

SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: BUILDING BOARD CAPABILITIES

Introduction

Thriving in a skills economy requires Workforce Development Board members to strengthen their core capabilities so they can lead transformation with clarity and impact. This document provides a framework for evaluating your board's readiness across five essential capability areas and a guide to professional development resources that can close the gaps.

Use the self-assessment questions in each section to spark honest conversation among your leadership team, board, and partners. Rate your board's current capacity, identify priority areas for growth, and connect those priorities to NAWB's professional development offerings. By investing in these capabilities, your board becomes a catalyst for inclusive growth, ensuring that workers, employers, and communities all benefit from a skills-rich future.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

1. **Review** each capability area and discuss the self-assessment questions with your leadership team.
2. **Circle or mark** your board's current level for each question: *Emerging, Developing, Strong, or Leading*.
3. **Identify** your top two priority areas and connect them to NAWB Professional Development offerings.
4. **Revisit** annually to track your board's growth.

BOARD CAPABILITY SELF-ASSESSMENT

Complete the self-assessment for each capability area below, and use the results to identify your board's strengths and growth areas. This is not a pass/fail exercise; it's a conversation starter for your board and leadership team.

Board Capabilities

Review the self-evaluation questions for each board capability.

01	Strategic Regional Planning	Setting and communicating a compelling regional vision for workforce transformation that aligns economic development, education, and employer needs.
02	Funding And Resource Alignment	Understanding and aligning diverse funding streams, federal, state, philanthropic, and employer co-investment, toward shared skills priorities rather than siloed programs.
03	Workforce Center Operations	Providing informed oversight of one-stop service delivery and understanding where skills practices are implemented at the front lines of career services.
04	Convening And Partnership Building	Leveraging board members' professional networks and community standing to facilitate cross-sector collaboration and position the board as the region's 'skills table.'
05	Initiative Development And Management	Moving from ideas to action, scoping skills pilots, managing implementation timelines, evaluating results, and making evidence-based decisions about what to scale.

Capability Rating

Use this rating scale to rate where your board and its members are on the scale (1-4)

1 Emerging	The board has limited awareness or capacity in this area. This is a priority for development and should be addressed through professional development, peer learning, or targeted recruitment of new board members with relevant expertise.
2 Developing	The board has begun building capacity, yet efforts are inconsistent or early-stage. Continue investing in this area through structured learning and by connecting with boards that are further along.
3 Strong	The board demonstrates consistent capability and can execute effectively. Focus on sustaining this strength, documenting your approach, and mentoring other boards.
4 Leading	The board is an innovator and model for others in this area. Consider sharing your story through NAWB spotlights, presenting at conferences, and contributing to national best practices.

01 Strategic Regional Planning

Setting and communicating a compelling regional vision for workforce transformation that aligns economic development, education, and employer needs.

Why it matters: In a skills economy, boards must look beyond program compliance and position themselves as regional strategists. This means interpreting labor market intelligence, anticipating industry shifts, and crafting a shared vision that partners can rally around.

Self-Assessment Questions	Emerging	Developing	Strong	Leading
Can our board members articulate a clear, skills-focused vision for the region?				
Do we regularly use labor market data and industry intelligence to inform strategic priorities?				
Is our strategic plan explicitly connected to skills-based hiring and credentialing goals?				
Have we engaged employers, educators, and community leaders in shaping our regional vision?				
Do we revisit and update our strategic direction at least annually based on emerging trends?				

➔ See Toolkit Resource: **Action Guide: Strategic Planning for a Skills Economy**

02 Funding and Resource Alignment

Understanding and aligning diverse funding streams, federal, state, philanthropic, and employer co-investment, toward shared skills priorities rather than siloed programs.

Why it matters: Skills transformation requires boards to move beyond administering individual grants and instead braid resources across WIOA, state initiatives, philanthropy, and employer partnerships. Board members who understand the funding landscape can unlock new investment and sustain innovation beyond any single grant cycle.

Self-Assessment Questions	Emerging	Developing	Strong	Leading
Do board members understand the full range of funding sources available for skills work?				
Are we actively braiding or blending funds to support cross-cutting skills initiatives?				
Have we pursued non-traditional funding such as philanthropy, employer co-investment, or social impact bonds?				
Do we have a sustainability plan that extends beyond current grant cycles?				
Can we clearly demonstrate return on investment to our funders and stakeholders?				

