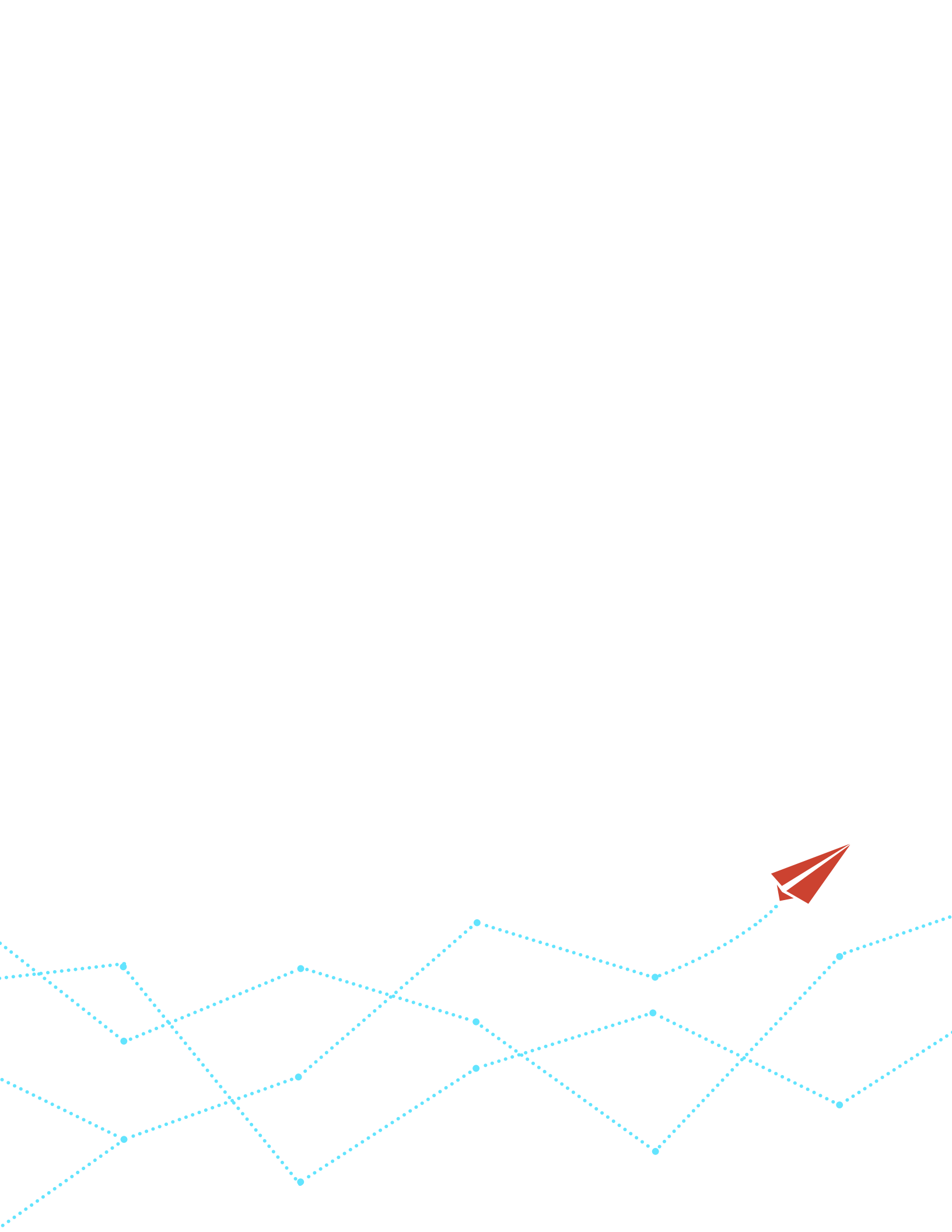




DURABLE BY DESIGN:

An Update on the High Demand for Durable Skills



Preface by Lightcast



AT LIGHTCAST, we recognize that skills are the currency of today's labor market – the most powerful way to connect people with opportunity, education with employability, and employers with the talent they need to thrive.

But too often, the spotlight only shines on the technical skills: those that are closely connected to the latest technology or emerging industry threatening to disrupt the world of work. And of course, that matters. In reality though, it's the timeless things that often matter most. And human skills – or, as America Succeeds calls them, “durable skills,” like communication, leadership, and problem solving – are no exception.

In fact, the rapid evolution of technology today actually amplifies rather than diminishes the need for durable skills. How do we know? The data shows it.

The Durable Skills Framework, developed by America Succeeds, is based on the set of durable skills identified in partnership with Lightcast as most prominent throughout the job market. Updated [Lightcast Data](#) continues to provide compelling evidence that employer demand for these skills is not only enduring, but growing across every kind of industry and occupation. In fact, some of the strongest growth in demand has occurred in highly technical fields like finance and engineering.

That insight, and the many others like it that you'll find in this report, is exactly why skills data matters. It helps us cut through assumptions and headlines to understand what employers actually value, and what students and job seekers need to succeed. By quantifying the importance of durable skills, this research can inform educators, employers, and policymakers as they work together to build clearer pathways to opportunity for all.

