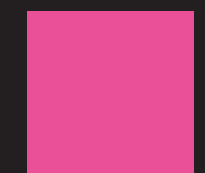




Building a Modern Apprenticeship Program to Drive Diversity and Innovation

Adobe's open-source playbook for reskilling and upskilling nontraditional talent



Why build an apprenticeship program? To strengthen your company through diversity.

At Adobe, we believe that our employees are our most valuable assets—and that their diverse perspectives drive our success.

If your company has a similar philosophy, you're probably making strategic investments like we are to advance employee diversity and inclusion. One investment that's delivered great results for us is our Adobe Digital Academy. We built it to attract diverse candidates from nontraditional career backgrounds and to help them transition to careers at Adobe.

In the spirit of open-sourcing, we've created this playbook to help interested companies get their own apprenticeship programs off the ground. And although the Adobe Digital Academy focuses on teaching skills for design and technology jobs, we believe our model can serve as a guide for any company looking to train and hire diverse talent.

We hope our best practices help you on your journey to greater diversity and innovation.



Donna Morris
Chief Human Resources Officer and EVP, Employee Experience
Adobe



Introduction.

Adobe Digital Academy

The program provides bright, motivated people from nontraditional backgrounds an alternative and accelerated pathway into tech careers. Adobe works with nonprofit and education partners to identify and train career switchers from a variety of fields.

THE DIGITAL ACADEMY IS A THREE-PART PROGRAM CONSISTING OF

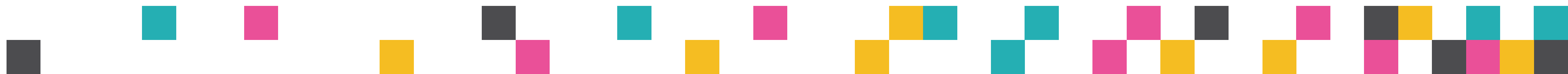
- 1) Education
- 2) Experience
- 3) Full-time role

We provide candidates with scholarships and living stipends to help them gain an education for a new career, and then we bring them on board as apprentices with the goal of helping them gain full-time employment at Adobe or another company.

HISTORY

In March 2016, the Adobe Digital Academy launched with General Assembly and five scholarship students in the San Francisco Bay Area. After an intensive web development training, four of the students became apprentices and all were hired full time as entry-level software engineers. In 2019, the program has expanded to 100+ scholarships and includes data science and UX/UI design, and it's now based in multiple offices across the U.S.

Just like with our software development, we use a rapid prototyping process to build, test, iterate, and continually improve the program.



First, let's talk about the real-world benefits.

A healthier bottom line

Diversity of thought and experience leads to innovative problem-solving. By using the Adobe Digital Academy to bring diverse talents into our design and engineering teams, we've been better able to create products that meet the needs of our diverse global customers.

Enhanced team morale & company culture

When Digital Academy graduates join us as apprentices and full-time employees, they bring new energy to our teams. They enthusiastically commit to making the most of their new opportunities, and they create an environment that's inclusive and accepting. They also give back by volunteering and advocating for change in a way that makes us healthier as a company. Long-time employees who work with apprentices and new hires also find new purpose in their mentorship and team-building roles.

Better lives & stronger communities

Many of the bright, motivated people in our program come from under-resourced communities. Our academy graduates significantly boost their earning potential, and that brings economic benefits and opportunities to their families and communities as well.

96%

retention rate for
Digital Academy
hires

50%

promoted within
their first year
on staff

**From \$30K
to \$100K**

average annual pay increase for
an Adobe Digital Academy hire

"As product managers, we're always trying to develop a really strong sense of empathy and understanding of the customers who are experiencing our software. That's why it's essential to have multiple, diverse perspectives on our team."

Mark Nichoson
Principal Product Manager, Next-generation Creative Solutions
Adobe



Here's how we do it: The Adobe Digital Academy program process.



