

# Virtual Classrooms

Leveraging Technology  
for Impact



Sponsored by



© 2021 by ASTD DBA Association for Talent Development (ATD)  
All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to ATD Research, 1640 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

### **Ordering Information**

Research reports published by ATD can be purchased by visiting ATD's website at [td.org/research](http://td.org/research) or by calling 800.628.2783 or 703.683.8100.

ATD Product Code: 792105-WP

e-ISBN: 978-1-953946-12-6

Publication Date: June 2021

### **ATD Editorial Staff**

Associate Director, ATD Research: Maria Ho  
Manager, ATD Press: Melissa Jones  
Research Analyst: Alex Moore  
Cover and Interior Design: Shirley E.M. Raybuck  
Production Manager: Dirk Cassard

## **Survey Overview**

### **Target Survey Population**

The target population for this research was talent development professionals across different organizations and industries. Overall, participants from 434 unique organizations completed the survey.

### **Survey Instrument**

The survey was composed of 34 questions, including those related to the demographics of the respondents.

### **Procedure**

ATD Research distributed a link to an online survey to the target population in January 2021. The survey closed in February 2021. In-depth interviews were conducted by phone and correspondence in February 2021.

# About the Sponsor



## A Note From Jigsaw Interactive

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” —Ben Franklin

Training is a journey, not a destination, and technology has changed how we train. Virtual training has become a huge part of our learning and development programs. Technology designed specifically for virtual training help trainers and their organizations better understand their programs’ value and results. For example, virtual tools give facilitators the ability to quiz a group real-time and see immediate results or automatically capture engagement analytics.

But virtual training is not the same as a virtual meeting. While web-conferencing systems allow people to gather in a session, they don’t have the necessary elements to provide the type and quality of engagement needed for training. In most traditional online training solutions, the trainer is essentially in control of everything but the chat board. This leaves participants isolated, with little or nothing to do.

Jigsaw’s multi-dimensional platform allows every individual to actively look at information the way they learn and work. It offers immersive opportunities for trainers to engage participants on an individual or group level. With unique capabilities like customizable breakout rooms, recordable role-play rooms, and multiscreen sharing, Jigsaw provides a truly immersive, dynamic, powerful, and best-in-class virtual learning environment.

## About Jigsaw Interactive

Jigsaw Interactive is a technology company that specializes in virtual training and learning through its intuitively advanced platform. The technology optimizes the learning experience by providing multiple ways for participants to interact. Jigsaw provides an environment that allows for lots of engagement and project work, where training professionals can share all kinds of content and resources. It’s not about offering lecture-based programs, it’s about delivering information in a virtual environment that gives participants the chance to review information and engage in brainstorming to create potential solutions.

Through assessments, along with engagement and performance analytics, Jigsaw's platform provides an understanding of what happens during a training program. Measurement is a critical component for corporations to understand their training success. These analytics help organizations identify individual and group learning, engagement, and performance behaviors. They also provide valuable information around the teaching and leadership styles of instructors, and the learning and work styles of participants. For more information, visit [jigsawinteractive.com](https://jigsawinteractive.com).

# Executive Summary

Almost all organizations that participated in this research—98 percent—used virtual classrooms to deliver at least some training to their employees as of early 2021. For many, virtual classroom training eclipsed traditional classroom and self-paced e-learning as the top learning delivery method. It also comprised at least half of all formal learning hours delivered at 65 percent of organizations.

## Key Definitions

For the purpose of this report, the following definitions were used:

- **Virtual classroom training** is instructor led and conducted in an online environment. Learners interact with the trainer in real time, and the session occurs at a set time.
- **Traditional classroom training** is instructor-led training that occurs in physical environments.
- **Self-paced e-learning** is training conducted in online environments, but in which learners do not interact with the trainer in real time. Learners do not need to attend the training at a set time.

COVID-19 drove much of the surge in virtual classrooms' popularity. More than nine in 10 organizations (92 percent) listed safety, health, and travel concerns due to the pandemic among their top drivers for using the tool. However, it seems that the increased popularity of virtual classrooms is poised to stay even after the pandemic fades away.

Why? Most organizations (88 percent) expected their spending on virtual classroom training to stay the same or increase over the next year. It's likely that funding would recede if organizations expected the virtual classroom's importance to diminish in the foreseeable future. That means talent development leaders must stay committed to maximizing virtual classroom training and thereby the budgets that support it.

