Workforce Development Board Readiness

Embracing Skills-Based Hiring & Advancement and Learning & Employment Records

NAWB

Executive Summary

Every day, workforce development boards serve people who want and need quality jobs but lack the formal academic preparedness or work experience to fit traditional criteria or even get an interview. How many years have we all struggled with this tired paradigm? How much longer can we continue to burn time, talent, and treasure in this endeavor? We all strive for successful job matches.

We have suggestions that may change your work and the outcome for your employers and job seekers to make "better matches" in your community, particularly for small- and medium-sized employers.

This publication contains vital information and suggestions to reinvent your workforce approach. What if we assessed our jobseekers for skills plus the traditional information? New tools match an applicant to a job description and present them to waiting employers as the right hire based on all their acquired skills.

Joining the digital transformation is a crucial economic strategy to ensure your community remains competitive and resilient in the rapidly changing market. Skills-first is an urgent shift in hiring and advancing workers. **It is time to make bolder strides to reinvent our processes and achieve greater success for the workforce!**

Over the past two years, the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) has searched for the right intersection of skills, assessments, and Learning and Employment Records (LERs) to improve the success of workforce development boards. We have made important advances to that end.

Every workforce development board has a responsibility to its community to explore promising ideas and innovations. By convening the conversation and collaborating with area employers, you can make a difference. It is critical to be informed, explore the possibilities, and pressure-test the strategies with your ecosystem. NAWB's work provides you with the basic steps to launch this journey.

Employers and public entities throughout the U.S. are making a skills-plus adjustment in hiring. The transformation is being documented by many like-minded agencies in workforce:

- Skills in the States from the National Governor's Association has more than 24 states that are actively examining their traditional job requirements. Some are changing requirements to incorporate skills-based hiring and advancement (SBHA) for jobs needing talent today.

- Since 2018, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation has been supporting the growing LER movement, including through Jobs and Employment Data Exchange (JEDx), as well as many workgroups and data /technology projects managed under the T3 Innovation Network .
- Jobs for the Future (JFF) is investing in multiple strategies and research. Published works like How to Make Hiring Work for Young Adults, and examining products like Skill My Resume and others are on their website.
- SkillsFWD is piloting the advancement of skills-based hiring and economic mobility through the development and application of LERs. Launched in 2023, seven teams are implementing projects in Montana, Alabama, Ohio, Arizona, Colorado, Indiana, and Pittsburgh - including Transforming the Future of Skills-Based Hiring in partnership with your workforce board colleagues.
- National Skills Coalition also contributes to the discussion with a helpful publication, Charting a Course to Quality.
- Credential Engine has developed a Learning and Employment Records Action Guide that describes the phases and steps that stakeholders can take to develop and sustain trusted LER ecosystems.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, "emphasizing a skills-based approach to hiring and advancement can broaden talent pools and create more meaningful career opportunities for workers…"

Walmart.org has been a leader in the conversation and is making an investment in a skills transformation. "Walmart believes the U.S. needs to transition to a workforce system that recognizes and values all the skills people possess in the same way it recognizes and values college degrees. This gives talented, skilled workers who do not have degrees the same benefits as people who do."

What can you do to join the workforce evolution? Read, research, join NAWB in this conversation, and begin talking to your community. We hope our work will inspire you to be curious about SBHA, add knowledge about your community's willingness, and become interested in creating a bigger workforce with greater diversity and greater contributions to your regional economy.

Create your area's vision, determine affordable and effective strategies, execute, and manage a process determined by your board, your team, and your community. Suggestions and proven strategies are provided here. Begin building your SBHA skills as well as those of your board.

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BACKGROUND

NAWB provides timely information from multiple sources to assist workforce development boards in tackling the challenges of the rapidly evolving dynamics within the workforce. We remain committed to providing members with quality resources, delivered as "just-in-time" assets. Whether we convene on trending topics, unique innovations, or outline better practices to overcome shared challenges, we gather and synthesize conversations from partners, collaborators, thought leaders, and experts in the field.

Over the past year, NAWB has held in-person meetings, roundtables, learning labs, and virtual events to convene employers, workforce development boards, and stakeholders, for discussions about SBHA and LERs. The conversations produced a collection of thoughts ranging from vision to execution and everything in between.

