



# Examining Job Retention Among Summit Academy OIC Alumni

A Study to Inform Retention Supports for Graduates of a Workforce Development Training Program

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# Executive summary

## Overview

In June 2025, Summit Academy OIC contracted with Wilder Research to examine workforce retention among graduates of their training programs in construction, healthcare, and information technology (IT). The study investigated retention patterns, barriers to job persistence, and supports that could strengthen career outcomes for alumni. This research will inform program enhancements and targeted post-graduation support strategies.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data from 187 alumni (55% response rate) with 24 in-depth interviews with alumni who left their trained field. The analysis examined retention across sectors and demographics to identify both common challenges and sector-specific patterns.

## About Summit Academy OIC

Summit Academy OIC is an accredited, nonprofit Career and Technical Education Institute located in North Minneapolis. With a mission to assist individuals in developing their ability to earn and to become contributing citizens in their community, Summit offers 20-week accredited training for in-demand careers in financial services, construction, information technology, and healthcare.

## Key findings

### Retention rates show room for improvement, particularly in IT

- 60% of alumni remain employed in the industry in which they were trained
- IT alumni face the greatest retention challenge: only 46% still work in the field
- Older alumni (age 40+) are more likely to still be employed in their industry than younger alumni, with alumni age 25-29 the least likely to still be employed in their industry

### Alumni value their work but face challenges, such as health and mental health issues

- 85% enjoy the nature of their work; 65% cite good pay and benefits
- Health and mental health issues emerged as the most common major challenge (15%)
- Nearly one-half (46%) selected low pay or poor benefits as “somewhat of a challenge” or “a major challenge”.
- 39% identified lack of support on the job and inadequate training or preparation as barriers when combining “a major challenge” and “somewhat of a challenge” responses

### **Transportation and workplace environment present barriers**

- 26% of alumni lacked reliable access to a personal vehicle at initial employment and 14% said transportation challenges were a primary reason they left their job
- Transportation is a particular challenge for women (34% lack access to their own vehicle) and healthcare alumni (42%)
- Alumni also cited workplace environment concerns, schedule conflicts, job instability, and supervisor conflicts

### **Alumni report a strong demand for mentorship and coaching**

- 67% identified mentorship or job coaching as the most valuable potential support—far exceeding any other option
- Sector-specific priorities for potential support include tools/materials assistance for construction alumni, mental health support and transportation for healthcare alumni, and flexible schedules and regular check-ins for IT alumni

### **Wages are increasing and satisfaction with initial job placement is moderate**

- 84% of employed alumni experienced wage increases, averaging \$4.63 per hour more than the wage at their initial job placement
- Current average wage: \$25.06 per hour
- 74% see opportunities for growth in their current roles
- 66% expressed satisfaction with initial job placement; however,
- One-half of interview respondents (12 out of 24), alumni who left their field, reported their industry experience did not align with their expectations

### **Recommendations**

Based on these findings, Summit Academy OIC might consider the following strategies to strengthen alumni retention:

1. Expand job mentorship and coaching, particularly post-graduation
2. Strengthen partnerships with employers offering supports for new employees (e.g., structured onboarding, on-the-job training, demonstrate a commitment to developing early-career workers)
3. Explore additional apprenticeship, "earn-and-learn" models, or other real-world applied learning in the classroom to address gaps in hands-on experience and help graduates gain deeper exposure to day-to-day work requirements
4. Increase access to mock interviews and career preparation practice to build confidence and workplace navigation skills



## Conclusion

Summit Academy OIC graduates demonstrate strong potential for career success, with most expressing satisfaction with their work and experiencing meaningful wage growth. However, retention challenges, particularly in IT and among younger alumni, signal opportunities to strengthen both pre-graduation preparation and post-employment support. The overwhelming demand for mentorship and coaching, combined with alumni feedback about workplace navigation and skill gaps, points to concrete areas for program enhancement. By implementing targeted supports, deepening employer partnerships, and expanding hands-on learning opportunities, Summit can build on its current strengths to help more alumni sustain rewarding careers in their trained fields.

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# Introduction

In June 2025, Summit Academy OIC contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a comprehensive study examining workforce retention among graduates of their training programs in construction, healthcare, and information technology (IT) sectors. The study aimed to understand retention patterns and identify factors influencing career persistence among alumni.

## About Summit Academy OIC

Summit Academy OIC is an accredited, nonprofit Career and Technical Education Institute located in North Minneapolis. With a mission to assist individuals in developing their ability to earn and to become contributing citizens in their community, Summit offers 20-week accredited training for in-demand careers in financial services, construction, information technology, and healthcare.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews to investigate alumni retention. For participants who left their trained field, the study explored the underlying reasons for departure and identified potential supports that could have improved retention outcomes.

This summary report presents key findings from 187 completed surveys with alumni (a 55% response rate) and 24 interviews with alumni who transitioned out of their trained industry after completing training at Summit Academy OIC. Alumni included in the study sample completed Summit programming anywhere between 1-3 years prior (between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2024). The analysis examines retention patterns across sectors and demographic variables, including age, gender, and race, to provide actionable insights for program improvement. For detailed methods and respondent characteristics, see the [Appendix](#).

Summit Academy OIC will use these findings to enhance their programming and develop targeted supports to help alumni overcome barriers to job retention and maintain career trajectories within their trained industries.

Only differences of 10 percentage points or more are discussed in this report; however, not all 10 percentage point differences are noted. To keep findings clear and concise, the most significant and meaningful results, as determined by the author, are summarized.

# Recommendations for consideration

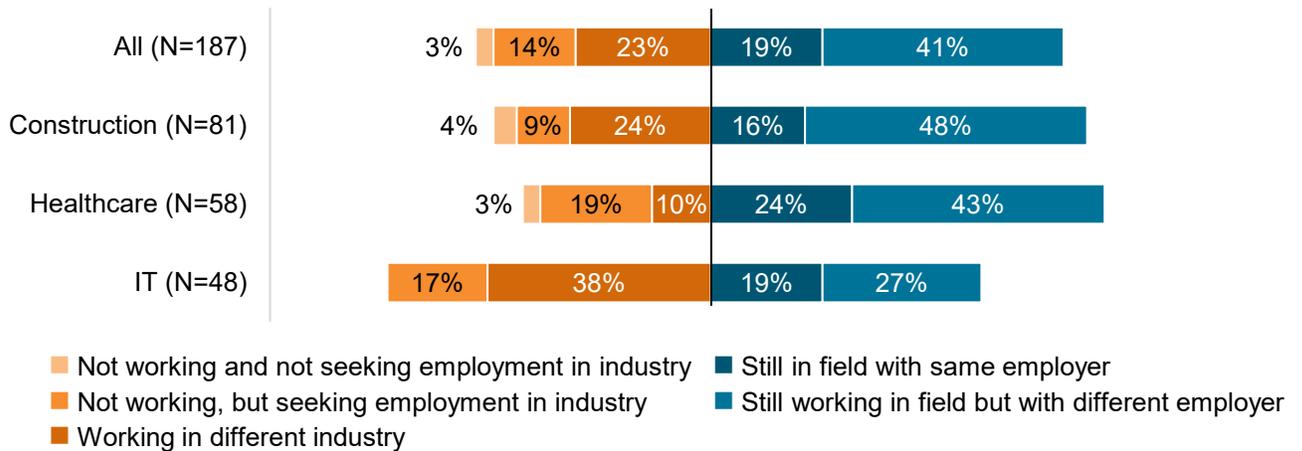
- **Expand job mentorship and coaching supports.** Summit should develop individualized wraparound supports that help alumni navigate workplace expectations, communication challenges, and self-advocacy. This should include integrating mental health support or referral pathways, given that health and stress-related challenges were common challenges across alumni from all industries. Coaching should be available both during initial job placement and when alumni transition to new roles.
- **Strengthen and formalize employer partnerships.** Summit should deepen relationships with a smaller number of employers to improve alignment between training curricula and on-the-job expectations. Rather than relying primarily on informal or non-binding agreements, Summit may consider identifying one or two priority employers per industry and working with them to develop clear, structured partnership plans over a two- to five-year horizon. These plans should articulate mutual expectations, including commitments related to onboarding, training, supervision, and communication, as well as Summit's role in preparing and supporting graduates. Establishing partnerships at an institutional level—rather than through individual relationships—can help ensure continuity over time. In some cases, employers may also benefit from guidance or mentorship on supporting early-career workers, making these partnerships mutually beneficial.
- **Explore additional apprenticeship or “earn-and-learn” models.** Apprenticeship and earn-and-learn models can address critical gaps in hands-on experience by providing structured exposure to day-to-day work, helping graduates build confidence and persist in their field. Where formal apprenticeships are not feasible, Summit should consider integrating more real-world, applied learning opportunities directly into training programs or classrooms. This could include project-based learning, simulations, employer-informed case studies, or problem-solving exercises that mirror workplace conditions. These approaches can help students practice adapting their skills to unfamiliar situations—closely approximating real work environments—and strengthen readiness for employment.
- **Increase access to mock interviews and career preparation practice.** Programs should offer more opportunities for students to practice interviewing, receive constructive feedback, and build confidence before they enter the job market.

