DESCRIPTION OF LEARN & WORK ECOSYSTEM LIBRARY

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BACKGROUND. In 2021, the leadership team of the national [Credential As You Go](#) (CAYG) initiative developed the plan to build a digital (wiki model) [Learn & Work Ecosystem Library](#). The Library was part of the 2021 grant proposal to the U.S. Department of Education's IES grant program, which subsequently awarded a three-year grant to CAYG. While the Library is meant to support CAYG's work, it is also designed to support the broader of efforts to improve the learn-and work ecosystem.

In June 2023, the Library entered into a collaboration agreement with [1EdTech](#) to assist in expansion efforts. The Library will provide information resources to 1edTech's nearly 900 members—school districts, colleges and universities, employers, government, tech vendors, and others.

PLANNING. In planning for the Library, the George Washington Institute of Public Policy (GWIPP) conducted two studies:

- In summer 2021, it reviewed 18 websites of key intermediaries, including federal agency sites working in the learn-and-work ecosystem to: (1) see if terms commonly used in the learn-and-work ecosystem are defined at those sites, (2) identify whether there are referrals to other sites for more information, and (3) identify generally what the sites cover. Among the takeaways, there were (1) few referrals, (2) few definitions of key terms, and (3) many websites were difficult to navigate. A few lacked a search bar, for example, and many appeared to display outdated information.
- A fall/winter 2021 study surveyed experts in the learn-and-work ecosystem. Participants rated the importance of areas that might constitute key categories or "building blocks" of the ecosystem and also rated the importance of a number of subcategories. The key finding was that most topics were rated as "very important" or "important." Twelve main categories were identified as the basis for the knowledge section of the Library (plus 80-100 subcategories):

Credentials & Providers	Employers & Workforce
Policy	Career Navigation
Data, Databases & Standards	Research
Transparency	Quality & Value
Verifications & Recordkeeping	Alliances, Partnerships, Networks
International Developments	Communications & Technology

NEED FOR A SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY. There is a growing need for information about the nation's learn-and-work ecosystem. No adequate source of information exists that explains our system of learning and working and how they're related.

Over the past decade, hundreds of initiatives have been launched to support learn-and-work components of our rapidly changing economy. The nation's dated, degree-centric higher education system is giving way to a multiplex of credentials and credential providers. Credentials include diplomas, degrees, certificates (within and outside the higher education system), industry certifications, apprenticeships, and state licenses. Providers include K-12 schools, colleges and

universities, professional associations, certification bodies, and industry groups. We are in the midst of a transformation in how and what students learn, how employers understand what prospective employees know and can do, and how policymakers and accreditors can and should set policy and rules related to credentials. This transformation, though long needed, has made the U.S. learn-and-work system more complex and confusing, especially for populations facing steep challenges for opportunity to education and good jobs.

The proliferation of innovative initiatives underscores the system's complexity. Major efforts are focused on: (1) transparency in credentialing; (2) employers' skills-based hiring processes; (3) new systems for student-owned, portable, comprehensive learning records that incorporate verified learning acquired outside the classroom; (4) common data standards to enable interoperability among efforts; (5) an array of competency and skills frameworks; (6) research on the quality and value of credentials, including studies showing the return on investment of various credential types and combinations, especially for people of color and low-income populations; (7) navigation and career coaching efforts for learners; and (8) transforming the degree-centric system to an incremental credentialing system.

Most of the large-scale initiatives have created some form of web-based repository about their work. Information typically includes: (1) description of the initiative; (2) documents (reports, dashboards, blogs, frameworks); (3) lists of network members, partners, board, and funders; (4) news items, podcasts, and calendars of events; and (5) action plans. Some projects operate during grant funding and are archived afterward—or slowly abandoned. Even when repositories are maintained, they tend to operate in isolation. From the standpoint of users (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, scholars, students, credential providers, and industry groups) useful information is scattered across websites and is difficult, if not impossible, to find. There also are gaps in information on many topics.

