

# Micro-pathways Explained

Micro-pathways will be an important bridge to the future in this new agile and uncertain age

## Why Micro-pathways?

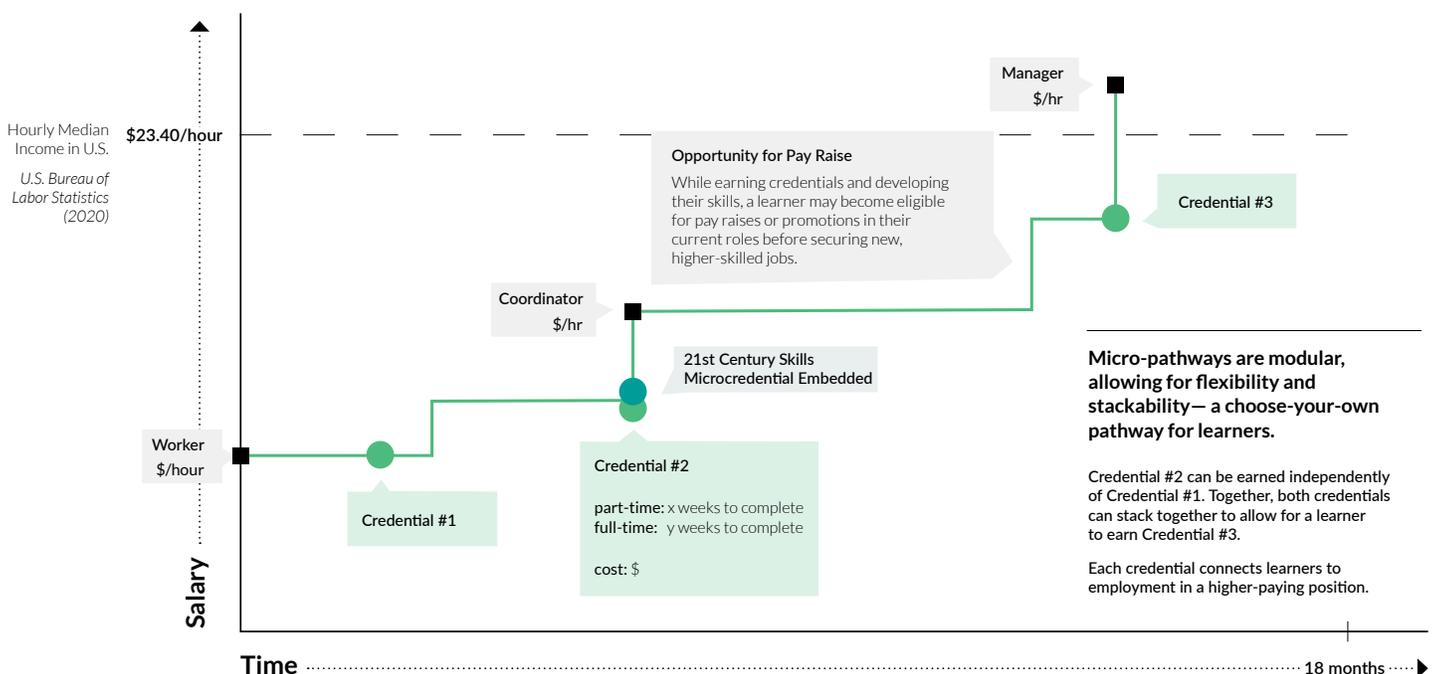
You've heard Udacity and EdX (two learning platforms) recommend nano-degrees. You may have heard that the number of "micro" credentials on offer has doubled in the past year to more than 700,000. Certificates and non-degree programs are the fastest growing learning offerings at community colleges over the last year. These are all attempts to break down degrees into targeted units of learning. And units that name the skills employers are asking for in job postings. But even the community colleges offering them believe we all need a more user-friendly and explainable way to organize and stack these options for learners.

At the Lab, we define a micro-pathway as "two or more stackable credentials that can be packaged as a validated market signal connecting learners to employment in high growth careers."

It is most important as a kind of subway map to show consumers where they can go to hop on a reliable transport to marketable skills. It shows the stops along the way, the transfer stations, the fastest route, a destination, and other places they might go if they change their mind along the journey. For a high school student, it is critical to be able to test different skill-building journeys, but to understand how they might link together into a degree.

As we speak, billions of dollars are being invested by companies hoping to win parts of the race shifting us all toward a skills-based economy. Artificial intelligence, precision data skills assessment, virtual reality training environments. At the heart of this, the part providing navigation, relevance and motivation for the learner, will be that subway map of micro-pathways.

## Example Pathway



## Defining Criteria

We see five key data points that a quality micro-pathway must address to help learners navigate the rising sea of opportunities as colleges, employers, content providers rush to fill the “if-not-degree-now-what” space.

1. **Verified regional data confirms salary increases:** If this is a “stack” of two to three credentials or certifications, each one must demonstrate a reasonable salary bump toward median wage income or higher.
2. **Can weave school and work together:** As 70% of college learners are working at least half-time, it’s essential that micro-pathways can be completed in parallel to work, or even through the workplace (as we are designing with several partners).
3. **Stackability:** that those skills “stack” towards a degree and/or recognized industry certifications in a portable way (which means you can earn some skills with one provider and others with the next provider and not have to start over).
4. **Fast, with milestones:** the credential can be earned quickly. Meaningful, salary- bumping milestones, toward a recognized pathway credential that can be earned in nine to 18 months.
5. **Includes 21st century skills:** as the liberal arts degree loses influence, we must still bring credentials for critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving into the shorter-term pathways. These skills improve hire-ability across all jobs and are the most critical for moving up a career ladder to management.