Lightcast is proud to support this important work and excited to amplify durable skills as foundational for long-term career success, and vital to the development of a future-ready workforce.

The Lightcast Team

July 2025

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Introduction



IN 2021, America Succeeds released a groundbreaking analysis quantifying the overwhelming demand for durable skills competencies like communication, leadership, critical thinking, and collaboration, across the U.S. labor market. At the time, 64% of job postings requested at least one durable skill, making clear that human-centered skills were no longer “nice-to-have” but essential for career success in every industry and region.

Today, that demand has only grown. What was true in 2021 is even more true today. Durable skills have proven to be not only enduring but also increasingly foundational in the economy.

Our updated analysis of nearly 76 million job postings from 2023-2024 reveals that durable skills are not just in demand; they are defining the future of work. Employers are now requesting these skills in 76% of all job postings, with nearly half asking for three or more. Eight of the top ten most requested skills in today’s labor market are durable skills - a marked shift that reinforces their enduring relevance even in technical and emerging sectors.

BASED ON THE EVIDENCE, WE BELIEVE THAT DURABLE SKILLS ARE:

- Essential for career success and economic mobility;
- Valued across industries and occupations, as they underpin leadership, adaptability, and collaboration in a changing economy;
- Future-proof competencies that are critical to humans flourishing in the age of AI and indefinitely into the future of work.

Compared to earlier data, we see significant increases in demand not only in traditionally human-facing fields like sales and management, but also in highly technical roles in computer science, engineering, and finance. Industries ranging from professional services to healthcare to manufacturing are elevating expectations around competencies like adaptability, collaboration, and metacognition — skills that are not easily automated and will only grow more critical amid rapid economic and technological change.

The accelerating demand for durable skills underscores why America Succeeds has continued to advance our durable skills work and work closely with states, districts, and employers to integrate these competencies into Portrait of a Graduate frameworks, skills-based hiring efforts, and broader education-to-employment pipelines. Ultimately, this initiative seeks to bridge the gap between education and industry leaders to ensure that every learner and earner can contribute to their local community and compete in the global workforce.

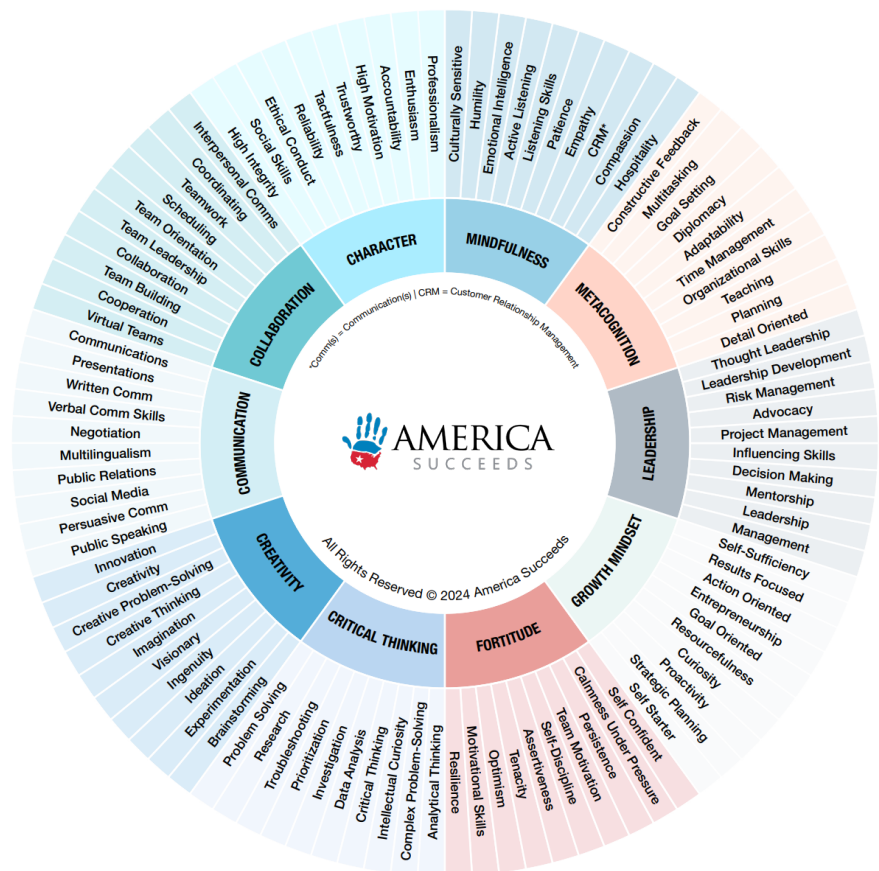
Defining Durable Skills



DEFINING DURABLE SKILLS

In an era when technical skills are evolving at an unprecedented pace, there is an important set of durable soft skills that last a lifetime. Durable skills include a combination of how you use what you know — skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity — as well as character skills like fortitude, growth mindset, and leadership.

