

LER TOOLKIT CASE STUDY COLLECTION

Recognizing Black Women Leaders and Entrepreneurs

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This case study highlights how verifiable credentials can help underrepresented entrepreneurs gain recognition, build trust, and access capital in a system that often overlooks them. The pilot explores how Black Girl Ventures (BGV), in partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF), Participate, and the Digital Credentials Consortium (DCC), supported Black and Brown women entrepreneurs by awarding verifiable digital badges for completing community-based learning and leadership pathways. These badges were integrated into a digital wallet, allowing participants to own, share, and leverage their skills and experiences for funding and business opportunities.

Case Study Details

Scope: National

Sector: Adult Learning and Education

Industry: Entrepreneurship and Leadership

Focus: Recognizing entrepreneurship and work-based leadership skills

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Introduction

Black Girl Ventures (BGV) is a nonprofit organization that empowers Black and Brown women entrepreneurs by expanding access to capital, community, and capacity-building resources. Through pitch competitions, leadership development programs, and a national network of community leaders, Black Girl Ventures supports early-stage entrepreneurs who are often excluded from traditional funding and support systems. In a landscape where individuals from underrepresented communities receive less than 1% of total venture capital funding in the United States, BGV addresses this disparity by creating inclusive learning, growth, and opportunity spaces.

This case study examines a pilot program launched by Black Girl Ventures in partnership with Participate to recognize and credential the entrepreneurial learning journeys of its community members. The pilot awarded digital verifiable badges to women entrepreneurs who completed learning pathways through a community of practice and work-based learning experience. These badges were then integrated into a digital wallet, giving participants ownership of their achievements and enabling them to share their verified skills and experiences with funders, collaborators, and business networks, unlocking new pathways for visibility, trust, and capital access.

Recognizing Leaders and Entrepreneurs

Recognizing Black women entrepreneurs is essential to addressing systemic inequities in access to capital, opportunity, and visibility. Although Black women are the fastest-growing group of entrepreneurs in the U.S., they receive less than 1% of venture capital funding and often face structural barriers rooted in racism, sexism, and economic exclusion. Recognition, through awards, verifiable credentials, and public validation, affirms their lived experiences and entrepreneurial skills and expands their access to funding, networks, and growth opportunities. It challenges dominant narratives about who is seen as a leader or innovator, inspires future generations, and supports inclusive economic development, as Black women are more likely to reinvest in their communities and create pathways for others.

The Black Girl Ventures pilot was designed to award verifiable digital badges for participants who completed curated learning pathways embedded in a work-based learning and community leadership program. Black Girl Ventures training programs include a 3-month Emerging Leaders Fellowship Program and Black Girl Ventures Pitch, a hybrid program coaching entrepreneurs on how to pitch their venture to potential funders and clients. The goal was to recognize the valuable competencies

women entrepreneurs develop through experience and peer-based learning while equipping them with portable, verifiable records to support visibility, investment, and opportunity.



Source: Participate YouTube Channel

Participant Engagement

Participants engaged were primarily Black and Brown women entrepreneurs from across the United States. They engaged in a multi-week program featuring peer collaboration, live workshops, business challenges, and mentorship, all grounded in real-world entrepreneurial problem-solving. The community of practice format fostered trust, mutual learning, and leadership development.

Credentials were awarded for competencies such as:

- ❖ Leading peer teams
- ❖ Pitch development and delivery
- ❖ Venture storytelling
- ❖ Navigating business planning and growth strategies

Women entrepreneurs valued the recognition of work-based skills developed outside traditional academic settings. Many expressed pride in having a record of leadership, creativity, and grit that was both portable and verifiable. The intended third-party verifier or consumer for the piloted credentials could include startup incubators, funders, or venture capitalists.



Source: Participate

The pilot included workforce development and digital credential partners, and aligned with emerging standards in verifiable open credentialing. This was intended to enable entrepreneurs to receive recognition and to own and share these credentials in ways that support business growth and funding access.

Technical Implementation

The technical solutions, Participate and the DCC Learner Credential Wallet, leveraged the open standards Verifiable Credentials and Open Badges. Each badge was issued using metadata aligned to the Black Girl Ventures credentialing frameworks and stored in Participate for issuing. This ensured:

- ❖ Learner ownership of their claimed credential
- ❖ Ability to share credentials with investors, partners, or funders
- ❖ Future interoperability with employment and funding ecosystems

The DCC Learner Credential Wallet was introduced through hands-on onboarding sessions, and human-friendly pathways helped participants store, organize, and share their credentials confidently. The product stack and credential model are outlined below.

