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# Skills-to-jobs at scale: How Cisco Networking Academy is transforming the lives of learners

Case study

# At-a-Glance

**Company:** Cisco

**Industry:** Technology

**Challenge:** Transform the lives of learners, educators, and communities through technology education and new economic opportunities.

**Asset-driven solution:** Networking Academy, a skills-to-jobs program that offers technology education through public-private partnerships, high-quality curriculum, and inclusive workforce development programs.

**Impact:** 4.7 million learners participated in the program in FY24 across 191 countries worldwide; Networking Academy partners with over 12,100 institutions globally, including high schools, community colleges, universities, libraries, and nonprofits.



# **The challenge:** **Bridging the gap** **between technology** **access and technology** **empowerment**

The idea for Cisco Networking Academy was born in 1997. Cisco employees returned to an under-resourced school where they had donated state-of-the-art networking equipment. They were excited to see how students and educators were being empowered by the technology. Instead, they found the equipment sitting unused. The lesson learned that day was that technology alone is not enough; without the knowledge and skills to use it, even the best equipment's potential will go untapped.

Cisco recognized that for networking technology to truly expand and thrive, there needed to be a workforce capable of installing, configuring, and maintaining those networks. There was a critical skills gap: educators and students lacked the training to leverage the new technology, and there was no established pathway to build that expertise at scale.

Beyond just technical skills, Cisco also saw an opportunity to transform lives by providing inclusive access to technology education. Cisco sought to use its own technology and vast networking expertise to create clear pathways for both new learners and those reskilling or upskilling, ensuring they become prepared for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Thus, Networking Academy was launched.



# Cisco's asset-driven approach

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“We may have a lot of people engaging with our Networking Academy content, but if learners don't feel like we helped them take their career or education to the next level, then I don't think we've done our job.”

**Lynn Bloomer,**  
*Director, Networking Academy Global Operations*

Networking Academy partners with high schools, vocational colleges, universities, and nonprofits around the world to deliver comprehensive curricula and project-based learning on some of the most relevant topics in technology, including AI and cybersecurity. Through hands-on experience and scalable support, Networking Academy translates into real-world impact by building a skilled workforce, transforming communities, and supporting Cisco's mission to power an inclusive future for all.



## Key components

**A global ecosystem of support:** One of Networking Academy's greatest strengths is its ecosystem model, which includes Instructor Training Centers (ITCs), Academy Support Centers (ASCs), and a robust internal Cisco team. ITCs provide expert-led training to instructors, while ASCs foster local communities of practice, host events, and offer implementation support. This distributed infrastructure ensures quality, consistency, and ongoing professional development at scale.

**Multiple access pathways:** While the program began with institutional partnerships, Cisco has since expanded access to introductory courses through NetAcad.com, a free, self-paced learning platform open to anyone, anywhere. In addition to schools and universities, Cisco also partners with libraries and nonprofit organizations — including Love Never Fails, which works to reskill victims of human trafficking, and Covenant House, which works to address youth homelessness — to ensure a variety of access pathways.

**Building flexible, scalable toolkits:** Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, Cisco has developed a flexible toolbox — curriculum, labs, assessments, and support services — that organizations can adapt to meet their local needs.

**A focus on hands-on learning:** Networking Academy prioritizes hands-on labs and real-world simulations, focusing on a practical approach that helps learners bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and job-ready skills.

## Key components

**Empowering educators alongside learners:** Cisco emphasizes training instructors alongside students, multiplying the impact across generations of learners.

**Wraparound career support:** Beyond technical training, Networking Academy offers a suite of career-focused resources, including career prep workshops, resume and interview guidance, and “wraparound” courses focused on soft skills like stakeholder engagement and professional communication. Cisco also curates job boards aligned with Networking Academy pathways.

**Relentless focus on efficiency and prioritization:** While internal support is strong, managing costs and justifying investment remain ongoing priorities for the team.

**Inclusive, global reach:** Along with traditional students, Cisco also targets career changers, underserved communities, and global learners, with Networking Academy now reaching millions of learners in almost every country.

**Ongoing portfolio evolution:** While networking was the Academy’s initial focus, the platform has now expanded into cybersecurity, AI, data science, and more, adapting to evolving workforce needs.

**Supporting career outcomes:** The Academy aligns its curriculum with industry certifications and job pathways to ensure that the education translates into real economic opportunity for learners.

# Impact highlights

In FY24, Networking Academy supported learners in **191 countries** with over **24 million students** participating since 1997.

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**12,100 institutions** and organizations offered Networking Academy courses, and **31,300 active instructors** were teaching in FY24.

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**125,600+ educators** and school staff have been trained to use Networking Academy since its inception in 1997 through FY24.

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**96% of students** who completed Cisco certification-eligible courses obtained a career and/or educational opportunity, based on student survey responses in fiscal year 2024.

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**94% of surveyed instructors** said that Networking Academy helped them become a better educator, based on responses in fiscal year 2024.

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“Cisco’s mission is to power an inclusive future for all. What better way to empower individuals than through education?”

**Lynn Bloomer,**

*Director, Networking Academy Global Operations*

# Why the program is good for Cisco

Networking Academy enables Cisco to grow its technology ecosystem, foster brand loyalty, fulfill its mission of inclusivity, and ensure a global pipeline of skilled professionals — all of which support Cisco's long-term business goals and industry leadership.