1. **Leadership:** Directing efforts and delivering results
2. **Character:** Personal and professional conduct
3. **Collaboration:** Teamwork and connection
4. **Communication:** Information exchange and management
5. **Creativity:** New ideas and novel solutions
6. **Critical Thinking:** Informed ideas and effective solutions
7. **Metacognition:** Self-understanding and personal management
8. **Mindfulness:** Interpersonal and self-awareness
9. **Growth Mindset:** Improvement and aspiration
10. **Fortitude:** Constitution and inspiration



Key Findings + Comparisons

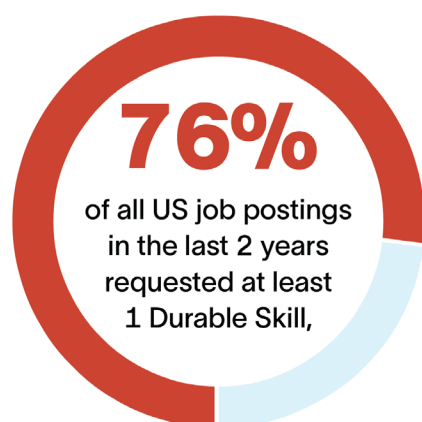


We defined
100 Durable Skills
grouped in
10 Competencies

Over
40M
US postings
requested
Communications

The **TOP 5**
Durable Skills
were requested
3.8x more than
the top 5 Hard skills

8 of the **10**
most-requested skills
were Durable Skills

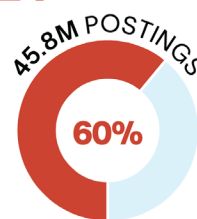


A MAJORITY OF US JOB POSTINGS REQUEST DURABLE SKILLS

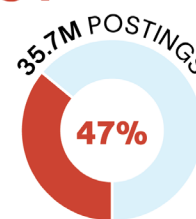
1+ Durable Skills



2+ Durable Skills



3+ Durable Skills



Nearly **36M** US postings
(47%) requested at least
3 Durable Skills



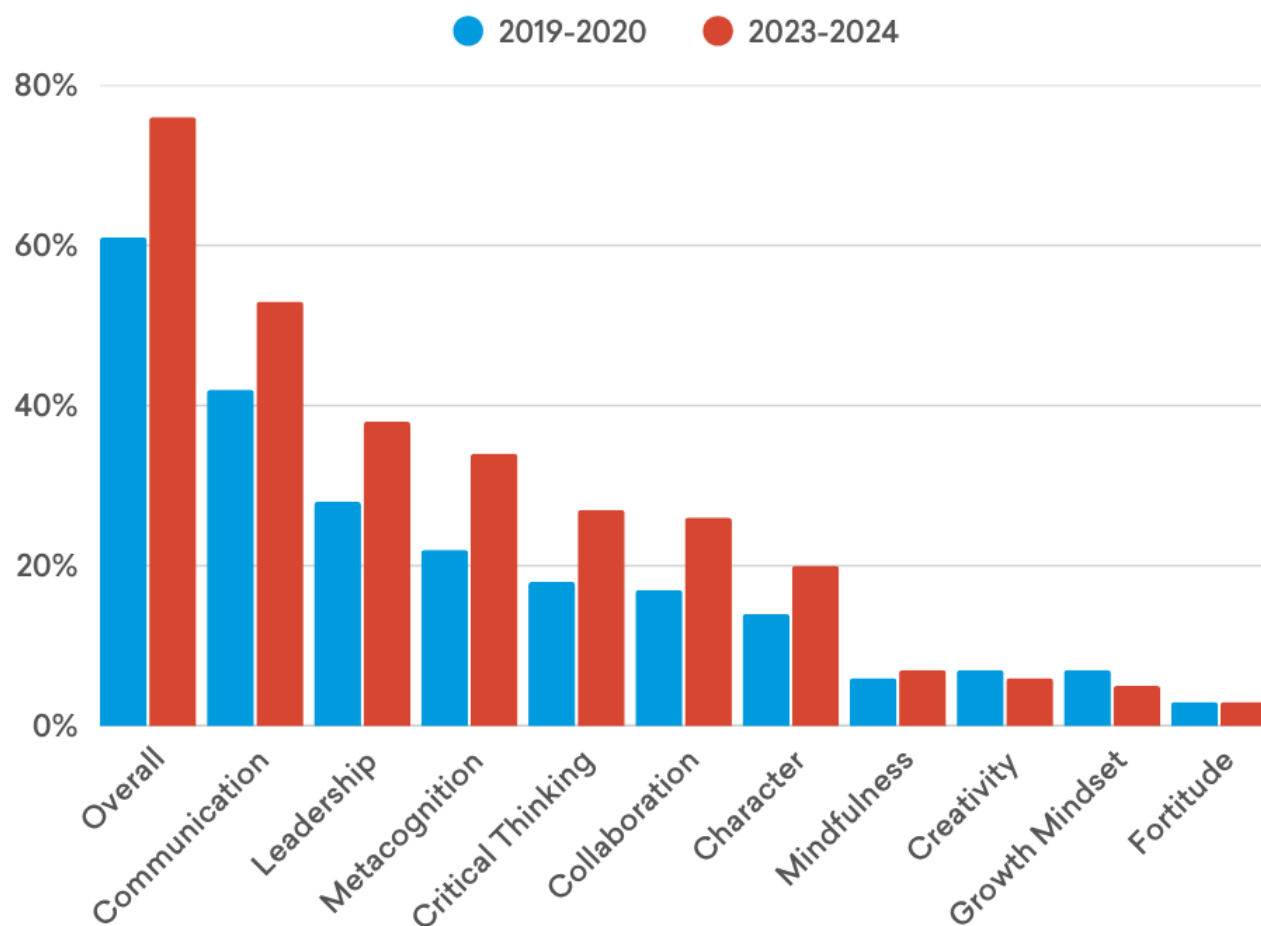
In evaluating data about Durable Skills, it is necessary to keep in mind that the data reflect language used in job postings; employers have adopted some standard language for common human competencies, such as Leadership and Communication, but others are often evaluated less explicitly during the interview stage of hiring. As a result, Durable Skills may be crucial and may not be proportionately represented in the data.