Existing search engines do little to address these problems. For example, a Google search for "work and learn ecosystem" in summer 2022 yielded 234 million results. Lacking an organized, curated library of information, today's system operates mostly through an informal network of peer insiders. They email or call one another to ask if 'anyone knows where to find X;' hold meetings to trade intel; co-author blogs to further develop and then share information; attend webinars to learn from one another; and tweet about efforts—primarily to a specialty, nuanced audience. Finding information this way slows the work of experts precisely when rapid information flow and problem-solving are needed. Also, newcomers to the work typically have no idea who to call or where to find information. Librarians, essential agents in the knowledge world, are hard-pressed to help because curated, synthesized sources simply don't exist.

A repository of resources is clearly needed to support those who are working to build a fairer, more effective learn-and-work system. Those working in this arena need information—historical, recent, complete, and curated—to develop and fine-tune solutions, to make the case to the many stakeholders needed to transform our system, and to expand and accelerate the reform effort.

We concluded that a specialty library would fill that need—one that is updated regularly by those best equipped to do so, through a community-supported wiki model.

Development of prototype. The Library was initially described as a "web-based library that collects, curates, and coordinates resources to support the learn-and-work ecosystem." Content development has evolved to include:

- Index
- Glossary of key terms in learn-and-work ecosystem

- Key components (building blocks) that compose the ecosystem
- Key Topics within the components
- Initiatives (Key Projects)
- Organizations working in the learn-and-work ecosystem
- Relational maps (that depict how a search item relates to glossary terms, topics, components, initiatives, and organizations)
- Archive
- Methodology (methods of searching)

Several supporting components of the library were identified for the About section, to include:
- Library Collections Management Statement
- The Why, The What, The Who
- Library Advisory Board
- Library Team
- Stakeholder Groups/Searches
- Partnerships & Sponsorships
- Newsroom
- Creative Commons License
- Special Projects

The Library contracted technical design/web services from CURE, (Richmond, VA) in summer 2022. Several part-time writers/researchers were subcontracted to draft content prior to the prototype launch in late 2022, under the direction of the Library leadership.

LAUNCH OF PROTOTYPE. The prototype launched December 1, 2022, with an online webinar. Attended by more than 100 stakeholders, A Summary of December 1, 2022 Webinar: Launch of Prototype Learn & Work Ecosystem Library is available at the Library's Newsroom.

LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD. An advisory board provides guidance to ensure that the Library is useful to diverse users; expand partnerships; and provide guidance in the development of sustainability plans. The Board includes representatives of key user groups such as research and policy think tanks; higher education institutions, philanthropies; industry/business community; data intermediaries; accreditors; and communications experts and journalists.

KEY DEVELOPMENTS SINCE LAUNCH. Since launch, key efforts have been made to improve the Library's utility and increase its value to the field. Among them:

- *Growth in content and users*. The Library's artifacts have grown substantially since launch, as has the number of users. The Library added an Index and Glossary. In prototype development are "relational maps" to be automated, in part, by AI. Maps depict the relationships among types of content at the Library. [See Tables.]
- *Improvements in search capacity*. A number of efforts have improved the search capacity. For example: key word search problems; adding descriptors for what types of individuals constitute stakeholder groups; new sequence of search results to begin with a definition if there is one for the item in search, followed by a component or subcomponent topic, followed by initiatives related, followed by intermediaries; moving coding to the end of each article to enable faster access to text; moving external URL to the top of articles; improving coding options; making color assignments to categories consistent. [See Methodology]

- *Awareness-building*. Efforts to raise awareness of the library's resources with stakeholders have included presentations at conferences, issuing blogs, posting information about contents at LinkedIn, podcasts, and other social media.
- *Librarian*. A part-time librarian joined the Library in fall 2023. His role is to curate the material, help the Library's team with next-stage development, and serve as a reference librarian to assist users.
- *Graphics*. Graphical content has been added to the Library site to enhance understanding of the Library's breadth and depth.