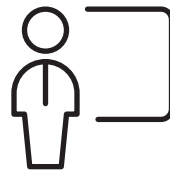
Step 1

Determine talent needs



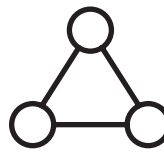
Step 2

Identify program partners



Step 3

Train & educate candidates



Step 4

Manage apprenticeships



Step 5

Transition to full-time roles

Critical foundations

As our program has evolved, we've identified the following phases as key to our success:



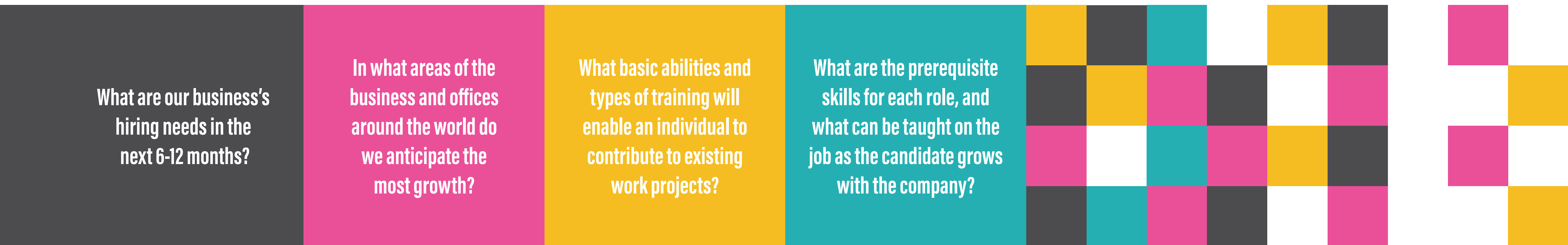
Step 1

Determine your talent needs.

- Align with business hiring demands
- Establish strong partnerships
- Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

Start by identifying open and future roles within your organization and the basic know-how needed for those roles. Work closely with your hiring managers to determine the foundational skills that will enable candidates to contribute and grow with the team. Remember that after the training, candidates will continue to learn on the job as part of their apprenticeships.

In our case, we ask questions like these:



Creating new roles

If entry-level roles don't already exist in your organization, you may want to consider creating some. While this potentially represents a big change to your hiring process, it will enable you to accommodate less-experienced talent from your program. Then you can provide on-the-job training and mentorship to continually raise their skill levels.

Teams that want to participate in the apprenticeship program should be sure to include new headcount as part of their regular planning process.

Step 2

Identify program partners.

Building an apprenticeship program takes committed teamwork from partners both inside and outside your company. Before you begin, you'll need to establish the following relationships and get everyone on board:

External partnerships

EDUCATION PARTNERS WHO CAN PROVIDE ACCELERATED TRAINING

When evaluating potential education partners for your apprenticeship program, review their curricula to see how well the skills they teach map to your needs. Determine whether potential education partners are aligned with your company's values. Look at how accessible their educational material is for career-switcher applicants. And be sure they're transparent about student outcomes—they should make data about their graduates' job-placement performance publicly available.

ASK:

Does the partner have the expertise and infrastructure to support nontraditional, diverse candidates? Can career-switcher candidates easily onboard into the course material? And can they effectively learn all the material over the duration of the course?



Align with business hiring demands

Establish strong partnerships

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

EDUCATION PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

General Assembly is a global education company focused on closing skills gaps for individuals and employers. Their programs are designed for adult learners who are looking to change careers and pursue professions in software engineering, user experience design, and data science.

After piloting the Adobe Digital Academy with a few different education partners, we chose to work with General Assembly for three key reasons:

1

They have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion.

2

They offer a wide range of courses and have a proven ability to adapt to changing industry needs.

3

They've designed their curricula to make it feasible for nontraditional candidates to switch careers.

PROMOTING THE PROGRAM

Once you've selected your education partner(s), help them get the word out about your apprenticeship program. At Adobe, we've held launch events and information sessions; created marketing materials detailing the benefits and process; and recruited program graduates, hiring managers, and HR reps to help act as ambassadors.

Step 2 *(continued)*

Identify program partners.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS WHO CAN HELP RECRUIT AND SUPPORT DIVERSE CANDIDATES

Local nonprofits, job centers, community groups, and even community colleges can help you get the word out to promising candidates for your apprenticeship program. They can also support candidates once they begin the application process.

You can find great partners by looking to organizations your company has sponsored with grant money or volunteer time. Your education partner may also have recommendations. The key is to look for organizations that focus on early skill-building for your identified job roles, or that help people already in the job market transition to new careers.

Adobe's community partners include:

Upwardly Global, a nonprofit working to eliminate employment barriers for skilled immigrants and refugees and help integrate them into the professional U.S. workforce.

Hack the Hood, a nonprofit that introduces low-income youth of color to careers in tech by hiring and training them to build websites for real small businesses in their own communities.

Digital NEST, a nonprofit dedicated to providing young people in underserved communities with equal access to technology and resources.