SOC-2	Occupation	At Least 1 Durable Skill	At Least 2 Durable Skills
11	Management	90.0%	80.2%
13	Business and Financial Operations	89.8%	80.4%
43	Office and Administrative Support	87.4%	73.5%
41	Sales and Related	87.4%	74.3%
15	Computer and Mathematical	86.8%	73.9%
17	Architecture and Engineering	85.9%	71.1%
55	Military-only	84.7%	70.5%
23	Legal	83.0%	70.1%
33	Protective Service	80.4%	65.3%
19	Life, Physical, and Social Science	79.9%	66.2%
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	78.6%	63.0%
25	Educational Instruction and Library	78.4%	58.5%
21	Community and Social Service	77.4%	61.2%
49	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	73.2%	53.4%
39	Personal Care and Service	70.8%	53.8%
51	Production	68.9%	48.6%
35	Food Preparation and Serving Related	68.3%	46.8%
37	Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	63.6%	40.1%
31	Healthcare Support	60.2%	39.4%
29	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	58.3%	39.6%
47	Construction and Extraction	56.0%	37.0%
45	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	55.0%	38.4%
53	Transportation and Material Moving	54.5%	35.1%

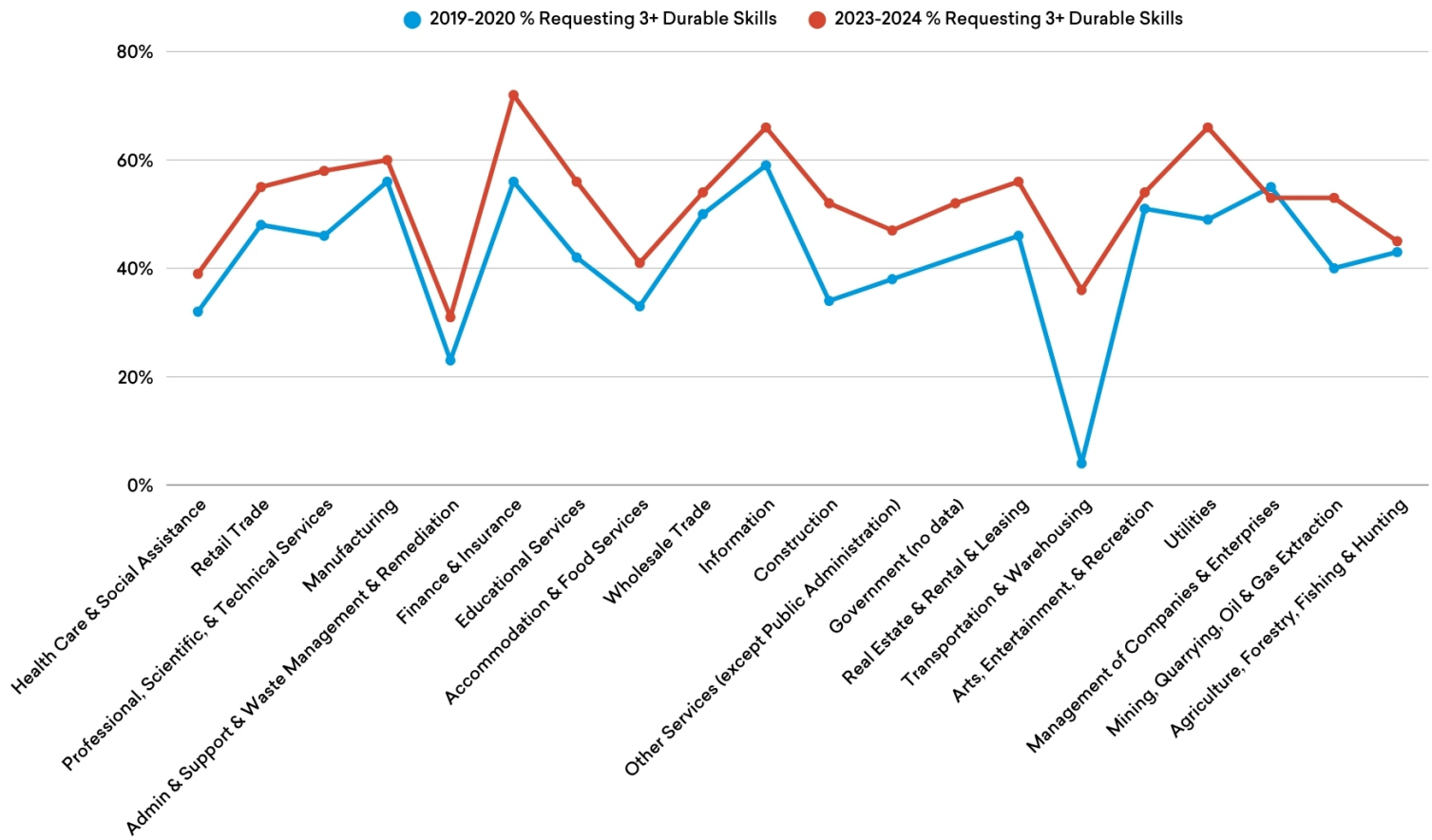
Source: Lightcast Job Postings

TOP TEN DURABLE SKILLS			
Skill Ranking	Durable Skill Keyword	Durable Skill Competency	# of U.S. Job Postings
1	Communications	Communication	26,207,969
2	Customer Service	Communication	19,748,162
3	Management	Leadership	17,531,154
4	Leadership	Leadership	11,656,642
5	Detail Oriented	Metacognition	9,454,288
6	Problem Solving	Critical Thinking	8,809,658
7	Writing	Communication	7,538,266
8	Planning	Metacognition	7,422,703
9	Interpersonal Communications	Collaboration	6,279,519
10	Coordinating	Collaboration	5,603,796

