



INDIANA COMMISSION *for*
HIGHER EDUCATION

EDUCATION VALUE

Messaging Guide *2022*



WHY THIS GUIDE?

It is difficult to articulate the value of post-high-school education amidst growing skepticism of its worth and increasing concerns about its cost. Factors such as the hot labor market – where those without education after high school can earn a \$15/hour+ starting wage – and a rising culture of resistance to being told what to do add to the challenge.

The guide that follows offers you **five key pillars** for how to talk about education after high school with prospective students (high school and adult) who may be skeptical. Changing beliefs starts with changing the narrative, and the words and phrases you use are important.

Pillar #1: Embrace Individualism and Choice

Audiences want education after high school to feel like a choice that’s theirs to make. This is particularly true of high school students, who are set on forging their own path. Conversations should start with acknowledging the myriad options people have for their future, affirming their ability to choose, and nodding to some of the big barriers to pursuing post high school education. That will get them listening and open them up to hearing why education is one of the options they should consider.

LANGUAGE TO USE:	LANGUAGE TO AVOID:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you aren’t sure education after high school is right for you, you’re not alone.• Rightfully so, college can sound like an expensive choice, especially when you could instead be working and earning a paycheck.• There are many paths you can take, depending on what’s right for you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Higher education is the one thing that can give you the power to accomplish whatever you set out to do.• Choose education today, so you aren’t held back tomorrow.

Pillar #2: Expand the Definition of “College”

Students overwhelmingly associate education after high school with four-year degrees, which have a negative connotation for their cost and lack of perceived relevance. Rather than focusing intently on four-year degrees, instead present four-year degrees as one of many options for getting education after high school. And rather than using “college” as the catch-all for postsecondary education, use terms such as “education after high school” or “education opportunities after high school.”

LANGUAGE TO USE:	LANGUAGE TO AVOID:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can choose from options like career certifications, trade school, a 2-year Associate degree, or a 4-year bachelor’s degree.• Education opportunities after high school as the catch-all	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one.• “College” as the catch-all term for education after high school.

Pillar #3: Show That “College” Can Look Different

For those who are receptive to hearing more about four-year paths, it’s important to break down barriers to enrollment such as cost and flexibility. While people overwhelmingly associate college with an on-campus, full-time experience that costs \$200,000, we need to show there are different ways of doing college that make way for work, family, and other responsibilities.

LANGUAGE TO USE:	LANGUAGE TO AVOID:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• With many programs, you can learn at your own pace, taking as much or as little time as you need - and some programs are entirely online.• While a 4-year, in-person may be right for some, others are looking for something faster and more flexible.• Opportunities that meet the needs of people at all stages of their lives - including short-term, online, and part-time options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each year, Hoosiers with financial obligations, family responsibilities, and other challenges find success—providing an example for others.

Pillar #4: Talk About What Education Means For Today

Many of the current arguments for education beyond high school rely on data about long-term benefits such as higher lifetime earnings, better employment benefits, and more job security. These arguments largely fall flat because 1) they're too long-term to feel tangible, especially in competition with a job that leads to immediate earnings; and 2) despite the facts, people are ready to counter the data with anecdotes from their own lives (e.g., "My neighbor doesn't have a degree, and he's a self-made businessman who earns more than I do with my degree.") Instead, it's critical to talk about what education means for today in ways that resonate with our audiences. And, for an audience that feels as though opportunities have been closed off to them, the idea that education "opens doors" is immensely resonant.

LANGUAGE TO USE:	LANGUAGE TO AVOID:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No matter what you pick, you're becoming a stronger candidate for what's next, helping get your foot in the door to the career - and life - you want.• Education after high school expands what you're eligible for in the first place.• Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control, now and into the future.• You learn not just how to do one job, but how to apply a skillset to many jobs. That gives you the flexibility to make a change if you want down the line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one.• Roles that require education beyond high school also tend to be ones with benefits beyond a salary, like health insurance and paid time off.• In 2020, 60% of jobs required education beyond high school.• Employers across industries are demanding ongoing education.

