



Impact Report

2021 – 2025

Updated October 2026



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Brace for Impact

When Kepler's leadership looked honestly at who enters this industry — and who never gets the chance — the barrier was never talent or ambition. It was *access*.

Higher education often builds the foundations for professional success, but a degree alone cannot teach you how to manage live media spend, navigate client accounts, or step onto an agency floor with total self-belief.

In 2020, backed by founder Rick Greenberg, we built Kepler U to be the ultimate professional amplifier: a free, agency-powered externship bridging the gap between academic theory and real-world execution.

As applicant demand outpaces program capacity, we are expanding our infrastructure to serve more students. We are modernizing our curriculum, scaling standardized mentorship, and launching a talent collective connecting partner employers directly to our graduates; all changes informed by our past to support our future.

This report is both the evidence of what's possible and an invitation for what still can be...

Help us open the door wider.

— Justin Roberts

PROGRAM DIRECTOR | KEPLER U
AVP, Culture & Inclusion



Kepler U metrics behind the magic

589

GRADUATES

Cohorts 1–10 graduates

81%

EMPLOYED

Within ~6 months

79%

IN-INDUSTRY

Of employed, in-industry, or marketing roles

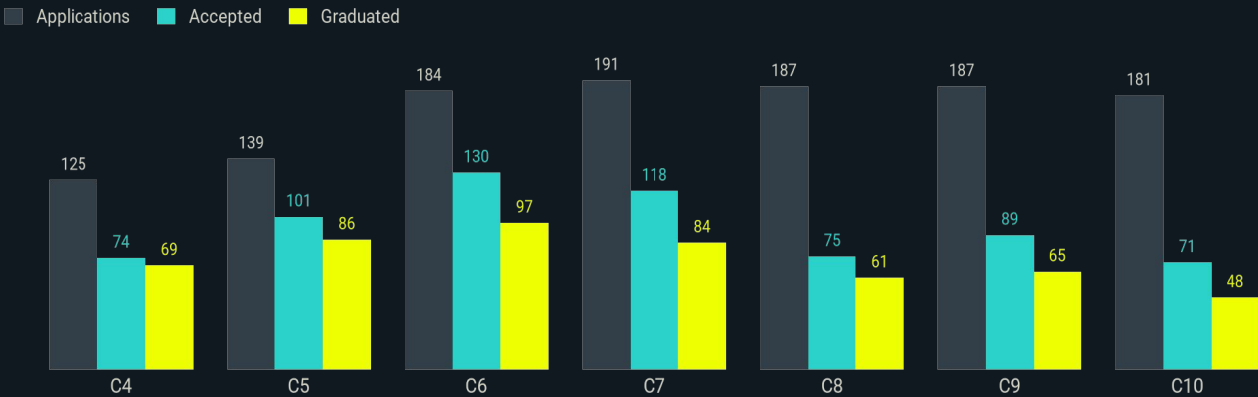
30+

EMPLOYERS

Digital media network

THE DEMAND CURVE

1,191 applications for 667 seats, average acceptance 56%, and 44% across the three most recent cohorts. Demand exceeds capacity.



Graduate count: 589 across Cohorts 1–10 (2021–2025); see Appendix A.

Employment and in-industry rates are reported on a Cohorts 1–10 basis (see Appendix A); Cohorts 9–10 employment verified via LinkedIn review, Aug 2026.

Chart covers Cohorts 4–10, the cohorts with application data on record.

What the first five years show

86%

First generation graduates

- ~70% are women.
- ~90% identify as BIPOC.
- Half of Cohort 11 was aged 18–24.

71%

Moved up an income band

At entry, 60% of those who shared their salary earned under \$25,000.

Today, half our grads earn \$50,000 or more.

9.2 / 10

Likelihood to recommend

82% of respondents rated the program 9 or 10.

In alumni calls, mentorship is the element alumni cite most often as most valuable.

