

Messaging Guide:

Making the Case for Learning & Employment Records with Employers

April 2024



**UPSKILL
AMERICA**


 aspen institute

Table of Contents

- Introduction.....2
 - Messages Built for Advocates.....3
 - Beginning with the Basics.....4
- Defining the Right Message.....7
 - Target Message: Outcomes.....8
 - Target Audience: Employers.....10
- Crafting Compelling Content.....15
- Messaging Tips and Tactics.....22
 - Term Consistency.....23
 - Words to Say, Words to Avoid.....25
 - Reaching Employers Where They Are.....26
- A Call To Action.....27

A Note About Scope

There are many LER activities underway, and every LER model will benefit from deep engagement by employers. In the process of discussing LERs with employers over the course of the last year, we have gained insights about some design factors that most excite employers - where appropriate, we inserted those insights in this document. It is important to note that employers view LERs and the benefits of LERs primarily through their own lens - that is, the benefit to the business, its operations, and its employees. As a result, the messages that most resonate with employers are ones that play to employers' interests.

Employers we spoke to indicated a limited willingness to visit separate websites for individual profiles outside of applicant tracking systems. They are seeking means of identifying new groups of candidates, understanding skills profiles at-a-glance, and leveraging LERs for their own hiring and talent management needs. For LER programs and models that have been designed without prioritizing these employer-driven applications, this guide may be of limited value.

To download this guide, and for more information on making the employer case for LERs and Skills First strategies, visit www.upskillamerica.org.

Introduction

Over the last year, UpSkill America has held dozens of conversations and interviews with employers on the topic of Skills First approaches and specifically, employers' awareness, understanding, and challenges with Learning and Employment Records (LERs). While there is still much to learn about the impacts of these tools, and an ever-increasing pace of change in the skills-based movement, we share this guide to support the field's efforts to better engage employers in the design, development, and deployment of LERs.

A messaging guide can be a powerful tool to ensure your communications are consistent, clear, and targeted. This guide is designed to:

- Empower the stakeholders, including government, academic, and technical leaders who are developing and advocating for LER solutions, to communicate clearly and consistently about their tools and the value of these innovations.
- Enable more effective engagement of employers in LER pilots and expansion projects, particularly relating to skills-based hiring and talent management.
- Support employer involvement in discussions about LERs, the design and development of these tools, and integration with existing policies, practices, and processes.

This guide is organized around three key themes, relevant to anyone communicating about LERs and related topics, including digital credentials and Skills First talent management.

1) Defining the Right Message (and Messenger) for the Audience

Key messages land differently with different audiences based on their understanding, priorities, and previous exposure to topics. This guide will help you understand what resonates with specific groups, allowing you to tailor your message accordingly.

2) Crafting Compelling Content

This guide includes specific phrases, stories, and statistics that effectively convey and support vital aspects of the Skills First agenda and value of LERs to employer audiences.

3) Messaging Tips and Tactics

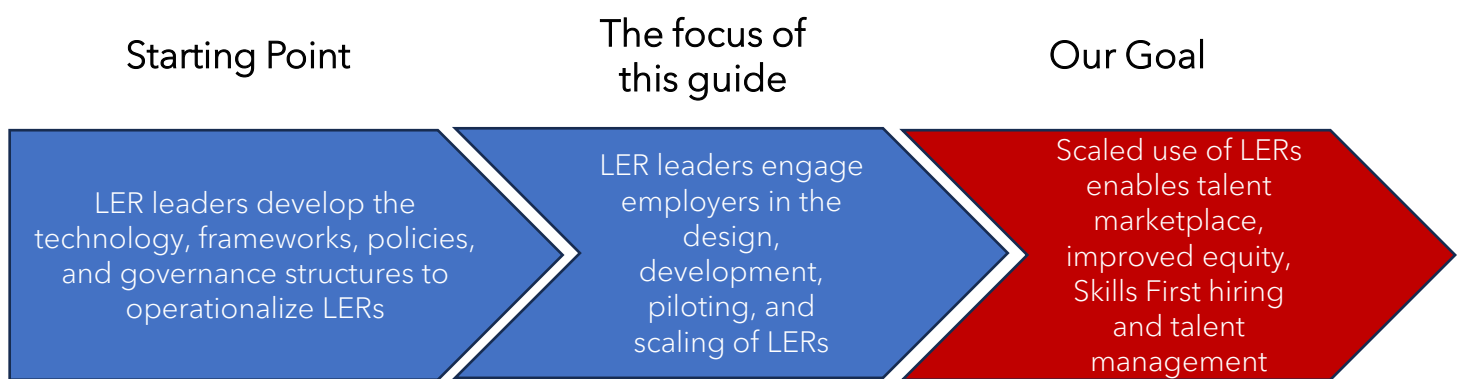
The guide includes insights supporting term consistency, words to use and avoid in communicating about LERs with employers, and ideas for reaching multiple employers with the same message.

Messages Built for Public, Non-Profit, and Academic Advocates

This guide is designed specifically for the anyone working in organizations designing, developing, and launching Learning and Employment Records, including public sector, non-profit, quasi-public, and academic entities, in their efforts to bring employers into conversations, pilots, demonstrations, and implementations. It may, too, be useful for organizations working to support the uptake and implementation of LERs and Skills First approaches among employers.

This guide does not directly address all the important work leading up to this point. Ideally, employers should be deeply involved in the design and development of LERs - indeed, it will be difficult to communicate with and engage employers in use of LERs if they have not influenced the design of these tools. We will, where appropriate, include tips about what employers value when they interact with LERs, but this information will not replace the relationships and trust that can be built when employers are consulted and heard as these tools are designed.

Our goal is to support advocates of LERs with information, resources, data, ideas, and visuals that are likely to resonate with people in talent, workforce strategy, and hiring roles in all sectors, and to help them consider how LERs may be helpful in supporting their talent goals and mitigating pain points. These messages, information, and resources are likely to resonate with most employers, especially those experiencing talent challenges. We could not control for all variables, including geography, industry, and political leanings, and recommend that advocates learn about partner businesses in advance, understanding their pain points and what topics might be most compelling to them.



