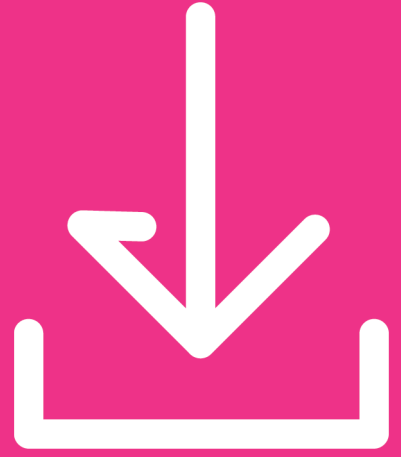




DLC

Impact and Outlook Report

What the pilot cohort achieved and where the program goes next, built with the partners helping to shape it.

CONFIDENTIAL. DO NOT DISTRIBUTE.

A Note on This Report

This Impact & Outlook Report is shared in confidence with our Program Partners, the Digital Leadership Alliance, and the organizational sponsors who have supported the program to date. It is embargoed and not for public distribution. The impact findings will be published in our public edition at a later date; the outlook that follows will not. The plans, timelines, and direction shared here are early-access, and intended only for you.

We're glad to share this first edition with everyone who has helped get us here, with our thanks. As the program grows from broad public support toward sustained partnership, our Impact and Outlook Reports will become a benefit for our Alliance members and Program Partners (we would love for you to be among them). In the meantime, we ask that you keep this report within your organization and treat its forward-looking content as confidential.

One Cohort. Global Impact.

The DLC Leadership Program completed its pilot cohort in the spring of 2026. The program delivered free, evidence-based certification to digital community leaders across six continents and 20 countries. Graduates of the program steward online communities reaching more than 200,000 members. Over the pilot's expedited timeline of six weeks, the participants collectively completed more than 4,000 lessons spanning nine topics: self-care; de-escalation; operational security; bystander intervention; creating community codes of conduct; preventing online and offline harm; creating player facing resources; culture setting; and ethical leadership.

200K+

community members reached*

20

countries, 6 continents*

4,000+

lessons completed*

48

completed the full program

40

completed the full program
plus pre- and post-assessment

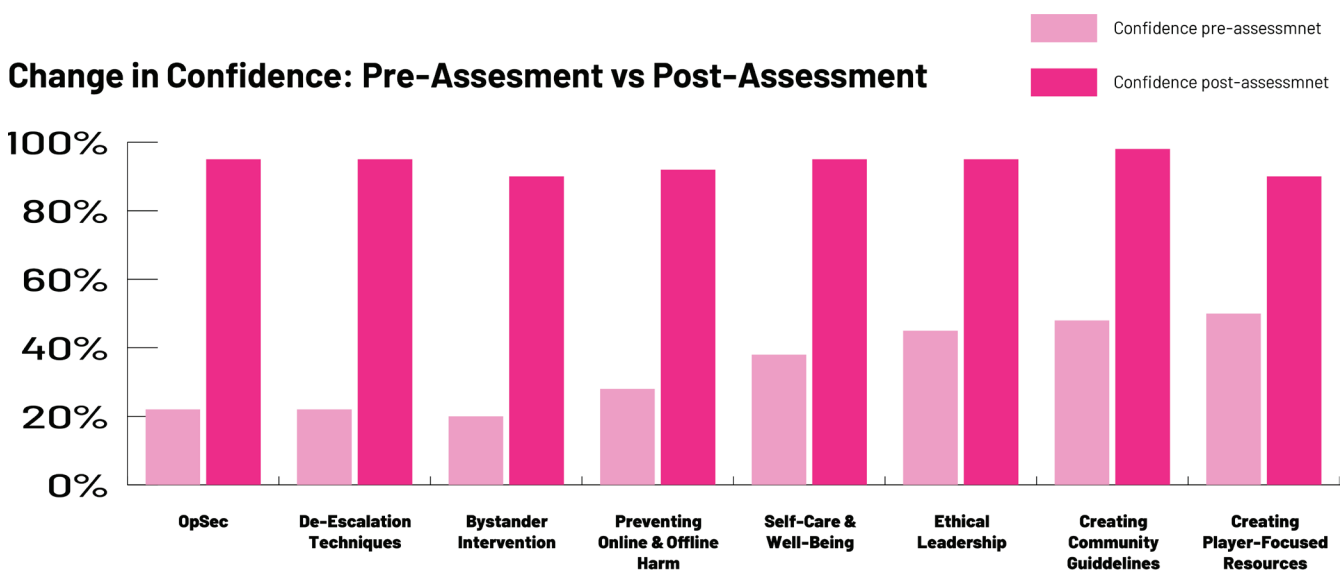
Forty-eight participants completed the program. Of these, 40 completed both the pre-program and post-program assessments. The following impact, confidence, and outcome figures throughout this report reflect those 40 participants.

