PURPOSE DRIVEN

OUTCOMES AND CORE LEARNINGS
FROM 20 YEARS OF ROADTRIP NATION
Roadtrip Nation started in 2001 with the idea to seek out people who had found careers connected to their interests and learn from their stories and insights. Since then, it's become an award-winning documentary series on public television, wide-ranging educational programs and content, and learner-driven career exploration tools.

OUR MISSION IS TO EMPOWER PEOPLE TO DEFINE THEIR OWN ROADS IN LIFE
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When Roadtrip Nation started, over 20 years ago, we never could have predicted how this journey would unfold. But passing the torch to new generations of career seekers has been our North Star. We began with the guiding principle that learners should be in the driver's seat—whether on a road trip, in the classroom, or exploring their career possibilities—and that approach has helped us stay focused on amplifying students' voices and making their experiences central.

Along this journey, we've also prioritized evaluating the impact of this approach. From our early days, we've been lucky to surround ourselves with third-party researchers who have evaluated and informed our work, highlighting what's working and identifying opportunities for improvement.

These evaluations and studies have been foundational to our continued evolution and development, generating a number of consistent themes and learnings from across the spectrum of our programs that inform how Roadtrip Nation has impacted learners and indicate why this approach matters. Many of our more recent reports were co-designed and funded in partnership with Strada Education Network, the nonprofit social impact network that Roadtrip Nation is part of. Strada has also been instrumental in helping Roadtrip Nation develop our Theory of Change (see pg. 82), which continues to guide future research and evaluations.

Now, after 20 years of building Roadtrip Nation, we have an incredibly important opportunity to engage in a more diligent review of our impact model and synthesize our programs' major third-party evaluations and research studies, which go deep into learners' experiences. In the following pages, we are very excited to share with you our first-ever retrospective report from those consolidated evaluations and studies, featuring the voices and experiences of the wide range of learners who have used our curriculum and career exploration tools, and who have been part of our road trip experiences.

This is by no means a capstone or the end of the journey. If anything, this is the beginning of a new chapter for Roadtrip Nation, animated by the agile spirit we started with, but grounded in a deeper understanding of how we make a difference in the lives of the people we serve.

Lastly, Roadtrip Nation would not exist without the incredible network of individuals and partners who continue to push our organization forward. You help us strive to be better and always encourage our team to keep looking to the horizon.

We hope you see your own important thumbprint on Roadtrip Nation, and know that we are so grateful for your role in this work.

Sincerely,

Mike Marriner
Co-Founder & President
Roadtrip Nation
What outcomes do we see when we put learners at the center of career exploration, so that they’re the change agents in their own lives, navigating based on their own interests, values, strengths, and goals? In this report, we’re looking at the outcomes that have remained constant across Roadtrip Nation’s different offerings, over many years, for many different kinds of learners, as measured by several independent, third-party studies and data analyses.

Roadtrip Nation was founded in 2001, and launched its curriculum and career exploration resources in 2008. Since then, measuring the impact of a story-driven, interest-based approach to career exploration has been a primary focus. Before we examine the six core outcomes that have been consistent across Roadtrip Nation’s three main program areas—our road trip experiences, project-based curriculum, and career exploration tools—we want to highlight the data, evaluations, and reports from third-party researchers that were analyzed to draw out the six core themes that form the foundation of this retrospective report.
SPEC Associates, November 2011

A national evaluation measuring student perceptions and engagement after participating in the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum, with case studies at three schools

This national evaluation, made possible through a grant by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, measured student perceptions and engagement after participating in the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum. Surveys of students and teachers assessed student outcomes and perceptions of quality after curriculum implementation during the 2010-11 school year.

35 teachers and 873 students were surveyed using the Retrospective Pre-Post Test (RPT) methodology. The survey represented a wide range of students in 8th to 12th grade, where 71% lived in an urban area, 49% were economically disadvantaged, 43% were bilingual, 44% were showing average or above average performance on academic achievement tests, 16% were in advanced placement classes, 12% were behind grade level in school or credits earned, and 2% were system impacted.

Journey Toward Deeper Learning: An Evaluation of the Roadtrip Nation Experience in the San Jose Plus Academies
Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC, now Inflexion), 2012

A multimethod evaluation of how the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum fosters students' deeper learning skills, based on the Deeper Learning Rubric

In this deep-dive evaluation of the implementation of the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum in three high schools in San Jose, made possible through a grant by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, researchers led by Dr. David Conley, a thought leader in college and career readiness, applied a multimethod evaluation approach using the Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning Rubric¹, with additional analysis of the program curriculum and instructional materials, in order to answer the question: How and to what extent does the Roadtrip Nation Experience foster students' Deeper Learning?

Researchers focused on the implementation of the curriculum at three of six sites in the San Jose Plus Academy schools, which were created to support graduation and credit recovery for students who are at risk of not graduating. 81% of students in the Plus Academy schools are from minority groups, 80% are first-generation college students, 51% are in free or reduced lunch programs, and 39% are in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. A student diagnostic was administered to participating students at the three schools using the Roadtrip Nation curriculum and a comparison group of students from Plus Academy schools who were not participating in the Roadtrip Nation curriculum. The researchers applied five investigative lenses: 1) a comprehensive curriculum analysis, 2) pre- and post-program surveys, 3) analysis of student work samples, 4) classroom observations, and 5) focus groups.

An Implementation Study of the Roadtrip Nation Experience in San Jose Unified School District Plus Schools
John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University, February 2015

An implementation study of the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum at six schools, measuring students' shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and skills

During the 2013-2014 school year, Roadtrip Nation partnered with the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford's Graduate School of Education to study the implementation of the Roadtrip Nation Experience. This study, made possible by a grant from AT&T, was conducted across six San Jose Unified School District Academy Plus schools in San Jose, California.

The Plus program is part of the district's Learning Options Department, which offers a variety of alternative education programs intended to help students recover credits, explore career options, and graduate from high school.

The majority of students attending the Plus program are Hispanic or Latino, low income, and in their senior year of high school. The following questions...
guided the research: 1) What shifts in students’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills are associated with their participation in Roadtrip Nation? 2) What are students’ experiences with the program? 3) What are program implementation experiences at different sites? 4) What factors affect program implementation?

The study used mixed methods, including observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and teacher and student surveys. Data was collected across all six schools during the 2013-14 school year.

Roadtrippers Alumni Research Report
Clear Path Market Research, December 2019

A retrospective survey covering 15 years of road trip experiences and measuring the impact on roadtrippers’ career outcomes and mindset

In November 2019, Clear Path Market Research surveyed 109 of the 160 people who went on a Roadtrip Nation road trip between 2003 and 2018, made possible with funding by Strada Education Network and Roadtrip Nation. The intention of the study was to better understand how their road trip experience impacted roadtrippers’ career paths, lives, and self-perceptions after the road trip—and how Roadtrip Nation could make the experience even more impactful going forward.

Respondents were 59% female, 28 years old on average, and had a median household income of $63,000. 76% had an associate degree or higher, 71% were currently employed, and 24% were current students. 36% identified as first-generation college students and 43% received a lunch subsidy during their K-12 education.

Roadtrip Nation subscribers survey, comparing students to educators viewing habits and content preferences
Texas Tech University, December 2019 – Ongoing

Research survey, continuous response measurement, and focus groups measuring viewer motivation and engagement

Researchers at Texas Tech University’s Audience Testing Lab are conducting a two-part engagement and impact research study of viewers of Roadtrip Nation films and videos. The study is meant to determine viewers’ motivations for watching, the main takeaways and impacts for viewers, and which segments are most engaging. In the first phase of the study, conducted in December 2019, researchers surveyed 538 Roadtrip Nation viewers. In the second phase, which was paused due to Covid-19, researchers will conduct in-person audience testing in their state-of-the-art lab with 150-250 participants, to measure engagement, interest, and impact.

College Board’s Career Finder Survey
College Board, June 2021

Survey data from PSAT and SAT students using Roadtrip Nation’s career exploration and planning tool

Roadtrip Nation and College Board partnered to build Career Finder™, a career exploration tool that helps students make informed academic and career decisions based on what truly drives them. As part of College Board’s BigFuture, Career Finder lets students explore careers aligned to their interests and plan small steps today that build toward the future. Career Finder is powered by Roadtrip Nation’s video archive, so students hear from real people with leading roles in diverse industries. Students accessed Career Finder after taking the PSAT or SAT or by visiting College Board’s free digital resources for planning life after high school on BigFuture™. In pre and post surveys of ~1,000 8th- to 12th-grade students administered by the College Board, changes were measured in 17 statements across five constructs, including Confidence, Goal Setting, and Career Awareness, after using the Career Finder tool. In addition to percent changes, researchers utilized Cohen’s d to measure effect sizes.
It’s been an extraordinary 20-year journey to get to where we are today as an organization. One road trip has led to many; three roadtrippers have rolled into nearly 200; a handful of conversations with inspiring people have led to thousands more; and those stories have gone on to reach over 60 million households annually on public television and over 14 million more learners through our curriculum, career tools, and incredible partners.

Over these two decades, we’ve heard consistent themes when we talk to people about how they’ve experienced Roadtrip Nation—as roadtrippers, learners, educators, viewers, readers, and more—and how their experiences have impacted their career paths and their mindsets. In this report, we’re bringing forth key research findings and mapping the themes that have persisted in third-party evaluations and studies of Roadtrip Nation’s offerings and impacts.

Throughout this report, we’ll be regularly referencing a recent working paper from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Career ready? How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19,” which covers decades of research on career readiness and student outcomes across the globe. The report is especially focused on evidence-based solutions that target systemic inequality in order to create more equitable outcomes for all students, and their review of the research has been instrumental in how we think about the six core outcomes, and how we continue to support them.
Career Engagement | Core Outcomes

**EXPANDED CAREER EXPOSURE & ENGAGEMENT**

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"Roadtrip Nation was life changing for me. The takeaways were empowering. I had no idea what I wanted to do, and after watching videos of how people found their career paths I was inspired. I learned that life does not always go one way, the road may lead you in all different ways... I WENT FROM WANTING TO BE A TEACHER, (AN) ENGINEER, TO FINALLY FINDING MY COLLEGE MAJOR IN NURSING.