98%

Already had a degree

Yet still could not access the industry.

The barrier is network and applied experience, not schooling.

+ 117%

Professional network strength

Self-rated network strength rose from 1.8 to 3.9 out of 5 —

the largest readiness gain the program measures.

All figures in this report trace to program records, the FY2026 budget, or the 2026 alumni survey, and are labeled by source and sample.

Origin Story

In 2020, Kepler launched a company-wide effort to build a bridge between untapped talent and our industry. Backed by Kepler founder, Rick Greenberg, we built a free, agency-powered externship to put live client campaigns and working mentors directly into the hands of rising professionals.

Kepler U built its momentum organically through alumni word of mouth and peer referrals. Our story isn't defined by a single turning point, but by five years of quieter momentum — thousands of thank-you notes, Slack messages, and job offers celebrated one cohort at a time.

“This is not a talent gap. It is an access gap.”

What began years ago as a 16-student pilot has matured into an established workforce engine for our industry. Recognized by AdExchanger as the industry's **Best DEI Initiative in 2024**, the program stands today as a permanent pathway into paid media — built by agency conviction, driven by alumni success.



A growing industry, a *closed door*

Digital media continues to innovate and grow

Providing stable life-sustaining jobs with upward mobility.

Marketing careers pay well and keep growing

Median pay for marketing managers is \$161,030 (BLS).

Kepler U confronts 3 barriers to access at once

The lack of network, the “paper ceiling,” and the required experience catch-22.



Industry trajectory: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook — median pay for marketing managers was \$161,030 (May 2024), and employment of advertising, promotions and marketing managers is projected to grow 6% from 2024 to 2034, faster than the average for all occupations (bls.gov/ooh).

For the four-way win

Kepler U's model bridges untapped potential and industry demand to deliver value to four different stakeholders at once.



Our students

- Industry-current skills, professional networks, and direct employment outcomes.



Nonprofit clients

- Free, professional-grade digital advertising campaign management via cohort capstone projects.



Funders & partners

- A measurable workforce investment with verified results and tax-deductible giving.



Digital Media Industry

- A deeper, more diverse talent pipeline and stronger client relationships.

2020–2027: From *impulse* to *infrastructure*

2020

Founding impulse. Kepler's DEI initiative takes shape, led by Justin Roberts, backed by founder Rick Greenberg.

2022–2023

The word-of-mouth and COOP flywheel engages; cohorts scale from 31 to 97 graduates.

2025

Cohort 9 (Mar–May) carries the rebrand from Kepler Academy to Kepler U.

2026

Cohort 11 graduates 91. Alumni survey and the program data engine are built.

MAY 2021

Kepler Academy launches. Cohort 1 pilot graduates 16. The COOP partnership is in place from the first cohort.

2024

AdExchanger names the program its Best DEI Initiative — external industry recognition of the model.

FALL 2025

Tides confirms the Kepler U Program Fund (Aug 29). Cohort 10 runs Sep 22 – Nov 13.

2027

Orbit talent collective in formation; Cohort 12 launches late March 2027.



Our Partnership with *COOP*

Kepler U has scaled organically across 5 years. Growth is driven by two trusted pipelines: a partnership with **COOP Careers**, and alumni word of mouth.

