National Association of Workforce Boards

SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDES

DRIVING ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH SKILLS TRANSFORMATION

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

KEY TERMS

In a skills economy, having a shared language is essential for collaboration, clarity, and effective action. Whether you're a board member, workforce center leader, or partner organization, these terms underpin strategy, planning, communication, and service delivery.

We created a list of **key terms** that every Workforce Board member and partner should understand when working in and transitioning to a skills economy. This list provides definitions of key terms commonly used in discussions of the transition to a skills economy. It is designed to promote shared understanding and alignment among workforce development professionals, employers, educators, and policymakers.

What are skills?

Skills are the abilities, knowledge, and capacities that enable a person to *perform tasks, solve problems, or produce outcomes* effectively in a given context, whether at work, in learning, or in daily life. Skills are demonstrations of what a person can do. They can be learned, practiced, assessed, or evaluated, and applied, and they are often categorized as:

- **Technical skills**: Job-specific abilities (e.g., coding, welding, data analysis)
- **Soft or social skills**: Interpersonal or behavioral traits (e.g., communication, teamwork, adaptability)
- **Transferable skills**: Skills applicable across roles and industries (e.g., critical thinking, time management). These are also referred to as *durable skills and essential skills.*
- **Digital skills**: Competencies in using technology tools and platforms (e.g., spreadsheets, digital collaboration, AI literacy):

In a skills economy, these competencies become the primary basis for hiring, training, and advancement decisions.

Skills vs. Knowledge vs. Understanding

In workforce development, education, and hiring, clarity matters. Differentiating among skills, knowledge, understanding, and related terms enables people and organizations to more accurately define job requirements, design training programs, and assess readiness.

Term	Definition	Focus	Example
Knowledge	Information, facts, or principles acquired through learning or experience.	What you know	Knowing that Excel can create pivot tables.
Understanding	The ability to interpret, explain, or make meaning of knowledge.	Why and how it works	Explaining why pivot tables are useful for summarizing data.
Skill	The ability to apply knowledge effectively to complete a task or solve a problem.	What you can do	Creating and customizing a pivot table in Excel.
Competence	A combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviors applied successfully in context.	How well you perform in real settings	Analyzing sales trends using Excel and presenting insights to a team.
Ability	The capacity to perform physical or mental activities. Often innate or developed.	Your potential or capacity	Having the mental agility to learn new software tools quickly.

Source: Page (2026) and LWYL Studio (2025).

What is a skills economy?

A skills economy is an economy where skills, not just degrees, credentials, or other qualifications, are the main drivers of labor markets, productivity, and competitiveness. In a skills economy, skills are treated as valuable personal assets, like currency, that individuals can earn, apply, and leverage throughout their careers, and that employers and industries value and develop.

List of Terms

Term	Definition
Competency	A combination of skills, knowledge, and behaviors applied successfully in context, such as a specific job or role.
Learning and Employment Record (LER)	A record of an individual's learning experiences, skills, and credentials.
Microcredential	A short, focused credential that verifies a specific skill or competency. Typically, more flexible and faster to earn than a certification or degree.
Skill Signal	Any evidence or indicator that communicates a worker's skills to an employer or educational institution. e.g., credentials, portfolios, endorsement, or assessments.
Skills	Skills are the abilities that enable a person to perform tasks, solve problems, or produce outcomes effectively in a given context, whether at work, in learning, or in daily life. Skills can be learned, practiced, assessed, and applied.
Skills-Based Economy	A subset or practical framing of the skills economy. It emphasizes systems and practices that structure economic opportunity around measurable skills.
Skills-Based Hiring and Advancement	An approach to hiring and retention that includes a candidate's validated and verified skills as well as their qualifications, such as diplomas or prior job titles.
Skills Economy	An economy where skills, not just degrees, credentials, or other qualifications, are the main drivers of labor markets, productivity, and competitiveness. In a skills economy, skills are treated as valuable personal assets, like currency, that individuals can earn, apply, and leverage throughout their careers.
Skills Framework	A structured set of skills organized for a particular purpose, such as to express the range of skills relevant to occupations in a specific sector or organization. Frameworks may express relationships between individual skills.
Skills Gap	The disconnect between the skills employers need and those available in the labor market.

Skills Readiness	Skills readiness refers to the ability of a Workforce Development Board, employer, and its partners to prepare for and lead in a skills-based economy.
Skills Recognition Gap	A skills recognition gap refers to the disconnect between the skills a person possesses and the extent to which those skills are recognized, validated, or accepted by employers, educators, or systems.
Skills-First Economy	A movement or philosophy within the broader skills economy. It advocates a cultural and organizational shift in which employers, educators, and workforce boards prioritize skills in their decision-making.
Skills-Rich	Describes an individual, organization, or region that possesses or cultivates a breadth of validated, in-demand, and transferable skills.
Skills-Rich Economy	An economic state or region where the workforce possesses a high concentration of in-demand, validated skills across sectors, enabling adaptability, resilience, and innovation.
Skills Taxonomy	A structured classification of skills used to describe and organize labor market needs. Examples include O*NET, ESCO, and SFIA.
Transferable Skills	Skills that are applicable across multiple jobs or industries, such as communication, problem-solving, or project management.
Source: Page (2026) and LWYL Studio (2025).	

🔴 **Invite your board members** to reflect on what they think of when they hear the terms 'skills' and 'skills-economy.' This will help uncover how your board and region view skills and the language they are most comfortable using. Always lean into what works best for your members and region.

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
EVALUATING YOUR SKILLS READINESS

Introduction

Workforce Development Boards have always focused on what people can do. As the broader economy embraces skills-first and skills-based approaches, new tools have emerged, such as digital badges, skills taxonomies, AI matching, and open data standards, that can further support the work boards are already doing. This has also amplified the need for workforce development boards to be ready to lead your region's skills economy transformation.

Skills readiness is your board's ability to prepare for and lead in a skills-rich, high-performance economy. It reflects how prepared your region is to connect people to jobs based on their demonstrated abilities, not just their credentials or job titles, and your board's capacity to leverage emerging tools to lead your region's skills economy transformation. It's about having the data, partnerships, infrastructure, and commitment to make skills visible, validated, portable, and actionable.

This assessment helps you understand where your board stands today and identify your next steps forward.

Why Skills Readiness Matters

The challenge is clear: *employers can't find qualified workers, job seekers struggle to demonstrate their capabilities, and traditional credentials don't always reflect what people can actually do.* Skills readiness is your board's answer to these disconnects.

When your board is skills-ready, you can:

- **Close talent gaps faster** by helping employers see beyond degrees to find overlooked workers
- **Expand opportunity equitably** by recognizing skills from any source, such as work experience, military service, community college, or apprenticeships
- **Respond to change** as automation and technology reshape job requirements in real-time
- **Demonstrate impact** with data showing how skills-based approaches improve employment outcomes and wages
- **Lead regionally** as the trusted convener who brings employers, educators, and workers together around a common language

Four Elements of Skills Readiness

Your board's readiness can be assessed across four interconnected elements. Each element represents a critical dimension of capacity, from understanding your labor market to building partnerships that drive change. Together, these elements create a complete picture of what it takes to lead skills transformation.

🔴 ***Action:*** *Use this framework to identify your strengths and prioritize where to focus your efforts.*

Element	What It Means	Why It Matters
Element 1: Labor Market Alignment	Data and analysis of priority industries, occupations, and skill needs in your region	You can't build a skills economy without knowing which skills your region needs
Element 2: Shared Skills Framework	A clear, inclusive definition of what "skills" mean for your region, within and across sectors	A common language enables employers, educators, and workers to communicate about skills
Element 3: Inclusion Commitments	Specific goals to expand access and remove barriers for underrepresented groups	Skills-based approaches only work if they expand opportunity for everyone, especially those historically excluded
Element 4: Partnership Roadmap	A roadmap for how the board, employers, educators, and community partners will collaborate	No single organization can build a skills economy alone—it requires coordinated action

TOOL: SELF-ASSESSMENT

Element 1: Labor Market Alignment

Check all that apply to your board:

- ☐ We have current data on priority industries in our region
- ☐ We know which occupations are growing and declining
- ☐ We've identified the top in-demand skills for key sectors
- ☐ We regularly analyze job posting data to understand employer needs
- ☐ We track skill gaps and credential requirements
- ☐ We use labor market data to inform training investments

Score: _____ / 6

Element 2: Shared Skills Framework

- ☐ We have a shared definition of what 'skills' means in our region
- ☐ We've adopted or are exploring a skills taxonomy (e.g., O*NET, ESCO)
- ☐ Employers, educators, and partners use a common language to describe skills
- ☐ We distinguish between technical skills, soft skills, and foundational competencies
- ☐ We have processes for validating and recognizing skills from various sources
- ☐ Our skills framework is inclusive of non-traditional pathways

Score: _____ / 6

Element 3: Inclusion Commitments

- ☐ We have explicit goals to expand access for underrepresented groups
- ☐ We collect information on the people and communities represented in our work
- ☐ Underrepresented communities are at the planning table
- ☐ We've identified specific barriers that skills approaches can address
- ☐ Our skills initiatives prioritize workers with non-degree and/or without degree credentials
- ☐ We measure whether benefits are reaching all populations equitably

Score: _____ / 6

Element 4: Partnership Roadmap

- ☐ We have engaged employers to understand their skills priorities
- ☐ Educators and training providers are aligned on skills strategies
- ☐ We have identified champions to lead skills initiatives
- ☐ There's a clear plan for who does what in our skills ecosystem
- ☐ We have regular convenings focused on skills
- ☐ Resources (funding, staff capacity, tools) are allocated to skills work

Score: _____ / 6

Interpreting Your Score

Total your scores across all four elements (out of 24 possible): _____ /24

Score	Level	What It Means	Recommended Next Steps
20-24	**Leading**	You're ready to lead regional skills transformation	Focus on deepening partnerships, scaling initiatives, and sharing your lessons with other boards
15-19	**Building**	You have strong foundations	Identify your 1-2 weakest elements and prioritize improvement in those areas. Consider piloting a skills initiative to build momentum
10-14	**Developing**	You're making progress	Start with the Skills Economy Visioning activity to build shared understanding and commitment. Focus on strengthening one element at a time
0-9	**Starting**	You're beginning your skills journey. That's okay!	Start with awareness-building: share this toolkit with your board and staff. Use the Quick Action Checklist to identify your first 2-3 steps

Quick Action Checklist

Check all that apply to your board:

- ☐ We've held a strategic discussion on what a skills economy means for our region
- ☐ We have labor market data on priority industries and skill gaps
- ☐ Underrepresented communities and partners are at the planning table
- ☐ We've engaged employers to understand their skills priorities and challenges
- ☐ We have a communications plan to educate employers and partners about skills
- ☐ We've identified champions (board members, employers, educators) to lead this work
- ☐ We have resources (funding, staff capacity, tools) allocated to skills initiatives
- ☐ We've completed the Skills Economy Visioning activity with stakeholders

If you've checked 5 or more boxes: Your board has strong readiness foundations and is positioned to lead skills transformation.

If you've checked fewer than 5: Focus on completing the unchecked items first, as they represent critical building blocks for skills readiness.

Next Steps

After completing your readiness assessment:

- Share findings with your board, staff, and key partners
- Use the Skills Economy Vision guide to develop a shared future vision
- Reference Action Guide: Strategic Planning to build a roadmap
- Start with your highest-impact actions and build momentum
- Revisit this assessment quarterly to track progress

Additional Resources

- Skills Economy Vision Guide: Develop your regional vision
- Action Guide: Strategic Planning for the Skills Economy
- Action Guide: Mapping Your Regional Skills Ecosystem
- Action Guide: Employer and Issuer Engagement

Questions or feedback?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

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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
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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

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

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
MAP YOUR PATH FORWARD

Introduction

Every board's journey to a skills economy is unique. Some start by convening employers, others by building digital infrastructure. Some move quickly with strong funding, others take incremental steps with existing resources. There's no single "right" path, but there are patterns that help you see where you are, where you're going, and what comes next.

This action guide is not intended to be a strategic plan with detailed timelines and budgets. It's a journey map, a visual way to understand the natural progression from *awareness to transformation*, identify where you are today, and chart realistic next steps. Use it to communicate your journey to board members, partners, make decisions about sequencing, and celebrate progress along the way.

Why Journey Mapping Matters

A journey map helps you:

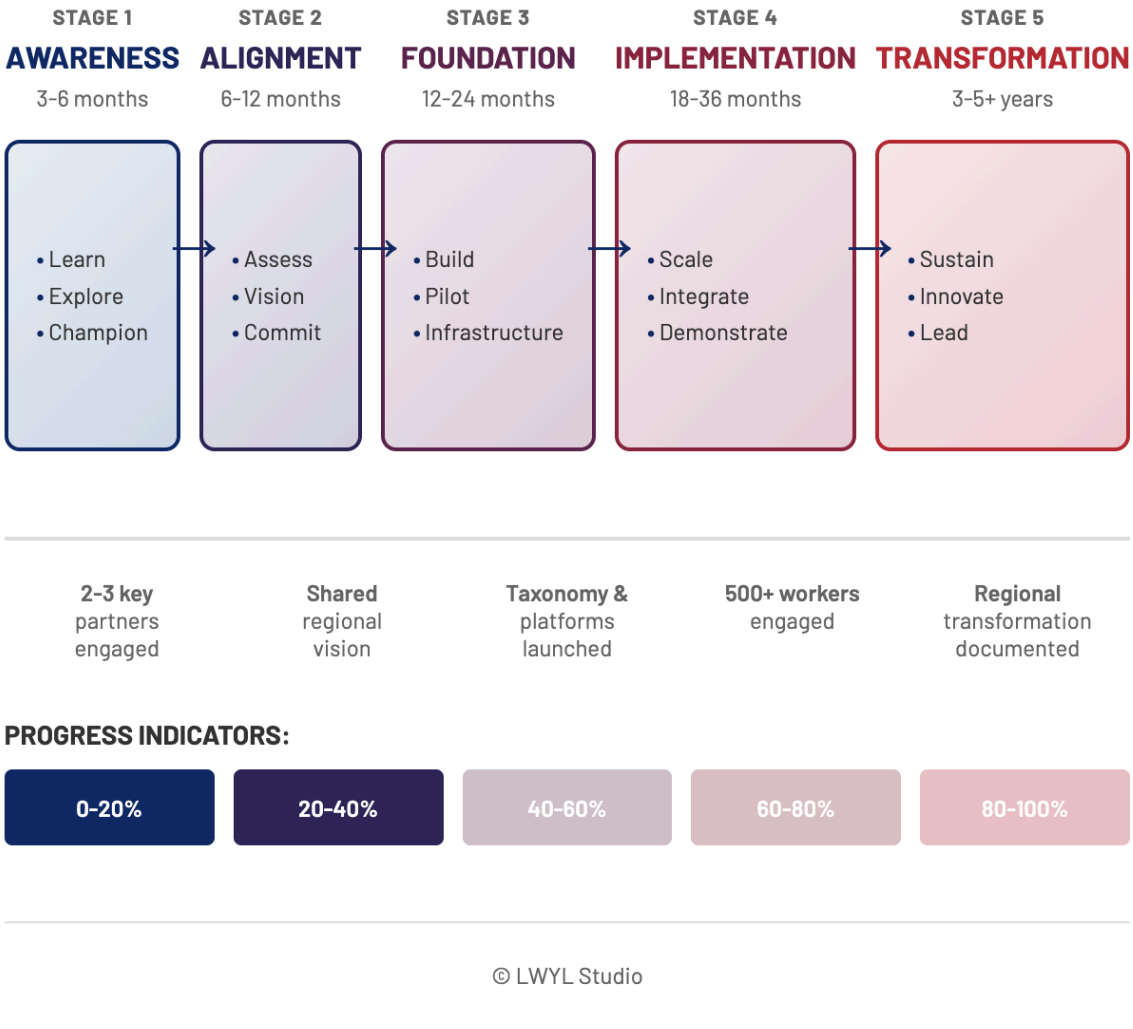
- **Normalize where you are:** Understand that early stages are necessary, not failures
- **Sequence smartly:** Know what typically comes before what
- **Set realistic timelines:** See that transformation takes 3-5 years, not months
- **Avoid common pitfalls:** Learn from boards that tried to skip stages
- **Communicate progress:** Show partners you're moving forward even when outcomes aren't visible yet
- **Make strategic choices:** Decide which path fits your context and capacity

Without a journey map, boards:

- Try to do everything at once and accomplish little
- Expect immediate outcomes and lose momentum when change is slow
- Can't explain to people and partners why foundation-building matters
- Don't recognize progress because they're measuring against the wrong stage

The Five Stages of Skills Economy Development

Most boards move through these stages over 3-5 years. The timeline varies, but the sequence is remarkably consistent. We've created a visual diagram of the Skills Economy Journey Map boards that will be experienced.