Align with business hiring demands

Establish strong partnerships

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

“Our community partners help us identify high-potential candidates in the local areas where Adobe operates. They also guide candidates through the application process and support them as they make their way through the education program, apprenticeship, and beyond.”

Liz Lowe
Innovation Lead, Social Impact
Adobe

Step 2 *(continued)*

Identify program partners.

Internal partnerships

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY TEAM FOR FUNDING AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Partner with the corporate team that's spearheading your company's diversity or social impact efforts. That team should be able to help you secure funding for apprenticeship program scholarships, whether through their own budgets, marketing budgets, or even executive sponsorships. Plus, these teams often have established relationships with community nonprofits to help you find the right external partners.

HUMAN RESOURCES TEAM FOR HELP WITH THE HIRING PROCESS

This team can help you determine your talent needs as detailed in Step 1. Work with HR's business partners to get in touch with hiring managers, identify open roles, and plan for new headcount as needed. And when it's time to bring your program graduates on board as apprentices, you can tap into HR's existing university internship program for best practices and support.

HIRING TEAMS FOR CURRICULA REVIEW AND GRADUATE SUPPORT

These are the people who will work directly with your program graduates every day, so you should partner closely with them to understand their needs. Enlist them to review your education partners' curricula to be sure it either provides a 1:1 match to the skills they need or it teaches foundational skills that will enable continued learning on the job.

Hiring partner buy-in is essential to your program's success. And once you have your first success story, these partners can champion the program to other hiring managers to help accelerate its growth.

Align with business hiring demands

Establish strong partnerships

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive



Step 2 *(continued)*

Identify program partners.

COMMUNICATIONS TEAM TO BOOST PROGRAM VISIBILITY

Your communications pros can help raise the profile of your apprenticeship program both inside and outside your company. By writing blog posts, social media posts, press releases, newsletters, and more, they can help you find potential hiring managers, program applicants, community and education partners, and more.

EMPLOYEE NETWORKS TO HELP GRADUATES ACCLIMATE AND ENGAGE

Internal networks help apprentices and new hires find community and feel at home within your company. By connecting them with employees who have similar backgrounds, identities, and interests, these networks foster inclusion, provide mentorship and support, and drive retention.

Adobe's employee networks include:

- AccessAdobe
- AdobeProud
- Adobe & Women
- Asian Employee Network
- Black Employee Network
- Hispanic & Latino Employee Network
- Veterans Employee Network



Align with business hiring demands

Establish strong partnerships

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

“The Adobe Digital Academy became my first family in the tech industry. (Now I also have the Latinx Employee Resource Group and my team at Adobe.) Without the support, inspiring trailblazers, mentors, and raw/honest conversations, this would have still been possible but it would have been a challenging path instead of an enriching one. I have been inspired over and over again by those before me and those after me to own my identity, my success, and my commitment to inclusion.”

Melisa Im
Digital Academy graduate
Software Developer, Creative Cloud
Adobe



Step 3

Train & educate candidates.

Establish strong partnerships

Foster a growth mindset & provide support

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

Screening applicants & awarding scholarships

The education phase begins with selecting the most promising candidates from your applicant pool. At Adobe, our education partners do the first round of application screening, and then our HR and Corporate Social Responsibility leads conduct in-person interviews and make the final selections.

Since candidates won't necessarily have the standard work experience and education, it's important to establish appropriate selection criteria. Remember to look at candidates holistically, and try to evaluate them based on the opportunities they've been afforded versus any set path or traditional success milestones.

At Adobe, we look for individuals who have at least 2-5 years of work experience, broadly defined as nontraditional experience that shows growth in a particular area. For example, candidates can be career parents, veterans, or former teachers transitioning into tech. We also look for candidates with demonstrated financial need—those who wouldn't be able to make the career transition without scholarship support.

We have five criteria for our Adobe Digital Academy scholarships:

1. DEDICATION TO A CAREER SWITCH

The applicant has strong reasons for wanting to make a career switch. They demonstrate their passion for learning and show that they've been reading up on the industry and using free resources to start building skills in the field. Great candidates have an online portfolio of work they've done, displaying a passion that drives them to pursue their own ideas and learn by doing.

2. A GROWTH MINDSET

The applicant demonstrates that they can receive and integrate feedback with self-awareness, and they understand the importance of continuous learning.