## Micro-pathways in Response to COVID-19

Coronavirus gives us the moment to put a stake in the ground and clarify for high school, community college students, or any younger or older adult who wants to upskill, what is the new ticket to their American Dream. Roughly 60% of Americans say they have lost hours or their jobs entirely, according to a new Strada tracking poll. And many say they would hope to reskill to a different career entirely.

We feel particular urgency to design through this crisis with underserved populations, as COVID-19 is leaving a devastating wake of rippling impact for them. And going back to college, which has been a safe harbor in previous recessions, doesn’t feel safe because of rising costs, tenuous savings for middle and lower income learners, and frankly, the relevance and length of many degree offerings.

**We’re working with community colleges, employers, and workers to build new earn-and-learn micro-pathways.**

Get an inside look on our on-the-ground work—delivered right to your mailbox.

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Learn more on our website  
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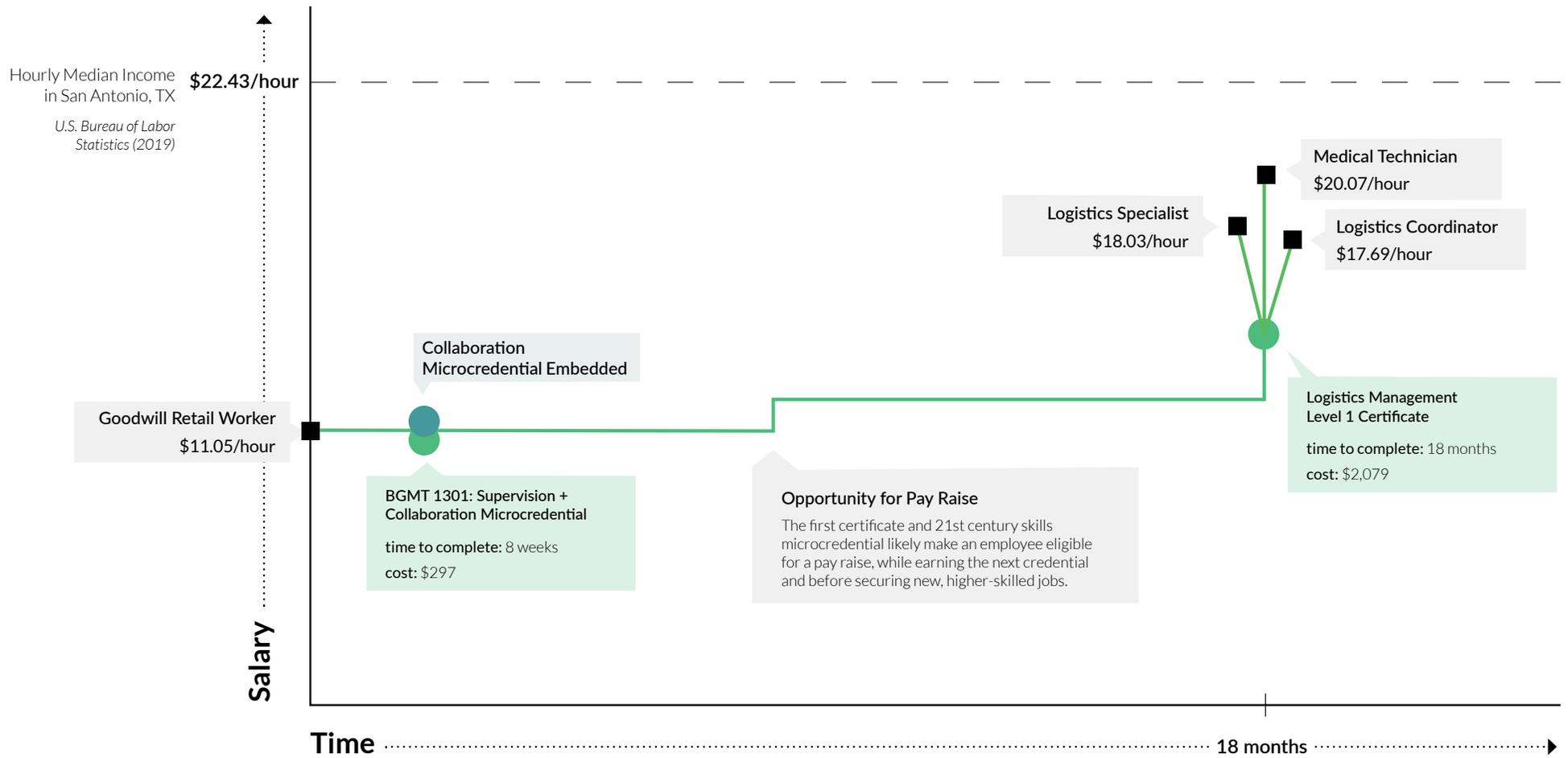
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# Logistics Pathway / Working Full-time

Developed with Goodwill San Antonio for Employees in San Antonio, TX



# Healthcare Pathway: Associate Supervisor / Full-time Enrolled

Developed with Virginia Western Community College for Learners in Roanoke, VA

