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.





MYCAREERFORWARD PITTSBURGH

MyCareerForward aims to provide the Pittsburgh region with next-level, skills-based, talent matching and allow l/earners to stack skills into higher-level skills and credentials for career progression and improved economic position.

CAEL

Serving ALICE Workers in Pittsburgh

Background

MyCareerForward is designed to align regional partners to better support adult learners along the full education-to-employment journey. Its inaugural site is the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County region, where a significant share of adults without postsecondary education struggle to earn a living wage. To address these disparities, CAEL has been building a coordinated network of community-based organizations (CBOs) serving the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) population, employers seeking skilled talent, and data partners who can help track outcomes and guide continuous improvement.

Before the SkillsFWD grant period, CAEL identified the banking sector as a high-demand industry well-positioned to offer quality jobs. They conducted foundational labor market research, validated career pathways with employers, and mapped priority skills aligned to local hiring needs. CAEL then partnered with the Energy Innovation Center Institute's BankWork$ program, a credentialed training initiative preparing learners for banking roles. With these relationships, data insights, and training infrastructure in place, the team saw an opportunity to introduce LERs to help facilitate skills-based connections between l/earners and employment opportunities.

Team

Project Lead

Established project vision, engaged partners, facilitated project management.

Career Navigators

Facilitated connections to prospective l/earner participants and supporting their use of LERs.

Career Navigators

Facilitated connections to prospective l/earner participants and supporting their use of LERs.

Co-Lead & Employer Convener

Facilitated connections with employers committed to diversifying their workforce.

Credentialing Issuer

Training provider piloted the building of a digital credential and providing first cohort of users to utilize the MCF LER.

Technology Partner

Provided platform for l/earner career exploration.

Technology Partner

Provided technology that enables students to store, share and verify digital credentials.

Technology Partner

Served as the platform for issuing credentials.

Technology Partner

Provided technology used to build metrics dashboard.

Implemenation

Throughout the SkillsFWD grant period, the CAEL team focused on expanding capacity and strengthening connections across Pittsburgh's workforce ecosystem by introducing an end-to-end LER solution. Operating under the banner "MyCareerForward Pittsburgh," the team worked to align employers, CBOs, and technology partners around a shared approach to skills visibility and talent mobility.

The project began with intensive employer engagement to identify which roles were best suited for a skills-based hiring pilot connected to the BankWork$ curriculum. Vibrant Pittsburgh, a regional coalition of employers committed to advancing diverse talent, played a central role in convening banking-sector partners. These employers helped validate in-demand skills and shape clear career pathways, reinforcing confidence that the system reflected real hiring needs. As a result, the group identified three target occupations, defined the core skills required, and collaborated with BankWork$ to build a digital credential that reflected the alignment of the training to employer validated skills needed for these roles.

CAEL selected Canvas Credentials (now Parchment Digital Badges) as the credentialing platform and SmartResume as the tool for managing and sharing LERs. CAEL collaborated closely with both vendors to adopt all necessary standards and practices to ensure interoperability and a seamless user experience. This integration created a seamless pathway: learners could earn badges through Canvas Credentials, transfer them directly into SmartResume, and make their verified skills visible to employers through SmartResume's Talent Marketplace. They then created training materials for learners, employers, and CBO staff to help them understand how to access the value provided by these tools.

In order to engage the ALICE population in accessing the training opportunity through Bankwork$ and new LER tools available, CAEL activated a network of CBOs that collectively serve thousands of learners each year. These partners agreed to introduce learners to LERs, SmartResume, and the Talent Marketplace as part of their career navigation and job placement services. They also launched digital marketing campaigns and localized career exploration tools in the Skillup platform. SkillUp allowed them to track these engagements and adjust messaging based on age and role interest.

To monitor progress and support continuous improvement, the team partnered with AGS Prime to build a shared data dashboard to aggregate insights across participating organizations. Developed collaboratively with ecosystem partners, the dashboard is designed to illuminate patterns in learner engagement, credential use, and hiring outcomes generating the insights needed to refine the system and guide future scaling.







Insights for the Field

Community-based organizations serve as valuable intermediaries.
If we want to be sure LERs serve those who stand to benefit the most, CBOs help to reach those populations. The Pittsburgh- based CBOs that CAEL has partnered with have longstanding experience serving the ALICE population and hard-earned trust as a result. This positions these organizations well to support this population in adopting emerging technology like LERs.

Employers committed to diversifying their workforce are promising early adopters.
LERs can be used to help surface candidates to employers that they might not reach through traditional channels. The CAEL team's partnership with Vibrant Pittsburgh facilitated connections with employers who were interested in diversifying their workforce and open to new strategies to do so. When employers are looking to reach new populations, LERs can help them identify individuals within them that have the skills they need.



Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the CAEL team looks toward moving beyond the banking sector to add additional credentialing pathways to scale their project into the IT, advanced manufacturing, and energy sectors. CAEL also plans to partner with local higher education institutions to facilitate credit for prior learning to enable their participants to continue their education with recognition of the skills they already have. They will also launch the dashboard they have been working to create which will allow them to continue to build this initiative and maximize impact by leveraging data-driven insights.