Defining and Measuring Success

Defining success in an emerging field like LERs is inherently difficult. At the outset of the grant period, there were few real-world implementations to serve as benchmarks. As a result, success had to be defined in real time. This required setting hypotheses, testing assumptions, and learning what was both valuable and feasible within the grant timeframe. Compounding this challenge, each grantee pursued a distinct use case shaped by its local ecosystem. While all projects focused on LER implementation, differences in partners, goals, and contexts meant that success could not be measured uniformly. Metrics that made sense for one project were not always relevant or realistic for another.

What We Learned

Establish metrics, but remain flexible. Establishing milestones at the start of a project is essential, but the inability to meet an initial target should not be viewed as failure. Instead, adjustments often signal an opportunity to learn, adapt, and refine the approach. As projects evolved, grantees gained clarity on what outcomes were realistic and which measures best reflected value. Many adjusted their use cases in response to user feedback, partner engagement, or logistical constraints. These shifts required redefining success over time. In practice, both the problem being addressed and the metrics used to assess progress must remain flexible, particularly as engagement shifts among l/earners, employers, states, and education partners.

Grantee Example

ACCELERATE MT

Grantees defined and measured success in ways that reflected their local conditions and responses from target users. For example, while the Accelerate Montana team had planned to leverage LERs to support the small business community with hiring, through user research they found that hiring was not the most pressing issue for these employers - it was retention and talent management. As a result of this discovery, they modified their use case and objectives to support employers with their most pressing needs. Instead of measuring hiring facilitated by LERs, they identified new metrics that resonated more with their target employer group.

How to Apply It

Plan for change. In innovative and rapidly evolving spaces like LER implementation, objectives will shift. Changes may be driven by user needs, partner readiness, or political and policy dynamics. Building adaptability into project plans from the start is critical.

Track multiple dimensions of progress. Relying on a single metric, such as adoption volume, can obscure important signals of success. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data provides essential context and supports more informed decision-making as well as a more thorough means of sharing the project's full story. Success may take the form of a policy win, a strengthened partnership, or increased trust among stakeholders. Using a Dimensions of Progress framework that values relationships and trust-building alongside numeric outputs helps capture this full picture.

Helpful Resources

- SkillsFWD Research & Discovery (R&D) Metrics - This is the table with the metrics SkillsFWD grantees tracked throughout the project that enable comparison and recognize variation across use cases. These metrics can be modified or added to depending on use cases.
- SkillsFWD Action Plan and Reporting Template - This is a flexible tool used by grantees to track progress toward self-defined milestones. It was designed to be iterative and allow for goals to be modified over time while documenting how and why changes occur.
- T3 LER Toolkit: Evaluation Plan - This tool can be used to identify, track, and monitor key metrics across project activities and partners, ensuring alignment on KPIs, supporting reporting needs, and improving outcomes.