

The banner features a background image of a modern building with many windows and some trees in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

ICATT Virtual Career Academy

Did you know that ICATT Professional Services is a social enterprise with a purpose of creating jobs in our community by enhancing employability and strengthening job creators?

Concept Note: ICATT Virtual Career Academy

In the United States today, there are 10 million job openings. However, there are 8.4 million unemployed people actively looking for jobs.¹ So what is going on?

There are several factors for this phenomenon. Due to the pandemic, significant numbers of workers had to move locations to cheaper areas, with lower socioeconomic standing. As such, many have chosen to pursue remote work in addition to career advancement opportunities. 55% of job applicants now prefer remote jobs.² Furthermore, the increase of automation and digitization post-pandemic is driving up the amount of skills requirements necessary for available jobs – Economists call this a “skill gap”. To put it simply, there is significant demand for skilled workers, but a shortage in supply. Another explanation is that there is an “opportunity gap,” where people with the greatest barriers to employment lack access to the new and changing post-COVID 19 economy.³

Suzanne Clark, President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, proposes three potential solutions – “(1) increase upskilling initiatives for current employees; (2) work with educational programs to strengthen talent pipelines; and (3) improve alignment between educational program curricula and the skills needed in the workforce.”⁴ This is where ICATT comes in.

The target audience for ICATT’s Virtual Career Academy is people who are unemployed and underemployed with the greatest barriers to employment, such as:

- At-risk youth
- Communities with lower socioeconomic standing
- Inner city / urban communities
- Rural communities
- Recent immigrant and refugee groups
- People with disabilities and other medical conditions
- Formerly incarcerated individuals

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2021/09/04/ten-million-job-openings-labor-shortage/>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/job-openings-are-at-record-highs-why-arent-unemployed-americans-filling-them-11625823021>

³ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/09/09/the-labor-market-doesnt-have-a-skills-gap-it-has-an-opportunity-gap/>

⁴ <https://www.uschamber.com/series/above-the-fold/closing-the-skills-gap>

What are the Benefits of a Virtual Approach?

1. Flexibility
 - a. ICATT has 27 years of experience in working remotely.
 - b. It has training services available across the globe.
 - c. Its services are manageable for an increasingly remote workforce.
2. Cost Effective
 - a. Students can focus on learning without worrying about extra costs such as:
 - i. Childcare
 - ii. Transportation
 - iii. Course materials
3. Accessible
 - a. ICATT's courses are available anywhere, anytime, to anyone.
 - b. It is inclusive for those with cultural barriers, disabilities, social anxiety, etc.

Credentialed Training Combined with Employment Enhancements

Enhancements

ICATT takes a two-pronged approach to achieve its overarching goal of career readiness. The ICATT Credentialed Training programs and the ICATT Enhancing Employability Initiative.

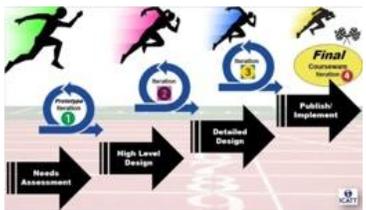
ICATT Credentialed Training

First, we have our ICATT **Career Academy Credentialed Training** programs. Each credentialed program represents an occupational field of study that leads to employment based on aptitude and interest. ICATT's signature courses are:



CompTIA A+

The CompTIA A+ certification is often described as an “entry-level rite of passage for IT technicians.” This training program comes with an industry recognized credentialed career certification to prepare candidates seeking a career as a help desk, support, service center or networking technician, and covers PC and laptop hardware, software installation, and configuration of computer and mobile operating systems.

 <p><u>CompTIA Network+</u></p>	<p>The CompTIA Network+ certification is geared toward professionals who have at least nine months of networking experience. A candidate must be familiar with networking technologies, media, topologies, security, installation and configuration, and troubleshooting of common wired and wireless network devices.</p>
<p><u>CompTIA Security+</u></p> 	<p>CompTIA Security+ covers network security concepts, threats and vulnerabilities, access control, identity management, cryptography, and much more. Although CompTIA does not impose any prerequisites, the organization recommends that cert candidates obtain the Network+ credential and have at least two years of IT administration experience with a security focus.</p>
<p><u>Agile ISD Practitioner</u></p> 	<p>The Agile ISD Practitioner course is for aspiring instructional design practitioners who want an industry-recognized credential or career certification. This program is ideal for candidates who want to create learning experiences that yield proficient and motivated learners. Candidates can develop the skill sets needed to produce highly engaging courseware quickly and efficiently.</p>

Upon completion, all programs come with:

- Coaching assistance for 90 days to develop relevant portfolio
- One free year of informational interview career assistance to boost employability
- One free year of access to monthly cohort refresher and examination preparation webinars on related topics.