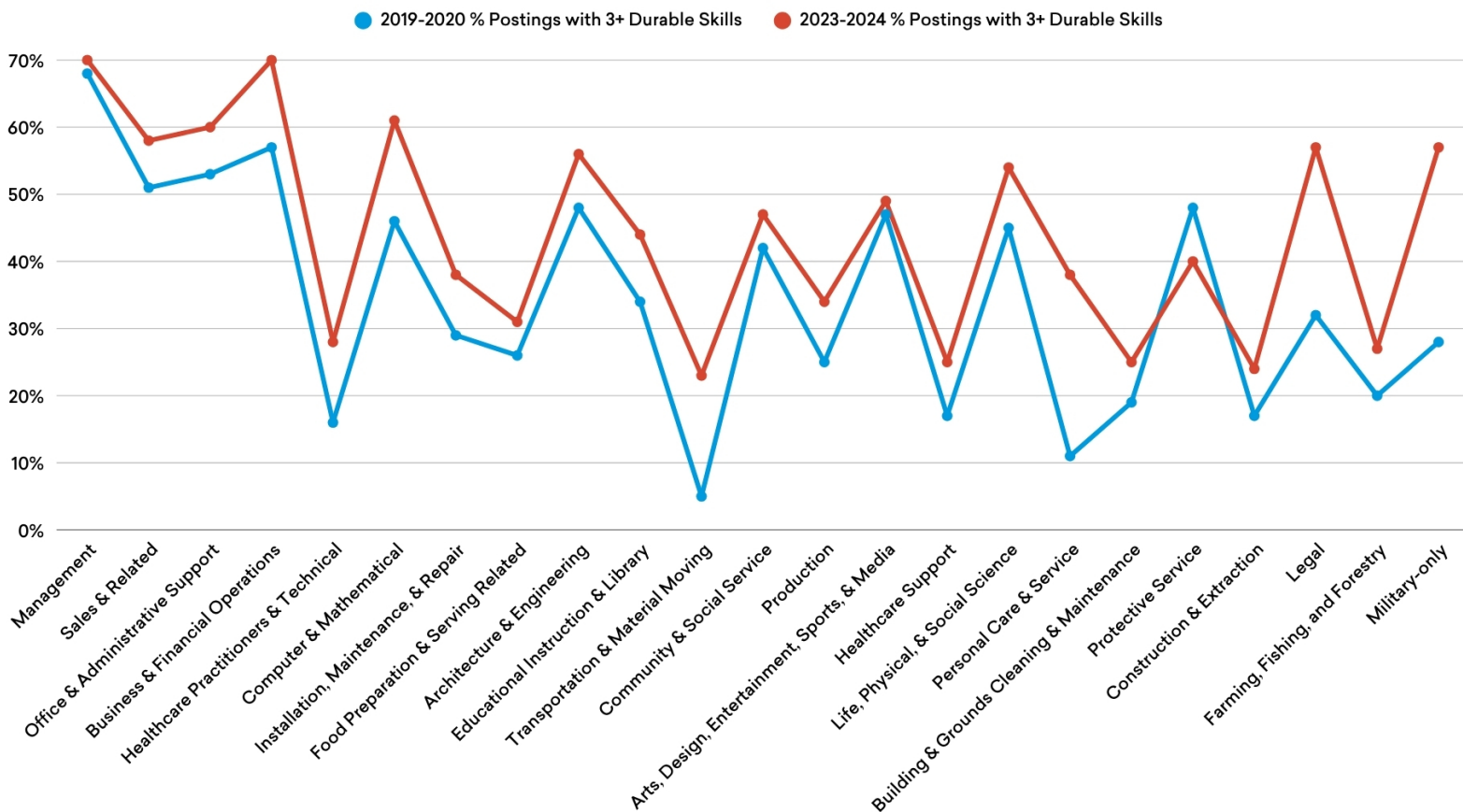
% OF JOB POSTINGS REQUESTING 1+ DURABLE SKILLS IN EACH COMPETENCY



% OF JOB POSTINGS REQUESTING 3+ DURABLE SKILLS IN EACH INDUSTRY



% OF JOB POSTINGS REQUESTING 3+ DURABLE SKILLS IN EACH OCCUPATION



Observations



THE DATA PRESENTED in this report affirms the powerful truth that durable skills are not only in high demand, but they are also redefining what it means to be prepared for the workforce. The patterns in hiring trends, industry expectations, and education modernization efforts all point to the same conclusion: communication, leadership, and other durable skills are the baseline for success across roles, sectors, and geographies. These skills are essential for accessing economic opportunity, universally valued across occupations, and uniquely resilient in the face of rapid technology change. As we look across industries and roles, our findings illustrate the rising urgency and transformative potential of durable skills in a modern, AI-influenced economy.

1. DURABLE SKILLS HAVE GAINED GROUND.

In just four years, job postings requesting at least one durable skill increased by 12 percentage points (64% to 76%). Those requesting three or more durable skills jumped 13 percentage points, from 34% to 47%. This sharp uptick is not just a momentary shift; it reflects a long-term transformation in what employers value. Durable skills are now embedded in hiring expectations across the economy. This trend mirrors global findings, such as the [2025 World Economic Forum Future of Jobs Report](#), which highlights that eight of the ten “core skills of 2030” fall under the category of durable skills ([WEF FOJ Report 2025, Core Skills in 2030](#)).

These capabilities are precisely what employers expect to grow in importance as technology evolves and AI becomes more integrated into the workplace. Durable skills are a central component of individual career development, and competence in these skills provides learners and earners with greater opportunity to access economic mobility, move between occupations and industries, and remain competitive as the workforce continues to be reshaped by AI and other emerging technologies.

2. HUMAN-CENTRIC SKILLS ARE OUTPACING TECHNICAL DEMANDS.

Eight of the ten most requested skills in U.S. job postings are durable skills. While technical skills remain important, particularly for job entry in specialized fields, they are increasingly seen as easier to teach or replace. In contrast, durable skills are harder to train and more predictive of long-term success. [Research](#) shows that promotion and retention decisions often rely more on an employee’s ability to communicate, collaborate, adapt, and solve problems than on their technical know-how.

