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.**



Resesarch & Development Team



Christi Harter, PhD
Research & Discovery Lead

Dr. Christi Harter is the Assistant Vice President of Professional and Continuing Education at Eastern Washington University, where she leads strategy and innovation for lifelong learning, workforce-aligned education, and adult learner engagement. She brings deep experience in research, evaluation, and translating institutional data into actionable insights that inform program design and impact.

Christi served as the lead grant evaluator, guiding the research and discovery process from assessment design through final insights and reporting to capture grantee progress, outcomes, and lessons learned.



Tara Diggs, PhD
Research and Discovery Co-Lead

Dr. Tara Riggs is a research and evaluation professional who was most recently a Research Associate at Manhattan Strategy Group, where she supported data analysis and reporting for large-scale education and workforce initiatives. She brings strong experience in qualitative and quantitative analysis, synthesis of grantee data, and translating findings into clear, funder-ready insights.

Tara supported the research and discovery process by analyzing grantee reports and compiling data into cohesive findings and reports for funders, helping surface cross-cutting insights and evidence of impact.

Goals

- Support grantees in defining and measuring success within their projects and across the cohort, so that outcomes are meaningful, actionable, and comparable.
- Build confidence and understanding of interoperable LER ecosystems, helping grantees design and implement systems that adhere to open standards.
- Share insights on how digital records and LER tools can advance equitable, lifelong learning and improve economic mobility.
- Provide funders and SkillsFWD leadership with timely, accurate reporting on cohort progress, challenges, and lessons learned to inform future investments.

Approach

The R&D process unfolded over four phases spanning January 2024 through December 2025, each building upon each other and with a distinct objectives and activities:

- **Project Initiation and Baseline Discovery** (January – April 2024): Developing preliminary project plans, convening grantees, and establishing the R&D Charter and reporting templates.
- **Implementation and Initial Data Collection** (May – July 2024): Beginning data collection, meeting with grantees to learn about scopes of work, and generating preliminary findings.
- **Refining** (August 2024 – August 2025): Refining data collection points to demonstrate the full LER lifecycle and meeting with grantees to discuss refined scopes of work.
- **Final Reporting** (September – December 2025): Preparing data for the final report, sharing refined findings, and publishing the final evaluation report in December 2025.

Approach (cont'd)

Objectives and Dimensions of Progress

The R&D process was guided by five Dimensions of Progress (DOP) established and agreed upon by the grantees as a strategy for narrating progress in the form of ongoing "stories" about each grantee project. The DOP were established in alignment with the five SkillsFWD objectives set out in the RFP. The DOP were:

- Relationships and Trust-Building (Internal and External)
- Surprises and Hard-Won Lessons
- Sustainability
- Measures/Counts
- Infrastructure Design, Buildout, and Interoperability

Methodology

The R&D evaluation employed a combination of developmental and fidelity evaluation techniques to capture both adaptive learning and adherence to project plans. Analysis drew on multiple data sources, including grantee action plans, quarterly responses to objective-related questions, data submissions aligned with the LER Ecosystem Map, and direct conversations with grantees. R&D Leads established by each grantee provided ongoing updates during monthly meetings and produced in-depth quarterly reports to monitor progress and inform technical assistance. A standardized set of metrics, aligned with the SkillsFWD RFP and the LER Ecosystem Map, was used to benchmark progress across key areas, including system performance, learner adoption, employer adoption, and impact.

Lessons Learned

- **Set clear expectations for team engagement,** Robust data collection requires dedicated focus in addition to regular responsibilities. Teams should recognize that this work often takes more time and commitment than anticipated.
- **Clarify data sharing expectations.** Sharing data can feel vulnerable. To build confidence, it is essential to communicate what information is needed, how it will be used, and who will have access.
- **Use an LER ecosystem map as an evaluation framework.** Involving all stakeholders in research and discovery ensures a comprehensive understanding of the system and supports meaningful evaluation.
- **Trust is essential and takes time to build.** Convening the team in person at the start of the grant period helps align on shared values and establish relationships. As trust grew, grantees felt comfortable sharing insights informally, providing valuable perspectives beyond formal evaluation channels.
- **Be explicit in communication.** Clearly articulate expectations and avoid assumptions about roles, responsibilities, or processes to prevent misunderstandings.

Helpful Resources

- R&D Metrics Template - SkillsFWD grantees reported on these metrics throughout the project to enable comparison and recognize variation across use cases. These metrics can be modified or added to depending on use cases.
- 6 Month Reporting Template - Three times during the grant period, grantees reported on progress toward their action plans and how each step was related to the R&D dimensions of progress. Through this process they identified what was working and revised their action plans as needed to stay on track toward meeting their project goals.
- R&D Questions - The R&D team crafted questions to capture grantees' progress and learnings as their projects evolved throughout the grant period. Questions for each quarter are associated with a distinct phase of work and objective for that time.
- R&D Timeline and Process - The R&D Team worked collaboratively with the grantees to develop a timeline and process to capture learnings throughout the grant period as projects progressed. This can be used as reference for teams looking to develop their own process.