This resource is a compilation of the informed questions, strategies, and steps that were elevated during the sessions to encourage workforce development boards to advance SBHA and LERs in every local community.

NAWB initiated a national conversation on skills-based hiring and the adoption of LERs among workforce development boards with these questions:

- How can the gap between jobseekers' skills and employers' needs be bridged to ensure a more efficient and equitable job matching process that increases workforce participation?

- What strategies and technological innovations are required to integrate LER systems with existing workforce information systems to create a more dynamic, accessible, and real-time data-inclusive workforce ecosystem?

- What can be done to ensure that the workforce development system is inclusive and equitable regarding job seekers and employers, particularly small and medium size employers?

- How can the system provide equal opportunities to individuals with limited access to employment and adapt to their unique needs?

- What are the best practices for using technology and data analytics to make informed decisions about how best to solve workforce development issues?

- How can we foster a culture of continuous learning and skills development that aligns with the evolving demands of the global economy?

Today, workforce development boards are challenged to increase the available pool of workers, train more workers for necessary skills, and connect a larger ready-workforce to waiting employers.

Each community faces unique challenges and opportunities, but certain measures to increase access and build a more inclusive workforce are universal. We hope each workforce development board finds this information useful in crafting methods to meet challenges by adopting strategies for access and inclusion of all our neighbors, including those currently disconnected from opportunities to work. We aim to significantly elevate the understanding and implementation of skills-first practices within the workforce system.

What is Skills-Based Hiring and Advancement (SBHA)?

SBHA is a transformative process of defining jobs based on prioritizing required skills over credentials. It matches talent based upon an individuals' abilities and competencies rather filtering for education and experience. The latest conversations include retention strategies.
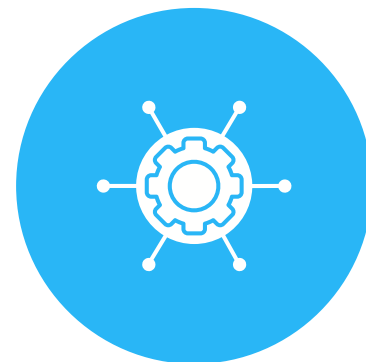
What are Learning and Employment Records (LERs)?

LERs are an open standards-based, machine-actionable, digital record of an individual's formal and informal learning and employment that can be combined with other digital records useful in supporting an individual's education, employment, and supportive services.

How engaged are you in SBHA and the adoption of learning and employment records?

The objective is to create a larger talent pool for employers and welcome disconnected workers to experience success in the workplace. Outreach to neighbors and securing greater trust is not always easy, but it is necessary. Strengthening communications throughout the delivery system will assist in establishing buy-in to embrace change.

Strategies are changing and many workforce development boards are already involved in local conversations.

As workforce development boards lean in, the following questions are being asked around the ecosystem:

- Will SBHA hiring meet the needs of local employers, including those that are small- and medium-sized?
- What new data tools are effective, affordable, and relevant?
- Is the workforce development board informed about the current trends for SBHA? Will the board adopt a position, vision, and goals?
- Have partners been identified who are working in this space?
- Will employers and/or jobseekers adopt electronic LERs?
- Does the local team understand the prevailing environment concerning policy and resources for SBHA and LERs?
- What will the current staffing and budget support?
- Are the goals understood, ambitious, and attainable?
- Can the initial effort be sustained, and can it evolve year-over-year?
- Who will join the ecosystem to support the transformation?

Skills-based practices enhance your ability to fulfill the expectations of employers and job seekers, while creating a more inclusive and diverse workforce.

Respecting the diversity of workforce development boards, the following represents a broad spectrum of strategies in a succinct and accessible format to advance the conversation of SBHA in each community. Communities can customize the practices best suited for their workforce ecosystem. We invite you to reference these strategies in determining your level of engagement on the continuum of the skills-first transformation.

VISION

Visioning is what interests most workforce development board members. How can boards improve the community and the workforce? Public and private employers began the journey for SBHA in the last few years, and the trend is growing quickly. Is it something that will work for your community? Who better to accept the challenge than the private industry-led and community inclusive workforce development board?