Product Stack

Product Name	Role(s)
Participate	Issuer
Learner Credential Wallet	Holder credential management
DCC VerifierPlus	Verifier

Credential Model

Category	Implementation
Verifiable Credential Data Model Version	VCDM 1.1
Credential Specification	Open Badges 3.0

Interoperability is critical for digital wallets and LER credential solutions to ensure that the credentials and data can be understood, trusted, and accepted across systems. We invited the project team to share a detailed interoperability profile of the technical specifications and protocol choices they made. A complete interoperability profile is available in the appendix.

Key Findings

Documentation of the experience with participants and the participating organizations revealed the following findings:

- ❖ **Authentic learning pathways:** Participants thrived in learning experiences that reflected real entrepreneurial challenges.
- ❖ **Community as catalyst:** The peer-led, supportive nature of the community of practice was a driving force for engagement and completion.
- ❖ **Recognition matters:** The credentials issued and claimed affirmed the value of lived experience and work-based learning, helping entrepreneurs articulate their strengths.
- ❖ **Portable proof:** The digital wallet empowered participants to carry their accomplishments with them, to open new doors.
- ❖ **Investor-funder Support:** Potential consumers of the credentials appreciated and supported the tamper-evident and portability of the credentials.

Challenges and Opportunities

Some of the challenges and opportunities identified from the experience include:

Challenges	Opportunities
❖ Onboarding participants unfamiliar with digital wallets required time and guidance. ❖ Standardizing credentials across diverse entrepreneurial experiences is complex, providing challenges for systems that require self-assertions and endorsements.	❖ Integrating credentials into funding and procurement platforms to unlock new value. ❖ Scaling the model to include employer and investor validation. ❖ Building bridges between informal learning and recognized credential ecosystems.

Recommendations

Recommendations for next steps from the pilot include:

- ❖ **Invest in onboarding:** Provide step-by-step guidance and live support to help women founders adopt digital wallets and understand the value of their credentials.
- ❖ **Elevate community learning:** Continue using communities of practice to anchor learning in lived experiences and relationships.
- ❖ **Expand credential utility:** Explore partnerships with funders and business accelerators to recognize Black Girl Ventures credentials in application and vetting processes.
- ❖ **Center equity in design:** Involve entrepreneurs in co-creating future credentials to ensure relevance and empowerment.

Conclusion

The Black Girl Ventures pilot represents a meaningful shift in how we recognize and support women entrepreneurs by valuing lived, work-based learning and equipping individuals with verifiable tools that travel with them. By combining the strength of community, the credibility of verifiable digital credentials, and the power of self-owned digital wallets, Black Girl Ventures is paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial future.

Sources

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Attribution

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People	Organizations
❖ Omi Bell ❖ Jasmine Edwards ❖ Julie Keane ❖ Kerri Lemoie ❖ Gillian Walsh	❖ Black Girl Ventures (BGV) ❖ Participate ❖ Digital Credentials Consortium (DCC)

Appendix: Interoperability Profile

Project teams shared information about the open standards and protocols they used to support interoperability and integration of the end-to-end experience.

Category	Item	Implementation
Product Stack	Issuer Product(s)	Participate
	Holder Credential Management Product(s)	Learner Credential Wallet
	Verifier Product(s)	DCC VerifierPlus
Identifiers	Issuer Identifier Type	did:key ; did:web
	Holder Identifier Type	did:key, did:web
	Verifier Identifier Type	None
Credential Model	VC Data Model Version	VCDM 1.1
	Credential Specification	Open Badges 3.0
	Skill Alignment	Not specified
	Metadata Extensions (e.g., CTDL)	None
	Skills Library or Framework Used	BGV Learning Framework
Security	VC Proof Type / Cryptosuite	Ed25519Signature2020
	Credential Status Method	Bitstring Status List 1.0
	Credential Expiration	None
	Credential Refresh Method	None
	Issuer Authority Confirmation	None

Category	Item	Implementation
Authentication	Holder Authentication Method	DID Auth via VCALM Exchanges , DID Auth via CHAPI
	Delivery Protocol to Holder	VCALM Exchanges, Learner Credential Wallet deep link
Delivery	VC Export Options	Download JSON
	Presentation Protocol Supported	CHAPI (Presentation Request for OB)
Registries & Discovery	Issuer Registry	DCC Community Registry
	Verifier Registry	None

Source: This Interoperability Profile Template was developed by LWYL Studio from interoperability frameworks developed by Project Unicorn, 2023; CBEN, 2022; SkillsFWD, 2024; EDL, 2024; and LWYL Studio, 2025.