Roadtrip Nation not only helped me find my major/career path, but also taught me things can change. I just need to make sure I like what I’m doing in my work to be happy and successful." — Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

I have had students tell me that they would not have ever known about certain careers if not for Roadtrip Nation. ... ROADTRIP NATION GIVES STUDENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO ACHIEVE THESE CAREERS, HELPING STUDENTS CHOOSE THEIR COLLEGE MAJORS AND HAVE MORE FOCUS AT AN EARLY AGE." — Educator

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"I WENT FROM WANTING TO BE A TEACHER, (AN) ENGINEER, TO FINALLY FINDING MY COLLEGE MAJOR IN NURSING.

Roadtrip Nation not only helped me find my major/career path, but also taught me things can change. I just need to make sure I like what I’m doing in my work to be happy and successful." — Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

THE BIGGEST IMPACT ROADTRIP NATION HAD ON ME WAS AN EXPANSION OF THE CAREER HORIZON. It made it immediately clear to me that a career wasn’t some traditional title you picked out of a pre-stamped bucket of jobs they hand out after graduation, but rather A LIVING, BREATHING, AND ENDLESSLY EVOLVING PATH THAT I COULD PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN SHAPING.” — Roadtripper

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Learners developed a greater awareness of career possibilities and pathways, and this translated into increased goal-setting and knowledge about how to explore and pursue their career interests. Most importantly, hearing real stories about career journeys humanized the process and made them feel that they aren’t alone.

An implementation study of Roadtrip Nation’s curriculum, conducted by Stanford University’s John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities in 2015, found that students are more likely to succeed if they have better role modeling options for their future, and that Roadtrip Nation programs could help to fill that gap. This key insight has been the cornerstone of Roadtrip Nation’s work in career exploration, as we have sought to scale this experience to more students, especially those who need it most.

In OECD’s working paper ‘Career ready?: How schools can better prepare young people for working life in the era of COVID-19,’ this inequity and unequal access is top of mind, because, as they note, access to career information, resources, and support is not equally distributed in society. The authors remark, “Evidence is strong that the capacity of many young people to aspire is systematically constrained…there exists in many societies a close alignment between social disadvantage and lack of access to information and support required to enable progression.” Bringing more career thinking into schools and programs to improve access can be one small intervention that improves individual student outcomes.

One way to understand whether students have the career information they need in order to make informed choices about their future is to look at how students answer when asked about their desired future occupations. In general, are young people knowledgeable about the range of careers and pathways that are available to them? Or are many of them naming the same handful of occupations? The OECD working paper points out that this phenomenon, where students cluster around the same careers, can be indicative of students’ career knowledge: “Career concentration provides a convenient means … to test the strength of labour market signalling and the effectiveness of career guidance interventions in broadening the occupational interests of young people. …Overly narrow career aspirations suggest lack of full access to the information and support required to make sense of academic potential and the breadth of labour market opportunity.”

It’s notable that the OECD authors report, then, that in the United States, in 2018, the percentage of girls who expected to work in one of the 10 most commonly cited jobs was 59%, and for boys that number was 47%. In other words, nearly half of boys, and more than half of girls, all named the same 10 occupations they’d like to pursue. These numbers show that students lack a broad view of the opportunities available to them, and therefore are also at a disadvantage in being able to make an informed choice about their future careers. The first goal, then, is to support students in widening the lens of possible options.

### Opening students up to career possibilities

The Stanford-led Roadtrip Nation Experience implementation study from 2015 looked closely at Roadtrip Nation’s high school curriculum in use at six San Jose school credit recovery programs, which offer alternative education options to help students recover credits, explore career options, and graduate from high school. The teachers surveyed noted that many of their students had experienced personal struggles, and also tended to consider only a limited range of occupations. The majority of the students served by the program are Latino or Hispanic and low income.

“Many of the kids are living in a world that is pretty closed in,” one teacher noted. “They only see what they see. A lot of their parents and relatives are laborers, that’s all they see. They should know there are other doors.” In this particular case and community, students’ families mostly worked as laborers—which isn’t to diminish their family members’ valuable work—this pattern of a limited purview of careers and possibilities has been observed in roadtrippers and other students regardless of their background. These expectations, no matter where students live, are powerful. Unless young people get exposure to a range of paths through school, career experiences, or other programs, they don’t have models of what’s available beyond what they see on a day-to-day basis.

In the Stanford study, students’ participation in the Roadtrip Nation curriculum was associated with greater awareness of the wide range of career pathways available to them, and with increased career knowledge. 61% of participating students reported that the course helped them discover career paths they had not considered before, and in open responses, they shared that the exploration of their favorite hobbies and activities helped them uncover new career paths that they hadn’t known about previously. “At first I wanted to be a police officer,” one student said. “But now that I see that there’s a broad range that I could choose from … I feel that Roadtrip opened more doors.”

In another evaluation of Roadtrip Nation’s curriculum, a national evaluation by SPEC Associates, students similarly felt they had unprecedented exposure to career pathways for their future. The survey included a wide range of students who engaged with the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum, including middle and high school students, bilingual students, low-income students, disabled students, advanced placement students, and system-impacted students. Across this broad range of participants, the SPEC analysis found that, after engaging with the curriculum, there was a 20% increase in students who reported feeling that they’ve had a chance to discover what kinds of jobs they might like to have in the future.
More knowledge about specific career pathways

The Stanford study found that exploring the videos in Roadtrip Nation’s career interview archive and completing the course’s Interview Project, where students talked to a role model in their community working in a career aligned with their interests, increased students’ knowledge about specific careers. Students came away with more knowledge about the tangible steps to pursue specific careers, and what the day-to-day of different careers is like. In focus groups, students noted that they liked the video interviews in the course because the stories helped them learn about careers they didn’t know existed and that it was interesting to hear about the different career paths.

One student reported, “When I talked to the person that I interviewed, I got to learn more about the job than I thought I already knew. I thought I knew a whole lot about the job, but I really didn’t. When she started explaining to me the whole college process, and everything that you have to do, and going through all the academics, and all the basic training of being a police officer; I was like—wow, I had no idea you had to do all of that.”

Another described, “Well, I [interviewed] a biologist. And I didn’t even know there was [such] a job [like his]. But apparently when there’s construction going on, and maybe there’s a river or a park by it—he counts and does surveys, and sees if the animals are going to be affected, and if the environment’s going to be affected. It opened my eyes to—oh, wow, there’s even more jobs out there that I didn’t even know, than just being a lawyer or a doctor.”

These findings were also reported for students who used Career Finder, the career exploration tool that Roadtrip Nation built in partnership with the College Board. Students who used Career Finder reported greater knowledge of specific pathways, with a 16% increase in students who reported that they understood the knowledge and skills they’d need for their chosen career path.

More students make goals and plans

Roadtrip Nation’s content and curriculum seemed to widen the lens, empowering students to imagine and identify new careers and pathways that they were not previously considering. But did this create ambitions or more career certainty for students? Did they begin to make goals and experiment and engage with these new ideas and possibilities? In the Stanford report, 73% of students reported that the experience had helped them set goals for themselves, think about what they need to do to accomplish their goals, and feel confident that they could achieve their goals. In the SPEC report, there was a 13% increase in students’ ratings of their ability to set and prioritize goals as “good” or “excellent” after taking the Roadtrip Nation course.

Students who used Career Finder, which is more self-directed, also displayed meaningful gains in awareness of career opportunities, confidence, and goal setting. There was a 15% pre to post survey increase in students who agreed that they have specific goals about what they would like to do for a career. There was also a 21% pre to post survey increase in students who said they know the actions they need to take in order to accomplish their career goals.

In these reports, we see that when students who participated in the Roadtrip Nation Experience gained greater exposure to career possibilities and pathways, their new awareness began to translate into clearer career ambitions. Students deepened their understanding of what education and skills they needed, and that knowledge transferred into action with increases in goal setting. In a study conducted by EPIC, which investigated how the Roadtrip Nation course fostered Deeper Learning skills, students in focus groups reported that Roadtrip Nation helped them identify goals. Students who said that they already had goals before completing the course stated that the program helped them confirm and commit to those goals. In the Student Diagnostic, these qualitative reports were supported by students’ survey responses: After the course, 93% of students indicated that they do set goals or could do better at setting goals, 91% reported that they do think about what they have to do to achieve their goals or could do better at thinking about what they have to do to achieve their goals, and 88% said they do know what they want to do after high school or could do better at knowing what they want to do after high school.
Stories from authentic, relevant role models humanize careers and pathways for students

In the EPIC evaluation of the Roadtrip Nation curriculum, researchers noted that one program strength is “in students’ application of facts, processes, and theories to real world situations. The whole of the [Roadtrip Nation] program curriculum is an application of content to students’ own lives, and the content derived from real people’s experiences in the video archive and in-person interviews with community leaders.”¹⁷ According to learner responses, the videos and guidance in Roadtrip Nation programs and resources feel relevant to students’ lives because they are real, candid stories that include the challenges and failures alongside the successes. The connections made through personal stories help show students that they’re not alone, and that achieving their goals is within reach no matter their start point.

This same finding was true for participants in Roadtrip Nation’s road trips, which power the Roadtrip Nation documentary series on public television. In 2019, Clear Path Market Research conducted an independent study of 109 of the 160 people who went on a road trip with Roadtrip Nation between 2003 and 2018 in order to understand the impact of the experience on their careers and overall well-being.

Many of the data findings mentioned above, related to increased awareness of career pathways and possibilities, also hold for this group. But notably, Clear Path’s research demonstrated that the most valuable part of the experience for roadtripper participants was the exposure to the emotional journey and story behind the career paths of the people they spoke to in their interviews.¹⁸ In fact, this was the most frequently selected reason that these interviews were valuable—even more than the exposure to new possibilities. The top two aspects (out of 11 choices) that roadtrippers marked as most meaningful about the interview were, “The leaders showed some of the same insecurities and vulnerabilities that I have” (selected by 50% of roadtrippers), closely followed by, “The leader’s personality, charisma, or sense of humor” (selected by 43%). The third aspect that roadtrippers chose is more focused on awareness of new career opportunities: “The conversations opened my eyes to new ideas and new possibilities” (selected by 41%).