Employer Insight

“Don’t fall in love with what you build. Whatever the minimum viable product that you create, co-create and co-design it with employers, because that will help your students more. If you want your students to have the best shot, employers have to be bought in.” ~Sr. Manager

Beginning with the Basics

If you are reading this guide, you are likely well-versed in Learning and Employment Records, the technologies they use, and what they do.

Your audience, employers, are not.

Consider the following:

1) *Employers are still largely unaware of LERs and what they do, or ambivalent about the topic.*

A [recent study](#) conducted by UpSkill America in partnership with i4cp asked employers whether they were exploring LERs for any reason - we also offered a definition of LERs. More than 35% of survey respondents, representatives of companies of all sizes from across the country, were unaware of LERs or did not know whether their company was exploring. Another 32% of respondents indicated that they were not exploring LERs for any reason.

2) *The field is extremely noisy with skills-focused activities.*

Employers are exercising skills strategies. They are building talent marketplaces, concentrating efforts to understand incumbent employees' skills, and leveraging technology to do so. In our conversations with employers, it is not clear that they are, generally, yet distinguishing between these company-specific skills documentation efforts, and the broader, interoperable LER models.

3) *We are still bridging the gap between Skills First strategies and LERs.*

Even for employers who are shifting towards skills-based hiring, there is not consistent and clear understanding of how LERs might facilitate those shifts.

4) *Many conversations with employers about LERs and related topics, including digital credentials, have focused on inputs and processes rather than likely outcomes.*

While LER leaders may find pockets of interest in the technology that facilitates digital wallets, or the work that goes into building a credential, the employers we have spoken to need to know why they should care as a first order of business.

5) *Employers are looking for evidence of impact on their pain points and likely return-on-investment before they invest time, energy, and resources in any project.*

But until employers are engaged deeply in LER projects, this evidence is impossible to gather. LER leaders need to get creative in helping employers anticipate potential positive impacts for their businesses.

Complex Terms, Transformational Solutions

The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation's [T3 LER Hub](#) provides a helpful overview of the nuts and bolts of LERs. LERs are digital records of learning, employment, and experiences from a variety of sources, including education, military, and work-based learning. LERs are:

- Interoperable - transferable, machine-readable across systems and platforms
- Individually-owned - controlled and shared by the LER-holder
- Verifiable - secure, "checked" records

In layman's terms, LERs take information that is usually tucked away behind glass on a wall, or trapped in a PDF, or even written on a paper performance assessment, and turn that information into data that is sharable, verified, and readable.

Imagine the transformations that could occur if:

- Background checks took two days instead of two weeks because relevant data was verified in LERs instead of housed within multiple institutions?
- Skills gained through postsecondary credentials were easily discoverable, and verified as a part of the credential record rather than trapped on a transcript or in a learner's head?
- Resume fraud was impossible, because employment dates, titles, and responsibilities were all verified directly by employers?

How can you shift away from technical terms, wonky proclamations, and academic jargon, and toward communicating about the very powerful outcomes and impacts that LERs promise?

Employer Insight

"We have to make the business case for this - hiring becomes faster, these folks become stickier. You can imagine customizing an onboarding experience. There could be all these beautiful things that could come of this. The amount of cost savings we stand to gain through things like this are substantial." ~Vice President for Talent Acquisition

Four Key Questions

When preparing your strategy for communicating about LERs to an employer, it can be helpful to frame your messaging around the following four questions. You may already have answers for some, while others might become your learning objectives for the meeting. By addressing all four points, you can demonstrate your understanding of employers' needs and build trust with your potential partner.

1) What will the LER do for the company?

What benefits will it create for the company's bottom line? What pain points will it reduce?

2) What will LERs do for individuals in their roles (HR, executive, recruiting, etc.)?

For decision-makers, how will LERs help them overcome challenges, streamline processes, save money, save time, and save effort?

3) What will LERs do for candidates or employees?

What benefits will LERs create for job seekers or incumbent workers? Can you assure employers are LERs will be a value-add to these important groups, and not a distraction or time-waster?

4) What does it cost/what will it save?

What are the potential costs or cost savings of LERs? And how will your model help the individual employer save money or at least break even?

For guidance on answering these questions, see [UpSkill America's November 2023 brief](#), and keep reading.

It is important for LER leaders to go into conversations with potential employer partners armed with not only the general insights we have gained from the limited pilots and research done to date, but their own research and analyses.

Be particularly attentive to cost estimates, and be honest and direct about the time, energy, and resources that engaging with LERs will require from employers' HR, L&D, and recruiting staff. Wherever possible, create venues for employers to provide feedback on design, and turn that feedback into real change.

This type of exchange increases trust: the ultimate facilitator of your employer partnership.

Employer Insight

"Ask us what we need. For schools, the key will be going back to the employer, asking what skills they need to prepare people for the next step. When they ensure that people have the skills they need, it makes it easier for us and we get 'ready now' talent. And I love the concept of 'moving at the speed of trust.' Engaging like this helps build trust between us."

~Program Manager, Equity Strategy



**Defining the Right Message
(and Messenger) for the
Audience**

Target Message: Outcomes

If you are a state policy official, an academic leader, or a technical expert who has invested their time, energy, and resources into getting an LER developed and off the ground, kudos to you. Your efforts will pay dividends for generations to come.

And despite all those efforts, now is the time to stop talking about them, especially with employers. Resist the instinct to share insights about process, policy, or technology (unless asked) with employers, focusing instead on the likely outcomes that LERs will produce for employers, workers, and for society, communities, and the economy.

Messages that Resonate

LERs Facilitate Skills First Hiring and Talent Management

For employers seeking to explore Skills First practices, LERs can help hasten and streamline implementation. LERs include portable, digital, verified records of individuals' skills and experiences, which employers can use in identifying new talent to bring into the company, and in advancing incumbent talent.

