity of Design interests’ designers, not necessarily the rest of the organization.<sup>96</sup> Thus, learning how to speak the language of business can help build empathy and understanding of such value.<sup>97</sup> It can also help position Design as a strategic driver for organizations, instead of a last stop to make a so-so idea aesthetically pleasing.<sup>98</sup>

The value of Design depends on how mature the organization is.<sup>99</sup> At first, in the pathway for Design to become a strategic driver, organizations tend to view Design narrowly, focusing on aesthetics and form. In the second phase, organizations begin to encompass overall user experiences. And, in the most mature phase, organizations realize Design’s potential to transform the entire organization.<sup>100</sup> Overall, the Design community identified that Design adds value to organizations through differentiation, strengthening brand equity, creating a culture of innovation, improving customer satisfaction/loyalty, providing social impact, improving financial results, breaking organizational silos, developing new business areas, improving productivity, and improving capabilities (Figure 54).

**Figure 54: Top Ways Design Adds Value to Organizations**



<sup>92</sup> AIGA Pulse Survey (May, 2020 with 4,766 respondents)

<sup>93</sup> <https://www.dmi.org/page/DesignValue/The-Value-of-Design-.htm>

<sup>94</sup> <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/>

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.invisionapp.com>

<sup>96</sup> <https://design.co/design-in-tech-report-2019-no-track/#10>

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.invisionapp.com>

<sup>98</sup> <https://design.co/design-in-tech-report-2019-no-track/#10>

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.invisionapp.com>

<sup>100</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/>

The perception of how Design adds value to organizations varies from in-house Design leaders and educators, as seen in Table 7 below.

**Table 7: Top ways Design adds value to organizations — in-house leaders and educators**

In-house Design Leaders		Educators	
56%	Differentiate from competitors	55%	Create a culture of innovation
49%	Strengthen brand equity	48%	Differentiate from competitors
42%	Improve customer satisfaction/loyalty	43%	Provide social impact
41%	Create a culture of innovation	37%	Strengthen brand equity
32%	Improve financial results	30%	Improve customer satisfaction/loyalty
24%	Provide social impact	21%	Improve financial results

Design still functions within many organizations as a disconnected activity. The value of Design, though, is in relation to the whole and not in isolation. It is the integration that makes it powerful.<sup>101</sup> The more an organization embraces and integrates Design practices, the more positive business outcomes it sees.<sup>102</sup> One of our interviewees said it best:

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.dmi.org/>  
<sup>102</sup> <http://www.invisionapp.com>



Historically, it's not common to have Design at the table. It's seen as executional and not a strategic investment or growth driver."

**Anonymous |**  
 Design leader interviewed as part of a series of community conversations and focus group sessions AIGA held in 2020

Research indicates that designers are not currently viewed as competent to lead strategy as they typically do not have (or do not care to have) the business acumen needed.<sup>103</sup> But, designers do have an important role to play in strategic leadership by focusing on making their organization’s strategic vision a reality and facilitating this through other functions of the organization. The strategic role of Design, then, is to build bridges with other departments to then aid in taking a given strategy from intent to reality.<sup>104</sup>

Measuring Design’s value is important both as an exercise to manage value and to help evolve the narrative around the value of Design. The link between Design and shareholder value was first uncovered by the UK Design Council in a study of Design-led firms which found that **Design organizations outperformed their peers in the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 over a 10-year period by 231 percent.** Design Management Institute undertook a similar effort in the U.S. market, and the outcome for U.S. companies indicated a **stock performance advantage of 228 percent over 10 years.**<sup>105,106</sup>