Beyond illuminating an exact career or pathway, participating in real, wide-ranging conversations that touched on personal topics humanized these career paths and choices and proved to be deeply meaningful for roadtrippers. These conversations illuminated the anxieties, uncertainties, mistakes, and joys behind what might look like a fairly straightforward path from the outside.¹⁹ “The most impactful aspect was the human connection,” said one roadtripper, “Feeling like we are not alone, that there are people who come from similar places and are doing great, and are there for you.” These connections and conversations gave roadtrippers the confidence to make their interests the center of their decision-making about their futures. After the road trip, 90% of roadtrippers are more confident that they can pursue what interests them and turn it into a livelihood.

For learners, beginning to think about and experience careers is the first step to expanding their awareness of what’s possible for their futures. The next step—the one that will help guide them through changes, challenges, and uncertainties—is developing a strong sense of their own interests, strengths, values, and goals. Roadtrip Nation programs lead with self-discovery, encouraging learners to define their own version of success and become more confident in who they are—and this showed in their growth in self-perception.
KEY FINDINGS:
CAREER ENGAGEMENT

MORE AWARENESS OF CAREER POSSIBILITIES
61%

Of students who used the course said they discovered career paths they hadn't previously considered.

GREATER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SPECIFIC CAREERS AND PATHWAYS
16% ↑

Increase in students who said they knew the knowledge and skills they'd need for their career path after using Career Finder.

INCREASED GOAL-SETTING
21% ↑

Increase in students who said they know the actions they must take to meet their career goals after engaging with the course.

STORIES FROM AUTHENTIC, RELEVANT ROLE MODELS HUMANIZE CAREERS AND PATHWAYS

“The most impactful aspect was the human connection, feeling like we are not alone, that there are people who come from similar places and are doing great, and are there for you.”

- Roadtripper
ROADTRIP NATION PROVIDED A SUPPORTIVE AND KIND SPACE TO LEARN CONFIDENCE, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING ME WITH THE NECESSARY STRUCTURE TO SEE THE VALUE IN MYSELF. The road trip changed my life in ways that I have not even articulated to myself yet. While I still struggle with confidence, I know that when I doubt my confidence I always think, ‘Remember Roadtrip Nation,’ because of the confidence and support I gained from that trip.” — Roadtripper

Before I began my journey, I could not define my way of success. I had plenty of doubt in myself. I could not see going to college and having a good future in what I found most interesting to me...I realized the most challenging things for me to face and deal with are doubt, self-confidence, hard work and support. I thought I was one of few people who found this difficult and had these challenges to face. With Roadtrip Nation, I noticed everyone has situations like this to deal with. THE LESSONS AND THEMES IN ROADTRIP NATION CONNECTED WITH MY CHALLENGES AND HAS HELPED ME FACE THEM...I HAVE GAINED CONFIDENCE IN ME, AND I AM DETERMINED TO PROVE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DOUBTED ME WRONG BY BEING SUCCESSFUL IN MY OWN WAY.” — Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

The biggest connection was...when they identify what they are good at and what they like. The interview process is fantastic. The students seem to understand the whole purpose once they have had their interview. IT HAS OPENED THE EYES OF ALL OF MY STUDENTS. THEY HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE AND ARE PROUD OF WHO THEY MET.” — Educator

CONFIDENCE

GROWTH IN SELF-PERCEPTION
Learners’ confidence, motivation, and sense of agency grew through Roadtrip Nation programs as they gained a greater sense of their own interests and encountered stories of people from similar backgrounds and experiences.

Roadtrip Nation programs were shown to improve learners’ self-perception, affecting their confidence,⁰⁰ self-awareness,⁰¹ and sense of agency.⁰² When these programs focused on growing self-perception, learners were supported in developing a greater sense of who they are and what they care about, while also gaining exposure to a range of possibilities beyond what they may have encountered so far.

Self-perception can be a force that propels learners forward—and it can be a barrier that holds them back from realizing their goals. Strong self-perception has been shown to counter biases and stereotypes that can lead to limiting opportunities for learners.⁰³ And self-perception is closely tied to the capacity to aspire. The OECD notes, “The [capacity to aspire theory] provides a useful tool for understanding how young people’s aspirations emerge from their social circumstances. It’s not enough to hold ambition for a certain profession or educational pathway, young people need access to information, resources and self-understanding that will allow them to develop informed knowledge of what is required to meet their ambitions and to navigate education and training systems and the early labor market with confidence. For schools, this means recognising that career ambitions are closely tied to often unspoken assumptions and expectations that begin at a young age and which are closely tied to social background. Stereotyping linked to gender, socio-economic status and migrant background about who it is deserving of certain pathways. This is an important asset-based narrative to support students in their future success—and to disrupt and reshape common narratives about who is capable or not for non-first gen and 34% for low-income participants compared to 16% for non-low-income roadtrippers. And Gen Z roadtrippers in particular noted that talking to someone who shared the same insecurities and vulnerabilities was the most impactful part of the interviews for them (59%), closely followed by the interviewee’s ability to lessen their anxiety about the future (52%). Before the pandemic, the American Psychological Association had already identified that Gen Z is the most likely generation to report poor mental health,⁰⁴ and more recently, Gen Z was also the most likely generation to say that their mental health had worsened compared with before the pandemic (34% compared to 19% of millennials).²⁷ For young people who are feeling especially uncertain right now, these connections can be particularly powerful and reassuring.

The Search Institute elaborates on the value of social support in “Defining and Measuring Social Capital for Young People,” specifically for young people of color, stating, “Social support may also be especially important for [youths and young adults] of color, as research shows that social support may mitigate some of the negative effects of discrimination on psychological distress among college students of color (Prelow, Mosher, & Bowman, 2006). This type of support may give [youths and young adults] of color the confidence and agency to actively seek educational and employment opportunities.”

The connections made during the road trip—and as a result, in the course that models the road trip experience through the Interview Project—provided important social support, specifically related to bonding social capital, which is support received from someone who is from a similar background. For more than 9 in 10 roadtrippers, this experience of getting to meet “someone like me” who had found a successful career connected to their interests was one of the most impactful parts of the trip.²⁴ Roadtrippers who were first generation college students or low-income were more likely to say that meeting someone who came from a background or circumstances like them was extremely valuable—36% for first-gen roadtrippers vs. 16% for non-first gen and 34% for low-income participants compared to 16% for non-low-income roadtrippers. And Gen Z roadtrippers in particular noted that talking to someone who shared the same insecurities and vulnerabilities was the most impactful part of the interviews for them (59%), closely followed by the interviewee’s ability to lessen their anxiety about the future (52%). Before the pandemic, the American Psychological Association had already identified that Gen Z is the most likely generation to report poor mental health,⁰⁴ and more recently, Gen Z was also the most likely generation to say that their mental health had worsened compared with before the pandemic (34% compared to 19% of millennials).²⁷ For young people who are feeling especially uncertain right now, these connections can be particularly powerful and reassuring.

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One roadtripper reflected, “The road trip built bridges between my comfort zone and the outside world. It shattered my self-imposed limitations and boundaries and shoved me out of my comfort zone. I still pinch myself every single day and ask how the heck did I get to live this life? The simple answer: [the road trip] gave me this opportunity. For that I’m forever grateful.”

In the EPIC evaluation of the Roadtrip Nation curriculum, researchers pointed out the connection between the ideas in the Roadtrip Nation content that learners consumed, and its application to students’ own lives. “The real-life connection came out in the student work, where learners noted that someone’s story ‘applies to my own life’; that the person in the video believes in hard work ‘just like me’; and that one of the people was shy, noting, ‘That’s exactly how I am…but if he can get through it then certainly I can too.’” ²⁹
Confidence and motivation drive shifts in attitude

Gaining a greater awareness of their own interests is a critical foundation of developing learners’ self-perception. This awareness starts with providing space to discover and validate their interests and passions. In the Stanford study, 60% of students noted that the program helped them determine the things they enjoy doing no matter how much money, free time, or experience they have.³⁰ In addition to the survey findings, in open-ended responses and focus groups, students reported that they appreciated the time for self-reflection, which helped them gain clarity about what was most important to them.

Growth in self-perception was also demonstrated for the roadtrippers through the increase in their sense of career confidence and agency, and, as a result, their motivation. After the road trip, 90% of roadtrippers felt that they knew they could pursue what interests them and turn it into a livelihood; 92% said they were more confident exploring new opportunities on their career path; and 88% reported that after the road trip they believed that authentic career choices were a real option in their life.³¹ Alongside confidence, 88% of roadtrippers reported that after the trip, they felt motivated to make things happen for themselves. One roadtripper said, “Roadtrip Nation changed my life in every aspect. I am confident in who I am and what I can accomplish in life regardless of what life throws my way.”

Learners who used Roadtrip Nation’s career exploration resources and curriculum also demonstrated more confidence about their futures. Students who used Career Finder, the career exploration tool that Roadtrip Nation built in partnership with the College Board, reported similar increases in confidence. After using Career Finder, students reported a 9% pre to post survey increase in their confidence that they will find a career that is built around their interests, and an 11% increase in students who reported that they feel confident they will reach their career goals.³² Likewise, in internal pre and post surveys of students who used the Roadtrip Nation curriculum between 2015-2020, there was an 18% increase in the number of students who felt in charge of making things happen or empowered to make things happen for themselves.³³ Those same surveys showed an 11% increase in the number of students who said that the curriculum helped them not give up on difficult tasks.