To aid these efforts, *Virtual Classrooms: Leveraging Technology for Impact* investigates key questions around virtual classroom training to provide benchmarking data and highlight best practices. It draws upon a sample of talent development professionals from 434 organizations. Of these, 40 percent reported performing well across several key business areas and having talent development functions that made strong contributions to organizational performance. The research compares these highly effective organizations with other participants to identify virtual classroom practices with statistically significant connections to being a high performer.

For example, consider how organizations engage the managers and supervisors of employees who attend virtual classroom training. While 47 percent of participants shared reinforcement aids or activities, such as discussion prompts, that managers could use to extend their employees' learning, those who did were significantly more likely to be high performers than those who did not. Another such practice was featuring virtual classrooms in a high percentage of talent development programs. Delivering at least 50 percent of formal learning hours as virtual classroom training had a strong connection to better organizational performance.

### Defining High Performers

This report compares the practices of high-performing organizations with those of all other organizations surveyed. In this report, high-performing organizations are those that met two criteria:

- They were performing as well as or better than their competitors in financial performance, customer and client satisfaction, employee engagement, and growth potential for the next five years.
- Their talent development functions helped them achieve their business goals to a high extent.

The research also covered several aspects of the process of adapting traditional classroom training for the virtual classroom, as nearly all participants said they had converted at least some traditional classroom training to a virtual classroom format in the last year. Of these, 93 percent regularly conducted at least some needs assessment tasks, 95 percent reviewed whether at least some course assets remained suitable for a virtual environment, and 95 percent considered updating at least some aspects of the program's format and design during the adaptation process. However, some participants approached these processes more thoroughly than others, which the research explores.

Other topics discussed include drivers for using virtual classrooms, barriers to expanding their use, and the features organizations leverage from their virtual classroom platforms. The report also reviews the people organizations entrust with designing and delivering their virtual classroom training, the learning activities they use during virtual classroom training, the activities they use before and after the training occurs, and best practices for communicating expectations about virtual classroom training to learners.

To add context to the findings and make them more actionable, the report features insights from talent development leaders who share their recommendations and experiences.

# Introduction

This section shares key facts about participants in the research, including the percentage of formal learning hours they deliver as virtual classroom training. It also examines their top drivers for relying on virtual classroom training and barriers to expanding its use.

## About the Participants

ATD Research surveyed 434 talent development professionals who were able to discuss their organizations' formal training activities. Of these, 60 percent were managers or above.

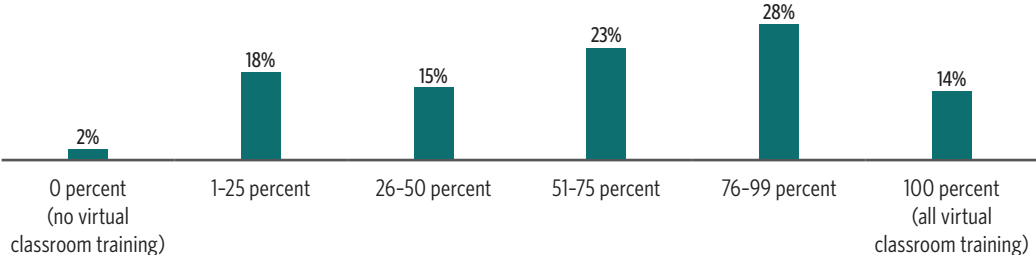
Nearly a third of respondents (30 percent) represented large organizations with 10,000 or more employees, and 49 percent represented mid-sized organizations with between 500 and 9,999 employees. The remaining 21 percent were from small organizations with fewer than 500 employees.

## Virtual Classroom Use

As of early 2021, the median organization delivered between 51 and 75 percent of its formal learning hours as virtual classroom training (Figure 1). High performers were significantly more likely to deliver more than half of their formal learning hours with this delivery method than other organizations ( $p < 0.05$ ), which suggests that virtual classroom training may be most effective when organizations treat it as a core priority for talent development.

**FIGURE 1**  
Percentage of Learning Hours Delivered in the Virtual Classroom

*Approximately what percentage of learning hours at your organization are delivered as virtual classroom training?*



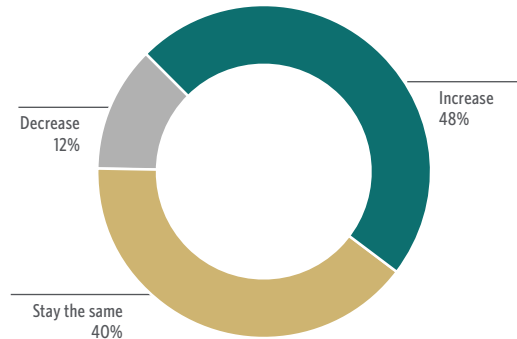


Among participants who did use virtual classroom training, nearly half expected their spending on it to increase during the next year (Figure 2). Another 40 percent expected it to stay the same, and only 12 percent anticipated that it would decrease.

