

SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: CLARIFY YOUR BOARD'S ROLE

Introduction

In a skills economy, Workforce Development Boards can play many roles, but you can't do everything. Success requires clarity about where your board adds unique value, which partners are better positioned for other work, and how to focus limited resources for maximum impact.

This guide helps you identify your board's distinctive role in skills transformation. It provides frameworks to assess opportunities, tools to clarify responsibilities, and templates to align your team and partners on who does what.

Why Role Clarity Matters

Without clear roles, boards struggle:

- Trying to do everything and accomplishing little
- Duplicating work that partners could do better
- Missing opportunities where only the board can lead
- Creating confusion about accountability
- Burning out staff on activities outside their strengths

With role clarity, boards thrive:

- Focusing energy where they have unique convening power
 - Leveraging partners' expertise effectively
 - Building on existing strengths and relationships
 - Demonstrating clear value to funders and stakeholders
 - Making strategic choices about resource allocation
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Five Core Roles for Workforce Boards

Your board can play one or more of these roles in the skills economy. Most boards excel at 2-3 roles rather than trying to do all five.

Role	What It Means	When Your Board Should Play This Role
1. Convener	Bringing together employers, educators, workers, and community partners around skills initiatives	Your board has established relationships across sectors and credibility as a neutral facilitator
2. Infrastructure Builder	Creating shared systems, platforms, and standards for skills transparency	Your region lacks digital infrastructure or common frameworks, and your board has technical capacity or funding
3. Capacity Builder	Training employers, educators, and service providers to adopt skills-based practices	Partners want to adopt skills approaches but lack know-how, and your board has expertise to share
4. Advocate	Championing skills-based policies and practices with policymakers, funders, and the public	Your board has strong relationships with decision-makers and can influence policy or funding priorities
5. Implementer	Directly delivering skills-based services to workers and employers	Your board operates career centers or programs, and can integrate skills approaches into service delivery

We have created a number of tools to help you and your board evaluate which role is best for your board and your region.

TOOL 1: Role Assessment Matrix

For each role, rate your board's capacity and opportunity (1-5 scale).

Role	Our Capacity (1-5)	Opportunity (1-5)	Priority (High/Medium/Low)	Notes
Convener				
Infrastructure Builder				
Capacity Builder				
Advocate				
Implementer				

Guidance

Capacity Scale
 1 = No capability
 2 = Limited capability
 3 = Moderate capability
 4 = Strong capability
 5 = Exceptional capability

Opportunity Scale
 1 = No demand/need
 2 = Limited demand
 3 = Moderate demand
 4 = Strong demand
 5 = Critical unmet need

Priority Guidance
High Priority: Roles where you have high capacity (4-5) AND high opportunity (4-5)
Medium Priority: Roles where capacity or opportunity is moderate (3)
Low Priority: Roles where capacity or opportunity is low (1-2)

TOOL 2: Role Definition Worksheet

Use this template to clearly define your board's role(s) in work on the skills economy.

Our Primary Role(s):

Convenor	Infrastructure Builder	Capacity Builder	Advocate	Implementer

What We Will Do (Specific Activities):

As a _____ [PRIMARY ROLE], we will:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What We Will NOT Do (Boundaries):

We will not:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What Partners Will Do:

Partner	Their Role	How We'll Support Them

Resources Required:

To fulfill our role, we need:

- Staff capacity:
- Funding:
- Technology/tools:
- Partnerships:
- Expertise/training:

TOOL 3: Role Scenarios by Board Type

Different boards are positioned for different roles. Find the scenario that matches your context:

Scenario 1: Large Metro Board with Strong Employer Network

Best Roles: Convener + Infrastructure Builder.

Why: You can bring partners together and have resources to build shared platforms.