Taken together, this foundation of confidence and self-awareness that students build when they grow their self-perception is ultimately helping them to develop their sense of purpose, and this confidence in who they are and what they want from their lives drives a greater sense of agency. The OECD notes, “Student agency relates to the development of an identity and a sense of belonging. When students develop agency, they rely on motivation, hope, self-efficacy and a growth mindset (the understanding that abilities and intelligence can be developed) to navigate towards well-being. This enables them to act with a sense of purpose, which guides them to flourish and thrive in society.”³⁴

When learners grow more confident in who they are, they’re developing a strong foundation of self-assurance that gives them more agency over their path forward. In beginning to make future plans, learners gain a new understanding of the “why” behind their education—they’re beginning to develop their sense of purpose. When they do so, school has a direct connection to future goals that they care about, and this creates a new understanding of the purpose of their education and its connection to tangible goals that will help them realize their vision of a good career and life.
CONFIDENCE AND MOTIVATION DRIVE SHIFTS IN ATTITUDE

92% Of roadtrippers said they were more confident exploring new career opportunities after the trip.

11%↑ Increase in students who, after using Career Finder, feel confident that they will achieve their career goals.

18%↑ Increase in students who felt empowered to make things happen for themselves after using the Roadtrip Nation course.
EDUCATION RELEVANCE
STRONGER CONNECTION TO EDUCATION

“I had all F’s and one A, and then... we went to Advisory one day and [our teacher] had us draw in a Roadtrip book and it had a question in there... what did we want to do in life as we get older—our career. AND I STARTED THINKING ABOUT, LIKE, I GOT TO PICK ALL MY GRADES UP IF I WANT TO DO ALL THAT. SO, I DID. I PICKED ALL MY GRADES UP TO DO WHAT I WANT TO DO.” — Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

Roadtrip Nation gives students the opportunity to know what it takes to achieve these careers; thus, HELPING STUDENTS CHOOSE THEIR COLLEGE MAJORS AND HAVE MORE FOCUS AT AN EARLY AGE.” — Educator

“It has made me more confident to go out and pursue my career. IT MADE ME WANT TO GET SERIOUS WITH COLLEGE AND MY FUTURE.” — Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

Education Relevance | 20 Years of Impact
Widening the lens of possible careers helped students feel that school is relevant to their lives and who they want to be—now and in the future. That realization resulted in improved academic performance for learners in Roadtrip Nation programs.

Greater ambitions lead to better outcomes—and that’s, in part, because clearer dreams and goals drive students’ engagement and investment in their education. Visualizing the future is the first step for students in finding their bigger “why.” And once they have a greater connection to that purpose, their connection to education grows alongside it.

The OECD report “Career ready?” notes, “Studies systematically find that the more ambitious youth succeed in securing higher educational credentials and more prestigious jobs and that this holds even when [teenage] academic ability, socio-economic origin, ethnicity, or gender differences are taken into account.”³⁵

When we’re able to engage learners in career thinking that widens their exposure to career pathways and helps them formulate future ambitions, we can positively impact their relationship to education. “Higher levels of teenage ambition are seen to drive adult outcomes (higher earnings, reduced unemployment, greater job satisfaction) in significant part by encouraging greater engagement in education,” the OECD reports.³⁶ And that connection between young people’s ambitions and their educational attainment held true even with controls in place for prior educational attainment. Across multiple reports, we’ve seen those results in evaluations of Roadtrip Nation in the classroom and beyond.

**Career thinking and conversations make education feel more relevant**

Our road trips put people who are in the midst of making big decisions about their future in conversation with inspiring leaders whose stories can provide a model of what’s possible. These leaders share their stories of the successes and setbacks that have defined their career journeys, and for the roadtrippers, this experience is deeply impactful; it often reframes how they think about education and its relevance. One roadtripper reported that the experience of Roadtrip Nation showed them what they could gain by committing to self-development and education, “My road trip pushed me to see endless possibilities of how I could use my talents, education, and passion to live a meaningful life beyond a restricted career path,” they reported. “I was able to see more possibilities and opportunities within my field. Now, I work hard at my job and also work hard beyond my job to create those opportunities.”³⁷

As a result of the road trip, 70% of roadtrippers agreed that their education was relevant to their life, and 71% reported that the experience had a somewhat or very favorable impact on their perceptions of their education.³⁸ For roadtrippers who were first-generation college students, these effects were even greater, as evidenced by the percentage of first-gen roadtrippers who selected the highest category of impact on this measure—64% of first-gen roadtrippers reported that the road trip experience had a very favorable impact on their perceptions of their education, compared to 41% of non-first-gen roadtrippers who made this selection.

After the road trip, which placed roadtrippers in conversation with dozens of people talking about how their education related to the work they do, roadtrippers were able to make connections to education’s relevance in their own lives. This shift in perception was demonstrated for students who participated in Roadtrip Nation programs as well. Exposure to conversations around careers, and the many pathways that real people have taken to get to their careers, helped students make the connection between the future they imagine, and what they need to do in school in order to get there. The OECD echoes this finding for young people who engage in career conversations, noting, “With controls in place for social background and academic proficiency, those young people who had spoken to someone about a job they wanted to do when they left school were more likely to agree with the following statements: ‘Trying hard at school will help me get a good job’ … ‘Trying hard at school will help me get into a good college’ … ‘Trying hard at school is important.’ In these responses, young people are seen as developing stronger understandings of the relationship between educational provision and workplace ambitions.”³⁹

The reports on Roadtrip Nation’s educational programs were not longitudinal studies, but the researchers were able to measure how learners’ attitudes and feelings about school shifted during and after their participation in watching and/or participating in career conversations. Analyzing the combined research shows that if students have completed some career exploration and can identify future careers they are interested in, they demonstrate greater drive to gain the skills and education needed to get there. We saw this finding demonstrated...
Students’ greater understanding and drive toward educational achievement was clear in more facilitated classroom experiences as well. In the Stanford implementation study of Roadtrip Nation’s course in six San Jose schools, 69% of students who participated in the Roadtrip Nation Experience said that Roadtrip Nation helped them view education as relevant to their life.41 As a benchmark, a study by YouthTruth, which analyzed responses from 230,000 students between 2012 and 2017, found that across all secondary students, only 48% feel that what they are learning in class helps them outside of school.42 In the SPEC Associates evaluation of the Roadtrip Nation curriculum, learners who had participated in the Roadtrip Nation Experience demonstrated a 19% increase in their belief that the things they were learning in school were going to be important for their futures.43 In the SPEC Associates survey, a more immediate effect on school perceptions was also observed. Participating in the Roadtrip Nation curriculum was associated with learners’ more positive feelings about their immediate classes and coursework. There was a 11% increase in students who said they felt interested in the work they did in their classes, and 5% fewer students felt their classes were boring after completing the course.44

But one additional data point was interesting to consider. Educators have often shared with us that one of the benefits of the course from their perspective is that it helps them get to know their students more personally so they can build stronger connections and better support their students’ goals in the classroom. In the SPEC Associates evaluation, students reported feeling more of this support and connection—there was a 10% increase in the percentage of students who felt like there was at least one teacher who cared about their hopes and dreams.45

**Deeper learning and improved performance**

Students and participants have self-reported deeper engagement and interest in their education, but studies have also shown that Roadtrip Nation had a marked effect on students’ actual performance. In one study from 2012, “Journey Toward Deeper Learning: An Evaluation of the Roadtrip Nation Experience in the San Jose Plus Academies,” EPIC researchers asked the question, “How—and to what extent—does the Roadtrip Nation Experience foster students’ Deeper Learning skills?”

Alongside this inquiry, they were able to measure impacts on learners’ GPAs compared to a control group of classes who did not participate in the Roadtrip Nation program. The study also included classroom observation, focus groups, curriculum analysis, and analyzing students’ work in the program. San Jose Plus Academy is a program for students at risk of not graduating on time. The student body at the time of the research was 81% students of color, 80% first-generation college students, 51% in free or reduced lunch programs, and 39% ESL students.46 Roadtrip Nation students not only had a higher GPA than their peers at the end of the school year—the average GPA of students participating in Roadtrip Nation increased from 2.35 to 2.75 compared to 2.4 to 2.6 for Plus Academy students who did not participate—but they also demonstrated greater academic improvement by a factor of 2.

This improvement did not occur because the Roadtrip Nation Experience directly promotes educational achievement—but perhaps because it helped students imagine their futures, and understand how education could help them make their dreams a reality. It also helped them develop the skills and mindset to succeed. The researchers noted, “The increase in [Roadtrip Nation] students’ average GPA is interesting at face value, because the program itself does not focus on academic achievement. There are no lessons that encourage students to study harder or get good grades. The Roadtrip Nation Experience does, however, focus squarely on the behaviors, attitudes, and strategies—termed ‘noncognitive’ factors by educational researchers—that hold a direct positive relationship to students’ concurrent and future outcomes.”47

Researchers asserted that Roadtrip Nation students were engaging in the transfer of the lessons they were learning in the program to their broader perspective on life-long learning—a cornerstone of Deeper Learning.48 The report found that students mastered core academic content and engaged with an expanding structure of knowledge, with 93% expressing that what they learn in school today will be important to them later on in life as compared to 83% of students who were not in the Roadtrip Nation program.

**Connecting students’ career ambitions to postsecondary paths that best support their goals**

One part of learners developing a stronger connection to education is understanding why education matters to their future goals; but the next part is understanding the needed level of education to achieve their goals, and what pathways are available to them to do so.
“It is not enough to hold ambition for a certain profession or educational pathway,” the OECD states. “Young people need access to information, resources and self understanding that will allow them to develop informed knowledge of what is required to meet their ambitions and to navigate education and training systems and the early labour market with confidence.”

Supporting students with self-discovery-driven career exploration opens up the opportunity for young people to gain access to the information and resources they need to avoid misalignment between their career goals and their educational plans.

Roadtrip Nation's programs are centered on career conversations that help students begin to imagine their future career lives. Students explore the immense video archive of thousands of interviews, full of authentic and real conversations led by learners like them—and the curriculum culminates in an Interview Project where students lead their own career conversation with someone from their community. The OECD's report notes that teenage career conversations are linked to lower rates of teenage uncertainty, but career conversations are also linked to lower levels of educational misalignment for students—that is, when their career ambitions don't line up with the level of education they aspire to. “In terms of misalignment, young people ... who had not talked about their imagined working lives were 71% more likely to be planning on pursuing education insufficient to meet their career goals.”