LERs Can Unlock Your Team's Full Potential

Many companies struggle to understand and articulate the full array of skills and credentials possessed by their current workforce, relying instead on self-attested data from skills profiles. LERs enable companies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the verified skills and credentials of their workforce, allowing for improved planning, leverage, and execution of talent strategies.

LERs Can Drive Talent Retention and Mobility

Talent retention is at the top of every HR leaders' list of concerns and priorities in 2024, while skills development and advancement remain in high demand by workers. LERs can facilitate retention by enabling "better fit" hires, and improved career pathways, increasing retention and creating transparent pathways for internal mobility.

LERs Can Promote Diversity and Inclusion

Skills First hiring unlocks a wider talent pool, fostering diversity and inclusion within organizations. Diverse workforces bring a broader range of perspectives and experiences, leading to more innovative and successful companies. Ultimately, the ways in which LERs can support Skills First hiring processes benefit candidates, who are evaluated based on their abilities, and organizations, which gain a competitive edge through a richer talent pool.

Turnover

40% of HR leaders indicate that retention is their top concern. By helping employers identify candidates with the right skills and experiences for roles, LERs can support “best fit” hires, leading to improved retention. Education and career pathways are key retention strategies. The data included in LERs about individuals’ learning and career backgrounds enables L&D teams to design upskilling and career development programs that can maximize retention, resulting in great outcomes for both the company and employees.

LERs, implemented at scale, are poised to address systemic talent challenges. Help employers understand how LERs can relieve their pain points.

Talent Pipelines

With unemployment at historic lows and employers struggling to reach new audiences with job postings, LERs can help employers connect with candidates they may have overlooked and to reach new applicants with a variety of experiences and skills backgrounds.

Open Roles

Open roles cost money. SHRM indicates that hiring costs average \$5,000 per role, and sustained openings can lead to reduced productivity, decreased morale, and increased workload for current staff. LinkedIn research showed that Skills First hiring happens faster—“Hirers finding talent using skills are 60% more likely to find a successful hire than those who are not relying on skills.” LERs can facilitate skills-based hiring at scale.

Improving DEI

According to OneTen, Skills First hiring is five times more predictive of future performance than a candidate’s education. LERs enable employers to view candidates’ skills and experiences with more nuance, and because these skills and experiences are often verified, they can be trusted

Verifying Credentials

Just recently, a south Florida woman was sentenced to years in prison for selling thousands of fake nursing diplomas. Under an LER system, employers can trust that credentials are real, and that they have been issued to the candidate. Fake credentials will be a worry of the past.

Reducing Resume Fraud

70% of ResumeLab survey respondents say they have lied on their resume about their responsibilities, titles, employment dates, and skills – resume fraud costs employers \$600 billion annually. LERs offer means of verifying experiences and competencies, eliminating fraud and saving money.

Creating Targeted Upskilling and Training

The World Economic Forum indicates that 60% of workers will require training, upskilling, or reskilling by 2030 to keep up with skills demands—and HR professionals are already concerned about keeping workers skills updated. LERs that include verified skills and competencies can support companies’ efforts to design targeted and tailored training programs and to build career pathways, with the aim of increasing retention and growing internal mobility.

Target Audience: Employers

We tend to think about employers as primarily private sector companies, and large private sector organizations have received the lion's share of attention in many Skills First and LER conversations to date. But employers include any organization that hires and retains a workforce, including:

- 2.1 million federal employees.
- Nearly 20 million state and local government employees.
- 24 million non-profit organization employees.
- And 118 million private sector employees, with 61 million people employed by small businesses of less than 500 employees.

With US unemployment at historic lows, and [every state](#) facing shortfalls in the number of available workers for open jobs, no sector is spared from talent challenges. As a result, LER leaders should think comprehensively and inclusively about working with employers from all sectors. Indeed, small businesses, government, and non-profit organizations, many of which have limited HR and talent capacity, or who may struggle to compete for talent against larger organizations, may stand to benefit most from the impacts of LERs.

A Note About Messengers

The objective is for your messenger to be highly effective at reaching as many employers as possible with your transformational tools. The most impactful messenger for your employer audience is the messenger they already trust. This trust can come from personal connections or a proven track record in writing and communicating about the subject you're addressing.

Never assume that the expertise one has gained in policy, academic, or technical spaces will translate into success with employer audiences. In fact, these skills may work against you with employers.

Think about your LER as a product and identify the best salesperson in the organization—the person who is most comfortable discussing the challenges of leading a business and who can best translate the goals, objectives, and outcomes of LERs to employer audiences, and cultivate that person as the messenger.

Employer Insight

"You can call up a university and get information about credentials; that piece is easy. Skills data provide a true value to the strategic direction of an organization. Skills are the currency." ~Vice President, Enterprise Learning

Employer Size

Effective communication considers audience readiness for the message you are attempting to share. Understanding employers' awareness of LERs, the benefits they can provide, and the unique challenges that employers are facing is key. Companies of different sizes often have different hiring and talent management approaches, making LER adoption relevant in various ways. This section provides several messaging frameworks tailored to resonate with employers of different sizes.

Small Employers

For many small employers of less than 100 employees, innovations in talent management technology may be an abstraction. Yet, the capacity provided by LERs, especially those that provide expand access to new talent pools and provide new capacity to stretched managers and owners, can be a fantastic opportunity for LERs to add value for employer partners. Messages that may resonate particularly with small businesses include:

1) LERs can help you find the right talent.

While still evolving, LERs offer a more complete picture of a candidate's skills and experiences than a resume, including verified details of formal training, certifications, and even informal learning experiences, allowing potential employers to see a candidate's full potential while making hiring decisions.

2) LERs can provide you with a talent management system.

Lacking many of the talent management systems that large employers utilize, small businesses often rely on paper or Excel-based processes to track the skills and capacities of their candidates and employees. LERs can automate some of those manual processes.

3) LERs can help your workforce grow from within.

LERs can be used to identify employees within the company who possess skills needed for open positions. This promotes internal mobility and reduces reliance on external recruitment, saving time and money.

