

HOW CUNY PARTNERED WITH AMAZON TO **INCREASE ECONOMIC MOBILITY**

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ABOUT AMAZON

Amazon is guided by four principles: customer obsession rather than competitor focus, passion for invention, commitment to operational excellence, and long-term thinking. Amazon strives to be Earth's Most Customer-Centric Company, Earth's Best Employer, and Earth's Safest Place to Work. Customer reviews, 1-Click shopping, personalized recommendations, Prime, Fulfillment by Amazon, AWS, Kindle Direct Publishing, Kindle, Career Choice, Fire tablets, Fire TV, Amazon Echo, Alexa, Just Walk Out technology, Amazon Studios, and The Climate Pledge are some of the things pioneered by Amazon. For more information, visit [amazon.com/about](https://www.amazon.com/about) and follow @AmazonNews.

ABOUT AWS SKILLS TO JOBS

The AWS Skills to Jobs team mission is to enable governments, education systems, and collaborating organizations to deliver skills-based pathways to entry level tech jobs so that employers can meet hiring needs and drive their business forward. The Skills to Jobs team works backwards from customer needs to identify the programs and tools to support cloud skills delivery at scale, through ready-to-teach cloud courses and lab environments for students to demonstrate builder experience, to self-guided learning and assessment checks for students to earn credentials. We support employer demand through workforce development solutions that connect entry-level cloud talent to AWS public sector customers. AWS customers that are recruiting technical talent need workforce development programs and initiatives that work backwards from their career needs to help learners gain the right skills so they can continue to innovate, meet their customers' needs, grow their talent base, reduce the risk of attrition.

ABOUT THE BUSINESS-HIGHER EDUCATION FORUM

The Business-Higher Education Forum is a 40-year-old nonprofit membership organization that connects higher education institutions to business talent demand. Corporate CEOs and university presidents join BHEF to anticipate skills needs and improve pathways between higher education and workforce. BHEF members improve competitiveness, increase productivity, and drive high-value university credentials. BHEF builds better skills through identifying high-value emerging skills, developing pathways that quickly source high-value talent, and leading action-oriented forums and partnerships. Learn more at www.bhef.com.

ABOUT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (CUNY)

The City University of New York is the nation's largest urban public university, a transformative engine of social mobility that is a critical component of the lifeblood of New York City. Founded in 1847 as the nation's first free public institution of higher education, CUNY today has seven community colleges, 11 senior colleges and seven graduate or professional institutions spread across New York City's five boroughs, serving over 243,000 undergraduate and graduate students and awarding 55,000 degrees each year. CUNY's mix of quality and affordability propels almost six times as many low-income students into the middle class and beyond as all the Ivy League colleges combined. More than 80 percent of the University's graduates stay in New York, contributing to all aspects of the city's economic, civic and cultural life and diversifying the city's workforce in every sector. CUNY's graduates and faculty have received many prestigious honors, including 13 Nobel Prizes and 26 MacArthur "Genius" Grants. The University's historic mission continues to this day: provide a first-rate public education to all students, regardless of means or background.

THE CHALLENGE

New York City, home to a vibrant economy and one of the most diverse populations in the U.S., is constantly evolving with a thriving tech industry. However, not all New Yorkers have benefited from the growing economy, especially those in lower-income communities. Too often, degree requirements are a barrier to obtaining a high-growth job: according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in New York City over the past year (October 2021–October 2022), 55 percent of job postings requested a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹ While the majority of working-age adults in Manhattan meet this requirement, “the rate is considerably lower in each of the other four boroughs: 39.6 percent in Brooklyn, 35.7 percent on Staten Island, 34 percent in Queens, and 20.5 percent in the Bronx.”²

This reality requires business and higher education to implement pathways into higher education so that a pipeline of qualified workers can fill in-demand jobs. This benefit boosts local economic development and is also a means for individuals to access degrees and credentials that provide a family-sustaining wage and professional fulfillment.

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022

2. [Building an Inclusive Economy in NYC: Boosting College Attainment](#) | Center for an Urban Future (CUF) (nycfuture.org)

THE SOLUTION

[The City University of New York](#) (CUNY) is well positioned to expand this pipeline of qualified workers through their partnerships with leading employers. CUNY has 25 colleges across New York's five boroughs, awarding over 55,000 degrees annually, and more than 80 percent of graduates remain in the New York metro area. Recognized as one of the most [diverse higher education systems](#) in the country, CUNY provides opportunity to traditionally underserved populations.

CUNY has been deliberate and strategic about employer outreach, ensuring they understand what employers need and connecting degree completers to jobs. Included in this approach is a desire for solutions that can be scaled to serve the greatest number of New Yorkers.

One employer that realizes CUNY's impact on the local workforce is Amazon. CUNY has developed partnerships with both Amazon and Amazon Web Services (AWS) to create more opportunities for working adults—including Amazon's own employees—to access credentials that help them advance in their careers. Amazon employs workers across New York's five boroughs, with the largest concentration of 9,000 employees on Staten Island. Many of these employees are looking to attend college for the first time or are revisiting educational pursuits postponed due to affordability issues, difficulties with balancing work and school, or concerns about the value of higher education.