Stage 1: AWARENESS (3-6 months)

What's Happening	Success Indicators
Board members, staff, and key partners are learning about skills economy concepts and exploring relevance to your region	• Leadership understands what the skills economy means • Initial interest from 2-3 key partners • Skills economy appears in board conversations
Key Activities	**Common Challenges**
• Sharing toolkits and research • Attending conferences and webinars • Having initial conversations about skills-based approaches • Identifying early champions	• Skepticism: "We already do this." • Competing priorities • Unclear how to start

Stage 2: ALIGNMENT (6-12 months)

What's Happening	Success Indicators
Building shared understanding and commitment among stakeholders; conducting assessments to understand the current state and opportunities	• Shared regional vision documented • Core group of champions committed • Readiness assessment completed • Early priorities identified
Key Activities	**Common Challenges**
• Skills Readiness Assessment • Skills Economy Visioning workshops • Partner and worker interviews and focus groups • Labor market analysis • Identifying gaps and opportunities	• Getting diverse stakeholders to the table • Competing visions for the future • Pressure to show results before the foundation is built

Stage 3: FOUNDATION (12-24 months)

What's Happening	Success Indicators
Building essential infrastructure, partnerships, and capabilities needed for skills transparency	• Skills framework adopted • Partnership governance established • At least one pilot is underway • Resources allocated to skills work
Key Activities	**Common Challenges**
• Adopting or adapting skills taxonomy • Establishing data governance • Convening regular stakeholder groups • Piloting initial skills-based initiatives • Securing dedicated funding or staff capacity	• Technical complexity of taxonomies and platforms • Partner capacity limitations • Pilot scale too small to demonstrate impact • Impatience from stakeholders wanting faster results

Stage 4: IMPLEMENTATION (18-36 months)

What's Happening	Success Indicators
Scaling successful pilots, integrating skills approaches into operations, and demonstrating early outcomes	• Multiple employers use skills in hiring • Credentials recognized by 10+ employers • Workers earn and share credentials • Measurable outcomes emerging
Key Activities	**Common Challenges**
• Employers adopting skills-based job descriptions • Training providers aligning with the skills framework • Digital credentials or badges are being issued • Career centers integrating skills into services	• Uneven adoption across partners • Technology integration issues • Change management resistance • Sustaining momentum

• Collecting and analyzing outcome data	

Stage 5: TRANSFORMATION (3+ years)

What's Happening	Success Indicators
Skills approaches are embedded across the ecosystem; continuous improvement and innovation; demonstrating regional impa	• Skills language used routinely by all partners • Measurable impact on employment and wages • Self-sustaining governance and funding • Regional recognition as skills leader
Key Activities	**Common Challenges**
• Skills infrastructure operating at scale • Partners co-investing in maintenance and growth • Continuous improvement based on data • Sharing lessons with other regions • Influencing state/national policy	• Maintaining innovation as work becomes routine • Sustaining funding as grants end • Adapting to technology and labor market changes

TOOL 1: Plot Your Current Position

Use this tool to identify where you are in the journey:

Stage	Do These Describe Your Board?	Score (0-5)
AWARENESS	☐ We're learning about skills economy concepts ☐ Leadership is exploring relevance ☐ We've shared resources with the board/staff ☐ Early champions are emerging ☐ Skills are part of conversations	
ALIGNMENT	☐ We've conducted a readiness assessment ☐ We have a documented vision ☐ Core partners are committed ☐ We've identified gaps and priorities ☐ Stakeholders share a common language	
FOUNDATION	☐ We've adopted a skills framework ☐ Data governance is established ☐ Regular stakeholder convenings occur ☐ At least one pilot is underway ☐ Dedicated resources allocated	
IMPLEMENTATION	☐ Multiple pilots are scaling ☐ Employers use skills in hiring ☐ Credentials are being issued and recognized ☐ Early outcomes documented ☐ Integration into core operations	
TRANSFORMATION	☐ Skills infrastructure at scale ☐ Measurable regional impact ☐ Self-sustaining governance/funding ☐ Continuous improvement cycles ☐ Regional/national recognition	

Your highest-scoring stage is likely where you are today. Your next-highest score shows where you're transitioning to.

TOOL 2: Identify Your Next Milestones

Based on your current stage, what are your next 3-5 milestones?

Stage	Next Milestones	Timeline
AWARENESS	☐ Complete Skills Readiness Assessment with the leadership team ☐ Share the toolkit with board members at the next meeting ☐ Attend the NAWB webinar or conference ☐ Identify 2-3 initial champion partners ☐ Schedule Skills Economy Visioning workshop	3-6 months
ALIGNMENT	☐ Complete Skills Economy Visioning with the board and partners ☐ Document shared regional vision ☐ Conduct labor market analysis to identify priority skills ☐ Clarify board's role (Convener/Builder/Advocate/etc.) ☐ Secure initial funding or reallocate existing resources ☐ Form a skills working group or coalition	6-12 months
FOUNDATION	☐ Select and adopt skills taxonomy (or adapt existing) ☐ Establish a data governance framework ☐ Launch first pilot (badges, skills-based hiring, etc.) ☐ Create a regular convening structure for partners ☐ Train staff on skills-based approaches ☐ Build or select a technology platform	12-18 months
IMPLEMENTATION	☐ Scale successful pilots to 3-5x original size ☐ Integrate skills into all career center services ☐ Engage 10-20 employers in skills-based hiring ☐ Issue 500+ digital credentials ☐ Collect 6-12 months of outcome data ☐ Share early results with funders and board	18-24 months
TRANSFORMATION	☐ Document and share lessons learned ☐ Establish a sustainable funding model ☐ Influence state or federal policy ☐ Mentor other boards starting their journey ☐ Launch next-generation innovations ☐ Measure and communicate regional impact	Ongoing

Example Journey Maps

Journey #1: Metro Regional Board (Large Urban Area)

Stage	Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
Starting Point (Year 0): Large board with strong employer network, career center operations, and state funding. Limited understanding of skills economy, no digital infrastructure.		
AWARENESS	Months 1-6	• The executive director attended the NAWB Forum and brought back the Skills Economy Toolkit • Presented to the board; formed an exploratory committee • Staff attended webinars, shared research articles • Identified 3 employer champions from existing Business Services team relationships
ALIGNMENT	Months 6-18	• Conducted readiness assessment: scored 15/24 (Building) • Facilitated 3 visioning sessions with 40 stakeholders • Hired a consultant to conduct labor market analysis • Documented vision: "Skills-based pathways in healthcare, IT, and advanced manufacturing." • The board formally adopted the vision and allocated $150K for the pilot
FOUNDATION	Months 18-30	• Adopted the O*NET skills taxonomy for three sectors • Partnered with the state community college system on data sharing • Selected digital badge platform vendor • Launched pilot: healthcare skills badges with 2 hospitals, 3 training providers • Trained 15 career center staff on skills-based career counseling
IMPLEMENTATION	Months 30-48	• Scaled healthcare pilot: 8 hospitals, 10 training providers, 500 badges issued • Launched the IT sector, pilot • 12 employers adopted skills-based job descriptions • Early data: 78% badge earners employed within 90 days vs. 62% comparison group • Expanded to all 6 career centers
TRANSFORMATION	Year 4+	• Healthcare and IT infrastructure are fully operational • 2,500+ badges issued, 35 employers participating • Demonstrated $2.3M in wage gains for participants • State replicated model in 3 other regions • The board is now mentoring other workforce areas
Key Success Factors: Strong employer relationships from the start, secured dedicated funding early, started with one sector before expanding, invested in staff training and change management.		

Journey #2: Rural Workforce Board (Small Service Area)

Stage	Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
Starting Point (Year 0): Small board serving 3 counties, limited staff, modest budget. Strong community college partnership, but employers are fragmented and hard to engage.		
AWARENESS	Months 1-9	• A board member heard about the skills economy at the state conference • Small team (ED + 2 staff) reviewed the toolkit together • Reached out to NAWB for information • Attended virtual peer learning community
ALIGNMENT	Months 6-24	• Conducted readiness assessment: scored 8/24 (Developing) • Decided to focus on Convener + Advocate roles (not Infrastructure Builder) • Facilitated 2 visioning sessions with local employers and the community college • Vision: "Skills pathways for local youth and dislocated workers in agriculture tech and healthcare." • Decided to leverage the state technology platform rather than build our own
FOUNDATION	Months 24-42	• Joined the state's digital credential consortium (cost-sharing model) • Formed a monthly "Skills Roundtable" with 8 employers and the college • Community college aligned 3 programs to the state skills taxonomy • Launched a small pilot: 50 students earning badges in ag tech • Applied for and won a $75K rural innovation grant
IMPLEMENTATION	Months 42-60	• Pilot successful: 80% badge earners employed locally • Scaled to include a healthcare program • 12 local employers now recognize badges in hiring • Youth engagement increased 40% • Board advocating at the state level for rural broadband to support digital credentials
TRANSFORMATION	Year 5+	• Model being adapted by 4 other rural boards statewide • Employer roundtable is now self-organizing with board facilitation • Sustainable through a combination of state platform, local employer investment, and grants • Recognized as a model for rural skills infrastructure
Key Success Factors: Focused on convening role given limited capacity, Leveraged state infrastructure rather than building own, Started very small (50 participants) and proved concept, Strong partnership with community college from the start, Creative about funding (piecing together multiple small sources).		

Journey #3: Mid-Size Board (Suburban Area)

Stage	Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
Starting Point (Year 0): Board serving a diverse population, strong K-12 connections, and less employer engagement. Focused historically on youth programs.		
AWARENESS	Months 1-4	• Youth program staff noticed employers asking for skills documentation • Explored digital badges for the career pathways program • Brought the concept to the board with research on the skills economy
ALIGNMENT	Months 4-12	• Conducted readiness assessment: scored 12/24 (Developing) • Realized the need for broader employer engagement beyond youth focus • Facilitated visioning with an expanded stakeholder group • Vision: "Every young person graduates with documented skills employers value." • Decided to start with youth as a pilot, expand to adults later
FOUNDATION	Months 12-24	• Partnered with 3 high schools to integrate badges into career pathways • Engaged 10 employers to validate which skills matter for entry-level roles • Selected badge platform used by the school district for continuity • Trained teachers and counselors on competency-based approaches
IMPLEMENTATION	Months 24-42	• 500 students earned badges in the first year • Employers created "skills-preferred" entry-level positions • Early data: badged students had 2x interview rate • Schools formally integrated badges into career readiness curriculum • Began pilot with adult dislocated workers
Challenges encountered: Year 3: New superintendent less supportive, momentum slowed, Solution: Shifted to employer-driven model, less dependent on schools, Year 4: Badge platform vendor changed pricing, budget pressure, Solution: Negotiated consortium pricing with neighboring boards		
TRANSFORMATION	Year 5+	• Youth and adult pathways both operational • Regional brand: "Skills-Ready Graduates." • 20 employers participating, some co-funding • Model being written into state education policy

Key Success Factors: Started with existing strength (youth programming). Employer validation of skills from the beginning. Adaptable when leadership changed. Regional collaboration on technology costs.

Common Journey Patterns

Pattern 1: Employer-Led

Path: Strong employer engagement → Skills-based hiring pilot → Scale to credentials → Infrastructure follows demand
Best For: Boards with established Business Services teams and active employer networks
Timeline: Typically faster (3-4 years to transformation) because demand drives adoption

Pattern 2: Education-Led

Path: Training provider alignment → Competency-based credentials → Employer adoption → Scale across sectors
Best For: Boards with strong education partnerships, less employer engagement initially
Timeline: Typically moderate (4-5 years) as employer engagement takes time to build

Pattern 3: Infrastructure-First

Path: Adopt taxonomy → Build digital platform → Recruit partners → Launch pilots → Scale
Best For: Boards with funding and technical capacity to build before proving demand
Risks: Can build infrastructure no one uses; needs strong change management
Timeline: Often longer (5+ years) due to upfront investment before outcomes

Pattern 4: Coalition-Building

Path: Convene stakeholders → Co-create vision → Shared decision-making → Distributed implementation
Best For: Boards with limited authority but strong convening power
Timeline: Slower to start (18+ months of alignment) but more sustainable long-term

TOOL 3: Your Journey Map Template

Use this template to map your unique journey:

Stage	Timeline	Key Activities & Milestones
Starting Point (Year 0):		
AWARENESS	Months	
ALIGNMENT	Months	
FOUNDATION	Months	
IMPLEMENTATION	Months	
TRANSFORMATION	Year 5+	
Challenges:		

Key Success Factors:
Decision Points We've decided to prioritize ... We've decided not to prioritize ...

Avoiding Common Journey Pitfalls

Pitfall	Why It Happens	How to Avoid It
Skipping Alignment	Pressure to show quick results	Invest 6-12 months in vision and readiness before implementation
Building Infrastructure No One Uses	Technology-first approach without demand validation	Start with pilots that prove demand before scaling infrastructure
Trying to Boil the Ocean	Attempting all sectors, all populations, all services at once	Start with 1-2 sectors or populations, prove the concept, then expand
Losing Momentum	Leadership changes, funding gaps, competing priorities	Build distributed leadership, diversify funding, and integrate into core operations early
Measuring Too Early	Expecting outcomes before the foundation is built	Set stage-appropriate success metrics (awareness metrics in Year 1, outcome metrics in Year 3+)
Going It Alone	Underestimating partnership requirements	Invest heavily in convening, align partners around shared goals, and distribute responsibilities

Questions, feedback, or need help mapping your path forward?
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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR A SKILLS ECONOMY

Introduction

The shift to a skills economy represents a fundamental transformation in how we understand, value, and deploy talent. For Workforce Development Boards, this is both an opportunity and a mandate to lead regional transformation.

This guide provides a structured 7-step process to help your board develop and implement a strategic plan that positions your region to thrive in a skills economy. You'll learn how to build consensus, align partners, set clear goals, and create actionable roadmaps that drive measurable change. It will also help you. Your strategic plan will articulate the board's vision, goals, ecosystem strategy, and regional-level accountability framework.

Note: This is not an operational manual for running skills-based programs, initiatives, or delivering services. Those operational details belong in workforce center operating plans, informed by your board's strategic direction.

Who Should Use This Guide

This action guide is designed specifically for boards as the governing and strategic body:

- Board chairs and members seeking to set strategic direction
- Executive directors and leadership teams are responsible for implementation
- Employer representatives who want to influence workforce strategy
- Planning staff who need frameworks and tools

What You'll Learn

- How to conduct a skills economy readiness assessment
- Strategies for building member and partner buy-in and consensus
- Frameworks for setting vision, goals, and measurable outcomes
- Action planning techniques with clear timelines and ownership
- Methods for tracking progress and adapting your strategy

How to Use This Guide

Work through the seven steps with your board leadership, senior staff, and key partners. Each step produces content for a specific section of the companion Skills Economy Strategic Plan Template. The process typically takes 8–12 weeks, depending on the scope of stakeholder engagement.

