Expectation vs. Reality

SkillsFWD was designed, in large part, as an opportunity to test assumptions about LERs and to identify what truly works in practice. While some of the expectations we brought into the initiative did not fully materialize, the process of testing these assumptions yielded valuable lessons. By confronting the gap between our initial expectations and the realities of implementation, we gained insights that will help guide future investments, refine strategies, and equip the ecosystem with more realistic expectations and practical tools to address the challenges uncovered.

Stakeholder Enagement

Successful LER implementation requires explicit engagement and buy-in from relevant stakeholders with a clear, shared vision for how to integrate with existing initiatives.

Expectation

Teams with demonstrated success facilitating sector strategy and skills-based initiatives can easily engage the same partners to implement LERs.

Reality

LERs don't automatically plug into existing initiatives, even if priorities seem to be aligned.

Technology

Organizations must set the expectation that the design and buildout phase will be resource-intensive and take longer than anticipated before any credentials can be issued.

Expectation

LER technology was ready to go and could be implemented quickly.

Reality

Most vendors did not have production-ready LER technology and those that did, were not ready to incorporate user feedback as grantees needed. This required grantees to invest significant time working with their vendors to get technology to a place where it would meet grant expectations and be most useful for their target users.

Employee Adoption

True employer engagement involves understanding the HR systems adoption landscape and recognizing that employers often cannot circumvent their existing infrastructure.

Expectation

If an employer expresses interest in LERs, they are ready to leverage them in their hiring processes.

Reality

"Just because they said they wanted to, doesn't mean they could." Operational realities like established hiring systems, training investments, and rigid processes make it challenging for many employers to adopt LERs even if they say they want to.

L/Earner Adoption

User engagement must inform the project from the beginning. Success requires leading with human benefit and investing heavily in socialization and training.

Expectation

L/earners will readily understand how LERs can benefit them and will be eager to use them.

Reality

L/earners are largely unfamiliar with LERs and do not immediately see the value proposition. Targeted socialization and training efforts are key in driving adoption.

Sustainability

Strategic investment, coupled with strong demonstrated value and long-term planning for ongoing costs can create the foundation for long-term sustainability and scale of LERs.

Expectation

A substantial investment in LER implementation over a discrete period of time is a sufficient catalyst for sustainability and scale.

Reality

The initial investment required to get an LER implementation established is indeed disproportionate compared to the ongoing costs. However, sustainability is dependent on stakeholder interest and capacity to continue to invest in ongoing maintenance as well as demonstrated alignment with institutional priorities.