

SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: CREATE YOUR SKILLS ECONOMY VISION

Introduction

A compelling vision is the foundation of any successful transformation. Before you can build or grow a skills economy in your region, you need a clear, shared picture of what success looks like and why it matters to employers, workers, educators, and your community.

This guide helps you develop that vision. It provides frameworks, prompts, and activities to engage board members and partners in articulating your desired future state and building the alignment needed to make it real.

Why a Skills Vision Matters?

A skills-economy vision describes the future state of your regional labor market, in which skills are the primary currency of opportunity. It illustrates how work, learning, and advancement function when skills are transparent, portable, and valued. A skills vision will help your board with:

Element	Benefits
Alignment	A shared vision unites diverse partners around common goals
Motivation	A compelling future inspires action and sustains momentum through challenges
Direction	Vision guides decisions about where to invest time and resources
Communication	A clear vision helps you tell your story to funders, policymakers, and the public
Accountability	Vision provides a benchmark to measure progress

A strong vision answers a number of questions for people and organizations in your region:

Group	Questions Answered
Workers	How will I identify my skills, earn credentials, and advance my career?
Employers	How will I find qualified talent, hire for skills, and develop my workforce?
Educators	How will I align training to labor market needs and help learners demonstrate competencies?
Workforce Boards	What infrastructure, partnerships, and services enable this skills economy?
Community	How does this create economic opportunity, reduce inequality, and strengthen our region?

There are five components of an effective vision:

Component	Description
Aspirational	Describes a future significantly better than today, inspiring people to stretch beyond current limitations
Specific	Includes concrete details about what changed, who benefits, and how systems work differently
Inclusive	Explicitly addresses equity and ensures benefits reach all community members, especially those historically excluded
Shared	Co-created with board members and partners so they see themselves in it and commit to making it real
Actionable	Points toward concrete steps and strategies, not just lofty ideals

Vision Development Process

To develop your skills economy vision, follow this four-step process. Plan for a series of 2-3 stakeholder sessions over 1-2 months.

STEP 1: Engage Stakeholders

Session 1 - 90 minutes

- **Goal:** Build shared understanding of skills economy concepts and gather diverse perspectives

Who to Include:

- Board members and staff
- Employers from priority sectors
- Education and training providers
- Community-based organizations serving underrepresented populations
- Workers and job seekers (including lived experience)
- Economic development partners

Activities:

Activity 1.1: Define "Skills" (20 min)

● **Ask:** "When you hear 'skills,' what comes to mind? What examples can you give?"

- Collect responses via sticky notes, chat, or a collaborative document
- Cluster similar responses and identify themes
- Draft working definition of 'skills' that reflects your region's values

Activity 1.2: Current State Assessment (30 min)

● **Ask:** "How do skills show up in our region today?"

Document challenges and opportunities, and use the following prompt questions:

- How do employers describe job requirements?
- How do workers prove their capabilities?
- What barriers exist for talent and employers?

- Who benefits from current systems? Who doesn't?

Activity 1.3: Why Change Matters (20-30 min)

● **Ask:** "Why should we invest in building a skills economy? What problem does this solve?"

- Capture responses from different people, groups, and perspectives
- Identify shared motivations

Activity 1.4: Assign Homework (10 min)

● **Ask:** "What would our region look like in 5 years if we successfully built a skills economy?"

- Encourage them to consider: *What changed? Who benefits? How do systems work?*

STEP 2: Envision the Future

Session 2 - 2 hours

- **Goal:** Paint a detailed picture of your desired future state for your region

Activities:

Activity 2.1: Future Scenarios (45 min)

● **Ask:** "Imagine it's 2030 and our region has successfully built a skills economy. Walk us through a day in the life of:"

- A job seeker looking for work
- An employer trying to fill an open position
- A worker seeking to advance their career
- A training provider designing a new program

Process:

- Break into small groups, assign one scenario per group
- Have groups present their scenarios
- Identify common themes across scenarios

Activity 2.2: Infrastructure Mapping (30 min)

● **Ask:** "What infrastructure, systems, and tools exist in this future to make skills visible and actionable?"

Categories to consider:

- Data and technology platforms
- Credential and assessment systems
- Partnership structures
- Policies and standards

Document required infrastructure

Activity 2.3: Equity Check (30 min)

● **Ask:** "Who benefits most from this vision? Are we addressing existing inequities or potentially creating new ones?"

Test the vision against equity questions:

- Can people with non-degree credentials succeed?
- Are language and literacy barriers addressed?
- Is technology accessible to all?
- Do costs prevent participation?

