LER ACCELERATOR

From Planning to Practice

What the LER Accelerator Cohort Built and What Comes Next

October 2026



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Executive Summary

The LER Accelerator was designed to address a persistent problem in higher education: Student learning happens across academic programs, non-credit training, co-curricular activities, and work, but the evidence of that learning remains fragmented across systems that rarely communicate. Learners struggle to assemble and share a complete, verifiable account of their capabilities, while employers and other institutions lack consistent ways to interpret and trust that evidence.

Launched in 2024 by a coalition of national postsecondary associations, the LER Accelerator brought this field-level challenge to institutions themselves, asking what it takes to build learning and employment records (LERs) that can travel with learners across education and employment. LERs represent a paradigm shift, enabling individuals to own, manage, and share their learning and employment data across educational institutions, employers, and workforce systems.

In May 2025, the LER Accelerator kicked off its first institutional cohort, composed of 22 institutions and systems across 14 states and representing a diverse mix of community colleges, universities, technical college systems, academic health centers, state agencies, and consortia. The cohort's work was deliberately aimed toward planning for LERs, not implementation, with each team receiving a grant, an expert coach, monthly cohort convenings, and shared resources. Success meant building clarity, alignment, shared vocabulary, and institutional readiness around LERs before committing to technology.

Across the 22 institutions and systems, teams developed roadmaps that converged around **six innovation streams:** Learner-Centered Credential Innovation; Credit/Non-Credit Integration; Skills-Based Ecosystem Development; Systems Alignment & Governance; Vendor Collaboration; and State-Level Workforce Integration.

Together, these streams offer a framework for understanding the institutional work required to make LERs trusted, portable, and useful to learners. This compendium showcases the cohort's progress across the six innovation streams, featuring real stories from the field that illustrate different approaches, decisions, and constraints.

The Accelerator's next chapter extends this work beyond individual institutions. On October 20, 2026, 16 national organizations launched the **Learning Mobility Coalition**, a cross-sector effort to make learning records more portable, trusted, and useful as learners move across institutions, into the workforce, and across state lines. Its priorities around LERs — strengthening institutional capacity, coordinating technical assistance, advancing shared infrastructure, and bridging institutions with labor-market systems — directly address the challenges that the cohort in this compendium surfaced.

The LER Accelerator built institutions' readiness for LER adoption. Now, the Learning Mobility Coalition will connect that readiness across systems so learners can present verified records of what they know and can do, and have those records recognized wherever they go next.

Acknowledgments

This compendium consists of case studies authored by members of the 2025-26 **LER Accelerator Cohort:**

- Alamo Colleges District
- Arizona Board of Regents & Community College Coordinating Council
- Bristol Community College
- Dallas College
- Eastern Washington University
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- Johns Hopkins University
- Marshall University
- Michigan State University
- Morgan State University
- Northern Michigan University
- Southern Illinois University System
- Southern University Baton Rouge
- Technical College System of Georgia
- University of Central Oklahoma
- University of Colorado Boulder
- University of Maryland, Baltimore County
- University of Maryland Global Campus
- University of Minnesota
- University of Texas Medical Branch
- West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission & Community and Technical College System

This cohort was led by the **LER Accelerator Coalition,** 12 national organizations partnering to advance the development and adoption of LERs in postsecondary education.

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The cohort was overseen by AACRAO, led by Dr. Mike Simmons, with support from Michelle Mott, and facilitated by Dr. Julie Johnson and Dr. Kylah Torre of StrategyForward Advisors.

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Overview

Launched in 2024, the **LER Accelerator** was formed to address a persistent problem in higher education: Learning happens across academic programs, non-credit training, co-curricular activities, and work, but the evidence of that learning remains fragmented across systems that rarely communicate. Learners struggle to assemble and share a complete, verifiable account of their capabilities, while employers and other institutions lack consistent ways to interpret and trust that evidence.

The LER Accelerator, a coalition of national postsecondary associations, brought this challenge to the field, asking what it would take inside an institution to build the awareness, development, adoption, and implementation of learning and employment records (LERs) — comprehensive, verifiable digital records of academic credentials, skills, competencies, and experiences, designed to travel with learners across institutions and careers. LERs represent a paradigm shift, enabling individuals to own, manage, and share their learning and employment data across educational institutions, employers, and workforce systems.

THE COHORT

In May 2025, the LER Accelerator took its efforts to a new level, initiating its first LER Accelerator cohort, composed of 22 institutions and systems selected from more than 40 applicants. The cohort represented 14 states and included community colleges, four-year and research universities, HBCUs, academic health centers, technical college systems, state agencies, and multi-institution consortia. This mix was deliberate: Institutions with established digital credentialing infrastructure sat beside institutions just beginning to explore LER concepts so that the cohort would surface use cases relevant at every stage of LER adoption.

Structure and support. Each institution received a grant, a dedicated expert coach who held monthly meetings and reviewed roadmaps, monthly virtual cohort convenings, and a two-day, in-person convening focused on sense-making across members. In addition, the Accelerator produced open-access resources, including a shared terminology guide, federal policy analyses, and vendor engagement tools, centralized in the Learn and Work Ecosystem Library.

A focus on planning. The cohort's work was deliberately aimed toward planning for LERs, not implementation, and success was defined accordingly — that is, success meant building clarity, alignment, shared vocabulary, and institutional readiness around LERs before committing to technology. Every institution completed a self-assessment and a strategic roadmap naming goals, strategies, and action steps.

Innovation Streams

The cohort's planning efforts were organized into six innovation streams:

1. **Learner-Centered Credential Innovation:** Designing credential systems and digital wallets that put learners in control of curating and communicating their verified achievements.
2. **Credit/Non-Credit Integration:** Building the governance frameworks, data systems, and skills mapping processes needed to recognize and record non-credit and workforce learning alongside credit-bearing credentials.
3. **Skills-Based Ecosystem Development:** Embedding skills and competency language into curriculum, credentials, and assessment so that records communicate learner capabilities in terms employers can read.
4. **Systems Alignment & Governance:** Developing the cross-functional structures, policies, and data infrastructure required to issue interoperable records.
5. **Vendor Collaboration:** Working with technology partners to implement LER-compatible tools and to ensure that institutions can produce records in formats employers and state systems can use.
6. **State-Level Workforce Integration:** Aligning institutional readiness with state platforms, workforce boards, and policy frameworks so that records flow into labor market infrastructure.

Together, these streams offer a framework for understanding the institutional work required to make LERs trusted, portable, and useful to learners.

The following sections take a closer look at each innovation stream, featuring deep dives and spotlights on colleges, universities, and systems whose projects exemplify different approaches, surface practical lessons, and offer adaptable strategies for institutions at every stage of LER adoption.

Learner-Centered Credential Innovation

Designing credential systems and digital wallets that put learners in control of curating and communicating their verified achievements.

Across higher education, evidence of learning is often scattered across multiple platforms, departments, and credentialing systems. This fragmentation can make it difficult for learners to present a complete picture of their skills and accomplishments to employers, educational institutions, and other audiences.

Innovation Stream 1: Learner-Centered Credential Innovation examines how institutions can address this challenge by simplifying credential ecosystems, strengthening interoperability, and creating learner-centered approaches to recognizing and sharing skills. It focuses on making learning visible and portable, helping learners bring together evidence of what they know and can do across academic programs, non-credit courses, digital badges, work experience, and other learning opportunities.

Featured Colleges

Dallas College

Deep Dive: *Surveying the Digital Credentials Landscape*
Authors: Sharon Manna, Michael Coleman, Robert Rosenbalm

Northern Michigan University

Spotlight: *mySkills@NMU LER Implementation*
Authors: Brad Hamel, Steph Zadroga-Langlois

Dallas College

Surveying the Digital Credentials Landscape

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Identify the smallest number of solutions to allow Dallas College students to showcase all they know and can do as a result of their time with our institution.
GOAL 2	Expand its digital badge offerings in Phase III.
GOAL 3	Present the proposed action plan to the LER Accelerator.

Project Team

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> **In Their Words**
>
> *"In building a digital credentials ecosystem, finding solutions that learners and viewers will use at scale is a challenge of technology, collaboration, and communication. Getting it right requires understanding the conditions on the ground."*

Dallas College: *Surveying the Digital Credentials Landscape*

THE CHALLENGE

Dallas College entered the planning year with a great deal already built. A dean-led Marketable Skills and Digital Badging function was running; the college's badges were moved to Open Badges 3.0 by July 2025; badge programs were already aligned to the college strategic plan and to its quality enhancement plan; and a labor market intelligence center was tracking employer needs and graduate salaries. Students moved through credit and non-credit programs and had opportunities to earn digital badges and certificates, but the evidence of that learning sat in software solutions that had been accumulated program by program. The June 2025 self-assessment recorded the pattern plainly: Developments were "*happening in certain programs, but they [were] not widespread across the institution,*" and articulation from non-credit into credit was "*not a consistent process across different programs*." The gap the team named as its reason for joining the cohort was learner-facing. The question it set out to answer was subtractive rather than additive: What is the smallest number of solutions that would let a Dallas College student showcase everything they know and can do?

STARTING POINT

Dallas College is one of the largest community colleges in the nation, with a student population of approximately 130,000, spread over seven campuses covering Dallas County, Texas. The college is a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), with a large dual-credit student population. The team assembled for the planning year included 13 people spanning the Office of Academic Initiatives, Degree Audit, Academic Compliance, the Dallas College Research Institute, the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Career Services, and the college's Employment Resource Center, a team that doubled as its own advisory body.

The assigned cohort coach noted that Dallas College was in an excellent position to launch during the planning year, with several areas for growth ahead of them. The digital program was in its early phases but not yet deployed institution wide. Additionally, digital credential management was not integrated with the student information system or the learning management system.

APPROACH

Dallas College's first move was to inventory before procuring. The team chose to catalogue every credential a Dallas College student is eligible for, along with where and how each one is showcased, and then review the college's existing solutions against that catalogue. The inventory is what made duplication visible as true duplication rather than as unmet need, and it required no procurement to produce.

The college's second move was to settle open standards early and cheaply, then spend the year on governance instead of technology. By July 2025, the college had joined 1EdTech and

updated its digital badges to Open Badges 3.0, the interoperability standard that allows a badge to be verified outside the system that issued it.

With that question closed, the team rebuilt the badge proposal process for its third phase. Through their redesign, proposals had to align with the Board of Trustees' strategic pillars and argue the value of the badge being proposed, assessed on perceived and normative value using a framework adapted from the University at Buffalo. The team added office hours to help proposers write better submissions, and a Digital Badging Steering Team scored submissions against a more demanding rubric. Collectively, this redesign created a strong proposal-and-review process, not a platform.

