

# SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

## ACTION GUIDE: EMPLOYER AND ISSUER ENGAGEMENT

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### Introduction

The shift to a skills economy depends on the adoption by employers and credential issuers. Employers must hire, promote, and develop talent based on skills rather than degrees alone. Credential issuers must validate and verify skills in ways that are trusted, portable, and transparent. Workforce Development Boards are uniquely positioned to convene, educate, and support both groups through this transformation.

This guide provides practical strategies for engaging employers and credential issuers, including how to design effective convenings, communicate the business case, and provide implementation support.

### Why Engagement Matters

Employers and credential issuers are the anchors of any skills economy; without them, the infrastructure has nothing to stand on.

- **Employers** define which skills actually matter in the labor market, validate that credentials signal real capability, and create the hiring practices that make skills transparent and portable.
- **Credential issuers**, colleges, training providers, and industry associations translate learning into trusted, validated, and verifiable records that workers can share.

If employers don't recognize the credentials being issued, workers earn badges that go nowhere. If issuers create credentials that employers don't value, the system collapses. Successful workforce boards engage both groups early and often: *asking employers what skills they need, which credentials they trust, and how they'd use skills data in hiring; and working with issuers to align programs with labor market demand, adopt common frameworks, and issue digitally verifiable credentials.*

When employers and issuers are at the table together, skills infrastructure gets built on solid ground. In this action guide, we outline steps and tools to engage employers and credential issuers.

# Step 1: Understand What Motivates Your Audience

Effective engagement starts with understanding what employers and credential issuers care about. Different motivations require different messages and approaches.

## Employer Motivations

Motivation	How to Message
<b>Talent Shortages</b>	Skills-based hiring expands your talent pool by 3-5x by removing unnecessary degree requirements and focusing on what people can actually do.
<b>Hiring Efficiency</b>	Validated and verified skills credentials reduce time-to-hire by providing objective evidence of competency, cutting interview cycles and assessment time.
<b>Quality of Hire</b>	Skills-based selection improves job performance by matching candidates to actual job requirements rather than proxy credentials.
<b>Diversity &amp; Inclusion</b>	Removing degree barriers could increase access for underrepresented groups with skills but without degrees.
<b>Internal Mobility</b>	Skills taxonomies enable internal career pathways, making it easier to upskill and promote from within.

## Credential Issuer Motivations

Motivation	How to Message
<b>Market Recognition</b>	Employer validation increases the value and recognition of your credentials in the marketplace.
<b>Learner Outcomes</b>	Portable, verified credentials improve employment outcomes for your credential holders and strengthen your impact.
<b>Standards Alignment</b>	Connecting to common frameworks ensures your credentials are interoperable and stackable across systems.

● **Action Item:** Use the Audience Assessment Tool (Tool 1) to profile your key employers and issuers before outreach.

## Step 2: Design Effective Employer Convenings

Well-designed convenings move employers from awareness to action. The key is combining education, peer learning, and practical next steps in a format that respects their time. Here we provide an overview of a skills-based roundtable.

### Skills-Based Hiring Roundtable Format (2 hours)

Time	Activity	Purpose
0-15 min	Welcome & Intros Quick round-robin: name, company, biggest talent challenge	Build community, surface shared challenges
15-30 min	Why Skills-Based Hiring 5-min video + business case presentation	Establish a common understanding, share data
30-50 min	Peer Case Studies 2-3 employers share their journey (10 min each)	Learn from peers, understand practical steps
50-80 min	Hands-On Workshop Work on your own job description with templates	Apply learning, produce tangible output
80-110 min	Resources & Next Steps Share toolkit, discuss pilot opportunities	Provide support, secure commitment
110-120 min	Networking & Q&A Informal discussion, peer connections	Build relationships, answer individual questions

● **Action Item:** Use the Convening Planning Template (Tool 2) to design your employer engagement event.

## Step 3: Communicate the Business Case

Employers need a clear ROI and value proposition to engage. Using data, examples, and concrete metrics to demonstrate value to employers is really important. Here are some key messages used by the employer type.

Employer Type	Primary Pain Point	Skills Solution
<b>Tech Companies</b>	Can't find enough qualified candidates with specific technical skills	Access bootcamp grads, self-taught developers, and non-degree talent with verified portfolios
<b>Healthcare</b>	High turnover and need for rapid onboarding and upskilling	Competency-based progression enables faster advancement and internal mobility
<b>Manufacturing</b>	Skills gap in advanced manufacturing and automation	Industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeships provide clear skill validation
<b>Small Business</b>	Limited HR capacity and resources for talent acquisition	Pre-screened, skills-verified candidates reduce hiring burden

**Pro Tip:** Always include ROI data. For example, companies that use skills-based hiring see a 25% faster time-to-hire and a 20% higher retention rate.

## Step 4: Provide Implementation Support

Interest doesn't automatically translate to action. It is important throughout an engagement with employers and credential issuers to build relationships and to provide hands-on implementation support to help employers implement skills-based practices. Here are some examples of support services to offer.

