

CASE STUDY #6

WELLSPRING INITIATIVE PHASE II

BRIDGING THE GAP

CLOSING GAPS TO IMPLEMENT
SKILLS-BASED HIRING

PROJECT REPORT

Wellspring is a multi-year initiative of the [1EdTech Foundation](#) and [IMS Global Learning Consortium](#) aiming to accelerate the adoption of an education-to-work ecosystem based on open technology standards. Wellspring envisions an environment where educators and employers can collaborate on education curricula focused on skills, learners control their skills-based achievements through secure and verifiable [digital credentials](#), and employers can find highly qualified talent based on their verifiable credentials. The initiative establishes proof points through research, practice, and demonstration as a roadmap for talent ecosystem stakeholders to achieve digital transformation based upon proven open standards. See the [Wellspring Initiative](#) for more information.

This case study shares the practical experiences of the participating teams of the Wellspring Phase II Project and highlights the tremendous value of a network of organizational relationships as part of the competency framework development process.

While all Wellspring teams exemplified cross and inter-organizational collaboration, this case study highlights the value of identifying and validating skills for career pathways and shares the stories of three teams, Team St. Louis, UAPB-Con-Real CBE Team, and UNT Data Analytics, that exemplified the importance of relationships in forging skills-based learning and hiring practices.

SKILLS-BASED HIRING, SKILLS PATHWAYS, AND SKILL ALIGNMENTS

With the advent of skills-based hiring, both employers and academic institutions are navigating the identification, prioritization, validation, and communication of skills along a career and continuous learning trajectory.

The Wellspring project developed competency frameworks that can be digitally linked and aligned to directly demonstrate the relationships between learning and earning in skills pathways. Interestingly, while organizations are internally attempting to identify ways to respond to the development of a highly-skilled workforce, the connecting points between the organizations can

be critical to success in the emerging skills marketplace. The rapidly changing talent gaps of hiring partner organizations require relationships with education providers that are quickly responsive.

By engaging in a co-design process to develop independent and shared sets of competencies, the Wellspring partner teams created products of mutual benefit to education providers, employers, and the learner-earner.

The symbiotic relationship between the academic institution and the employer was clearly demonstrated by these

Wellspring partner teams:

Team St. Louis -
Maryville University,
Rung for Women,
and Keeley Construction

UAPB-Con-Real CBE Team -
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
and Con-Real, LP

UNT Data Analytics -
University of North Texas and
TD Ameritrade & Charles Schwab

Skills-based hiring is identifying the objective skills required for a role and searching for or training candidates who have these specific skills instead of using a degree as a proxy for preparation for a role.¹

Developing Both Academic and Job Role Competency Frameworks

The existing partnership relationships were further strengthened through the process of developing both academic and job role competency frameworks. The [IMS CASE Network Labs](#) was used for digitizing and cataloging the competency frameworks that resulted from extensive validation and data alignments between the partners.

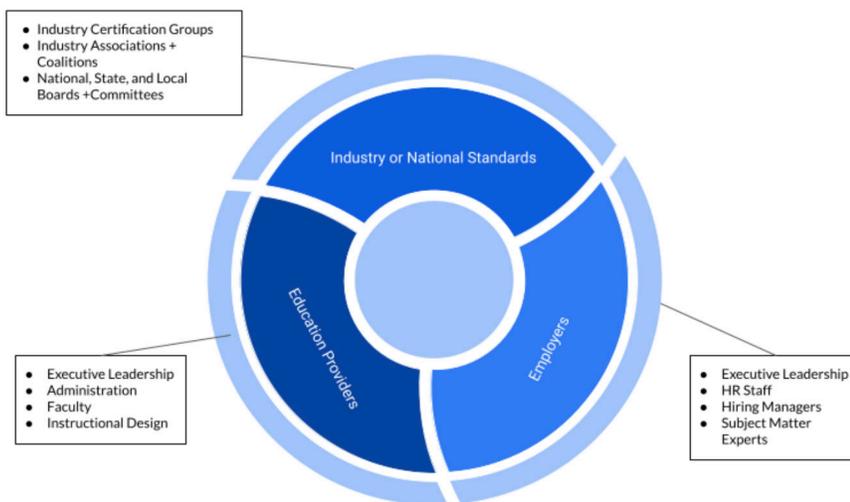
The collaborative work was described as very valuable by participants, with sustainable long-term future relationships and significant potential for the creation of additional academic and job role frameworks by each of the teams.