The third move was to route the decision upward before routing it outward. The goal was to bring a proposed action plan to the executive sponsor, the Vice Chancellor of Student Success and the Provost. To do so, they created a strong process for communicating their action plan: They developed a communications plan with a newly reorganized marketing department; they aligned the plan to the college's strategic plan and to U.S. Department of Education and Department of Labor guidance; they added training on digital badging to the Student Success new-employee onboarding; and they developed an employer engagement strategy with the Employment Resource Center and Strategic Initiatives. And rather than standing up a second committee, the team designated itself as its own advisory body.

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

Asked what contributed most to its highest-progress goals, the team identified leadership support, technology support, personnel capacity, and alignment to strategic priorities. When asked what got in the way, they identified a lack of clarity on what the institution wanted to accomplish and a lack of stakeholder buy-in and awareness. As a large college with the typical silos endemic to higher education, knowledge of different workgroup goals impeded progress. The team also reported that an absence of state coordinating board input on national guidance was an obstacle.

> *"We're still seeing disconnects between work groups on the ultimate goal of finding the smallest set of solutions that serve the largest number of students."*

LESSONS LEARNED

Dallas College's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **Consolidation is a credential strategy, not just an exercise in IT clean-up.** By inventorying their system, they were able to identify duplication and consolidate processes. The college's central goal was to reduce its solution set rather than to extend it, based on the reasoning that a student cannot show learning scattered across systems nobody has counted.
2. **Settle the standards question early and cheaply, then spend the year on governance.** Joining 1EdTech and moving existing badges to Open Badges 3.0 was

finished within the first few months of the year. That freed the remainder of their time for the harder work: a value-based proposal rubric, a standing steering team, and a route for the consolidation decision to reach executive leadership.

> *"...we should consider our purposes to move our initial evaluations 'more to the right,' meaning fuller development of our existing solutions before adopting new ones."*

LOOKING AHEAD

A potential LER solution for Dallas College was recommended to academic leadership, along with a narrative about the LER Accelerator Cohort experience. The team says it will advocate for an LER/Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) solution that helps learners articulate their skills and accomplishments while satisfying the needs of different workgroups.

In the meantime, Dallas College is continuing its current goals, even after the cohort has finished, and is already executing tasks. They are expanding their badging program, including implementing new badge programs for student, faculty, and staff accomplishments, as well as preparing to open a Fall proposal period. Additionally, the team is engaging with industry sector partners to create conditions for digital badge awareness and validation.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Complete a credential inventory before any vendor conversation,** recording every credential a student is eligible for and where each is currently showcased.
- **Develop a badge proposal process** that makes proposers indicate the value, including a required alignment to board-level strategic goals, an assessment of perceived and normative value adapted from the University at Buffalo's framework, office hours for proposers, and scoring by a standing Digital Badging Steering Team.
- **Join 1EdTech and move existing badges to Open Badges 3.0** as an early self-contained decision, so the interoperability question is closed before the governance work starts.
- **Sequence a recommendation to executive leadership ahead of any vendor solicitation** so that procurement follows an institutional position rather than being asked to create one.

Northern Michigan University

mySkills@NMU LER Implementation

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Foster Employer Engagement: Work with and expand the partnership with NMU Career Services to utilize current/future employer connections and job posting platforms.
GOAL 2	Advance the 60-Year Curriculum Model: Align LERs with NMU's long-term vision of continuous, lifelong learning opportunities for all students.

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In Their Words

"Early on, not many saw the value. However, after the launch and providing use case scenarios, more are seeing the value. The LER is now being integrated into other strategic initiatives."

Northern Michigan University: *mySkills@NMU LER Implementation*

Northern Michigan University (NMU) began its LER work with a practical challenge. Learners develop skills through courses, degrees, digital badges, continuing education, employment, service, leadership, and other experiences, but those achievements often remain scattered across different systems. NMU's established digital badge program provided a strong foundation, but learners still needed a way to organize their broader learning and explain it to employers. The university's response was mySkills@NMU, a free, learner-controlled skills profile powered by SmartResume and offered through NMU's Skills Path initiative.

The LER Accelerator year focused on early implementation, learner participation, and clearer alignment across campus. NMU worked to define how its credentialing tools serve different purposes. Credly continues to issue and store NMU digital badges. mySkills@NMU gives students, alumni, and employees a broader place to bring together academic learning, credentials, work experience, internships, volunteer service, leadership roles, and learning gained throughout life. Learners can use that information to build a skills-focused, shareable record. Handshake remains Career Services' separate job-posting and employer-engagement platform; the SmartResume record is not housed inside Handshake.

NMU paired the platform rollout with a communications and registration strategy. Outreach to more than 2,000 badge earners and the Bring It & Get Hired webinar series introduced the record through practical career-use examples, including using skills in resumes and interviews. Registration and profile completion gave the team concrete measures of learner engagement. As campus partners saw the platform and its use cases, understanding and support increased, and the LER began to connect with other university priorities. Implementation and stakeholder engagement moved forward together, with each informing the other.

The project also clarified where NMU should build new capacity and where it should use existing strengths. An early goal considered a separate talent community platform to connect learners with regional employers. The team instead chose to deepen its partnership with NMU Career Services and use Career Services' existing employer relationships and Handshake infrastructure. That decision preserved mySkills@NMU as the learner's portable skills record while linking the work more closely to established career services.

The transferable lesson is that the technology strategy and the adoption strategy must advance together. Clear roles for each platform, practical use cases, sustained learner communication, and coordination with existing campus initiatives helped turn an early-stage concept into an active institutional effort.

> *"The tide seems to be turning a bit with stakeholder buy-in. Early on, not many saw the value. However, after the launch and providing use case scenarios, more are seeing the value. The LER is now being integrated into other strategic initiatives."*

Credit/Non-Credit Integration

Building the governance frameworks, data systems, and skills mapping processes needed to recognize and record non-credit and workforce learning alongside credit-bearing credentials.

Non-credit programs play an important role in helping learners develop in-demand skills and respond to employer needs. However, these programs often operate separately from traditional academic pathways. Inconsistent program descriptions, undocumented learning outcomes, and limited articulation agreements can make it difficult for learners to translate completed training into academic credit or apply prior learning toward a degree.

Innovation Stream 2: Credit/Non-Credit Integration examines how institutions can address these barriers by exploring how colleges and universities can build the governance, data systems, and skills-mapping practices needed to connect non-credit learning with credit-bearing credentials. It focuses on creating clearer pathways for learners to carry forward the knowledge and skills they gain through workforce training, continuing education, short-term programs, and other learning experiences toward additional education and recognized credentials.

Featured Colleges

Technical College System of Georgia

Deep Dive: *Scaling Statewide Non-Credit-to-Credit Pathways*
Authors: Jaime Wadowiec and Jessica Turner

University of Central Oklahoma

Spotlight: *Unified Skills-Focused LER / STLR 3.0*
Author: Trevor Cox

Technical College System of Georgia

Scaling Statewide Non-Credit-to-Credit Pathways

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Identify two pilot non-credit programs that feature (a) stackable credentials and (b) opportunities to unpack articulation agreements.
GOAL 2	Ensure that the ongoing integration reflects the Nine Principles of LER Adoption (see Appendix), with a focus on learner agency, interoperability, and quality assurance.
GOAL 3	Establish the basis for a systemwide communication plan involving faculty, school administrators, and system office personnel to: (a) promote digital resumes, credentialing, and credit for prior learning; and (b) develop a proof of concept for faculty-led quality assurance and articulation agreements for prior learning in the non-credit-to-credit pathways.

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In Their Words

"This work enabled TCSG to identify the 'gold standard' requirements of non-credit-to-credit pathways, including detailed, rich non-credit program outcomes, stackable credentials, and functional articulation agreements into the degree programs."

Technical College System of Georgia: *Scaling Statewide Non-Credit-to-Credit Pathways*

THE CHALLENGE

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) enrolls a substantial number of students in non-credit programs at its 22 technical colleges across the state; proportionally, students in non-credit programs represent slightly less than half of all annual student enrollments statewide. However, with few exceptions, students in non-credit programs do not have a clear path to continued enrollment in credit-bearing degree pathways.

In June 2025, TCSG's Office of Economic Development began a system-level review of non-credit programs to document whether programs featured stackable credentials, equivalencies to courses on the credit side, and/or formalized pathways into specific careers or degrees. Completed over summer 2025, this discovery process allowed the team to define a central impasse to student mobility from non-credit-to-credit programs: Non-credit programs are usually designed for rapid delivery to meet the needs of local employers, but colleges typically did not situate non-credit programs as foundations to longer learning trajectories. As such, the majority of non-credit programs in the state lacked the program-level data needed to connect them to credit-bearing pathways.

STARTING POINT

TCSG's participation in the LER Accelerator Cohort drew upon the team's experience of establishing and scaling a statewide digital credentialing program. Beginning in 2021, TCSG established a Digital Badging and Learning Pathway Procedure Manual to standardize credentialing processes. This badging work began in earnest in 2022, with the development of hundreds of badges that reflected credit-bearing courses, including course descriptions and course learning outcomes.

TCSG staff also built a custom integration between the credentialing platform and the student information system (SIS), enabling college staff to auto-issue digital badges to students enrolled in those courses at the end of each semester. By the beginning of 2025, TCSG had issued over 330,000 digital credentials to students.

However, the brunt of the work achieved through TCSG's digital credentialing initiative reflected credit-bearing courses and pathways, leaving project leaders to note early on that "*building digital badges and learning pathways for non-credit programs in Adult Education and Economic Development*" would be critical next steps. To do so, the project team recognized that TCSG would need to work closely with college staff to surface non-credit program descriptions and learning outcomes — both of which would enable them to map non-credit programs onto credit-bearing coursework.

APPROACH

Given the absence of course-level data on the non-credit side, the team's first priority was to make non-credit program details across the state visible. The project team asked each college's Vice President of Economic Development to submit a list and descriptions of their five highest enrolled non-credit programs. The team then reformatted those programs into the same layout used on the credit side, including a formal description and a detailed list of learning outcomes. At the same time, a non-credit data subcommittee began to apply data standards to common non-credit programs, altering them to include standardized naming and numbering conventions.

By the end of the cohort year, the project team reviewed submissions from each of the 22 colleges, implemented the first data standard, and began organizing reformatted non-credit programs into a catalog. The data standards and non-credit catalog enabled the team to begin drawing non-credit-to-credit equivalencies and, eventually, dedicated non-credit-to-credit learning pathways that could scale across the state.

The team's second priority emerged from the first; based on the growing catalog, the team was able to identify two non-credit programs that featured stackable credentials and were aligned to the Georgia High-Demand Career List. Ogeechee Technical College's (OTC) Fast Track SACA Industrial Systems Program and Savannah Technical College's (STC) Fast Track Logistics Program both featured clearly defined credentials that (a) are stacked within the short-term programs, and (b) are robust enough to articulate into credit-bearing learning pathways.

To highlight these gold standard programs, the team produced several artifacts intended to encourage other colleges to adopt these or similar programs, including fully defined catalog entries, visual maps showing credential-to-course equivalencies, and college-approved non-credit-to-credit articulation agreements. Overall, the two pilot programs at OTC and STC offered other colleges templates for successful non-credit programming and provided TCSG with a roadmap for standardizing articulation policy systemwide.