**The 200,000+ reach and 20-country / six-continent figures describe the full pilot cohort, not the 40-participant impact group.*

Strong Outcomes & Renewed Commitment

Confidence rose significantly across every competency

The clearest signal of impact is the increase in confidence. Before the program, fewer than half of the participants rated themselves as confident (a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale) in most competencies. After completing the DLC curriculum, over 90% rated themselves confident in every measured competency. Average ratings rose from 3.0 to 4.4 overall. Operational security (among the lowest entry confidence) saw the largest shift of any competency.



"Confident" = share rating 4 or 5 out of 5. Every gain is statistically significant ($p < .001$), with large effect sizes across all eight competencies.

Strong Outcomes & Renewed Commitment

Exit ratings point to high satisfaction and to outcomes that matter for the sustainability of the field. For every outcome, at least 93% of graduates agreed or strongly agreed that the program had fostered a stronger professional identity, greater willingness to advocate for safety inside their organizations, and renewed commitment to staying in demanding roles.

100%

feel more empowered to advocate for trust & safety

98%

would recommend the program to other community leaders

85%

have already changed how they lead their communities

100%

feel better equipped to sustain themselves long-term

Table of Exit Rating Satisfaction Outcomes

Outcome	% rated 4–5	Avg
Feel more empowered to advocate for trust & safety	100%	4.85
Would recommend to other community leaders	98%	4.85
Feel more confident identifying as a professional	98%	4.55
Feel better equipped to sustain themselves long-term	100%	4.75
Program increased their commitment to continuing in their role	100%	4.70
Certification increased legitimacy & recognition	93%	4.68
Their community will benefit	98%	4.65
Overall satisfaction	98%	4.80

Learning is Already Changing Practice

Impact did not wait for the program to end; 85% of DLC graduates reported that what they learned had already changed how they lead their communities before the program ended. These were concrete changes, not abstract intentions. At least half or more of the graduating class reported they had already made changes in each of four areas:

Where participants changed how they lead	% changed by category
Self-care and personal boundaries	78%
Operational security	55%
Community codes of conduct	53%
Community culture (“vibe setting”)	50%



“I recently noticed an argument getting heated on one of our Discord channels. I reminded the members of the community guidelines, specifically the section on mutual respect. Both members apologized, and the argument turned into a more respectful debate.”

— DLC Graduate, Spring 2026

What Participants Want You to Know

At the end of the pilot, we asked graduates one question: what would you want a funder of this program to know? Four themes came through again and again and they put it better than we could.

A program that fills an unmet gap

“

“There are too many communities who aren’t getting better because they don’t have access to the resources provided by this program... Nobody is out there doing what these people do. This program is filling the very important need for education on community management.”

— DLC Graduate, Spring 2026

Well-designed and high-quality program

“

“It’s a fantastic, well-curated and designed program. You could not support a better program based on actual research and expertise.”

— DLC Graduate, Spring 2026

A direct contribution to safety and harm prevention

“

“This program can help decrease the significant financial, reputational, and personal costs associated with online harms by helping prevent these harms in the first place.”

— DLC Graduate, Spring 2026

An investment in the field and the future of the industry

“

“Continued investment in programs like this is an investment in the people who help shape player experiences every day – helping to create safer, more inclusive, and more sustainable communities across the industry for years to come.”

— DLC Graduate, Spring 2026

Taken together, the pilot of the DLC Leadership Program has demonstrated that focused, evidence-based development produces measurable gains in confidence, capability, and commitment among the people who hold online communities together. Continued investment extends that impact to the next cohort, the communities they serve, and the industry at large.