Aside from technological competencies like AI skills, cybersecurity skills, and technological literacy, the WEF FOJ report shows that creative thinking, metacognitive skills, leadership, and growth mindset are the skills employers report will increase in importance the most ([WEF FOJ Report 2025, Skills on the Rise](#)). As technology advances, a wealth of technical skills that were once a key predictor of success in the workforce are becoming more supplementary to a wealth of durable skills that can be used across roles, occupations, and industries. Durable skills are the key to accessing economic mobility and upward career growth, which will not change anytime soon.

3. DEMAND IS SPREADING BEYOND TRADITIONAL ROLES.

Durable skills were once most associated with management and customer-facing roles. Today, they are just as likely to be required in technical, analytical, and professional occupations. Occupations and industries that have long been dominated by technical competency like Computer and Mathematical (61% of postings request 3+ durable skills) and Architecture and Engineering (56% of postings request 3+ durable skills), Finance and Insurance (72% of postings request 3+ durable skills), Information (66% of postings request 3+ durable skills), Manufacturing (60% of postings request 3+ durable skills), now show substantial demand. Even occupations that have historically been more human-centered, such as Legal (57% of postings request 3+ durable skills), have shown increased demand for durable skills, underscoring the broad applicability of durable skills across the economy.

This widespread (and growing) demand illustrates that durable skills are not just role-specific. Regardless of industry or level, today’s professionals are expected to demonstrate the ability to solve complex problems, communicate effectively, and lead through uncertainty. As more industries adopt skills-based hiring practices and as AI and automation transform routine work, durable skills will serve as a durable advantage for workers and companies alike. They are the connective tissue across roles, sectors, and states of career.

4. EMPLOYERS ARE MAKING DURABLE SKILLS A HIRING PRIORITY.

Employers are embedding durable skills into hiring and advancement. Large employers from global consulting firms, to health systems, and financial institutions are now designing job postings, performance reviews, and professional development programs around durable skills. This shift reflects both business needs and [employer recognition that durable skills drive team performance](#), leadership pipelines, and long-term organizational resilience. Companies like Deloitte, PNC, and Oracle include 3+ durable skills in the vast majority of job postings, signaling their commitment to hiring for capabilities that promote adaptability, leadership, and team effectiveness. This growing emphasis positions durable skills as essential infrastructure for how employers recruit, evaluate, and grow talent. It marks a shift beyond credentials to focus on what truly drives individual and organizational success.

5. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS MUST BE TRANSFORMED TO ENSURE LEARNERS ARE EMPOWERED WITH DURABLE SKILLS.

Education systems are starting to align, but more work is needed. K-12 and postsecondary systems are beginning to prioritize durable skills through initiatives like Portrait of a Graduate frameworks, employability skill standards, and career-connected learning models. Over 20 states have adopted or are developing such frameworks that emphasize durable skills. Some high-quality examples include [Indiana](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Utah](#). Many other states, such as California, Colorado, Montana, and Ohio, are directing school districts to locally develop their own Portraits of a Graduate and providing guidance and supporting resources to those districts. Yet, despite this momentum, most systems still lack consistent methods to teach, measure, and signal durable skills. Without clear frameworks, assessments, and accountability, students may graduate without ever being recognized for the competencies that matter most to employers.

Addressing this gap is urgent; the success of both individual learners and the entire American workforce depends on the ability of education systems to evolve in order to meet the growing demand for durable skills. Embedding durable skills into academic standards, teacher training, and accountability systems can ensure more equitable outcomes and better alignment between education and the world of work. America Succeeds and our partners are working to create [playbooks](#), [educator professional learning experiences](#), [technical implementation supports](#), and [career exploration courses](#) powered by our [Durable Skills Framework](#) that make much of this work more attainable around the nation.

6. DURABLE SKILLS ARE FUTURE-PROOF IN AN AI-DRIVEN WORLD.

As AI and automation continue to reshape the labor market, durable skills are emerging as the ultimate hedge for workers. While machines can process data, perform calculations, and even generate content, they cannot yet replicate human judgment, empathy, and ethical reasoning. Last year, David Meads, Cisco's top UK executive, [told Fortune](#) that "attitude and aptitude are more important than whatever letters you have after your name, or whatever qualifications you've got on a sheet." These skills serve as durable career capital that supports individuals through workforce transitions and economic shifts. Durable skills represent the capabilities that will only grow more important as the economy evolves. They are what allow humans to [work alongside technology](#), not be replaced by it. As roles become more hybrid, blending technical tasks with interpersonal collaboration and problem-solving, the ability to use durable skills is becoming more essential. In short, durable skills are indispensable. They represent a safe investment for learners, a smart strategy for employers, and a clear path to building a more resilient, equitable, and future-ready economy.

7. SHIFT TOWARD SKILLS-BASED HIRING IS ACCELERATING.

The rise in durable skills demand aligns with the growing momentum behind skills-based hiring practices. Employers are reassessing degree requirements, focusing on demonstrated competencies rather than credentials alone. Initiatives like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's T3 Innovation Network, the National Governors Association's work on Skills-Driven States, and multiple federal and state-level skills-based hiring initiatives are driving this change. These efforts represent an apt response to critical [workforce skills gaps](#), and our work is driven by the need for greater alignment between skills development in education systems and the skills that employers desire most. As Joe Zidle, Chief Investment Strategist at Blackstone, put it, "Blackstone isn't hiring [employees] for these 'hard skills,' which they can learn. Instead, they are hired for their 'soft skills,' like responsibility, leadership, teamwork" ([Business Insider](#)). Durable skills serve as a common currency within skills-based hiring models, and America Succeeds Durable Skills Framework provides language for evaluating talent based on performance rather than proxies.

8. DURABLE SKILLS OFFER A PROMISING PATHWAY FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY.

Durable skills present a powerful lever for upward mobility. When education and hiring systems recognize and reward these competencies, they open doors to high-quality jobs for individuals who may not have traditional credentials or access to elite institutions. Unlike highly specialized technical certifications that may quickly become obsolete, durable skills offer long-term relevance across sectors and occupations. This statement is reinforced by [research from McKinsey Global Institute](#), which shows that time spent using higher cognitive skills and social emotional skills increases consistently across wage quintiles. Those skill categories are proxies for many of the durable skills at the center of our research. Employees in occupations that make up the top two wage quintiles each spend 64% of their time using skills in those categories (while the lowest wage quintile spends less than half as much time using durable skills). Intentional development and validation of durable skills can be a game changer. These skills allow individuals to demonstrate workplace readiness, even in the absence of a degree or extensive work history. That's why efforts to embed durable skills into K-12, postsecondary, and workforce systems are critical to disrupting cycles and promoting economic mobility.