As this work occurred, TCSG assembled cross-division teams to improve governance around digital badging and to document additional non-credit-to-credit learning pathways. This work is further supported by separate grant funding for a dedicated credit for prior learning platform pilot, running from March 2026 to September 2027, with the goal of streamlining college admissions for adult learners enrolled in non-credit programs.

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

TCSG identified three conditions that enabled the pathways component of the project, including leadership support, personnel capacity, and clarity on institutional goals. The team noted that external influences, such as funding and a lack of clarity on changing federal policy, existed as barriers to the project.

Challenges came in late summer 2025: Federal policy changes in Workforce Pell guidelines delayed progress, and the vendor put the project on hold to shift focus to developing a more

robust LER-aligned product that responded to federal requirements around a statewide talent marketplace. However, despite the early obscurity around Workforce Pell guidelines, the team noted that "*the announcement of Workforce Pell eventually helped to galvanize support around short-term, non-credit training. As a result, the project team found that TCSG leadership and college teams were willing to dig into project-related work.*" Rather than waiting for clarity on Workforce Pell guidelines, the TCSG project team used the shifting landscape of federal funding to frame and advocate for meaningful advances in non-credit programming during the cohort year.

LESSONS LEARNED

Technical College System of Georgia's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **Credit for prior learning and non-credit-to-credit parity occur in the granular work** of surfacing, documenting, and cataloging learning outcomes.
2. **Federal policy can be a tailwind.** Workforce Pell guidance made short-term, non-credit training a live institutional question, and the system office and college leadership were much more inclined to see value in non-credit-to-credit pathways.
3. **Tech-based solutions, particularly those depending on vendor partnership, are not always within an institution's immediate control.** In those cases, institutions may need to weigh priorities against external barriers.

> *"...the focus on student-centered tech interoperability has stood out for TCSG, particularly as the agency considers building bridges between the Georgia Department of Education and the University System of Georgia."*

LOOKING AHEAD

With the two pilot programs at OTC and STC documented as gold standards within the context of a non-credit catalog, TCSG's Office of Economic Development is currently adding courses and programs to the repository. A grant-funded pilot of a credit for prior learning platform will help the team identify pathways to credit based on student-centered data, including how a student's work history, military experience, and previous coursework apply to credit-bearing learning pathways.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Identify where the students are when embarking on a comprehensive project like building a catalog.** TCSG used enrollment data, insight from college staff, and high-demand career lists to prioritize starting points.

- **Reformat non-credit program descriptions and learning outcomes to match the format used for credit-bearing programs.** A necessary prerequisite to this work might include incorporating non-credit data standards like naming conventions, course codes, and defined subject areas.
- **Find and promote exemplars and provide resources that help other colleges or divisions stand up similar programs.** TCSG identified pilot programs at Ogeechee Technical College and Savannah Technical College that they could showcase as exemplars.
- **Choose pilots that reflect the state's high-demand career list** so that the workforce case for the pathway is already made by the time it reaches a curriculum committee.

University of Central Oklahoma

Unified Skills-Focused LER / STLR 3.0

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Design a unified skills-focused LER system that seamlessly captures students' STLR experiences and microcredentials in one digital, interoperable record.
GOAL 2	Create a technical integration plan and timeline to integrate the current STLR and badging systems to meet the needs of the envisioned student experience.
GOAL 3	Research options for adding a product to the STLR+ system that would take student input/records, as well as some relevant student information on career goals and plans to offer students pathways and real-time job opportunities.

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Coach

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StrategyForward Advisors

In Their Words

"We learned the importance of alignment across divisions within the institution to create something like this."

University of Central Oklahoma: *Unified Skills-Focused LER / STLR 3.0*

University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) has run a campus-wide co-curricular record for a decade. The Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR), created internally in 2016 and holding more than 200,000 entries, exists alongside the academic transcript, and since 2019, 4,000-5,000 microcredentials have been issued on a separate platform.

A student, therefore, accumulates three separate accounts of what they have learned. Each is well developed on its own terms: STLR is evidence-based, built upon a rubric from the Association of American Colleges & Universities, is tied to mission and accreditation, and was developed with campus-wide collaboration; the microcredential operation has established processes and a strong internal reputation; and Career Services houses career-readiness competencies. The issue was that these three processes functioned as parallel systems rather than as one navigable experience. Faculty may award STLR credit for anything they choose, and by design, it does not touch academic credit. The institution's own assessment is that while it has strong assessment requirements for individual credentials, it has no process for determining how a microcredential translates into credit, and that it would like to explore better connections between its non-credit and credit-bearing offerings.

The team's answer was to unify the language before touching any of the systems and to make the oldest of the three frameworks the backbone rather than build a fourth over the top. Two facilitated cross-unit sessions brought the STLR staff, the microcredential team (LX Studio), and Career Services into the same room, with each unit's rubrics and maps submitted so that they could begin at integration rather than an orientation.

What surfaced was a hierarchy the team had not previously stated: The six tenets of the transformative-learning framework carry university-wide buy-in, are tied to mission and to accreditation, and were built a decade earlier with campus-wide involvement. As such, the team treated the transformative-learning framework as immovable. Realizing this, the team decided that the microcredential framework and the career-readiness competencies needed to map onto the STLR, using it as the backbone for all credentials while updating some of the language to fit career-readiness competencies.

The next step is to build an LER that connects the internal systems and helps students translate their credentials to employers. The group will also engage in faculty training, encouraging them to take the time in their classes to explain the credentials offered in class and why they are meaningful to future employment. Further, the university has partnered with the state regents to create a statewide LER based on the work done in this cohort.

The transferable lesson for other institutions is to put every unit's rubric and metadata on one table before choosing a system, identify which of the frameworks is genuinely immovable, and make that one the backbone that the newer efforts map onto rather than inventing a fourth vocabulary to sit above the other three.

> *"Originally, we thought this would be a simple technology wish list with a technical plan for how to accomplish it. It quickly raised bigger questions about frameworks and alignment across campus, along with the fact that we hadn't conducted research with organizations in over 10 years."*

Skills-Based Ecosystem Development

Embedding skills and competency language into curriculum, credentials, and assessment so that records communicate learner capabilities in terms employers can read.

Institutions often have established credentials, transcripts, and learning platforms but lack consistent ways to define, document, and communicate the skills behind them. Course outcomes, digital badges, co-curricular experiences, and workforce competencies may use different terminology or operate within separate systems. This fragmentation makes it difficult for learners to explain their capabilities and for employers to interpret the value of their educational experiences.

Innovation Stream 3: Skills-Based Ecosystem Development examines how institutions can bridge these gaps by embedding skills and competency language into curriculum, credentials, and assessment so that learning records communicate meaningful, verifiable information to employers and other institutions. It focuses on building a shared understanding of what learners know and can do, how those skills are developed and assessed, and how evidence of achievement can be recognized across educational and employment contexts.

Featured Colleges

Marshall University

Deep Dive: *Building a Learning & Employment Record Ecosystem for Flexible, Transferable, and Recognized Learning*

Authors: Julia Spears, Brandon Dennison, Jodie Penrod

University of Texas Medical Branch

Deep Dive: *Verified Achievement Data for a Health System Workforce*

Author: Cynthia LaBrake

Johns Hopkins University

Spotlight: *The JHU Comprehensive Learner Record – Guided by Student and Employer Input*

Authors: Chadia Abras and Janet Schreck

Marshall University

Building a Learning & Employment Record Ecosystem for Flexible, Transferable, and Recognized Learning

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Develop a shared, skills-centered understanding of LERs at Marshall University.
GOAL 2	Identify and validate priority skills and learning signals across credit and non-credit learning.
GOAL 3	Produce an implementation-ready proposal for follow-up LER and skills infrastructure funding.

Project Team

Julia Spears ***(Project Lead)***
Assistant Provost, Online Education and Certification

Brandon Dennison
Vice President, Economic and Workforce Development

Hilary Gibson
Instructional Designer, Online Education and Certification

Jeff Green
Deputy Executive Director, WorkForce

Michelle Morrison
Senior Director, Student Engagement, Marshall Online

Jodie Penrod
Chief Information Officer, Marshall University

Coach

Mike Simmons
AACRAO

> **In Their Words**
>
> *"The pressure to show tangible outputs — a wallet, a digital credential, a new transcript — was real, but the discipline of staying in planning mode meant our implementation roadmap is grounded in evidence rather than assumptions."*

Marshall University: *Building a Learning & Employment Record Ecosystem for Flexible, Transferable, and Recognized Learning*

THE CHALLENGE

Marshall University entered the planning year with a well-formed plan, which proposed work around three concrete systems: (1) a system for transferring non-credit microcredential courses into credit-bearing learning; (2) the unstacking of three-credit courses into three one-credit modules with flexible start dates; and (3) a standardized process for credit for prior learning.

Each of these systems presupposed a settled account of the skills they would carry, but the project's self-assessment showed a gap between systems and skills. On the pre-assessment, Marshall ranked itself highly on data governance, learner consent, credential validation, issuing permissions, the updating and revocation of credentials, platform integration, and learner access. However, Marshall answered "*I don't know if we do this*" when asked whether it had mapped where specific competencies are assessed for each credential. Shown plainly in the self-assessment, the institution was furthest along on systems and least far along on skills.

Noting this gap, Marshall's guiding question pivoted from its original focus on systems to a focus on skills. In their own words, they asked: "*What skills do our learners actually develop, and who validates that claim?*"

> *"...none of those conversations could land until we answered a more fundamental question: What skills do our learners actually develop, and who validates that claim?"*

STARTING POINT

A four-year public university in West Virginia, Marshall University's work was led by the Assistant Provost of Online Education and Certification, with the Vice President for Economic and Workforce Development, the Chief Information Officer, an instructional designer, a workforce deputy executive director, and a senior director for student engagement working alongside.

Behind that six-person team sat an unusually large apparatus for a planning year. By December, the institution had stood up three design teams — transcripts and learner records, credit for prior learning, and stackable credentials — seating 25 named participants from across the university, and giving each team a research question, target outcomes, a reading list, and a meeting schedule running from January to April 2026.

The team's assets were a working credentialing stack and a strategic plan that already pointed in the direction of their work; the team later credited the "*Marshall for All, Marshall*

Forever" plan — and its access, demand, and lifetime-achievement priorities — with making it "straightforward to frame LER planning as advancing goals the institution had already committed to, not as a side initiative."

On the self-assessment's five-point scale of LER adoption, Marshall placed itself at the midpoint, with records that were already machine-readable and organized but not yet digitally signed, tamper-evident, or privacy-preserving. The data was ready to be exchanged; the guarantees that would let a receiving institution trust it were not.

