



AWS Career Resource Guidebook

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INTRODUCTION

Your Welding Career Map: From Foundation to Future

No one hands you a roadmap the day you pick up a torch. Welding careers rarely follow a straight line — and sometimes, the next step isn't obvious.

Whether you're new to the trade or decades in, this guide is here to help you figure out what's next. Maybe you're working toward a certification, stepping into an inspector or educator role, or exploring leadership paths in your organization. Or you're simply looking to see where your skills can take you.

This guide helps cut through the noise.

It's not a checklist or a finish line. It's a map you can return to as your goals evolve. Inside, you'll find potential career paths, AWS tools to support your progress, and ideas to help you shape what comes next.

You bring the drive.
We'll provide the directions.



SECTION 1: BUILD YOUR FOUNDATION

Every welding career should start with a solid foundation. Whether you're still in school, just getting started on the job, or making a career switch, this section covers the groundwork that can help set you up for long-term success.

Explore Education and Training Options

Welding is hands-on, and so is your education. Start with researching programs that match your learning style and timeline: trade schools and technical colleges, community college welding programs, union or employer-sponsored training, or high school CTE and dual-enrollment opportunities.

Not sure which route makes the most sense? Visit AWS [Accredited Testing Facilities \(ATF\)](#) in your area to find out about local welding schools. Then, meet the instructors, ask about their curriculum, and the certifications or credentials they can offer.

Apply for Scholarships and Financial Support

The [AWS Foundation](#) offers scholarships for students, educators, and current members of the welding workforce. You don't have to be right out of high school to qualify. Check the AWS Foundation website for current opportunities and deadlines. And make sure to check your local AWS Section for scholarships too.

Find That First Job or Apprenticeship

Getting your foot in the door doesn't always mean landing a full-time welding job on day one. Look for apprenticeships, internships, co-ops, job shadowing, or entry-level roles with advancement potential. These first steps build experience, connecting you with industry members and mentors, helping you understand shop culture, and potentially opening doors to future opportunities.

"The registered apprenticeship model provides the flexibility for small or medium-sized employers to say, 'OK, I want to bring someone in, get them trained, and follow this pathway that's already been laid out by AWS Foundation.' They're able to save time and effort by adapting the training to their specific workplace and equipment, while still meeting a nationally recognized standard."

—Brent Weil, Consultant, *Jobs for the Future*

SECTION 2:

DEVELOP AS A PROFESSIONAL

Once your foundation is established, it's time to think about your long game — the kind of work you want to do, the credentials that will get you there, and the training it will take to grow. You don't need to have it all figured out up front, but knowing the kind of AWS Certification/s you'll need to advance your career, understanding what each one provides and how it fits your path is important.

No matter which path you choose, you'll frequently revisit the essentials — safety, welding symbols, materials, and procedures — and adding advanced skills as your career progresses.

Get Started with Entry-Level Certifications

If you're just beginning, the CW and CAWI credentials can be good places to start. These certifications can build your confidence and open doors for employment. Having one or more CW credentials shows that you can perform specific welds to code; the CAWI lays the groundwork for inspector roles.

Certified Welder (CW)

The CW certification shows you can perform specific welds to code. There are many CW options, based on joint type, filler metal, and welding process — so make sure you know which one/s you will need for your work or career goals.

Certified Associate Welding Inspector (CAWI)

The CAWI certification is designed for those looking to move into inspection roles but are working on gaining either experience or educational requirements. It builds foundational knowledge to support welding inspection and sets the stage for advanced certifications like the CWI.

Learn Beyond the Classroom

Welding isn't just a trade — it's a lifelong learning process. Classrooms and textbooks are only part of the journey. As your career develops, you'll start building knowledge through hands-on experience, peer conversations, mentoring, and community involvement.

AWS offers tools to help along the way: certification and other training courses, code clinics, and seminars that go deeper into both theory and application, and industry conferences. Local AWS Section events give you the chance to connect with others, ask questions, and hear what's working in the field. These connections and experiences can shape your growth just as much as formal training.



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