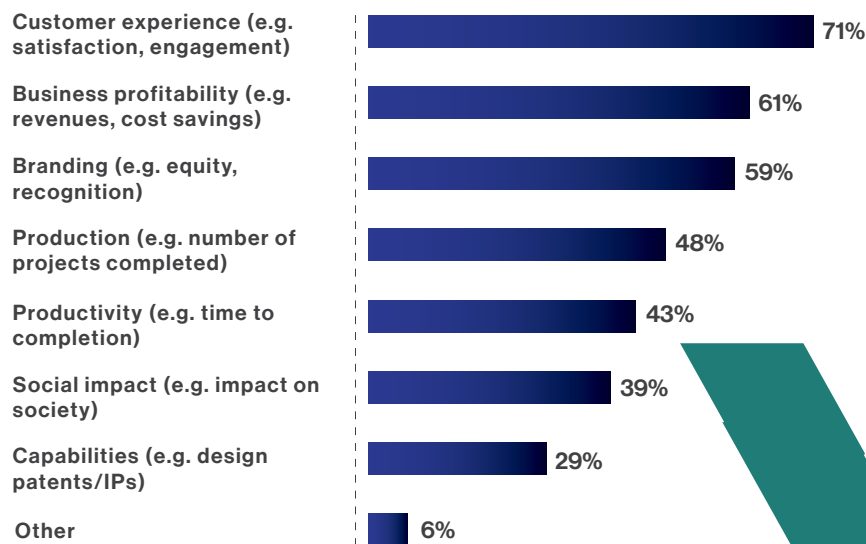
One of the four components of the McKinsey Design Index (which is also correlated with superior business performance) is around the importance of measuring and driving Design performance with the same rigor as revenues and costs.<sup>107</sup> In our study, only nine percent of respondents noted they have a Design scorecard to measure performance in their organizations. And those that do, measure mostly: customer experience, business profitability, branding, production, and productivity (Figure 55).



Designers need a seat at the table from the very beginning. The smartest companies and advertising agencies are already doing that. It’s shifting dramatically and rather quickly but it simply was not true in the past. The role of the designer can’t be an afterthought.”

**Alison Gragnano** | Executive Creative Director, The New School

**Figure 55: Measures on Design Scorecard**



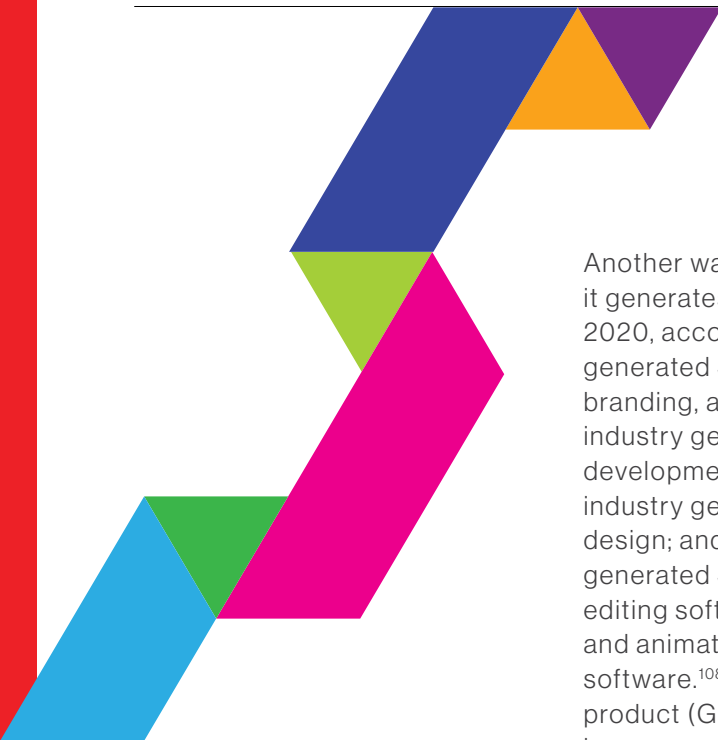
<sup>103</sup> <https://id.iit.edu/lead-with-purpose/>

<sup>104</sup> <https://id.iit.edu/lead-with-purpose/>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net>