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“Networking Academy's core goals are just as important now as ever. Our driving question remains ‘How do we leverage technology education to create opportunity and transform the lives of learners, educators, and communities.’”

**Lynn Bloomer,**  
*Director, Networking Academy Global Operations*



**By collaborating with business units** to identify relevant technologies and skills for Cisco's future success, Networking Academy ensures a steady pipeline of talent ready to help drive the company and field forward. Some Networking Academy learners end up joining Cisco's workforce.



**Networking Academy introduces Cisco's brand** to a vast, global audience, fostering brand loyalty and preference as learners enter the workforce.



**The program directly supports Cisco's mission** to “power an inclusive future for all.” By providing inclusive access to technology education, Cisco demonstrates leadership in corporate social responsibility.



**By providing a “toolbox”** of curriculum, labs, and support to partner organizations, Cisco strengthens relationships with educational institutions, nonprofits, and other stakeholders.



**The program provides Cisco with insights** into global education trends, workforce needs, and technology adoption, informing future business and product strategies.



# Lessons and implications for other businesses

**Pair asset donation with education and support.** Businesses should ensure their assets are accompanied by the training, resources, and support necessary to unlock their full value.

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**Design for flexibility and scalability.** Networking Academy's flexibility has allowed the platform to scale globally and serve a wide variety of learners, from high school students to career changers and underserved communities.

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**Focus on measurable impact.** Define clear, impact-oriented goals and track whether their programs are truly transforming lives or communities.

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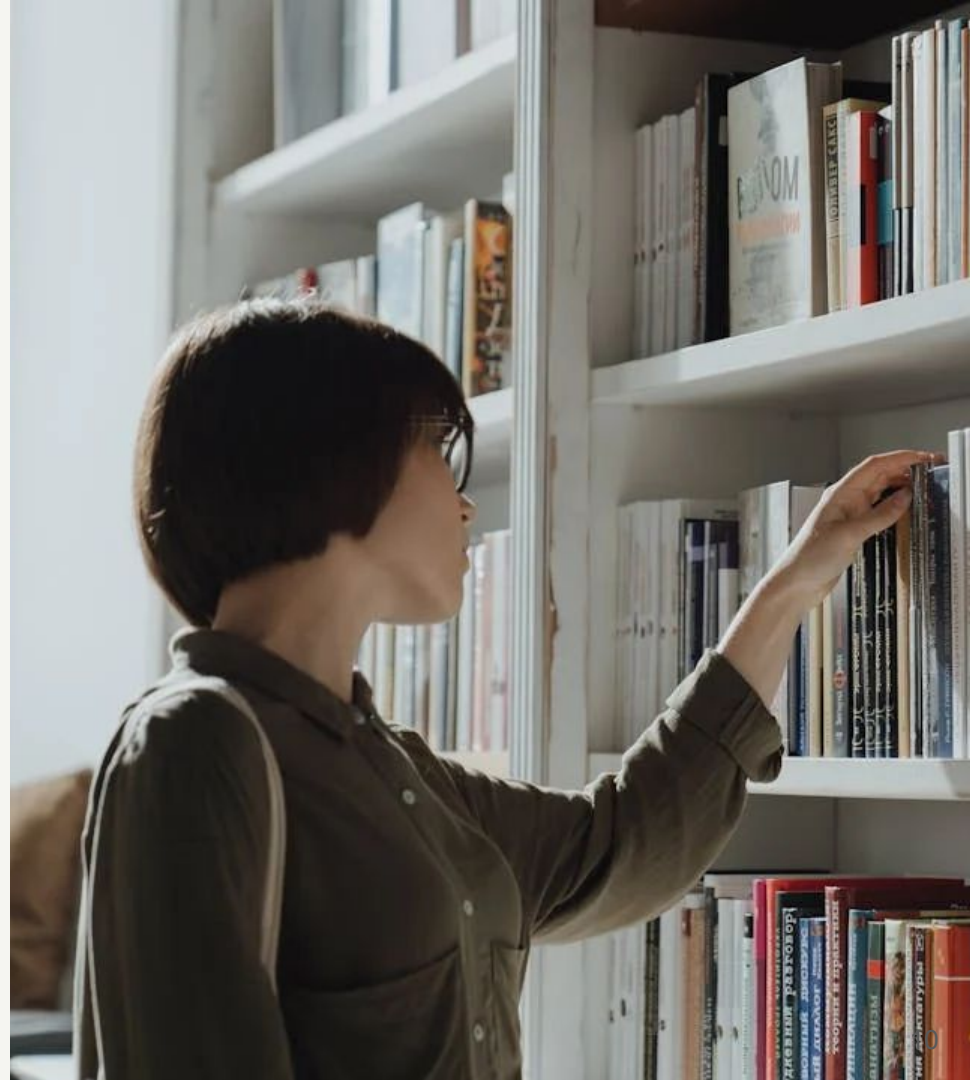
**Continuously evolve the offering.** Impact programs should remain agile and responsive to evolving community and industry demands.

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**Think big and don't lead with obstacles.** Don't self-limit your ideas. Lead with where you want to go, and you'll find ways to get there.

# Related resources

[NetAcad.com](https://netacad.com): The main portal for Networking Academy, where learners can access free courses, explore skill pathways, and enroll directly in self-paced programs.



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**Please don't hesitate to  
reach out if you have  
questions or feedback!**

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