

# Every Path. Every Possibility.

## Modern Learner Summit 2025

Hosted by Trellis Strategies & Trellis Foundation | Austin, Texas

### Redefining What It Means to Be a Modern Learner in Texas

The Modern Learner Summit united higher education, workforce, and policy leaders from Texas and beyond to reimagine how institutions can better serve today's learners. While traditional education systems were built for linear pathways, students now balance work, family, and education as they navigate more flexible, non-linear routes to meaningful credentials.

Over two days of discussion and discovery, one theme stood out: modern learners are the norm, not the exception. The summit challenged outdated systems and inspired new models of flexibility, belonging, and partnership to help every learner succeed.

### Core Themes from the Summit

#### Learners Lead the Redesign

Institutions are reframing their missions to become student-ready, adapting to the lives of learners rather than expecting learners to adapt to traditional systems. Flexible course schedules, stackable credentials, and portable credit models are key to making higher education work for students who are also workers, parents, and caregivers.

#### Belonging Is the Foundation of Learning

Summit conversations, specifically the redesign of physical and virtual spaces, highlighted the importance of human connection. Faculty and staff engagement, consistent communication, and compassionate coaching were shown to increase student persistence and completion.

#### Pathways Must Be Flexible, Stackable, and Aligned

Leaders emphasized the need for learning pathways that respond to labor market demands and adapt to students' real-world circumstances. Stackable credentials, recognition of prior learning, and stronger alignment with employers are essential to a future-ready Texas.

#### Data and Design Drive Student Success

Data-informed redesigns such as curriculum mapping, predictive scheduling, and credential value analysis are helping institutions identify barriers and improve outcomes. Tools like the Credential Value Index and state policy reforms are offering new insights into time-to-value and the economic return of education.

#### Partnerships Power Progress

The summit reinforced that no single sector can meet the needs of modern learners alone. Collaboration among higher education, employers, and workforce systems is key to building ecosystems where skills, credentials, and careers align.

Examples shared throughout the event, including competency-based education, micro-credentials, transportation solutions, and rural outreach, demonstrated how cross-sector partnerships create scalable and equitable impact.

### Looking Ahead: Designing for the Future

Texas higher education and workforce communities are already moving toward a shared vision:

- Expanding credentials of value and outcome-based funding
- Strengthening student support ecosystems that address basic needs, transportation, and mental health
- Building flexible, tech-enabled systems that support lifelong learning and career mobility

#### About the Modern Learner Initiative

The Modern Learner framework, led by Trellis Strategies, advances research, policy, and partnerships that center students' lived experiences. Through events like this summit, Trellis connects leaders who are committed to ensuring that every learner can access opportunity and achieve success.

#### [www.trellisstrategies.org](http://www.trellisstrategies.org)

Trellis Strategies is a leading nonprofit research and technical assistance firm focused on advancing postsecondary education and strengthening the workforce. With a deep commitment to understanding the modern learner experience—from application through graduation—we provide institutions with actionable insights that inform strategic decision-making and improve student outcomes.

#### [www.trellisfoundation.org](http://www.trellisfoundation.org)

Trellis Foundation is a grant-making public charitable organization focused on improving postsecondary attainment for all Texas students, with a particular interest in supporting equitable access and outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds and communities of color. Our approach is highly collaborative and prioritizes catalytic investments, focused on changing or informing change to policy, practice and systems. We believe every student deserves an equal opportunity to earn a credential or degree beyond high school. Our primary focus areas include supporting holistic approaches to meeting student needs, streamlining student pathways, and reconnecting returning learners.