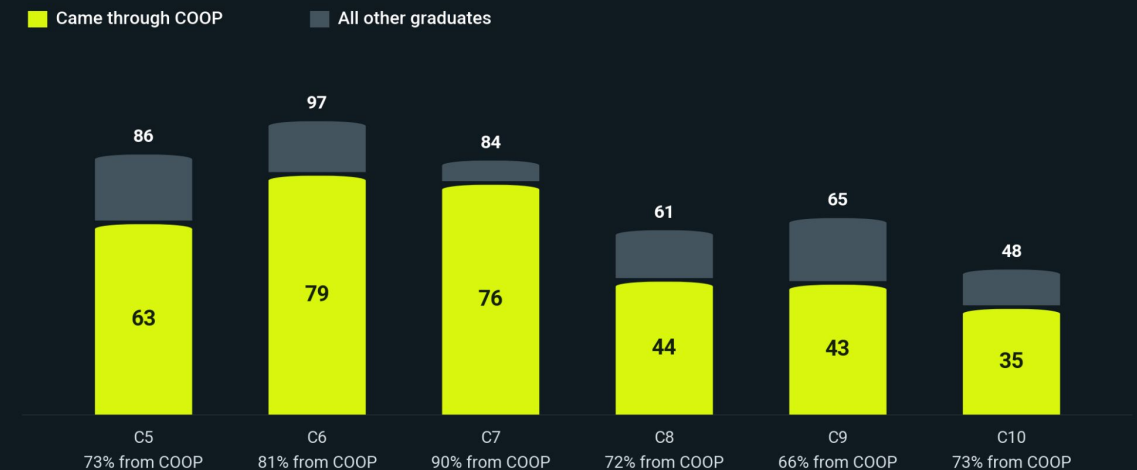
COOP Careers is a national nonprofit working to overcome underemployment among first-generation and low-income college graduates. Operating in NY, SF, LA, Chicago, and Miami, they run a free 16-week evening fellowship.

COOP Careers has hired over 20 Kepler U graduates as instructors of digital media marketing. These are often gateway jobs into the industry itself.



77%

Of Graduates Via COOP



COOP figures are recorded from Cohort 5 onward. Cohorts 1 to 4 have no COOP data in any source. Cohort 11 excluded as too recent.

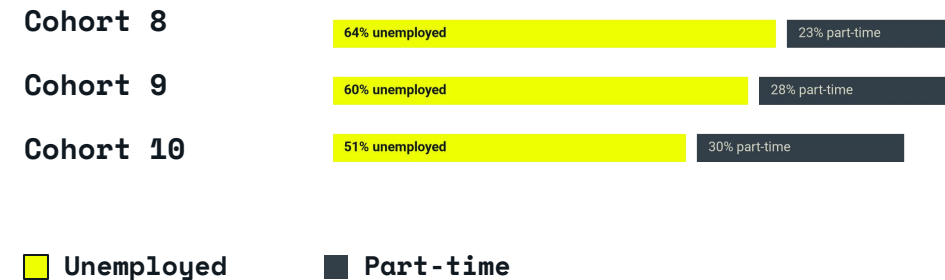
The *reality* of the job market

Kepler U reaches people actively locked out of the industry. Across three application cycles, most applicants arrived unemployed or underemployed and job-searching, with most of the remainder in part-time work.

THE INVESTMENT, HONESTLY

Job hunting in this market is a full-time cost — months of searching, with networks doing the deciding. As AI continues to transform the industry, entry-level jobs are the first to be cut, and last to be created. Kepler U trains students in the technical *and* human skills needed to break in. Over ten structured weeks, they gain applied platform experience, a live campaign portfolio, personalized coaching, and professional network.

Applicant pools, Cohorts 8–10 (n=555)



“Unemployed” = unemployed and actively job-searching. Most of the remainder of applicants arrived in part-time work or underemployed positions.

Student *demographics*

EXPANDING DEMOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

These are self-reported snapshots, not a program-wide census; building standardized intake across all cohorts is the program's top data-infrastructure priority.

