

Helping Survivors Navigate Online Education and Training Opportunities

COVID-19 has reshaped the world in many ways – necessary safety measures have led to job losses, school closures, and significant impacts on businesses and industries. With historic levels of unemployment, many job seekers are “upskilling”, or building new skills to become more competitive within the labor market, or advance in or change their career. Many education and training programs offering opportunities to build or improve skills have had to move online due to the pandemic and many new programs are emerging to help job seekers upskill and improve their employment prospects. However, not all opportunities are beneficial and some are even predatory. So how can you help determine the good programs from the bad?

Here are some important questions to help guide survivors of human trafficking and other forms of gender-based violence as they consider enrolling in an online program:

What skills or credentials are needed for their chosen career path?

Does the survivor need to complete a GED or attain technical skills such as learning how to use Microsoft Excel or learning how to weld? Find out more about job requirements by reviewing job postings or visiting **O*Net Online** (www.onetonline.org) to identify the skills survivors already have and the skills they need to develop for different jobs.

O*Net Online is a tool created by the U.S. Department of Labor to provide job seekers and workforce development professionals with the information to explore a variety of careers.

Who is offering this education or training program?

Consider the person, institution, or organization providing the course. Is this an individual making personal profit who claims to be an expert? Or is this an academic

institution or non-profit organization? Are they funded and thus supported by [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) which supports workforce development programming under the U.S. Department of Labor or other trade association? To learn more about WIOA, visit: [Opportunities for Survivors of Human Trafficking through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\): A Primer](#).

Is it accredited?

Accreditation means a program meets certain educational standards determined by either the [Department of Education](#) or the non-profit [Council for Higher Education Accreditation](#). Accreditation demonstrates that a degree program is legitimate and recognized by the industry. Programs that are not accredited are not eligible for [federal financial aid and may not satisfy the educational requirements necessary for some jobs](#).

Does the training result in an industry-recognized credential or certificate?

Employers look for [industry-recognized credentials or certificates](#) when reviewing job applications. These credentials are established by employers within specific industries to show that an individual has the basic skills needed for a specific job. Look for accreditation or endorsements from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), National Career Technical Education Foundation (NCTEF), National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), or other professional and trade associations.

What are the eligibility requirements?

Does the program require certain citizenship status or do they also accept individuals with U or T visas or Certification Letters from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services? Do they bar individuals with prior arrests or criminal records? Are there previous levels of education, degrees, or certifications that must be completed prior to enrolling?

Note: Education and training programs funded under WIOA are open to foreign national survivors of human trafficking with T visas or Certification Letters from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Does the program require basic literacy and core skills and/or provide non-English alternatives?

What are the literacy and core skills requirements (topics such as basic reading, writing, simple math, etc.) for this online opportunity? If the program requires a level of core skills, do they offer any precursor courses, videos, or learning opportunities to eventually meet those requirements?

Does the program require the survivor to speak and/or read English? Does the survivor have Limited English Proficiency (LEP)? If so, does the program offer the opportunity in other languages than English? Any program funded (partially or fully) by the federal government must provide accessible language alternatives to English in the requested language as mandated by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Does the survivor have reliable access to technology and basic tech literacy?

Does the survivor have the necessary technology to participate in the online training – for example, sufficient bandwidth for video meetings or required software? Does the institution subsidize or provide help accessing technology and Wi-Fi? Does the survivor have the skills necessary to navigate the internet and Microsoft Office Suite including Word and Excel? Look to [local digital literacy organizations](#) to help improve [access](#) to and comfort with technology.

Does the learning structure match the individual's learning style?

What is the pace of the course? Are classes live and interactive or are classes pre-recorded? Is learning based on group work or more independent? Are there opportunities to interact with the instructor one-on-one? How much time will it take to complete the program?

While some skills are able to be learned via online programs some will require in-person, hands-on instruction and/or training. Will the course have an in-person component, and if so, what safety measures has the program put in place?

Does the program have demonstrated results?

Look for completion rates to determine how many students successfully complete the course as well as employment rates among graduates. Look for reviews but be cautious of any testimonials highlighted because often only the positive reviews are shared. In addition, be wary of programs that guarantee employment – how do they ensure employment? Do they work with specific employers? Is there a timeframe in which employment is guaranteed?

What is the cost?