# Industry retention

## 60% OF ALUMNI WERE STILL EMPLOYED IN THE INDUSTRY IN WHICH THEY WERE TRAINED

Summit Academy OIC is committed to supporting alumni in sustaining long-term employment in the industries for which they were trained. When asked about their current employment, 60% of alumni reported they are still working in their training-related industry, 1-3 years after completing training, either with their original employer or a new one (Figure 1). However, **less than half of IT alumni (46%) reported remaining in their field—a notably lower proportion compared to alumni in construction and healthcare.**

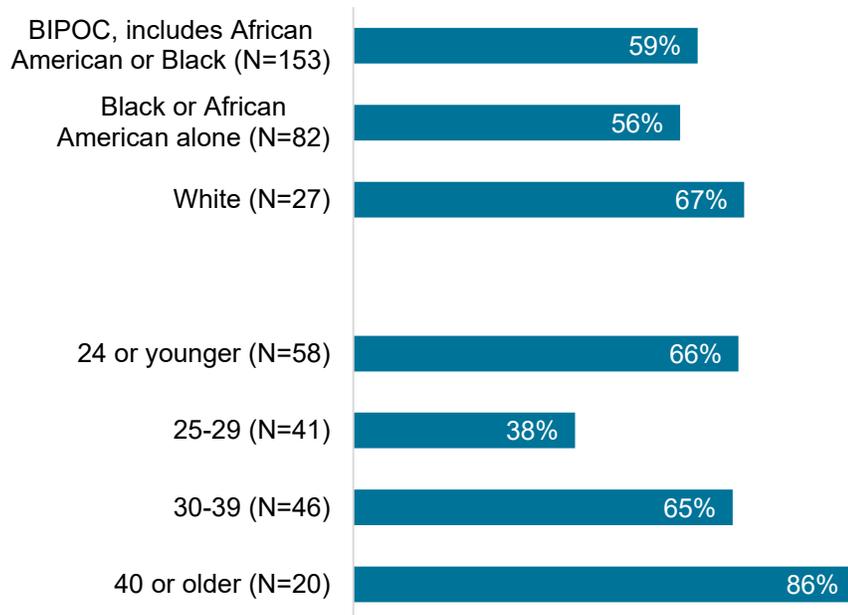
### 1. Current employment situation



Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

Differences in industry retention are also evident by age and race. A higher proportion of White alumni reported remaining employed in their training-related industry compared to Black or African American and BIPOC alumni (Figure 2). By age, retention was lowest among alumni age 25–29 (38%) and highest among those age 40 and older (86%)—a difference of 48 percentage points.

## 2. Percentage still employed in the industry by race and age



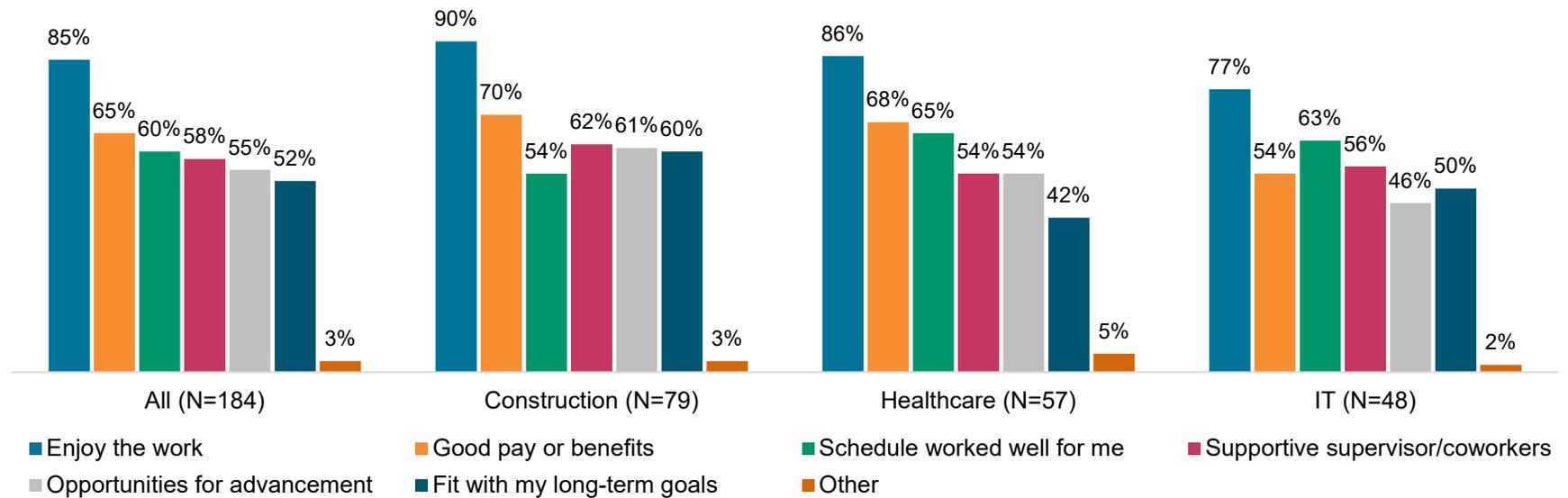
There were no notable differences in employment status by sex or transportation status.

## 85% OF ALUMNI ENJOY THE NATURE OF THEIR WORK AND 65% REPORT THEY RECEIVE GOOD PAY AND BENEFITS

Alumni were asked about positive experiences working in the field and could select all that apply from a list of options. The largest proportion of alumni said they enjoy the work (85%), have good pay or benefits (65%), and have a schedule that works well for them (60%; Figure 3). A smaller proportion, yet still over 50%, said they enjoy supportive supervisors/ coworkers, opportunities for advancement, and that their job fits with their long-term goals.

Compared with their counterparts in construction and healthcare, a smaller proportion of IT alumni reported enjoying their work, receiving good pay or benefits, or having opportunities for advancement. A smaller proportion of construction alumni indicated that their schedules worked well for them, while a smaller proportion of healthcare alumni reported that their jobs fit with their long-term goals compared to their counterparts.

### 3. Positive work experiences by sector



### KEY CROSS-INDUSTRY DIFFERENCES

- **Pay and benefits:** A smaller proportion of IT alumni reported having good pay or benefits compared with healthcare or construction alumni from other industries.
- **Opportunities for advancement:** IT alumni were notably less likely to report opportunities for advancement compared with construction and healthcare alumni.
- **Work schedule:** Construction alumni were less likely to report that their schedule worked well for them compared with alumni from IT and healthcare.
- **Enjoyment of the work:** A smaller proportion of IT alumni reported enjoying their work compared with construction and healthcare alumni.
- **Job fit with long-term goals:** Healthcare alumni were the group least likely to report that their job fit with their long-term goals.
- **Support on the job:** Construction alumni reported higher levels of support from co-workers compared with alumni from other industries.