APPROACH

Marshall's first move was to treat empathy-informed research as discovery rather than as validation. Twenty empathy interviews and listening sessions with learners, faculty, staff, and workforce partners ran across September and October 2025, and three deliberately complex case studies were developed in parallel, tracing real learner journeys across non-credit-to-credit pathways, modularized coursework, and graduate microcredentials. Thirty-five people attended a sensemaking event in November to review the findings, participate in ideation sessions, and form the design teams. These efforts produced a pivot, which Marshall described in a single sentence: "*Across all scenarios, the most persistent question was not how to transcript learning, but how to define, validate, and communicate skills.*"

Marshall's second act was to stay the course instead of shifting strategy based on initial feedback. The November sensemaking event surfaced concerns about scalability and complexity, so the team "*intentionally did not immediately move away from the case studies.*" Instead, it spent the period from November 2025 to February 2026 interrogating the same scenarios with national partners, "*using them as stress tests to better understand institutional readiness, policy constraints, and technical dependencies.*" In their February meeting, the team concluded that the case studies "*were valuable diagnostic tools but premature as implementation targets.*"

Its third move was to test whether faculty-led skills mapping could scale and to build a control into the test. Four courses were chosen to span instructional and workforce contexts — mathematics, geography, counseling, and journalism and mass communications — and faculty were asked to identify professional and durable skills, technical skills, and domain or disciplinary skills separately, using a shared template and guided prompts. In parallel, on the same course content inside the learning management system, the team ran a skills-surfacing pass with Bevel AI and compared the two outputs. The purpose was to assess automation as a scaling mechanism while retaining faculty as the validator. Marshall stated the boundary explicitly: The tool "*does not automate credit decisions, transcripts, or learner records.*"

Overall, Marshall's work over the planning year pivoted from systems to skills. In their own words, "*a skills-first foundation was required before returning to case-based solutions. Governance before technology, skills before systems, and faculty validation before scale.*"

> *"A skills-first foundation was required before returning to case-based solutions. Governance before technology, skills before systems, and faculty validation before scale."*

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

The team named three enablers for their progress. First, leadership support from the provost's office was "*the single biggest enabler,*" as the interim provost's willingness to sponsor the project meant "*the planning year could follow the evidence rather than a predetermined path.*" Second, personnel capacity made the daily work possible; instructional designers, a project coordinator, and a dedicated project team ran the empathy interviews, coordinated the four-course pilot, managed the AI comparison, and synthesized the findings "*without competing for borrowed time from other offices.*" Third, alignment to the institutional strategic plan gave the work legitimacy from the outset, and clarity "*emerged through the planning year itself.*"

The team named constraints with equal precision. First, the skills-surfacing tool "*produced useful outputs in the pilot,*" but integrating those outputs into "*a repeatable workflow that faculty could trust and could run independently requires more configuration, training, and iteration than one planning year allows.*" Second, while the core team and the faculty in the four pilot disciplines were "*fully engaged,*" the "*broader faculty awareness across colleges and departments [was] still limited,*" with the registrar's office, financial aid, and faculty outside the pilot disciplines named as those "*who [would] need to engage during implementation.*"

LESSONS LEARNED

Marshall University's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **Stress-test a pivot before you make it.** Marshall first reviewed their case study findings in November, but they did not make decisions about those findings until February, using the intervening months to treat its case studies as diagnostic instruments. This helped them produce a documented rationale, which is what a funder, a provost, and a skeptical faculty senate each requires. A pivot taken at the first meeting cannot show its work.

2. **Faculty are the trust anchor, and automation is the scaling tool, not the reverse.** Comparing faculty-identified skills against a Bevel AI pass over the same four courses produced alignment the team calls "*instructive but imperfect — and the gaps were exactly where faculty judgment mattered most.*" That is the argument for keeping validation human even where surfacing is automated, and it is an argument available only to an institution that ran both passes and compared them.

3. **Map skills at the course level.** The pilot produced a method for articulating skills inside individual courses, which the team noted is "*uncommon in the field, where*

most LER efforts have focused at the credential or program level." Course-level skills are what make a credential-level claim checkable from outside the institution, because they identify where the claim was assessed and by whom.

> *"The skills-centered pivot happened mid-year, which meant there was less time to socialize the new direction with stakeholders beyond the immediate team."*

LOOKING AHEAD

Marshall is still considering (a) how to scale these efforts and (b) what technological architecture is needed to support the work. Skills mapping has not moved beyond the four pilot courses, co-curricular skills capture has not begun, and the decisions on Salesforce integration, interoperability standards, and wallet selection remain open — which the team describes as "*inherently implementation-stage work that the planning year was designed to scope, not complete.*"

As Marshall moves into its second year, they are focused on broader faculty awareness, along with more deeply engaging the registrar's office and financial aid office, both of which will need to be more involved during an implementation phase. Marshall will continue its current goals while adding new ones, and the follow-on funding proposal is its immediate deliverable.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Initiate a faculty skills-mapping pilot across deliberately unlike courses.** Marshall selected mathematics, geography, counseling, and journalism, using a shared template that asks for professional, durable, technical, and domain skills separately, so that variation in how disciplines name skills becomes data rather than noise.
- **Conduct an AI-driven skills review of course content and compare the results against the faculty's own review.** This tests with evidence, rather than assumption, whether automation can scale skills mapping. Marshall used Bevel AI inside its learning management system, with the tool explicitly barred from credit, transcript, and record decisions.
- **Use complex case studies as stress tests rather than as implementation targets.** Marshall used three detailed learner journeys, taken to external experts over a period of months, to expose policy constraints and technical dependencies before committing to a direction.
- **Create a risk register written into the roadmap itself.** Marshall named premature implementation, faculty burden, inconsistent skill definitions across units, and over-reliance on technology as risks, each with a stated mitigation, allowing them to prepare answers for a skeptical governance body.

University of Texas Medical Branch

Verified Achievement Data for a Health System Workforce

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Explore the expansion of the data warehouse to integrate verified achievement data.
GOAL 2	Create and document an evaluation plan for the digital microcredential pilots.
GOAL 3	Create a process for developing assessable skills taxonomies.
GOAL 4	Articulate the resources (human and financial) needed to set up and manage a Comprehensive Learner Record for employees in the health system.
GOAL 5	Create a phased implementation plan, keeping design principles front of mind.

Project Team

Cynthia LaBrake ***(Project Lead)***
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William (Scott) Boeh
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Mark Shultze
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Darwin Van Dyke
Director, IT Services

Coach

Kylah Torre
StrategyForward Advisors

> **In Their Words**
>
> *"...my role changed from launching a revenue generating microcredential program to serve internal and external stakeholders, to working on creating workforce aligned pipelines, pathways and bridges for future and current UTMB employees."*

University of Texas Medical Branch: *Verified Achievement Data for a Health System Workforce*

THE CHALLENGE

As an academic health center, the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) is obliged to document competence attainment, and its students must pass licensure examinations. The June 2025 self-assessment showed that the institution was performing well on defining competencies for each course, on using a variety of assessment types, on governance for approving new competencies, and on formal processes for verifying learner achievement.

Beyond the student transcript, the picture changed. When asked whether UTMB incorporated credit for prior learning into credential pathways, the team answered that it had not considered doing so, noting: "*We are not ready to address the non-credit-to-credit space and won't be for a while. However, we do plan to collect data on non-credit learning experiences.*" UTMB also shared what was leading to this gap: It had documented that its own employees' learning was "*siloed and fragmented and lacks an overall strategic plan.*"

Overall, UTMB had a precise record of what its students had learned, but it had no equivalent record for its own workforce. As such, the question the institution set out to answer during the planning year was: Where should the learning of a health system's workforce live, and who could use it?

STARTING POINT

An academic health center with six hospitals, 90 clinics, and a workforce of more than 13,000 people, UTMB's assets were governance and data infrastructure. A new Office of Personalized Professional Success had been created to govern microcredentials, with an inaugural director appointed, and it had convened a Visionary Advisory Board drawn from leadership on both the healthcare and the academic sides of the organization. With these pieces in place, the team's verdict on its own data systems was warm and specific: "*We have great data management in place for existing systems. The current data management is amazing. We just need to set up the credential earners into the data lake with all the other data.*"

Five people were named to the project: The Director of the Office of Personalized Professional Success, the Registrar, a director for Information Technology Services, a director for Human Resources Consulting Operations, and an executive director for Business and Academic System Workforce. The tension the team had to resolve was between the breadth of the plan and the concentration of the staffing: The work ran through a single office whose director held the digital badge initiative as a primary job duty.

APPROACH

UTMB started by identifying the institution's data strategy and reviewing the existing plan for data collection, storage, and use. But when no such plan was found, the team carried on

mapping every current and planned source of credential and training data to the data warehouse, specifying three short white papers to settle vocabulary before settling on technology: one white paper on what a digital badge is and how its metadata is stored; one on CLRs; and one on verified credentials. Each white paper was presented to the advisory board and folded into an implementation plan.

Next, UTMB engaged students to help with the process. The team hired six capstone students from the University of Texas at Austin's School of Information. The students built the mapping from badge intake through to the data lake, and their proof of concept for a programming interface won an honorable mention at the end-of-semester capstone project poster presentation.

Finally, UTMB specified the record as searchable rather than merely stored. Instead of stopping at a wallet or transcript, the team focused on pushing all learning data into the data lake through a structured form. This meant the data could be interrogated through the institution's AI assistant, by individuals planning their professional growth, and by managers and administrators making operational decisions. This work created a proof of concept but stopped there, which the team stated plainly: "*We were able to show proof of concept but not test our idea on a full set of learning data inside the data base.*"

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

UTMB shared that dedicated staffing made this work possible: "*It was one of my primary job duties to launch the digital badge initiative. So, I had the support of my administration, and I had time to prioritize the work.*"

Two constraints stood in their way. First, procurement of a learning management system for microcredentials stalled during the year, a technical dependency the team had already raised with the Chief Information Officer. Second, a question on records remains open: The team canvassed adding badge metadata to the transcript, replacing the transcript with a CLR, or using a separate résumé product, but instead of deciding, the team reported that "*the registrar settled on exploring a vendor-provided CLR.*"

LESSONS LEARNED

University of Texas Medical Branch's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **A learner may also be an employee and that is the record that does not exist.** UTMB documents student competence rigorously because licensure requires it, but it had no equivalent for its own workforce. Its finding that employee learning "*is siloed and fragmented and lacks an overall strategic plan*" is worth testing at any institution, because an absence of this kind stays invisible until someone goes looking for the plan that would describe it.
2. **Engaging students can deliver real capacity on a small budget.** Instead of hiring consultants, UTMB hired six capstone students from a partnering school of information. The students completed the metadata mapping, produced a proof of

concept that won an honorable mention, and could be redirected when the project's subject changed.