<sup>106</sup> <https://www.dmi.org/page/DesignValue>

<sup>107</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/>



Another way to show the economic value of Design is through the revenue it generates, or the gross domestic product impact in the economy. In 2020, according to Ibis World, the graphic design industry in the U.S. generated \$12.2 billion in revenue primarily through advertising, corporate branding, and online design and development; the web design services industry generated \$39.6 billion primarily through custom platform web development and WordPress web development. The industrial designers industry generated \$3.0 billion of revenues primarily through product design; and the design, editing and rendering software publishing industry generated \$12.3 billion of revenues in the U.S. primarily with image editing software, CAD and other design software, computer graphics and animation software, and video post production and sound editing software.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the historical growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) from arts and cultural industries (which includes Design) has exceeded the U.S. economy growth and the 2019 numbers from the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) highlight that the production of arts and cultural goods and services (which includes Design) approached a trillion dollars (\$919.7 billion).<sup>109</sup>

In closing, Design is essential to organizations, but not all organizations are able to capitalize on its value. As seen previously, respondents in organizations where Design is a strategic driver were more likely than respondents in lagging organizations to feel good about their organization's financial future, to believe their customers were very loyal, and to be satisfied with their current work situation. Learning how to quantify and articulate Design's value (and create new value) should be an ongoing endeavor and area of focus for the Design community.

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<sup>108</sup> <https://www.ibisworld.com/>

<sup>109</sup> <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/SummaryReportAccessLinks.pdf>



## Insights to Action

Check out [AIGA.org](https://AIGA.org) and [EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org](https://EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org) for resources you can use.

### How do you articulate the value of Design?

### How are you measuring the value of Design?

### How are you promoting the value of Design?

# Design for Positive Impact

*Points of view shared by the community*

# Design for Positive Impact

## *Points of view shared by the community*

Positive impact is important for the Design community. For decades, companies have been singular in their aim: financial growth. Stakeholders are now pushing to evaluate organizations more broadly, considering, for example, their social and environmental impact.<sup>110</sup> Designers have an important role in this process as they can ask essential questions about their potential impact.<sup>111</sup> They can empower organizations to operate with greater integrity, moving from viable/desirable/feasible to viable/desirable/feasible/inclusive/sustainable/just.<sup>112</sup>

The Design community continues to inspire and impress with its social conscience as approximately one out of two designers stated that they volunteered their Design skills to help their communities during the ongoing pandemic of 2020 (AIGA Pulse Survey, conducted in May 2020). Additionally, the community looked at many of the challenges as opportunities. For instance, some see the opportunity to work from home more often as a positive: enjoying the comfort of working from home, saving money by being home, and saving time by being home. Others found time to invent their own future or rethink businesses, to help local small businesses with their online e-commerce websites, guided clients through changes, and created positive change in their communities. Some saw it as a chance to indulge creativity, used the time to network, and used the time to show the value of Design (e.g., how good Design can generate profit for businesses and how designers can lead a transition to what’s coming after the pandemic).

Another interesting finding to note was that designers were willing to turn down a job if the company’s values did not align with their own. In a survey conducted by The Creative Group and AIGA in 2020, we learned that 88 percent of designers currently employed (and 56 percent of those unemployed) reported they would not accept a job for a company whose values did not match their own.<sup>113</sup>

**Figure 56: Willingness to Turn Down a Job that Does Not Align with Values**



<sup>110</sup> <https://www.accenture.com/>

<sup>111</sup> <https://www.wearecollins.com/ideas/the-day-after/>

<sup>112</sup> <https://id.iit.edu/lead-with-purpose/>

<sup>113</sup> Survey with 500+ creative professionals by The Creative Group and AIGA conducted in Oct. 2020.

One thing that was very clear throughout this research was that designers have a point of view about the future. Below are selected quotes shared by survey respondents.

**Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**

“  
**Amplifying diverse talent and collaboration through understanding of all roles within an organization.**  
 ”

“  
**Celebrate diverse perspectives and focus less on globalized/generic Design perspectives.**  
 ”

“  
**Currently, I think the biggest importance is the acceptance of people with LGBTQ identities.**  
 ”

“  
**Be more inclusive of both designers and the people for whom we design.**  
 ”

”  
**Being far less elitist and far more welcoming and accessible to all.**  
 ”

“  
**Awareness of the wide range of viewpoints in the community.**  
 ”

“  
**Continuing to diversify the people who make and create this community.**  
 ”

“  
**Equal opportunities and rights, as well as social responsibility.**  
 ”

“  
**Represent and celebrate diverse stories and voices**  
 ”





“  
Accessibility and inclusion. Design for all people.  
”

“  
Software being accessible, affordable.  
”

“  
Fair pay at every level and position.  
”

“  
Allowing many different voices.  
”

“  
Make sure we elevate voices that are often not heard.  
”

Creating Standards for the Profession

“  
Ethical standards and business practices to help clients and creatives.  
”

“  
Being on-the-hook and responsible for what your designs are used for.  
”

“  
Ethics and responsibility for the work we do and its effects on society and individuals.  
”

“  
Design standards. With the plethora of templates included in software the old saw ‘anyone can be a designer’ is coming true. It’s past time to throw some letters of achievement after our names. Even project managers get that PMP!  
”

”  
Design ethics. We are responsible for the work we put into the world.  
”

“  
Enforcing ethics related to technology, tools, social media.  
”

“  
Accountability for the impact of our work.  
”

“  
A professional standard for conduct.  
”



**Advocating for Design**

“  
Help build credibility for Design and designers among business and government.  
”

“  
Articulating and demonstrating the value of Design to business and culture.  
”

“  
Getting people in worthwhile jobs. Helping designers with advancing careers.  
”

“  
Design needs to continue to emphasize its importance to the success and advancement of business.  
”

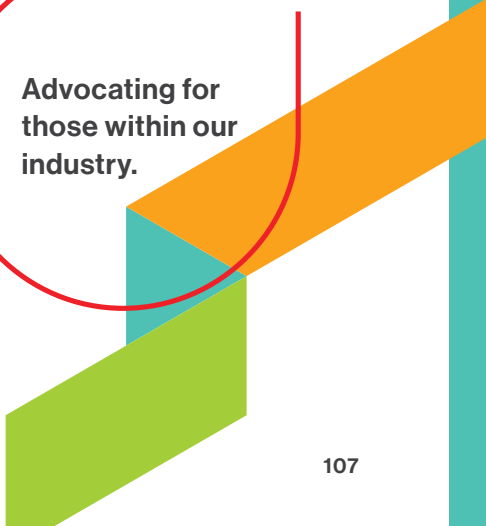
”  
Communicating the importance and ubiquity of Design in everyday life to the general public.  
”

“  
Design as a ‘serious,’ business-strategic profession (vs. ‘make it pretty’).  
”

“  
Design needs to have a seat at the table.  
”

“  
Creative opportunities within a healthy work/life balance.  
”

“  
Advocating for those within our industry.  
”



**Strengthening the Community**

“

Connecting creatives from all walks of life and levels of experience.

”

“

Creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue among diverse groups.

“

Building community and community engagement outside of Design.

”

“

Bringing people together to solve social, environmental, business and technology challenges.

”

”

Building a community that encourages everyone to join together and think outside the box.

“

I would like to see the Design community be a little more supportive of each other.

”

“

Community conversation, inspiration, and help/gratitude!

”

“

Create universal community and understanding.

“

Cultivating communities open to diverse ideas.

