Budgeting and Sustainable Funding

It can be very difficult to answer the question “How much does it cost to implement a LER?” because there are so many factors at play. While the technology is a significant portion of the cost, robust implementation also requires dedicated time from project leadership, funds to support user testing, and marketing to drive broad-scale adoption. Even the cost of technology can vary significantly depending on whether a project is able to leverage and build upon some existing legacy systems, is implementing a new technology, or is working with a vendor to build a custom solution from scratch. To date, LERs have been predominantly funded through philanthropy and it is not clear what sources will be best positioned to provide sustainable funding moving forward.

What We Learned

The way grantees spent their funding varied significantly depending on what investments they had made prior to the grant period as well as the scope and scale of their projects. One thing was consistent across all projects though: significant investment is required to get an LER implementation off the ground and ongoing investment is required to achieve sustainability and scale. The primary factor that impacted the up-front costs of technology was the level of customization expected. Building a new technology from scratch and robust user testing both require significant investment. However, this may lead to a better user experience in the long term.

Grantee Example

Many grantees chose to align their demonstrations with long-standing partnerships and initiatives. Aspyr, in partnership with Columbus City Schools, chose to build LER technology upon the district’s existing career and college readiness system, SchooLinks. This allowed them to leverage the existing functionality SchooLinks offered in career planning and have confidence that the partnership with this vendor would continue beyond the end of the grant period, enabling ongoing access to the LER technology created. This approach was a win-win for SchooLinks as they now have created new functionality within their platform that they can offer and sell to their other clients across the country.

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How to Apply It

Plan for significant upfront costs and ongoing maintenance costs. Before you invest in building a new technology, make sure that there is a plan to maintain and scale it once it is implemented. Those upfront costs are both in technology and all the work that goes into building the LER ecosystem. In order to achieve real returns on that up-front investment, there must be some ongoing support to keep it up and running. Reaching broad adoption takes time, and though that is not the most expensive part, investment is required.

Consider how to align with existing platforms and initiatives. The best way to minimize upfront costs and to ensure ongoing financial support is to leverage existing technology platforms and align with broader institutional or regional initiatives. For example, it may be possible to build LER technology upon an existing learning management or digital credentialing system for which a long-term contract is already in place. Or, there may be a sector strategies initiative with long-term funding allocated that could benefit from leveraging LERs.

Helpful Resources

- LER Funding Guide—This resource was created in partnership with SkillsFWD grantees and includes a breakdown of the types of costs associated with LER implementation and questions teams should consider to help determine the overall cost of a specific initiative.
- SkillsFWD Budgeting Template—This is the template SkillsFWD grantees used to plan for spending their funds. It includes both a table for planning spending over time and for a more detailed breakdown based on the use of funds.
- T3 LER Toolkit: Sample Budget—This tool can be used at a starting point for budget creation and modified to meet project needs. It includes guidance to consider around each component.