Incentive Research Foundation

APPENDICES: IMPACT OF LEARNING ON TRAINING, LEARNING AND CERTIFICATION

Appendix A: Reward value and motivation

Equal total value does not settle perceived value

> *"Smaller rewards feel like they'd be cheaper even though the overall value is the same as the large reward."*

This respondent explicitly accepts equal total value while describing smaller rewards as feeling cheaper. Other accounts assume that dividing a reward changes the quality or usefulness of what is received. Those explanations imply different tests: concentrate versus divide the same fungible reward, then vary the usefulness of the goods separately. The comments concern the direct structure question; they cannot establish what caused each conjoint choice.

> *"I feel that smaller rewards a lot of times would just be trashy little objects that are of no use. If you got one larger reward maybe it would be something nice you would actually use."*

A contrasting case pools milestone gift cards into one larger purchase, so milestones and a useful final acquisition need not conflict. Another respondent values a tangible reward as a sign of accomplishment even when it is not needed or used. Practical utility is therefore one account of reward value, not the only one. These comments do not identify a minimum motivating dollar amount.

Progress and a final goal can be complementary

> *"Even though the total value in the end is equal, knowing I'm being rewarded on each milestone keeps me motivated on moving forward to completion. With the majority of the amount at the end, make me want to complete it rather than getting most of the reward along the way."*

This explanation assigns different functions to interim and final rewards. Visible progress is another function: one respondent describes evidence of doing something right and being appreciated. In contrast, another respondent expects a hybrid to be distracting, while a third sees no difference when totals are equal. A useful experiment would hold the material reward constant while separately varying progress feedback and completion contingency.

Completion pressure may coexist with low engagement

> *"If it's smaller awards - if the training isn't super compelling i'd be more inclined to cut my losses and take the partial earnings and leave"*

The possibility of accepting partial earnings and leaving contrasts with accounts in which interim rewards sustain effort. It also raises a practical question: does a completion contingency improve worthwhile learning, or hold people in a course they find unengaging? Measure dropout reasons, knowledge and later use alongside completion.

Appendix B: Learning support and contrasting cases

Learning may be the valued benefit

> *"Generally any training I undergo through is beneficial to me on its own or is its own reward. I like gift cards and merch but it would just be a minor bonus to the training itself."*

This differs from an ability to self-motivate, indifference because total rewards are equal, or an obligation to finish required training. These explanations should lead to different design choices. Courses need relevance and access even when the added reward is attractive.

Progress rewards may signal support or create unwanted attention

> *"I find it's really rewarding to get a reward at each milestones. Feels like I'm doing something right and I'm appreciated. Also it's a good way to motivate me to continue."*

> *"I don't need continued recognition for completing small steps of a program because I don't need to have that much attention called to myself."*

The first account links milestones with competence and appreciation; the second dislikes repeated attention. Together they suggest testing useful feedback separately from public visibility. They do not establish whether automated or manager delivery is more effective. Two respondents also describe rewards as reducing felt compulsion, while another welcomes pressure to finish. These contrasting meanings motivate an autonomy question without measuring autonomy or disproving reward crowding-out effects.

Practical frictions and opportunities deserve measurement

> *"If there was something to gain at the end, then that would motivate me. I prefer the one larger reward at the end because I don't want the hassle of counting points as milestones."*

One respondent also reports difficulty finding time for certification during or after work, while another describes manager-protected, company-paid time for optional courses (quoted in the body). These are clues about access and organizational support, not estimates of how widespread those practices are.

Ambiguity remains part of the evidence

Review identified 2 eligible comments with a possible mismatch to the equal-total-value premise and 1 with tension between the selected option and the explanation. These are interpretive flags, not automatic exclusions. One respondent asks why they would not want a larger reward overall; another selects a large completion reward but explains that smaller rewards would sustain progress. Other respondents explicitly acknowledge equal totals. None of these cases justifies treating all choices as misunderstood.

Quotations retain respondents' wording and spelling. Shortened quotations are continuous extracts marked as excerpts. Quotations illustrate meanings and contrasting cases; their selection is not a frequency estimate.

Appendix C: Detailed reward preferences

These tables give the full rankings behind the main findings. The two reward categories were ranked separately and cannot be treated as a single choice among all options.

Tangible Rewards for optional training

Tangible reward	Ranked first n	Ranked first %	Mean rank
Gift cards	271	50.3%	2.03
Travel	160	29.7%	2.63
Experiences	47	8.7%	3.21
Merchandise	26	4.8%	4.03
Points accumulated for a larger reward	30	5.6%	4.40
Points redeemed immediately for smaller rewards	5	0.9%	4.71

Recognition options for optional training

Recognition option	Ranked first n	Ranked first %	Mean rank
Promotion consideration or new assignments	380	70.5%	1.61
Private manager recognition	48	8.9%	3.01
Public recognition	56	10.4%	3.13
Digital badge or credential	44	8.2%	3.37
Peer recognition	11	2.0%	3.86

Source: IRF worker survey, September 2026. n = 539 for each ranking. Lower mean rank indicates greater preference. Tangible options explicitly held dollar value equal; recognition options did not assign equal monetary values. Rows follow mean rank within each category.

Appendix D: Detailed reward schedules

Preferred structure during a multiweek program

Structure	n	%
One larger reward at completion	228	42.3%
Progress rewards plus a larger completion reward	203	37.7%
Several smaller rewards at milestones	73	13.5%
No difference	35	6.5%

n = 539. The question explicitly held total reward value equal. The combination keeps a larger reward at completion and adds smaller progress rewards.

Design for completion and later learning

Design	n	%
Progress rewards plus a larger reward for later demonstration	246	45.6%
Reward for demonstrated skill 60–90 days later	98	18.2%
Small rewards for starting, progress, completion, and later use	84	15.6%
All equally motivating	104	19.3%
None motivating	7	1.3%

n = 539. This question asked about completion, on-the-job use and an effort to retain learning together. It did not explicitly hold total reward value equal. The most popular combination tied its larger reward to demonstrating learning later, rather than to completion alone. Neither question measures actual learning effects.

Recognition visibility preferences

Among 539 eligible respondents, 242 (44.9%) generally preferred private recognition, 182 (33.8%) public recognition and 115 (21.3%) had no preference. The paired-choice experiment offered a public announcement; it did not test private feedback or recognition added to a tangible reward.

Appendix E: Recent rewards and required training

Main incentive in the most recent rewarded training

Main incentive	n	%
Digital badge, credential, or certificate	102	23.8%
Gift cards	100	23.3%
Career opportunities	49	11.4%
Merchandise	39	9.1%
Private manager recognition	36	8.4%
Experiences	32	7.5%
Public recognition	21	4.9%
Travel	20	4.7%
Accumulated points	17	4.0%
Extra time off	10	2.3%
Other noncash or unspecified incentive	3	0.7%

n = 429, excluding 109 not-applicable answers and one explicit cash-reward report. Respondents selected the main incentive if more than one was offered. Recent use is not a desired budget allocation.

Stated motivators for earlier mandatory completion

Response	n	%
Small tangible reward	217	45.3%
Entry into a prize drawing	54	11.3%
Manager or leadership recognition	48	10.0%
Leaderboard or team challenge	32	6.7%
Workload determines timing regardless of reward	97	20.3%
None would change timing	31	6.5%

n = 479 with screener-confirmed mandatory-training experience and an applicable response. The four incentive options total 351 respondents (73.3%). These are hypothetical motivators, not measured changes in completion behavior. All tables: IRF worker survey, September 2026; rounding may affect totals.

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