250+ Leaders

Over 250 leaders are on the waitlist for our first public cohort, launching fall 2026 – demand already exceeds capacity

The Team Behind the Program



Rachel Kowert, PhD

*Founder,
Director of Programming*



Kelli Dunlap, PsyD

*Director of Learning and
Community*

Over the past six months, the DLC leadership team (Drs. Rachel Kowert and Kelli Dunlap) co-developed and built this program from the ground up – designing an evidence-based curriculum, recruiting and running a successful pilot cohort, and bringing together more than 35 organizational partners into the work across industry, technology, trust and safety, and academia. What began as an idea is now a proven program.

This program also took its shape from the people in it. Many in the pilot cohort came from our organizational supporters and sponsors, who did far more than complete the curriculum – their feedback, expertise, and lived experience have shaped the program into what it is today. With the model now proven and refined alongside that founding community, we are ready for the launch of our first public cohort in the Fall of 2026.

Of course, none of this would exist without our Founding Partner, **Shine a Light Gaming**, whose early belief in this work made the pilot (and everything that follows) possible.

The experts who teach with us

The DLC curriculum is brought to life by guest lecturers – practitioners and researchers who bring front-line experience directly into the courses. Our pilot guest lecturers included:

Victoria Tran – Community Director, Innersloth; author of *Mastering Community Management*
Vibe Setting for Healthy Communities

Matt Soeth – Executive Director, Thriving in Games Group
Creating Player-Facing Resources

Celia Hodent – Founder, Ethical Games (ethicalgames.org)
Ethical Leadership in Online Communities

Ashley Blake – Head of Partnerships & Community, vrCAVE / BBL and CEO & Founder, elsewhereNFP
Ethical Leadership in Online Communities

Maria Tamellini – Co-Founder, GamerSafer
Protecting Players from Harm

Henry Adams – Intelligence Director, Resolver
Operational Security

DLC Graduates

Where our graduates come from

More than 35 organizations took part in the pilot, across tech, games, academia, and non-profit sectors. Industry partners whose teams include our first graduates include:



Twitch



Finji



Electronic Arts



Dungeons and
Dragons



Scorched
Entertainment



Roblox



Games for Change



Academy of
Interactive Arts
and Sciences



Modulate

What Comes Next: A Look Ahead

The findings above are public. What follows is not; it is an early view of where the program is heading, shared with the people building it with us. Please keep the below information confidential.

A program built to last

The pilot was step one in building a durable, evidence-based institution for digital leadership that grows with the field. Graduates now earn one of two credentials: Level 1 Certified — Essentials (completed all foundational courses) or Level 1 Certified — Advanced (completed all foundational courses and all current masterclasses). A Level 2 credential for deeper specialization is in development. Graduates can return to upgrade their learning and certification as new courses launch, making the DLC a framework leaders come back to rather than a one-time training they age out of.

What we're building for 2027

Our next production cycle will be filmed at GDC and integrated into the spring 2027 cohort. This round adds six new foundational courses and a growing slate of elective masterclasses. Five of the six foundational courses are in pre-development:

- What Makes a Good Leader
- Communication Strategies
- Crisis Support and Documentation
- Platform Dynamics & Community Contexts
- Recognizing and Addressing Hate in Communities (working title)

Three of the six masterclass topics are confirmed:

- Building a new community 101
- AI tools in digital leadership
- Crisis management

One foundational course and three masterclass topics for the 2027 content production cycle remain open by design, so partners can help set the scope, suggest topics, and lend their own experts.

An alliance, forming now

As we grow and develop we are formalizing our partner network into the Digital Leadership Alliance – a standing group of organizations that don't just support the program but help steer it. Alliance members get first input on what we build next, the first opportunity to shape and sponsor masterclasses, and acknowledgement that travels with the program wherever it's presented. We're already in early conversations with major industry organizations, which makes now the moment to help define the alliance rather than join it later.

From a program to a body of evidence

Every course is built around applied activities and every response is captured. As cohorts move through the program (including leaders from studios and sectors across the field), we will build the most detailed picture available of how digital leaders actually think and work, including what they need, how they approach challenges, and where the field's real gaps are. The community of practice becomes an ongoing source of information that we can aggregate into research that gives back to the whole field, not just our cohorts – a central knowledge base the industry can draw on. Few organizations are positioned to produce this kind of insight.

Where partners come in

The pilot proved the model. The next phase is being built *with* partners, not just for them. We're looking to work with studios and organizations who will help shape the curriculum, lend their expertise, put their name behind the field as it professionalizes, and support the program which sets the standard for it. Confirm your commitment before September 2026 and you can contribute to the next cycle of content production (slated for March 2027), putting your content in front of leaders in the spring 2027 cohort.