Differences that exist by age are quite variable with no clear trends. There are no differences of 10 percentage points or more by sex or race.

### Enjoyable aspect of the job

When interview respondents were asked to describe what they enjoyed about their initial job placement after training, the largest number of alumni shared that they enjoyed learning new things and the nature of the work.

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**As a health unit coordinator (HUC), I enjoyed taking in new information, learning new things. I was a CNA, so I never knew what HUCs did.**  
– Healthcare alumnus

**What I enjoyed was I got to learn new things, fix things, see how things work and operated. That's what got me into Summit in the electrical program. I was putting in an electrical outlet, and it shocked me, which is why I wanted to go to Summit and learn more about electricity.**  
– Construction alumnus

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Specifically, construction alumni enjoyed the hands-on nature of the work and learning new skills on the job. Healthcare alumni enjoyed a mix of learning new skills and the nature of the work. IT alumni enjoyed learning new skills and helping others.

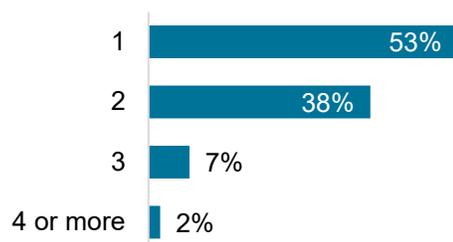
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**I really enjoyed helping clients get fully set up, taking a brand-new computer from the box to a working machine with a user account, email, and everything ready.** – IT alumnus

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Alumni may hold multiple positions within an industry as they advance or make lateral career moves. To capture this, survey respondents were asked how many jobs they had held in their industry since starting their first job after completing Summit training. They were instructed to include both new positions with the same employer and jobs with new employers; those no longer in the industry were asked to count only the jobs they held before leaving it. Overall, most alumni (91%) reported working one or two jobs in their industry (Figure 4).

#### 4. Number of jobs in the industry (N=184)



A higher proportion of construction alumni reported having had more than one job in the industry (60%) compared with 40% of IT alumni and 33% of healthcare alumni. This may be due to the seasonal or temporary nature of construction jobs. For some groups, a higher proportion of alumni had three or more jobs in the industry compared to their counterparts—alumni age 24 or younger and White alumni.

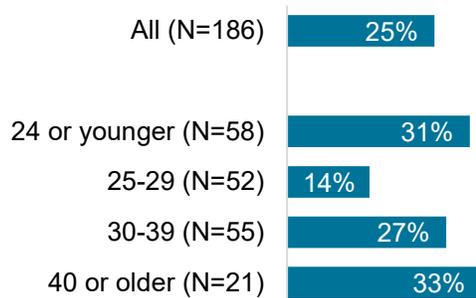
## 25% OF ALUMNI HAD EARNED AN INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIAL SINCE INITIAL EMPLOYMENT

Summit aims to support alumni in obtaining additional credentials and skills that enhance their opportunities for career advancement. An *industry-recognized credential* refers to a certification, license, or certificate that is widely accepted by employers as evidence of the skills and knowledge required for employment or progression within a field. Overall, one in four alumni reported earning such a credential since completing their training at Summit (Figure 5).

Credential attainment did not vary across sector or sex. However, variations exist by age and race.

A lower proportion of alumni age 25-29 (14%) earned an industry-recognized credential compared to other age groups (24 or younger, 31%; 30-39, 27%; 40 or older, 33%). A slightly higher proportion of White alumni (33%) earned a credential compared to BIPOC (23%) alumni (Figure 5).

### 5. Earned an industry-recognized credential since initial employment



## TWO-THIRDS OF ALUMNI WERE “VERY” OR “SOMEWHAT” SATISFIED WITH THEIR INITIAL JOB PLACEMENT AFTER TRAINING AT SUMMIT

Overall, most alumni expressed satisfaction with their first job after completing training at Summit. Thirty-four percent reported being “very satisfied” and 32% were “somewhat satisfied” (Figure 6).

## 6. Satisfaction with initial job placement (N=182)

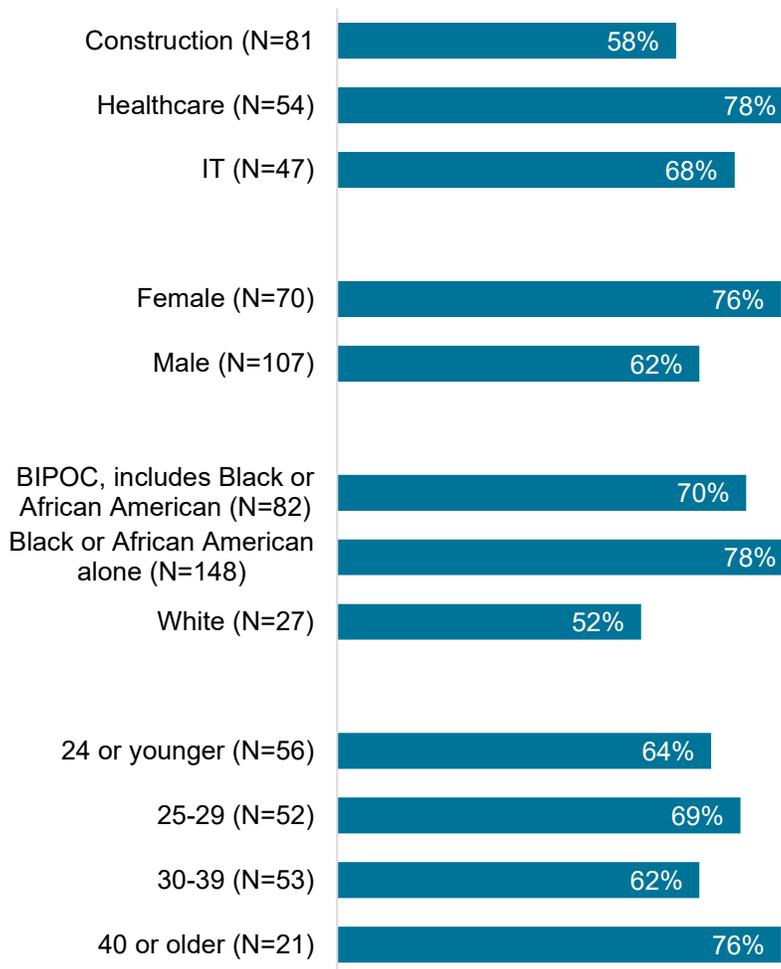


■ Very satisfied   
 ■ Somewhat satisfied   
 ■ Neither dissatisfied or satisfied   
 ■ Somewhat dissatisfied   
 ■ Very dissatisfied

Note. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Satisfaction with initial job placement varied by sector, gender, race, and age (Figure 7). The highest levels of satisfaction were reported among alumni working in healthcare, those who identified as female, Black or African American, or BIPOC, and those age 40 or older.

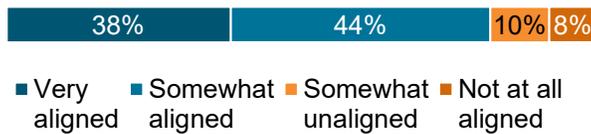
## 7. Satisfaction with initial job placement by characteristics (“very satisfied” and “somewhat satisfied” responses combined)



# Job expectations and career goal alignment

**MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS OF ALUMNI (82%) REPORTED THAT THEIR FIRST JOB WAS EITHER “VERY ALIGNED” OR “SOMEWHAT ALIGNED” WITH THEIR CAREER GOALS**

## 8. Initial job alignment with career goals (N=182)



While satisfaction with initial job placement differed by demographic and sector, perceptions of career alignment with their goals were more consistent across groups. The only notable differences were by race and age: a smaller proportion of White alumni (63%) indicated their first job was “very aligned” or “somewhat aligned” with their goals, compared with 84–86% of their counterparts. Similarly, alumni age 30–39 (75%) were less likely to report alignment than other age groups (79–90%).