3 **Build the plan around broad areas of work and develop the details as the work unfolds.** UTMB set five goals and 18 strategies, then struck out ten action steps as the year proceeded. Its own verdict was that the plan should have been built through facilitated sessions in buckets of work, because detail written before the work begins mostly changes once it does. The team offers that judgment with a qualification — "*This comment might be a case of hindsight is 20/20!*" — alongside its own assessment of the result: "*Overall, I am pleased that we were able to focus our work and produce an actionable plan to present to leadership.*"

> *"Changing the current system will take a significant institutional investment, but building a more robust and trained workforce leading to better patient outcomes will be worth it."*

LOOKING AHEAD

The proof of concept has not been run against a full learning dataset, and the AI process for the data lake has been passed to an analytics director in HR. Further, procurement of the microcredential learning management system has stalled, although two plans are ready to go to leadership — a CLR for students and a CLR for employees — with the chief HR officer intending to take the work to the President's Executive Council. In addition, the team is still preparing to identify how credit and non-credit credentials are tracked across the institution.

UTMB has not yet engaged in state-level initiatives but intends to, because "*we have learned a lot about what it takes to get going on LERs. It should not be fast; it should be deliberate and coordinated.*" For a health-system employee's verified learning to travel to another employer, or a student's learning into another institution, the record must leave the data lake in a portable form.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Begin by checking for an existing data strategy.** If none exists, record that as an important finding, not just an obstacle.
- **Develop short briefs or guidance on digital badges, CLRs, and verified credentials,** each to be shared with the institution's leadership, so that decisions on vocabulary precede decisions on technology.
- **Tap student talent for hands-on technical tasks**, such as data mapping and proof-of-concept development.

- **Specify the record as searchable rather than only storable** so that the same structured data can be used by individuals planning professional growth and by managers and administrators making operational decisions.

Johns Hopkins University

The JHU Comprehensive Learner Record – Guided by Student and Employer Input

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Determine the content, format, and design of the JHU CLR through stakeholder engagement.
GOAL 2	Create a prioritized set of recommended modifications to the JHU CLR prototype.
GOAL 3	Identify CLR implementation pilots for AY 2026-27.

Project Team

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Coach

Tom Green
StrategyForward Advisors

> **In Their Words**
>
> *"We were able to accomplish our goals due to leadership support and support from the LER Accelerator group and our coach."*

Johns Hopkins University: *The JHU Comprehensive Learner Record – Guided by Student and Employer Input*

As part of its Comprehensive Learner Record (CLR) vision, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) introduced an initiative aimed at developing a skills-based curriculum process that ensures transparent competency frameworks, accessible skills taxonomies, and the integration of verified achievement data. This initiative sought to enhance learners' ability to identify, explain, and showcase their skills and achievements in a verifiable and portable manner, bridging the gap between education and workforce needs. The project addressed student learning in curricular and co-curricular spaces. By mapping learning activities to stated competencies endorsed by potential employers, the university sought to maximize students' potential and success at employability. This mapping is the basis of the Johns Hopkins CLR (JHU CLR) vision.

For this work, their goal was to align educational and employability outcomes with workforce expectations through a series of structured interviews with potential employers, students, and staff to gather information about competencies that employers valued most. Additionally, the team aimed to get input from employers, students, and staff about the CLR prototype, mainly related to its usability, usefulness, layout, and potential benefits. Key goals of the project included the development of transparent competency frameworks, the creation of usable skills taxonomies, and the integration of verified achievement data into the CLR.

The transferable lesson is in JHU's data collection methods. Through the interviews and focus groups, the team was able to finalize a set of overarching competencies that JHU students need to achieve based on feedback from employers and current students. This enhanced the alignment between curriculum design, learning assessments, and labor market needs. The interviews also yielded valuable input on the prototype and how to improve it. The results were shared with the vendor to improve the tool and add the requested enhancements before pilot implementation. JHU was able to identify three programs to participate in the pilot featuring the improved CLR.

> *"We needed more than the time allowed through the LER grant. The work will continue until accomplished."*

Systems Alignment & Governance

Developing the cross-functional structures, policies, and data infrastructure required to issue interoperable records.

Digital credentials and learning records often develop through individual departments, programs, or technology platforms without a consistent institution-wide approach. Even when credentials are already being issued and data governance practices are established, institutions may lack agreement on who owns learner records, which systems serve as the official source of information, how credentials are validated, and how data can be shared securely.

Innovation Stream 4: Systems Alignment & Governance examines how institutions can address these challenges through coordinated governance, clear policies, shared standards, and sustainable institutional structures. It focuses on establishing clear ownership, coordinating stakeholders, and aligning existing systems so that verified learning achievements can be recorded, managed, and shared across educational and employment contexts.

Featured Colleges

Georgia Institute of Technology
Deep Dive: *Unifying Digital Credentials Across Learner Pathways*
Author: Eric Sembrat

University of Maryland Global Campus
Deep Dive: *Evidence of Learning*
Author: Insiya Bream

Southern Illinois University System
Spotlight: *Systemwide LER Initiative*
Authors: Patrick Sears, Rachel Frazier, and Gireesh Gupchup

University of Minnesota
Spotlight: *Build the Blueprint for the Future of Student Records*
Authors: Sandy Nelson, Erik Dussault, Steven Hawks, June Nobbe

University of Maryland, Baltimore County
Spotlight: *Digital Credential Innovation at UMBC*
Author: Collin Sullivan

Georgia Institute of Technology

Unifying Digital Credentials Across Learner Pathways

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Work towards an institution-wide governance framework to unify digital credentials across pathways (e.g., credit, non-credit, experiential learning).
GOAL 2	Identify, introduce, and influence key stakeholders, both internally and externally.
GOAL 3	Create high-level technology plans for pilot implementations of LERs in existing technology products (such as the student information system, training data management system, enrollment records).

Project Team

Eric Sembrat ***(Project Lead)***
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Steve Harmon
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Lacy Hodges
College of Lifetime Learning, Director, Learning Analytics & Assessment

Jonna Lee
Director of Research in Education Innovation, Center for 21st Century Universities

Melissa Marsh Lockhart
IT Project Development Manager, Georgia Tech Professional Education

Coach

Stacy Townsley-Kestin
StrategyForward Advisors

> **In Their Words**
>
> *"[Our goal is] ...the monumental task of moving an organizational mindset and culture that has not fully embraced digital credentials (and more granular levels of academic accomplishments [via digital assets]) to buy-in to LERs at an organizational level."*

Georgia Institute of Technology: *Unifying Digital Credentials Across Learner Pathways*

THE CHALLENGE

Georgia Institute of Technology's challenge was not that it lacked digital credentials — it was that it had them siloed and governed nowhere. Microcredentials, like badges and certificates, were being issued out of the free tier of a credentialing platform in what the team later described as "*wild west use*."

Georgia Tech's self-assessment showed it was performing well on data governance policies, procedures for validating the authenticity of learner achievement data, validation protocols providing assurance of credential authenticity, protocols determining who holds permission to award credentials, and governance processes for reviewing and approving new competencies. However, Georgia Tech had not determined a process for learner consent to data use, and integration between credential management and the student information system had not been finalized.

In short, Georgia Tech was strong on the credential but unresolved on the record. The question the team set out to answer was governance: Where does authority over learner records sit inside the Institute?

> *"This accelerator truly did 'accelerate' the adoption of LERs through Georgia Tech as a blueprint for implementation and scalability, providing benchmarks and exemplars of how to move this LER initiative from an exploratory effort to a structured, governed process."*

STARTING POINT

Georgia Tech is a research university with a large professional and continuing education operation. The work for this project sat inside a newly formed College of Lifetime Learning, with six people from the College comprising their project team.

Georgia Tech's strengths were concentrated in assessment. Institute-wide assessment runs through a dedicated academic effectiveness office; a range of assessment types is embedded in regional accreditation processes; competencies were already being identified at the faculty, co-curricular, and program level; verified achievement was already being issued through the College and a digital credentials partner; and the Institute's quality enhancement plan was preparing to attach competencies to a transcript designation process across designated courses and experiences. However, these pieces lacked connection: The Institute had not centrally defined a set of competencies expected in each course and had not considered sequenced pathways that scaffolded skills from foundational to advanced.

APPROACH

The Institute was making some early progress. It had procured a vendor for badges and certificates, with credential management already partly integrated with the learning management system, open standards already in partial use, and a digital wallet forecasted for future implementations.

Georgia Tech started with governance by getting onto the agendas of three standing bodies: the Education Innovation Council, where campus education leaders sit; Faculty Governance, through the Faculty Executive Board; and the Executive Leadership Team, for direction from college deans. The team's plan was to request guidance for LER governance and acceptance. This sequence allowed the team to state in advance which decisions it could not make itself.

Next, they chose use cases that had low academic stakes: a newly formed microcredential pathway (FlexStack) and an existing professional development pathway (Center for Teaching & Learning). These use cases were high volume, involved a mixture of learner audiences, and required no faculty judgment about credit. Stakeholder outreach was planned to run alongside it, aimed at units holding the most unrecorded experiential learning: the career center, undergraduate internships, international education, student organizations, and the library. Beginning with an internal, ungraded population allowed the record to be tested before anyone had to agree on what it was worth.

Georgia Tech then converted a vendor pricing change into a governance mandate. Halfway through the Fall 2025 semester, the credentialing platform's free tier was quickly approaching — sunsetting in December 2025 — which forced a consolidation that voluntary coordination had not produced. The team found this timing useful. It moved to the premium product and, in the same conversation, told its coach that it did not yet have full accountability of migrations for free tier microcredentialing efforts and was "*[steadily] moving toward greater governance/structure*."

The year's most consequential outcome came from holding that line. Georgia Tech, in its own account, "*was able to acquisition a full-time employee for microcredentials management across the Institute, owing to the large reach of the LER Accelerator,*" using the planning year to "*formalize and cement a starting point for LER governance, intake, and stewardship.*"

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

This team named five conditions that helped their work. Leadership support, personnel capacity, alignment to strategic priorities, clarity about what the institution wanted to accomplish, and institutional stakeholder buy-in were all enablers, with the Accelerator project serving as "*a roadmap that we could align leadership to.*"

A constraint came with technology. The team shared: "*Technology (especially at the SIS level and adjacent records) feels antiquated, meaning that any customized feature needs to be set aside for 'here's what works now.*'" In particular, the team noted that the registrar's platform "*doesn't scale*" for greater volume of permanent record-keeping, while the system of record for LER data is still only planned but not yet implemented.

The second constraint was external: "*External influences (e.g., funding and mandates) hinder effective utilization at a state or regional level.*" The team shared: "*Building interoperability is difficult when decision-making is essentially [held by] a handful of institutional leaders.*"

LESSONS LEARNED

Georgia Institute of Technology's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **A planning year can deliver a staff position instead of a framework.** Georgia Tech set out to build institution-wide governance and ended with something narrower and more durable: a funded full-time position for microcredential management and a named organizational home.

2. **Sometimes governance can get its opening when a vendor changes the terms.** A free tier on a credentialing platform ended in December 2025, which forced a consolidation that voluntary coordination had not produced. An institution with sprawling badge use should treat its next license change as the moment governance becomes arguable, and it should have the argument prepared before the notice arrives.