**FIGURE 2**

### Projected Expenditure Changes for Virtual Classroom Training

*How do you expect your organization's spending on virtual classroom training one year from now to change compared with today?*



### Virtual Classroom Drivers

More than anything else, the COVID-19 pandemic fueled organizations' use of virtual classroom training. When asked to select up to five drivers (from a list of 15) for using virtual classrooms, more than 90 percent of respondents chose safety, health, and travel concerns and restrictions due to the pandemic (Figure 3). However, the pandemic is not the only factor that deserves attention.

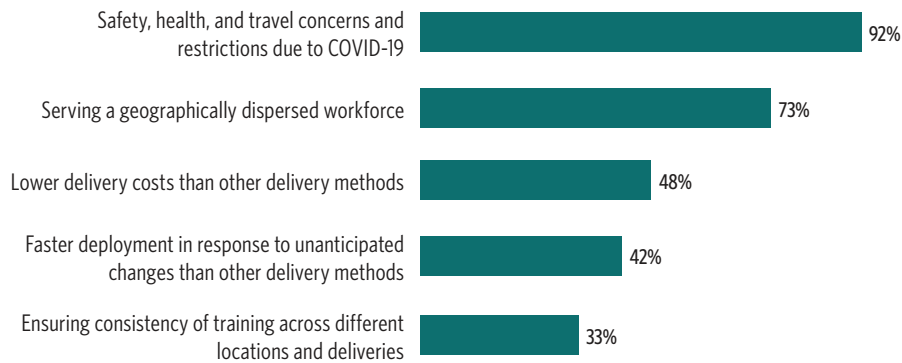
Nearly three-quarters of organizations (73 percent) cited the need to serve a geographically dispersed workforce as a top motivator of virtual classroom training use. Nearly half (48 percent) listed lower delivery costs for virtual classroom training compared with other delivery methods, 42 percent listed faster deployment in response to unanticipated changes compared with other delivery methods, and 33 percent pointed to the ability to ensure consistency of training across different locations and deliveries.

Notably, high-performing organizations highlighted the ability to deploy virtual classroom training faster than other delivery methods in response to unexpected circumstances significantly more often than other organizations ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that virtual classroom training can prove especially useful for educating employees on key knowledge, skills, and behaviors in times of rapid change and uncertainty.

**FIGURE 3**

## Top 5 Drivers for Using Virtual Classroom Training

Which of the following factors most influence your organization's use of virtual classroom training? (Select up to five.)



## Barriers to Expanding Virtual Classroom Usage

To investigate what prevents organizations from employing the virtual classroom for more formal learning hours, the research asked participants who indicated they only used the method to deliver some of their formal learning hours about the top barriers to expanding its use. Participants could select up to five options from a list of 14.

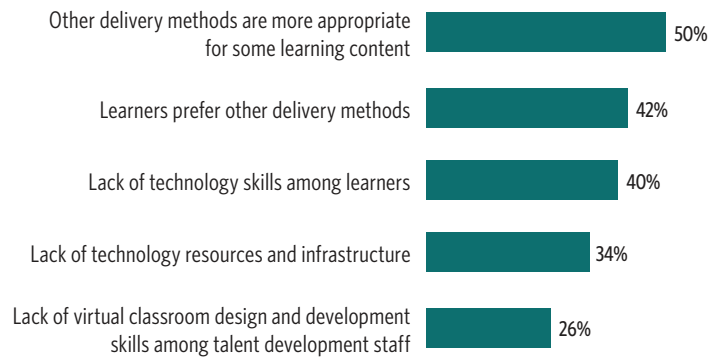
Cited by 50 percent of respondents, the option “other methods being more appropriate for some learning content” was the top reason virtual classroom training wasn’t used to deliver more formal learning (Figure 4). Slightly fewer organizations cited learner preference for other delivery methods and a lack of technology skills among learners as their top barriers (42 and 40 percent, respectively). A third considered their lack of technology resources and infrastructure a top barrier, and 26 percent pointed to a lack of virtual classroom design and development skills among talent development staff.