"We didn't just prove the infrastructure gap was real – we proved that the DLC closes it. Those who stand behind this work as Program Supporters have helped get us here and for that we are forever grateful. We're now ready for the next evolution of the DLC, and we want you to join us in it: join the Digital Leadership Alliance or become a Program Partner. Bring your expertise, your support, and your voice to the table. The question isn't if this program works. It does – and it's already reaching the lives of more than 200,000 people across our digital communities. We are excited to be able to expand our partnership options to bring the leading voices in the industry (that's you!) to the table to actively shape and build the professional infrastructure for digital leaders today and in the future."

— Rachel Kowert, PhD, Founder

3 Ways to Partner with DLC

Games are social platforms that are increasingly being held responsible for what happens inside their communities, by players and policymakers alike. The people who lead those communities are the ones who deliver on that responsibility, and the organizations that invest in them aren't just staying compliant - they're setting the standard that compliance will be measured against. The DLC Leadership Program is the only program that trains and certifies this work on evidence. It brings leaders together across studios and sectors into a community of practice that builds shared best practices and a central knowledge base the whole field can draw on. There are three ways to support the program, with each tier building on the one before it, so you can start where it fits and grow from there.

What you get	Program Supporter	Program Partner	Digital Leadership Alliance
	<i>No financial commitment</i>	<i>Project-based (full list of options below)</i>	<i>Yearly commitment (3-year minimum)</i>
Best for	A starting point for supporting the work publicly	Philanthropic funders, smaller studios and academic partners	Organizations investing in community safety as a long-term priority
Named as an official DLC supporter	On our website	Print and digital materials	Print and digital materials
Public alignment with the mission	✓	✓	✓
Priority placement on our resources page	✓	✓	✓
Cohort seats for your team	1 reserved spot, one cohort	3 reserved spots, one cohort	5 reserved spots, every cohort intake
Fund a masterclass, course, research, or cohort	—	✓	✓
Annual Impact & Outlook Report	—	✓	✓
Industry Insight (research) Reports	—	For sponsored content	✓
Prioritized partners for co-produced content	—	—	✓

The tiers are built to stack. Program Supporters can step up to Program Partner or Alliance membership at any time, and Alliance membership gives first access to every sponsorship opportunity as it opens.



Join the Digital Leadership Alliance

For organizations investing in community safety as a long-term priority

Safeguarding your digital communities, and the people who lead them, is no longer a back-office function. It is a board-level priority, an ever-growing regulatory expectation, and a promise platforms, publishers, and studios make to their players. The Digital Leadership Alliance is where the industry invests in the people who deliver on that promise – the community managers, moderators, and digital leaders who keep online spaces safe, resilient, and worth being part of. Alliance Partners are not just sponsors of the DLC Leadership Program, they help build and visibly stand behind the professional infrastructure of a safer digital world. The alliance is not only for organizations that run their own communities. The Alliance is built just as much for the trust and safety vendors, consultancies, and platform-adjacent partners around them – organizations that gain the research, the intelligence, and a hand in shaping the standard, whether or not they run community teams of their own.

What Alliance Partners receive

- **Recognition as an official Alliance Partner.** This includes priority placement on our public resources page, and named recognition across all of our materials, talks, and channels.
- **A training pipeline for your team.** A standing allocation of five seats in every cohort intake, so your community and safety staff always have a seat at the table.
- **Prioritized partners for co-produced content.** Prioritized partnership opportunities for the program's co-produced content (masterclasses, foundational courses, and specialty tracks) each built around your area of expertise with your experts and featured on camera (if desired), before those opportunities open more broadly.
- **Funding & sponsorship opportunities.** First access to every sponsorship opportunity as it opens, including funding a masterclass, course, research project, or cohort.
- **Industry Insight Reports – exclusive to Alliance Partners.** Bi-annual reports built from aggregated, anonymized findings and emerging trends from the DLC research. Together with the Annual Impact & Outlook Report, they give you a read on the field you can't get anywhere else.
- **Annual Impact & Outlook Report.** Receive our annual report, with strategic insight into where the program is and where it's going, plus recognition as a named Alliance Partner.
- **DLC Alliance credential.** A formal mark identifying your organization as a Digital Leadership Alliance member, for use across your own materials and channels.