3. **Build contingencies for approvals that fall outside your control.** The team sought approval from three standing governance bodies at once, and by January 2026 it became clear that the faculty governance process was unlikely to conclude within the project timeline. A strong plan identifies early which bodies might decline or defer, and how the work will move forward if they do, rather than leaving those questions for the post-mortem.

> *"...external influences (e.g., funding and mandates) hinder effective utilization at a state or regional level, while we are able to make a band-aid solution working locally."*

LOOKING AHEAD

Georgia Tech has planned an implementation of the full LER, followed by a plan to scale the solution to the rest of the Institute. The team reported that planning is complete but implementation has not yet begun, with a few unresolved items. First, there is no defined system of record for LER data, no learner-consent process, and no integration between credential management and the student information system. Second, the registrar's platform may not scale for permanent record-keeping. Resolving these issues will allow implementation to move forward.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Map the governance path early.** For each body whose endorsement the work requires, identify the body, the meeting where the item needs to appear, and the specific decision it will be asked to make.
- **Choose a first LER use case that is low stakes.** Georgia Tech chose use cases that were high volume, entirely internal, and demanded no faculty judgment about academic credit.
- **Use system transitions as an opportunity to strengthen governance.** When a platform change or vendor shift forces a migration, take the chance to replace inconsistent practices with shared standards and clear oversight.
- **Use planning resources to build lasting capacity.** Where possible, direct a planning grant toward permanent structures that will carry the work forward after the grant ends.

University of Maryland Global Campus

Evidence of Learning

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Develop and articulate a clear institutional strategy for *Evidence of Learning*, with LERs positioned as a core component within that broader program, to guide future implementation across the student journey.
GOAL 2	Ensure students understand the value of *Evidence of Learning*, including LERs and related mechanisms, by defining how students will encounter, engage with, and benefit from these efforts, and by identifying approaches for assessment and iteration.
GOAL 3	Expand UMGC's approach to digital credentialing by planning for the recognition of all learner experiences, including credit and non-credit learning, within the Evidence of Learning framework.

Project Team

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> **In Their Words**
>
> *"The value of a CLR/LER and individual credentials is fully realized when learners are supported by a strong infrastructure that helps them understand, access, and effectively communicate their achievements."*

University of Maryland Global Campus: *Evidence of Learning*

THE CHALLENGE

At the beginning of the grant period, University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) had already established many of the foundational elements needed to support learner records and learning mobility. The university was issuing LERs to students in select programs and had implemented a digital badging strategy integrated directly into those records. The institution also possessed strong data governance practices, defined systems of record, credential validation processes, and the technical infrastructure necessary to support learner record initiatives.

Because UMGC had already established LER capabilities, digital credentialing infrastructure, and processes for issuing LERs in select programs, the opportunity was to create institutional alignment around a shared learner-centered vision, to clarify governance, and to connect existing efforts into a cohesive strategy. As such, the project team set out to answer the question: How can we create the institutional framework, partnerships, and shared narrative necessary to transform existing capabilities into a unified ecosystem that better serves learners throughout their educational and career journeys?

STARTING POINT

UMGC serves a diverse population of adult learners, including a significant military-connected student population studying across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Because of this, UMGC had already developed strong practices for recognizing and documenting learning from multiple sources, including experience in issuing LERs in select programs, digital credentialing infrastructure, and strong data governance practices.

Despite these strengths, UMGC recognized that the next stage of its work required more than technology or credential issuance. The responsibility for learner mobility efforts is distributed across multiple functional areas, including academic affairs, learning design, institutional effectiveness, and the registrar's office. The opportunity was to bring these efforts together under a shared vision, formalize governance and ownership, and create a coordinated strategy that connects curriculum, skills, credentials, and learner outcomes.

Rather than building new systems from the ground up, UMGC's focus was on aligning existing capabilities into a cohesive learner mobility ecosystem. The LER Accelerator grant provided an opportunity to define how the institution's many strengths could be connected through a common framework and narrative, enabling learners to better understand, document, and communicate the full value of their learning throughout their educational and career journeys.

> *"What began as an effort to advance a learner record ultimately became a deeper examination of what it takes to build an institutional ecosystem for learning recognition and learner mobility."*

APPROACH

Building on their existing capabilities, the planning year focused on creating an institutional strategy that could connect and scale learner mobility, credentialing, skills recognition, and learning documentation efforts across the university.

UMGC's first move was to name an umbrella initiative and denote the LER inside it. Rather than running an LER project alongside skills mapping, credit for prior learning, military credit, competency-based education, and digital credentials, the team established a parent strategy titled *Evidence of Learning* and positioned LERs as "*a core component within that broader program*." Doing so took the various narratives of each of these initiatives and unified them into one, helping the team "*level-set language, intent, scope, and relationships across initiatives*."

The UMGC team then established clear sponsorship by proposing to make *Evidence of Learning* into an official university project. The team submitted the *Evidence of Learning* proposal to the university's Enterprise Project Management Office and wrote its governance success metrics accordingly. This ensured that the initiative would have an executive sponsor and a dedicated project manager.

UMGC next focused on sequencing the learner ahead of the technology, based on evidence. Early experience with the CLR for MBA learners underscored that providing a tool is only the beginning. The team shared: *"Providing learners with a tool is only the first step; empowering them to recognize its relevance and apply it to their goals is what drives meaningful engagement."* The team sought to define what students should understand about *Evidence of Learning*, mapping the advising, instructional, and support touchpoints where students encountered them. To do this, the team decided it "*first need[ed] to have an assignment that requires students to engage with the LER*."

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

The planning phase was instrumental in transforming UMGC's effort from a product-focused initiative into a comprehensive institutional program. Through deliberate analysis, stakeholder engagement, and iterative refinement, the project revealed the full scope of what is required to successfully operationalize an LER ecosystem.

While UMGC has made significant progress through initiatives focused on skills mapping, credentialing, and learning recognition, the planning process highlighted several critical success factors that must be advanced in parallel. These include comprehensive skills alignment across the curriculum, increased learner awareness and understanding of the value of credentials and records, and the seamless integration of these capabilities throughout the student journey.

Most importantly, the process clarified that readiness for institution-wide LERs extends beyond technology and credential issuance. Success depends on creating an ecosystem in which skills are consistently defined, learning achievements are meaningfully recognized, and learners understand how to leverage these assets throughout their educational and career journeys.

At the same time, the planning effort affirmed that the institution is on the right path. The work completed to date has established a strong foundation and provided greater clarity regarding the investments, infrastructure, partnerships, and learner-centered experiences necessary to achieve its vision. As a result, UMGC is now better positioned with a strategic roadmap and a deeper understanding of the capabilities required to deliver a scalable, sustainable, and impactful solution that benefits both learners and the institution.

LESSONS LEARNED

University of Maryland Global Campus's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **Learner mobility requires an institutional ecosystem, not a standalone solution.** The success of LERs depends on the alignment of skills, credentials, learning recognition, policies, and learner support services working together toward a common goal.
2. **A shared framework creates the foundation for scale.** Establishing *Evidence of Learning* as an institutional strategy that housed existing initiatives underneath it ultimately provided a cohesive vision and unified narrative for advancing learning recognition across the university.
3. **Learner engagement must be intentional.** Records and credentials deliver the greatest value when learners understand their purpose and can readily apply them throughout their academic and career journeys. Embedding these experiences across the student lifecycle is critical to adoption and impact.

> *"Our vision is to create a holistic view of learner achievement by capturing and recognizing learning wherever it occurs, enabling learners to communicate the full value of their knowledge, skills, and experiences."*

LOOKING AHEAD

UMGC intends for the LER Accelerator initiative to serve as a catalyst and coordinating force for the broad range of institutional efforts that contribute to a CLR. As this work matures, the goal is for learner records to become a natural extension of UMGC's larger skills and learning recognition strategy rather than a standalone initiative.

UMGC recognizes that learning occurs across a lifetime and in multiple contexts. Adult learners bring valuable knowledge, skills, experiences, and competencies with them before enrollment, continue to develop them throughout their academic journey, and acquire new capabilities throughout their careers. The institution's vision is to create a more holistic view of learner achievement by capturing and recognizing learning wherever it occurs. In doing so, UMGC can better support learners in articulating their unique value, connecting their experiences to meaningful opportunities, and confidently navigating their educational and career pathways.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Build upon existing strengths.** Institutions often have many of the foundational elements already in place, including skills-based curriculum initiatives, credentialing efforts, prior learning assessments, and experiential learning programs. Identifying and connecting these efforts can accelerate progress and reduce duplication.
- **Design with the learner experience at the center.** The value of learner records and credentials is realized only when learners understand how to use them. Embedding awareness, guidance, and opportunities for use throughout the learner journey is critical to driving adoption and impact.
- **Create cross-functional ownership.** Advancing learner mobility requires collaboration across academic affairs, student affairs, technology, workforce partnerships, and registrar functions. Shared governance and institutional sponsorship help ensure sustainability and scale.
- **Treat planning as a strategic investment.** Taking the time to assess readiness, identify gaps, and build a roadmap can provide clarity on the infrastructure, partnerships, and resources needed for long-term success while reducing implementation risk.

Southern Illinois University System

Systemwide LER Initiative

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Creation of SIU First LER Credential to enable learners to showcase their true skills to employers.
GOAL 2	Technology software solution to support and maintain a user interface for learners and employers.
GOAL 3	Policy formulation and alignment/SIU System and University Governance Structure.

Project Team

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In Their Words

"This [cohort] helped move LER work from a concept to an institution-wide initiative."

Southern Illinois University System: *Systemwide LER Initiative*

Learners across Southern Illinois University System (SIU)'s two campuses were earning badges, certificates, and co-curricular recognitions into systems that had developed separately. The system office opened the year by inventorying these two systems, compiling a combined list of Carbondale (SIUC) and Edwardsville (SIUE) courses, activities, high-impact practices, badges, and certificates.

On the June 2025 self-assessment, the system rated its data governance and data-sharing policies as aspects it does well — both SIUC and SIUE run on a common student information system, and the system's platforms were rated accessible and continuously improved for usability. What was not yet in place was the machinery a portable record requires. Asked whether it had defined a system of record, could track changes to an awarded credential, could revoke or expire one, or held protocols for who may award one, the system selected the instrument's baseline option — that it had not yet considered the question — on seven of the twelve items in that section.

What the team did with the planning year is its most transferable lesson: It governed by adoption rather than by authorship. Rather than negotiating a new system-level structure across two campuses, the plan proposed for SIUC to mirror the digital badge operating papers already in force at SIUE and to form an Alternative Digital Credentials Committee on the same model, with a named lead. Instead of formalizing a policy, the team decided explicitly against one, building a guideline and framework instead, modeled on one it had reviewed from a fellow LER Accelerator Cohort institution, Florida Gulf Coast University. And rather than drafting its own vocabulary, it put the question to a vote and adopted the LER Accelerator's common terms and definitions as written. By inventorying what already existed — on their campuses, at peer institutions, and in the coalition — the system was able to adopt rather than author anything that was not institutionally distinctive.