These findings suggest that while overall satisfaction is strong, perceptions of career alignment vary for certain groups, highlighting opportunities to strengthen post-training placement supports and career development pathways.

### Job alignment with expectations

When asked whether their industry experience aligned with their expectations, about half of interview respondents said it did not. Among construction alumni, four out of nine reported a mismatch. Their reasons varied, including finding it harder than expected to enter the trade, not doing the type of work they had hoped for, receiving little or no on-the-job training, having long commutes, lacking benefits, or experiencing challenges with coworkers. Among healthcare workers, four out of nine reported a mismatch. Most felt they ended up not doing the type of work they had hoped for or not feeling that they were equipped with adequate skills.

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**I thought that I was going to be doing data input management because they were training us with computers and computer systems and documenting medical information. That was what I was gearing towards, but, when I graduated, the only thing I seemed to be qualified for was a call center job. I wanted to be in medical coding, but I don't know [that] the program had the resources to give us everything we needed or at least the job market wasn't there. – Healthcare alumnus**

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**What didn't meet my expectations was that we weren't really equipped with enough computer and hands-on skills. The program was a lot of paperwork, and not enough practical training. When I got out into the field, I felt like I was missing a lot of knowledge that I should've had.**  
– Healthcare alumnus

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Four out of six IT alumni reported a mismatch between their expectations and their experience. Most felt they needed additional skills to do the type of work they hoped to pursue or that the work was more difficult than anticipated. One alumnus, however, noted that their first role required far fewer skills than what they had learned at Summit.

# Employment or job challenges

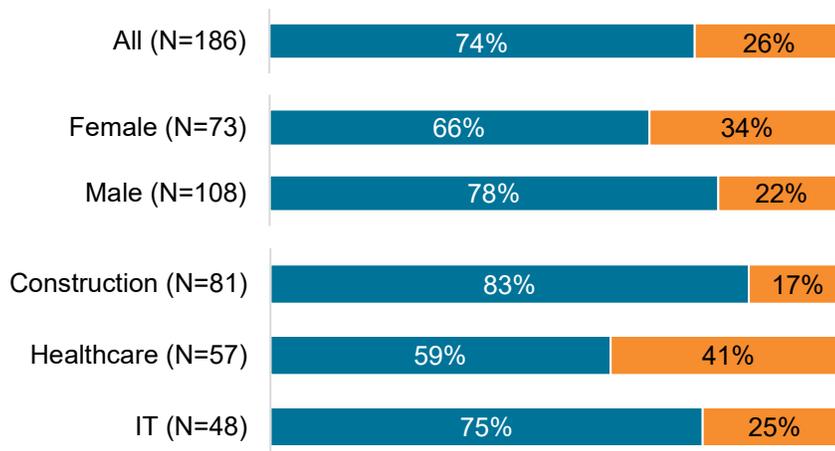
## MORE THAN ONE-QUARTER OF ALUMNI (26%) LACKED ACCESS TO A PERSONAL VEHICLE AT INITIAL EMPLOYMENT

Transportation challenges can be a barrier to sustained employment. Alumni were asked to describe their transportation situation at the start of their first job after completing Summit training. Overall, 26% reported lacking reliable access to a personal vehicle (including two respondents who reported working from home) (Figure 9). Other than having access to their own vehicle, the most common alternatives were relying on public transit (10%) or sharing a vehicle with members of their household (8%).

Differences in transportation access were evident by sector and sex, but not by age or race. Sex may be a confounding factor for sector, as most healthcare alumni are female.

- **By sex:** 66% of women, compared with 78% of men, had access to a personal vehicle; 15% of women relied on public transportation.
- **By sector:** 59% of healthcare alumni had access to a personal vehicle, compared with 75% in IT and 83% in construction.

### 9. Transportation status at initial employment



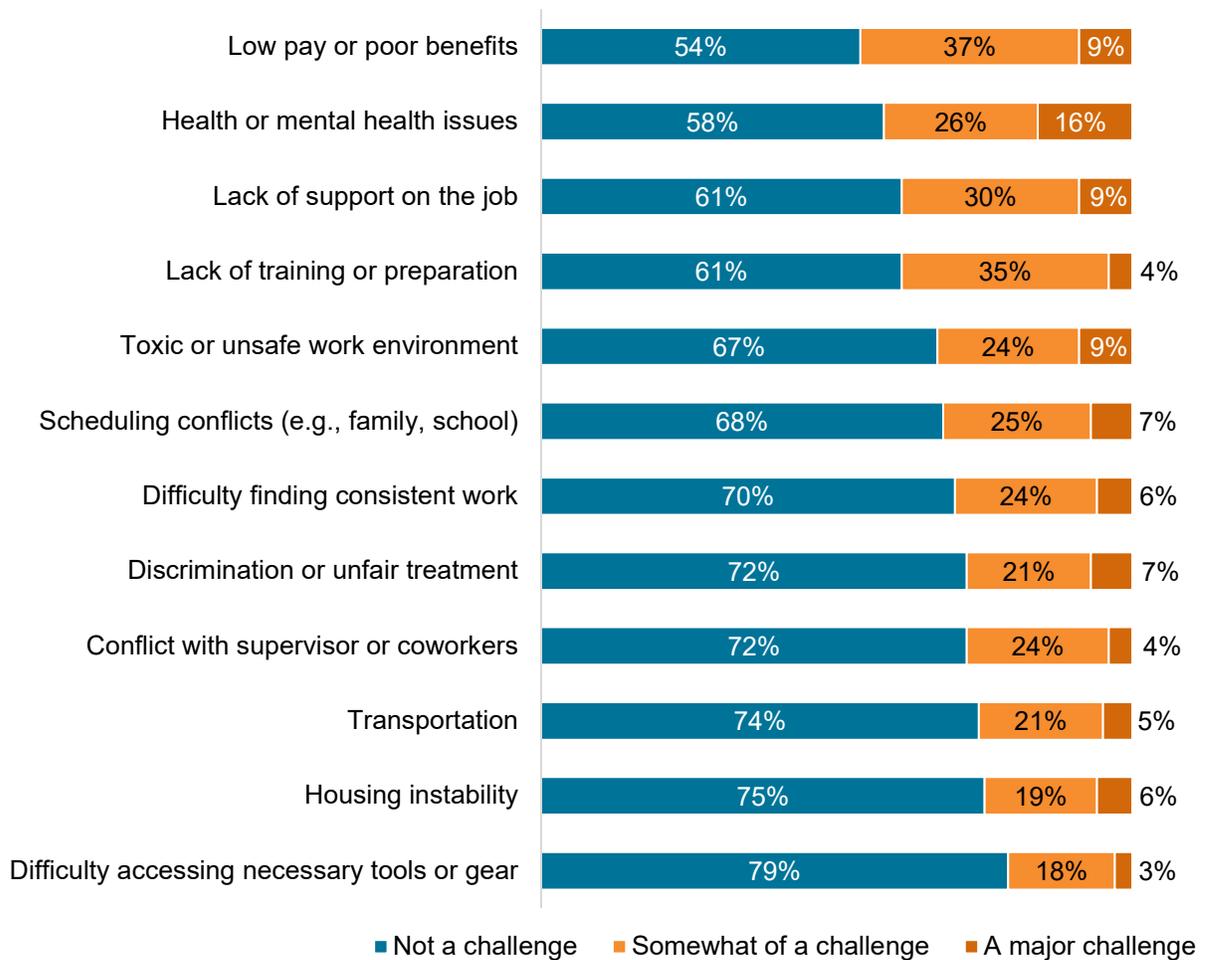
- Had regular access to my own vehicle or worked from home
- Something else

Note. Responses in the 'something else' category include: I shared a vehicle with others in my household; I relied on public transportation (e.g., bus, light rail); I relied on rides from family, friends, or others; I used ride-hailing services (e.g., Uber, Lyft) regularly; I primarily walked or biked; other.