Explore and discuss the possibilities with your community.

The following are "readiness" suggestions to form a broader vision for your workforce development board:

Hold strategic discussions that include the integration of SBHA.
- Conduct workshops and training sessions on the nuances of SBHA.
- Align SBHA strategies with local labor market needs and trends.

Promote LERs among stakeholders.
- Initiate campaigns and discussions to educate stakeholders and employers about the benefits of LERs. Which jobs fit, and how will employers benefit?
- Where is the "constructive collaboration" for LERs in your community?

Partner with diverse community groups to reach underrepresented potential workers.
- Establish partnerships with organizations representing various underrepresented groups.
- Collaborate on joint initiatives that promote workforce access and inclusion for all neighbors including small and minority employers.
- Share resources and best practices with community partners.

Commit to removing barriers to employment for marginalized groups and promote equitable access to job opportunities.
- Budget better access for American Job Centers; add interpreters and fully accessible technology, provide special access for individuals who are formerly incarcerated, foster youth services, and forge intentional inroads to underserved communities.
- Use local information, collaboration, and data to build a larger skilled workforce. Know your workforce participation rate, and improve it.

Data, Information, Collaboration, Skills-Mapping and Career Pathways
- Develop a comprehensive skills inventory within the local labor market.
- Use data analytics to identify current skill surpluses and shortages to engage with industry leaders to forecast future skill needs with direct employer input.
- Assist employers with job analysis and skill validation for critical jobs.
- Develop employer collaboration that accurately reflects the career opportunities and requirements for specific industry trends, and employers within the industry supply chain.
- Collaborate with educational institutions to align curricula with these pathways.
- Create feedback loops with employers, educational institutions, and job seekers to refine career pathways.
- Select or develop seamless data integration tools that align with staff capabilities and system needs to provide a holistic view of workforce and economic trends.

Data & Technology Infrastructure
- Adopt open data standards that describe credentials and skills as linked, open, and interoperable.
- Integrate geospatial data into strategic planning for local labor market analysis, evaluating current capabilities.
- Map current data flow and show integration pain points.
- Foster a data-centric culture for informed decision-making.
- Evaluate current IT infrastructure to find and fill gaps.
- Establish a system for continuous updates to skills-mapping as job requirements evolve.
- Utilize labor market intelligence tools to adopt strategies in real time.
- Build and leverage partnerships with technology labs, educational institutions, and industry experts to stay abreast of fresh insights.
- Implement the latest cybersecurity technologies and practices to protect data integrity and user privacy.
- Explore advanced technologies like AI for dynamic skills analysis.

Partnerships and Collaboration

- Identify and categorize all stakeholders including small, medium and large employers, educators, community groups, and policymakers, frequently reviewing and updating lists as appropriate to acknowledge changing dynamics and growth.
- Collaborate to develop clear and comprehensive budget plans for LER and SBHA initiatives, including detailed multi-year financial planning to ensure sustainability and effectiveness of future workforce programs.
- Foster employer participation in SBHA by providing mapping tools that match job descriptions with new candidates.
- Evaluate the current level of community and employer engagement and develop strategies for regular and meaningful stakeholder involvement.
- Use feedback from these groups to refine skills-mapping and data practices.

STRATEGY

A great vision deserves fully executable strategies to engineer a win. Strategies are clearly defined, long-term initiatives to create value for your community and achieve customer satisfaction.

As we consider skills-based hiring and retention, we address the needs of the employer customer. It is not for every employer, but it may assist in filling worker shortages. How will the jobseeker customer respond to LERs? Will the education system assist in addressing skills, documenting achievement?

Aligning strategies to local needs and capabilities is the next step.

Inclusive User Experience and Accessibility

- Allow users to set career goals and receive recommendations based on their skillsets and desired pathways.
- Ensure workforce programs are inclusive and accessible to all community members by partnering with community organizations to reach new populations and address specific community needs; and all system updates consider accessibility from the onset.
- Establish effective channels for both employer and job seeker users to provide feedback on their experiences.
- Use this information to continually improve systems design and functionality.
- Provide ongoing training on inclusive design principles for development teams.
- Offer programs to aid job seekers and incumbent workers in effectively navigating and using tech solutions including LER platforms. Regularly update systems to meet the latest accessibility standards and ensure all users can engage with the platform without barriers.