3. GRIT

The applicant has overcome a number of challenges through perseverance and dedication to growth, and demonstrates the ability to continue to tackle difficult situations.

4. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The individual has answered application questions in a clear and concise way with few errors, showing attention to detail and pride in their work.

5. OVERALL POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS

The applicant seems well-positioned to succeed in the scholarship program as well as in an Adobe apprenticeship and full-time position. They have a clear vision of the future and a deep sense of purpose, and they embody Adobe's core values: genuine, exceptional, innovative, and involved.

“Throughout the program we work closely with candidates, mentors, and hiring managers to emphasize a growth mindset and an individual's potential to keep learning. We focus on feedback as an opportunity for continual growth.”

Liz Lowe
Innovation Lead, Social Impact
Adobe

Step 3 *(continued)*

Train & educate candidates.

Funding scholarships & stipends

In order to bring in the highest-potential talent and serve career switchers from all backgrounds, we recommend providing scholarships that cover the full cost of the education program. And since training often requires a full-time commitment for a number of months, we also recommend giving your scholarship winners a stipend to help with living expenses.

Adobe Digital Academy scholarships range from \$10,000 to \$15,000, depending on the program. Stipends are calibrated to each geography's cost of living. Scholarship funds go directly to our education partner, and stipends are processed by our education partner but go directly to the students.

Support during the education phase

While your scholarship students work to complete their education programs, it's important to help them build community. When they feel connected to one another and to members of your corporate team, they'll be more likely to stay motivated, ask for support when they need it, and successfully complete the program.

At Adobe, we invite students to local Adobe offices for regular group lunches, visits, and tours. We also set up a dedicated Slack channel so they can easily communicate with and support one another. We talk openly about mental health, and outline strategies for success and identify key resources for support.

Establish strong partnerships

Foster a growth mindset & provide support

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

TOP STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING STUDENTS

Adobe Digital Academy students come from all walks of life and have diverse professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and career trajectories. In working with adult learners, General Assembly has deployed a number of strategies to ensure that students are set up for success before, during, and after the program. These supports are critical when working with adults from underserved and overlooked communities.

Deliver contextualized learning. From day one, students participate in contextualized learning, approaching it as a professional would approach their job. Students apply their learning immediately and reinforce it through pair programming exercises, group projects, and cross-functional collaborations.

Lead with empathy. Making a big bet on a career change is risky and uncertain. While General Assembly's programs are rigorous and demanding, their instructors, career coaches, and support teams take a student-centric approach that meets students where they are and supports them through the highs and lows of their educational journey.

Provide ongoing feedback. Support students' growth by giving them ongoing feedback on how they're performing in the course. Share this feedback with hiring managers in order to determine apprenticeship placements.

Step 4

Manage apprenticeships.

When your students have completed their training, mobilize your internal partners to help place them in apprenticeships and support them as they begin working in a new professional environment.

Matching graduates to apprenticeships

Use the feedback you've received from your education partners to determine which teams might be a good fit for each apprentice. Follow your existing best practices for university intern hiring—align with dates and programming, and follow established interview processes.

At Adobe, we set up virtual interviews for graduates to meet hiring managers, and then we follow up with a "mutual matching" process that allows hiring managers and candidates to rank their top choices. Then we have another interview round between graduates and hiring managers so they can have more in-depth discussions about the specifics of the role, team dynamics, and expectations.

Once graduates are offered apprenticeships, you can get them up to speed using your standard intern onboarding or new-hire processes.

Foster a growth mindset & provide support

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

HIRING MANAGER TOP TIPS

1) Start apprentices with a non-critical path project to alleviate any of the pressure and stress that would result from a hard deadline. It's important for new hires to get a few wins under their belts to help reduce any feelings of impostor syndrome.

2) Encourage new hires to dig for answers before reaching out for help, but at the same time not to stay stuck for too long. It's a balance between grit and humility. A supportive team will always want to help those who've shown they tried to help themselves first. The quality of the answers a new hire gets will depend on the quality of the questions they ask, and that will be determined by how much work they put in before reaching out.



Step 4 *(continued)*

Manage apprenticeships.

Supporting apprentices to ensure their success

Take a multidimensional approach to supporting and guiding your apprentices so they make a smooth transition from trainees to valued team members. Consider setting up the following four support programs:

MENTOR PROGRAM

Pair each apprentice with the following mentors:

- A **technical mentor** to help with continual skills development.
- A **business mentor** from a relevant employee network—like the Black or Veterans Employee Network—to help the apprentice feel included and engaged.
- If possible, a **graduate mentor** who's been through the program and can help the apprentice get acclimated socially, culturally, and professionally.
- Once an apprentice has been hired full-time, a **senior level professional mentor** to help them understand paths for career progression and continuing education.