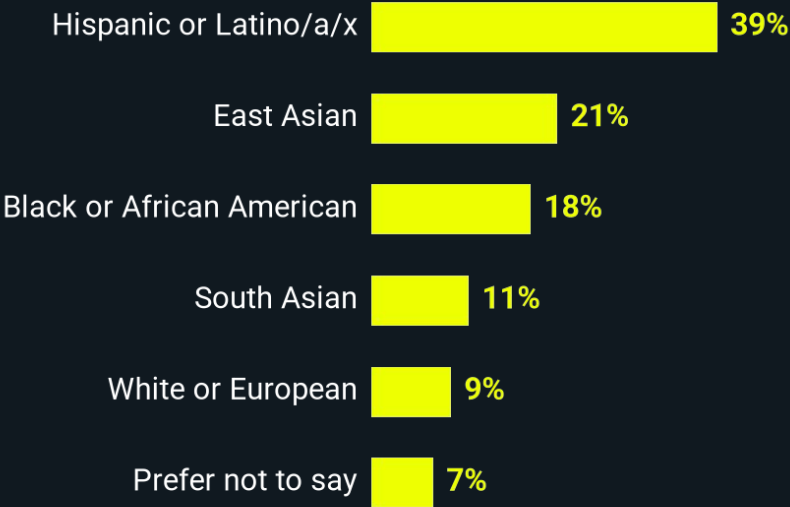
OTHER KEY FINDINGS

69% reported three years or less of workforce experience; 41% speak English as an additional language.

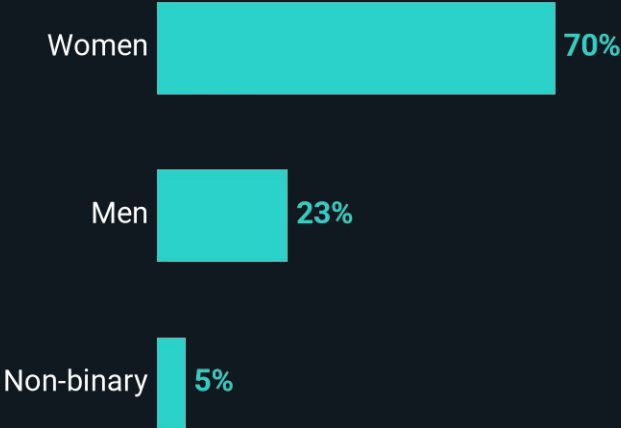
WHERE WE SERVE

Fully remote, rooted in the Northeast corridor: early cohorts drew overwhelmingly from the New York metro area, and alumni now span 13+ states — the largest documented clusters in New York / New Jersey, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

RACE & ETHNICITY



GENDER



The clearest signal of *impact*

71%

Of alumni who disclosed income at both points moved up at least one income band.

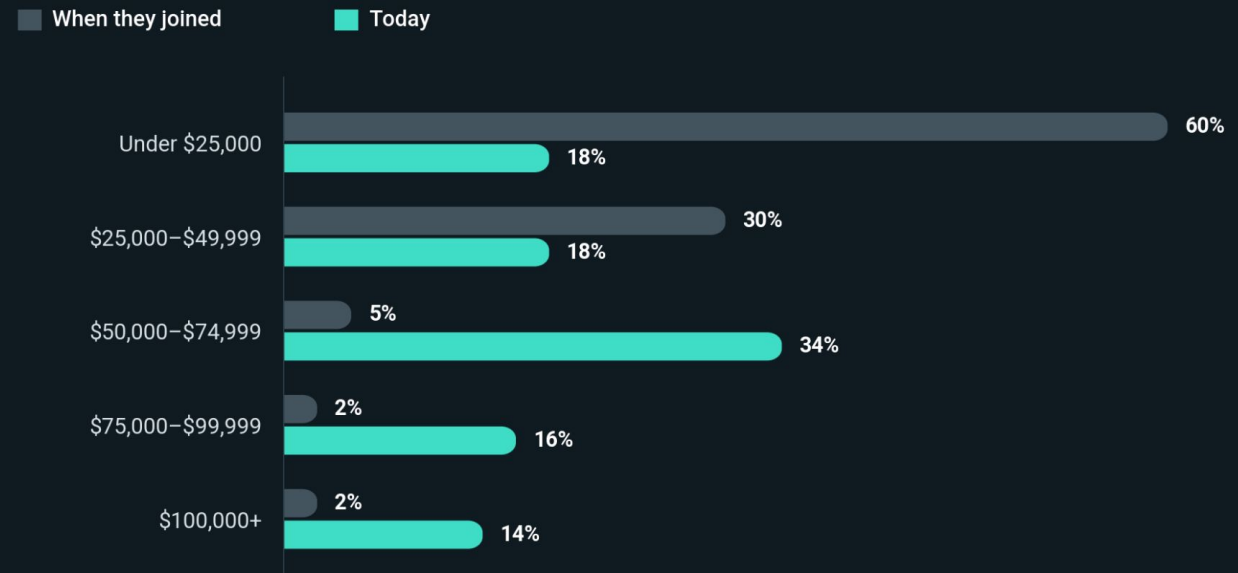
None *moved down*.