Accommodations

- Support various communication modes (text, voice, video) for diverse user needs ensuring the system is flexible.
- Guarantee compatibility with common assistive technologies like screen readers, and regularly test the system with various assistive tools and innovative assistance.
- Include multiple language options and literacy support features, adjusting readability and glossary terms for diverse language skills.
- Offer programs to aid job seekers in effectively navigating and using tech solutions including LER platforms.

Training and Development

Outreach, Education, and Community Engagement

- Utilize social media and digital platforms to effectively reach customers with metrics determining maximum impact. Include more traditional community/social service outlets to expand and include all neighbors.
- Tailor outreach programs to address employer needs and concerns as a mechanism to track and evaluate employer engagement and response.
- Conduct a variety of outreach initiatives catering to different community segments and underserved employers and industries.
- Collaborate with new community organizations, educational institutions, and advocacy groups to amplify outreach efforts and achieve greater inclusion.
- Collect and disseminate success stories and case studies and include these in outreach and educational materials.
- Partner with schools, colleges, and training providers to ensure curriculum relevance, skills assessment, and alignment to better develop work-based experiences like internships and apprenticeships.
- Design collaboration frameworks to craft targeted strategies for engaging each stakeholder group effectively to maximize the impact of joint initiatives.
- Effectively collect and use customer feedback to refine outreach and education initiatives from customers including employers and community groups.
- Adopt metrics for evaluating the impact of outreach and education efforts and choose adjustments based on evaluation results.

Promising Data-Sharing Practices

- Establish clear data sharing agreements with all partners, ensuring adherence to privacy laws and ethical standards.
- Regularly review and update agreements to stay compliant with changing regulations.
- Develop clear, actionable guidelines for internal and external data sharing.
- Set up secure, user-friendly platforms for data access by stakeholders.
- Develop an integration strategy for seamless data sharing and functionality.
- Ensure user-friendly interfaces for all integrated systems.
- Participate in regional and national networks to strengthen workforce development strategies by engaging in the exchange of best practices, resources, and insights.

Tools, SBHA and LERs

- Use free and open tools as you navigate this journey, addressing both supply- and demand-side tools.
- Pursue employer, educator, and community engagement to discuss SBHA to increase job accessibility and the pool of jobseekers.
- Employ best practices in user interface design for intuitive, easy-to-navigate platforms, regularly conducting usability testing with diverse user groups for continuous improvement in eliminating barriers.
- Track and regularly update staff and trainers on new laws, legal clarifications, or regulations affecting SBHA and LERs.
- Plan for upgrades that support LER integration and functionality.
- Forge strong relationships with hiring managers from local businesses to align skills-based hiring and LERs with market needs.
- Collaborate directly with employers to design training and outline relevant pathways.
- Adopt agile practices for responsive development and updates of the LER platform, encouraging flexibility and adaptability in development.

- Link skills-mapping and career pathways information to LERs for real-time accuracy. Involve industry experts for relevant content to regularly update training curricula to align with industry changes and the strategic use of an LER.
- Incorporate design thinking and user-centered design principles in platform development, continuously refining the user experience to ensure the LER platform is intuitive and meets user needs.
- Establish systems for collecting and analyzing user feedback to continuously enhance the LER platform and regularly implement changes based on user input to improve functionality and user experience.
- Ensure the LER system is optimized for mobile devices providing flexibility and accessibility for all users on all devices.

Professional Development Prompts

- Offer continuous training opportunities to staff in modern technologies and digital trends relevant to LERs so staff may support and advocate customer use of the platform.
- Train staff in best practices. Include ethical considerations and accuracy in skill verification, emphasizing the need to stay informed about new and emerging tools for verifying and validating skills on LERs.
- Provide specialized training on integrating Workforce Information Systems (WIS) with LERs, focusing on data privacy, security, and information necessary to workforce development.
- Equip staff with skills in labor market data analysis for informed decision making, including training on interpreting and utilizing data from an LER.