## HEALTH OR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WERE A MAJOR CHALLENGE TO EMPLOYMENT PERSISTENCE

Understanding the challenges alumni encounter in their industries can help Summit better prepare and support future graduates as they navigate these situations. Alumni were asked to indicate whether various factors posed a “major challenge,” “somewhat of a challenge,” or “not a challenge” during their employment. Overall, the most reported “major challenge” was **health or mental health issues (16%)**, followed by **low pay or poor benefits** and **lack of support on the job** (each cited by 9% of alumni; Figure 10).

### 10. Challenges working in the industry (N=181-183)

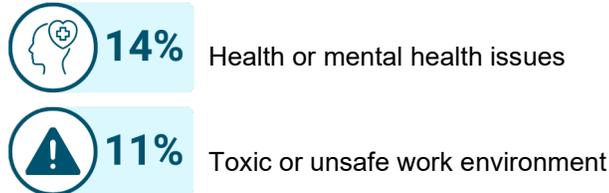


When looking at “somewhat of a challenge” and “a major challenge” responses combined, 39% of alumni identified **lack of support on the job** and **lack of training or preparation** as challenges they faced. These findings suggest that Summit could strengthen both its **pre-graduation preparation** and **post-employment support** to better equip alumni for success in the workplace.

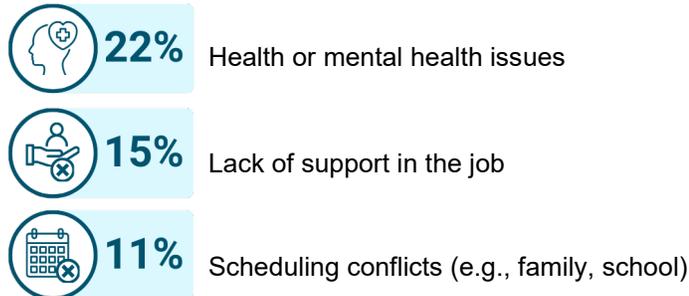
Health or mental health issues were identified as a top “major challenge” across all sectors (11-22%), but other major challenges varied by sector. Construction workers indicated they are challenged by the work environment (11%), healthcare workers experience a lack of support on the job (15%), and IT experience low pay or poor benefits (13%), although all of these were selected by less than one-fifth of respondents.

## 11. Top “major challenges” by sector

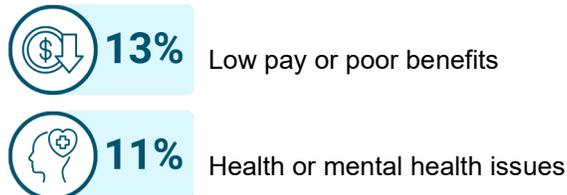
### Construction (N=80)



### Healthcare (N=54-55)



### IT (N=47-48)



Some groups were more likely to experience health and mental health issues as a challenge than others. By race, a higher proportion of White alumni (37%) reported health or mental health issues as a major challenge compared with 13% of Black or African American and 12% of BIPOC alumni. And by age, 25% of alumni age 25-29 reported health or mental health issues as a major challenge, a much higher percentage than their younger and older counterparts (9-14%).

## Challenges of job

The largest number of interview respondents noted the biggest challenge of their job was feeling that the workload was stressful or that the work was emotionally demanding. These responses were particularly common among healthcare alumni.

**The amount of work per person was a lot. As an individual, we were taking over 150 calls per person and we weren't expected to take breaks between those. People were often upset and we didn't get a chance to collect ourselves after that. – Healthcare alumni**

Some construction alumni noted a mismatch between what they had learned at Summit and the skills required for the job tasks (N=3) and pressure they felt with job responsibilities (N=2). Challenges among IT alumni varied greatly from person to person from transportation challenges to difficult customer service interactions, to not having the training to use software for the job.

## ATTRITION WAS SPREAD FAIRLY EVENLY ACROSS EMPLOYMENT MILESTONES

Understanding when, after job placement, alumni are leaving the industry can inform Summit about when to engage with alumni to overcome challenges. The range of time from leaving the industry after job placement was fairly evenly distributed across time periods (Figure 12).

Differences by sector are reported in numbers rather than percentages given the low numbers among healthcare alumni (N<20). A larger proportion of construction alumni left the industry within the first three months compared to alumni in other industries. Healthcare alumni appear to have the longest job persistence across all industries.

### 12. Job attrition by sector

	All (N=71)	Construction (N=29)	Healthcare (N=18)	IT (N=24)
Within 3 months of starting	15 (21%)	8	3	4
3–6 months	21 (30%)	10	2	9
6–12 months	20 (28%)	9	6	5
After 12 months	15 (21%)	2	7	6

When conducting analyses of a smaller subset of only survey respondents who are not still employed in the industry, sample sizes across sex, race, and age demographics are too small (N<20) across some categories to report percentages.

Among alumni who were no longer working in the industry in which they were trained, **the largest number of alumni selected job loss or the end of employment as the reason for leaving, followed by low pay, and dissatisfaction with the work environment** (Figure 13). Other commonly selected reasons included schedule conflicts, such as due to school or child care responsibilities, and limited or inconsistent work opportunities.

Patterns differed somewhat by sector. In construction, alumni most often selected job loss and low pay. Healthcare alumni selected schedule conflicts, conflicts with supervisors or coworkers, and low pay the most, while IT alumni most often selected job loss, didn't like the work environment, returning to school or training, lack of necessary training or skills, or lack of full-time or consistent work as reasons for leaving the industry.

These results suggest that while certain challenges, such as pay and job stability, cut across sectors, others appear to reflect the unique working conditions and career pathways within each field.

### 13. Main reasons for leaving industry

	All (N=72)	Construction (N=29)	Healthcare (N=18)	IT (N=25)
Was laid off or job ended	28	13	5	10
Didn't like the work environment	15	6	3	6
Pay was too low	20	9	6	5
Poor benefits	9	4	1	4
Schedule conflicts (school, child care, etc.)	15	3	9	3
Health challenges	6	1	5	0
Transportation	10	6	2	2
Conflict with supervisor or coworkers	13	5	6	2
Returned to school or training	9	1	2	6
Lack of full-time or consistent work	13	6	1	6
Lack of necessary training or skills	10	3	1	6
Other	12	6	2	4

Note. Cells are highlighted if over 25% of respondents selected that option.

### Reasons for leaving their job

Among interviewees, alumni described several factors that contributed to leaving their job or industry. The most common were related to **job fit** (e.g., not enjoying the nature of the work), **workplace climate** (e.g., poor management, communication issues, or toxic environments), and **job stability** (e.g., inconsistent hours or temporary positions).

Reasons for leaving varied by sector. Construction alumni most often pointed to the temporary or inconsistent nature of their roles, as well as insufficient training or support on the job. Healthcare alumni were most likely to cite management-related issues—such as poor communication, lack of supervisor support, or toxic work environments—along with scheduling challenges. IT alumni reported a mix of reasons, but contract-based or inconsistent work hours were the most common.

# Potential helpful supports

## MENTORSHIP OR JOB COACHING WERE MOST COMMONLY IDENTIFIED AS POTENTIAL SUPPORTS FOR JOB PERSISTENCE ACROSS INDUSTRIES

When asked what would make it easier to be successful in their industry, two-thirds of alumni (67%) selected mentorship or job coaching from a list of potential supports of which they could select all that apply (Figure 14). This far exceeded the percentage of alumni that selected any other option.

### 14. Supports that would make it easier to succeed in industry (N=177)



Across sectors, mentorship and job coaching were consistently the most frequently selected supports. Beyond this, priorities varied by industry:

- Construction alumni most often selected assistance with tools or materials (42%) and mental health or stress support (32%).
- Healthcare alumni identified mental health or stress support (39%) and transportation assistance (37%) as key supports.
- IT alumni most often selected a flexible schedule (36%) and regular check-ins with Summit staff or a case manager (36%) as needed supports.

