Building an Ecosystem

Our grantees had the opportunity to be at the forefront of implementing a novel technology in an emerging space. While this put them in an exciting position of leadership, it also meant there were many eyes on them, wanting to learn from their successes and challenges alike. It was important to the SkillsFWD team that these grantees gained as much as they were contributing to the broader ecosystem and that there was sufficient context provided around the challenges they faced to ensure takeaways would truly benefit long-term success of the ecosystem. Furthermore, in this emerging space, there are many ideas about the best way to do things. There is a delicate balance of developing a community that adheres to certain standards and expectations that enable interoperability and scale while still appreciating the value of developing solutions that meet the needs of specific communities and fostering innovation.

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

The long-term success of the LER ecosystem will depend on both strong relationships and clear guidance within and across demonstrations. The Alabama Talent Triad illustrates how these elements can work together. Prior to SkillsFWD, the state passed legislation mandating the statewide implementation of an LER and talent marketplace and established a dedicated team to coordinate stakeholders around that goal. This combination of clear policy direction and sustained relationship-building enabled Alabama to achieve broad engagement with both learners and employers by leveraging its statewide network of workforce boards and educational institutions.

ALABAMA TALENT TRIAD

How to Apply It

Foster relationships across the ecosystem. As the LER ecosystem continues to grow, creating intentional spaces for shared learning and collaboration is essential. Organizations embarking on LER implementation should proactively connect with peers who are further along, those implementing in parallel, and subject matter experts and researchers with deep experience in areas such as interoperability, user research, and employer engagement. Leveraging existing knowledge across the ecosystem strengthens individual efforts and accelerates progress toward a more cohesive and sustainable LER landscape.

Appreciate the vulnerability of being an early innovator. Innovation is inherently messy, and when you go first, your successes, and challenges, are often under a microscope. Meanwhile, in these early stages, shared efforts are critical and reveal lessons that those who follow can learn from. We should celebrate those who are bold enough to be at the cutting edge and value the lessons we learn from them.

Helpful Resources

- LER Project Showcase - This site highlights many existing LER projects and is a great way to see organizations involved in implementation and can be a resource for connecting with others who have experience in this space.
- T3 LER Ecosystem Map - T3's LER Ecosystem Map was a foundational component of SkillsFWD's design and highlights many of the key stakeholders in the LER ecosystem and the roles they play.
- SmartResume SmartReport LER Ecosystem Map - This report, updated annually outlines the organizations and companies involved in issuing, sharing, and consuming LER data in the United States.