EXECUTION AND MANAGEMENT

The most critical step in innovation is the execution and management of great strategies. Transformation is only successful if the system has the capacity to exceed expectations. As we all learn, effective communication and coordinated actions are required to achieve collaborative excellence.

Transforming hiring and job skills documentation takes community participation. The workforce development board table is the perfect setting for an inclusive community endeavor.

This section deals with many of the most important decisions and commitments to the vision.

Policy, Legislation, Funding & Resource Allocation

- Ensure the workforce development board's leadership and staff are aware of current policy and potential impacts of SBHA and LERs.
- Join or form coalitions with other workforce development boards and regional and national organizations for collective advocacy.
- Leverage alliances to amplify the voice and impact of policy initiatives regarding innovations in workforce development.
- Include sustainability strategies in funding proposals and communicate long-term viability plans to funders and stakeholders.
- Consider designing specific pilots as an activity to increase interest and awareness, and build resources.
- Develop compelling cases and presentations to engage stakeholders, including employers and community groups for financial support.
- Train and develop professional grant-writing skills among staff to build internal capabilities or retain external writers to obtain funding.

Identify and Budget Transformative Dollars

- Structure and allocate budgeted resources for effective and accessible outreach activities focused on accessibility, skills-based hiring, and LERs; include training for staff and community.
- Create a budget plan that allocates funds for regular technology updates and maintenance.
- Find and use free options whenever possible!
- Find potential funding sources and include regular updates to the list to capture new opportunities.
- Catalog potential funding sources including government grants (federal, state, and local government), and philanthropic sources to support LERs.
- Identify and pursue matching fund opportunities, leveraging workforce development board resources to secure additional funding and other intentional actions to diversify and reduce reliance on single sources.
- Ensure long-term financial support for the sustainability of IT infrastructure.

Evaluation, Monitoring, and Impact Assessment

- Determine the organization's openness and readiness for third-party evaluations to gain unbiased insights.
- Assess the ability to benchmark against industry standards and best practices to understand the workforce development board's performance compared to peers.
- Review qualifications and readiness of the evaluation team to conduct ongoing assessments of programs and initiatives.
- Ensure that all monitoring, reporting, and evaluation activities are compliant with relevant data protection and privacy laws.
- Regularly update security protocols to combat emerging cyber threats.
- Set metrics to assess the impact of skills-mapping and career pathways on employment rates and job satisfaction.
- Track the progress of individuals along their career pathways to measure mobility and upskilling.
- Analyze employer satisfaction with the skills alignment of new hires.

Data Analytics and Safeguards

- Establish robust data recovery systems as a safeguard against data loss, regularly testing and updating systems to ensure their effectiveness.
- Assess the adequacy of current data collection systems and analytic tools for capturing and interpreting relevant data. Do standardized reporting protocols effectively communicate findings to stakeholders?
- Evaluate the presence and effectiveness of analytics dashboards for monitoring key performance indicators (KPI) related to SBHA/LERs.

Continuous Improvement and Innovation

- Host innovation workshops, hackathons, or problem-solving groups to generate creative solutions and encourage cross-functional participation from diverse perspectives.
- Launch pilot programs to evaluate new platform features with a small user group, using beta programs for broader testing and refinement before wider rollout.
- Establish specific performance metrics to gauge the success of each innovation, regularly reviewing and adapting these metrics to align with changing objectives.
- Form a dedicated team tasked with driving innovation and exploring new features and tools, encouraging a strategy of open-mindedness and creativity in approaching platform improvements.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We thank our network of "pioneers" for recommending the following resources for your continued study and adoption of a skills-first shift.

T3 Innovation Network's resources, LER Toolkit, and ILR Priority Use Case Template

Credential Engine's Learning & Employment Records Action Guide

National Skills Coalition blog and Charting the Course to Quality

JFF Skills-Based Hiring Toolkits and How to Make Skills-Based Hiring Work For Young Adults

SkillsFWD Resources and Transforming the Future of Skills-Based Hiring video

NGA Skills-Based Hiring in the Public Sector

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The National Association of Workforce Boards thanks the many workforce development boards, collaborating organizations, sponsors, contributors, employers, and reviewers for sharing their time and talent over the past year to create this narrative.

We look forward to learning of your experiences in SBHA, Retention and the use of LERs in your community.