Step	Action	Strategic Plan Section	Action Guide or Tool Ref
1	Assess Your Board's Readiness	Section 1: Current State	Skills Readiness Assessment, Board Capabilities
2	Develop Your Regional Vision	Section 2: Vision & Direction	Skills Economy Vision Guide
3	Clarify Your Board's Role	Section 2: Vision & Direction	Clarifying Your Board's Role
4	Set Strategic Goals	Section 3: Goals & Objectives	All relevant Practice Guides
5	Create Action Plans	Sections 4–5: Ecosystem & Roadmap	Clarifying Your Board's Role, Employer and Issuer Engagement, The Role of Technology in Skills Work, and Ensuring Accessibility
6	Establish Governance	Section 6: Governance	Board Capabilities, Skills Data Governance
7	Launch, Monitor & Adapt	Sections 8–10: Risk, Eval, Comms	Evaluation and Impact Measurement

Before You Begin

We recommend completing the Action Guides - Skills Readiness Assessment and developing your Skills Economy Vision before starting this strategic planning process. These foundational activities create the shared understanding and partner alignment that make strategic planning more productive.

If you haven't completed them yet, Steps 1 and 2 of this guide will walk you through abbreviated versions.

Board Use Story

This is a fictional story based on research with boards across the country as to how they used strategic planning processes and tools to support their skills economy work.

The Challenge

Great Lakes had piloted digital badges with two employers for 18 months, but the initiative stayed small. They had early wins but lacked a roadmap for scaling. Every board meeting, someone would usually ask 'What's next?' and the board didn't have a good answer. They needed a real strategy, not just a pilot.

How They Used the Guide

The board's executive committee worked through the Strategic Planning Action Guide over eight weeks, completing corresponding sections of the Strategic Plan Template.

- **Assess Readiness:** The Board Readiness Quick-Check revealed they scored high on employer engagement but low on infrastructure and regional ecosystem connections. They had relationships but no system.
- **Vision & Role:** Using the Vision Development Worksheet, they drafted a regional vision statement. The Role Clarity Matrix helped them define their primary role as Investor and Capacity Builder, funding infrastructure others would operate, rather than running programs directly.
- **Goals:** The Goal-Setting Framework prompted them to set SMART goals at the board level. Instead of 'expand the badge program,' they set: 'By Q4 2026, 50% of manufacturing employers in our region will use skills-based job descriptions for entry-level roles.'
- **Action Plans & Governance:** The Action Plan Template assigned clear ownership, staff vs. board vs. partners, for each initiative. They established a Skills Economy Committee with quarterly reporting to the full board, in accordance with the Governance Framework.

The Result

Six months after adopting the plan, Great Lakes had secured a $400K state grant for regional skills infrastructure, funding they couldn't have pursued without a documented strategy. Their pilot expanded from 2 employers to 14, and their community college partner began aligning credentials to the shared skills framework.

Step 1: Assess Your Board's Readiness

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Section 1: Current State Assessment*

Before you can plan where you're going, you need an honest picture of where you are. This step helps your board evaluate its current capacity across the four elements that drive skills economy readiness. This is a board-level assessment; it evaluates your board's strategic capacity, not the operational performance of individual workforce centers or programs.

The Four Elements of Board Readiness

Use the following framework to evaluate your board's current capabilities across key dimensions:

Element	What It Measures	Key Questions
Leadership & Vision	Board's understanding of and commitment to skills economy principles	Does the board have a shared vision? Are skills language embedded in strategy?
Employer Engagement	Depth and quality of employer relationships around skills practices	Are employers adopting skills-based hiring? Do they participate in governance?
Infrastructure & Technology	Data systems, taxonomies, and platforms that support skills transparency	Do you have shared language skills? Can data flow between partners? Are there LER/Digital Credential pilots or demonstrations in the region?
Regional Ecosystem	Strength of partnerships and collective action across the region	Are partners aligned? Is there shared ownership of skills economy outcomes?
Policy & Resources	Presence of board, regional, and state policies around skills practices.	Are there state or local policies supporting skills-based approaches? Do you have dedicated funding or staff? What resources are available?

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Schedule a 90-minute board workshop to complete this assessment together. Document current state ratings (Starting, Developing, Leading) for each dimension.*

Board Readiness Quick-Check

➡ **Toolkit Cross-Reference:** *See the Action Guide: Skills Readiness Assessment for a comprehensive self-assessment with scoring, and Action Guide: Board Capabilities Self-Assessment for evaluating board member competencies.*

Use this condensed assessment with your board or planning committee. Rate each area from 1 (Starting) to 5 (Leading).

Readiness Area	Rating	Evidence / Notes
Board members understand skills economy concepts	/ 5	
The board has adopted a skills economy vision statement	/ 5	
Employer partners are engaged in skills-based practices	/ 5	
Regional skills taxonomy or a common language exists	/ 5	
Technology infrastructure supports skills data	/ 5	
Staff have the capacity for skills-first approaches	/ 5	
Partners are aligned around shared skills goals	/ 5	
Board governance includes skills economy oversight	/ 5	
Total Score	/ 40	

Interpreting Your Score

Crierion	Leading	Building	Developing	Starting
Score	**32-40**	**24-31**	**16-23**	**8-15**
Description	Your board is well-positioned. Focus on scaling and deepening impact.	Strong foundation in place. Prioritize gaps and accelerate momentum.	Key elements are emerging. Focus on vision alignment and early wins.	Begin with foundational work: education, vision, and stakeholder engagement.

Step 2: Define Your Regional Skills Economy Vision

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Section 2: Vision & Strategic Direction*

A compelling regional vision creates the shared direction that aligns your board, partners, employers, and community. As a workforce development board, your role is to convene members, partners, and stakeholders around this vision, not to develop it in isolation.

What Makes a Strong Skills Economy Vision?

Your vision should answer one question: What does our region look like when skills are the primary currency connecting workers and employers?

- **Aspirational:** Paints a compelling picture of the future that motivates action
- **Regional:** Reflects your specific economy, industries, populations, and opportunities
- **Inclusive:** Centers equity and access for all workers, especially underserved populations
- **Shared:** Developed with input from employers, educators, workers, and community
- Actionable: Specific enough to guide strategic decisions and resource allocation

Your vision statement should answer:

- What does success look like in 3-5 years?
- How will workers benefit from a skills-based system?
- How will employers benefit?
- What makes your region unique or competitive?

The Board's Role in Vision Development

The board convenes the conversation, but the vision belongs to the region. Your role is to:

- Identify and invite the right stakeholders to the table
- Facilitate a structured process for developing the vision
- Ensure diverse voices are represented, especially those historically excluded
- Formally adopt the vision as board policy
- Communicate the vision consistently across all channels

Example Vision Statements

Example 1: Manufacturing Region

"By 2030, our region will be recognized as a leader in skills-based manufacturing careers, where every worker has a portable skills profile, employers hire based on verified competencies, and training providers align to industry-recognized credentials, creating clear pathways from entry-level to advanced manufacturing roles."

Example 2: Urban Tech Hub

"Our region will eliminate degree requirements as the primary barrier to opportunity, replacing them with skills-based hiring practices that expand access to high-wage tech careers for underrepresented communities, creating 10,000 new pathways to economic mobility by 2030."

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Vision Development Worksheet in the guide (Tool 1) to draft your vision statement through stakeholder input sessions.*

➡ ***Toolkit Cross-Reference:*** *See the Skills Economy Vision Action Guide for a detailed facilitation process, including a 90-minute workshop format with instructions.*

Step 3: Clarify Your Board's Role in the Skills Ecosystem

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → Section 2: Vision & Strategic Direction (Board Role)

Not every board will play the same role in the skills economy. Your board's specific role depends on your region's needs, your existing capacity, your partnerships, and your strategic priorities. Clarity about your role prevents overcommitment and focuses your impact.

The Role Spectrum

Most boards operate across a spectrum of roles. The key is knowing where you lead, where you support, and where you defer to partners.

Role	Description	Example Activities
Convener	Bringing stakeholders together around shared priorities and creating the conditions for collective action	Hosting employer roundtables, facilitating cross-sector partnerships, coordinating regional alignment
Strategist	Setting regional direction through research, planning, and policy influence	Publishing labor market analyses, developing regional skills strategy, advocating for policy change
Investor	Directing resources and funding toward skills economy priorities	Funding pilot programs, investing in technology infrastructure, supporting employer incentives
Capacity Builder	Building the capabilities of partner organizations across the ecosystem	Training providers on skills-based approaches, supporting employer HR practices, sharing best practices

➡ **Toolkit Cross-Reference:** *See Clarifying Your Board's Role (Action Guide) for a detailed self-assessment of your board's unique value. See the Action Guide Mapping the Skills Ecosystem for understanding your regional landscape.*

Key Questions for Your Board

- Where does our board add the most unique value in the skills ecosystem?
- What are other organizations already doing well that we should support rather than duplicate?
- What gaps exist in our region that only a board-level convener or strategist can fill?
- How does our skills economy role complement our existing WIOA responsibilities?

Step 4: Establish Strategic Goals and Objectives

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Section 3: Strategic Goals & Objectives*

Strategic goals translate your vision into measurable targets. Focus on 3–5 major goals that will drive transformation across your regional ecosystem. These should be board-level goals that set the system's direction, not operational targets for individual programs.

Recommended Goal Areas for Boards

Consider setting goals across these areas, each of which connects to specific Practice Guides in the toolkit:

Goal Area	What It Looks Like	Relevant Action Guides
Ecosystem Building	Strengthening partnerships, aligning regional actors, and building shared infrastructure	Mapping the Ecosystem, Skills Data Governance, Skill Taxonomies
Employer Adoption	Increasing the number of employers using skills-based hiring and talent practices	Employer & Issuer Engagement
Infrastructure	Building technology, data systems, and shared platforms for skills transparency	Role of Technology, Skills Data Governance
Equity & Inclusion	Ensuring skills-based approaches expand access for underserved populations	Ensuring Inclusion and Accessibility
Innovation	Leveraging AI and emerging tools to enhance skills work responsibly	AI in Skills Economy
Measurement	Demonstrating impact and continuously improving based on evidence	Evaluation & Impact

Example Goals

Goal Area	Example Goal	Measurable Outcomes
Employer Adoption	Increase employer use of skills-based hiring practices	50% of partner employers remove degree requirements from 25% of job postings by 2027
Worker Access	Enable workers to access and share validated and verifiable skills-rich credentials	10,000 workers create digital wallets with verified skills-rich credentials by 2026
System Alignment	Align education, training, and credentialing to common skills frameworks	75% of WIOA-funded training maps to recognized skills taxonomies by 2027
Infrastructure	Build data and technology infrastructure for skills transparency	Implement skills management platform and integrate with 3 partner systems by Q4 2026

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Goal Setting Framework (Tool 2) to develop SMART goals with your planning team.*

Step 5: Develop Action Plans with Clear Ownership

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Sections 4–5: Regional Ecosystem Strategy & Implementation Roadmap*

Each strategic goal needs a detailed action plan that breaks it down into manageable initiatives with clear timelines, responsibilities, and milestones. This step also involves developing your regional ecosystem strategy, how you will engage partners, employers, and infrastructure to achieve your goals.

Developing Your Ecosystem Strategy

Before detailing individual action plans, map out the ecosystem-level strategy that supports your goals. This involves three elements:

1. **Partner Engagement:** Which organizations will play key roles in your strategy? What will you ask of them, and what will you provide in return?
2. **Employer Approach:** How will you engage employers in skills-based practices? What is your phased engagement strategy?
3. **Infrastructure Investment:** What technology, data systems, or shared resources does your region need? What is the board's role in building or funding these?

➡ **Toolkit Cross-Reference:** *See Action Guide: Mapping the Skills Ecosystem for partner identification methodology. Action Guide: Employer & Issuer Engagement for engagement strategies. Action Guide: Role of Technology for infrastructure planning.*

Components of a Strong Action Plan

- **Key Initiatives:** Major projects or workstreams that will achieve the goal
- **Lead & Team:** Who owns each initiative and who supports them
- **Timeline:** Start and end dates, key milestones, and decision points
- **Resources:** Budget, staff time, partnerships, and other assets required
- **Success Metrics:** How you'll measure progress and impact
- **Risk Mitigation:** Potential obstacles and contingency plans

Sample Action Plan: Employer Adoption Goal

Initiative	Lead/Team	Timeline	Milestone	Success Metric
Skills-Based/First Hiring Roundtables	Employer Engagement Manager	Q1-Q2 2026	Host 4 roundtables with 50+ employers	20 employers commit to pilot
Job Description Toolkit	Program Manager + HR Consultant	Q2 2026	Toolkit published and distributed	100+ downloads in the first quarter
Pilot Implementation Support	Business Services Team	Q3-Q4 2026	20 employers complete 6-month pilot	15 employers revise job postings

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Action Planning Template (Tool 3) to detail each initiative under your strategic goals.*

Step 6: Establish Governance and Accountability

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Section 6: Governance & Accountability*

A skills economy requires sustained attention beyond what a single staff member or a committee meeting can provide. Establishing clear governance ensures your strategic plan has the oversight, decision-making authority, and accountability structures it needs to succeed.

Governance Structure Options

Consider which model best fits your board's structure and the scope of your skills economy work:

Model	How It Works	Best For
Dedicated Committee	A standing board committee focused on skills economy strategy, with regular meeting cadence	Boards with significant skills economy investment and multiple active initiatives
Task Force	A time-limited, cross-functional group charged with overseeing plan implementation	Boards launching skills work for the first time or piloting new approaches
Integrated Oversight	Skills economy goals embedded intothe existing board committee structure and reporting	Boards where skills work is woven into the overall strategy rather than being separate
Multi-Stakeholder Body	A regional governance body that includes the board, employers, educators, and community organizations	Regional strategies that require shared ownership across multiple organizations

Key Governance Elements

- **Decision Authority:** Who can approve resource allocation, partnership agreements, and strategy changes?
- **Reporting Cadence:** How often does the full board receive updates on skills economy progress?

- **Staff Accountability:** Which staff positions are responsible for day-to-day implementation?
- **Partner Roles:** How do partner organizations participate in governance and decision-making?
- **Escalation Process:** How are challenges, delays, or strategy changes raised and resolved?

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Governance and Partner Engagement Tool (Tool 4) to outline key governance and engagement decisions*

> ➡ **Toolkit Cross-Reference:** *See the Board Capabilities Self-Assessment for evaluating your board's governance readiness. Clarifying Your Board's Role: Action Guide for aligning governance with board functions*

Step 7: Launch, Monitor, and Adapt

📄 **Strategic Plan Template** → *Sections 8–10: Risk Management, Evaluation & Improvement, Communication*

A strategic plan is only as good as its execution. This final step establishes the rhythms and processes that keep your plan alive—turning a document into a living system of accountability, learning, and adaptation.

Launch Checklist

Before formally launching your strategic plan, ensure these elements are in place:

- The board has formally approved the strategic plan
- Staff leads are identified and understand their roles
- Partner organizations have confirmed their commitments
- Baseline data has been collected for all success metrics
- The communication plan is ready for internal and external audiences
- The first quarterly review date is scheduled
- Budget has been allocated for Year 1 priorities

Quarterly Review Process

Schedule quarterly reviews with your governance body to assess progress, surface challenges, and make adjustments. A consistent review rhythm prevents plans from becoming shelf documents.

Each Quarterly Review Should Cover:

1. **Progress Update:** What milestones were achieved? What's behind schedule?
2. **Metrics Review:** What do the data tell us about our impact?
3. **Partner Feedback:** What are we hearing from employers, educators, and the community?
4. **Risk Assessment:** Have new risks emerged? Are existing mitigations working?
5. **Adaptation Decisions:** What changes do we need to make to strategy, timeline, or resources?
6. **Communication Actions:** What do we need to communicate, and to whom?

➡ **Toolkit Cross-Reference:** *Action Guide: Evaluation & Impact Measurement for comprehensive metrics frameworks and evaluation methodologies.*

Communication Strategy

Consistent communication keeps stakeholders engaged and maintains momentum. Plan for both internal and external communication:

Audience	Communication Type	Frequency
Full Board	Progress report and dashboard	Quarterly
Staff	Implementation updates, training, and celebrations	Monthly
Employer Partners	Impact stories, engagement opportunities, recognition	Quarterly
Education Partners	Alignment updates, data sharing, joint planning	Quarterly
Community / Public	Success stories, annual report, media	Semi-annually
Peer Boards	Lessons learned, resource sharing, and collaboration	Ongoing

Appendix: Planning Tools & Templates

The following tools will support your strategic planning process. Copy and adapt them to fit your region's needs.