> *"Education and discussion is very important; sometimes speed doesn't win; doing something or anything is progress."*

University of Minnesota

Build the Blueprint for the Future of Student Records

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Establish a Robust Foundational Framework: Define and implement the leadership and project team structures with clear roles and responsibilities, while also determining the essential content of the CLR.
GOAL 2	Identify Business and Technology Needs for a CLR System: Assess existing data sources, identify necessary integration points, and define the comprehensive business and technology requirements for the CLR's successful implementation.
GOAL 3	Develop a plan for Strategic Rollout, Adoption, and Sustainability: Identify key student co-curricular programs and select academic programs for initial rollout, develop effective communication strategies to gain buy-in from all stakeholders, and establish phased rollout and long-term management plans for the CLR's accuracy and continued success.

Project Team

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In Their Words

"Rather than rushing into implementation, the cohort allowed the university to use this as a planning and discovery year."

University of Minnesota: *Build the Blueprint for the Future of Student Records*

Learners at the University of Minnesota accumulate academic records, involvement in roughly 1,000 student organizations, participation in internships and service opportunities, digital badges, and state testing certificates administered directly by the university. However, the institution previously lacked agreement on three key questions: Which of these achievements belong on a single verified record, who has authority to add them, and which system holds the official copy?

The university was already strong in general data governance, rating its data-sharing policies, consent processes, and learner control over personal information as areas of strength. It has, for some time, issued digital badges and certificates for non-credit offerings through the enterprise non-credit registration system and Credly, and it has added additional badging capability through a completed Parchment Digital Badges pilot and implementation. What it had not done was resolve those core governance questions for a CLR designed to leave the institution in a student's hands.

To move forward, the team used its initial goals to map out its planning and implementation phases for a CLR:

- **Planning:** Define stakeholder roles and establish the steering committee and project team.
- **Implementation:** Document where relevant data resides, write content policies, and identify technology requirements.

The third goal — covering rollout, adoption, and sustainability — was moved almost entirely out of the initial planning year. Its strategies and action items were deferred to a final report to be written during implementation.

The planning phase produced tangible deliverables, including an organizational chart, a draft steering committee charter, and a RACI matrix, defining who is Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed for each decision. Meanwhile, implementation strategies received specific target dates and success metrics.

The project increased awareness and broader support for a CLR among senior leadership. By May 2026, the team was drafting an implementation plan that could be handed to a project management team, but implementation needs money and people. Funding for FY27 was not available, the university does not yet have technology capable of supporting a CLR, and every member of the project team carries full-time responsibilities elsewhere. As such, the University of Minnesota's plan is waiting on a budget cycle, not on a decision about what to build, illustrating a transferable lesson: The project needs a champion at a high level, with a charge *and* a budget allocation from executive leadership.

> *"We realized that most of the action steps we defined as planning were actually implementation steps."*

University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Digital Credential Innovation at UMBC

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Map and align LER efforts with institutional initiatives.
GOAL 2	Strengthen employer partnerships and feedback loops.
GOAL 3	Ensure equitable design for all learner populations.

Project Team

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In Their Words

"Perhaps the most important accomplishment is...this work became intentional."

University of Maryland, Baltimore County: *Digital Credential Innovation at UMBC*

By the end of the planning year, learners at University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) could earn verified microcredentials across coursework, undergraduate research, service learning, and co-curricular programs, issued through a migrated platform and reviewed by a peer body, with credentials for on-campus student employment targeted for the following academic year.

What it did not yet have was institutional standing. Coordination, credential design, platform administration, policy, data, and partnership work all ran through a single staff member in one division, and the committees that governed the work operated on the strength of their practice rather than on a formal charge — a fragile arrangement for a system that is supposed to follow a learner for life.

The team wrote its year-end roadmap as a series of institutional conversations and requests rather than as a report. The document opened with what UMBC built, stated plainly what the year revealed about the limits of a programmatic approach, and then made six numbered requests, most of them addressed to a formally named office and, in the roadmap's own phrasing, "*in most cases, low-cost relative to their potential impact*."

The second of the six requests was the governance ask: that the Microcredential Advisory Committee and the Microcredential Review Board — bodies UMBC was already running — be formally recognized as the institution's home for LER governance. The request noted that such recognition could come through a Provost-level endorsement like a charge letter, through inclusion in institutional planning documents, or through a stated expectation that stakeholders engage with them.

The transferable lesson is identifying the type of gap an institution has. UMBC did not have a governance gap; it had an institutional recognition gap. By identifying this, UMBC was able to avoid duplication and move forward more efficiently. That is, instead of designing a new institution-wide structure that would duplicate bodies that were already convening, the UMBC team simply asked for those bodies to be named in the institution's own planning architecture — something that only costs a letter.

Another transferable lesson is the way the team framed the ask. The UMBC team chose against the more comfortable genre: the year-end report that describes accomplishments, softens progress and constraints, and requests nothing. Instead, they provided clear, actionable requests that made the work ahead plain to see, easy to understand, and compelling to act on.

> *"The process of building and stress-testing this roadmap generated more focused, productive institutional dialogue than the preceding years combined, and created the conditions for conversations now underway with the Provost, academic leadership, and employer partners."*

Vendor Collaboration

Working with technology partners to implement LER-compatible tools and to ensure that institutions can produce records in formats employers and state systems can use.

As institutions expand digital credentials, microcredentials, and comprehensive learner records, choosing the right technology can be challenging. Platforms may offer different capabilities for issuing credentials, managing learner achievements, integrating with existing systems, and enabling learners to share verified records with employers. Yet a promising product does not automatically create a sustainable learner record ecosystem. Institutions must first understand their requirements, establish shared priorities, and determine how new tools will fit within existing policies, workflows, and infrastructure.

Innovation Stream 5: Vendor Collaboration examines how institutions can approach procurement and vendor partnerships strategically, ensuring that technology decisions support long-term goals for credential portability, skills recognition, and learner mobility. It focuses on evaluating digital credentialing platforms, assessing interoperability and integration capabilities, and making informed technology decisions that prioritize institutional mission over vendor-defined solutions.

Featured Colleges

Eastern Washington University

Deep Dive: *EWU's LER Journey*
Authors: Christi Harter and Jackie Coomes

Alamo Colleges District

Spotlight: *Creating the Conditions for Credential Portability: Building Institutional Readiness Through Strategic Partnership*
Authors: Diana Rademaker and Amber O'Casey

Eastern Washington University

EWU's LER Journey

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Develop and scale microcredentials with academic programs in collaboration with industry partners.
GOAL 2	Enhance technology infrastructure to support digital credentialing and provide students with a digital achievement wallet that recognizes skills, organizes achievements, and enhances career readiness.
GOAL 3	Work with local, state, and national organizations to increase credit mobility, skills alignment to educational programs, and ease of entry to high-demand, gainful employment opportunities.

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In Their Words

"A digital credentialing system piloted by EWU Professional & Continuing Education (PCE) has transitioned to a university-wide pilot as Eastern moves to expand portable, digital, verifiable records to all for-credit and non-credit courses."

Eastern Washington University: *EWU's LER Journey*

THE CHALLENGE

Eastern Washington University (EWU) entered the planning year with three learner-record pilots already behind it, each on a different platform and each funded from a different source: a wallet with one vendor for summer bridge students, a wallet with another for military-adjacent and therapeutic recreation students, and a credit-prediction tool through a labor-union apprenticeship grant. Its own draft technology timeline described the year ahead as one more round of the same, naming "*credentialing technology (possibly Accredible) and digital wallet (Territorium or iQ4).*" In June 2025, when asked whether EWU had implemented a system letting learners manage their earned credentials, and whether learners could combine credentials from multiple issuers, the team indicated that they had merged funding from two separate grants to pilot Parchment Digital Badges through the EWU Professional & Continuing Education (PCE) unit.

It was clear that appetite and experience were not the constraint. The problem was evolving a run of grant-funded pilots into one institutional platform with policy behind it and putting a durable record into the hands of students.

> *"The funding and this partnership allowed EWU to move forward with digital credentialing with a goal to have a true LER technology integration for 2026-27."*

STARTING POINT

EWU is a regional public university, and its interoperable, digital credentialing work sits inside a dense stack of other commitments. The team mapped six concurrent grants and initiatives to determine which credit mobility goals each one serves. These grants included a holistic credit mobility cohort, an apprenticeship-to-degree partnership with a labor union, a national learning-record pilot for which the project lead serves as a grant evaluator, a state community of practice on credentials of value, a national capacity-building initiative in which the state agency participates, and the LER Accelerator.

In their initial self-assessment, EWU rated itself as performing well on quality assurance for credential integrity, on governance for approving new competencies, on protocols determining who may award credentials, and across data governance, learner consent, and learner control of personal information. The work still to be done resided in the technical layer: The system of record for LER data was undefined, revocation and expiry were planned rather than built, and open standards were in use only inside a pilot.

APPROACH

EWU started by evaluating exhaustively and putting the Coalition's Nine Principles of LER Adoption (see Appendix) to use. The institution assessed six platforms between September

2023 and July 2025, taking two of them as far as a live wallet pilot. Selection took place in July and August 2025, with the goal of integration rather than function — the chosen platform "*will help integration within the current LMS.*" The state board for community and technical colleges runs the same platform across its 34 colleges, which makes a credit mobility argument easier to sustain beyond one campus. The contract was signed in September 2025, and vendor onboarding began in October, funded by stacking the LER Accelerator grant with a holistic credit mobility grant to support a two-year pilot.

Its second step was to increase awareness while building the governance and vocabulary before trying to scale. The EWU Credentialing Committee, which was already standing when the year began and had already secured IT approval for credentialing software, met throughout the year to draft credentialing procedures. It produced a badge taxonomy of four categories — academic, student life, professional development, and standalone — each with a named audience and a distinct outline so that a badge's category is legible from its shape before its text is read. Alongside it ran a strategic internal communications sequence: functional leaders and assistant deans in late July, faculty organization and chairs in mid-August, a support-staff webinar in late August, a non-credit-to-credit policy webinar in September, and academic policy processes in October.

EWU then acted to scale in two directions at once: eight microcredentials developed with academic programs and three more with industry partners. The platform was contracted and integrated, a Professional and Continuing Education pilot ran during the year, university-wide integration was set for July 2026, and a full LER technology integration was named as the goal for 2026-27.

ENABLERS & BARRIERS

Alignment to EWU strategic priorities both enabled and constrained the LER work. The team shared that the strategic plan "*involves aligning programming to workforce skills, so this work with digital credentialing has provided the avenue to make this possible. However, many other aspects of the Strategic Plan have priority over this one.*" Stakeholder buy-in divided along the same line, with strong buy-in where the Credentialing Committee had built it and absent where it had not. Capacity was the third condition and the plainest: "*The team of three that is implementing digital credentialing at EWU has multiple other responsibilities for this unfunded effort.*"

LESSONS LEARNED

Eastern Washington University's key takeaways and insights from this project include:

1. **Use the adoption principles as a procurement test rather than as a reporting framework.** EWU evaluated six platforms over two years and, in the record of the platform it selected, put the Coalition's Nine Principles of LER Adoption directly to the product.