01

The percentage of students who made less than \$25,000 fell from **60% to 18%**.

02

The percentage of students that made \$50,000 or more grew from **9% to 64%**.



2026 Kepler U alumni survey. n=43 disclosed income at entry, n=44 today. Self-reported and self-selected, so this is not a program-wide census.

2026 Kepler U alumni survey. n=43 disclosed income at entry, n=44 today. Self-reported and self-selected, so this is not a program-wide census.

Outcomes that matter

41%

ADVANCED

of applicable survey respondents report a promotion or a more senior role since graduating.

Employment & Placement: program records, Cohorts 1–8 basis (396 of 476 employed).

Readiness & Advocacy: 2026 alumni survey (n=56).

Confidence in digital marketing

Professional network strength

Comfort with tools & platforms

Confidence in digital marketing

2.5

4.2

+68%

Professional network strength

1.8

3.9

+117%

Comfort with tools & platforms

2.0

4.0

+100%

Self-rated, 1–5 · before Kepler U vs. today

1 2 3 4 5

Real budgets, *real nonprofits*

Every cohort's capstone is a live Google Ads campaign built and managed for a U.S. 501(c)(3) nonprofit holding a Google Ads grant.

Students gain agency-grade experience; nonprofits receive professional campaign management they could not otherwise afford.



In the words of our *clients*

“

“I was incredibly amazed by the dedication demonstrated by Cohort 5 and Kepler Academy. The entire process was executed with utmost excellence — the cohort’s performance was nothing short of outstanding.”

Patrick’s Kids Foundation

COHORT 5 CAPSTONE CLIENT

“

“Kepler Academy was so comprehensive and helpful! The team took initiative to go above and beyond what we originally discussed. They did an amazing job.”

Sexual Violence Prevention

COHORT 6 CAPSTONE CLIENT

“

“Hiring paid professionals to set up and optimize our Google Ads was beyond our budget. The students exceeded expectations — thorough, insightful, and delivered with professionalism. Their support made a meaningful impact.”

Enriched Living

COHORT 10 CAPSTONE CLIENT

Where our *graduates* have landed

Kepler	29	Wavemaker	6
Vaynermedia	19	Kinesso	6
WPP Media (prev. Group M)	17	CMI Media Group	5
OMD USA	10	Essence Mediacom	5
Dentsu	9	Mindshare	5
Horizon Media	9	Havas Media Network	4

ADDITIONAL OUTLETS

Alumni also work at Google, IBM, Adobe, Meta, L’Oréal, DoorDash, Expedia Group, Microsoft, TikTok and across the Publicis, and IPG networks.



Brittany King
SVP, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, VaynerX

“Graduates of the Kepler U program join Vayner grounded and with a ton of ambition. Their ability to make an impact in their work and support their teams shows in their growth within the organization.”



Dylan Whyte
Sr. Analyst, Talent Attraction, Kepler Group

“From my experience, KU alums are always fantastic. They’re super passionate, well-researched, and genuinely excited about our company. I LOVE speaking with them!”

Counts per the program’s employer table (Aug 2026); estimates that shift as alumni advance. Source: ‘Organizations hiring most KA grads’ table, Kepler U Program Data & Statistics workbook (updated Aug 11, 2026).