➔ See Toolkit Resource: **Action Guide: Evaluation and Impact**

03 Workforce Center Operations

Providing informed oversight of one-stop service delivery and understanding where skills practices are implemented at the front lines of career services.

Why it matters: Board members don't manage day-to-day operations, but they must understand them well enough to set effective policy, evaluate performance, and champion skills-based innovations in service delivery. This means knowing how career services, training programs, and employer engagement actually work in practice.

Self-Assessment Questions	Emerging	Developing	Strong	Leading
Do board members understand the core service delivery model at our workforce centers?				
Can board members distinguish between governance and operational management?				
Are we measuring workforce center performance using skills-based outcomes rather than just activity counts?				
Do board members visit workforce centers and engage with front-line staff and customers?				
Have we supported staff in adopting skills-based tools, language, and practices?				

➔ See Toolkit Resource: **Action Guide: Skills and Credentialing Taxonomies**

04 Convening And Partnership Building

Leveraging board members’ professional networks and community standing to facilitate cross-sector collaboration and position the board as the region’s ‘skills table.’

Why it matters: Boards are uniquely positioned to bring together employers, educators, community organizations, and government partners. In a skills economy, this convening power becomes a strategic asset, creating the trust, shared language, and aligned action that no single organization can achieve on its own.

Self-Assessment Questions	Emerging	Developing	Strong	Leading
Do board members actively use their networks to advance skills initiatives?				
Have we established ourselves as the regional convener for skills economy conversations?				
Are we facilitating partnerships between employers and credential issuers?				
Do we have regular convenings that bring diverse stakeholders to the table?				
Can partners clearly articulate the board’s role and value in the regional ecosystem?				

➔ See Toolkit Resource: **Action Guide: Employer and Issuer Engagement**

05 Initiative Development And Management

Moving from ideas to action, scoping skills pilots, managing implementation timelines, evaluating results, and making evidence-based decisions about what to scale.

Why it matters: Transformation happens through concrete initiatives, not just strategic plans. Boards need members who can champion new ideas, navigate the messy middle of implementation, evaluate what’s working, and have the discipline to scale successes while sunseting efforts that aren’t delivering results.

Self-Assessment Questions	Emerging	Developing	Strong	Leading
Does our board have a clear process for vetting, approving, and launching new initiatives?				
Do we set measurable milestones and review progress regularly?				
Are we willing to pilot small before scaling, and to sunset initiatives that aren’t working?				
Do board members champion specific initiatives and stay engaged through implementation?				
Are we capturing and sharing lessons learned from both successes and failures?				

➔ See Toolkit Resource: **Action Guide: Evaluation and Impact**

BOARD PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The NAWB offers a range of professional development opportunities designed to build the capabilities outlined above. Whether your board members are new to workforce development or seasoned leaders looking to sharpen their skills in the economy, these programs provide the knowledge, networks, and confidence to lead transformation.

Webinars	Targeted learning sessions on emerging topics in the skills economy, including skills-based hiring, digital credentials, AI in workforce development, and labor market intelligence. Designed for busy board members and staff who need current, actionable information.
Townhalls	Open forums where board leaders engage directly with NAWB leadership, federal partners, and peers from across the country. These sessions provide space for candid dialogue on policy shifts, funding opportunities, and shared challenges.
Coffee and Conversations	Informal peer-learning sessions where board members and staff connect around specific topics in a low-pressure format. Ideal for exchanging practical insights, sharing what's working, and building relationships with colleagues facing similar challenges.
Executive Bootcamp	An intensive, immersive program for board chairs, executive directors, and senior staff. The Bootcamp covers strategic leadership, governance best practices, data-driven decision-making, and how to position your board as a regional leader in the skills economy.
Reports	Visit the NAWB website to access a library of reports, articles, and blog posts to continue your learning about all things workforce development and board leadership.

➔ To explore offerings, visit the [NAWB Professional Development](#) page.

Questions, feedback, or need support in building your board's capacity?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org