Advancing Design Education/Learning

“  
Making Design education more in touch with Design opportunities.  
”

“  
More focus on mentoring designers with business strategies.  
”

“  
Educational guidelines for high school and college students.  
”

“  
YouTube content from AIGA that’s not a speaker note but actually videotaping a designer at their computer walking you through their process with a mock project.  
”

”  
I think we need to create tools to help designers become more business smart.  
”

“  
Affordable places of trust where designers can go in and keep improving skills.  
”

“  
Constant weekly skills and technology training in every role.  
”

“  
We need to create a cultural exchange for Design.  
”

“  
Helping people think differently.  
”

## Being a Force For Change

Higher thinking.  
Creative solutions  
for challenges of  
society.

Catalyst for  
change in the  
Design and local  
communities.

Creating  
intentional and  
positive change  
in the world.

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

Creative  
problem-solving  
with a focus on  
the betterment  
of humanity.

A business leader  
that impacts  
change in the  
marketplace.

Addressing real-  
world problems.

Be the positive  
influencer of a  
better world.

Empowering  
people, not just as  
consumers.

Promoting Sustainability/Environmental Responsibility

“  
A commitment to social and environmental justice.  
”

“  
Ensuring a breathable atmosphere.  
”

“  
Countering climate change.  
”

“  
Environmental challenges in Design. Make your packaging better and not plastic, people!  
”

”  
Climate change is our biggest global issue, the choices we make each day in our personal and professional lives can make a difference.  
”

“  
Climate crisis. We have a way to contribute and Design is not doing much to save the planet.  
”

“  
Environmental responsibility.  
”

“  
Global warming.  
”



Advancing Purposeful/Ethical Business Practices

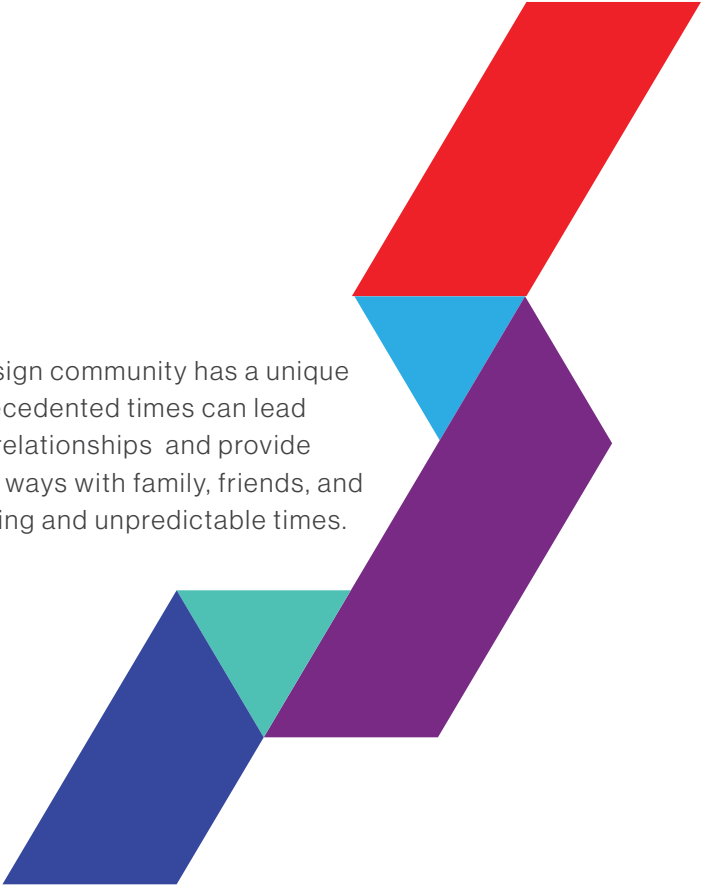
“  
**Design’s role in the impact of business on society and the environment, and professional and ethical boundaries/ expectations of designers.**  
 ”

”  
**Enacting and lobbying for the ethical alignment between business growth, environmental sustainability/ improvement, social inequity, and biodiversity loss.**  
 ”

“  
**I would like to see designers collectively push for more ethical business practices. Fair pay, reasonable hours, benefits, compassion, equality, representation, etc.**  
 ”

“  
**Fair treatment of employees in Design studios/ departments.**  
 ”

In closing, while there are tremendous challenges ahead, the Design community has a unique opportunity to show leadership, to do good, and to inspire. Unprecedented times can lead us in new and unexpected directions and allow us to strengthen relationships and provide opportunities for expanding networks and connecting in exciting ways with family, friends, and colleagues. The ability to adapt is what is needed in these changing and unpredictable times. Hopefully this ability will help us to rise even stronger.