Kepler U alumni *trailblazers*



COHORT 1

Ashoka Robin

Senior Account Manager,
Google
(former Kepler)



COHORT 2

Dana Mishenin

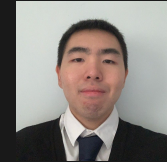
Associate Manager, Growth
Marketing, DoorDash



COHORT 2

Olya Sukhopar

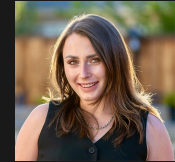
Paid Media Manager,
Givebuttr
(prev. Expedia Group)



COHORT 3

Raymond Tom

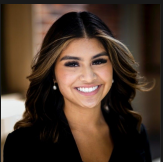
Supervisor, Analytics
Consulting, CSA (Havas
Media Network)



COHORT 5

Leslie Andrade

Strategy Senior Analyst,
Kepler · Co-Lead, Cosmic
Cultura ERG



COHORT 6

Ariadna Cruz

Marketing Strategy Analyst,
Adobe



COHORT 10

Anderson Peguero

Investment Associate,
Publicis Groupe



COHORT 8

Pearl Green

Associate Media Planner,
WPP Media
(prev. GroupM)



COHORT 8

Jeremiah Ortega

Product Manager, IBM



COHORT 9

Nizan Howard

Data Analyst, SOLVE(D) (IPG
Health)

Voices of *Kepler U*

“

The programming and curriculum felt so relevant and impactful — I received hands-on training from incredible experts and learned so much as they guided us through a client project.

— Kiara R.

Cohort 7
Microsoft Advertising

“

The biggest barrier to the job search is the lack of belief in yourself. Kepler U directly challenged that for me. I left knowing I was capable of planning and analyzing a real campaign.

— Anirudh S.

Cohort 10
RPA

“

Kepler has been one of the best things that happened in my life. I accepted a position at OMD as a digital activation associate. Thank you for being part of my journey to overcome underemployment.

— Raymond L.

Cohort 5
OMD

All quotations are published with the alumnus's recorded consent for use with first name and cohort.

Alumni feedback → Program build → *Partner runway*

ALUMNI SAID

“More programmatic and technical depth.”

“Mentorship is the most valuable element.”

“Smaller hands-on groups; earlier client work.”

“Modern skills: AI, data storytelling, creative.”

“The 3–5pm ET block is hard for working adults.”

KEPLER U IS BUILDING

• **Three tracks** in Cohort 12 — Social, Search, Strategy — on top of a refreshed common core curriculum, plus Programmatic workshops. Proposed for late March 2027.

• **A standardized** Mentor Library with professional development resources, so the highest-rated component scales.

• **Ten-week design** with project-lead working sessions roughly tripled. The project teams will include members of each track, as in an agency.

• **Applied AI woven** through the core and every track — not a bolt-on. Focused training on platforms by track, “How I AI” from Kepler staff, using AI for professional development.

• **We are going to add** more pre-recorded educational resources, and pilot new workshops and shorter format programs.

PARTNER CONNECTION

• **Track sponsorship** from ad tech partners. Partners advise on curriculum, can lead a class, and provide media credits or platform access to students.

• **Foundation grant-support** for program development and student support.

• **Deeper nonprofit-client** partnerships that offer more than just google ads, and advance their missions.

• **Corporate, local and regional** grant support for “AI training,” and “skills-based job training.”

• **Sponsorship** of our workshops, including programmatic advertising.

Building the *data engine*

Equity of impact will be measured and reported with *rigor* — not asserted.



Verified demographic intake

Standardized, consented demographic collection at enrollment for every cohort.



Before-and-after outcome surveys

Per-cohort readiness and outcome measurement, comparable across cohorts.



A longitudinal talent network

Tracking promotions, income mobility, and careers over years — not snapshots.