Organizations that listed a lack of virtual classroom design and development skills among talent development staff as a top barrier were significantly less likely to be high performers than other organizations ( $p < 0.05$ ). This underscores the importance of having a talent development team with specific expertise in virtual classroom formats for making virtual learning a success.

**FIGURE 4**

## Barriers to Expanding Virtual Classroom Training

What are the top barriers to expanding virtual classroom training at your organization?  
(Select up to five.)



### Key Findings

- Virtual classroom training made up at least half of formal learning hours delivered at 65 percent of organizations. High-performing organizations were significantly more likely than other organizations to deliver at least half of their formal hours in the virtual classroom ( $p < 0.05$ ).
- The features most commonly available for virtual classroom platforms included chat (96 percent), screensharing (94 percent), hand-raising prompts (94 percent), and session recording (92 percent).
- Most organizations (87 percent) regularly accompanied virtual classroom training with post-training activities and resources. More than half offered job aids and performance support tools, additional reading or videos related to the training content, self-paced e-learning, or access to coaching or mentoring.
- Less than half of organizations (39 percent) provided virtual classroom attendees with guidelines for communicating with other learners during the training. Those that did were significantly more likely to be high performers ( $p < 0.05$ ).
- Although almost all organizations said they conducted at least some measurement of their virtual classroom training's effectiveness, only 25 percent evaluated its influence on business results or return on investment (ROI).
- Nearly all organizations (95 percent) had adapted at least one traditional classroom course for the virtual classroom in the last 12 months. Within this group, 59 percent said they regularly evaluated whether the training program's business need was still relevant during the adaptation process.

## Identifying Statistically Significant Differences

This report often notes whether the differences between two groups is significant at a level of  $p < 0.05$ . A significance of  $p < 0.05$  implies a less than 5 percent probability that the difference is a result of chance, and one can be 95 percent confident that the results represent a statistically significant relationship.

# Conclusion and Recommendations

Many organizations turned to virtual classroom training as a core capability for talent development in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, drivers for using virtual training other than the pandemic—such as serving a geographically dispersed workforce and lower delivery costs compared with other training delivery methods—suggest the medium will likely remain highly important for the foreseeable future. The 88 percent of organizations that plan to maintain or increase their funding for virtual classroom training over the next 12 months point to the same conclusion.

Based on report findings and interviews with subject matter experts, ATD Research offers these recommendations to help talent development leaders make the most of their virtual classroom training. Whether they lead to small changes or sweeping ones, they can help virtual classrooms provide maximum support for organizational performance.

## **Drive Learning Transfer With Activities Before, During, and After Training**

Almost all organizations that participated in this research asked learners to participate in at least some learning activities during virtual classroom training, such as simulations and role plays. Most organizations also extended the virtual classroom training experience, with 87 percent providing access to additional learning resources beforehand and 92 percent assigning them afterward. In each case, organizations that reported using a higher number of activities or resources were significantly more likely to be high performers ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Darryl Wyles, of ATD Education, notes that activities “are a key part of the strategies we have for making training more engaging.” He recommends aiming to incorporate one every three to five minutes. “A wide variety of learning activities will promote engagement, a collaborative work environment, and learning transfer,” he explains.

Additional activities and resources aside from the primary virtual classroom event can help learners extend the process of thinking critically about the material they’re exposed to in the virtual classroom. According to Molly McAllister of the Connecticut General Assembly, activities done before training serve as a great opportunity to help learners start thinking critically about what they’ll learn, “opening the door for what’s going to occur in the training.” Activities that occur after the session, meanwhile, should focus on encouraging employees to apply what they’ve learned. At the CGA, for example, employees must

complete application conversations with their managers to earn learning and development certificates, an important milestone in their professional development. “I’ve had overwhelming positive feedback on these because the manager is the one who is most able to support the transfer of learning and help remove obstacles when it comes to applying new skills,” she says.

## Leverage Your Virtual Classroom Platform’s Capabilities

Many virtual classroom platforms share common features. For example, 95 percent of respondents said their virtual classroom platform had chat capabilities, 94 percent said it offered screensharing, and 94 percent said it offered hand-raising prompts. However, not all organizations took full advantage of these features. For example, while 87 percent of organizations indicated that their virtual classroom platform offered breakout rooms for small group activities, only 72 percent regularly used them.