Employer Insight

"When we talk about things like this, the people who are talking about it are often Fortune 100s, businesses with big wallets. They have money and bodies. I am often tapping volunteer efforts to help me do this work, and we don't have the budgets and resources. While I think it's fun, we're not talking about AI for another 5 to 10 years." ~Director of Training and Development, Small Business

Mid-Sized Employers

For mid-sized employers of between 100 and 1,000 employees, talent challenges can be acute. While these businesses may have slightly more internal capacity, they may face difficulties in finding specific skill sets in geographic regions. They may be concerned about staying competitive and relevant in the future as skills needs change. For mid-sized employers, messages include:

1) **LERs can support targeted recruitment.**

LERs can be integrated with applicant tracking systems, allowing you to filter candidates based on specific skills documented in candidates' records, saving time and resources during recruitment.

2) **Future-proof your workforce.**

The skills landscape is constantly evolving. LERs can help you identify skills gaps within your existing workforce and place targeted training programs, ensuring your employees have the skills needed to stay competitive and adapt to future industry demands.

3) **Build internal mobility.**

[Frontline workers want to be promoted](#), but few ever achieve a job advancement. Internal mobility can be a differentiator in a competitive field—the reason why great workers stay. LERs can support internal mobility, identifying talent with the skills for promotion.

Large Employers

Large and very large employers, despite having access to more resources, struggle to find, keep, and advance talent, as well as to create the innovations that keep scaled businesses running efficiently. For large employers, messages include:

1) **Data-driven talent acquisition.**

The days of “post and pray” are over. LERs will allow businesses to leverage data for smarter recruitment, filtering candidates based on a combination of skills verified in their records and experience levels, enabling businesses to identify top talent with the right mix of skills for the role.

2) **Deploy Skills First strategies.**

For businesses shifting away from degree requirements, skills verifications can be very important. LERs can support Skills First hiring and talent management approaches with validated credentials and skills, enabling employers to have confidence in their hiring decisions.

3) **Create an internal talent marketplace.**

LERs can facilitate the creation of an internal talent marketplace, showcasing employees' verified skills and experiences. A significant improvement over self-attested skills profiles, LERs highlight employees' backgrounds as fits for open positions. This can promote internal mobility, boost morale, and reduce reliance on external recruitment, saving time and money.

Employer Role

Knowing the background and priorities of the professional you are engaging with can increase your chances of building a successful partnership. In our conversations with employers, we have found the following entry points have been compelling to leaders with these roles:

Human Resources (HR) Professionals and Hiring Managers

HR professionals and hiring managers are those responsible for getting candidates, once identified, through the hiring process and into their roles. They often need to be concerned with compliance, and with ensuring that the appropriate process is followed by all parties involved.

Priority Message: Reducing time to hire, particularly by shortening duration of background checks.

According to HR strategist [Josh Bersin](#), time to hire increased by 20% last year to 44 days. For every day a role sits unfilled, money is lost and morale can often take a hit as incumbent staff take on extra work to compensate. By verifying many standard background check items, including credentials and employment, LERs can shorten time to hire significantly.

Secondary Message: Standardized and secure way of documenting employee skills and qualifications.

In industries requiring specific credentials, accurate information is crucial for hiring managers and HR professionals. Streamlining the hiring process is a benefit, but only when confidence in a candidate's skills and abilities is established. LERs provide a secure and reliable way to assess qualification. Moreover, LERs can be continuously updated to reflect an employee's evolving skill set over time.

Recruiters

Recruiters are those tasked, in roles of any name, with sharing postings and finding applicants. While some companies have specific professionals in these roles, recruiters are often HR and hiring managers, as well.

Priority Message: Finding new/different/larger/more diverse candidate pools.

Recruiters are under unique pressure in the current moment to expand candidate pools, indicating that they are just not finding the same level of talent that they may have in the past using the same strategies. LER leaders should be specific about how their tools can help recruiter reach new and different audiences that may not be on typical recruiting channels.

Secondary Message: Finding specific skill sets/experience levels within broader candidate pools.

LER leaders should be able to describe precisely how their tools enable employers to search and easily identify whether candidates have the appropriate skills and experiences.

Learning and Development (L&D) Professionals

L&D professionals are charged with designing, organizing and leading learning and training programs for employee skill development and organizational growth.

Priority Message: Identifying skills gaps in the incumbent workforce.

L&D leaders are constantly seeking opportunities to better understand where employees need to grow their skill sets, as well as opportunities to codify and track the learning that employees gain through employer-provided training. LERs are positioned to meet both needs, providing an up-to-date assessment of employees' skills and credentials, and an easily updatable way of credentialing learning gained on the job.

Secondary Message: Identifying personalized learning/career pathways for employees.

For L&D leaders charged with developing career and learning pathways for individuals and/or particular roles, LERs allow L&D professionals to understand which verified skills and credentials people currently possess, and which they must possess to move forward, enabling more comprehensive internal growth opportunities.

C-Suite/Executives

Executives are those at the top of organizations, including Vice Presidents and Chief Executives, whose decisions often affect those in the organization and whose voices can influence others in the field.

Priority Message: Thought leadership and peer influencer.

For executives, the opportunities presented by LERs are less about their own companies, though this is important, and more about their own buy-in as a thought leader and influencer. For an LER to be adopted by their company, work will be required to secure commitments down the chain, but the executive can be a champion for the idea, creating momentum and drawing attention inside and outside the company to the cause.

Secondary Message: Early adopter/leading edge of innovation.

For LERs to take hold and succeed at scale, the field needs risk-takers and innovators, leaders willing to take the first step and share what they learn for the benefit of others. Executives are the only leaders who can make these decisions on behalf of their organizations.



Crafting Compelling Content

Your content - the visuals, stories, presentations, videos, and leave-behinds that you develop to share your vision - will be highly specific and tailored to LER leaders' geography, functions, and priorities.

There is much to learn about effective content development in this space, and we will continue to upgrade this messaging guide with resources and tools over time.