Kepler U grew faster than its record keeping. For five years data was collected cohort by cohort, in different formats, by different people, for different purposes. Demographic collection was not standardized until 2024. Employment status at application was not recorded until Cohort 8. COOP referrals were not recorded until Cohort 5. The outcome figures in this report were reconstructed after the fact from a 2026 alumni survey of 56 graduates, cohort application forms, and an August 2026 LinkedIn review of Cohorts 9 and 10. Sources included application forms, post-graduate surveys, LinkedIn profiles, and other self-reported feedback.

That changes with Cohort 12. Demographic and employment questions move onto the application itself, asked with consent and asked of everyone. Readiness and outcomes are measured before and after each cohort on the same instrument, so cohorts become comparable to each other. Alumni employment moves into a standing record updated on a schedule.

Our program *development strategy*

In 2025 Kepler U made a structural decision: rather than stand up a separate nonprofit, the program established the Kepler U Program Fund as a Single Entity Fund at Tides Foundation EIN# 51-0198509 confirmed August 29, 2025 — 501(c)(3)-eligible giving with professional administration. On that foundation, a six-part development strategy is being built:

1 · Fiscal infrastructure at Tides

Kepler U receives tax-deductible gifts through Tides Foundation, a 501(c)(3) public charity, enabling all forms of fundraising.

2 · Advisory board

An advisory board of Kepler leadership and external partners being assembled to guide strategy and open networks — first invitations extended in 2026.

3 · Sponsorship structure

Giving tiers from \$2,500 to \$100,000, each tied to a concrete program component: a student, a curriculum track, a cohort, or Orbit.

4 · Kepler client partnerships

Conversations with major Kepler clients whose CSR and talent commitments align with workforce co-investment.

5 · Individual giving & events

Individual donation campaigns and in-person fundraising events, such as the Orbit Kick-Off, all through the Tides fund.

6 · Institutional grants

An active pipeline of private foundations, corporations, and other regional funders aligned with economic mobility and skills-based workforce development.

Sponsorship & *support opportunities*

TIERS OF SUPPORT

Up to \$2,500 · Individual gifts

Stardust up to \$100 · Signal Booster \$100–\$500 · Star Chart \$500–\$2,500

\$2,500 · Gravity Force

The first sponsor level. Your company is thanked by name on the Kepler U website.

\$5,000 · Rocket Fuel

Funds two students' full participation, including one-to-one mentorship.

\$30,000 · Constellation

Official sponsor of one of three named curriculum tracks — Paid Social; Paid Search/SEO; or Strategy — used across cohorts.

\$50,000 · Galaxy

Anchors a named yearly cycle with two cohorts — staff, technology, and graduation for roughly 200 students.

\$100,000 · Orbit

Underwrites the launch of Orbit: The Talent Futures Collective, formalizing employer pipelines at scale.

FY 26–27 PRIORITIES

COHORT 12

Curriculum Modernization

The proposed Cohort 12 redesign (late March 2027): ten weeks, three specialization tracks on a common core mirroring Kepler's departments, Programmatic delivered as a workshop series, applied AI woven through core and every track, and a tripling of hands-on project-lead session time.

COLLECTIVE

Orbit: Talent Futures Collective

Formalizing relationships with 30+ employer partners into a structured recruiting network. In formation — advisory board invitations under way.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Demographic Data Infrastructure

Building the structured intake + alumni-tracking systems funders require. The C11 intake survey is the first yield; longitudinal, equity-grade reporting is the next build.