These results suggest that while individualized mentorship and coaching are broadly valued, additional supports, such as mental health resources, flexibility, and material assistance, reflect the specific challenges faced within each industry.

### Desired supports

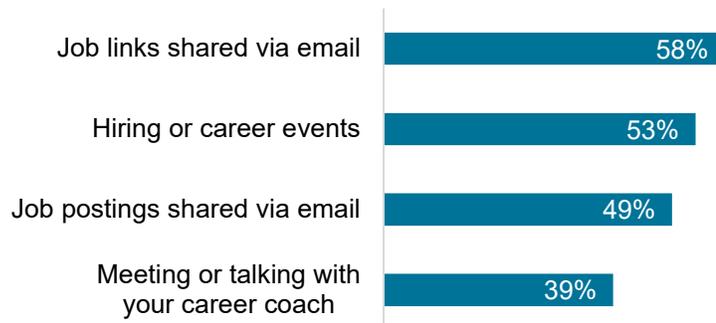
When asked which supports might have helped them remain in their job or stay in the industry, most alumni interviewed (N=20-21) identified **job coaching or mentorship**, **professional development opportunities**, and **workplace navigation support**. More than half indicated that bridge supports, or emergency retention funds, would have been helpful. A smaller number (11–12 alumni) reported that transportation or child care supports would have made a difference.

# Resources from Summit

## APPROXIMATELY ONE-HALF OF ALUMNI REPORTED HAVING USED SUMMIT RESOURCES TO FIND A JOB

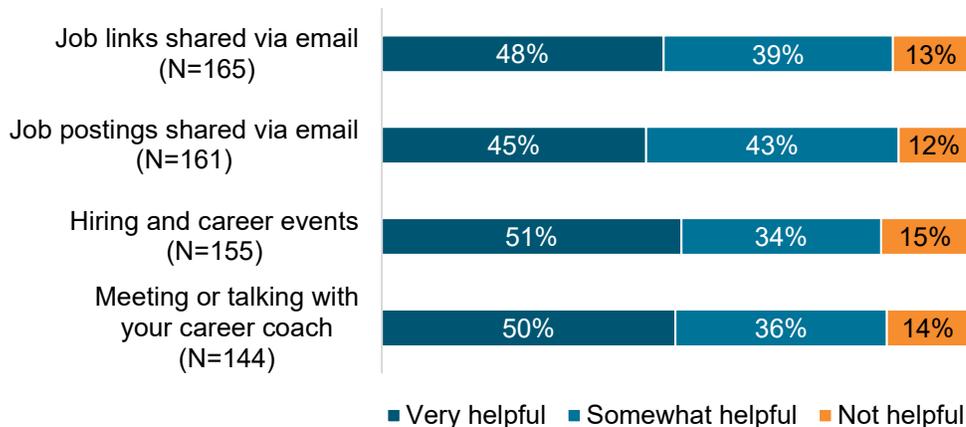
Summit encourages students to use the job search supports available through its programs and aims to ensure these resources are effective in helping graduates secure employment. When asked about their use of these services, just over half of alumni reported using job links or attending hiring or career events, while a smaller share said they had met or talked with their career coach (Figure 15).

### 15. Summit resources used (N=179)



A higher proportion of IT alumni reported using these resources—except for hiring and career events—compared to those in construction or healthcare. Among those who used them, most alumni described the assistance as either “very helpful” or “somewhat helpful” (Figure 16).

### 16. Helpfulness of Summit resources



Summit might consider efforts to increase the number of alumni who use resources provided to obtain a job, particularly the career coaching.

## 74% OF ALUMNI SEE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH WITHIN THEIR CURRENT ROLE

Overall, 74% of currently employed alumni (N=110) reported seeing opportunities for growth in their current role. By sector, the highest proportion was among construction alumni (83%), followed by healthcare (72%) and IT (59%). There were no notable differences by sex, race, or age. This suggests that most alumni feel they have room to advance within their current positions, though the perception of opportunities appear more limited in the IT sector.

## 84% OF ALUMNI EXPERIENCED AN INCREASE IN PAY FROM THEIR FIRST TO THEIR CURRENT JOB

Among alumni who were employed at the time of the survey, the average hourly wage was **\$25.06**. The minimum wage reported was \$15.57 and the maximum reported was \$60. For those who reported a wage increase, the average increase was **\$4.63 per hour since their initial job placement after training at Summit.**

### 17. Change in hourly wage from first to current job (N=107)

	Increased	84%
	Stayed the same	7%
	Decreased	9%

#### Average hourly wage change amount (mean)

	Increased (N=85)	\$4.63
	Decreased (N=8)	\$1.99

Positive changes in wages are a promising indication that Summit training is contributing to meaningful wage growth for graduates.

# Advice and feedback from alumni

## Advice for students

When reflecting on what they would tell current Summit students about post-graduation expectations, the largest number of alumni advised students to seek mentorship, use resources provided by Summit, continue developing their skills, and remain persistent and proactive during the job search process.

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I would encourage them to keep up with some of the training that they learned at Summit, that way they could be more prepared and try to go back and educate themselves more after when they get in the field. Ask them to stay in touch as much as they can; to stay in touch with Summit and the teachers; to visit with them and talk to them if they're struggling in an area or even just call. If they get into their field to not give up on it so easy even if it is a struggle. – Healthcare alumnus

I'd tell them after graduation, or maybe before they leave, learn as much as they can.... Afterwards, be patient. I know some that didn't find a job, but the ones that did were happy. I'd say be patient and stick it out. – Construction alumnus

Take the help. Pay attention to job fairs and make sure the resume is up to date. And if there's training in interview skills, make sure and take that, even if it's with a peer or a parent or a teacher to prepare for an interview. That way they don't go in SO nervous. Communication is key, take the help. – Healthcare alumnus

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By sector, construction alumni tended to emphasize skill development; healthcare alumni highlighted taking advantage of available resources, support-seeking, and maintaining flexibility as career paths evolve; and IT alumni focused on leveraging resources and sustaining persistence in navigating the job market.

## Advice for staff

When asked what advice they would offer Summit staff to better prepare students for staying in the field long term, alumni most frequently recommended changes to the training program. Their suggestions included expanding the curriculum for more in-depth learning, offering stronger preparation for post-graduation expectations (such as industry terminology or types of coding), and improving instructional quality, format, and pacing.

For a small number of alumni, having a criminal record posed a significant barrier when transitioning from previous employment to new job opportunities. Targeted assistance from Summit in identifying employers willing to hire individuals with a criminal background could make a meaningful difference in supporting successful reemployment for these alumni.

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I guess [my] advice is to try checking in with the students more often even if we don't check in to still just try to check in with us to see where they could support at or ask us if we need support. ...Maybe they could have scheduled a sit down time and we could sit down and talk.  
– Healthcare alumnus

I would say actual teaching – most of the time in the courses I took, you read it and do the homework – it was very limited that there was opportunity to interact with the teacher. It was minimal. More interactions would be better, not just things from the book. Like actual lectures. To be honest, with the course I took, I'm surprised I got the certification, because I don't feel I learned much from one of the main things in that course, so I felt lost in the course and clueless. So when I applied for jobs, I felt clueless – we were really taught on the surface. – Healthcare alumnus

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Construction alumni most often emphasized the need for material supports—including tools, winter gear—and help accessing additional training, as well as stronger post-graduation job support. Healthcare alumni provided the most critical feedback about the training they received and highlighted the need for more follow-up and support after program completion. IT alumni primarily focused on the need for more relevant, in-depth training and opportunities for hands-on experience.

# Appendix

## A. METHODS

### SURVEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Wilder Research collaborated with Summit staff to develop a comprehensive 19-question survey instrument addressing key research objectives. The survey predominantly featured closed-ended questions with strategic inclusion of open-ended questions and "other" response options to capture nuanced participant experiences. (See Appendix for complete survey instrument.)