No.	Title	Short Description
1	**Vision Development Worksheet**	Use this worksheet to guide board and partners' discussions and draft your skills economy vision statement.
2	**SMART Goals Framework (Board Level)**	Use this template to develop specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals for your skills economy initiative and activities.
3	**Action Planning Template**	Complete one template for each strategic goal.
4	**Governance Framework and Partner Engagement Matrix**	Map board governance framework, and member and partner interest, and plan your engagement approach.
5	**Quarterly Checklist**	A checklist to help the board stay on track with their work, building a skills economy

TOOL 1: Vision Development Worksheet

Use this worksheet to guide board and partners' discussions and draft your skills economy vision statement.

Vision Statement Prompt

"By [year], [region name] will be a place where [aspirational outcome for workers], [aspirational outcome for employers], and [aspirational outcome for the community]. We will achieve this through [key strategies], ensuring [equity commitment]."

1. What are our region's unique economic strengths and opportunities?
2. What workforce challenges do employers consistently face?
3. What barriers prevent workers from accessing good jobs?
4. How would a skills-based or skills-first system benefit our community?

5. If we adopt a skills approach, what does success look like in 3-5 years?

Draft Vision Statement:
(Synthesize the above responses into a compelling 2-3 sentence vision)

Vision Statement Prompt

"By [year], [region name] will be a place where [aspirational outcome for workers], [aspirational outcome for employers], and [aspirational outcome for the community]. We will achieve this through [key strategies], ensuring [equity commitment]."

TOOL 2: SMART Goals Framework

Use this template to develop goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. Frame goals in terms of what the board will achieve as a regional leader, not what individual centers will deliver.

> **Example SMART Goal (Board-Level)**
>
> "By December 2027, our board will have convened and supported at least 25 regional employers in adopting skills-based job descriptions, resulting in a measurable increase in interview rates for non-degree candidates across three priority industries."

Complete this for each goal

Element	Your Goal
Goal Area *What area does this goal focus on?*	
Specific *What exactly will you accomplish?*	
Measurable *How will you track progress?*	
Achievable *Is this realistic given your resources?*	
Relevant *How does this advance your vision?*	
Time-bound	

When will you achieve this?	
Final SMART Goal Statement:	

Goal Summary

Complete this table for a summary of your boards goals.

Goal Area	Strategic Goal	Key Objectives	Success Measures	Timeline
Goal 1:				
Goal 2:				
Goal 3:				
Goal 4:				
Goal 5:				

TOOL 3: Action Planning Template

Complete one action plan per strategic goal:

Component	Details
Strategic Goal	
Initiative 1	
Initiative 2	
Initiative 3	
Lead / Accountable	
Supporting Partners	
Timeline (Start–End)	
Q1 Milestones	
Q2 Milestones	
Q3 Milestones	
Q4 Milestones	
Budget Required	
Funding Source(s)	
Success Metrics	
Key Risks & Mitigation	

Initiative/Action	Lead	Start	Complete	Resources	Status

TOOL 4: Governance Framework and Partner Engagement

Governance Element	Your Board's Approach
Governance Model (Committee, Task Force, etc.)	
Chair / Lead	
Members / Composition	
Meeting Frequency	
Reporting to Full Board (frequency & format)	
Decision-Making Authority	
Staff Lead for Implementation	
Partner Participation Model	
Performance Review Process	
Annual Strategy Refresh Process	

Map board member and partner interest and plan your engagement approach.

Board Member and/or Partner	**Interest Level** (Low/Medium/High)	**Influence Level** (Low/Medium/High)	**Engagement Strategy**

TOOL 5: Quarterly Review Checklist

✓	Review Item	Status / Notes
	All milestone progress has been documented and reviewed	
	Success metrics data collected and analyzed	
	Partner feedback gathered (surveys, interviews, or meetings)	
	Budget expenditures reviewed against plan	
	Risk register updated with new or changed risks	
	Strategy adjustments identified and approved	
	Communication actions assigned and scheduled	
	Next quarter priorities confirmed	
	Wins and progress are celebrated with the team and partners	

Next Steps

Your strategic plan is a living document that will evolve as you learn and adapt. To get started:

1. **Schedule your readiness assessment workshop** within the next 30 days
2. **Draft your vision statement** using stakeholder input
3. **Select 3-5 strategic goals** aligned to your vision
4. **Develop detailed action plans** for each goal
5. **Map and engage stakeholders** to build momentum
6. **Establish review cycles** to track progress

Companion Resources

This guide is designed to work with the full Skills Economy Toolkit. Here's how the pieces connect:

Action Guides: Readiness

- **Skills Readiness Assessment:** Evaluate your board's capacity (feeds into Step 1)
- **Skills Economy Vision:** Develop your regional vision (feeds into Step 2)
- **Clarifying Your Board's Role:** Define your unique contribution (feeds into Step 3)
- **Mapping Your Pathway Forward:** Chart your board's journey across developmental stages

Action Guides: Implementation

- **Strategic Planning:** This guide and the **Strategic Plan Template:** Fill-in companion document, organized by 7 steps.
- **Mapping the Skills Ecosystem:** Partner identification and ecosystem analysis
- **Skills Data Governance:** Data standards and stewardship
- **Skills and Credentialing Taxonomies:** Common skills language
- **Employer and Issuer Engagement:** Employer adoption strategies
- **Role of Technology:** Platforms and digital infrastructure
- **Ensuring Accessibility:** Equity and inclusion in skills work
- **AI in the Skills Economy:** Responsible use of AI tools
- **Evaluation and Impact:** Measuring outcomes and continuous improvement

Support Resources

- **Board Capabilities and Professional Development:** Self-assessment of board member competencies
- **Stories and Lessons Learned from the Field:** Spotlights and lessons from peer boards

Questions, feedback, or need support setting your strategic plan?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: MAPPING YOUR REGIONAL SKILLS ECOSYSTEM

Introduction

A skills economy doesn't emerge in isolation; it requires a connected ecosystem of employers, educators, training providers, credential issuers, technology platforms, and community organizations working together. Understanding who these players are, what roles they play, and how they connect is the foundation for strategic coordination.

This guide will help you systematically map your regional skills ecosystem, identify gaps and opportunities, and build the relationships needed to create a thriving, skills-based talent system.

Why Ecosystem Mapping Matters

Ecosystem mapping in the context of workforce development and the skills economy is the process of identifying, documenting, and understanding the organizations, stakeholders, and relationships that comprise your region's skills and talent infrastructure. It is also about mapping the jobs and opportunities that mobilize the workforce.

When we map a regional skills ecosystem, we map four main categories: organizations and entities, relationships and connections, resources and infrastructure, and the jobs and roles that mobilize advancement and prosperity.

Category	Specific Elements	Why It Matters
Organizations & Entities	• Employers and industry groups • Education and training providers (K-12, community colleges, universities, and apprenticeships) • Workforce development boards and career centers • Community-based organizations • Economic development agencies • Credential issuers • Technology providers/platforms • Government agencies • Labor unions	Identifies all groups and organizations and their roles in the skills ecosystem
Relationships & Connections	• Who partners with whom • How information flows • Where gaps exist • How workers move through the system • Where bottlenecks occur	Reveals collaboration patterns, identifies silos, and shows where coordination is needed
Jobs and Roles that Mobilize	• Score occupations across four key dimensions: worker opportunity, employer demand, community impact, and strategic economic value • Generate a list of potential Jobs That Matter (JTM) • Validate with local board members and partners • Build a skills profile for each.	Documents the jobs, occupations, and opportunities that move an economy towards advancement and prosperity.
Resources & Infrastructure	• Skills taxonomies in use • Data systems and platforms • Credential types available • Funding sources • Technology tools	Documents existing capabilities and highlights gaps in infrastructure

The benefits of mapping the skills ecosystem are that it may:

- Reveals hidden connections and partnership opportunities
- Identify gaps in pathways, services, or infrastructure
- Align partners around a shared understanding of the system
- Inform strategic priorities and resource allocation

- Accelerates collaboration by making connections visible

In this action guide, we outline the steps to map your regional skills ecosystem and provide tools to help you identify the jobs, people, organizations, and resources needed to build a thriving skills economy.

Step 1: Define Your Ecosystem Boundaries

Before you can map your ecosystem, you need to define its scope. Consider geography, industry focus, and the populations you serve as ecosystem boundaries.

Key Scoping Questions

Dimension	Define Your Scope
Geographic Boundary	Will you map at the county, regional, or state level? Consider labor market areas and commuting patterns.
Industry/Sector Focus	Are you mapping the entire economy or specific sectors? Start with priority industries for deeper analysis.
Population Served	Who are you mapping for? Job seekers, incumbent workers, youth, and specific populations with barriers?
Time Horizon	Are you capturing the current state or mapping where you want to be in 3-5 years? Both have value.

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Ecosystem Scoping Worksheet (Tool 1) to document your boundaries and focus areas.*

Step 2: Identify Key Ecosystem Players

A skills ecosystem includes multiple types of organizations, each playing distinct roles. Start by inventorying who's already active in your region.

Core Ecosystem Components

Player Type	Examples	Role in Skills Economy

Employers/Demand	Large employers, SMEs, industry associations, staffing agencies	Define skill needs, adopt skills-based hiring, and provide work-based learning
Education/Training	Colleges, universities, technical schools, bootcamps, CBOs, apprenticeship sponsors	Build skills, align curriculum, provide credentials, connect learners to opportunity
Credential Issuers	Certification bodies, industry groups, licensing agencies, and badging platforms	Validate and verify skills, issue portable credentials, and maintain quality standards
Workforce System	American Job Centers, WIOA partners, career centers, and employment services	Provide career services, job matching, skills assessment, and training navigation
Technology/Data	LMS platforms, job boards, skills management systems, and data analytics providers	Enable data sharing, power matching, provide infrastructure, and deliver analytics
Community Partners	Libraries, faith-based orgs, nonprofits, economic development, chambers of commerce	Reach underserved populations, provide wraparound services, and build trust
Policy/Funders	State agencies, federal programs, foundations, local government, and economic development	Set policy, fund initiatives, align requirements, remove barriers, drive adoption

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Ecosystem Inventory Template (Tool 2) to create a comprehensive list of organizations in your region.*

Step 3: Map Connections and Flows

Once you've identified the players, map how they connect and interact. Understanding these relationships reveals where the system is working well and where gaps or friction exist.

Types of Connections to Map

- **Information Flow:** Who shares data, skills frameworks, or labor market information?
- **Talent Pathways:** How do learners move from training to credentials to employment?
- **Credential Acceptance:** Which credentials do employers recognize and value?
- **Service Referrals:** Who refers clients to whom? Are there warm handoffs?
- **Partnership Agreements:** Formal MOUs, contracts, or collaborations
- **Funding Flows:** How do resources move through the system?

Connection Strength Assessment

Not all connections are equal. Rate connection strength to prioritize where to invest in deeper partnerships:

Strength	Description
Strong	Regular collaboration, data sharing, joint programs, aligned goals
Moderate	Occasional communication, ad hoc collaboration, and awareness of each other
Weak	Little to no interaction, siloed operations, missed opportunities
Missing	Critical connection doesn't exist, a gap in the ecosystem

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Connection Mapping Matrix (Tool 3) to document relationships between key players.*

Step 4: Identify Jobs and Roles that Mobilize

The *Jobs that Mobilize Framework* from the Burning Glass Institute is a useful resource for identifying which jobs and roles in a region truly support advancement and move people toward prosperity. The framework tackles challenges faced by four key groups at once:

1. Employers looking to fill critical roles and address skills gaps
2. Workers seeking well-paying jobs with growth potential
3. Communities striving for equality and inclusivity
4. Local leaders need workers to drive growth in key sectors and the broader economy

To identify jobs and roles that mobilize, the framework asks you to:

- Score occupations across four key dimensions: worker opportunity, employer demand, community impact, and strategic economic value
- Generate a list of potential JTMs
- Validate with local stakeholders
- Develop a skills profile for each

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Read the Burning Glass Institute Report and use the Jobs that Mobilize Worksheet (Tool 4) to map which jobs and roles mobilize.*

Step 5: Identify Gaps and Opportunities

With your ecosystem mapped, you can now identify where interventions will have the greatest impact. Look for patterns that reveal systemic issues or untapped potential.

Common Ecosystem Gaps

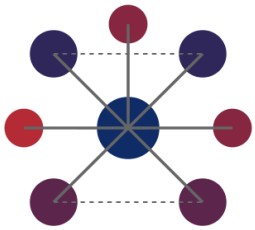
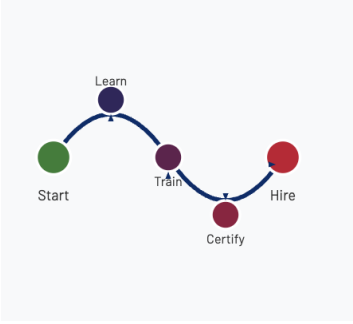
Gap Type	What to Look For
Missing Players	Are there categories with few or no organizations? For example, a lack of credential issuers or limited training capacity in key sectors.
Broken Pathways	Can learners seamlessly move from training to credentialing to employment? Look for dead ends or missing links in progression.
Information Silos	Do employers know what training providers offer? Do trainers understand employer needs? Where is communication breaking down?
Misaligned Incentives	Are funding structures, performance metrics, or organizational goals pulling partners in different directions?
Infrastructure Limitations	Is there technology for data exchange? Platforms for credential sharing? Systems for skills validation?
Equity Gaps	Are all populations served equitably? Do certain communities lack access to skills infrastructure or face barriers to participation?

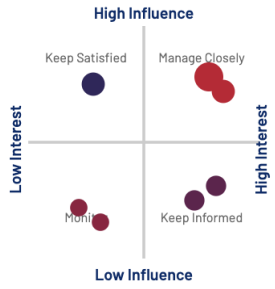
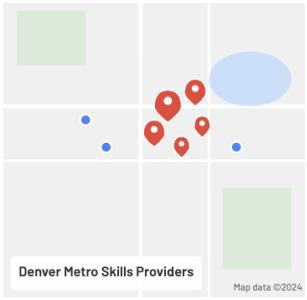
🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Gap Analysis Worksheet (Tool 5) to systematically identify and prioritize gaps in your ecosystem.*

Step 6: Create Visual Maps for Communication

Data becomes actionable when it's visualized. Create visual ecosystem maps of your region to help people, partners, and organizations understand the system and see their place in it.

Types of Ecosystem Maps

Visual Example	Map Type & Description
	**1. Network Map** Shows all players as nodes with connections between them. Great for identifying clusters, central actors, and isolated players. **Best for:** Understanding overall connectivity **Tools:** Kumu, Miro, PowerPoint, or specialized network analysis software
	**2. Journey Map** Follows the learner/worker path from initial engagement through skill development to employment. Shows touchpoints and transitions. **Best for:** Identifying friction points in talent pathways **Tools:** Lucidchart, Miro, Google Slides

	**3. Stakeholder Map** Organizes players by influence and interest to help prioritize engagement strategies. **Best for:** Planning stakeholder engagement **Tools:** 2x2 matrix in any presentation software
	**4. Geographic Map** Places ecosystem players on an actual map to identify geographic concentrations and deserts. **Best for:** Identifying service gaps and access barriers **Tools:** Google My Maps, ArcGIS, Tableau

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Play with a number of the tools to find which map type suits your skills ecosystem and the information you'd like to share about it.*

Step 7: Activate Your Ecosystem Map

A map is only valuable if it drives action. Here's how to use your ecosystem insights strategically:

Practical Applications

Use Case	How It Works
Strategic Planning	Use gaps to set strategic priorities. Strong connections suggest collaboration opportunities. Weak connections indicate where relationship-building is needed.
Partnership Development	Share the map with partners to create a shared understanding. Use it to identify complementary organizations and broker new connections.
Resource Allocation	Direct funding and staff time to areas where ecosystem gaps exist or connections are weakest.

Policy Advocacy	Use ecosystem insights to advocate for policy changes, funding priorities, or regulatory adjustments that strengthen the system.
Progress Tracking	Update your map annually to track how connections strengthen, new players emerge, and gaps close.