Powerful Words

One of the biggest challenges in communicating with employers about LERs is that they are a complex solution to many potential problems - how can an LER leader clearly and concisely convey what LERs can do without getting bogged down in all the details?

We came across a fantastic message in Noah Geisel's January 2024 piece, [Dirges for Degrees? Not So Fast](#). He wrote:

As job seekers apply for jobs in a Skills-Based Hiring landscape, some will be effectively raising their hands to say, "Trust *me*, I have those skills," while others will be pointing to official records from trade schools, colleges and universities, saying "Trust *them*, they assert I have those skills."

With just one sentence, Geisel did what it can take an hourlong presentation or pages of narrative to convey:

- He pointed out the current inefficiencies in how we recognize skills - paper resumes put trust in the individuals and can be falsified.
- He elevated a known entity—trade schools, colleges and universities—who can assert skills in a way that employers can trust.
- He conveyed the complex activity of skills assertion in a way that is almost intuitive to employers. It is understood that this act is the education provider putting its stamp on those skills.
- He implied a competitive advantage for the people who have provider-verified skills - employers understand immediately that they will want candidates with skills they can count on.

Skilled messengers will be seeking this type of phrase - simple, yet full of meaning for the employer audience. As LER leaders are creating leave-behinds and building presentations, including quotes like this to spark conversations and orient messages is an effective strategy.

Show and Tell

An effective part of any messaging strategy is complementing your words with visuals. One LER project used a very simple illustration to demonstrate the impact and value of shifting away from paper certificates and toward digital credentials verified in LERs, sharing a welding certificate.

This familiar image - immediately recognizable to just about every hiring manager - tells us a lot. It tells us:

- The issuing organization.
- The license number.
- The name of the credential.
- The date the credential will expire.
- The name of the person holding the credential.

SAMPLE: Current Professional Certificate

Below is an example of a current welding certificate.



Acknowledgement: Kimberly Wilson Linson

But in the hands of a skilled messenger, the shortcomings of this paper certificate become very apparent.

- To know the actual skills that this certificate represents, one would have to be very familiar with the particular standards and qualifications.
 - *A digital credential and LER would have those skills and competencies attached.*
- The seal on this image is easily replicated, and in a copied image is impossible to verify.
 - *In a digital credential and LER, verification is secure. Further, verified credentials are only accessible by those who have earned them. Employers can be confident that Jane Smith is a skilled welder.*
- Three wet signatures would be difficult to collect, and impossible to verify in a copied image.
 - *In a digital credential and LER, the signatures are secure.*
- All of the information in the paper certificate would have to be manually entered into a database if an employer wanted to keep it on file.
 - *Using an LER, that paper record is now data, able to be stored, moved, and manipulated.*

This strategy is effective for several reasons.

- 1) Employers are familiar with and likely comfortable with paper certificates - demonstrating how LERs are a clear improvement over the status quo can enable an immediate and deep understanding of your work in a way that long description may not.
- 2) There is some shock value in pointing out how vulnerable these paper records are to fraud—these moments are good opportunities to pose solutions.
- 3) Comparing and contrasting in this way makes LERs seem less complex, and a more tangible solution.

Employer Insight

"You have to get writings down to a level I can understand, because if I can understand it, most everyone else can, too. We have to go from policy down to everyday people - they don't care how you built it, so long as it works.

What's in it for me? How long will it take to implement? What will it cost me? That's the message you have to get across to end users." ~Business Owner

Effective Ambassadors, Urgent Stakes

Velocity Network Foundation is a nonprofit organization that provides a “decentralized utility layer,” enabling individuals, organizations, and HR and education solution providers to claim, issue, share, and verify education, work, and career-related credentials in a trusted, compliant, and secure ecosystem.

Velocity is working with one of the nation’s largest health care providers, operating hundreds of hospitals and clinics across 21 states and employing more than 300,000 people. Encountering consistent challenges in finding and onboarding talent, the healthcare sector is partnering with Velocity in adopting verifiable digital credentials.

For healthcare organizations, verifiable credentials and LERs are a particularly promising innovation. In this highly regulated industry, ensuring that candidates have the credentials and licensures they need to practice can be a time-consuming process. For a hospital, hastening the time between a job offer and getting a practitioner to the bedside is a compelling case. Using verified digital credentials and employment history held by individuals in an LER, the healthcare sector will eliminate significant time and cost from the hiring process – using the record, employers will not have to manually check employment records, credentials, and licensures. That information is already in the individual’s wallet, providing one-click access to instantaneously verify all of a candidate’s qualifications.

Velocity is creating some remarkably effective employer messages through this effort. Consider the slide below:

The Problem

1 billion people move jobs every year. Verifying they are who they say they are adds **unimaginable cost and friction to the labor market.**

Hiring and mobilizing talent based on what they say on their resume, or their LinkedIn profile, has been terribly inefficient. **Self-reported career records are unreliable and non-standardized.** Misrepresentation is a common issue, while regulators all over the world adapt the Negligent Hiring Doctrine.

Applicant and employee career credentials currently verified manually through 100-years-old, expensive, error-prone processes that take weeks.



[1] SHRM, The Cost of a Bad Hire Can Be Astronomical, 2017
[2] Negligent Hiring – The Million Dollar Mistake, HireRight, 2009
[3] Ethical Hiring Alignment survey, Checkster, 2020
[4] The Employment Screening Service Market, Research&Markets.com, February 2018
[5] Global Resume Screening Services Market Forecast 2019-2026, July 2019, QY Reports

With one visual, Velocity clearly defines the problem in a way that any employer that uses background checks and manual credential verification processes can understand. They provide compelling data helping employers understand how this problem is likely costing them time and money. And they point out how inefficient the current process is – using manual checks, employers need to access multiple sources to confirm unchanging facts (like where they worked or where they went to school) about candidates. Using the Velocity protocols, this inefficient process is unnecessary. Individuals gain control and agency over their data, and all parties benefit from trust across the ecosystem.