Educational misalignment affects students from historically marginalized groups in greater numbers, and this has serious implications for student outcomes. One-third of students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds have misaligned career and education plans, where their career objectives don't align with the level of education they plan to attain. Young people who underestimate the level of education they need to attain their career goals tend to experience poorer educational attainment, are less likely to go into higher status jobs, and earn less than their peers with similar career plans as teens. For this reason, creating more widespread access to programs that introduce earlier career thinking and conversations is one intervention to begin addressing the inequitably distributed effects of educational misalignment.

Roadtrip Nation programs start with exposing young people to careers and pathways that connect to their interests, and use that as a jumping-off point to introduce career thinking and conversations that unlock many possible directions. An educator who implemented Roadtrip Nation's course with their students reported, “Watching our students interview people that they were scared to death to interview, and then coming out of it so confident and accomplished, was amazing. They learned so much. It was heartwarming. Our youngest student, who is obsessed with soccer and comes from an economically struggling, [single-parent] family was able to interview the head coach and director of operations from [our local professional soccer team]. All he thought of before was becoming a professional athlete, but now he has been exposed to the business side of professional sports and is super pumped about other possibilities. I can’t imagine the empowerment and impact that this will have on our students as they become adults.”

Starting with their interests allows students to expand their career exploration out from their natural curiosities and passions. Identifying these possible pathways gives students a better opportunity to align with the postsecondary pathway that will support their goals. In the Stanford study, open-ended survey responses and student focus groups indicated that the curriculum and Interview Project gave students constructive insights about careers that aligned with their interests.

Disrupting narratives about education and careers that could limit learners’ aspirations

For many young people, perceived constraints and assumptions limit their aspirations for future education and career goals—the OECD report notes the influence of socioeconomic factors and parental expectations on these aspirations. Access to information about postsecondary education is also a barrier; only 43% of disadvantaged students at age 15 reported that they knew how to get information about financial aid. “In these cases, the capacity to aspire is clearly constrained by lack of access to trusted and relevant information,” the OECD states.

For this reason, introducing career thinking and career conversations feels even more urgent and impactful, especially to bring into school settings, where there's a greater ability to impact a broad range of students from many backgrounds. And this is why it’s particularly notable that exposure to Roadtrip Nation programs helped students understand the specific skills, knowledge, and pathways required for the careers they were interested in pursuing (as outlined in “Career Engagement,” pg. 18), as well as the relevance of education for their future.
Roadtrip Nation tools and resources have made strides in creating more equitable access to career resources and information through partnerships with national distribution platforms—such as Naviance, the College Board, and most recently, the Boys & Girls Club—where these conversations can reach the greatest number of students and young people. For learners who used the Career Finder tool, there was a 21% pre to post survey increase in those who felt that they understood the knowledge and skills they'll need for their chosen career path.⁵⁵ As one student noted, “[Career Finder was] very useful to help me figure out what classes I should take and how I should prepare for higher education.” According to data from the College Board, among Black and African American users of Career Finder, there was a 14% pre to post survey increase in the number of students who felt that the tool reinforced the importance of graduating in helping them reach their career goals. For both first-generation college students and Latino and Hispanic students, there was an 11% pre to post survey increase in students who said they know the importance of developing a purpose and plan for their education.⁵⁶

In addition to helping students develop knowledge of the specific pathways they want to pursue, there’s also work to be done in breaking down stereotypes and narratives about different educational paths: expanding awareness about high-quality options outside of four-year degrees, disrupting ideas about who is cut out for four-year degrees, and generally helping learners understand their options. For example, stereotypes about who pursues vocational education and training are highly gendered, and interest in working in the skilled trades is “substantially related” to socioeconomic status, academic performance, geographic location, and access to career guidance in school.⁵⁷ To that end, some of our recent storytelling projects have focused on careers in skilled work and trades, careers that are attainable without a four-year degree, and workforce training programs that open up better opportunities for young people. These more expansive stories about skilled work, trades, and more are meant to show a more inclusive vision of the future of this work, where students can see themselves represented.

As learners get more exposure to the many possible pathways ahead of them, it only adds to their chance at greater ambitions, better educational alignment, and more successful career and life outcomes. For students, more engagement in education helped them develop new skills, like problem-solving and communication, that are critical for a changing future of work.
KEY FINDINGS:

EDUCATION RELEVANCE

CAREER THINKING AND CONVERSATIONS MAKE EDUCATION MORE RELEVANT TO STUDENTS' LIVES AND GOALS

- 69% Of students taking the course agreed that it helped them view their education as relevant to their life.

- 19% ↑ Increase in students' belief that the things they were learning in school would be important for their future after engaging with the course.

DEEPER LEARNING AND IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

- 2X Greater average GPA improvement for Roadtrip Nation students compared to other students.
The road trip was a singular life experience for me. **IT BUILT MY CONFIDENCE, HELPED ME BUILD CONCRETE INTERVIEWING SKILLS, AND GAVE ME A RENEWED SENSE OF EXCITEMENT AND MOMENTUM FOR MY FUTURE.** From start to finish, it was an adventure and set of challenges and experiences that I continue to reflect on and draw from over 10 years later.” — Roadtripper

**SKILL DEVELOPMENT**

**IMPROVED CAREER & COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

“**This builds confidence. Gives you a valuable skill set to become not just capable of initiating an idea, but seeing it through to fruition.** This is a hugely important component to success.” — Roadtripper

“**Now [the students] get to go out and say, I know how to have a conversation with an adult other than my grandma. I KNOW HOW TO GET DRESSED [FOR THAT CONVERSATION]. I KNOW HOW TO HAVE MY CONVERSATION READY TO GO. I KNOW HOW TO LOOK PROFESSIONAL.** That’s what Roadtrip Nation sort of pushes these kids a little bit more to do. ... That’s what I see coming back.” — Educator
Learners developed new skills, especially through the Interview Project. These critical 21st century skills—adaptability, problem-solving, communication, collaboration, and more—are extremely valuable for learners as they prepare for an unpredictable future of work.

The centerpiece of the Roadtrip Nation Experience course is the Interview Project, where students conduct their own interview with someone from their community who’s working in a career they want to explore. The Interview Project is based on the model of the interviews in Roadtrip Nation’s documentary series. For roadtrippers, these career conversations were transformative for how they imagined and pursued their future paths. The process and experience helped them develop skills that have been instrumental in their lives and careers.

Roadtrippers often say that they gained just as much from building the trip as they did from the insights they heard in the interviews. Of all the applied skills that roadtrippers take away from the experience of building their trips, cold-calling to book the trip interviews is the clear standout. Making cold calls to book interviews tends to be the aspect of trip planning that just about every roadtripper has dreaded—it can be intimidating, especially as communication goes more and more digital—so we wanted to know if going through the experience contributed to the overall impact of the road trip. We found that it did, in a very substantial way. More than 3 out of 4 of the roadtrippers who participated in making cold calls reported that the experience was extremely or very valuable.⁵⁸ “Gaining a comfort level with cold-calling and emailing might be the single most valuable thing I took from my Roadtrip experience,” said one roadtripper. Another roadtripper reported, “I learned skills in cold-calling which I have used since to gain work experience, internships, and interview possible mentors.”

Developing this skill translated into more assurance in workplace settings. One roadtripper noted that this new confidence was one of the most valuable parts of their trip: “As simple as it sounds: confidence in professional settings. Personally, I have found cold-calling—as unpleasant as it can be—to be a relevant skill in almost every job I’ve had since. Roadtrip Nation was the beginning of me developing both the confidence and skill set it requires.”⁵⁹

In the SPEC evaluation, adults at the schools who supported students through their projects were struck by the new skills students learned over the period of the course, especially when it came to their Interview Projects. One facilitator noted, “It’s every week [that] they [acquire] a better skill, and we update our resumes every six weeks, and they put new skills [and] new experiences on them. And they look at their resumes that they did in September and what it looks like now in May, and they can see the progression.”⁶⁰ Students were more engaged and interested in the people they were interviewing and wanted to make a good impression and be professional. The Interview Project was a real opportunity for them to take a meaningful step toward their goals and further develop their interests, and this deep engagement set them up to build more meaningful Deeper Learning skills.

Roadtrippers who self-identified as low-income or as first-generation college students reported even greater impact on their skills and abilities, saying they are more confident pursuing new career opportunities, are more likely than their peers to agree that they have “authentic career choices,” and more likely to see the importance of discussing their potential career with mentors.⁶¹

Motivation and project-based learning opportunities that build practical skills

In the Interview Projects modeled on the roadtripper experience as part of Roadtrip Nation’s curriculum, the learner is responsible for making their project a success, from start to finish—whether as part of a group or on their own. Completing this project—which includes research, cold-calling, and conducting the interview—offers challenges that require them to problem-solve and be flexible. The most recent update to the course also incorporates Google Applied Digital Skills lessons to encourage digital literacy and skills, helping students translate the takeaways from the lessons into practical, real-world applications. The lessons in the Roadtrip Nation Experience course have also been mapped to the CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) framework; the course itself is based in the CASEL competencies, and builds students’ social awareness, promotes self-awareness by strengthening students’ self-confidence and increasing their efficacy, and fostering positive relationship-building skills and responsible decision-making.