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Share your ecosystem map widely. Make it a living document that stakeholders can reference and contribute to. Consider creating an online interactive version.*

Ecosystem Mapping Tools & Templates

Use these practical tools to systematically map your skills ecosystem.

TOOL 1: Ecosystem Scoping Worksheet

Define the boundaries and focus of your ecosystem mapping effort.

Geographic Scope
Which counties, regions, or areas will you include?
Industry/Sector Focus
Will you map all industries or focus on specific sectors?
Target Populations
Who are you mapping for? (e.g., job seekers, incumbent workers, youth)
Time Horizon
Current state or future vision? What timeframe?

TOOL 2: Ecosystem Inventory Template

Create a comprehensive list of ecosystem players. Add rows as needed. For organization type, consider: Employer, Education/Training, Credential Issuer, Workforce System, Technology/Data, Community Partner, Policy/Funder, etc.

Organization	Type	Role in Ecosystem	Contact

TOOL 3: Connection Mapping Matrix

Map relationships between key organizations. Rate connection strength: Strong (S), Moderate (M), Weak (W), or Missing (X).

Organization	Org A	Org B	Org C	Org D	Org E

Rating Key: S = Strong | M = Moderate | W = Weak | X = Missing

TOOL 4: Jobs that Mobilize Worksheet

This worksheet helps your board identify which occupations to prioritize for skills economy investments. Read the Burning Glass Institute report on *Jobs that Mobilize Framework*, and use these four metrics to evaluate potential target occupations, balancing worker opportunity, employer need, equity impact, and strategic value.

WORKER METRIC	
Which occupations offer strong opportunities for workers in terms of wages, job mobility, or accessibility?	
What jobs provide good career pathways for workers?	
Which occupations balance good pay with reasonable entry requirements?	

EMPLOYER METRIC	
Which occupations are experiencing high demand from employers, both now and in the future?	
Where are the current and projected "pain points" for employers in terms of workforce needs?	
Which occupations are facing potential shortages due to factors like an aging workforce or high turnover?	

EQUITY METRIC	
Which occupations can help reduce wage inequality or occupational segregation?	
What jobs offer opportunities to improve equity for people who identify as Black, Native, Hispanic, and women workers?	
Which occupations show the most promise for increasing diversity and inclusion in the workforce?	

STRATEGY METRIC	
Which occupations are strategically important for the growth and development of key industries because of their niche skill sets?	
Which occupations are central to skill networks within an industry, allowing for knowledge transfer and innovation?	
What jobs allow an economy to specialize in high-growth industries or in areas that capitalize on local resources?	

Next Steps: (1) Score each occupation 1-5 on each metric. (2) Prioritize occupations scoring highly across 3-4 metrics. (3) Choose 2-3 where you have partnerships and capacity. (4) Validate with labor market data and employer input.

Source: Burning Glass Institute (2025) Jobs that Mobilize Framework

TOOL 5: Gap Analysis Worksheet

Systematically identify and prioritize gaps in your ecosystem.

Gap Identified	Impact on System	Priority	Potential Solution

Priority Rating: High | Medium | Low

Next Steps

You now have the tools to create a comprehensive ecosystem map of your region in terms of opportunities, partners, and resources. Here's how to get started:

- Define your scope using the scoping worksheet
- Inventory ecosystem players across all categories
- Map connections between key organizations
- Identify the jobs and roles that provide opportunities for advancement and prosperity
- Identify gaps and prioritize them by impact
- Create visual maps to communicate findings
- Use insights to inform strategic planning and partnership development

Additional Resources

- Action Guide: Strategic Planning for Skills Economy
- Action Guide: Skills Data Governance
- Action Guide: Employer and Issuer Engagement
- Mapping Tools: Kumu.io, Miro, Lucidchart
- Ecosystem Maps: LER Ecosystem
- JFF Resources: Skills-Based Hiring Toolkit

Questions, feedback, or need help mapping your regional ecosystem?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

National Association of Workforce Boards

SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: SKILLS AND CREDENTIALING TAXONOMIES

Introduction

A common language for skills is essential to a functioning skills economy. Without standardized taxonomies, employers describe skills differently from training providers, credentials aren't comparable across issuers, and workers struggle to translate their capabilities into opportunities.

Skills taxonomies provide structured frameworks for organizing and describing competencies. This guide will help you understand major taxonomy systems, map between them, and implement them effectively in your ecosystem.

Why Skill Taxonomies Matter

Skills taxonomies are the common language that makes a skills economy work. Without a shared vocabulary, "customer service" means something different to every employer; "data analysis" can refer to Excel or machine learning; and workers can't translate their abilities across industries.

A taxonomy creates consistency when everyone uses the same terms to describe skills, employers can find talent they'd otherwise miss, training providers can align programs to real demand, and workers can see which skills transfer to new careers.

The wonderful thing about the world of skills ecosystem is that you don't need to build your own; proven frameworks like O*NET, ESCO, and industry-specific taxonomies already exist. The key is to pick one that works for your region, get partners to adopt it, and use it

consistently across job postings, credentials, and training programs. When a taxonomy is in place, the entire ecosystem speaks the same language.

In summary, a skills taxonomy provides:

- **A common Language:** It enables clear communication across employers, educators, and workers
- **Comparability:** Makes credentials and skills assessments comparable
- **Portability:** Workers can carry validated skills across employers and regions
- **Matching:** Improves job matching and talent discovery
- **Planning:** Better labor market intelligence and training alignment

In this action guide, we provide some steps and tools for evaluating skills taxonomies to support your region's choice over which skills taxonomies to adopt and use.

Step 1: Understand Major Taxonomy Systems

Multiple taxonomy systems exist, each with different purposes and strengths. Understanding them helps you choose the right approach for your ecosystem.

Comparison of Major Taxonomies

Taxonomy	Description	Strengths	Best For
O*NET	U.S. Department of Labor occupational database with detailed skills, tasks, and knowledge areas	Comprehensive, regularly updated, free, U.S. standard	U.S. workforce systems, career pathways, job matching
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations framework	Multilingual, EU integration, cross-border portability	International initiatives, multinational employers
EMSI/Lightcast Skills	Commercial skills taxonomy based on real-time labor market data	Current trends, emerging skills, and detailed granularity	Labor market analytics, real-time skill demand
Industry-Specific	Sector-specific frameworks (e.g., NICE Cybersecurity, CompTIA IT)	Deep domain expertise, industry recognition	Specialized sectors, technical roles

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Taxonomy Selection Worksheet (Tool 1) to identify which taxonomies best fit your needs.*

Step 2: Map Between Taxonomy Systems

No single taxonomy will meet all your needs. Create crosswalks between systems to enable translation and interoperability. There are several mapping and crosswalking strategies.

Type	How It Works
One-to-One	Direct equivalent between skills in different taxonomies. E.g., O*NET 'Python Programming' = ESCO 'Python (computer programming)'
One-to-Many	One broad skill maps to multiple specific skills. E.g., O*NET 'Data Analysis' maps to multiple EMSI skills like 'SQL', 'Tableau', 'Statistical Analysis'
Hierarchical	Map parent/child relationships across frameworks. E.g., O*NET 'Computer Programming' (broad) contains 'Object-Oriented Programming' (specific)
Weighted and/or Confidence	Include confidence scores for mappings. E.g., 'Customer Service' maps to 'Client Relations' (90% confidence) and 'Technical Support' (60% confidence)

Example: O*NET to ESCO Mapping

O*NET Skill	ESCO Equivalent	Mapping Type
Active Listening	active listening	1:1 Direct
Critical Thinking	think critically	1:1 Direct
Complex Problem Solving	solve complex problems	1:1 Direct
Programming	computer programming	1:Many
	→ Python	
	→ JavaScript	

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Taxonomy Mapping Template (Tool 2) to create crosswalks between your chosen frameworks.*

Step 3: Implement Taxonomies in Your Ecosystem

Successful implementation requires phased rollout, partner training, and integration into existing systems.

Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Key Activities	Success Criteria
Phase 1: Pilot (3-6 months)	Select 2-3 priority occupations or sectors, tag training programs and credentials, and test with a small employer group	100% of pilot programs tagged, 5+ employers using taxonomy in job postings, positive stakeholder feedback
Phase 2: Scale (6-12 months)	Expand to all WIOA-funded training, integrate into workforce center systems, and launch an employer toolkit	75% of training programs tagged, 25+ employers actively using, data flowing into case management systems
Phase 3: Sustain (12+ months)	Full ecosystem adoption, ongoing maintenance, quality monitoring, continuous improvement	90%+ ecosystem coverage, self-sustaining processes, improved job matching outcomes, documented ROI

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Implementation Roadmap Template (Tool 3) to plan your phased rollout.*

Step 4: Enable Learning and Employment Records (LERs)

Learning and Employment Records (LERs) are comprehensive, portable records that combine education, training, work experience, and verified skills into a single digital credential. LERs use skills taxonomies to make achievements comparable and machine-readable.

What Goes into an LER

Component	What It Includes	Example
Education	Degrees, diplomas, coursework with associated skills and competencies	Associate Degree in Business Administration (Skills: Financial Analysis, Project Management, Excel)
Training & Certifications	Professional credentials, micro-credentials, bootcamps, continuing education	Certified Nursing Assistant, Google IT Support Certificate
Work Experience	Job titles, responsibilities, and skills developed through employment	Retail Manager (2018-2022): Team Leadership, Inventory Management, Customer Service
Skills & Competencies	Verified skills from all sources, mapped to standard taxonomies	Python (verified via coding assessment), SQL, Data Visualization

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the LER Planning Worksheet (Tool 4) to design your approach to Learning and Employment Records.*

Taxonomy Tools & Templates

Use these tools to select, map, and implement skills taxonomies effectively.

TOOL 1: Taxonomy Selection Worksheet

Evaluate which taxonomy systems best meet your needs.

Criteria	O*NET	ESCO	EMSI/Other
Cost (1-5)			
U.S. Alignment (1-5)			
Industry Fit (1-5)			
Ease of Use (1-5)			
Stakeholder Buy-in (1-5)			
Total Score			

TOOL 2: Taxonomy Mapping Template

Create crosswalks between taxonomy systems.

Source Taxonomy	Target Taxonomy	Type	Confidence

Mapping Type: 1:1 (Direct), 1:Many (Broad to Specific), Many:1 (Specific to Broad)

Confidence: High (90-100%), Medium (70-89%), Low (<70%)

TOOL 3: Implementation Roadmap Template

Plan your phased taxonomy implementation.

Phase 1: Pilot (Timeline: _____)
Priority sectors/occupations: **Partners involved:** **Success metrics:**
Phase 2: Scale (Timeline: _____)
Expansion plan: **Training needed:** **Success metrics:**
Phase 3: Sustain (Timeline: _____)

Maintenance processes:

Quality monitoring:

TOOL 4: LER Planning Worksheet

Plan your Learning and Employment Record implementation.

What data sources will feed into LERs?

- ☐ Training provider systems
- ☐ Credential issuers
- ☐ Employer validation
- ☐ Assessment platforms
- ☐ Other: _____

Which taxonomy will you use for skills tagging?

How will workers access and share their LERs?

- ☐ Digital wallet or portfolio platform
- ☐ Workforce center portal
- ☐ Direct employer integration
- ☐ Other: _____

What privacy controls will you implement?

Next Steps

Implementing skills taxonomies is a journey. Start small, build momentum, and scale over time.

- Select your primary taxonomy based on your ecosystem needs
- Create mappings to secondary taxonomies as needed
- Launch a pilot in 2-3 priority sectors
- Train stakeholders on using taxonomies effectively
- Scale systematically across your ecosystem
- Explore LER implementation to enable portability

Additional Resources

- Action Guide: Skills Data Governance
- Action Guide: The Role of Technology in Skills Work
- O*NET Online
- ESCO Portal
- USCCF LER Toolkit

Questions, feedback, or need support with developing your skills, credentialing taxonomy, and LER strategy? Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
SKILLS DATA GOVERNANCE

Introduction

A skills economy depends on trusted, transparent, and interoperable quality data. When skills information is inconsistent, siloed, or unverifiable, the entire system breaks down, employers can't trust credentials, workers can't demonstrate competencies, and training providers can't align to market needs.

Data governance for skills data provides the structure, standards, and processes to ensure skills data is accurate, accessible, and actionable across your ecosystem. This guide will help you establish governance frameworks that enable skills data transparency and portability.

Why Data Governance Matters

Data governance is what transforms disconnected credentials into a functioning skills economy. Without it, badges can't be verified, skills can't transfer between systems, and employers can't trust what they see.

Strong data governance requires three things: clear policies that define who can access and share data; technical standards that ensure different systems can communicate with each other; and stakeholder buy-in so partners actually follow the rules they helped create.

The best workforce development boards start small, perhaps just governing badge data with three partners, and expand as they learn. When governance works, it's invisible: *credentials flow seamlessly, privacy stays protected, and everyone trusts the system.*

In summary, data governance matters for:

- **Trust:** Verified, quality data builds confidence in skills-based systems
- **Interoperability:** Common standards enable data sharing across platforms
- **Portability:** Workers can move credentials between employers and systems
- **Privacy:** Proper governance protects individual data rights
- **Value:** High-quality data enables better matching, planning, and outcomes

In this action guide, we walk you through establishing your governance structure and building trust by sharing high-quality data and information grounded in informed consent and privacy-preserving protocols.

Step 1: Establish Your Governance Structure

Effective data governance requires clear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. Start by creating a governance structure appropriate to your ecosystem's complexity.

Core Governance Roles

Role	Responsibilities	Who Fills This Role
Data Steward	Sets data standards, policies, and quality requirements across the ecosystem	WDB leadership or designated data governance committee
Data Custodian	Manages technical infrastructure, ensures data security, and system integrity	IT director or technology partner managing platforms
Data Owner	Creates and maintains specific data sets, ensures accuracy and timeliness	Employers, training providers, credential issuers
Data User	Accesses and uses data for decision-making, matching, or analysis	Workforce centers, employers, job seekers, analysts
Compliance Officer	Ensures adherence to privacy laws, regulations, and ethical standards	Legal counsel or privacy officer
Holder	Is personally linked to the data. They may upload, manage, share, and use the skills ecosystem in good faith.	The individual person to whom the data represents, such as a learner or worker.

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Governance Roles and Responsibilities Matrix (Tool 1) to assign these roles in your organization.*

Step 2: Define Data Standards and Policies

Data standards ensure consistency and enable interoperability. It is important to establish clear policies for how skills data should be structured, classified, and shared throughout the skills data ecosystem.

Essential Data Standards

Standard Type	What to Define
Taxonomy Standards	Which skills frameworks will you use? (e.g., O*NET, ESCO, industry-specific taxonomies). How will you map between them?
Data Formats	What technical formats for credentials? (e.g., Open Badges, Verifiable Credentials, CTDL). Required metadata fields?
Quality Thresholds	Minimum data completeness (e.g., 90% of required fields). Accuracy targets, update frequency requirements.
Access Controls	Who can view, edit, or share which data? Role-based permissions, consent requirements for personal data.
Verification Methods	How will skills be validated? Assessment standards, issuer credibility criteria, and digital signature requirements.
Retention Policies	How long to keep data? Archiving procedures and deletion protocols for inactive credentials or outdated skills.

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Data Standards Definition Template (Tool 2) to document your standards and policies.*

Step 3: Implement Data Quality Management

High-quality data is accurate, complete, timely, and consistent. Establish processes to measure and maintain data quality across your ecosystem.

Six Dimensions of Data Quality

Dimension	What It Means	How to Measure
Accuracy	Data correctly represents the real-world skill or credential	Verification checks, audit samples, and error rates
Completeness	All required fields are populated with valid values	% of required fields populated, null value tracking
Consistency	Same data values across different systems and sources	Cross-system validation, duplicate detection
Timeliness	Data is current and updated at appropriate intervals	Last updated timestamps, freshness metrics
Validity	Data conforms to defined formats, ranges, and rules	Format validation, range checks, referential integrity
Uniqueness	No unnecessary duplication of records or credentials	Duplicate detection algorithms, unique identifiers

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Data Quality Scorecard (Tool 3) to assess and track your data quality metrics.*

Step 4: Protect Privacy and Security

Skills data often includes personally identifiable information (PII). Strong privacy and security practices build trust and ensure regulatory compliance.