What makes the Alliance different

Most industry partnerships are peer-to-peer: member companies sharing frameworks, principles, and practices with one another. The Alliance is built differently. It puts an independent credentialing body at the center and works at the level of people. We train and certify the practitioners who do this work every day, producing independent, evidence-based training rather than shared guidelines alone. It is the only partnership that invests directly in the workforce behind community building and trust and safety.

Digital Leadership Alliance partnerships require a \$50,000 per year commitment over a minimum of 3 years.

What graduates want funders to know:

“

The creators behind this program are giving the world a gift; one that leaders of the future will use for years to come to rethink and cultivate the way we think about digital spaces.

- DLC Spring 2026 Graduate

“

I'm changing our community guidelines right this second.

- DLC Spring 2026 Graduate

“

This program covers all of the foundations you would need to start managing your community in a thoughtful, safe and deliberate way.

- DLC Spring 2026 Graduate

“

Not only do I have a better equipped toolbox, but I have a new community of experienced and budding leaders to lean on for support, advice, and camaraderie.

- DLC Spring 2026 Graduate

“

With all the information I have gotten it has directly changed how we operate. Our guidelines are better and we are actively using resources provided by the courses to continue to get better and better

- DLC Spring 2026 Graduate

Become a Program Partner

For philanthropic partners and smaller studios

Program Partners fund the work and share in the visibility of a program reaching leaders and communities around the world. Program Partner standing is also open to non-profit, academic, and research partners who contribute to the DLC research arm in kind, rather than financially — see below. Please note that sponsorship levels are independent of each other (i.e., they do not stack).

What Program Partners receive

- **Recognition as an official DLC Program Partner.** This includes priority placement on our resources page, plus your logo placed across all print and digital materials — including our website, annual reports, and DLC conference presentations and public talks (GDC, SXSW, Games for Change, and ongoing speaking engagements). Your support travels with us wherever we present.
- **Reserved cohort seats for your team.** Skip the line for an upcoming cohort intake for three members of your organization (one time allocation).
- **Funding & sponsorship opportunities.** Priority access to every sponsorship opportunity as it opens, including funding a masterclass, course, research project, or cohort.
- **A personalized Industry Insight Research Report (sponsored content only).** We will produce a one-time Industry Insight Report for your sponsored cohort, masterclass, foundational module, or speciality track.
- **Annual Impact & Outlook Report.** Receive our annual report, with strategic insight into where the program is and where it's going, plus recognition as a named Program Partner.

\$10,000 Supporting Partner · Unrestricted support

Flexible, unrestricted support that goes where it's needed most. For one year, you will receive the full Program Partner recognition and visibility package as a named supporter — the simplest way to put your name behind the field.

\$20,000 Research Support · Help the data reach the industry

Fund a research project that turns the program's data into content that advances the whole field. You will be recognized as a named funder in the acknowledgments of one peer-reviewed manuscript and one DLC Industry Insight Report, prepared and submitted within the funding year. We will align the research focus on a topic that matters to you (e.g., self-care, community guidelines, bystander intervention).

\$25,000 Sponsor a Masterclass · Showcase your expertise

Co-produce an elective masterclass built around your team's expertise — your specialists featured on camera (if desired) and in the material, co-drafted and co-produced with the DLC leadership team. Masterclasses are electives that draw a self-selected, highly engaged audience. This is your spotlight,

not just your logo. You will receive a one-time Industry Insight Report for the masterclass you sponsored, including participant numbers, community reach, course feedback, and confidence change. Additional yearly insights will be provided in our reports. Alliance Partners are offered these first.

\$50,000 Scale the Working Model · Sponsor a cohort

Fund a full cohort of 75 digital leaders through the 8-week program. Your support covers facilitation and the operational backbone that ensures individualized support for every course-taker. You will receive a one-time Industry Insight Report on the cohort you sponsored, including participant numbers, community reach, course feedback, and confidence change.

\$50,000 Build a New Foundational Course · Reach every cohort

Fund one foundational course that every participant completes – so your support reaches the whole cohort, not a subset. Your experts are featured on camera and in the material, co-produced with DLC. You will receive a one-time Industry Insight Report for the foundational course you sponsored, including participant numbers, community reach, course feedback, and confidence change. Additional yearly insights will be provided in our annual reports. Alliance Partners are offered these first.