Contacts



Justin Roberts

Program Director, Kepler U

justin.roberts@keplergrp.com



J.J. El-Far

Program Manager, Kepler U

jj.elfar@keplergrp.com



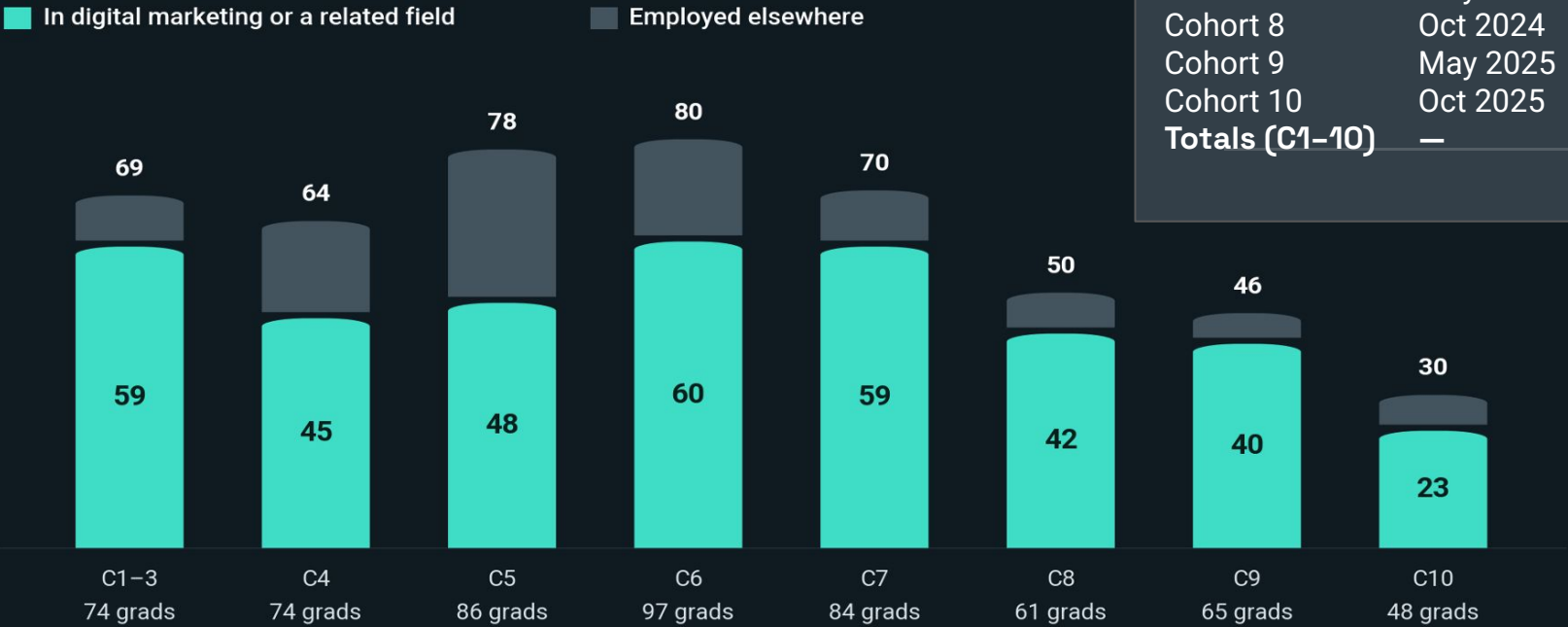
Malenie

Areché Rodríguez

Fund Manager, Tides Foundation

mareche@tides.org

Cohort graduates & outcomes



COHORT	TERM	GRADUATES	EMPLOYED	IN-FIELD
Cohort 1	May 2021	16	92%	78%
Cohort 2	Oct 2021	27	92%	78%
Cohort 3	May 2022	31	91%	78%
Cohort 4	Oct 2022	74	86%	90%
Cohort 5	May 2023	86	91%	70%
Cohort 6	Oct 2023	97	82%	62%
Cohort 7	May 2024	84	83%	75%
Cohort 8	Oct 2024	61	82%	84%
Cohort 9	May 2025	65	71%*	84%
Cohort 10	Oct 2025	48	63%*	87%
Totals (C1-10)	—	589	81%	79%

Cohorts 1 to 10. Cohort 11 graduated June 2026 and is excluded as too recent for comparable outcome data.