Velocity also points to the very real and urgent stakes behind this work. In healthcare, negligent hiring (a legal claim made by an injured person against an employer) is a very real concern – one with implications for the company and for people receiving treatment. Continuously validating and monitoring all the credentials required to allow a practitioner to work is a challenge, but through Velocity’s protocols, individuals hold, own, and control all these credentials and employers can instantly and regularly verify all the required credentials from diverse sources, ensuring nothing slips through the cracks.

Importantly, wherever possible, it is not just the Velocity Network Foundation sharing information about this work and encouraging other employers to learn more. Velocity has created events and webinars featuring industry leaders sharing their views on:

- How verified credentials and LERs can address their problems and removing barriers
- Real examples and impacts for their companies, helping other employers see the potential of LERs
- Why this solution is “worth” the time, energy, and resources required by the employer in making the shift toward using LERs

To view some of Velocity Network Foundation’s great examples of employer-led conversations about the value of LERs, visit:

- [Conversation](#) with HCA Healthcare Senior Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer Jen Berres, and Vice President of Operations and Technology, Mike Andres.
- [Highlights](#) from a November 2023 Education Ecosystem event, featuring multiple employers and education providers discussing the needs for verified credentials.
- [Testimonials and insights](#) from leading organizations engaged in the founding of the Velocity Network Foundation, speaking to the need for these solutions.

Effectively leveraging existing employer partners to share their own insights will be one of the most important strategies you can use to influence other employers.

The Right Stuff

When considering content, messaging, and design, it is important for LER leaders to put themselves in the employer's shoes. This means managing information and data in a way that is optimized for employers.

When employers have the opportunity to look at emerging LER platforms and systems, they share enlightening insights:

- **6 to 7 Seconds** – Employers spend [6 to 7 seconds](#) looking at paper resumes. Developers of LER systems shouldn't anticipate that employers will spend more time looking at digital profiles.
- **Alignment and Interoperability** – According to a [2021 Sapient survey](#), the average organization uses over 16 HR solutions. While it will take time for LERs to fully integrate with existing HRIS, talent acquisition, and applicant tracking systems, attention to interoperability and alignment with these systems will pay off in the long run. One employer commented, "If a system is proprietary, don't offer it. You are not going to convince my company to join another vendor."
- **Skills** – Without exception, [employers are seeking skills data in LERs](#). Digital credentials alone have value, especially in highly regulated fields like healthcare, but on the whole, employers are seeking to understand not just that job seekers have credentials, but what those credentials mean in terms of competencies.
- **Filters** – LER developers may be inclined to enable all skills or competencies to be visible in a skills profile. Instead, employers are seeking understand whether job seekers have *specific* needed skills. LER developers should ensure that employers are able to filter for specific skills, or build matching capability into platforms and interfaces, highlighting for employers how candidates' skills align with position descriptions.
- **Proficiency** – Employers are always seeking to understand not just whether job seekers possess skills, but to what degree they are proficient in those skills, and where they have been practiced. LER developers should consider ways of visualizing proficiency in their interfaces.

Employers are willing to talk and learn about innovations like LERs that have the potential to transform talent acquisition and save costs. Wherever possible, lead with demonstrations and examples that highlight how employers will engage with your tools, and be open to their comments and suggestions for optimized design.

Employer Insight

"From a recruiting perspective, what I am interested in with any credential, especially one that I am not familiar with, is what is this credential signifying. And then, what is this credential signaling that this person can do? I am willing to dig in on this because I think that is the murky water right now in so many areas, there are so many new credentials coming into the market, and there is ambiguity in what they mean. In talent acquisition, I am looking to distinguish between awareness of a topic vs. mastery and doing. I need to know what level and specifics—what they can do." ~Vice President.



Messaging Tips and Tactics

Term Consistency

In our conversations with LER leaders and employers over the last year, terminology emerged as a significant challenge across several topics.

Credentials

It is important for LER leaders to be precise (but not pedantic) when discussing credentials with employer partners. Depending on the business and industry, and the partner's role, the employer may have encyclopedic knowledge of the credentialing system, or little background at all.

We see use of the following terms in conversations with employers:

- Microcredentials
- Alternative Credentials
- Digital Credentials

Employers themselves, depending on their own experiences with internal credentialing programs, may use the term "badge" to refer to credentials, as well.

We recommend:

- Consider avoiding "alternative" as a descriptor. Without significant time to describe what is meant, alternative can signal an "otherness" or imply that the credentials or the individuals holding them are somehow of different or lower caliber.
- Always confirm with employers that digital credentials are credentials conferred in digital format. Some employers, especially those new to the topic, will view "digital credentials" as credentials in digital/IT subjects.

Commonly Used Terms

- **Competency Framework:** A logically related set of competencies, knowledge, skills, abilities, or other attributes.
- **Comprehensive Learner Record:** Standard format defined by the 1EdTech standards organization for issuing multiple achievements as a single credential.
- **Digital Wallet/Digital Credential Wallet:** A digital wallet is a secure software application that allows for the storage and exchange of digital credentials, skills, experiences, employment, and other records that conform to a standard.
- **Interoperability:** The ability of different devices, software, or systems to successfully talk to each other.
- **Issuer:** An organization or person who creates and digitally signs a credential.
- **Formal vs. Informal Learning:** LERs might capture details of both formal learning (like courses or certifications) and informal learning (like on-the-job experiences or self-directed learning).
- **Micro-credential:** AACRAO (2022) defines micro-credentials as "generally a subset of learning achievements or outcomes that is less than a full degree or certificate." These may be stackable and may be referred to as badges.
- **Verification:** Automated procedures that check the digital signature or "seal" on a credential.

For more details and terms, visit the [T3 Innovation Network](#), an initiative of the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The T3 Hub includes helpful links and resources on LER and related topics.

Records

LER leaders will likely have the benefit of being able to introduce their potential employer partners to portable, secure records of individuals' learning and employment. The term LER is slowly making its way into employer conversations - we estimate that about 2/3 of US employers likely do not know what LERs are or are not particularly interested in the topic at this point.