Privacy Principles

To ensure trust throughout a skills economy and ecosystem, so that organizations adhere to privacy principles such as the following:

- **Consent:** Individuals control their own skills data and explicitly consent to sharing
- **Transparency:** Clear communication about what data is collected and how it's used
- **Minimal Collection:** Only collect data necessary for specified purposes
- **Purpose Limitation:** Use data only for stated purposes, not secondary uses
- **Data Portability:** Individuals can export and transfer their credentials
- **Right to Delete:** Individuals can request deletion of their data

Security Requirements

Any skills data shared across a skills ecosystem should also adhere to security protocols to protect it against harm during storage, transmission, and use. Here are some ways we ensure data security.

Security Layer	Implementation
Authentication	Multi-factor authentication for system access, strong password requirements, and single sign-on where appropriate
Encryption	Encrypt data at rest and in transit using industry standards (e.g., AES-256, TLS 1.3)
Access Controls	Role-based permissions, principle of least privilege, regular access reviews, and audits
Audit Logging	Track all data access and changes with timestamps and user IDs for accountability
Backup & Recovery	Regular automated backups, tested recovery procedures, and a disaster recovery plan

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Privacy and Security Checklist (Tool 4) to audit your current practices and identify gaps.*

Step 5: Enable Data Interoperability

For skills to be portable, data must move seamlessly between systems. To work towards interoperability, it is recommended to adopt open standards and establish data exchange agreements.

Key Interoperability Standards

Standard	Purpose	When to Use
Open Badges	Digital credentials with embedded metadata about skills and achievements	Training completions, micro-credentials, skill validations
CTDL (Credential Transparency Description Language)	Standardized descriptions of credentials, competencies, and pathways	Publishing to Credential Engine, creating credential registries
Comprehensive Learning and Employment Records (CLR)	Comprehensive records combining education, training, and work experience	Comprehensive worker skill profiles, career pathways
Verifiable Digital Credentials (W3C)	Cryptographically secure credentials that can be independently verified	High-security credentials, professional licenses, certifications

Data Governance Tools & Templates

Use these tools to establish and maintain effective data governance practices.

TOOL 1: Governance Roles & Responsibilities Matrix

Assign governance roles and document responsibilities.

Role	Person/Team	Key Activities	Decision Authority
Data Steward			
Data Custodian			
Data Owner			
Data User			
Compliance Officer			

TOOL 2: Data Standards Definition Template

Document your data standards and policies.

Skills Taxonomy Standard
Which taxonomy/framework: (e.g., O*NET, ESCO, custom)
Credential Format Standard
Technical format: (e.g., Open Badges, Verifiable Credentials)
Required Metadata Fields
List all required fields for credentials:
Data Quality Thresholds
Completeness requirement: ___% of required fields Accuracy target: ___% Maximum age of data: ___ days/months
Verification Requirements
How will skills/credentials be verified?

TOOL 3: Data Quality Scorecard

Assess data quality across six dimensions. Rate 1-5 (1=Poor, 5=Excellent).

Dimension	Assessment Question	Current Metric	Score
Accuracy	Are skills and credentials correctly represented?	Error rate: ___%	
Completeness	Are all required fields populated?	Completeness: ___%	
Consistency	Is data consistent across systems?	Duplicate rate: ___%	
Timeliness	Is the data current and up-to-date?	Avg age: ___ days	
Validity	Does data conform to standards?	Validation pass: ___%	
Uniqueness	Are there unnecessary duplicates?	Duplicate records: ___	
Total Score: ___/30 Overall Rating: ___			

TOOL 4: Privacy & Security Compliance Checklist

Ensure your data governance practices meet privacy and security requirements.

Requirement	Compliant?
Individuals must provide explicit consent before data collection	
Privacy policy clearly explains data use and sharing practices	
Users can access and download their own skills data	
Users can request the deletion of their personal data	
Multi-factor authentication is required for system access	
Data encrypted at rest and in transit	
Role-based access controls implemented	
All data access is logged with the holder ID and timestamp	
Regular security audits and vulnerability assessments are conducted	
Data backup and recovery procedures are tested quarterly	
Incident response plan documented and staff trained	
Vendor contracts include data protection requirements	
Annual privacy and security training for all staff	
Data retention and disposal policies established	
Compliance officer designated and empowered	

Next Steps

Establishing effective data governance is an ongoing process. Here's how to get started:

- **Assign governance roles** and establish clear responsibilities
- **Define data standards** for taxonomies, formats, and quality
- **Assess current data quality** and set improvement targets
- **Implement privacy protections** and security controls
- **Adopt interoperability standards** to enable data portability
- **Review and update** governance practices quarterly

Additional Resources

- **Action Guide:** Skills and Credentialing Taxonomies
- **Action Guide:** The Role of Technology in Skills Work
- **Credential Engine:** CTDL Technical Specifications
- **1EdTech (IMS Global):** Open Badges Specification
- **USCCF:** LER Implementation Toolkit

Questions, feedback, or looking for help setting up your skills data governance?
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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
EMPLOYER AND ISSUER ENGAGEMENT

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

Credential Issuer Motivations

Motivation	How to Message
Market Recognition	Employer validation increases the value and recognition of your credentials in the marketplace.
Learner Outcomes	Portable, verified credentials improve employment outcomes for your credential holders and strengthen your impact.
Standards Alignment	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
Tech Companies	Can't find enough qualified candidates with specific technical skills	Access bootcamp grads, self-taught developers, and non-degree talent with verified portfolios
Healthcare	High turnover and need for rapid onboarding and upskilling	Competency-based progression enables faster advancement and internal mobility
Manufacturing	Skills gap in advanced manufacturing and automation	Industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeships provide clear skill validation
Small Business	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)	☐
Define the target audience and develop an invitation list	☐
Recruit 2-3 employer speakers willing to share their experience	☐
Prepare a presentation on a skills-based hiring business case	☐
Create or customize job description templates for the workshop	☐
Develop resource packet (toolkit, guides, next steps)	☐
Send invitations 4-6 weeks in advance	☐
Send reminders 1 week and 1 day before the event	☐
Prepare name tags, sign-in sheet, and evaluation forms	☐
Test technology (AV, screen sharing, mic) the day before	☐
Arrange catering or refreshments	☐
Prepare follow-up plan (thank you email, pilot invitations)	☐

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

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?
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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN SKILLS WORK

Introduction

Technology is the enabling infrastructure for a skills-based economy. The right platforms make skills visible, credentials portable, data interoperable, and matching efficient. Without robust technology systems, even the best policies and practices won't scale.

This guide will help you understand the technology landscape, evaluate platforms, and make strategic technology decisions that support your skills transformation goals.

Why Technology Matters

Technology is the infrastructure that enables a skills economy. You can't manually track, validate, and verify thousands of skills and digital credentials; manually help workers port verified skills across employers; or align training with real-time labor market demand without it.

- Spreadsheets and databases really help.
- Digital badges prove competencies across platforms.
- Learning and employment records (LERs) track achievements across jobs.
- Skills taxonomies embedded in applicant tracking systems help employers find overlooked talent.

Without technology, skills-based and skills-first approaches stay small and often siloed, good ideas that never scale. Yet, the technology landscape is complex. It includes credentialing platforms such as *Credly*, comprehensive record systems such as *Territorium and Velocity Network*, skills ontologies from providers such as *Lightcast*, and open standards such as *Open Badges* and *Verifiable Credentials,* amongst hundreds of others. No single solution does everything, and most boards require multiple technologies that integrate with one another. Understanding this landscape matters because boards must make smart choices.

All that said, you don't need to become technology experts, but you need enough literacy to ask good questions: *Will this system work with our partners' platforms? Does it support open standards? Can workers take their data with them?*

You can also start by mapping what technology your partners already use, what platforms local issues use to issue credentials, what systems local employers use for hiring, and what your technology career and workforce centers operate. Then prioritize interoperability over features, choose open standards to avoid vendor lock-in, and start small with one use case before expanding. Technology without strategy creates expensive digital clutter. When technology works well, it becomes invisible, credentials flow seamlessly, employers find talent efficiently, and workers advance based on verified skills.

In this action guide, we provide some steps and tools for scoping the skills technology landscape, asking good questions of vendors, and trying solutions before rolling them out to learners, workers, and workforce staff.

Step 1: Understand the Technology Landscape

The skills technology ecosystem includes multiple platform types, each serving different functions. Most organizations need several integrated systems. We provide an overview of different types in the table below.

Platform Type	Purpose	Example Platforms
Skills Management Systems	Central platforms for cataloging, mapping, and managing skills data across an ecosystem	*Workday Skills Cloud, Degreed, EdCast, Cornerstone*
Credential Wallets or Portfolios	Personal platforms where individuals store and share digital and verified credentials	*Credly, Badgr, Learning Machine, MyCredentials*
Job Matching Platforms	Skills-based job boards and talent marketplaces that match candidates to opportunities	*Indeed, LinkedIn Skills, Phenom, Eightfold.ai*
Assessment Tools	Platforms for validating and verifying skills through testing and evaluation	*HackerRank, Codility, Vervoe, SkillSurvey*
Labor Market Analytics	Data and intelligence on skills demand, supply, and trends	*Lightcast (EMSI/BurningGlass), CHMURA, Econovue, Revelio*
Case Management	Workforce center systems for managing job seeker services and tracking outcomes	*Geographic Solutions, America's Job Link, SkillSmart, MyOneFlow*

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Technology Needs Assessment (Tool 1) to identify which platforms your ecosystem requires.*

Step 2: Establish Platform Evaluation Criteria

Not all platforms are created equal. It is important to develop clear criteria to evaluate vendors and solutions that align with your board's policies, regulations, and the skills approach you are adopting. Here are some examples of criteria to help evaluate technology solutions and vendors to

Factor	Questions to Ask
Standards Compliance	Does it support Open Badges, CTDL, CLRs, or other open standards? Can credentials be exported and used elsewhere?
Integration Capabilities	Does it have APIs? Can it connect to your existing systems (case management, LMS, HRIS)? Are integrations well-documented?
Taxonomy Support	Which taxonomies does it support (O*NET, ESCO, custom)? Can you map between taxonomies? Is the taxonomy current and maintained?
Holder Experience	Is it intuitive for non-technical people? Mobile-friendly? Accessible (ADA/WCAG compliant)? What training is required?
Security & Privacy	What security certifications does it have (SOC 2, ISO 27001)? How is data encrypted? Who owns the data? Privacy controls for individuals?
Vendor Viability	How long has the vendor been in business? Financial stability? Customer base size? Product roadmap and update frequency?
Total Cost of Ownership	License fees, implementation costs, training, ongoing support, customization, data migration? Hidden costs?

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Vendor Evaluation Scorecard (Tool 2) to systematically compare platforms.*

Step 3: Plan Your Integration Strategy

Skills technology doesn't exist in isolation. It must integrate with existing workforce, education, and employer systems to be effective. Here we share some of the considerations for ensuring systems integrate.

Common Integration Patterns

Integration Type	Use Case	Implementation Approach
Skills Platform ↔ Case Management	Job seekers' skills profiles flow into workforce center systems for better matching	API integration, single sign-on, regular data sync
Credential Wallet ↔ Training Providers	Credentials issued by training programs automatically flow to learner wallets	Open Badges standard, automated badge issuance upon completion
Job Matching ↔ Employer ATS	Skills-based matches flow directly into employer applicant tracking systems	API partnership, job board feeds, and candidate profile sharing with informed consent
Analytics ↔ State Systems	Labor market data feeds regional and state workforce planning	Data sharing agreements, secure file transfer, and dashboard access

Pro Tip: *Start with 2-3 core integrations rather than trying to connect everything at once. Build incrementally as you prove value.*

Step 4: Follow Implementation Best Practices

Technology projects fail when organizations underestimate the need for change management and training. Success requires equal focus on people and platforms. Here, we share some implementation success factors from skills project technical demonstrations.

Implementation Success Factors

- **Executive Sponsorship:** Secure visible support from the board and leadership
- **Dedicated Project Team:** Assign staff with protected time, not just added duties
- **Pilot First:** Test with a small group before full rollout
- **Comprehensive Training:** Budget 20% of project cost for training and support
- **Change Champions:** Recruit early adopters to advocate and assist peers
- **Iterative Approach:** Launch with core features, add complexity over time
- **Measure and Communicate:** Track adoption metrics and celebrate wins

Common Implementation Pitfalls to Avoid

❌ Pitfall	✓ Better Approach
Buying platforms without clear use cases	Define specific problems to solve before evaluating solutions
Underestimating data migration complexity	Plan 3-6 months for data cleaning, mapping, and migration
Skipping testing with actual people who hold skills-rich credentials and information	Conduct usability testing with job seekers, employers, and staff before launch
Assuming staff will adopt new tools automatically	Invest in hands-on training, ongoing support, and incentives for adoption
Vendor lock-in without an exit strategy	Ensure data portability and export capabilities in contracts

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Implementation Checklist (Tool 3) to plan your technology rollout.*

Technology Tools & Templates

Use these tools to assess technology needs, evaluate vendors, and manage implementation.

TOOL 1: Technology Needs Assessment

Identify which technology platforms your ecosystem requires.

Platform Type	Priority	Current Solution
Skills Management System		
Credential Wallet or Portfolio		
Job Matching Platform		
Assessment Tools		
Labor Market Analytics		
Case Management		

Priority: High (Need Now) | Medium (Next 12 months) | Low (Future)

TOOL 2: Vendor Evaluation Scorecard

Score vendors on key criteria (1-5 scale; 5 = excellent).

Criteria	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
Standards Compliance			
Integration Capabilities			
Taxonomy Support			
Holder and Staff Experience			
Security and Privacy			
Vendor Viability			
Total Cost of Ownership			
Customer Support			
Training & Documentation			
TOTAL SCORE	**/45**	**/45**	**/45**

TOOL 3: Implementation Checklist

Essential tasks for successful technology rollout.

Task	Complete?
Define specific use cases and success metrics	☐
Secure executive sponsorship and budget approval	☐
Form an implementation team with dedicated time	☐
Complete vendor evaluation and selection	☐
Negotiate a contract with data portability provisions	☐
Create a detailed project plan with milestones	☐
Assess data quality and plan migration	☐
Design integration architecture	☐
Develop training materials and schedule	☐
Recruit learners, workers, job seekers, and staff to test/trial	☐
Configure the platform with branding and settings	☐
Load test data and validate accuracy	☐
Conduct acceptance testing	☐
Launch pilot and gather feedback	☐
Iterate based on pilot learnings	☐
Execute full rollout with training	☐
Monitor adoption metrics weekly	☐
Provide ongoing support and troubleshooting	☐
Celebrate wins and share success stories	☐

Schedule regular reviews and optimization	☐

Next Steps

Technology is an enabler, not a solution in itself. Successful implementation requires strategic planning and strong change management.

- **Assess technology needs** based on your strategic goals
- **Evaluate vendors systematically** using the scorecard
- **Plan integrations** with existing systems
- **Start with a pilot** before full deployment
- **Invest in training** and ongoing support
- **Monitor adoption** and optimize continuously

Additional Resources

- **Action Guide:** Skills Data Governance
- **Action Guide:** Skills and Credentialing Taxonomies
- **1EdTech Open Badges:** Technical specifications and implementation guides
- **USCCF LER Resources:** Platform comparison and selection guides
- **HR Open Standards:** Data exchange specifications

Questions or feedback?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE: ENSURING ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL WORKERS

Introduction

A skills-based economy only succeeds when everyone can participate fully. Yet too often, skills systems, especially technology-supported skills systems, create barriers for people with disabilities, limited digital access, language differences, or other accessibility challenges.

True skills transparency requires accessibility transparency. That is ensuring that everyone can discover, demonstrate, and deploy their skills.

This guide will help you design and implement accessible skills systems that work for all members of your community, meeting legal requirements while expanding opportunity.

Why Accessibility Matters

A skills economy promises to expand opportunity by recognizing what people can do, regardless of where they learned it. Yet, if the infrastructure required to prove those skills, such as digital platforms, badge wallets, and online portfolios, excludes people without reliable internet, smartphones, or digital literacy, you've simply replaced one barrier with another.