## Insights to Action

Please use the space below to reflect on how you can advance the positive impact of design. Check [AIGA.org](http://AIGA.org) and [EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org](http://EyeOnDesign.AIGA.org) for resources you can use.

### How are you creating a positive impact?

### How could you both increase your positive impact and help businesses grow?

## Resources

Accenture Fjord Trends

AIGA Design Futures

AIGA Design Futures Now

### **AIGA Design POV Research Initiative**

- AIGA Design POV: Executive Summary
- AIGA Design POV: Market Reset and Future Forward
- AIGA Design POV: Design Leads and Value of Design
- AIGA Design POV: Being a Designer, Design Pathways, and Market Intelligence
- AIGA Design POV: Creative Communities, Lifelong Learning, and Design for Positive Impact

AIGA Eye on Design

AIGA Jobs

AIGA Resources

Bain & Company Insights

BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook

BLS Reports—Labor force characteristics by race and ethnicity

BLS Reports—Women in the labor force

Cella Salary Guide

Cool Hunting

Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies

Danish Design Centre

Data USA

### **Deloitte Industry Outlook, Post Covid Restart and Future of Work**

- <https://www2.deloitte.com/xe/en/insights/economy/industry-trends/2021-industry-outlooks.html>
- <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/economy/covid-19/post-covid-restart-or-new-start.html>
- <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work.html>

Design Council

Design-Led Firms Win the Business Advantage

Design Management Institute

Design Singapore Council

Design, The Language of Innovation: A Review of the Design Studies

DNB restarting your small business

Edelman Trust Barometer

Euromonitor Global Consumer Trends

Faith Popcorn's Brain Reserve

Gallup—LGBT Identification Rises to 5.6% in Latest U.S. Estimate

Gartner Technology Trends

Glassdoor

Google Trends

Harvard Business Review on Behavioral Trends Post Covid

HBR: What It Takes to Lead Through an Era of Exponential Change

IBIS World

IIT Institute of Design on Leading with Purpose

Inc. article: What the Changing Demographics in the U.S. Mean for Your Brand

Innovate UK: Design in Innovation Strategy

Invision Design Maturity Model

IPSOS Mega Trends

John Maeda | Design in Tech Report

Jungle Scout on Consumer Trends

KPMG CEO Survey

Literature published at The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation

**Mckinsey on Consumer Shift, Restart and Future of Work**

- <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/the-great-consumer-shift-ten-charts-that-show-how-us-shopping-behavior-is-changing>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/the-restart>
- <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work>

Mckinsey: The Business Value of Design SHRM 2020 Lessons Learned

Mintel Consumer Trends

National Endowment for the Arts—The U.S. Arts Economy in 2019

National Endowment for the Arts: Industrial Design—A Competitive Edge for U.S.

Manufacturing Success in the Global Economy

Netflix Explained Why Women Are Paid Less?



OECD Measuring Design and Its Role in Innovation  
OECD on the Future of Work  
Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics  
PwC CEO Survey  
SHRM  
SHRM 2020 Lessons Learned  
SHRM Developing and Sustaining Employee Engagement  
State of the Global Workforce  
The Creative Group Salary Guide  
The Economist Special Report on the Future of Work  
The Future Laboratory & The Trend Forecaster's Handbook  
The Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing & Ethical Guidelines  
Trend Hunter  
Trend Land  
Trend Research Toolkit  
Trendwatching  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—Civilian labor force by age, sex, race, and ethnicity  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—Employment situation of veterans  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—Median age of the labor force  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics—Median age of the labor force, by sex, race, and ethnicity  
U.S. Census Quick Facts  
Vitamin Talent Salary Guide  
WGSN  
World at Work  
World Future Society  
World's Best Workplaces 2020: Rising to Historic Challenges (Great Place to Work)  
Wunderman Thompson  
Zenith Media Trends

## Methodology

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 to 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.<sup>†</sup> 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.