Failing to leverage every tool offered by a virtual classroom platform represents a lost opportunity for talent development. On average, high-performing organizations use a significantly higher percentage of the available features than other organizations ( $p < 0.05$ ).

According to Wyles, leveraging the virtual classroom platform’s features drives better talent development outcomes because “it establishes a connection with your audience to provide a much more engaging class.” By standing in for the nonverbal cues facilitators often rely on in a physical classroom and supporting learning activities, the features help foster learner interaction with facilitators and other learners. As he notes, they “mimic what we see in the traditional classroom setting.”

Transitioning toward the full use of a virtual classroom platform’s features often requires a concerted effort from instructional designers and facilitators. It involves weaving those features into the design and structure of virtual classroom experience and honing their use through extensive practice, testing, and piloting. “Sometimes you may see a hesitancy from professionals who are transitioning to the virtual classroom for the first time,” Wyles says, “but getting them to learn about these tools and then apply them will benefit everyone involved.”

## Build a Strong Process for Virtual Classroom Adaptation

Participants were asked about the steps of adapting traditional classroom training to the virtual classroom—including performing a needs assessment, reviewing existing instructional materials, and updating a course’s format and design. For all three processes, organizations that regularly performed all the tasks within the process were significantly more likely to be high performers than those that only performed some of the tasks ( $p < 0.05$ ), highlighting the importance of taking a thorough, comprehensive approach to preparing courses for an online environment.

The takeaway is that talent development professionals should view the virtual classroom adaptation process as exactly that—an adaptation and not a conversion. “In a sense, you aren’t converting anything. You’re redeveloping the training around a plan for learning to occur in a virtual environment,” says Laura Lubin of American University. “Much of your success depends on respecting that it’s a new medium and thinking about what’s going to work in it,” such as by rethinking business needs, learning activities, and even the pacing of content within the training.

Lubin recommends that talent development professionals identify a rubric or process for course adaptation that works well in general, and then customize it to their organization’s culture. “This is going to help you address best practices in a way that also fits the organization’s overall mission and values,” she says. Next, talent development leaders should find allies who can influence others to buy in to the implementation. “People don’t always like to feel like they’re being standardized, so getting them on your side and to understand why consistency is important is the biggest hurdle many learning designers will encounter,” she explains. “You need to produce evidence that the consistency you’re trying to achieve is going to lead to better outcomes and help people realize that it will offer a framework that enables them to put together the best virtual classroom experiences possible.”

# Acknowledgments

ATD Research gratefully acknowledges the contributions of time and professional insights from these experts:

- **Laura Lubin**, Assistant Director of Faculty Support, American University, Kogod School of Business
- **Molly McAllister**, CPTD, Training and Staff Development Professional, Connecticut General Assembly (CGA)
- **Darryl Wyles**, Facilitator, ATD Education



# About the Author and Contributors

**atd** The Association for Talent Development (ATD) is the world's largest professional membership organization supporting those who develop the knowledge and skills of employees, improve performance, and achieve results for the organizations they serve. Originally established in 1943, the association was previously known as the American Society for Training & Development (ASTD).

ATD's members come from more than 120 countries and work in public and private organizations in every industry sector. ATD supports talent development professionals who gather locally in volunteer-led US chapters and international member networks, and with international strategic partners. For more information, visit [td.org](http://td.org).

ATD's researchers track trends, inform decisions, and connect research to practice and performance. By providing comprehensive data and insightful analyses, ATD's research products, which include research reports, briefs, infographics, and webinars, help business leaders and talent development professionals understand and more effectively respond to today's fast-paced industry.



**Alex Moore** is the research analyst for ATD and served as the author of this report.



**Melissa Jones** is the manager of ATD Press and served as an editor for this report. She edits and manages the production process for ATD research reports and books.



**Maria Ho** is the associate director of ATD research services and served as an editor for this report. She provides oversight and direction for all of ATD's internal and external, industry specific, and market research services.