We see the following general terms used in conversations and communications with employers:

- Digital Wallet
- Learning and Employment Record

Occasionally, we see Comprehensive Learning Recording appear in written communications, but this term seems primarily geared toward education audiences.

We recommend:

- When using the term "wallet," lean on employers' existing understanding of how digital wallets work. Many will have used their wallets to hold credit cards, IDs, and other secure materials.
- Employers need multiple exposures to "Learning and Employment Records" before they will recognize the acronym LER.
- Employers are consistently interested in understanding not only candidates' learning and employment, but their experiences, as well. In discussing what the records can contain with employers, share information about how LERs capture candidates' experiences.

Skills First/Skills-Based Talent Practices

In our conversations with employers, and especially with those interested in building Skills First practices, LER leaders should take care in building the connective tissue between LERs, digital credentials, skills assertions, and Skills First practices.

In our experience, there is significant interest among employers in Skills First practices, though many employers understand these practices only as removing degree requirements from position descriptions. While this practice is often important to removing unnecessary barriers to employment for otherwise qualified workers, there are [many other Skills First practices](#) that can make a [significant difference](#) to the company's bottom line and talent challenges.

We see both "Skills-Based" and "Skills First" used in conversations and communications with employers, typically depending on the messenger. Both appear to be effective in sparking employers' imaginations, though in our conversations, employers will sometimes mention that "skills-based" is a misnomer because all their hires are based on skills.

We recommend:

- Be explicit with employers about how these movements - digital credentials, LERs, and Skills First - are connected. Employer interest in Skills First can create the entry point for their engagement in your LER project.
- Help employers understand the growing movement of Skills First employers in the US, and how LERs are poised to support, deepen, and hasten it. Share great success stories from the [Multiple Pathways Initiative](#), helping employers understand how other employers have advanced.

Words to Say, Words to Avoid

While your message has to be your own, and authentic to you as a leader, the following table provides some examples of words, phrases, and ideas that may invite further conversation, and some that might not.

Use these...	Not these...
<p>"...tools to help you implement Talent First practices."</p> <p>"...tools that enable skills and credentials to be easily identified in your systems."</p>	<p>"... tools we've developed to help students."</p> <p>"... tools to increase the value of our institution's credentials."</p>
<p>"These tools are designed to help you solve problems..."</p>	<p>"We need you to help us test these tools to help students..."</p>
<p>"A broader talent pipeline can help your organization achieve..."</p>	<p>"LERs could maybe help your hiring processes..."</p>
<p>Expansive</p> <p>"When you expand the talent pool, you have a better chance of making a successful hire."</p>	<p>Guarantee</p> <p>"If you start using our tool, you'll immediately improve the quality of your workforce."</p>
<p>Objective</p> <p>"Verified credentials and skills allow you to make informed decisions in a way that paper resumes do not."</p>	<p>Negative</p> <p>"Resumes are biased and ineffective."</p>
<p>Transparent</p> <p>"LERs make visible what has been hidden or trapped in paper records."</p>	<p>Jargon</p> <p>"Blockchain-powered credentialing technology"</p>
<p>Innovative</p> <p>"LERs will support innovative hiring and talent management practices and help your organization plan better for the future."</p>	<p>Exploratory</p> <p>"LERs are still largely unproven, and we hope to learn more about their impacts through pilot projects."</p>

Reaching Employers Where They Are

While some of your LER pilot and engagement partners will be long-term friends of your organization, to reach any kind of scale you will need to consider opportunities to reach many employers at once.

Depending on your state, region, or unique program reach, you may have specific organizations that engage employers in talent and economic development initiatives. Broadly, consider reaching out to:

- [SHRM](#)

SHRM supports local chapters across the country for networking, professional development, career resources, and local initiatives. Chapters host webinars, networking events, and conferences that are prime opportunities for you to share your message and reach HR professionals.

- **Chambers of Commerce**

Most chambers of commerce have education and workforce committees that are dedicated to solving talent challenges. These committees meet periodically, and staff are often seeking compelling speakers.

- **State Chambers**

For state-led LER initiatives, State Chambers of Commerce may be particularly good partners in reaching influential employers. Often tapped into the policy infrastructure and priorities of a state, State Chambers may be able to help LER leaders identify potential employers for partnership, as well as provide venues for connecting with larger groups.

- **Workforce Development**

State workforce development organizations are often powerful organizers and conveners of industry and sector partnerships. As potential beneficiaries of improved connectivity between education, employers, and job seekers, workforce development officials should be engaged in LER programs from the start.

- **Public Employers**

Seek meetings with a lead at your state personnel or administration agency. States and cities are often the largest employers, and as mentioned earlier, often struggle in finding and retaining talent.

Employer Insight

“You have got to tell us you’re doing this. Go to career centers, HR conferences, and show us how you can help us get our workforce. If you tell us you’re doing this, we’ll know where to go, but I don’t know what I don’t know.” ~Vice President



Learn
new skills

A Call to Action

A Call to Action

While we hope this messaging guide is helpful to leaders and organizations engaging employers in Learning and Employment Records and Skills First solutions, we recognize that there is still much to learn. As initiatives mature, we're excited to learn alongside of leaders and share stories and insights for the field. Over the next year, UpSkill America will continue to update and refine this messaging guide.

We hope you will consider the following actions as we build foundations for faster, stronger movements in the future:

Share your successes.

As you build your employer messaging strategies, share the approaches you built that proved successful in engaging employer partners. UpSkill America would be thrilled to highlight your successful approaches and to share your insights in future versions of this guide.

Share your challenges.

If you are encountering challenges in reaching employers, chances are strong that others are, as well. Reach out and share what you are experiencing. We can focus research efforts toward your challenges and help you develop solutions. We also encourage you to follow the efforts of key initiatives, including [SkillsFwd](#), the [T3 Innovation Network](#), and the [Multiple Pathways Initiative](#), which provide consistent insights and learnings.