Foster a growth mindset & provide support

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

At Adobe, business mentors attend training and then provide guidance to apprentices via emails and bi-weekly meetings. They also introduce apprentices to others in the employee network and invite them to attend Adobe for All events so they feel a sense of community and have an opportunity to grow their professional networks.

If you'd like to be connected with Adobe Digital Academy mentors for advice and support as you launch your own apprenticeship program, please contact us at academy@adobe.com

Step 4 *(continued)*

Manage apprenticeships.



Foster a growth mindset & provide support

Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

Growth mindset training

Adobe partnered with [Paradigm](#), a diversity and inclusion consulting firm specializing in growth mindset, to design and administer trainings for candidates, hiring managers, and mentors. The training highlights the importance of continuous learning and its effect on success. According to Dr. Carol Dweck, people with a growth mindset “believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.” By exploring strategies for fostering the growth mindset, you can help your apprentices quickly learn from their mistakes and build confidence.

In our growth mindset training sessions for Adobe’s hiring managers, we address:

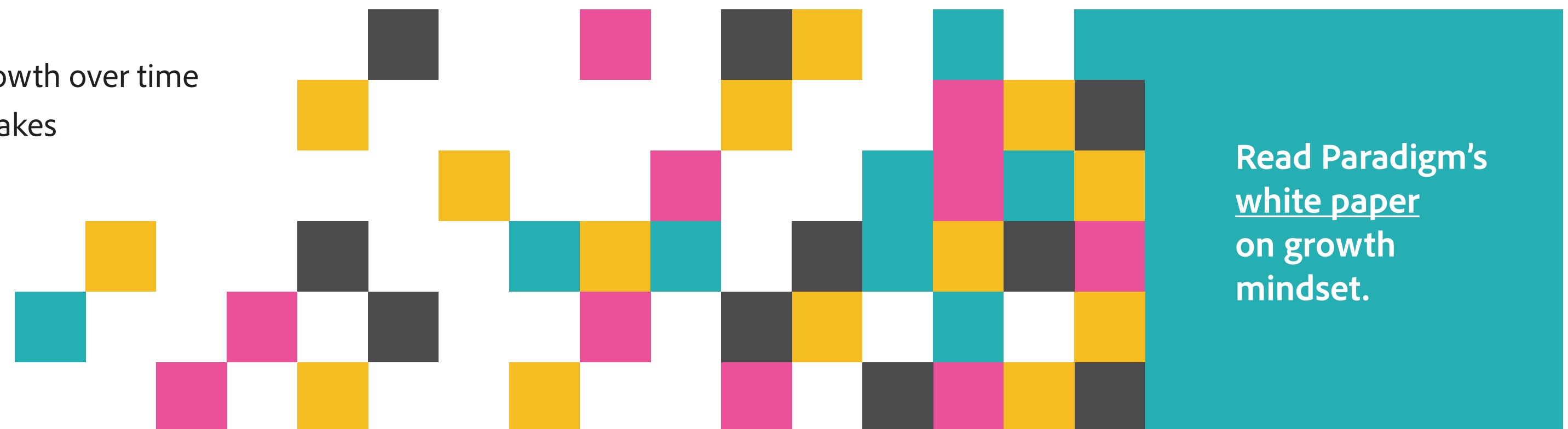
- **What is a growth mindset and why it matters**
- **Strategies for hiring managers to nurture a growth mindset in apprentices, including:**
 - » Setting learning goals with them and checking in on progress
 - » Giving consistent and growth-oriented feedback that focuses on growth over time
 - » Valuing mistakes and sharing how you learned from your own mistakes
 - » Rewarding apprentices for trying new things
 - » Using growth mindset language
 - » Sharing examples of challenges and how people overcame them
- **Creating an action plan with the apprentice that lays out their commitments to the team**

Community support

Schedule regular lunches for apprentices, set up dedicated communication channels via Slack or email, hold events to bring apprenticeship alumni together with new apprentices, and have frequent check-in meetings between your program manager and your apprentices to make sure the transition is going well.