Refine vision to explicitly address equity

STEP 3: Craft Vision Statement

Session 3 - 90 minutes

- **Goal:** Distill insights into a compelling, concise vision statement

Activities:

Activity 3.1: Review and Synthesize (30 min)

- Review outputs from Sessions 1 and 2
- Identify key themes, phrases, and priorities
- Cluster into categories

Activity 3.2: Draft Vision Elements (40 min)

Draft 2-3 sentence vision statement that includes:

- What the future looks like (aspirational)
- Who benefits (inclusive)
- How it's different from today (specific)

Create 3-5 supporting statements that elaborate on:

- Worker experience and mobility
- Employer talent strategies
- Education and training alignment
- Regional competitiveness and equity

Draft in small groups, then share and refine

Activity 3.3: Test and Refine (20 min)

- Read the vision aloud

● **Ask:** *"Is this inspiring? Clear? Inclusive? Actionable?"*

- Collect feedback and refine language
- Identify any gaps or concerns to address

STEP 4: Activate the Vision

Ongoing

- **Goal:** Turn vision into action and communication

Actions:

Action 4.1: Finalize and Adopt

- Polish vision statement based on feedback
- Present to the board for formal adoption
- Secure commitments from key partners

Action 4.2: Communicate Widely

- Create a one-page vision document
- Develop presentations for different audiences

- Share via website, social media, newsletters
- Host community conversations to build awareness

Action 4.3: Translate to Strategy

- Use the vision to inform strategic planning (see Action Guide)
- Identify specific initiatives and milestones
- Align budgets and resource allocation

Action 4.4: Monitor and Evolve

- Revisit vision annually
- Assess progress toward vision
- Refine as the labor market and technology evolve

TOOL: Vision Statement Template

Use this template to structure your vision statement.

CORE VISION STATEMENT (2-3 sentences)

Example: In [region name], skills are the foundation of opportunity. Workers advance based on demonstrated abilities, employers find the talent they need, and our economy thrives on the strength of our people's capabilities.

[YOUR VISION:]

WORKER EXPERIENCE

Example: Workers can identify, document, and share their skills through portable digital credentials. Career pathways are clear, advancement is based on competency, and everyone has access to the training and support they need to succeed.

[YOUR STATEMENT:]

EMPLOYER IMPACT

Example: Employers hire based on skills and potential, not just credentials and experience. Talent pipelines are stronger, time-to-hire is reduced, and workforce development investments yield measurable returns.

[YOUR STATEMENT:]

EDUCATION & TRAINING ALIGNMENT

Example: Training programs are designed around labor market needs, learners earn stackable credentials, and skills are validated through competency-based assessments.

[YOUR STATEMENT:]

REGIONAL IMPACT

Example: Our region is competitive, resilient, and equitable. Economic opportunity is accessible to all, gaps in outcomes are closing, and our talent infrastructure attracts employers and strengthens communities.

[YOUR STATEMENT:]

Sample Vision Statement

Here's an example to inspire your own vision.

Metro Region Skills Economy Vision 2030

In the Metro Region, skills are the currency of opportunity. By 2030, workers of all backgrounds can demonstrate their capabilities through portable, skills-rich digital credentials; employers will hire based on competency rather than pedigree; and our economy will thrive on the strength of our people's abilities.

For Workers: *Every worker can identify and document their skills through accessible platforms. Career pathways are transparent, advancement is based on what you can do, and training opportunities are aligned with real labor market demand. Barriers of cost, language, and access have been removed.*

For Employers: *Employers find qualified candidates faster by searching for specific skills rather than proxy credentials. Talent pipelines are more diverse and better prepared. Skills-based hiring has reduced time-to-fill by 30% and expanded access to overlooked talent pools.*

For Our Region: *Metro Region is nationally recognized for skills innovation and economic mobility. Workers earn 15% more than in comparable regions. Racial and gender wage gaps have narrowed by 40%. Our skills infrastructure has attracted new employers and strengthened existing industries.*

Infrastructure: *We have built shared digital infrastructure for skills transparency, common language through adopted taxonomies, strong partnerships between employers and educators, and equitable access to credential-earning opportunities.*

Next Steps

Once you've developed your vision:

1. **Share widely** with board, staff, partners, and community
2. **Use as a foundation** for your strategic planning (See Action Guide)
3. **Identify infrastructure needs** (See Action Guides)
4. **Engage stakeholders** around specific commitments (See Action Guide)
5. **Measure progress** toward vision (See Action Guides)

Questions or feedback? Questions, feedback, or need support developing your Vision?

Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards

www.nawb.org