Is there a cost to apply? Are there additional fees beyond enrollment such as purchasing books? Is the program eligible for [federal financial aid](#) or Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) training scholarships? Consider the technology costs needed to enroll such as having a laptop and reliable broadband connection.

Effectively Comparing Programs

All of these programs have different skill needs, learning methods, costs, and eligibility requirements that can be overwhelming to compare against each other in order to help a survivor find the right fit. This process can be daunting for many especially if you are unfamiliar navigating O*Net or the American Job Centers website. Using a simple chart to compare programs can help distill information in one place and make it more accessible for a broad range of survivors to understand how these programs fit their wants and needs.

For example, the chart below looks at three different online “upskill” opportunities with varying costs, requirements, digital literacy skills, and outcomes for someone who is interested in upskilling in retail and customer service. If this person is interested in learning basic skills and terms, Alison or Free Retail Training might be a good fit. However, if the job seeker wants a certificate in the retail industry, RiseUp would be more beneficial. **Download an Upskill Comparison Chart [here](#)** to utilize in your own research.

Online Program Comparison Chart

Online Program	Questions	Notes on program
Alison Course Focus: Retail Location: United States <i>A collection of free online courses on a variety of topics focusing on customer interaction and math skills.</i>	Skills or Credentials needed?	Core math skills and core reading skills.
	Who is offering the program?	A private for-profit company.
	Is it accredited?	No
	Result in credential or certificate?	Yes, but have to pay to receive it.
	Any eligibility requirements?	None
	Literacy required and/or offered in other languages?	Literacy: required Offerings in other languages: Yes- English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese (Brazilian)

Online Program	Questions	Notes on program
	What tech access is needed?	Internet access and access to a computer, laptop, or tablet.
	What is the learning structure?	Self-paced individual modules with quizzes to test knowledge.
	Program results?	No concrete outcomes, but learners state they have increased confidence and believe it helped give them a competitive edge. Learn more: Graduation Outcomes
	Cost?	Free; but must pay to receive a certificate or diploma ranging from \$27.00-\$279.00.
<p>RISE Up Training Course Focus: Retail Location: United States <i>An in-depth course on foundations of retail, customer service, and business decisions.</i></p>	Skills or Credentials needed?	Must be enrolled in school or training program or must be employed. Must be in good standing with an affiliated institution.
	Who is offering the program?	The National Retail Federation, which is a private non-profit.
	Is it accredited?	No
	Result in credential or certificate?	Results in industry-recognized credentials and certifications: (1) Customer Service and Sales, (2) The Business of Retail, and (3) Retail Management
	Any eligibility requirements?	Must be 15 years of age.

Online Program	Questions	Notes on program
	Literacy required and/or offered in other languages?	Literacy: Required Offered in other languages: No
	What tech access is needed?	Access to internet and computer, laptop, or tablet. Knowledge of how to access a learning management portal.
	What is the learning structure?	All online and can be done in two ways: 1) Individually self-paced (11 hours per credential) 2) Classroom: teacher led, group work, more structured times. (28 hours per credential)
	Program results?	None listed online- large focus on testimonials.
	Cost?	Costs for program range between \$135- \$175 per credential, which includes textbook, online course, and final exam. Other costs include: \$25 to retake final exam per credential. Scholarships are available to cover some of these costs.
Free Retail Training Course Focus: Retail Location: United States <i>Free online courses that focus on retail safety,</i>	Skills or Credentials needed?	None needed
	Who is offering the program?	The Retail Learning Institute, sponsored by Coca Cola
	Is it accredited?	No

Online Program	Questions	Notes on program
<i>food preparation, client interaction, and supermarkets. Has courses available in multiple languages.</i>	Result in credential or certificate?	No
	Any eligibility requirements?	None
	Literacy required and/or offered in other languages?	Literacy Required: Yes Offered in 31 other languages: Arabic, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Persian, etc.
	What tech access is needed?	Access to a computer, phone, or tablet and internet; familiarity with learning management systems.
	What is the learning structure?	Self-paced with quizzes and videos.
	Program results?	None found.
	Cost?	Free

These are just few questions to help survivors make an informed decision as they explore online opportunities to build or enhance their skills. For more support and guidance, contact your local [American Job Center](#) (AJC), which provides free education, training, and employment support services. AJC navigators can help identify available online opportunities and support survivors as they pursue their career interests.

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