Engage Employers Deeply

In our experience, employers are willing, and often excited, to provide input and guidance in the design and development of these tools. We strongly encourage you to get this employer input as early in your process as possible. It will pay off in the long run.

Stay in touch.

Being an innovator can be lonely work. Staying connected to others in the field can help. We are committed to supporting the leaders of LER initiatives in their collective learning and field-building. We encourage you to stay in touch. Email us at upskillamerica@aspeninstitute.org.

References

Bersin, Josh. "HR Predictions for 2024: The Global Search for Productivity." JoshBersin.com January, 2024. <https://jbc.joshbersin.com/hr-predictions-for-2024-the-global-search-for-productivity/>.

Business Roundtable. Multiple Pathways Initiative. <https://www.businessroundtable.org/mpi/company-success-stories>.

Capranos, D., Magda, A. J. "Closing the Skills Gap 2023: Employer Perspectives on Educating the Postpandemic Workforce." Wiley Inc. January, 2023. <https://universityservices.wiley.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Closing-the-Skills-Gap-2023-Digital-January-2023.pdf>.

Cates, Lindsay and Stephanie Ferguson. "Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Most Impacted States." U.S. Chamber of Commerce. February, 2024. <https://www.uschamber.com/workforce/the-states-suffering-most-from-the-labor-shortage?state=>.

Copeland, Chris, Bryan Hancock, Sofia Soto, Monne Williams, and Lareina Yee. "Race in the Workplace: The Frontline Experience." McKinsey & Company. July, 2022. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/race-in-the-workplace-the-frontline-experience>.

Geisel, Noah. "Dirges for Degrees? Not So Fast." Noah Geisel on Medium. January, 2024. <https://noahgeisel.medium.com/dirges-for-degrees-not-so-fast-fc88e574d0e6>.

Glover, Haley, and Kevin Martin. "Room for Growth: A Survey of UpSkilling Approaches." UpSkill America and the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp). March 2024. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/room-for-growth-a-survey-of-upskillingapproaches/>

Glover, Haley. "Creating Real Value: Skills Data in Learning and Employment Records." The Aspen Institute. January, 2024. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/creating-real-value-skills-data-in-learning-and-employment-records/>.

Glover, Haley. "From Should to Will: Getting Concrete About the Benefits of Learning and Employment Records." UpSkill America, Economic Opportunities Program, The Aspen Institute. November, 2023. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/from-should-to-will-getting-concrete-about-the-benefits-of-learning-and-employment-records/>.

Indeed Editorial Team. "How Long Do Hiring Managers Look at a Resume?" Indeed. February, 2024. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/how-long-do-employers-look-at-resumes>.

Lumina Foundation, "White Paper - Talent Investments Pay Off: Cigna Realizes Return on Investment from Tuition Benefits." Lumina Foundation. April, 2016. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/resource/talent-investments-pay-off/>.

References

Multiple Pathways Initiative. "Measuring the Impact of Skills-Based Talent Practices." Business Roundtable. 2022. <https://gradsoflife.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Business-RoundtableMultiplePathwaysInitiativeMeasuringtheImpactofSkills-BasedTalentPractices.pdf>.

Navarra, Katie. "The Real Costs of Recruitment." SHRM. April, 2022. <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/real-costs-recruitment>.

NBC6. "South Florida Woman Gets 6.5 Years in Prison In Fake Nursing School Diploma Scheme." NBC6. April, 2024. <https://www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/south-florida-woman-gets-6-5-years-in-prison-in-fake-nursing-school-diploma-scheme/3276119/>.

OneTen. <https://oneten.org/>

Shappley, Jennifer. "The Secret to Hiring is Skills Based." Fast Company. July, 2022. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90766649/the-secret-to-hiring-is-skills-based>.

Szczepanek, Agata. "The Truth About Lying to Get a Job." ResumeLab. October, 2023. <https://resumelab.com/career-advice/lying-to-get-a-job>.

Schooley, Skye. "Who Are You Hiring? The Shocking Cost of Resume Fraud." Business.com, April, 2024. <https://www.business.com/articles/the-shocking-cost-of-resume-fraud/>.

T3 Innovation Network. "LER Resource Hub." <https://lerhub.org/>

Ward, Cat, David Newsome, Sheila Jackson, and Jon Kaplan. "Skills-Based Practices: An Employer Journey Map." Jobs for the Future. October, 2023. <https://www.jff.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Skills-Based-Talent-Practices-an-Employer-Journey-Map-JFF.pdf>.

World Economic Forum. "Future of Jobs Report 2023: Insight Report." WEF. May, 2023. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf.

Acknowledgements

This messaging guide was prepared [Haley Glover](#), senior director of Upskill America at the Aspen Institute, and Alison Yost, communications consultant. The research included in this piece was made possible through funding by Walmart. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations presented in this piece are those of UpSkill America alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Walmart. We are grateful to Walmart for their support of this work.

Licensing

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program is proud to release this publication under a Creative Commons license ([CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)) so that other organizations can use and share it to inform and support their work. Note that the use and redistribution of this publication must include an attribution, and this license does not permit use for commercial purposes or modification of the source material. If your use of this publication is not covered by this license, please email us at eop.program@aspeninstitute.org for written permission,. We encourage you to [contact us](#) to share your feedback and let us know how you've used this publication in your work.

Suggested Citation

Glover, Haley. "Messaging Guide: Making the Case for Learning & Employment Records with Employers." UpSkill America at the Aspen Institute. April 2024.
<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/messaging-guide-making-the-case-for-learning-employment-records-with-employers/>



**2300 N Street NW # 700
Washington DC 20037**

Upskillamerica.org

upskillamerica@aspensinstitute.org

UpSkill America, an initiative of the Aspen Institute [Economic Opportunities Program](#), supports employers and workforce organizations to expand and improve high-quality educational and career advancement opportunities for America's front-line workers. We seek to create a movement of employers, civic organizations, workforce intermediaries, and policymakers working collaboratively to implement education, training, and development strategies that result in better jobs and opportunities for front-line workers, more competitive businesses, and stronger communities.