



UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

CONVEYING SKILLS AND
COMPETENCIES THROUGH LEARNING
AND EMPLOYMENT RECORDS (LERs)

A white paper from the LER Accelerator





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About the LER Accelerator

The **LER Accelerator** is a coalition of higher education stakeholders that seeks to promote the adoption of Learning and Employment Records (LERs) in postsecondary education by addressing various challenges hindering their implementation. The coalition aims to create awareness of the need for skills-centered credentials, develop guidelines for universal usage, foster collaboration among educational associations, and demonstrate successful models and examples that accelerate the creation and issuance of quality credentials in higher education.

Participating organizations include:



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education and workforce are shifting to skills-based learning and hiring, prompting higher education to align teaching, learning, and assessment practices to the competencies and skills their learners need and employers demand. This shift requires clearer communication between educators, learners, and employers to ensure learners can utilize the language of skills and competencies to demonstrate what they know and can do. Because skills and competencies are the foundation of Learning and Employment Records (LERs), LERs represent an innovative connector among employers and higher education institutions. By emphasizing achievement of specific learning outcomes, rather than courses and grades, LERs promote the transparent alignment of student success outcomes with workforce demands and provide much needed clarity of the specific learning and skills encompassed within a credential. Additionally, because LERs are owned by learners rather than by institutions, they serve to empower individuals to manage and share their credentials throughout their career.





INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, hiring practices among employers, including those in **22 states** and the federal government, have relied less on traditional hiring metrics, like grade point averages or degree attainment, and more on skills-based achievement. A skills-based approach prioritizes the competencies and skills individuals have developed across diverse environments, like education, the military, and the workplace, over long-standing measures like time in a job or years to a degree.

As a result, colleges and universities are evolving traditional transcripts into trusted digital records that provide verifiable evidence of the skills a learner has. Historically, transcripts have served as repositories of learning but often lacked explicit documentation of skills and competencies. To bridge this gap, **Learning and Employment Records (LERs)** are emerging as secure, digital records that capture academic achievements along with validated, demonstrated skills in a transparent and trusted format.

Employers are increasingly focused on developing partnerships with education institutions to better align learning with workforce needs. It is imperative for higher education institutions to understand employers' needs in order to effectively support learners in developing and articulating skills and competencies. Education institutions that ensure collaboration across education, employment, and support systems (e.g., advising and mentoring) are better able to create credential programs that lead to sustainable and thriving outcomes for learners.

This white paper describes the imperative for higher education institutions to translate learning into skills and competencies that learners can demonstrate and that employers value through LERs. Translating learning into skills and competencies is the foundation of LERs. By promoting skills and competencies as the measurements of learning, aligning learning with workforce demands, and being clear about the learning encompassed in a credential, educators, employers, policymakers, and institutions can build a strong foundation for the adoption and acceleration of LERs as a mechanism for empowering individuals to manage and share their credentials throughout their careers. Through the use of shared language and established frameworks, these stakeholders can create transparent, actionable credentials that bridge the gap between education and employment.



BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION

As the workforce shifts to skills-based hiring, **data reveal gaps in expectations** between what skills employers expect from their employees and what skills college graduates are demonstrating. While learners often believe their education has prepared them for the workforce, employers frequently identify shortcomings in areas like problem-solving and adaptability. Bridging these gaps requires adjusting higher education curricula and improving how educational outcomes are developed and communicated.

Moreover, the science of learning indicates that competencies are more than knowledge acquisition. There is a growing need to elevate the ways in which learners can apply knowledge, skills, and behaviors to solve problems within real-world contexts. **The key to bridging this gap lies in effectively converting measurements of learning—knowledge, skills, and behaviors demonstrated in diverse contexts—into meaningful credentials that resonate with employers and can be accumulated toward degree attainment and career advancement.** Using knowledge, skills, and behaviors as measurements of learning allows for more recognition of all forms of learning, making education more actionable for both learners and employers. This alignment between educational outcomes and workforce expectations opens more equitable career opportunities and ensures that learners are equipped with the skills needed for lifelong success.