Accessibility isn't an add-on; it's foundational to whether skills-based and skills-first approaches actually deliver on equity.

- **Workers with disabilities** need platforms that are accessible to screen readers and other assistive technologies.
- **Immigrants and English language learners** need multilingual interfaces and support.
- **Adults with developing digital skills** need simple, intuitive systems that don't require technical expertise.
- **Rural workers** need solutions that function on low bandwidth.
- **Low-income workers** need free or low-cost access to credentialing platforms.

When skills infrastructure is inaccessible, the very populations who could benefit most, those with non-degrees credentials and experiences, who are trying to prove their capabilities, get locked out. You've built a highway that only some people can use.

Boards must design for accessibility from the start, not retrofit it later. This means choosing technology platforms with strong accessibility features, providing multiple pathways to earn and share credentials (digital and paper), offering in-person support for workers who need help navigating systems, ensuring materials are available in multiple languages, and partnering with community organizations that serve populations facing access barriers.

It also means measuring who's actually using your skills infrastructure and who's not. If your digital badge program only serves tech-savvy workers with smartphones and college degrees, it's not expanding opportunity.

Accessibility isn't just about compliance with ADA requirements; it's about whether your skills economy works for everyone or just replicates existing privilege. The test of success isn't how elegant your technology is; it's whether the single mother working two jobs without home internet can earn, store, and share verified credentials as easily as someone with a laptop and unlimited data.

In this action guide, we explore common accessibility barriers people face in a skills economy and provide steps and tools to mitigate them.

Step 1: Understand Common Accessibility Barriers

Before you can remove barriers, you need to understand them. Skills systems can create obstacles across multiple dimensions of accessibility.

Types of Accessibility Barriers

Barrier Type	Common Issues	Impact on Skills Systems
Visual	Blindness, low vision, color blindness	Can't use platforms without screen reader support, credential badges not described, skills assessments rely on visuals
Hearing	Deafness, hard of hearing	Training videos without captions, phone-only support lines, webinars without transcripts
Mobility	Limited use of hands, wheelchair users	Platforms require a mouse, timed assessments, and training facilities not physically accessible
Cognitive	Learning disabilities, memory challenges, attention differences	Complex navigation, jargon-heavy content, overwhelming interfaces, and no alternative assessment formats
Digital Access	Limited internet, no computer, low digital literacy	Digital-only credential wallets, online-only services, and no mobile optimization
Language	Limited English proficiency, different primary language	English-only platforms, credentials not translated, cultural assumptions in assessments

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Accessibility Barrier Assessment (Tool 1) to identify obstacles in your current systems.*

Step 2: Apply Universal Design Principles

Universal Design means building systems that work for everyone from the start, rather than retrofitting accessibility later. These principles apply to digital platforms, physical spaces, training programs, and assessment processes.

Seven Principles of Universal Design

Principle	How to Apply in Skills Systems
Equitable Use	Provide the same means of use for all: credential wallets work with screen readers, training is available in multiple formats, and assessment accommodations are built in
Flexibility in Use	Accommodate preferences and abilities: keyboard navigation AND mouse, video AND text transcripts, self-paced AND cohort learning
Simple and Intuitive	Easy to understand regardless of experience: clear navigation, plain language, consistent patterns, progressive disclosure of complexity
Perceptible Information	Communicate effectively to all senses: alt text for images, captions for videos, text AND visual indicators, sufficient color contrast
Tolerance for Error	Minimize hazards and errors: auto-save, undo options, clear error messages, confirmation prompts, no data loss from mistakes
Low Physical Effort	Efficient and comfortable use: voice input options, single sign-on, pre-populated forms, minimal repetitive actions
Size and Space	Appropriate size regardless of body: touch targets at least 44x44 pixels, readable text at all zoom levels, responsive design for all devices

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Universal Design Checklist (Tool 2) to evaluate your systems against these principles.*

Step 3: Meet Digital Accessibility Standards

Digital platforms are central to modern skills systems. Meeting WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines) standards isn't just good practice; it's often legally required.

WCAG 2.1 Level AA Requirements

Level AA is the standard required by most laws and policies. Here are the key requirements for skills platforms:

Category	Requirements	Testing Methods
Perceivable	• Alt text for images • Captions for videos • 4.5:1 color contrast • No info by color alone	Automated scanners (WAVE, axe), screen reader testing, contrast checkers
Operable	• Keyboard accessible • No keyboard traps • Skip navigation links • Adjustable time limits	Tab through the interface, check focus indicators, test with keyboard only
Understandable	• Readable text (reading level) • Predictable behavior • Clear error messages • Help available	Readability checkers, user testing with diverse audiences
Robust	• Valid HTML • Proper ARIA labels • Works with assistive tech • Compatible with tools	HTML validators, test with JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the WCAG Compliance Checklist (Tool 3) to audit your digital platforms.*

Step 4: Provide Reasonable Accommodations

Even with an accessible design, some individuals will need specific accommodations. Have clear processes for requesting and providing accommodations for assessments, training, and credential verification.

Common Accommodations in Skills Systems

Context	Examples of Accommodations
Skills Assessments	Extended time (typically 1.5x or 2x), separate quiet room, screen reader compatibility, alternative formats (oral instead of written), breaks as needed, scribe for written responses
Training Programs	ASL interpreters, CART (real-time captioning), materials in advance, alternative assignments, flexible attendance, assistive technology, note-taking support
Credential Verification	Alternative evidence of competency, portfolio instead of test, demonstration instead of written, video recording of skills, third-party verification
Workforce Center Services	Wheelchair-accessible facilities, TTY/video relay service, documents in large print or braille, simplified forms, language interpretation, transportation support

Accommodation Request Process

- **Make it Easy to Request:** Simple form, multiple contact methods, no medical documentation required unless necessary
- **Respond Quickly:** Within 3-5 business days, ideally sooner
- **Engage in an interactive process:** Discuss what would work, explore options together
- **Document the Accommodation:** Put it in writing so everyone knows what to expect
- **Follow Up:** Check that accommodation is working, adjust as needed

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Accommodation Request Template (Tool 4) to create your process.*

Accessibility Tools & Templates

Use these tools to assess, design, and maintain accessible skills systems.

TOOL 1: Accessibility Barrier Assessment

Identify barriers in your current systems.

Potential Barrier	Present?	Priority
Website not compatible with screen readers	☐	
Videos lack captions or transcripts	☐	
Forms require mouse interaction	☐	
Insufficient color contrast	☐	
Timed assessments with no extensions available	☐	
Training materials only in English	☐	
No alternative to digital-only services	☐	
Complex jargon without a plain language option	☐	
Physical facilities are not wheelchair accessible	☐	
No process for requesting accommodations	☐	
Credential badges lack descriptive text	☐	
The job matching platform is not keyboard navigable	☐	
Training is only offered in person (no remote option)	☐	
Assessment formats are inflexible (one-way only)	☐	

Priority: High (fix within 30 days) | Medium (fix within 90 days) | Low (fix within 6 months)

TOOL 2: Universal Design Checklist

Evaluate systems against universal design principles.

Universal Design Element	Present?
Same functionality available to all people using the system (no separate 'accessible' version)	☐
Multiple ways to access content (keyboard, mouse, voice, touch)	☐
Consistent navigation and interaction patterns	☐
Clear, simple language without unnecessary jargon	☐
Information conveyed through multiple senses (visual + audio + text)	☐
High contrast and readable fonts	☐
Undo, back, and cancel options are available	☐
Auto-save to prevent data loss	☐
Keyboard shortcuts for frequent actions	☐
Single sign-on to reduce repeated authentication	☐
Touch targets at least 44x44 pixels	☐
Responsive design works on all screen sizes	☐
Content reflows at 400% zoom without horizontal scrolling	☐

TOOL 3: WCAG 2.1 Level AA Compliance Checklist

Quick audit of key accessibility requirements.

WCAG Requirement	Passes?
All images have descriptive alt text	☐
Videos have accurate captions	☐
Audio content has text transcripts	☐
Text has 4.5:1 contrast ratio (3:1 for large text)	☐
Information not conveyed by color alone	☐
All functionality is available via keyboard	☐
Keyboard focus is visible	☐
No keyboard traps	☐
Skip navigation link provided	☐
Page titles are descriptive	☐
Link text makes sense out of context	☐
Forms have clear labels	☐
Error messages are clear and helpful	☐
Content is organized with headings	☐
HTML validates correctly	☐
ARIA labels used appropriately	☐

TOOL 4: Accommodation Request Form Template

Use this template to create an accessible accommodation request process.

ACCOMMODATION REQUEST FORM
Name: Contact Information: Preferred Contact Method: ☐ Email ☐ Phone ☐ Text ☐ Video Call
Service/Activity Needing Accommodation
☐ Skills Assessment ☐ Training Program ☐ Workforce Center Services ☐ Credential Process ☐ Other: _____
Nature of Accommodation Needed
Please describe what accommodation would help:
Timeline
When do you need this accommodation?

Note to Staff: Respond within 3 business days. Engage in an interactive process to determine effective accommodation. Do not request medical documentation unless absolutely necessary.

Next Steps

Building accessible skills systems is an ongoing commitment. Here's how to get started:

- **Assess current barriers** using the audit tools
- **Prioritize fixes** based on impact and legal requirements
- **Apply universal design** to new systems from the start
- **Establish an accommodation process** and train staff
- **Test with real users,** including people with disabilities
- **Monitor and improve** continuously

Additional Resources

- **ADA.gov:** Official ADA resources and guidance
- **WCAG 2.1:** w3.org/WAI/WCAG21/quickref
- **WebAIM:** Free accessibility evaluation tools
- **Section 508:** section508.gov for federal requirements
- **Action Guide:** The Role of Technology in Skills Work

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN THE SKILLS ECONOMY

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming skills systems, from how we match candidates to jobs, to how we validate competencies, to how we predict future skill needs. AI offers powerful opportunities to make skills more transparent, accessible, and actionable. But it also introduces risks of bias, opacity, and exclusion if not implemented responsibly.

This guide will help you understand AI's role in the skills economy, evaluate AI-powered tools critically, and implement AI in ways that expand opportunity rather than reinforce inequality.

Why This Matters Now

AI isn't coming to skills work; it's already here, making decisions about who gets hired, what training gets recommended, and which skills count. *Right now, AI-powered applicant tracking systems are screening thousands of resumes, inferring skills from job descriptions, and ranking candidates before any human sees them. Machine learning algorithms are analyzing millions of job postings to identify emerging skills faster than any workforce center can. Workers are using ChatGPT to translate their experience into skills language. Training platforms are deploying AI to create personalized learning pathways.*

This technology is moving faster than most workforce systems can adapt, which is exactly why workforce boards must engage with it now, not five years from now, when the decisions have already been made.

The Promise	The Risk
• Surface Hidden Talent • Real-Time Labor Market Intelligence	• Amplified Bias • Black Box Decisions

• Personalized Career Navigation • Skills Translation Across Industries	• Narrow Definitions of Skills • Vendor Control

Given how quickly AI is being adopted and used by job seekers, recruiters, and employers alike, it is critical to understand the promises, risks, and potential impact of AI on people navigating a growing skills economy, where skills and credential data are required to participate.

In this action guide, we explore how AI is used in skills systems, uncover the risks and biases, and outline the steps and tools workforce board members can use to support their regions and communities.

Step 1: Understand AI Applications in Skills Systems

AI is being used across the skills ecosystem in multiple ways. Understanding these applications helps you identify where AI might help—and where extra caution is needed.

Application	What It Does	Key Risks
Resume Screening	Automatically filters candidates based on resume content, scoring, and ranking	May discriminate against non-traditional backgrounds, gaps in employment, or unfamiliar school names
Skills Inference	Predicts skills from job titles, education, or work history without direct assessment	May miss skills from non-traditional pathways or inaccurately assign competencies
Job Matching	Recommends candidates to jobs and jobs to candidates based on skills, experience, and fit	May reinforce existing patterns, limit career mobility, or create filter bubbles
Proctoring & Assessment	Monitors test-takers via video, detects cheating, or grades responses automatically	Privacy concerns, accessibility issues, bias in facial recognition, and false positives
Learning Pathways	Recommends training and upskilling based on current skills and career goals	May narrow options, push profitable programs, or miss innovative pathways
Labor Market Forecasting	Predicts future skill demand, emerging occupations, and workforce trends	Predictions may be wrong, overweight current patterns, or miss disruptions
Chatbots & Advisors	Provides career guidance, answers questions, and helps navigate resources	May provide inaccurate info, lack empathy, or fail to escalate complex issues

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the AI Application Inventory (Tool 1) to map where AI is being used in your ecosystem.*

Step 2: Recognize and Address AI Bias

AI systems learn from historical data, which often reflects past discrimination. Without intervention, AI can amplify existing inequities at scale. Understanding how bias enters systems is the first step to preventing it.

Bias Source	Example in Skills Systems
Training Data Bias	Resume screener trained on historically successful candidates reflects past discrimination in hiring (e.g., preference for male candidates in tech roles because most past hires were male)
Proxy Variables	AI uses ZIP code to predict skills, which correlates with race and income, effectively discriminating based on protected characteristics
Label Bias	AI trained to predict 'successful' employees based on biased performance reviews or subjective ratings from managers
Sampling Bias	The matching algorithm is trained primarily on traditional 4-year college graduates, underrepresenting non-degree pathways and creating worse matches for those populations
Design Choices	Assessment tool penalizes candidates who take breaks or work slowly, discriminating against people with disabilities or caregiving responsibilities
Feedback Loops	Job matching algorithm shows fewer opportunities to certain groups, they apply less, the system interprets as less interest, shows even fewer, the cycle reinforces itself

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the AI Bias Assessment Framework (Tool 2) to evaluate AI systems for potential bias.*

Step 3: Apply Responsible AI Principles

Responsible AI isn't just about avoiding harm; it's about actively designing systems that promote fairness, transparency, and accountability. These principles should guide every AI implementation decision.

Principle	What It Means	How to Implement
Fairness	AI treats all groups equitably, doesn't discriminate based on protected characteristics	Test for disparate impact across demographics, use diverse training data, and conduct regular bias audits
Transparency	People understand when AI is being used and how decisions are made	Disclose AI use, provide plain-language explanations, and document decision factors
Accountability	Clear responsibility for AI decisions, processes for appeal and correction	Assign oversight roles, create complaint mechanisms, and maintain human review for consequential decisions
Privacy	Protect personal data, minimize collection, and allow individuals to control	Obtain consent, encrypt data, provide opt-out options, and honor deletion requests
Human Oversight	Humans remain in the loop for significant decisions, and can override AI	Require human review for rejections, enable appeals, don't fully automate consequential decisions
Continuous Monitoring	Regular testing and auditing to catch drift, degradation, or emerging bias	Quarterly fairness audits, track outcomes by demographics, update models as data evolves

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Responsible AI Principles Checklist (Tool 3) to evaluate your AI implementations.*

Step 4: Evaluate AI Vendors Critically

Most workforce boards will purchase AI tools rather than build them. Rigorous vendor evaluation is essential to ensure tools meet responsible AI standards.

Questions to Ask AI Vendors

Topic	Critical Questions
Training Data	What data was the AI trained on? How diverse is it? Does it include populations we serve? How recent is it?
Bias Testing	Have you tested for bias? Can you share the results? What were disparate impact rates? How often do you re-test?
Explainability	Can you explain how decisions are made? What factors does the AI consider? Can individuals see why they got a particular result?
Human Oversight	Can we configure human review requirements? Can decisions be appealed? Can we override the AI?
Data Privacy	Who owns the data? How is it stored and protected? Will our data be used to train models for other clients? Can users delete their data?
Performance & Accuracy	What's the accuracy rate? False positive and false negative rates? Does performance vary across demographics?
Compliance	Does it comply with EEO laws? NYC's AI hiring law? EU AI Act? What documentation can you provide?

Red Flags: The vendor cannot answer these questions, refuses to be transparent, or makes unrealistic claims about accuracy or lack of bias.