2 **Adopting an issuing platform can move quickly; establishing a learner-held wallet may take longer.** EWU contracted and integrated a credentialing platform and scaled 11 microcredentials within the year. However, it did not contract a wallet, and the two wallet pilots that preceded the year have not converted into a sustained platform model yet.

3 **Being included in a strategic plan can help get a project started, but it doesn't guarantee that it will be a priority.** EWU found that its strategic plan made the work possible, but competing priorities affected how quickly it moved forward. Institutions should treat strategic-plan alignment as a starting point, not a guarantee of progress, and make sure they have dedicated time and resources to keep the work moving.

> *"The team of three that is implementing digital credentialing at EWU has multiple other responsibilities."*

LOOKING AHEAD

University-wide integration was set to begin in July 2026, and the steering committee must convert the pilot's taxonomy, governance, and request form into approved policy. A digital badge revenue model exists but is, in the roadmap's own words, "*not approved or implemented yet*." Another challenge is the employer connection, but the institution believes a digital wallet/talent marketplace would enhance the use of the digital credentials in the future. State engagement is a vital component to Washington learners' ability to be supported by skills-based hiring practices that honor digital credentialing.

PRACTICES TO ADOPT

Consider the following practices for your institution:

- **Apply the Coalition's Nine Principles of LER Adoption to a prospective platform as a procurement question** rather than using them as a reporting framework afterwards.
- **Create a badge taxonomy that encodes categories so that a credential's type is readable before its text is.** A taxonomy of this kind is worth establishing early, because it is the artifact to which every later policy question refers back.
- **Create a one-page map of every concurrent grant and initiative, showing which credit mobility efforts are aligned to the institution's strategic plan.** It makes the LER project legible to leadership as a contribution to work already partially funded rather than as a new ask.
- **Develop a dated internal communications sequence** — functional leaders, then deans, then faculty chairs, then support staff, then policy bodies — scheduled before the platform goes live rather than announced after it.

Alamo Colleges District

Creating the Conditions for Credential Portability: Building Institutional Readiness Through Strategic Partnership

Project Goals

GOAL 1	Create a guiding coalition to drive LER adoption.
GOAL 2	Update the Alamo Colleges District LER toolkit.
GOAL 3	Pursue a proof of concept for an LER tool to prepare for a successful implementation.

Project Team

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StrategyForward Advisors

In Their Words

"The project provided valuable insight into how our team can engage in technology exploration and evaluation in partnership with divisions outside of our own, positioning us to serve more effectively as technology consultants within our district."

Alamo Colleges District: *Creating the Conditions for Credential Portability: Building Institutional Readiness Through Strategic Partnership*

Across the Alamo Colleges District, students earn valuable evidence of their skills through a growing microcredential ecosystem, from skills and awards, to certificates and associate degrees, to bachelor's degrees. While the district could already document many of those achievements, it lacked a way to make them portable and easily verifiable by employers. Digital badges issued by the colleges use the Open Badges 3.0 standard, and the Skills Lab team partners with Career Services to manually upload the badges to the District's co-curricular transcript, which is a flat PDF file — they do not have a comprehensive, verified record of their skills to take into the labor market.

In 2022, the Skills Lab team worked with external partners to develop a roadmap for a digital skills wallet. That effort produced a learner journey map, an evaluation framework for skills wallets, a vendor-neutral inventory of desired platform capabilities, and a market assessment that concluded that no available solution met the district's needs at the time. With this information, the district chose to focus on expanding its microcredential ecosystem instead of launching a digital wallet that did not fit its needs.

In 2025, when the LER Accelerator began, the Alamo Colleges District needed to know whether the interoperability of the technology had advanced enough since its 2022 efforts to support the district's vision for credential portability. At the same time, Career Services, under new leadership, had launched a comprehensive review of its technology portfolio and was evaluating new career-planning platforms. The Skills Lab team identified an opportunity to strategically partner with Career Services by embedding their LER exploration work into Career Services' technology evaluation process. Through this approach, the team incorporated questions about learner records and microcredentials into a review that already had a budget and timeline. Although this decision was a deviation from the planned LER pilot, the new focus on internal strategic partnerships aligned with the original roadmap goal to partner with Career Services.

Over the course of the year, Career Services and the Skills Lab established a collaborative process for evaluating potential technology solutions. The teams examined each option against key requirements, including digital credential standards, system integration, security, cost, and connections to HR systems. This work surfaced important feasibility considerations and ultimately reframed the planned LER pilot as a feasibility study, providing a stronger foundation for future implementation decisions.

The most significant outcome of the planning year was not selecting a platform but evaluating institutional readiness and identifying stakeholder needs. By engaging vendors and evaluating platforms, Alamo Colleges District gained a clearer understanding of the requirements for learner record implementation and embraced the principle that "*LERs are a process.*"

The transferable lesson is to build readiness before the technology arrives. A technology solution is not an LER strategy; strategy centered on learner needs should always precede technology acquisition. For other institutions seeking to do this work, they should focus on developing a strong understanding — through direct engagement with institutional stakeholders and market research — of the capabilities, standards, workflows, and partnerships required to support credential portability.

> *"In one case, a CLR we previewed (that was being advertised as a CLR) was not even aligned to CLR 2.0 standards. It simply generated flat PDF files as an output."*

State-Level Workforce Integration

Aligning institutional readiness with state platforms, workforce boards, and policy frameworks so that records flow into labor market infrastructure.

To make learning achievements more visible, portable, and meaningful beyond the classroom, institutions must connect learner records with state workforce systems, coordinating across multiple organizations, platforms, and policy environments. However, differences in data standards, credential recognition practices, reporting requirements, and system capabilities can create barriers to sharing information and connecting learners with education and employment opportunities.

Innovation Stream 6: State-Level Workforce Integration examines how institutions can address these challenges by building the institutional relationships, data practices, and alignment strategies needed to connect learner records with state-level systems. It asks institutions to assess their readiness to engage state and workforce partners, to align records with existing infrastructure, and to identify opportunities to support interoperability between higher education and state-level workforce systems to better support workforce development, skills recognition, and employment pathways.

Moving Forward with State-Level Workforce Integration

The work of Innovation Stream 6 continues to develop as the cohort teams advance in their practices. As the cohort moves from a planning year to implementation, institutions will deepen their understanding of state-level workforce infrastructure, strengthen partnerships, and identify opportunities for alignment, allowing them to better connect with a broader ecosystem. The newly launched Learning Mobility Coalition, discussed in the next section, will be instrumental to moving Stream 6 forward.

From Planning to Practice: The Learning Mobility Coalition

The six innovation streams presented in this compendium offer a framework for building institutions' readiness for adopting LERs, including understanding the institutional work required to make LERs trusted, portable, and useful to learners. Now, the Accelerator must extend this work beyond individual institutions.

To meet this challenge, 16 national organizations launched the **Learning Mobility Coalition** in October 2026, a cross-sector effort to make learning records more portable, trusted, and useful as learners move across institutions, into the workforce, and across state lines. Supported by the Walmart Foundation and composed of higher education, employers, workforce development, and state-facing systems, the Learning Mobility Coalition will build on the LER Accelerator, carrying its work forward with broader cross-sector representation. Its priorities around LERs — strengthening institutional capacity, coordinating technical assistance, advancing shared infrastructure, and bridging institutions with labor-market systems — directly address the challenges that the cohort in this compendium surfaced.

While the LER Accelerator built institutional readiness for LER adoption, the Learning Mobility Coalition takes up the next challenge: connecting that readiness across systems so learners can present verified records of what they know and can do, and have those records recognized wherever they go next.

To learn more about the Learning Mobility Coalition, explore the website or follow on LinkedIn to stay informed about the work of the Coalition.

Appendix: Principles of LER Adoption

The LER Accelerator offers nine principles intended to guide institutions as they move along the LER continuum. It's important to note that some principles may be aspirational or not yet relevant to an institution, based on where the institution is positioned on the continuum. However, each principle will become relevant as the institution moves further along in their adoption of LERs.

Nine Principles of LER Adoption

Based on research from organizations, prior statements, and other resources, the LER Accelerator offers the following principles, which show how LERs should aim to be:

1. Designed for All Users: LERs should represent all learners and earners, ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and engagement across diverse backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, with clear processes for feedback and equitable access to technology. LER platforms should be accessible, jargon-free, and easy to use.

2. Skills-Centered and Competency-Focused: LERs should allow for clearly defined and validated skills, knowledge, abilities, and achievements across diverse learning experiences, including formal education, workplace learning, military training, certifications, and other alternative learning pathways, and the performance evidence of the skills, knowledge, abilities, and achievements per individual learner and earner

3. Accessible and Boundless: Systems should allow individuals to access and control their own LER, regardless of institutional or organization affiliation.

4. Centered on Learner Agency: Individuals should have full control over their LERs, allowing them to accept, manage, and remove credentials contained within them, view and share the asserted skills, and combine credentials from multiple issuers to create personalized presentations. They should be able to store credentials across various platforms, back up and recover them independently, and make informed decisions about their disclosure, all while ensuring privacy and security through transparent identity verification systems. LERs should empower individuals to control when, with whom, and for how long they share their credentials, ensuring they can manage access to their personal information as they choose regardless of institutional or organization affiliation.

5. Privacy Protected and Secure: LERs should protect individuals' data by complying with privacy and security standards and adhering to principles like personal data minimization, purpose limitation, transparency, and user consent, ensuring that individuals retain control over their personal information and that trust in the system is maintained.

6. Collaborative: LERs should involve as many relevant institutional and external stakeholders as necessary in their development, implementation, and management.

7. Interoperable: LER platforms should use as many interoperable and open standards as possible (such as W3C Verifiable Credentials, 1EdTech Consortium's Open Badges 3.0, and CLR Standard 2.0) to enable seamless, machine-readable data exchange across platforms, institutions, and industries, ensuring portability, shared meaning, and flexibility.

8. Able to Provide Assurance of Identity and Achievement: LERs should follow best practices, such as the interoperable and open standards referenced above, that promote confidence that the learner is who they say they are, their credential was issued to and is now held by the person they claim to be, and the credential metadata contains the evidence of the claimed assertions.

9. Updatable and Time-Delineated: LERs can be updated, revoked, or expired by the issuer.

These principles represent a broad consensus across higher education stakeholders, ensuring a unified approach to user agency, privacy, and interoperability in credential management. By fostering collaborative, equitable systems, the LER Accelerator empowers individuals to securely manage and share their achievements throughout their careers.

LER ACCELERATOR

aacrao.org/programs-initiatives/learning-mobility/ler-accelerator/

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