Amazon Career Choice is part of Amazon's Upskilling 2025 pledge—a \$1.2 billion commitment to provide 300,000 employees with access to education and skills training programs through 2025. This educational benefit program helps Amazon's 750,000 hourly employees grow their skills for career success at Amazon and elsewhere. In January 2022, Amazon Career Choice expanded to include pre-paid college tuition, new industry certifications, courses to improve English language proficiency, and high school completion programs.

Soon after, Amazon Career Choice added CUNY to its education partner network. CUNY is a strong fit for this program because of its track-record with academic and workforce programs and the system's reach across all parts of the city. The Amazon/CUNY partnership is led by the CUNY Office of Careers and Industry Partnerships, with strong support from the chancellor and provost. Through this program, eligible Amazon employees can pursue undergraduate certificates and degrees at any of the eight initial CUNY institutions selected for the pilot phase. These eight campuses represent all of New York City's five boroughs.

Key features of Amazon Career Choice include:

- Funding to cover tuition, books, and select fees, with no limit on the number of years an employee can participate.
- Eligibility to participate after being employed for 90 days.
- Flexibility in degree pursuit. Amazon provides a wide range of opportunities to students so they can choose the institution and program that best meets their needs; the academic program does not have to be related to the employee's current job.

The CUNY central office spearheaded and coordinates this partnership with Amazon Career Choice, providing a streamlined point of contact for Amazon across all CUNY campuses. It also provided a structured process to identify the best campuses to initially participate based on where Amazon employees live and work, borough representation, and diversity of degree offerings and formats. Centralization allowed the program to roll out simultaneously with cohesion across all participating campuses and makes the program more efficient to administer on an ongoing basis.

This program presents an opportunity for CUNY to meet New Yorkers where they are, making it easier for adult learners to earn their degree and advance in their careers. As part of this work, CUNY is eager to create models that can scale across the system and deepen partnerships with large employers that can be replicated with other companies throughout the city.



OVERCOMING BARRIERS FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Amazon and CUNY provide adult learners with support to understand the enrollment process and be successful.

TRANSPARENCY ON ELIGIBILITY AND PATHWAYS

Amazon: Amazon provides tools that show employees the benefits for which they are eligible and where they can enroll. For example, Amazon Career Choice offers employees free access to career coaching, college advising, and specialized career services through a collaboration with Kaplan. Amazon employees can receive virtual one-on-one coaching to identify the academic programs that best fit their academic and professional goals and continuous support throughout the higher education experience.

CUNY: CUNY developed [a central landing page](#) for Amazon employees to see the educational opportunities available across the eight participating CUNY institutions. Once students identify an interest, staff working out of the CUNY central office can contact potential students to understand their goals and needs.

REMOVING THE FINANCIAL BURDEN

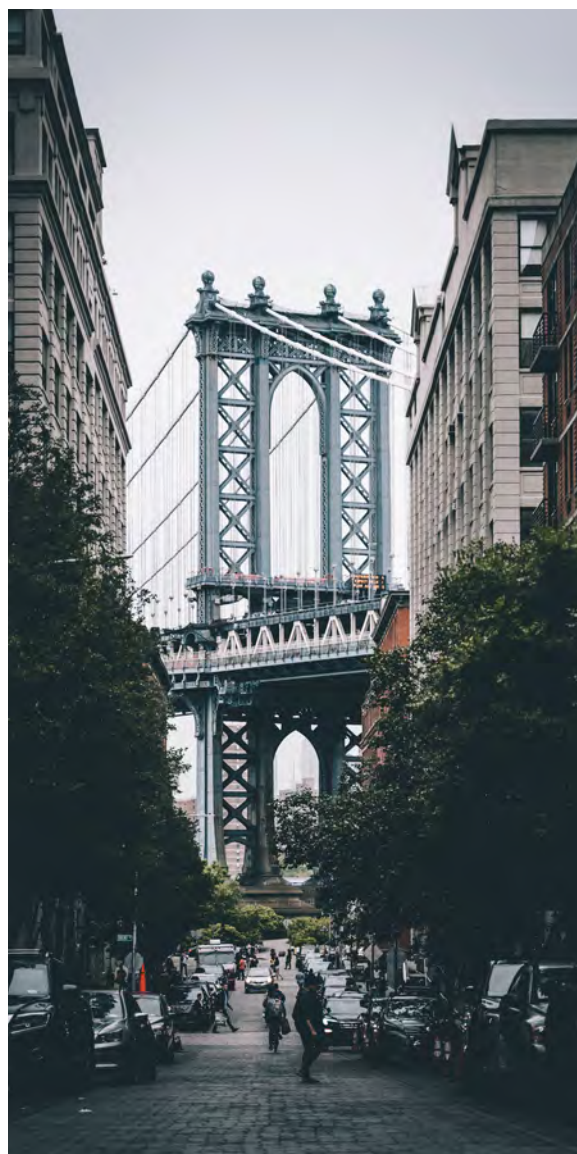
Amazon: The program provides direct payment to CUNY, not a reimbursement, so students do not have to find the money for classes and then wait to get reimbursed as with most other employer tuition assistance programs.

