02. The Team

The SkillsFWD initiative was carried out by a nimble team of contractors working in close coordination to support grantees and advance the initiative's objectives. Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) serves as the initiative's operational foundation and fiscal sponsor. The contractor team was responsible for the day-to-day execution of the work, serving as the primary interface with grantees and ecosystem stakeholders.

Organized to align with the core functions of the initiative, the SkillsFWD Team operated as an integrated set of partners delivering implementation support, evaluation and reporting, technical and user experience assessment, and communications. The specific roles and responsibilities of each group are detailed in the sections that follow: **Project Implementation, Research and Discovery, Technology** and **IUX Assessment, and Communications.**



Communications Team

The Conquer Company

The Conquer Company is a marketing and branding agency that helps mission-driven organizations in education, workforce, and tech communicate complex ideas with clarity and impact. Founded by Thania Guardino, a marketing strategist with 15+ years of experience, the agency specializes in messaging, branding, stakeholder communications, and go-to-market strategy that drives adoption, builds trust, and moves missions forward.

Conquer Company supported communications efforts by helping translate early project insights into accessible narratives, promoting initiative updates and resources, contributing to newsletter development, and strengthening SkillsFWD's digital presence to elevate the initiative's brand and engagement within the learning and workforce ecosystem.

SINA Communications

SINA Communications is a strategic communications firm specializing in helping mission-driven organizations amplify their voice across the education, workforce, technology, and social impact landscape. They bring deep expertise in strategic storytelling, stakeholder engagement, digital and social strategy, and thought leadership that aligns complex topics with audience needs and sector opportunities.

SINA supported the initiative's communications and branding by developing the SkillsFWD brand, logo, and look and feel, designing and maintaining the initiative's website, surfacing early findings from grantee projects to inform the broader ecosystem, promoting grantee achievements and resources, building a robust digital media presence, identifying opportunities for representation at key events and conferences, and fostering ongoing engagement through newsletters and polished communication materials for funders and stakeholders.

Goals

- Communicate early findings, emerging lessons, and grantee updates and resources to inform and advance broader ecosystem efforts.
- Develop and maintain a strong digital media presence that clearly communicates SkillsFWD's purpose, progress, and value to the field.
- Use newsletters and other channels to support regular communication and sustained engagement with stakeholders across the broader ecosystem.
- Identify and support opportunities to share SkillsFWD insights and grantee successes at relevant events and conferences.
- Support creation of clear, consistent, and high-quality communications tailored to funders and other key stakeholders.

Approach

The Communications Team worked in close partnership with the Project Team to establish a clear, coordinated approach to sharing information about SkillsFWD. Together, the teams determined what to communicate and when, established processes for ongoing communications, and identified opportunities to engage the broader learning and workforce ecosystem. This collaboration ensured that communications were timely, accurate, and aligned with project milestones, funder priorities, and grantee progress.

Through a mix of digital media, newsletters, and targeted outreach, the Communications Team shared early findings, emerging lessons, grantee updates, and relevant resources to inform and advance work across the ecosystem. The team maintained a strong digital presence to clearly articulate SkillsFWD's purpose, progress, and value, while also supporting opportunities to highlight insights and grantee successes at events and conferences. In addition, the team developed clear, consistent, and high-quality communications tailored to funders and other key stakeholders, helping sustain engagement and support continued investment in this space.

Lessons Learned

- **Time communications to match project maturity.** Meaningful insights did not emerge immediately. It took several months for grantee work to reach a stage where lessons were concrete and credible. Effective communications required patience and intentional timing, ensuring findings were shared once they were sufficiently developed rather than rushing early narratives.
- **Lead with context to meet audiences where they are.** Understanding of the LER ecosystem varied widely across audiences, from those with deep familiarity to those encountering the concept for the first time. Communications needed to balance advancing the conversation for informed stakeholders while providing enough context for newcomers to engage without confusion.
- **Balancing diverse perspectives is essential to maintain clear communication.** Communicating within a complex ecosystem required balancing the priorities, perspectives, and levels of influence of many different stakeholders. Effective messaging depended on maintaining a clear and consistent narrative while adapting tone and emphasis to resonate across audiences without fragmenting the core message.
- **User-centered storytelling strengthens relevance and clarity.** Communications were most effective when grounded in the real experiences of learners, employers, and practitioners. Prioritizing human-centered narratives helped translate complex or unfamiliar concepts into relatable stories that demonstrated value in practical terms. Data and research findings were most impactful when used to complement these stories rather than replace them.
- **Sustained, multi-channel engagement requires intentional investment.** Reaching a diverse and distributed ecosystem required consistent communication across multiple channels over time. Maintaining this presence demanded significant coordination and effort, but it proved essential for building awareness, trust, and credibility. A steady cadence of content reinforced key messages and ensured that insights reached audiences where they were most likely to engage.

Helpful Resources

- **Badge Summit Poster Template** - This is the template teams used to present on their projects at the Badge Summit in July 2025. It can serve as a guide as to the type of information key stakeholders may be interested in as your project progresses.
- **FWD Thinking** - This brief summarizes themes that emerged in grantee projects each quarter throughout the grant period. It was the primary way we shared cohort-wide lessons as work was ongoing.