- **Job Description Workshops:** Help employers rewrite job postings using skills language
- **Screening Tools:** Provide templates for skills-based assessments and interviews
- **Credential Mapping:** Help them understand which credentials validate required skills
- **Pilot Programs:** Offer small-scale pilots with dedicated support
- **Peer Learning Cohorts:** Facilitate ongoing employer groups for shared learning
- **Data and Reporting:** Track outcomes and help employers measure impact

# Employer Engagement Tools and Templates

These tools will help you engage employers and support their transition to skills-based practices.

## TOOL 1: Employer Audience Assessment

Profile key employers to tailor your engagement approach.

Employer	Top Challenge	Readiness*	Key Message

\* **Readiness:** Curious | Interested | Ready to Pilot | Already Active

## TOOL 2: Convening Planning Checklist

Use this checklist to plan your employer roundtable or convening.

Task	Complete?
Set date, time, and venue (in-person or virtual)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Define the target audience and develop an invitation list	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recruit 2-3 employer speakers willing to share their experience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepare a presentation on a skills-based hiring business case	<input type="checkbox"/>
Create or customize job description templates for the workshop	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop resource packet (toolkit, guides, next steps)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send invitations 4-6 weeks in advance	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send reminders 1 week and 1 day before the event	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepare name tags, sign-in sheet, and evaluation forms	<input type="checkbox"/>
Test technology (AV, screen sharing, mic) the day before	<input type="checkbox"/>
Arrange catering or refreshments	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prepare follow-up plan (thank you email, pilot invitations)	<input type="checkbox"/>

# TOOL 3: Skills-Based Job Description Template

Use this template to help employers rewrite job descriptions with a skills-first approach.

SKILLS-BASED JOB DESCRIPTION	
<b>Job Title:</b>	
<b>SECTION 1: Role Overview.</b>	<i>Briefly describe what this role does and why it matters.</i>
<b>SECTION 2: Core Skills Required.</b>	<i>List 5-8 essential skills needed to succeed in this role.</i>
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
4.	_____
5.	_____
<b>SECTION 3: How We'll Assess These Skills</b>	
	<i>Describe how candidates can demonstrate these skills (portfolio, work sample, interview, credential).</i>

#### **SECTION 4: Credentials That Validate These Skills**

*List relevant certifications, badges, or credentials (if applicable).*

#### **SECTION 5: Desired Experience (Not Required)**

*What experience would be helpful but is not mandatory?*

#### **✓ SKILLS-FIRST CHECKLIST**

- No degree requirement unless legally mandated
- Skills listed as competencies, not years of experience
- Clear assessment methods defined
- Non-degree credentials accepted
- Inclusive language is used throughout

## TOOL 4: Sample Skills-Based Job Descriptions

Here are two complete examples to share with employers.

### Example 1: Customer Service Representative

#### Customer Service Representative

##### Role Overview:

As a Customer Service Representative, you'll be the first point of contact for our customers, resolving issues, answering questions, and ensuring a positive experience with our products and services.

##### Core Skills Required:

- Clear verbal and written communication
- Problem-solving and critical thinking
- Empathy and active listening
- Time management and multitasking
- Basic computer navigation and data entry

##### How We'll Assess:

- Role-play customer scenarios during the interview
- Written response exercise
- Reference checks highlighting these skills

##### Credentials We Value:

- Customer service certifications (e.g., ICMI, HDI)
- Professional communication skills badges
- Relevant work samples or portfolios

## Example 2: Junior Software Developer

### Junior Software Developer

#### Role Overview:

Join our development team to build and maintain web applications. You'll work on real projects from day one, learning from experienced developers while contributing to our codebase.

#### Core Skills Required:

- Proficiency in JavaScript, HTML, and CSS
- Understanding of version control (Git)
- Ability to debug and troubleshoot code
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Continuous learning mindset

#### How We'll Assess:

- Review of GitHub portfolio or code samples
- Live coding exercise (pair programming)
- Technical interview discussing past projects

#### Credentials We Value:

- Coding bootcamp certificates
- Online course completions (freeCodeCamp, Codecademy)
- Open source contributions
- Personal projects or app launches

**Note:** We value demonstrated skills and passion for coding over formal degrees. Self-taught developers with strong portfolios are encouraged to apply.

## Next Steps

You now have the tools to engage effectively with employers and credential issuers. Here's how to get started:

- **Profile your key employers** to understand their motivations and readiness
- **Plan your first convening** using the roundtable format and checklist
- **Customize the business case** for your region and industries
- **Prepare job description templates** and share examples
- **Recruit employer champions** willing to pilot and share their stories
- **Provide ongoing support** through cohorts and resources

## Additional Resources

- **Action Guide:** Strategic Planning for Skills Economy
- **Action Guide:** Skills and Credentialing Taxonomies
- **SHRM Foundation:** [Skills-Based Hiring Resources](#)
- **Harvard Business School:** [Managing the Future of Work Research](#)
- **Jobs for the Future:** [Skills-First Hiring Toolkit](#)

*Questions, feedback, or need support with your engagement strategy?*

*Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards*

[www.nawb.org](http://www.nawb.org)