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the AI Vendor Evaluation Scorecard (Tool 4) to compare vendors systematically.*

AI Implementation Tools & Templates

Use these tools to implement AI responsibly in your skills systems.

TOOL 1: AI Application Inventory

Map where AI is currently used in your ecosystem.

System/Tool	AI Function	High Stakes?	Bias Risk
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐
		☐	☐

High Stakes: Impacts access to opportunities, training, jobs, or income
Bias Risk: Could discriminate based on protected characteristics

TOOL 2: AI Bias Assessment Framework

Evaluate AI systems for potential bias.

Bias Assessment Question	Yes	No
Has the training data been examined for demographic representation?	☐	☐
Are historically underrepresented groups adequately represented in training data?	☐	☐
Have proxy variables (ZIP code, school name, etc.) been identified and controlled?	☐	☐
Has the system been tested for disparate impact across protected groups?	☐	☐
Are pass/fail rates comparable across demographic groups (within 4/5ths rule)?	☐	☐
Have false positive and false negative rates been measured by demographics?	☐	☐
Is there a process for individuals to appeal or contest AI decisions?	☐	☐
Can humans override AI recommendations?	☐	☐
Are AI decision factors explainable in plain language?	☐	☐
Is there monitoring in place to detect drift or emerging bias over time?	☐	☐
Have affected communities been consulted about the AI system?	☐	☐

TOOL 3: Responsible AI Principles Checklist

Verify AI implementations meet responsible AI standards.

Responsible AI Principle	Yes	No
System tested for fairness across demographic groups	☐	☐
Disparate impact documented and within acceptable thresholds	☐	☐
People are notified when AI is being used to make decisions	☐	☐
AI decision factors are explainable	☐	☐
Clear accountability for AI decisions established	☐	☐
Appeal/dispute process available	☐	☐
Human review required for consequential decisions	☐	☐
Privacy impact assessment completed	☐	☐
Data minimization principles applied	☐	☐
Consent obtained for data use	☐	☐
Regular bias audits are scheduled (at least quarterly)	☐	☐
Performance monitoring tracks outcomes by demographics	☐	☐
Incident response plan for AI failures/bias	☐	☐
Staff trained on AI systems and their limitations	☐	☐

TOOL 4: AI Vendor Evaluation Scorecard

Score vendors on responsible AI practices (1-5 scale, 5=excellent).

Evaluation Criteria	Vendor A	Vendor B	Vendor C
Training data diversity and quality			
Bias testing documentation			
Fairness/disparate impact metrics			
Explainability of decisions			
Human oversight capabilities			
Privacy protections			
Compliance with regulations			
Performance accuracy			
Appeal/dispute mechanisms			
Continuous monitoring			
Customer support and training			
Transparency about limitations			
TOTAL SCORE	**/60**	**/60**	**/60**

Next Steps

Responsible AI implementation is an ongoing practice. Here's how to get started:

- **Inventory AI use** across your ecosystem
- **Prioritize high-stakes systems** for bias assessment
- **Establish governance** with clear accountability
- **Evaluate new vendors carefully** using the scorecard
- **Require transparency** and explainability
- **Monitor continuously** for drift and bias
- **Engage affected communities** in AI design and oversight

Additional Resources

- **NIST** AI Risk Management Framework
- **NYC AI Hiring Law:** Bias audit requirements
- **Partnership on AI:** Responsible AI guidance
- **AI Now Institute:** Research on AI and equity

Questions, feedback, or need help developing or implementing your AI strategy?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

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SKILLS ECONOMY TOOLKIT

ACTION GUIDE:
EVALUATION AND IMPACT

Introduction

Building a skills economy is a significant investment of time, resources, and political capital. To sustain momentum, secure continued funding, and continuously improve, you must demonstrate impact. Evaluation isn't just about accountability; it's about learning what works, telling your story effectively, and making data-driven decisions.

This guide will help you design evaluation frameworks, select the right metrics, collect meaningful data, and communicate impact to diverse stakeholders.

Why Skills Economy Evaluation Matters

In a skills economy, you can't show the value of the transformation without data. Workforce boards face constant pressure to demonstrate ROI to funders, justify investments to taxpayers, and show employers that skills-based approaches actually work. Yet, traditional workforce metrics weren't designed for skills infrastructure.

- **Measuring** 'credentials earned' doesn't tell you if those credentials led to jobs.
- **Tracking** 'training completion rates' doesn't show if workers gained skills employers value.
- **Counting** 'job placements' doesn't reveal if skills-based hiring expanded opportunities for underrepresented populations.

A skills economy requires new metrics that capture what actually matters: *Are workers advancing based on demonstrated skills? Are employers finding talent they couldn't reach before? Are credential systems creating pathways or just adding paperwork? Are equity gaps closing or widening?* Without rigorous evaluation, skills initiatives risk becoming expensive experiments that can't prove impact, secure sustainable funding, or improve over time. In this action guide, we outline the steps and tools for effectively evaluating the reach, engagement, and impact of skill-focused workforce activities.

Step 1: Develop a Logic Model

A logic model maps the relationship between your investments, activities, and intended results. It provides the foundation for selecting metrics and designing an evaluation.

Component	Description & Examples
Inputs	**Resources invested:** Staff time, funding, technology platforms, partnerships, training materials
Activities	**What you do:** Convene employers, map skills ecosystem, implement digital badges, provide training, conduct outreach
Outputs	**Direct products:** # of badges issued, # of employers engaged, # of training programs aligned, # of people served
Short-term Outcomes	**Initial changes (0-12 months):** Increased awareness of skills-based hiring, credentials recognized by employers, and job seekers able to articulate skills
Medium-term Outcomes	**Behavioral changes (1-3 years):** Employers hire based on skills, not just degrees, workers earn stackable credentials, training aligns with the job market
Long-term Impact	**Systemic change (3+ years):** Reduced skills gaps, increased economic mobility, more equitable access to opportunity, stronger regional economy

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Logic Model Template (Tool 1) to map your theory of change.*

Step 2: Select Meaningful Metrics

Not all metrics are equally useful. Select measures that are meaningful, measurable, and actionable. Balance leading indicators (predict future success) with lagging indicators (measure final results).

Category	Example Metrics	Data Source
Ecosystem Development	# of active employer partners, # of aligned training programs, # of credentials mapped to skills taxonomy	Partnership agreements, training provider records, credential registry
Individual Outcomes	# earning credentials, % placed in jobs, average wage at placement, credential completion rate	Case management systems, wage records, credential platforms, and follow-up surveys
Employer Impact	% using skills-based job descriptions, time-to-hire reduction, quality of hire ratings, retention rates	Employer surveys, ATS data, HR analytics, interviews
System Efficiency	Average time from enrollment to credential, cost per credential earned, and credential portability rate	Program tracking systems, financial records, and credential transfer data
Equity	Outcomes by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, income level; participation rates by demographic group	Disaggregated program data, demographic surveys, and accessibility metrics

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Metrics Selection Matrix (Tool 2) to choose your key performance indicators.*

Step 3: Consider Skills Specific Evaluation Methods

Skills are deeply connected to the context in which they were learned, developed, and in which they are used. There are multiple methods for evaluating skills to uncover their richness and value, as well as to assess their demonstration. Here, we present 12 methods for evaluating the adoption, use, and value of skills in a skills economy.

Method	Measures	How to Do It	Example
Pre/Post Skills Assessment	Actual skill gains using competency-based assessments before and after training	• Use validated skills assessments (WorkKeys, industry certifications) • Conduct practical demonstrations (welding test, coding challenge) • Have employers verify skill acquisition • Use rubrics to measure proficiency levels (beginner → expert)	Healthcare training tests participants on patient care competencies at intake, mid-program, and completion, showing progression from Level 1 to Level 3 proficiency.
Skills Pathway Progression Tracking	How workers stack skills-rich credentials and advance along defined skills pathways	• Map skill-rich credential sequences (entry → intermediate → advanced) • Track time between credential milestones • Measure wage increases at each credential level • Document job transitions enabled by new credentials	Track workers who earn the Customer Service badge → Supervisory Skills certificate → Team Leadership credential, measuring employment and wage changes at each step.
Employer Skills Verification	Whether workers actually demonstrate the skills indicated by their credentials on the job	• Survey employers 3-6 months post-hire about skill demonstration • Use 1-5 rating scales for specific competencies • Compare credential holders to non-credential holders • Conduct supervisor focus groups about credential value	90-day survey asking employers to rate new hires on 10 specific skills from digital badges, revealing which credentials accurately predict job performance.

Skills-Rich Digital Credential Analytics	How workers earn, share, and use skills-rich digital credentials over time	• Track skills-rich credential earning rates and patterns • Monitor how often workers share credentials with employers • Measure credential 'velocity' (time from earning to employment) • Analyze which credentials lead to the fastest job placement • Track credential stacking sequences that correlate with advancement	Platform data shows workers who earn IT Support credentials share them with employers 3.2x more often than traditional certificates, with 60% employed within 90 days.
Skills Transfer Measurement	Whether skills gained in one context transfer to different jobs or industries	• Track workers who transition across industries using the same skills • Compare outcomes for transferable vs. job-specific credentials • Survey workers about which skills they use across roles • Map skills taxonomy alignment across occupations	Measure how many workers with "Project Management" skills earned in construction successfully transition to healthcare administration roles.
Skills Gap Closure Analysis	How do training programs close specific skills gaps identified by employers?	• Start with labor market analysis, identifying skill shortages • Compare worker skills before/after training against employer needs • Track reduction in unfilled positions requiring specific skills • Survey employers about whether skill gaps are narrowing	Regional analysis shows 200 open positions requiring "CNC machining" skills; after training, track positions filled by credential earners and remaining gap.

Competency-Based Assessment Results	Mastery-based evaluations rather than seat time or completion	• Require learners to demonstrate 80%+ proficiency on assessments • Track how many attempts learners need to reach mastery • Compare achievement rates across training modalities • Measure employer-verified on-the-job competency	The welding program requires Level 3 proficiency on practical weld tests before earning credentials, with employers verifying quality work consistently.
Credential Recognition Rate	How many employers actually recognize and value the credentials programs issue	• Survey employers: "Do you recognize [specific credential]?" • Track job postings that mention your credentials • Measure wage premiums for credential holders • Document employer partnerships that accept credentials	45 employers in the region now list "ABC Digital Marketing Badge" in job postings, up from 5 two years ago, showing growing recognition.
Skills-Based Hiring Outcomes	Hiring outcomes when employers use skills-based methods vs. other requirements	• Track time-to-hire for skills-based vs. other postings • Methe asure diversity of applicant pools • Compare retention rates • Survey hiring managers about candidate quality	Employers using skills-based job descriptions fill positions 30% faster and hire 40% more candidates without bachelor's degrees, with equal retention.
Skills Portfolio Quality Assessment	Comprehensiveness and market-relevance of workers' documented skills	• Review worker portfolios for breadth and depth of skills • Rate portfolio completeness (technical + soft skills + work samples) • Assess alignment between documented skills and job requirements • Track portfolio updates over time as workers gain competencies	Workers with portfolios containing 8+ validated skills and 3+ work samples get interviews 2.5x more often than those with incomplete profiles.

Skills Taxonomy Alignment Analysis	How well do training programs align with standardized skills frameworks	• Map curriculum to O*NET, ESCO, or industry taxonomies • Calculate % of training hours building taxonomy-defined skills • Compare taxonomy alignment to employment outcomes • Identify gaps where programs don't teach in-demand skills	The training audit shows that 75% of the curriculum aligns with O*NET skills for the target occupation, with 25% needing updates to reflect labor market changes.
Longitudinal Skills Progression Study	How skills accumulation affects career trajectories over 3-5 years	• Follow cohorts from first credential through career milestones • Document skills added over time and resulting changes • Compare credential stackers vs. single-credential earners • Identify which skill sequences lead to the greatest advancement	A five-year study shows workers who stacked 3+ credentials in complementary skills earned 35% more than single-credential holders, with faster promotions.

Step 4: Establish Data Collection Systems

The best metrics are useless without good data. Design collection systems that are sustainable, minimize burden, and protect privacy.

Method	Best For	Considerations
Administrative Data	Tracking enrollments, completions, placements, wages, and data already collected for other purposes	Low burden, but limited to what's already tracked. Ensure data quality and completeness.
Surveys	Gathering perceptions, satisfaction, outcomes beyond what's tracked administratively	Keep short, offer incentives, time strategically, expect 20-40% response rates
Interviews	Deep understanding of experiences, context, and nuances that quantitative data misses	Time-intensive, small sample size, rich qualitative data, complement with quantitative data
Platform Analytics	Usage data from digital platforms, such as logins, searches, credential views,and job applications	Automatic, but shows behavior, not outcomes. Privacy considerations for tracking.
Case Studies	In-depth stories showing how skills-based approaches work in practice	Powerful for storytelling, not statistically representative, choose diverse examples

🔴 ***Action Item:*** *Use the Data Collection Plan (Tool 3) to organize your measurement approach.*

Step 5: Tell Your Impact Story

Data doesn't speak for itself. Translate findings into compelling narratives that resonate with different audiences. Balance numbers with stories, celebrate wins while being honest about challenges.

Tailoring Messages by Audience

Audience	What They Care About	Key Messages
Funders	ROI, outcomes, accountability, scalability, alignment with priorities	$X invested → Y people served → Z% employment rate → $A in wage gains
Employers	Quality of talent, time-to-hire, retention, skills match	Partners saved X days in hiring, 90% of placements retained after 6 months
Job Seekers	Opportunities, fairness, recognition of skills, and career advancement	Success stories of people who earned credentials and advanced their careers
Policymakers	Economic development, equity, constituent impact, innovation	Skills initiative increased regional employment by X%, reduced disparities by Y%
General Public	Community benefit, fairness, opportunity, human stories	Video profiles of community members whose lives improved through skills-based pathways

Pro Tip: *Lead with stories, support with data. A single compelling case study plus 3-5 key statistics is more memorable than 20 charts.*

Evaluation Tools & Templates

Use these tools to design, implement, and communicate your evaluation.

TOOL 1: Logic Model Template

Map your theory of change.

INPUTS: What resources do we invest in?
ACTIVITIES: What do we do?
OUTPUTS: What do we produce?
SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES: What changes in 0-12 months?

MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOMES: What changes in 1-3 years?
LONG-TERM IMPACT: What systemic change in 3+ years?

TOOL 2: Metrics Selection Matrix

Evaluate potential metrics against key criteria.

Potential Metric	Important?	Feasible?	Actionable?	Use It?
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐

	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐	☐

Important: *Aligns with goals, matters to stakeholders*

Feasible: *Data is available or collectible at a reasonable cost*

Actionable: *Results will inform decisions and improvements*

TOOL 3: Data Collection Plan

Organize your measurement approach.

Metric	Data Source	Frequency	Responsible

TOOL 4: Impact Dashboard Template

Track and visualize your key metrics.

Key Performance Indicator	Target	Actual	Status
# of Employers Engaged			
# of Credentials Issued			
# of People Served			
% Job Placement Rate			
Average Wage at Placement			
Credential Completion Rate			
Employer Satisfaction Score			
Participant Satisfaction Score			
Time to Credential (avg days)			
Cost per Credential			

Status: ✓ On Track | ⚠ Needs Attention | ✗ Off Track

Next Steps

Evaluation is not a one-time event; it's an ongoing process of learning and improvement. Here's how to get started:

- **Build your logic model** to clarify your theory of change
- **Select 5-10 key metrics** that balance outputs and outcomes
- **Create a data collection plan** with clear roles and timelines
- **Set up reporting systems** and dashboards to track progress
- **Share results regularly** with stakeholders in accessible formats
- **Use findings** to continuously improve your work

Additional Resources

- **W.K. Kellogg Foundation:** Logic Model Development Guide
- **Urban Institute:** Outcome Indicator Library
- **DOL WIOA Performance Accountability:** Federal reporting requirements
- **Other Action Guides:** Strategic Planning and Data Governance

Questions, feedback, or need help in determining your region's impact?
Contact the National Association of Workforce Boards
www.nawb.org

National Association of Workforce Boards

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 sunsetting 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?
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Questions, feedback, or need support with your skills strategy?
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