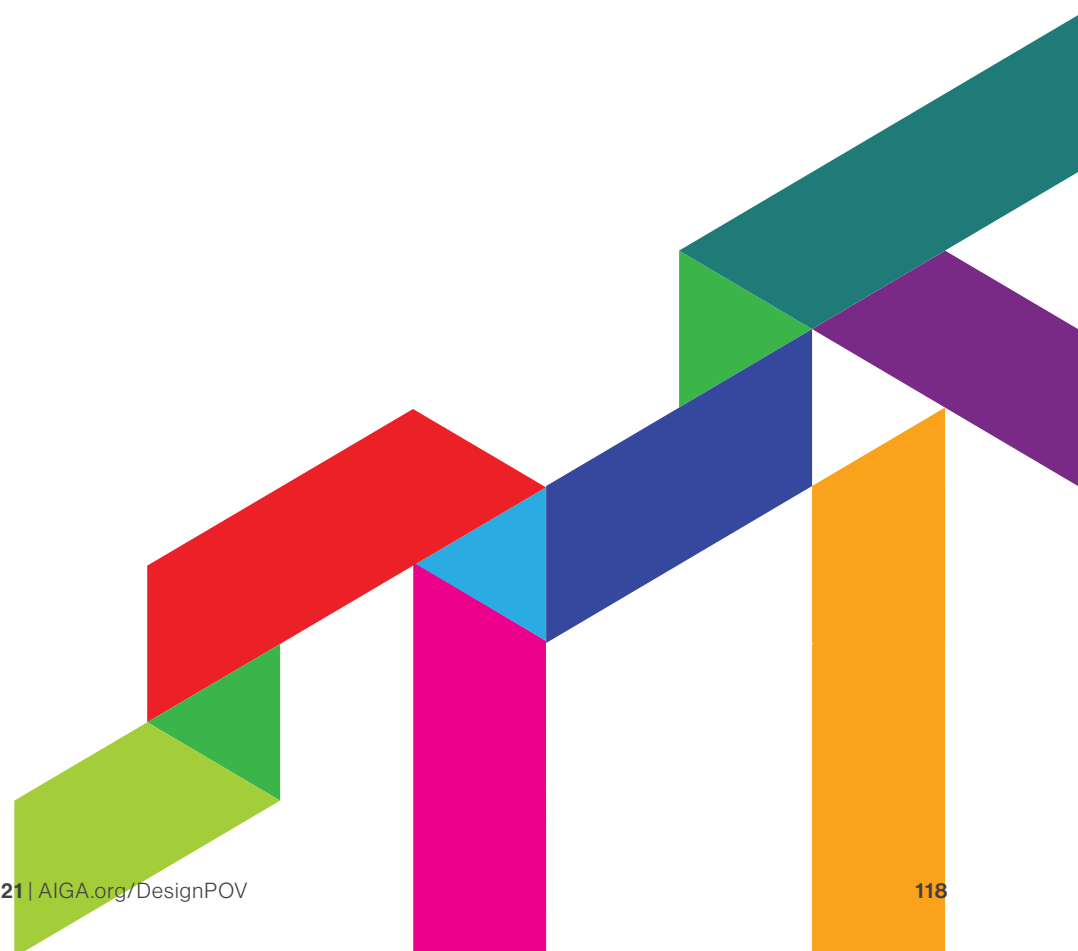
<sup>†</sup> Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. SAGE Publications.

## Acknowledgments

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**PEPSICO**





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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