Example Activities:

- Convene a regional skills coalition with employers and educators
- Invest in shared skills taxonomy and credential registry
- Broker data sharing agreements

Scenario 2: Rural Board with Limited Resources

Best Roles: Advocate + Convener

Why: You can't build infrastructure alone, but you can align partners and influence policy

Example Activities:

- Advocate for state investment in rural digital infrastructure
- Convene monthly skills roundtables with employers
- Connect to state/national platforms rather than building your own

Scenario 3: Board Operating Career Centers

Best Roles: Implementer + Capacity Builder

Why: You have direct service delivery and can model skills-based practices

Example Activities:

- Integrate skills assessments into career counseling
- Train staff on skills-based career navigation
- Share lessons learned with other service providers

Scenario 4: Board with Strong Education Partnerships

Best Roles: Convener + Capacity Builder

Why: You can align training providers and help them adopt skills frameworks

Example Activities:

- Facilitate alignment of training programs to skills taxonomy
- Train educators on competency-based assessment
- Create feedback loops between employers and training providers

Scenario 5: Board with Policy Influence

Best Roles: Advocate + Convener

Why: You can shape enabling conditions while bringing partners together

Example Activities:

- Advocate for skills-based language in state workforce policy
- Educate policymakers on skills economy benefits
- Convene employers to demonstrate demand for skills approaches

TOOL 4: Stakeholder Alignment Conversation Guide

Use these questions to align your board, staff, and partners around roles:

Questions for Your Board:

- What unique strengths do we have that others don't?
- What are our members and partners asking us to do?
- What roles would stretch us too thin?
- Which partners could play roles we shouldn't?
- What resources can we realistically commit?

Questions for Your Partners:

- What role do you see us playing in skills work?
- What support do you need from us?
- What roles can you play that we shouldn't duplicate?
- How can we best support your work?
- What would success look like in partnership?

Questions for Your Staff:

- What roles align with our current work?
- What new capabilities would we need to develop?
- What roles would energize our team?
- What roles would create an unsustainable burden?
- What resources would make success possible?

Common Role Combinations

Most successful boards focus on 2-3 complementary roles:

Role Combination	Why It Works	Example
Convener + Advocate	Bring partners together AND influence policy to support their work	Host skills coalition while advocating for state investment in skills-rich credentials

Convener + Infrastructure Builder	Align partners around shared systems you build together	Convene employers to co-design a regional skills taxonomy
Implementer + Capacity Builder	Model practices in your programs, then help others adopt them	Integrate skills into career centers, then train partners
Convener + Capacity Builder	Bring partners together and strengthen their capabilities	Facilitate learning communities where partners build skills together
Advocate + Infrastructure Builder	Shape policy while building tools that make it actionable	Advocate for digital credentials while implementing a badge system

Role Clarity Red Flags

Warning signs your board lacks role clarity:

- Partners duplicate your efforts or express confusion about responsibilities
- Your team feels pulled in too many directions
- You're trying to be everything to everyone
- Stakeholders can't articulate what makes your board unique
- You're building infrastructure that already exists elsewhere
- You're delivering services that partners could provide better
- Board members disagree about strategic priorities
- Staff burnout is high, and morale is low

If you checked 3 or more boxes, use the tools in this guide to refine your role.

Next Steps

- **Complete the Role Assessment Matrix** with your board and leadership team
- **Use the Role Definition Worksheet** to document decisions
- **Have Partner Alignment Conversations** with board, staff, and partners
- **Update your strategic plan** to reflect role clarity (See Action Guide)
- **Communicate your role** clearly on the website, in presentations, and with partners
- **Revisit annually** as capacity and opportunities evolve

Examples of Clear Role Statements

1: Metro Workforce Board

"We serve as the regional convener for skills economy transformation, bringing together employers, educators, and community partners to build shared infrastructure. We do not deliver direct training, but we help training providers align their programs to labor market needs through our skills taxonomy and employer feedback loops."

2: Rural Workforce Board

"We advocate for policies and investments that support skills-based hiring in rural communities, and we convene local employers to identify shared priorities. We partner with the state system for technology infrastructure rather than building our own, focusing our resources on relationship-building and policy influence."

3: Regional Workforce Board

"We implement skills-based practices in our American Job Centers and build the capacity of our frontline staff to help workers identify and document their skills. We share our lessons learned with other boards and advocate for skills-based approaches in state policy."

Questions, feedback, or need help clarifying your board's role?

Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards

www.nawb.org