**Sample and recruitment:** Summit provided contact information (email addresses, phone numbers, and mailing addresses) for 341 alumni who completed programming between January 1, 2022, and December 31, 2024. The sample included 173 construction alumni, 85 healthcare alumni, and 83 IT alumni.

**Data collection procedures:** The survey was programmed in Qualtrics, a web-based survey platform. Each participant received a unique login credential with their invitation, enabling individual response tracking and linkage to administrative records containing demographic, career pathway, and program-specific variables. Initial invites were sent by Wilder Research on August 12, 2025, and the survey was closed approximately six weeks later on September 22, 2025.

The multi-modal outreach strategy included:

- Initial email invitation with personalized messaging from relevant Summit staff (e.g., program manager)
- Two follow-up email reminders sent at weekly intervals from additional staff at Summit
- Mailed postcards featuring QR codes for mobile survey completion
- Phone outreach with up to three contact attempts per participant
- Enhanced contact tracing through Been Verified searches and LinkedIn outreach for participants with insufficient contact information

Survey participants received a \$30 electronic gift card incentive upon completion of the 10-minute survey.

## A1. Survey response rates

	Sample size	Completes	Response rate
Construction	173	81	46%
Healthcare	85	58	68%
IT	83	48	58%
Total	341	187	55%

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Survey participants who indicated industry departure were invited to participate in a 30-minute follow-up interview. Wilder staff conducted outreach via email and phone, including up to two reminder contacts.

Wilder completed a total of 24 interviews with alumni (9 construction, 9 healthcare, 6 IT participants). Interview participants received a \$50 electronic gift card incentive. (See Appendix for interview protocol.)

## DATA ANALYSIS

**Quantitative analysis:** Wilder merged survey responses with administrative data to create a comprehensive dataset, which it provided to Summit Academy OIC. Analysis included frequency distributions, cross-tabulations examining responses by sector and key demographic variables (age, gender, race, transportation status), and wage change analyses. Where sample sizes permitted, Wilder conducted within-sector analyses across demographic characteristics.

**Qualitative analysis:** Wilder staff developed a codebook to conduct systematic coding and thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Wilder identified sector specific themes, as possible.

Wilder Research and Summit staff collaboratively reviewed key findings to ensure accuracy and relevance for program enhancement initiatives. Wilder Research staff collaborated with Summit staff to review the key findings to identify priority areas for programmatic improvement. Recommendations were also informed by a brief scan of best practices as evidenced in the academic literature to support industry retention.

## SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Survey respondents represented a broad cross-section of alumni, with participation distributed across the construction (43%), healthcare (31%), and IT (26%) sectors

(Figure A2). The respondent pool reflected notable demographic diversity, with nearly half identifying as Black or African American (46%) and approximately two in five identifying as female (41%). Respondent age was relatively evenly distributed, though a majority of respondents were under age 40. At the time of their initial employment, nearly three-quarters reported having full access to a vehicle or the ability to work from home.

## A2. Respondent characteristics

	#	%
<b>Sector (N=187)</b>		
Construction	81	43%
Healthcare	58	31%
Information Technology	48	26%
<b>Gender (N=182)</b>		
Female	74	41%
Male	108	59%
<b>Race (N=180)</b>		
BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)	153	85%
Black/African American	82	46%
White	27	15%
<b>Age (N=187)</b>		
24 and younger	58	31%
25-29	52	28%
30-39	55	29%
40 and above	22	12%
<b>Transportation status (at initial employment) (N=186)</b>		
Full access to a vehicle or work from home	137	74%
Something else <sup>a</sup>	49	26%

Note. Black/African American and BIPOC are not mutually exclusive categories

<sup>a</sup> Other response options for transportation status include: I shared a vehicle with others in my household; I relied on public transportation (e.g., bus, light rail); I relied on rides from family, friends, or others; I used ride-hailing services (e.g., Uber, Lyft) regularly; I primarily walked or biked.

When interpreting results by sector, it is important to consider the dominant demographic characteristics of alumni within each field, as some variables may be interrelated.

**Construction:** 43% of respondents are age 24 or younger; 90% are male; 76% identify as BIPOC.

**Healthcare:** Respondents span a wide age range; 95% are female; 89% identify as BIPOC.

**Information Technology (IT):** Respondents span a wide age range; 75% are male; 94% identify as BIPOC.

## INTRODUCTION

Wilder Research is working with Summit Academy OIC to survey recent alumni about their employment experiences since completing training. Your input will help Summit improve how it supports graduates in finding and keeping jobs in their chosen fields. As a thank you, you'll receive a \$30 e-gift card for completing the survey.

Your responses will be confidential and only shared with Wilder and relevant Summit staff for improvement purposes. While your name will be linked to your answers during analysis, it will never appear in any public reporting.

The survey takes about 10 minutes. Thank you for helping strengthen support for future Summit graduates!

If you are having technical difficulties, please contact Dan Swanson at Wilder Research: [dan.swanson@wilder.org](mailto:dan.swanson@wilder.org) or call 651-280-2800

### Current employment status and history

Our records indicate you received training from Summit Academy OIC in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry and that you started employment in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] at [name of employer] on [start date].

**1. What best describes your current employment situation?**

- Still in [Healthcare, IT, Construction] with [name of employer].
- Still working in [Healthcare, IT, Construction] but at a different company.
- Working in a different industry.
- Currently not working but **seeking employment** in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry.
- Currently not working and **not seeking employment** in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry.

**2. What best describes your current employment status?**

- Employed full-time (35 hours or more per week)
- Employed part-time (less than 35 hours per week)

**3. How many jobs have you had in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry since you first started at [name of employer]?**

*(If you're no longer in the industry, please only count the jobs you had before leaving it. Please consider jobs with new employers or new positions with the same employer.)*

- 1

- 2
- 3
- 4 or more

**4. Have you earned an industry-recognized credential since your initial employment in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?**

*(An industry-recognized credential is a certification, license or certificate that is widely accepted by employers within a specific industry as evidence of the skills and knowledge required for employment or advancement.)*

- Yes
- No

**5. Please list any industry-recognized credentials you have earned since your initial employment in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry.**

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**6. When you started working at [name of employer], which best describes your transportation situation for getting to and from work after you left Summit Academy OIC?**

- I had regular access to my own vehicle
- I shared a vehicle with others in my household
- I relied on public transportation (e.g., bus, light rail)
- I relied on rides from family, friends, or others
- I used ride-hailing services (e.g., Uber, Lyft) regularly
- I primarily walked or biked
- Not applicable: I worked from home
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**General positives and challenges in employment**

**7. What positives have you experienced working in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] field?**

*(select all that apply)*

- Enjoy the work
- Supportive supervisor/coworkers
- Good pay or benefits

- Schedule worked well for me
- Opportunities for advancement
- Fit with my long-term goals
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. To what extent have the following been challenges for you while working in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?**

*(Please select one response per row.)*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Not a challenge</b>	<b>Somewhat of a challenge</b>	<b>A major challenge</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
Transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Scheduling conflicts (e.g., family, school)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of support on the job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing instability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health or mental health issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of training or preparation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Low pay or poor benefits	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty finding consistent work hours	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Toxic or unsafe work environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Conflict with supervisor or coworkers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty accessing necessary tools or gear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discrimination or unfair treatment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Did you have any other challenges while working in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?

Yes

No

10. [If yes to Q9] What other challenges did you have while working in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?

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11. What kind of support would make it easier for you to be successful in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?

*(select all that apply)*

Mentorship or job coaching

Regular check-ins with Summit staff or a case manager

Transportation assistance

Mental health or stress support

Flexible schedule

Childcare support

Help with appropriate wardrobe or uniform

Help with tools or materials needed for the job

Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Display Logic for Section 3:**

**If the respondent selects one of the following options on Q1:**

**“Working in a different industry”**

“Currently not working but seeking employment in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry”

“Currently not working and not seeking employment in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry”

→ Then display Section 3.

