03. Case Studies

The diverse ways LERs are being explored, implemented, and scaled across the SkillsFWD grantees.

While all projects shared a common commitment to advancing skills-based practices and interoperable digital records, each was shaped by distinct community needs, institutional contexts, and strategic priorities. As a result, the teams pursued different use cases, assembled different partnerships, and encountered unique challenges that required adaptive approaches.

Each case study is organized to provide a clear view into these efforts, including the project's background and origins, the partners and roles that formed the project team, a description of implementation and key milestones, major takeaways and lessons learned, and plans for sustaining and expanding the work. Together, these case studies illustrate that there is no single path to LER implementation. Instead, successful efforts are grounded in intentional design, strong relationships, and solutions tailored to the learners, workers, employers, and systems they are meant to serve.





COLORADO FWD

Address talent shortages by equipping learners and workers with aggregated access to their learn and work achievements allowing them to make their skills more visible and better match to open work and learning opportunities.

CWDC

Serving healthcare employers and workers

Background

The Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) entered the SkillsFWD initiative as a long-standing leader in the skills-based movement and sector strategies. In the years leading up to the grant, they had pursued significant exploratory work in the LER space, including participation in the 2023 National Governors Association's Skills-Driven States Community of Practice and early testing of interoperability across statewide learning and workforce systems. These efforts revealed how essential user-centered design, employer engagement and seamless system integration would be for a successful LER implementation.

Through SkillsFWD, CWDC and partners aimed to pair skills-first approaches with LER infrastructure to make the skills and competencies of healthcare learners and workers visible while facilitating more efficient matching among skilled talent and available jobs in behavioral health through the use of interoperable data and technology systems. The team prioritized deep user engagement, partnering with Live What You Love Studios to facilitate a process to inform the development of an LER ecosystem grounded in user needs. CWDC sought technology vendors that would build collaboratively, respond to user input, and integrate with existing systems and programs. To meet these needs, CWDC engaged SpruceID because of their willingness to co-develop skills-based LER capabilities and their interoperability and data privacy practices in the digital identity space and iQ4 because of their demonstrated success with increasing talent visibility and mobility.

Team

Colorado Workforce Development Council

Team Lead

Established project vision, engaged partners, facilitated project management.

cha Colorado Hospital Association

Employer Engagement Lead

Facilitated connections to healthcare employers to support sector-specific learning.

COLORADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Credentialing

Issued skills-based microcredentials in behavioral health

WORKFORCE COLORADO | PIKES PEAK WORKFORCE CENTER

Local User Engagement

Accelerated adoption of skills-first practices and facilitated local user engagement.

WORKFORCE COLORADO WORKFORCE BOULDER COUNTY

Local User Engagement

Accelerated adoption of skills-first practices and facilitated local user engagement.

COLORADO Department of Health Care Policy & Financing

Governance &Credentialing

Provided insight on healthcare credentialing processes and issued skills-based credentials in direct care.

LIVE WHAT YOU LOVE

User Engagement & Consulting

Led user engagement and research and evaluation efforts.

COLORADO SUCCEEDS

Support

Served as fiscal sponsor on behalf of CWDC.

SpruceID

Technology Partner

Created technological infrastructure for ColoradoFWD.

IQ4

Technology Partner

Created technological infrastructure for ColoradoFWD.

Implemenation

Colorado is known as a leader in education and workforce innovation. This allowed the ColoradoFWD demonstration to build upon early progress driven by the adoption of skills-first practices, apprenticeships and work-based learning as key strategies. In 2024, the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) introduced the Qualified Behavioral Health Assistant (QBHA) credential, a stackable into a behavioral health pathway that created a more affordable onramp to behavioral health careers. To accelerate this progress, the ColoradoFWD team partnered with CCCS to issue the QBHA to incumbent workers as a verifiable credential, featuring evidence of skills. In addition to issuing the credential, the team engaged workers to understand the data within the credential and explore how individuals might use the credential to advance their careers or access additional training opportunities. The demonstration revealed both the promise and challenges of moving from traditional digital badges to verifiable, privacy-preserving credentials, highlighting needed shifts in data and technology governance support adoption and greater user agency.