Pillar #5: Tell Them There's Financial and Personal Support

Because cost is such a barrier to enrollment, it's critical to create a loud and consistent drumbeat for students that there are resources to make paying for education after high school manageable. Because these resources are myriad and complex to navigate, it's equally important to tell students there are mentors, organizations and others to support them in making these resources work for them.

LANGUAGE TO USE:	LANGUAGE TO AVOID:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more manageable. <i>(NOTE: The word manageable feels less subjective than affordable.)</i>• From finding programs that will help lead to the career you want to connecting you with the right financial assistance, there are mentors, counselors, and people who've been there before, who can help you navigate the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You can comfortably pay for expenses, like student loans, while saving for the future.• Each year, Hoosiers with financial obligations, family responsibilities, and other challenges find success—providing an example for others.

FINAL REMINDERS: THE THREE O'S

- **Be outright:** High school students are being inundated with messaging about college daily, many adult learners have had negative experiences with formal education, and even parents note that the state of education isn't the same as it used to be. So, acknowledging skepticism and telling it like it is from the get-go will keep them listening.
- **Be optimistic:** Positive framing does the most work for us. We're better served focusing more on doors opening WITH education beyond high school than doors closing beyond it. And avoid talking about "lifelong learning," which feels exhausting and overwhelming.
- **Be open-minded:** Suggesting that those who don't pursue education will eventually "fall behind" or lead a "simpler" life is seen as judgmental. Not to mention, it also contradicts anecdotal experiences of friends and family who've succeeded without formal education. Instead, emphasize choice, individualism, and many pathways that will help them create their own definition of success.

THE ELEVATOR PITCH

Imagine you're riding up an elevator with a prospective student and have 30 seconds or less to get them interested in considering education after high school. We've offered two examples below of ways into the conversation. These "elevator pitches" are designed to get people listening and nodding along.

Option 1

After high school, you decide what comes next – and there are endless paths you can take. But whatever you want to pursue, education can help open doors and expand options, today and tomorrow.

Option 2

Wherever you want to go, there's no one way to get there. Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control now and in the future.



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EDUCATION VALUE MESSAGING

	Principles	Do Say	Don't Say
<p>The What: Relevant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support individualism and choice. • Present multiple options, both within 4-year pathways and beyond them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “There are many paths you can take, depending on what’s right for you.” ✓ “You can choose from options like career certifications, trade school, a 2-year Associate degree, or a 4-year Bachelor’s degree.” ✓ “Many programs can be completed in as little as 2 to 3 semesters and are designed so you can balance them part-time or in the evenings along with a job.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ “Higher education is the one thing that can give you the power to accomplish whatever you set out to do.” ✗ “Choose education today, so you aren’t held back tomorrow.” ✗ “Employers across industries are demanding ongoing education.” ✗ “Lifelong learning is needed to keep up and prevent yourself from falling behind.”
<p>The Why: Valuable</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid a hard sell on long-term value, which invites pushback. • First talk about what education means for today, then pivot to what it means for tomorrow. • Highlight that education opens doors and keeps them open. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “No matter what you pick, you’re becoming a stronger candidate for what’s next, helping get your foot in the door to the career – and life – you want.” ✓ “Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control, now and into the future.” ✓ “You learn not just how to do one job, but how to apply a skillset to many jobs. That gives you the flexibility to make a change if you want down the line.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ “People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one.” ✗ “Roles that require education beyond high school also tend to be ones with benefits beyond a salary, like health insurance and paid time off.” ✗ “That means no matter who you are, there are opportunities awaiting you.”
<p>The How: Accessible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that cost is a challenge. • Highlight resources available to start the conversation. • Let audiences know there are people to help them navigate resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ “College can sound like an expensive choice, especially when you could instead be working and earning a paycheck.” ✓ “Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more manageable.” ✓ “There are mentors, counselors, and people who’ve been there before, who can help you navigate the process.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ “Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more affordable.” ✗ “You can comfortably pay for expenses, like student loans, while saving for the future.”





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