CUNY: CUNY has deferred the application fees for Amazon Career Choice students. Students pay for the course by electronic payment request in the Amazon School Portal. The enrolling institution then reviews and approves the payment requests which generates an invoice for Amazon.

MAKING ENROLLMENT EASY

Amazon: Interested employees can check the eligibility requirements in internal Amazon portals.

CUNY: Students are referred to student services personnel at the college in which they want to enroll to complete the registration process and be oriented to their educational experience at the local level.



PARTICIPATING CUNY CAMPUSES AS OF 2023

Borough of Manhattan Community College

CUNY School of Professional Studies

Bronx Community College

CUNY System Office

City College of New York

Kingsborough Community College

College of Staten Island

LaGuardia Community College

Queensborough Community College

OUTCOMES

The Career Choice partnership between CUNY and Amazon is in the pilot stage. The program was [formally announced](#) in March of 2022 and strong marketing of the program began for the Fall 2022 semester. Two key metrics for the future success of the program will be overall enrollments and, longitudinally, the persistence of students as the program progresses in 2023 and beyond.

Based on early data from the partnership, nearly 30 percent of those enrolled are returning to college with some transfer credits. The three most popular majors amongst enrolling Career Choice students at CUNY are Business (17 percent), Computer Science/Computer Technology (17 percent), and Biology (13 percent), with other selections ranging from African Studies to Mathematics, English, and Philosophy.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR CUNY AND AMAZON?

Amazon Career Choice and CUNY continue to offer options to employees based on where they live and work. This regional knowledge will guide any modifications or expansion of the programs. With more students enrolling in the program, **CUNY and Amazon are identifying ways to provide stronger supports for learners.**



“Adult New Yorkers need to know that they don’t have to choose between their jobs and a degree that will help them advance in their careers,” SAID FÉLIX MATOS RODRÍGUEZ, CHANCELLOR OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK. *“Through partnerships like this groundbreaking collaboration with Amazon, we’re making it as easy as possible for adults across the five boroughs and beyond to secure the future they strive for.”*



CUNY-AMAZON WEB SERVICES PARTNERSHIP

IN ADDITION TO PARTNERING with Amazon Career Choice, CUNY has also developed a partnership with AWS to offer all New Yorkers (not only those employed by Amazon) access to AWS credentials. These credentials provide skills-based pathways to entry-level technology jobs. Using labor market data, AWS and CUNY identified which credentials to offer within the system. These credentials are currently offered at five CUNY institutions, with the most prominent partnership at Queensborough Community College (QCC). The key to the success was involving faculty early in the process so that they understand the base curriculum and can collaborate with AWS to fine tune it for the needs of employers across New York. AWS staff work directly with deans and faculty as

well as with CIOs and CHROs at Accenture, American Express, Bloomberg, BNY Mellon, Bank of America, and other companies to ensure the curriculum and pathways connect to the skill needs of the local workforce.

Over 7,000 students have enrolled in AWS non-credit bearing credential courses in Cloud and IT at QCC since January 2022. As an AWS Academy Institution, CUNY faculty have access to curriculum developed by AWS, which the local campus can then modify to align with local business needs. Looking forward, CUNY and AWS are interested in making these credentials connect more directly with work, specifically by implementing capstone project opportunities for students to showcase to employers their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

SKILL MAPS

AWS Skills to Jobs specialists created skill maps to document the competencies required for in-demand technical entry level roles. **The aim of the skill map is to provide higher education institutions with an objective list of competencies to align program of studies to skills needed by employers.** The skill map contains a list of technical and soft skills to prepare learners for entry-level jobs. Current skill maps include: Software Development Engineer, Cloud Support Associate, Data Integration Specialist, and Cybersecurity Specialist. More skill maps will be developed as demand for specific entry-level roles increases.

The skill maps are created by synthesizing labor market data (commissioned by independent research firm Draup) with entry level and apprentice frameworks (ONET, IFATE) to create an aggregate list of knowledge, skills, and abilities. The industry specialist leverages their background knowledge to distill the aggregate into a list of competencies. The skill map is validated with AWS hiring managers and regional hiring companies.

Industry specialists use validated skill maps with institutions who have committed to developing job-aligned pathways. **The skill map enables a gap analysis tool and serves as a guide to modifying and enhancing programs of study** (degree granting and non-credit). AWS industry specialists advise schools to incorporate cloud technologies, create projects to demonstrate skills (capstones), and engage employers to support internship programs and hiring events based on the updated program of study.



“At Amazon, we’re committed to empowering our employees by providing them access to the education and training they need to grow their careers, whether that’s with us or elsewhere,” SAID TAMMY THIEMAN, DIRECTOR OF AMAZON CAREER CHOICE. “We’re thrilled to partner with CUNY on our Career Choice program at eight CUNY colleges in all five New York City boroughs, giving Amazon employees local access to pursue the education path that fits their passions.”





Build better skills for better performance.

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