Conclusion

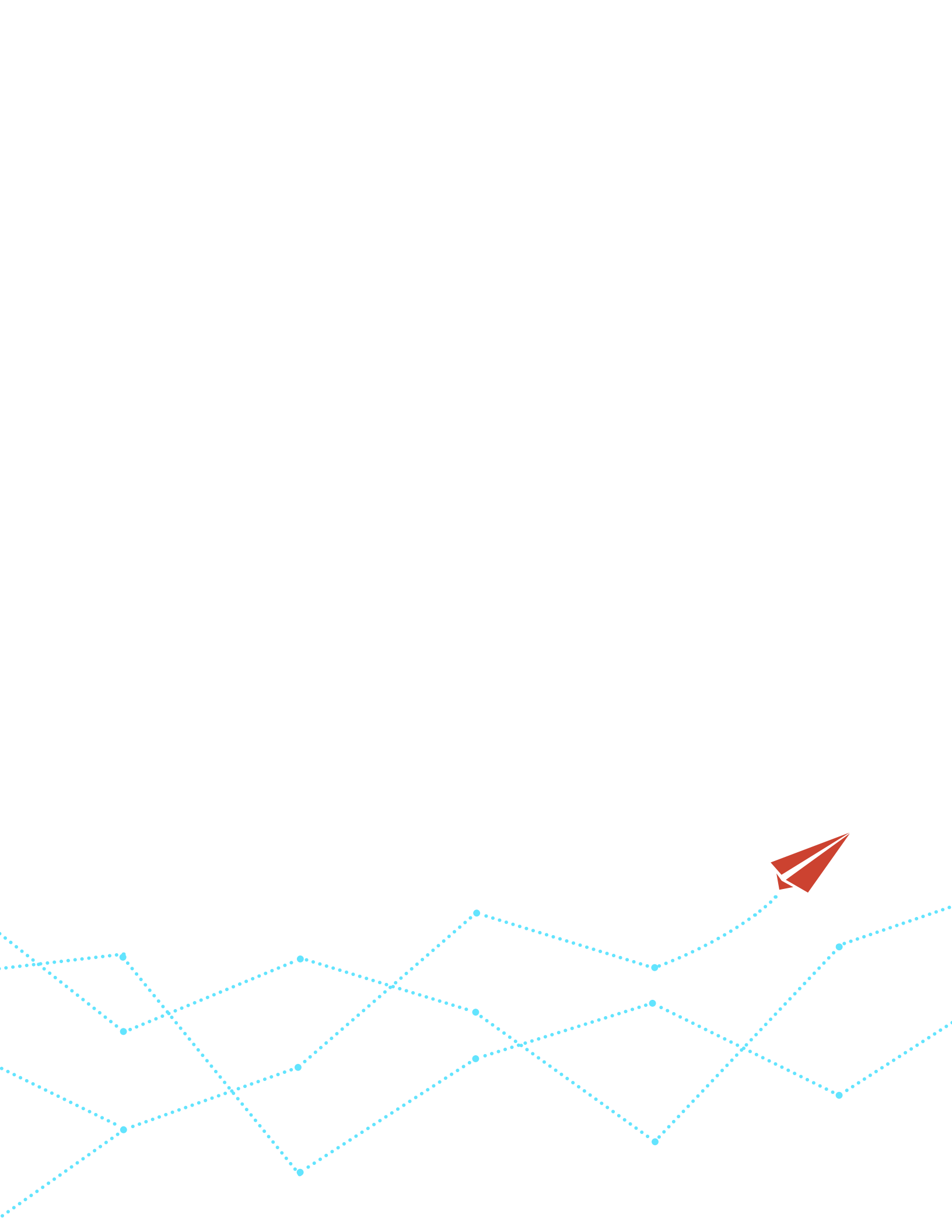


THE DATA IS CLEAR: Durable skills are no longer optional. In today's labor market, 76% of job postings request at least one durable skill, and nearly half ask for three or more. As industries evolve, technologies advance, and job requirements shift, employers continue to signal that the ability to think critically, collaborate effectively, and lead with confidence is essential.

This surge in demand, from human-facing roles to highly technical fields, confirms what our durable skills work has long asserted: Durable skills are critical for economic mobility, professional resilience, and organizational success. As the economy transforms, these skills are the connective tissue between education and employment.

For America Succeeds, this reinforces our commitment to embedding durable skills in education and workforce systems. Through our work with states, postsecondary institutions, and employer partners, we are helping build systems that ensure all learners and earners have the opportunity to develop, demonstrate, and validate durable skills at scale.

The future of work will belong to those who are not only technically proficient but also able to communicate, collaborate, adapt, and lead. Durable skills remain the most future-proof investment we can make in learners, earners, and the broader economy.





America Succeeds is a national nonprofit that works at the intersection of education and workforce development to advance economic mobility.

By providing cutting-edge research, strategic advocacy, cross-industry partnerships, and practical solutions, America Succeeds bridges the gap between education and industry leaders to ensure that every learner and earner can contribute to their local community and compete in the global workforce. Our employer-informed, research-backed insights and solutions are shaping the future of education and the workforce of tomorrow, today.



Lightcast is the global leader in labor market intelligence, empowering smarter decisions for businesses, education institutions, and governments worldwide.

With the world's most comprehensive database—spanning over 2.5 billion job postings, 800 million career profiles, and 100+ government sources—Lightcast delivers unparalleled insight into skills, jobs, companies, professional profiles, and workforce trends across 160+ countries. Our proprietary taxonomies, advanced AI, and expert guidance transform complex data into clear, actionable intelligence.