The Colorado team leveraged an intentional user-centered design approach in their work. Instead of starting with a predefined technology or system, the team anchored its work in a discovery-focused stage dedicated to deeply understanding the needs, workflows, and constraints of learners, jobseekers, employers, and regional practitioners. Through interviews, journey mapping, and co-design sessions, they uncovered the friction points that individuals experienced when navigating education and employment transitions. These insights validated the need for portable, verified records and gave shape to the functionality and user pathways that would guide subsequent development.

The Colorado Hospital Association (CHA) was key in facilitating employer engagement to ensure their needs were centered in the solution. User research and collaborative design sessions revealed that healthcare employers faced persistent challenges related to verifying primary source documents, particularly licenses, certifications, identity information, and training credentials. Employers emphasized that slow or inconsistent verification processes delays hiring and onboarding, sometimes preventing qualified candidates from entering high-demand roles. In response, the team engaged regulatory bodies to understand requirements for primary source verification and incorporated workflows and technical capabilities to enable verification in future phases. This established a strong foundation for secure, authoritative validation and future scaling beyond healthcare.

The team partnered with several local workforce areas and the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP), to demonstrate and test how skills-based verifiable LERs could strengthen recognition of worker essential skills, job-seeking skills, workforce development service delivery, employer engagement, and job seeker empowerment. These demonstrations emphasized the desire for simple, mobile-friendly solutions with strong privacy controls and clear information sharing permissions. They also revealed how issuing skill-based, verifiable LERs could enhance as well as limit the validation, verification, and visibility of skills and experiences; and the parameters and conditions needed for compliance, sustainability, and scale. In total, demonstrations reached more than 41,000 people statewide and issued 532 verifiable digital credentials. Across eight demonstration sites and five special-interest groups the team observed a 62% claim rate, underscoring both demand for and ongoing support needs associated with skills-based, verifiable LERs.

From the outset, the team intended to integrate their solutions with statewide data and technology infrastructure. Their goal was to make verified records interoperable with technology Coloradans already use, like the MyColorado digital wallet, which can store drivers licenses and other important records. While policy, technical, and governance barriers limited integration during the grant period, the team ensured the technology was designed for future interoperability through flexible architectures, APIs and modular components.

Toward the end of the grant period CWDC launched the “Skills-First Local Workforce Board Challenge,” inviting boards statewide to propose how they would leverage LERs and skills-first practices within their region. Nine of ten boards submitted proposals, indicating a strong statewide interest, even beyond the pilot regions. By building upon existing strategies, maintaining a strong commitment to user experience, engaging regional partners from the start, and building future-ready technology anchored in skills and competencies, the Colorado team created a scalable model grounded in real user needs and positioned for statewide interoperability.

Insights for the field

Adoption of skills-based LERs depends on people-first design, solution readiness, and integration with existing systems. ColoradoFWD showed that leading with the needs of learners, workers, employers, and the organizations that support them—while ensuring accessibility, privacy, security, and ease of use—and collaborating across established partners and platforms is essential to building trust, sustaining participation, and minimizing the burden of adoption.

Testing specific workflows reveals where skills-based LERs can create real value. Through 22 months of issuing and using skill-based, verifiable LERs and wallet technologies in live healthcare and workforce workflows, ColoradoFWD provided useful insights to move the state from concept to implementation. The team uncovered where LERs can improve skill visibility, portability, and trust in healthcare hiring and onboarding, and where solutions must mature to meet the operational, regulatory, and user demands of real-world systems.

Looking ahead

Moving forward, CWDC plans to leverage insights gained through their demonstration to enhance their governance approach, refine data frameworks, and amplify communications to promote more broad-scale adoption of LERs. So long as state budget shortfalls limit the possibility of robust funding at the state level, the team is pursuing creative, low-cost, high-impact strategies that align with existing programs to leverage existing staff and resources. This may include supporting local workforce boards to implement the plans they submitted in their proposals for the Skills-First Local Workforce Board Challenge and coordinating efforts to enhance skills-visibility in new and emerging industries.
new and emerging industries.