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Supporting students in building skills and adaptability that prepare them for the future of work

In the EPIC evaluation, the research team mapped the Roadtrip Nation Experience course to the Hewlett Foundation’s Deeper Learning competencies: “Deeper Learning is an umbrella term for the skills and knowledge that students must possess to succeed in 21st century jobs and civic life.”⁶² These 21st century skills are unique in their expansiveness and breadth—this concept of what students need to know to be successful in their education, work, and civic lives is inclusive
of digital and practical skills, plus the mindset and character traits that will help students be engaged learners who can absorb lesson content and knowledge, and be critical thinkers who flexibly apply concepts in their education and work. Supporting this, the OECD similarly notes the importance of these skills for this generation in particular, “Critical thinkers will understand the challenges of the contemporary labour market, the changing patterns of demands for knowledge, skills and qualifications, and the culture of labour force recruitment. Effective provision will equip young people with a sense of agency as they approach their transitions towards career ambitions.”⁶⁴

As young people approach those transitions, that agency, created by the skills they’ve developed, can make the difference in how they react to change and new opportunities. These aren’t just the applied skills that will translate directly into specific jobs—they’re the career and communication skills that create a foundation for their future success and set the stage for the development of applied and technical skills. These 21st century skills or human skills, as they’re also called, are about learning how to learn, to adapt, and to grow. In a 2018 report from Strada Education Network, “Robot-Ready: Human+ Skills for the Future of Work,” the authors note, “[Human skills] are skills that enable learners to transfer their knowledge from domain to domain in the face of job obsolescence and to learn new skills in demand.”⁶⁵ The report goes on to elaborate why these skills matter for learners’ future outcomes. “In a new learn-earn-learn cycle, workers will need to return to learning throughout their work lives. They’ll need to be flexible and agile, able to shift and grow over the course of their longer work lives. It’s also increasingly clear that the skills that cannot be easily automated—such as systems thinking, creativity, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and communication—will be the ones needed to succeed in the future.” These skills are among the most in-demand in the labor market, and they’re particularly valuable when paired with technical skills.⁶⁶

Anthony Mann, the lead author of OECD’s “Career ready?” working paper and a senior policy analyst with the OECD’s Directorate for Education and Skills, notes, “Something that we did find in our analysis ... is that if a young person has volunteered, if they have worked part-time or if they’ve done an internship or work placement within their schooling, we find that they are much more likely to agree that they are able to adapt to new circumstances and to be personally effective in new situations. And adaptability is one of the key things of the 21st century—we expect all these new jobs to appear, new jobs to arrive, and continually having to change. It’s the life of jobs rather than the job for life. And how do we teach adaptability? What we find is that by having an experience where you’re required to be personally effective in an unfamiliar situation, that you actually become it. You become more confident.”⁶⁷ The Interview Project that learners complete as part of Roadtrip Nation’s course creates the circumstances for some of these same experiences for learners: they’re faced with a challenge that they may have never encountered before, and they have to quickly learn in a real world setting to be effective in this new situation in order to complete the curriculum project.

Improvements in self-efficacy, resilience, communication, and collaboration

As the jobs of the future become more technical and complex, it’s imperative that students are given opportunities like these to master Deeper Learning competencies to prepare them for future careers, and for postsecondary success. The EPIC evaluation noted the noncognitive factors, highly featured in the Deeper Learning competencies, that were demonstrated by students who participated in the Roadtrip Nation Experience course. “Students used metacognitive strategies to learn the ‘big ideas’ of academic content; they persevered by using different approaches to overcome obstacles; they incorporated and provided peer feedback to execute group work; and they collectively demonstrated a strong increase in self-efficacy.”⁶⁸ The researchers noted that this study measured the students’ demonstrations of these noncognitive factors, but it also operationalized the ways that the course supported the development of these outcomes, and offers a strong example of how to foster noncognitive factors that are critical to students’ success.

The Interview Project is not a simple, predictable task. Students have to engage with real people from their community, reacting to obstacles that stand in the way of their objectives in order to figure out how to overcome them and be successful in their project. The EPIC researchers noted that this was a key strength of the Interview Project. The opportunity to struggle against a complex challenge required students to apply knowledge in non-routine ways.⁶⁹ While they

“I can rise to the challenge when I’m presented with challenging work.”
struggled at first, they learned to shift and refine their strategies until they were successful. 92% of student participants agreed with the statement, “I change my strategy and try again when my first try doesn’t work.” In focus group discussions, students noted that cold-calling and interviewing were new skills they had not previously been exposed to—these were the areas where students felt most challenged, but also where they felt most rewarded. After participating in the course, 86% of students answered affirmatively to the statement, “I can rise to the challenge when I’m presented with challenging work.” The interview is also where they developed new communication skills (Deeper Learning competency “Communicate Effectively”) that are directly applicable to future interviewing and work experiences. As the researchers noted, “[Students] demonstrated keen awareness that their communications with interviewees needed to meet professional standards,” and they learned to tailor the messages to this professional audience.

Findings about students’ development of communication skills were also echoed in the Stanford study. Students reported that Roadtrip Nation helped them a lot or quite a bit to improve their communication skills with adults (65%), improve their communication skills with peers (63%), present their ideas clearly (59%), understand others’ points of view (64%), and feel comfortable in new situations (58%).⁷⁰ In the focus groups and open-ended survey questions, students consistently called out the self-presentation skills they were able to practice through the completion of the Interview Project and felt that this would help them in their future careers. Even students who completed the project and commented that they hadn’t felt prepared for the interview learned something; they reflected on how the interview experience helped them learn firsthand about the importance of being prepared.

The course lessons and the Interview Project are focused on individual students’ personal goals and interests, but the classroom environment encourages collaboration such that students explore these possibilities and solve problems together as a team. As a result, the EPIC evaluation notes, students developed their skills in the “Work Collaboratively” competency of Deeper Learning.⁷¹ Students expressed positive growth and experience in this area in focus groups and in the diagnostic. When compared to their peers who were not participating in the Roadtrip Nation program, participants had higher rates of positive responses on every question linked to this competency. “This finding is significant,” the report states, “considering the large body of research linking teamwork and social competence to success in college, the workplace, and the transition into adulthood.”

**Greater self-awareness drives the desire to improve**

Perhaps one of the most significant and interesting findings was in participating students’ self-awareness about where they could improve. Students who participated in the Roadtrip Nation program recognized their weaknesses and anticipated that they needed to work harder in those areas (Deeper Learning competency “Learn How to Learn”). The researchers noted, “Students participating in [Roadtrip Nation] in all three schools, for almost every item on the spring survey, most frequently selected the ‘I can do better’ over all other response options. … This pervasive clustering around ‘I can do better,’ and the stark contrast to student responses at comparison schools, is significant evidence of the Roadtrip Nation Experience supporting students’ development of self awareness and desire to improve.” But on top of this, the researchers point out, it wasn’t just the desire to improve that was notable—students did do better, improving their GPA at twice the rate of their peers.⁷³ This increase in GPA was also noteworthy because GPA is one of the strongest predictors of secondary and postsecondary success. “Grades reflect the degree to which students have demonstrated a range of behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that are critical for success in school and in later life.” The Roadtrip Nation course does not explicitly encourage students to study harder or focus on academics, but it does promote those behaviors, attitudes, and strategies (noncognitive factors) that are positively associated with student outcomes.

The career and communication skills that students developed, alongside these meaningful improvements in GPA and academic performance, are positive indicators helping set students up for future success in education beyond high school, and in their future careers. But, as we’ve looked deeper, the foundation of learners’ future success is also, critically, built on the relationships and resources that they developed through Roadtrip Nation programs. Many of the skills learners practiced and learned also gave them the tools to build critical social capital.
KEY FINDINGS:
SKILL DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES BUILD PRACTICAL SKILLS

"It's every week [that] they [acquire] a better skill, and we update our resumes every six weeks, and they put new skills [and] new experiences on them. And they look at their resumes that they did in September and what it looks like now in May, and they can see the progression."
- Educator

IMPROVEMENTS IN SELF-EFFICACY, RESILIENCE, COMMUNICATION, AND COLLABORATION

86% Of students answered affirmatively to the statement, "I can rise to the challenge when I'm presented with challenging work."

65% Of Roadtrip Nation students reported that the course helped them improve their communication skills with adults.
The most valuable aspect of the road trip was MEETING LEADERS THAT BECAME FUTURE MENTORS.” — Roadtripper

I learned how to sell myself and my projects as a valuable investment for someone’s time. I ALSO IMPROVED MY ABILITY TO LEVERAGE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE POWER OF PERSONAL NETWORKS.” — Roadtripper

The experiences this course provides for students really HELP OPEN THE DOOR TO THEIR COMMUNITIES IN WAYS THEY MAY NOT HAVE THOUGHT OF BEFORE.” — Educator

SOCIAL CAPITAL
INCREASED SOCIAL CAPITAL
Providing opportunities to develop social capital can increase access to resources blocked by systemic barriers. Learners developed relationships with mentors and supporters—and felt empowered and motivated to continue making connections after the end of their programs.

In “Career ready?” the OECD notes, “Variations in social capital can help explain how the economic prospects of young people with similar academic ability can vary so much once they have left education and entered the labour market.” Roadtrip Nation’s programs develop social capital by emphasizing the formation and nurturance of developmental relationships, defined by the Search Institute as “close connections through which [young and young adults] discover who they are (their identity), cultivate abilities to shape their own lives (agency), and engage with and contribute to the world around them (connections and contributions to community).” In addition to developing relationships, Roadtrip Nation programs helped to fulfill the resources pillar of social capital, connecting youth and young adults to mentors and resources that provide information, instrumental and emotional support, and a network that can support them.

Social capital brings together many of the themes outlined in this report and shows how they relate and interact to drive better outcomes. After participating in Roadtrip Nation programs, learners reported near-term outcomes of successfully mobilized social capital, as outlined by the Search Institute, most notably a sense of autonomy: a greater sense of self-efficacy and purpose and a greater awareness of their occupational identity and goals. They also reported outcomes associated with a sense of competence: increased skills in planning and goal-setting, and greater levels of resilience and belief in a growth mindset.

Beyond a sense of autonomy and competence, Roadtrip Nation programs have had an impact on long-term outcomes, as evidenced by the percentage of past roadtrippers employed in meaningful work. In Clear Path Market Research’s study, roadtrippers report higher than usual success and engagement in their work: 92% indicated that their job gives them the opportunity to do work they find engaging, 84% agree that their job is closely aligned to their interests, and 70% reported that their work is personally rewarding. As a benchmark, in 2021, Gallup found that the percentage of “engaged” workers in the U.S.—those who are highly involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to the work and workplace—reached an all-time high of 84%, since Gallup began tracking the metric in 2000.

In “Career ready?” the OECD notes, “Variations in social capital can help explain how the economic prospects of young people with similar academic ability can vary so much once they have left education and entered the labour market.”