Mental health support

Create a list of company resources that are available to help apprentices manage any mental health challenges they may encounter that affect their work or home lives. Your HR team should be able to help you identify support mechanisms, such as employee assistance programs that offer free counseling sessions and/or legal advice.



Step 5

Transition to full-time roles.

Once your participants have finished their apprenticeships, most if not all of them will be ready to move into full-time staff positions. We recommend setting up the following programs to ensure successful transitions:

CAREER COACHING

Bring together mentors and the apprenticeship program manager to help apprentices find their ideal roles and prepare them for interviews. Keep in mind that they may look for roles outside as well as inside your company.

ENGAGING HIRING MANAGERS

Get the word out to hiring managers and talent teams across the company to let them know about the candidates who've just completed their apprenticeships. New entry-level job opportunities may appear at any time, so you'll want to make sure everyone is aware of the skills and experience apprentices bring to the table.

EXECUTIVE SUPPORT

See if you can bring executives on board to invest in an apprenticeship graduate by sponsoring a new entry-level role. Do a mini-campaign to encourage executives to see the long-term benefits for the company's bottom line and its goal of fostering diversity and inclusion.



Foster a growth mindset & provide support

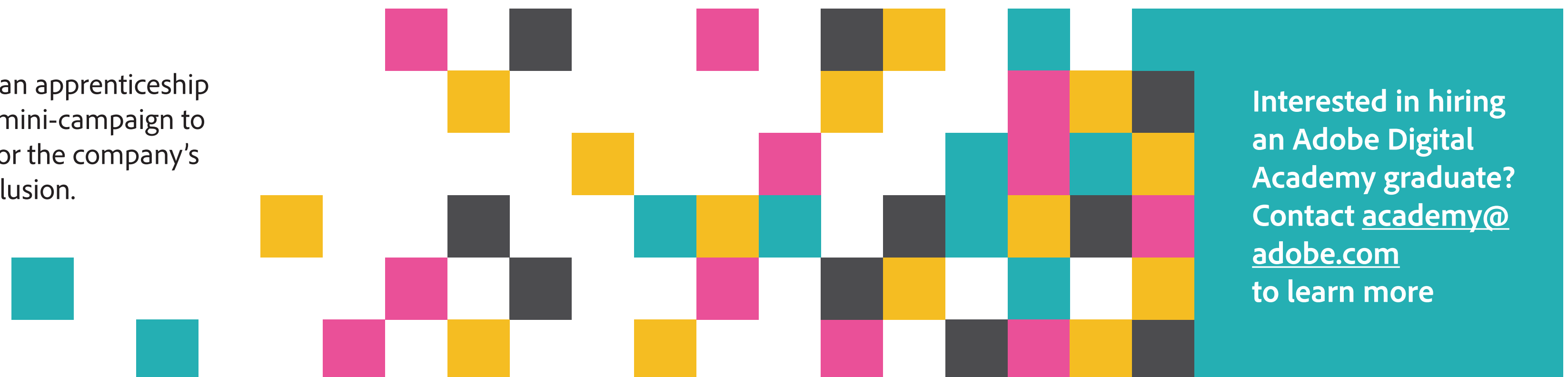
Continually evolve the hiring process to make it more inclusive

LEARNING AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Make sure your new hires are aware of your company's continuing education benefits, whether those involve attending internal training sessions or getting tuition reimbursement for working toward a degree. Also, be sure new hires understand career pathways so they can more efficiently advance their careers within your company. Support those who want to stay involved by giving them opportunities to mentor, volunteer in the community, and speak publicly about their experience. We believe that apprenticeship graduates who have the foundation of a growth mindset can continue to learn and evolve their careers as the business grows.

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS OR OTHER COMPANIES

If you can't find an internal role to fit a talented apprentice, encourage team members to reach out to their customer and professional networks. They may be able to find opportunities for full-time positions at other companies.



Interested in hiring
an Adobe Digital
Academy graduate?
Contact [academy@
adobe.com](mailto:academy@adobe.com)
to learn more

Scaling for growth and evolving for success.

Once your apprenticeship program is up and running, check in frequently with your internal and external partners as well as your program participants and graduates to make sure the program is meeting everyone's needs. Use feedback to iterate and improve the program as you go. With clear processes in place and some initial success stories to inspire your team, it should be easy to scale as your talent needs grow.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

If your company decides to pilot an apprenticeship program, please contact us with any question and/or share your feedback with us. We'd love to hear about your experiences so we can continue to learn and evolve our own program.

Contact us at academy@adobe.com