**Marisa Deshaies** is an associate editor for ATD and served as an editor for this report.



**Hannah Sternberg** is a production editor for ATD and served as an editor for this report.



**Shirley E.M. Raybuck** is a senior graphic designer for ATD and served as the designer for this report.

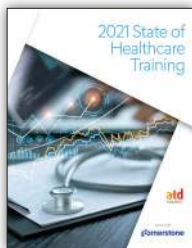
# More From ATD Research

## Developing Virtual Managers: Driving Excellence From Afar



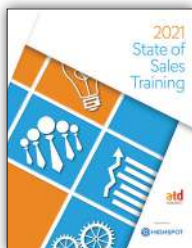
*Developing Virtual Managers: Driving Excellence From Afar* examines how organizations develop their virtual managers, who are leading teams that include employees who work at different locations than they do. Based on a survey of talent development professionals, this report provides data-driven insights for helping leaders understand what separates managing in a virtual environment from managing in a traditional one, create talent development experiences and opportunities that cater to virtual managers' needs, and promote organizational policies that reinforce virtual manager effectiveness. For more information, visit [td.org/virtualmanagersreport](https://td.org/virtualmanagersreport).

## 2021 State of Healthcare Training



The *2021 State of Healthcare Training* examines the training activities of US healthcare organizations. Based on a survey of talent development professionals working in healthcare, the report provides data that will aid readers in benchmarking their own organizations' healthcare training expenditures and activities against those of other organizations. Additionally, it discusses how talent development professionals in healthcare have contributed to their organizations' COVID-19 responses and the talent strategies they are using to address issues related to the nursing shortage. For more information, visit [td.org/healthcarereport2021](https://td.org/healthcarereport2021).

## 2021 State of Sales Training



The *2021 State of Sales Training* examines the formal training organizations provide for salespeople. Based on a survey of sales enablement, sales leadership, and talent development professionals, the report provides data that will aid readers in benchmarking their own organizations' sales training expenditures and activities against those of other organizations. For more information, visit [td.org/2021stateofsalestraining](https://td.org/2021stateofsalestraining).

## Simulations and Scenarios: Realistic, Effective, and Engaging Learning Success



*Simulations and Scenarios: Realistic, Effective, and Engaging Learning Success* examines how organizations use simulations and scenario-based learning in their talent development programs. Based on a survey of TD professionals, the report compares the practices of highly effective organizations with those of other organizations. TD professionals can use the information in this report to benchmark their organization's practices against those of their peers, guiding how they incorporate technology-based simulations, nontechnology-based simulations, and scenario-based learning into their work. For more information, visit [td.org/simsandscenarios](https://td.org/simsandscenarios).

Note: All ATD research reports can be purchased by visiting [www.td.org/Store](https://www.td.org/Store).

# Sponsor and Partner Benefits

## Sponsorship

Sponsoring ATD Research highlights your organization to our global customers and members. We'll feature your brand and advertise your name across the spectrum

of our research promotion efforts. Benefits include:

- placement of your logo on the report, the whitepaper associated with the report, presentation slides, and the ATD Research webpage
- information about your organization placed directly within the report, in A Note From Our Sponsor
- link to free sponsor offering on ATD Research webpage
- webcast citation and participation
- complimentary copies of the report
- *TD* magazine article will mention you as a sponsor.

Sponsorship of ATD research reports vastly increases your visibility, recognition, and reach within the workplace learning and performance industry.

## Partnership

Partner with ATD Research to study the organizational performance topic of your interest.

### The Partner Advantage:

- Your theories synchronize with our objective research practices.
- Your interests are represented throughout the research cycle.
- Your specific research objectives are clearly defined and met.
- Our analytic efforts support your business interests and concerns.
- Our results improve your productivity, efficiency, and/or bottom line.

Partnership entitles you to the same promotional benefits as sponsorship. Also, as a partner, you guide and we execute the research plan to do the following:

- Define the topic and objective.
- Identify data sources.
- Deliver collection instrument(s).
- Conduct interviews.
- Analyze data.
- Author report(s).
- Disseminate findings.
- Conduct webcasts.

We promote our products and sponsors on social media.



# About ATD Research

## What We Do

- ATD Research tracks trends, informs decisions, and connects research to performance for talent development professionals.
- Our research reports offer an empirical foundation for today's data-driven decision makers.
- ATD Research cares about your success, and our specialized research devoted to talent development proves it.

## 2021 ATD Research Topics

- *2021 State of the Industry*
- Simulations and Scenarios
- 2021 State of Sales Training
- 2021 State of Healthcare Training
- Virtual Managers
- Virtual Classrooms
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Culture of Learning

## Contact Information

Research reports published by ATD can be purchased by visiting our website at [www.td.org/Store](http://www.td.org/Store), or by calling 800.628.2783 or 703.683.8100.

If you'd like to sponsor or partner with ATD Research, contact ATD Research directly at [research@td.org](mailto:research@td.org) or call 800.628.2783 or 703.683.8100.