→ Otherwise, skip to Section 4.

#### Leaving the industry

**12. You previously indicated that you are no longer working in [Healthcare, IT, Construction], when did you first leave the industry after initially starting at [name of employer]?**

*(Select the best option based on your recollection.)*

- Within 3 months of starting
- Between 3–6 months
- Between 6–12 months
- After 12 months

**13. What were the main reasons you left the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry?**

*(select all that apply)*

- Was laid off or job ended
- Didn't like the work or environment
- Pay was too low
- Poor benefits
- Schedule conflicts (school, childcare, etc.)
- Health challenges
- Transportation issues
- Conflict with supervisor or coworkers
- Returned to school or training
- Lack of full-time or consistent work
- Lack of necessary training or skills
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Support from Summit Academy OIC**

**14. What assistance from Summit Academy OIC did you utilize during your initial job search after leaving Summit? (select all that apply)**

- Job links shared via email
- Job postings shared via email
- Hiring or career events
- Meeting or talking with your career coach
- Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. How helpful was the following assistance from Summit Academy OIC in your initial job search?**

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	Not applicable
Job links shared via email	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Job postings shared via email	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hiring or career events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting or talking with your career coach	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**16. How satisfied were you with your initial [Healthcare, IT, Construction] job at [name of employer] after training at Summit Academy OIC?**

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Somewhat dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

**14a. Please elaborate in a few sentences why you chose [response from Q14].**

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**17. How well did your first [Healthcare, IT, Construction] job coming out of Summit Academy OIC align with your career goals?**

- Very aligned
- Somewhat aligned
- Somewhat unaligned
- Not at all aligned

**Display Logic for Section 5:**

**If the respondent selects one of the following options on Q1:**

- “Still in the same job at [name of employer]”
- “In a different job, but still in the same industry”

→ Then display Section 5 (Q16–Q17).

→ Otherwise, display ending message [Thank you very much for your time and the valuable information.] and then skip to Section 6.

**Employment outlook**

**18. Do you see an opportunity for growth within your current role?**

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

**19. What is your current wage?**

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_

- Hourly
- Weekly
- Biweekly
- Monthly
- Annually

**Thank you very much for your time and the valuable information.**

We’re inviting a small number of alumni to participate in a 20-minute interview to better understand why they left the industry in which they were initially working, and what support might have helped them remain employed in the industry. Interviews will be held virtually or by phone—whichever you prefer—in early fall (September/October). As a thank-you, participants will receive a \$50 gift card.

**20. Are you interested in participating in a brief interview?**

- Yes
- No

**[If yes] Please select the best way to reach you and provide contact information.**

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide an email address where we can send a \$30 Tango gift card to thank you for your time.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

You should receive a gift card in the next two weeks. If you do not receive a card, please first check in your junk mail and/or use the search bar and search the word 'Tango'. If you are still unable to find the email with card information, please contact Dan Swanson at [dan.swanson@wilder.org](mailto:dan.swanson@wilder.org) or at 651-280-2800.

Thank you. You have now completed the survey. You may now close this window.

## Summit Academy OIC – Alumni Retention Interview Protocol

Hi, my name is [interviewer name], and I'm a [position] at Wilder Research in St. Paul, MN. We are working with Summit Academy OIC to hear from Summit Alumni about their employment experience after completing training. We understand you left the industry in which you were trained and we would like to know more about the reasons and what, if anything, might have helped you remain in your job or in the industry.

We know that everyone's path is different and that many factors can influence career paths and decisions. We are hoping to learn from your experience to improve support for future graduates. Your responses will be combined with the responses of other interview participants to share key themes with Summit in a report. Nothing you say will be associated with your name. The interview will take about 30 minutes, depending on how much you have to say. As a thank you, a \$50 gift card will be sent to you following the interview.

I will be taking notes, but if it's okay with you, I would like to audio record our conversation to make sure I capture all of your feedback. The recording will be used as a back-up to my notes in case I miss something and I will delete the recording as soon as my notes are complete. Are you comfortable with me recording this conversation?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

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Industry [notetaker record here]:

You completed training at Summit Academy in [industry/job title] does that sound right?

### Experience in the job

1. To start, please tell me a bit about your first job in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry after completing training with Summit Academy. (*Probe: What was your first job after training? How long were you there? How many jobs did you have within the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry since completing training?*)
2. Thinking back to your most recent position in the [Healthcare, IT, Construction] industry, what parts of your job did you enjoy?
3. What parts of your job felt challenging?

### Reasons for leaving

4. People move on from jobs for many different reasons. What are the main factors that led you to leave your most recent job in the field? (*Probe: Whose decision was it (yours*

*or your employer's)? Were your reasons for leaving mostly related to the workplace or job itself, the industry, or personal circumstances?)*

5. In what ways did your experience in the industry meet and not meet the expectations you had going into it? *(For interviewer reference only: Examples might include it was harder work than they thought, they did not have the skills required, they didn't enjoy the work)*
6. Have you attempted to get another job in the industry? If no, why not? If yes, what challenges have you faced, if any?

### **Supports and retention**

I'm going to list a number of potential supports that might help someone to stay in their job/position. Please let me know the extent to which any of these might have helped you stay longer in your job or the industry you trained for.

\*Notetaker, you do not need to reread the question each time. Every other question should suffice.

7. How much of a difference would **transportation support** have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?  
(If needed: Help purchasing a reliable used vehicle (very expensive), public transit passes, or emergency ride vouchers.)
  - A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
8. How much of a difference would **childcare assistance** have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?  
(If needed: Subsidies for childcare costs or access to emergency/backup childcare options.)
  - A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
9. How much of a difference would **emergency retention fund** (e.g., short-term/one-time financial support for unexpected expenses (rent, utilities, tools, uniforms/boots)) have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?
  - A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference

10. How much of a difference would **bridge support** (e.g., small stipends or assistance to cover costs until the first paycheck arrives) have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?
- A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
11. How much of a difference would **job coaching/mentorship** have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?  
(If needed: Access to a career navigator, alumni mentor, or coach during the first year of employment.)
- A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
12. How much of a difference would **Workplace Navigation Support** have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?  
(If needed: Coaching for resolving workplace conflicts, adapting to culture, and managing expectations.)
- A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
13. How much of a difference would **professional development** (e.g., opportunities for refresher training, certifications, or skills workshops to support advancement) have made for you in staying in your job/the industry?
- A big difference
  - A little difference
  - No difference
14. What other supports would have helped you remain in your job/the industry that I didn't ask about?

### **Recommendations for Summit Academy**

15. What advice would you give to Summit Academy staff to better prepare students for staying in the field long-term? (*Probe: Are there topics you wish had been covered in training or certifications that would have helped you? Are there supports you wish had been available to alumni after graduation?*)

16. If you could talk to a current Summit Academy student about what to expect after graduation, what would you tell them? (*Probe: What would you warn them about? What would you encourage them to do?*)

**Closing**

17. Is there anything else about your experience that we haven't discussed but you think is important for us to know?

In the next few days, we will send a Tango gift card to your email. The link will allow you to select a \$50 gift card from hundreds of different retailer options. Can you verify the email you could like us to send the gift card to?

Email confirmation: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you. We send the gift cards in batches. You should receive an email with a link to your gift card within the week. If you have any problems, please contact Audrey at [Audrey.mutanhaurwa@wilder.org](mailto:Audrey.mutanhaurwa@wilder.org).

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Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

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## Wilder Research®

Information. Insight. Impact.

Summit Academy OIC is a Minneapolis-based nonprofit educational and workforce development organization that provides accredited training programs in high-demand fields such as construction, healthcare, and information technology. Its mission is to empower individuals, particularly adults from underrepresented communities, to achieve economic self-sufficiency through education, skill-building, and employment opportunities.