The career conversations that form the core experience in Roadtrip Nation programs emphasize “linking” social capital, where young people build connections with people across power differences. When these kinds of conversations lead to vertical connections that provide support, share power, and expand possibilities for young people, they can be transformative. Linking social capital is one of the three kinds of relationships that are part of building social capital: bonding connections between similar people and groups, bridging connections between people or groups who are dissimilar, and linking connections between people or groups across power or status differentials.

All three categories of developmental relationships are valuable, but linking social capital is particularly important because it provides a vertical connection that can be more impactful for gaining access to resources that might be systematically limited or blocked. The Search Institute notes, “These three relationship elements arguably are even more important in providing the ‘linking’ and social ‘leverage’ capital that may be particularly valuable in helping youth of color and youth from low-income communities achieve successful trajectories despite historical marginalization and current systemic obstacles.”

“Ultimately,” the Search Institute reports, “social capital that helps historically marginalized youth succeed within a context of systemic exclusion, racism, sexism, and discrimination has to also include ‘linking’ social capital.”

The benefits of these three categories of developmental relationships are clear in the experiences of the roadtrippers who participated in Roadtrip Nation’s road trips and documentary series. “The most impactful aspect was the human connection,” said one roadtripper. “Whether it was from the other roadtrippers, the team, and the people we interviewed. There was a fundamental level of community in all aspects. Feeling like we are not alone, that there are people who come from similar places and are doing great, and are there for you. Or even people who are so different from you, but that are still there for you.” After the road trip, 79% of the roadtripper participants agreed that they now know role models and mentors they can look to for guidance and support. (Compare that to a study by Olivet Nazarene University that polled 3,000 employed people across a spectrum of ages and industries, finding that only 37% of people had a mentor.) And 92% of roadtrippers agreed that they had the ability to seek out role models and build social capital. This percentage was even higher for first-generation college students.
Roadtrippers also gained a better sense of the impact of talking to people who are working in areas that they may want to pursue. 93% of roadtrippers reported that after the road trip they better understand the importance of talking with professionals in a career that interests them, and 79% stated that conducting interviews with influential people was extremely or very valuable in helping them pursue a career of interest. This finding was also demonstrated in the Roadtrip Nation Experience curriculum, where we observed a 24% increase for low-income students and a 16% increase for Latino or Hispanic students who felt that the curriculum helped them better understand the importance of speaking with professionals in a career that interested them.⁹¹

Bonding and bridging relationships were also incredibly impactful for roadtrippers, which includes the relationships with their teammates on the road trip. When asked what about the trip was most impactful, friendship and teamwork were some of the most commonly mentioned factors after the personal connections that they built with the people they interviewed. One roadtrpper described the importance of these relationships, “The people I went on the road trip with [were] definitely the most impactful aspect. ... I went into the trip thinking we were all so different, but left realizing that despite the differences we still had so much in common. It was enlightening being able to hear their stories and perspectives.”

**Skills to keep building social capital**

One of the outcomes from Roadtrip Nation programs is that learners feel more empowered to continue building these kinds of “linking” relationships across power differentials. Once the roadtrippers had the experience of successfully booking interviews and conducting career conversations, it built their confidence that they have the power to reach out and continue making these authentic connections with people they admire. “When I had the experience of cold-calling people, I had the realization that there were very few people on the planet that I couldn’t get ahold of,” one roadtrpper said. “The only things that prevented me from doing so were opportunity and confidence. The road trip supplied me with both.” Another roadtrpper noted, “It was terrifying to cold-call these people, and going through that process helped build my confidence that people are usually willing and excited to share their stories. In my current career, I am probably more comfortable reaching out and asking for help from strangers because of this experience.”⁹²

This increased confidence was also seen in students who completed an Interview Project as part of the Roadtrip Nation course. In an internal, rolling five-year survey of students who had completed the course, there was a 24% increase in learners who agreed that they have the ability to seek out role models and network. That number increased to 34% for Latino and Hispanic students.⁹³

### Supporting social capital development in classrooms for more equitable outcomes

Schools have the capacity to enhance the more equitable development of social capital for young people. The OECD’s “Career ready?” report notes the role of institutions and educators in helping to facilitate developmental relationships and connections and make social capital development more equally distributed. In a range of longitudinal studies, students who talked to their teachers about their future plans had better occupational outcomes. “Schools (and careers services) are particularly important for disadvantaged children in that they can potentially provide a fairer distribution of cultural and social capital and opportunities for supporting, developing and informing children’s interests.” ⁹⁴

Bringing these career conversations into schools (the Roadtrip Nation Experience course is an example), can be one intervention that creates an environment where young people have opportunities to build social capital by beginning to develop relationships and gaining greater access to resources and information. In the EPIC report, one educator summed up the impact of the Roadtrip Nation Interview Project, saying, “Finding the right people to connect with and asking them smart questions ... this stuff isn’t just going to get you an A on your project. This is preparing you to be successful in life.” ⁹⁵ In the SPEC evaluation, after using the curriculum, there was an 11% increase in students who said they’ve talked to someone who has a job they might want to do someday; an 18% increase in students who reported that they talked about their futures with people outside of school all or most of the time; and a 13% increase in students who felt that they have a strong ability to communicate with interesting adults in their community.⁹⁶ This increased confidence in talking to adults about careers was seen in the Stanford study as well with 65% of students reporting that Roadtrip Nation helped them improve their communications skills with adults.⁹⁷

Overall, what’s most important and impactful about social capital development is that when young people build this web of relationships and resources it provides them with an evolving and growing network that they can tap into for different purposes at key transition points in their lives. Building social capital helps young people prepare for a future they can’t predict, but when needs arise, they’ll have a well of support, resources, and information to pull from. Social capital is so critical for young people because it evolves with them, and also supports that evolution, ensuring their continued success and well-being.
KEY FINDINGS:

SOCIAL CAPITAL

AWARENESS OF NEW ROLE MODELS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A NETWORK OF SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

79%
Of roadtrippers agreed that they now know role models and mentors they can look to for guidance and advice

24%↑
Increase for low-income students who said after the course they understood the importance of speaking to professionals in a career that interests them

SKILLS FOR CONTINUING TO BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL

92%
Of roadtrippers agreed they had the ability to seek out role models and build social capital

24%↑
Increase for Latino and Hispanic students who agreed they have the ability to seek out role models and network
It has not only guided me but it also made me reflect about who I am, who the people are around me, and what’s the purpose in my life. It gave me knowledge of what I really want to do and how I can get there. It also showed that I’m not alone on this road.”
— Student, The Roadtrip Nation Experience

For me, the most impactful aspect of the road trip was my personal development. I became a lot more confident and happy with who I am and where I’m going in life. I didn’t know what I would do in the future (I still don’t know now), but I did know that whatever I ended up doing, it would be my own choice.” — Roadtripper

My students feel empowered by the lessons, and they look forward to challenging themselves to get out of their comfort zones. No longer is fear a valid excuse in our class—mainly because Roadtrip Nation provides countless examples of real success stories from people who conquered the same apprehension as my students. I also sense a purposefulness that my students have never exhibited at such a young age.” — Educator

Well-Being | Core Outcomes
Learners who took part in Roadtrip Nation programs reported a greater sense of purpose and comfort with who they are. They affirmed that their experiences positively impacted their mental health, and gave them more hope for the future.

How young people think about, explore, and experience careers during high school is formative. The OECD notes, “[I]t matters to their economic and psychological well-being and, in enabling progression towards higher paying employment, suggests a more efficient distribution of human capital across economies.” Roadtrip Nation programs were not specifically designed to address well-being, but it’s been notable that in short-term and long-term measures, learners reported positive impacts to their mental health, and a greater sense of hope, optimism, and purpose in their lives. And yet it makes sense that the accumulation of outcomes we’ve outlined in this report, taken together as a whole, support learners’ broader sense of contentment and comfort with who they are and their vision for their future.

**Validation, inspiration, and improved mental health**

93% of roadtrippers report that their life is in a better place after the road trip. Mental health is an increasingly discussed area of well-being, and roadtrippers who participated in Roadtrip Nation’s public television series overwhelmingly reported that the experience improved that aspect of their lives, with 86% reporting a favorable impact on their mental health. “I was never sure about what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go in life,” said one roadtripper, “but the road trip was a compass that showed me how to find my peace and gave me the opportunity to change direction.” Another roadtripper recounted a similar experience—and said that the road trip is what finally jolted them out of a long cycle of being uncertain about their future. “I joined the Navy at 18 because I didn’t know what I wanted to do in life. And I re-enlisted after four years because I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life. And then I re-enlisted again for six years. And then on this road trip, I figured out what I want to do with my life. Things are finally where I want them to be.”

Having the space to reflect on their career and future was a huge part of the road trip. One roadtripper noted, “My road trip gave me space to question who I am and how I want to live my life. Definitely one of the greatest gifts.” Nearly 2 out of 3 roadtrippers reported thinking about their experience once a month or more. But this high percentage of roadtrippers who reflect regularly on the impact of their trip is quite notable, as this data point includes roadtrippers who are 15 years beyond their road trip up through roadtrippers who hit the road only a year ago. As discussed in previous sections, much of this continued impact came from the validation roadtrippers gained through the stories of the people they met and talked to, who helped them feel that they weren’t alone.

That sense was also reflected in the stories and content captured during those experiences, and felt by Roadtrip Nation viewers in a study conducted by researchers at Texas Tech University. In response to the question of what they get out of the program, student viewers in the study felt that a major value of the content was narrative validation, the idea that “stories of others’ paths help them to find peace with, enjoyment in, and realization of the normalcy of their own career paths.” Additionally, the respondents cited inspiration, hope, and social inspiration, that is, “connecting with, learning about, or better understanding other people and their lives (with an emphasis on how career journeys unfold, how life improves, and how accomplishments are earned).”