Measuring learning through skills and competencies requires a trusted digital record that provides verifiable evidence of what learners know and can do. Learning and Employment Records (LERs) offer a solution, emerging as secure, digital records that not only capture academic achievements but also validate skills that learners can demonstrate and that employers value in a transparent and trusted format.



LANGUAGE MATTERS

The ability to use skills and competencies that employers recognize is the basis of LERs, but the absence of a shared vocabulary among educators, learners, and employers creates a barrier. **Language plays a critical role in education and workforce alignment, serving as the foundation for transparency and consistency across learning environments.**

Defining key terms and using consistent language across curricula, assessments, and credentials can enhance transparency, foster trust, and enable learners to effectively demonstrate their value to employers. We recommend the following definitions from the LER Accelerator in an effort to distinguish between terms that are often conflated:

KEY TERMS

Competency: The combination of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that an individual needs to perform a role successfully. The ability to integrate and contextually apply knowledge, skills, and psychosocial factors (e.g., beliefs, attitudes, values, and motivations) to consistently perform successfully.

Skill: A versatile term encompassing competencies, learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, values, or abilities relevant to learning and work. A skill communicates discrete, discernable value an individual can demonstrate or acquire.

Credential: An official document or digital record that validates an individual's achievements, knowledge, or skills. This can include degrees, diplomas, certificates, badges, licenses, microcredentials, professional certifications, and peer recognition or self-claims. Credentials can be issued by recognized authorities, such as industry organizations and associations, governments, and learning organizations, or by peers and self-attested.

Learning and Employment Record (LER): Lifelong, digital records that capture and communicate an individual's learning and employment information, including skills and competencies. LERs can document learning wherever it occurs and may include records of a person's credentials, degrees, learning, and employment history — including Comprehensive Learning Records (CLRs). LERs can refer to an individual digital record or a collection of multiple records and distinguish which records are verified and which records are not. Intended to bridge educational and employment spaces, LERs can provide a comprehensive view of an individual's skills and achievements.



CALL TO ACTION

Education and workforce are shifting to skills-based learning and hiring. This shift requires clearer communication between educators, learners, and employers, with education institutions adequately translating learning into skills and competencies that learners can demonstrate and that employers value. Doing so will empower individuals to manage and share their credentials throughout their careers.

To ensure every learner can navigate and succeed in the evolving education and workforce landscape, we call on stakeholders to:

1. PROMOTE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES AS MEASUREMENTS OF LEARNING.

Doing so allows learners to leverage previous learning and skills for career advancement and lifelong learning. It also positions higher education institutions as advocates for modern credentialing, fostering innovation and leadership in education. It encourages employers to engage in continuous learning and skills development, leading to a more adaptable and capable workforce.

2. ALIGN LEARNING WITH WORKFORCE DEMANDS.

Doing so ensures learners' educational achievements are relevant and applicable to current job market needs, improving employability. Aligning to workforce demands increases institutions' program credibility and helps employers ensure new hires possess the necessary skills for current and future industry demands.

3. BE CLEAR ABOUT THE LEARNING ENCOMPASSED IN A CREDENTIAL.

Doing so advances learners' confidence that their credentials accurately represent their skills, making them more marketable. It helps institutions improve transparency and trust in educational offerings, aiding recruitment and retention, and simplifies the hiring process for employers by making it easier to interpret credentials and qualifications.

By taking these collective actions, we can build a strong foundation for the adoption and acceleration of LERs, an innovation that empower individuals to manage and share their credentials throughout their careers.



LEARN MORE

About the LER Accelerator: The Accelerator initiative seeks to promote the adoption of Learning and Employment Records (LERs) in post-secondary education (PSE) by addressing various challenges hindering their implementation.

Principles of Learning and Employment Records (LER) Adoption, a coalition statement from the LER Accelerator.

LER Accelerator Inventory in the **Learn & Work Ecosystem Library**.