Enhancing Employability Initiative

While credentialed training provides the basic foundation of occupational readiness, ICATT also offers it's Virtual Career Academy to prepare the future workforce for virtual work opportunities outside the geographical area of their residence. Our employability enhancement activities give career seekers a

professional edge compared to their competitors. (Suggested: give an example of How ICATT does this/employability enhancement activities, it seems vague)

What is Enhancing Employability?

The Enhancing Employability initiative at ICATT is a comprehensive set of activities that offer tremendous opportunities to career seekers.

Here at ICATT, we focus on individuals. We use the word “enhance” because that is our purpose – we are not here to tell career seekers what they are lacking. Rather, we leverage the individuals’ skills and talents and find pathways to enhance them. We individualize our approach and provide tailored support to career seekers to make them more attractive to employers in this competitive workforce environment.

This initiative is virtual, which allows us to specialize in helping career seekers with the greatest barriers to employment (See Table 1).

Table 1

Financial Barriers to Employment	Social Barriers to Employment	Industry and Career Barriers to Employment
Transportation costs	Lack of understanding of work culture (Professionalism)	Laid off/Need new skills
Childcare	Inadequate support system	No Role Models
Disabilities	Language barriers	Limited work experience
Health problems	Low expectations from support systems	Unsure of what job or career to pursue
	Lack of soft skills	Unsure of how to search for employment
		Gaps in employment history

Enhancing Employability: Overview of Programs

Certification Exam Prep

One of the services we provide is Certification Exam Prep.

We assign cohort study groups that meet weekly for exam preparation. Some of the benefits of this approach include:

1. Participants can follow a structured approach and benefit from each other’s knowledge and insights.
2. The approach reduces test anxiety and according to a study from 2005, leads to better learning and retention of information (find another study)

3. Provides crucial experience in a safe environment for collaboration and teamwork to help prepare for entering the workforce.

Portfolio Development and Coaching

Our most successful service we provide is Portfolio Development and Coaching. We consider it one of our most important coaching programs.

Professional portfolios are becoming increasingly beneficial to gaining employment. An online portfolio sets candidates apart and allows employers to gain a comprehensive perspective about the individual.

1. Portfolios allow candidates to craft their own professional narrative.
2. Portfolios show a consistent catalogue of past works, so candidates can improve their credibility and showcase their skills.
3. Portfolios also allow candidates to showcase their creativity and written skills, in addition to verbal skills.
 - a. Portfolios not only boost communication with employers, but it is proven to be crucial for self-assessment and self-evaluation, which candidates entering the workforce always need.

To facilitate the development of professional portfolios, we have weekly meetings with cohorts of no more than five participants that show and tell our highly qualified coaches about their portfolios, resumes and sample works and receive feedback, suggestions, and advice. The participants make continuous enhancements to their work until they can secure a job.

Informational Interviews

The ICATT Career Academy also offer opportunities for **informational interviews**, which have several benefits:

- Helps candidates build confidence for future interviews and gain an understanding of the relevant industry.
- Provides access to critical information regarding career paths and opportunities and insider tips for career advancement.
- Starts the networking process for candidates who are new to the workforce and/or industry.

Studies also show that informational interviews provide a significant competitive edge. For instance, one study found that while one out of every 200 resumes results in a job offer, **One out of every 12 informational interviews** results in a job offer.

Professionalism Development

Here at ICATT, we invest our resources into **professionalism development** and **workforce preparation**.

Professionalism development builds soft skills ranging from emotional intelligence to cultural competence to leadership development.

As part of workforce preparation, we offer weekly career coaching sessions available for all participants that we work with and train, with cohorts of no more than five people.

Our career coaches are trainers, practitioners and subject and industry experts who work in both group and one-on-one settings with candidates on portfolio development, resume reviews, informational interviews, and so on. Additionally, coaches direct candidates towards other training programs, workshops, resources and smaller assignments to build the candidates' professional skills.