**A greater sense of agency and purpose**

Cultivating learners’ confidence and feeling that they are driving their own lives strengthens their sense of self-efficacy and a growth mindset, empowering them to act with purpose. 96% of roadtrippers reported that the road trip had a positive impact on their sense of purpose. “Roadtrip Nation plucked me out of my ‘everyday’ and exposed me to so many different versions of what makes a good career,” one roadtripper reported, “but maybe more importantly, what makes a fulfilling life. Without that experience, I would not have taken risks or had the courage to pursue the things I have.”

This sense of purpose helped many roadtrippers take action after their experience. As previously noted, after the road trip, roughly 9 in 10 roadtrippers reported that they felt motivated to make things happen for themselves. One roadtripper noted, “After my road trip, I doubled down on the business I was working on thanks to my newfound sense of purpose. I eliminated imposter syndrome from my vocabulary, stopped comparing myself to others, landed features in publications, and it’s only up from here. I wouldn’t be where I am today without Roadtrip Nation.”

But even shorter interactions with Roadtrip Nation’s career discovery tools were impactful for learners’ well-being. One user of Career Finder reported, “[Career Finder] is a great way to find what is best for my future and the kind of job I can choose to be happy and live a comfortable life.” Another reflected, “I definitely think the Career Finder is one of the most important and useful tools in order to really get a good understanding of what any individual is passionate about. Knowing the specifics and what it takes to really pursue something that feels so far away is eye-opening and real.”
A common misconception around purpose is that it exists in greater quantities for certain jobs and pathways. For many roadtrippers, the experience also helped debunk ideas about whose work can be purposeful and meaningful. “The biggest impact had to be the effect it had on my self-esteem,” one roadtripper said. “Not having a four-year degree used to really bother me and had a negative impact on my self-worth. After speaking with people that are doing what they love without a four-year degree, I learned that there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. It’s entirely possible to live a life full of purpose while doing a skilled trade.”

Another roadtripper noted, “My road trip helped me see the value of other careers and the importance of giving adequate value to all of my interests in finding a path that was the best fit for me. My road trip also gave me the confidence to take risks and try things that weren’t always guaranteed to work.”

Hope and optimism for the future

In visualizing their future paths, learners developed a greater optimism for the future. After using the Roadtrip Nation course, an internal, rolling five year survey indicated a 15% increase in learners who reported that the future appears brighter than the past.¹⁰⁵ This number was more dramatic for first-generation college students, who experienced a 21% increase, and for Latino and Hispanic students, who reported a 23% increase.

In the Stanford study, the report went into more depth about students’ outlooks on the future, indicating positive shifts. One teacher from the study said, “A lot of our students are the first to graduate high school in their family, let alone go on to college. That’s kind of a scary time for them then. [Roadtrip Nation] helps them with that.”¹⁰⁶ 72% of students said that the course helped them think differently about their future, 71% said the course helped them feel confident that they can make good decisions about their future, and 73% reported that the course helped them have hope for the future and helped them think about things they need to do in order to accomplish their goals.

For roadtrippers, the effect on their sense of optimism for the future was immense. 86% of roadtrippers reported that after the road trip their future appears brighter than the past. (As a benchmark, in a recent Pew study 56% of adults say they are either very optimistic (12%) or somewhat optimistic (44%) about the U.S. in 2050.¹⁰⁷) “The road trip was a singular life experience for me,” one roadtripper said. “It gave me a renewed sense of excitement and momentum for my future. From start to finish, it was an adventure and set of challenges and experiences that I continue to reflect on 10 years later.”

Overall, the sense of well-being that participants in Roadtrip Nation programs experienced is notable because individual well-being also fuels action toward more collective well-being, driven by innovation, societal progress, and problem-solving that can be realized by a more engaged, confident, motivated generation of young people who will shape what’s to come for all of us. Making sure that each of them has access to the conversations, support, and resources that we know are critical for more equitable education and career outcomes is the first step toward a better vision of the future for all.
KEY FINDINGS: WELL-BEING

VALIDATION, INSPIRATION, AND IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH

86%
Of roadtrippers reported that the road trip had a favorable impact on their mental health

A GREATER SENSE OF AGENCY AND PURPOSE

96%
9 OUT OF 10
Of roadtrippers said the road trip had a positive impact on their sense of purpose
Roadtrippers reported that after the road trip they felt motivated to make things happen for themselves

MORE HOPE AND OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

15%↑
Increase in Roadtrip Nation students who reported that the future appears brighter than the past

86%
Of roadtrippers said that after their road trip the future appears brighter than the past
We are so incredibly grateful to the learners who have shared their experiences with us, and to the researchers who dedicated their time and resources to evaluating the core outcomes of Roadtrip Nation—and who shared recommendations to increase impact for the people we serve.

The themes that have been constant over these last 20 years also offer a map forward as we reflect on how and where we can best support learners in gaining exposure to possible paths and pursuing careers in line with their interests, strengths, and goals. As we look ahead, these are our main areas of continued focus:

**FOCUS AREAS FOR THE FUTURE OF ROADTRIP NATION**

**Centering learners' voices**
The people who should be at the center of conversations around what learners need to thrive are learners themselves. We will continue to be an organization that amplifies important stories and experiences, driven and told by the people who are at the center of those stories. The evaluations featured in this report show how much more impactful content and programs were when they connected to the interests and perspectives of the people who are most affected.

**Stories and narratives that advance equity**
The capacity to aspire—discussed at length in the OECD report “Career ready?”—is powerfully impacted by societal narratives about work and education, and what kinds of work and education different kinds of people are expected to achieve. Those narratives can affect learners’ ambitions, and ultimately, their education, career, and life outcomes. We’ll continue to prioritize stories that make different narratives visible—stories that expand possibilities for where interests can lead, and dismantle ideas, stigmas, and stereotypes that limit possibilities.

**Creating more opportunities to build social capital**
In looking back, we found that social capital is one of the most impactful and important outcomes in this report. That realization makes this a critical focus as we move ahead—especially alongside key insights from the Search Institute indicating that building social capital is associated with better youth outcomes, and that creating opportunities for social capital development can contribute to more equitable outcomes for youth and young adults of color and from low-income backgrounds.

**Representing the wide range of postsecondary paths**
Even before the disruptions of Covid-19, many learners, especially young people, were thinking more broadly and flexibly about their education journeys. That trend is only accelerating. In our view, all high-quality postsecondary pathways can be valuable, as long as they align with learners’ interests and goals for themselves. But before learners can make an informed choice, they need to see more stories that represent a diversity of pathways ranging from community college, work-based learning, four-year degrees, stackable credentials, certifications, and more.

**Measuring impact through ongoing evaluations**
Going back and reviewing the reports and data from our first 20 years has us reflecting on how formative the evaluations and research we’ve been so lucky to participate in have been. It is because we’ve been able to work with world-class institutions and researchers on these studies, many of which have been done in partnership with Strada Education Network and our funding partners, that we’ve been able to validate the impacts we’ve outlined here and more deeply understand where we can improve our work. Going forward, we’ll continue to work with Strada and our funding partners to prioritize impact measurement and opportunities for in-depth evaluations that help us double down on areas where we can support better outcomes for learners.
20% of roadtrippers said they were more confident exploring new opportunities on their career path (Clear Path Market Research, 2019) and in the Stanford report, 73% of students reported that they feel confident that they could achieve their goals (John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University, 2015).

2Students participating in Roadtrip Nation in all three schools...most frequently selected the ‘I can do better’ over all other response options...This corroborates their belief in their ability to make changes for themselves. (Education Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), 2012.)

2After the road trip, roughly 9 in 10 roadtrippers reported that they felt motivated to make things happen for themselves. (Clear Path Market Research, 2019)

2Ibid.

2Ibid.


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2Colony, Katie, “From career readiness to career optionality: A conversation with Anthony Mann,” Julia Freeland Fisher, Christensen Institute, March 2021.

2Ibid.

2Ibid.
ROADTRIP NATION’S THEORY OF CHANGE

KEY AUDIENCE

ACTIVITIES

OUTCOMES NEAR-TERM

INTERMEDIATE

PRIORITY AUDIENCE

Profile 1: In-system
US-based secondary (grades 6-12) & community college students who are students of color and/or low-income, inclusive of the BIPOC community

Provide facilitated learning experiences that provide life and career lessons:
- Project-based activities
- Facilitator capacity building
- Experiential activities - Events
- Experiential activities - Road Trips
- Licensed Digital Media

Self-efficacy

Understanding of own interests, skills, & talents

Knowledge of diverse career paths

Knowledge of career exploration & social capital building pathways

Identification of a designated career path and plan

Pursuit of post-secondary credentials, certificates, or experience career

Completion of credentials, certificates, or experience for chosen career

INTENDED IMPACT

Increased # of formerly at-risk young people who are gainfully employed in an interest-aligned career

LONG-TERM

Outgrowth of RIN Activities

A world in which the pursuit of an interest-aligned first career is celebrated and possible for youth from all walks of life

VISION

Guided by humanity, sustainable context

Profile 2: Out of System
US-based young people (ages 16-25) who withdrew from high school, student of color and/or low-income, inclusive of the BIPOC community

Providing self-guided learning experiences using materials that provide life and career lessons:
- Broadcast television
- Public Digital Media
- Print Literature

Increased acceptance among the general public that the pursuit of an interest-aligned career is a worthy pursuit and accessible to all

INTERMEDIATE

LONG-TERM
Roadtrip Nation is a nonprofit organization that humanizes career through stories. We're one part media company, one part career education organization, and one hundred percent mission-driven. We believe there's power in doing work that's true to who you are. That's why we've dedicated ourselves to helping people explore career possibilities that connect to their interests. We seek out inspiring individuals who've built lives around what they love, then share their stories through our award-winning documentary series on public television and an online video archive featuring thousands of conversations about struggle and success. We also provide a process for how to navigate the career journey, with a project-based course, career discovery resources, live events, and our New York Times best-selling career guide, “Roadmap.” Along the way, we've been supported by great organizations, foundations, and people who are passionate about making change in the world.

Roadtrip Nation is a part of Strada Collaborative, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to empower all learners—and those who serve them—by providing the critical resources, educational support, and career experiences that lead to equitable education and employment pathways.

To learn more, visit roadtripnation.com.