\$75,000 Sponsor a Specialty · Curate a track

Fund a full track – one foundational course plus two masterclasses. Every participant completes the foundation; those who complete the full combination earn a dedicated Track credential. Your experts are featured on camera across the course and its masterclasses, co-produced with DLC. You will receive a one-time Industry Insight Report for the track you sponsored, including participant numbers, course feedback across all track courses, and confidence change. Additional yearly insights will be provided in our annual reports. Alliance Partners are offered these first.

\$100,000 Train Your Community · Run a tailored DLC cohort

We adapt existing DLC content to your context and run a private cohort of up to 75 students for your community. This could include, but is not limited to: aligning the community-guidelines work to your standing guidelines, swapping in your recommended resources, and similar context-fit adjustments (no new content creation). A private learning space for your cohort can also be provided, if desired. You will receive a one-time Industry Insight Report for this cohort, including participant numbers, community reach, course feedback, and confidence change.

How it scales: \$100,000 covers content adaptation (one-time) and community of practice support plus your first cohort of 75; each additional cohort of 75 runs at \$20,000, with large-scale roll-outs moving to a custom quote.

Academic & Research Partners

Not every partner contributes with a budget. Universities, labs, and research groups can hold Program Partner standing by contributing to the DLC research arm in kind by lending faculty expertise, embedding student researchers, and collaborating on the studies that build the field's evidence base. Research partners receive the same recognition as funding partners, including named acknowledgment across our materials, talks, and channels; credit on the research they help produce (co-authorship or acknowledgment, in line with their contribution); and cohort seats for their students and researchers. Full details are in the companion Academic & Research Partnership outline.

Become a Research Partner

For universities, labs, and research groups

The DLC Leadership Program is built on evidence and that evidence comes from research. Our research arm studies what digital community leaders actually need, what works in training them, and how safer communities get built. Academic and research partners help produce that work, and in doing so, help set the standard for an emerging field.

Research Partners Receive:

- **Recognition as an official DLC Program Partner.** You receive the same recognition as funding partners – no financial contribution required. This includes priority placement on our resources page, plus your logo placed across all print and digital materials – including our website, annual reports, and DLC conference presentations and public talks (GDC, SXSW, Games for Change, and ongoing speaking engagements). Your support travels with us wherever we present.
- **Research credit.** Co-authorship or acknowledgment on the studies you help produce, in line with your contribution and standard authorship norms.
- **Reserved cohort seats for your team.** Reserved seats for up to three of your students or researchers in an upcoming cohort (one time allocation).
- **Annual Impact & Outlook Report.** Receive our annual report, with strategic insight into where the program is and where it's going, plus recognition as a named Program Partner.

Research Partners Contribute:

- **Faculty expertise.** Guest lectures, masterclass contributions, or advisory input on study design and curriculum (with the potential of being featured on camera).
- **Student researchers.** Graduate or undergraduate researchers who work on DLC studies as research assistants, thesis projects, or capstones, with mentorship from the DLC research team.
- **Research collaboration.** Co-design, data analysis, and co-authorship on the manuscripts and Industry Insight (research) Reports that move the field forward.
- **Field connection.** Introductions to academic networks and conferences, and to partners exploring credentialing and accreditation pathways for the work.

We will help shape the collaboration around your lab's capacity, interests, and the questions you want to answer. If your lab or department works on online safety, community, games, or digital wellbeing, there's a natural fit here. Reach out to start the conversation around potential projects.

Become a Program Supporter

A no-cost way to stand publicly behind the work

Program Supporter is the entry point for organizations that want to stand behind the DLC Leadership Program publicly, with no financial commitment required. It's the easiest way to start, with a clear path to step up to Program Partner or Alliance membership when you're ready.

Program Supporters receive:

- **Recognition as an official DLC supporter.** This includes priority placement on our resources page, plus listing on our website and public alignment with the mission.
- **Reserved cohort seats for your team.** Skip the line for an upcoming cohort intake for one member of your organization (one time allocation).
- **A path to Program Partner benefits (by invitation).** Supporters who co-create course materials with us step up to receive the full Program Partner benefits package.

However you come in, you're part of setting the standard for this field.

Not sure which tier fits? Let's talk it through.

Reach out at rkowert@gmail.com.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS

FOUNDING PARTNER



PROGRAM PARTNERS



PROGRAM SUPPORTERS