The cultivation of skills pathways, which includes all types of certificates, certifications, micro-credentials, and degrees, can be designed within any one organization; however, a more robust, collaborative process leads to scalable results. Including third-party organizations, such as industry associations, standard-setting bodies, consortia, nonprofits, and accrediting bodies in the dialogue can expand a 1:1 relationship between an employer and a college to represent job role details from a broader industry perspective.

Spanning organizational boundaries, engaging in dialogue, and building networks of relationships are instrumental to developing a skills continuum for learning across a lifetime.

The insights from across different institutions allow for alignment, mapping, and linkages among various credentials, standards, and job roles. The Community Connections Career Partnership Opportunity (C3PO) team, which included Wichita State University, Sedgwick County Developmental Disability Organization, InterHab, ResCare Central Kansas, and Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals, provided a stellar example of how to leverage relationships across organizations.

Designing Skills Frameworks: A Collaborative Process



By including existing standards bodies, industry associations, and service providers to inform the process, C3PO produced a compilation of frameworks rooted in national quality standards and curricula to serve the training and hiring needs.

The [Education Design Lab 21st Century Skills](#) competency framework was also utilized by all Wellspring teams to analyze skill pathways against a nationally adopted, employer-informed framework that represents high-demand, cross-domain skills.

Voices Across the Organization

Spanning boundaries as part of the co-design of skills pathways is necessary not only between organizations and organizational types but also within organizational departments. In all organizations, senior leadership support is critical to leveraging a skills-based project; however, additional expertise and job roles such as instructional designers, trainers, and subject matter experts should be integrated into the process.

Beyond administrative support in academic institutions, including faculty voice as content experts and curricular authorities is imperative, regardless of the type, duration, or delivery of the credential associated with the identified skills. Employers also have dynamic and valuable perspectives within their organizations that can be enhanced by including human resource staff and hiring managers to provide an understanding of the job role and associated documentation, as well as the most current data regarding the highest organizational daily skill priorities of a particular position. The College Unbound team further expanded its organizational representation by including students and alumni in the co-design process, which was invaluable in determining the relevance of skills.

Design Considerations for Building Robust Skills Pathways

The project participants identified the following considerations as part of their work:

- Engage stakeholders across the learn-earn continuum with local and global insights. Suggestions include education providers, community organizations, employers, industry associations, and standards bodies.
- Within the organization, identify the required talent to contribute a variety of perspectives, such as administrators, hiring managers, human resource professionals, faculty, subject matter experts, and instructional designers. It can also be helpful to engage alumni, students, and employees in the validation or design process.
- The co-design process, while mutually beneficial, can also be time-consuming and arduous. Clearly identify the team and organizational roles to allow those groups with expertise to craft and structure the time they can give while identifying resources to manage and streamline, the work within the multi-organizational teams.
- Learning over the lifetime and the need to have skills aligned across educational boundaries and time has been termed the “Big Blur.” No longer is workforce preparation a discrete task that is completed prior to entering the workforce, nor is learning complete upon beginning work. Clear skills pathways have the ability to logically and digitally communicate the skills that are required for learners and earners.
- The crafting of the skills ecosystem requires the nurturing of shared language and goals across all stakeholders. Ultimately, moving beyond degree credentials to validation of skills as a lever to increase individual equity and agency in the hiring process has the potential to fundamentally alter current practice and reduce barriers to success.

About 1EdTech Foundation

[1EdTech Foundation](#) facilitates cooperative investment catalyzing a connected ecosystem of innovative educational products and digital credentials that together accelerate teaching and learning innovation enabling every individual to achieve without limits.

For more information visit <https://www.1edtech.org>.

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About IMS Global Learning Consortium

IMS Global Learning Consortium is a non-profit organization that advances technology to scale and improve educational participation and attainment affordably. IMS members are leading suppliers, higher education institutions, K-12 districts and schools, and government organizations that enable better teaching and learning by collaborating on interoperability and adoption initiatives. IMS sponsors the annual [Learning Impact](#) program to recognize the impact of innovative technology on educational access, affordability, and quality while developing the leadership and ideas to help shape the future of educational technology.

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¹ DeMark, S., & Kozyrev, J. (2021). Enabling pathways to opportunity through a skills-based architecture. *Journal of Competency-Based Education*, 6(1).

² Hoffman, N., Vargas, J., Hartung, K., Barrett, L., Cuevas, E., Sullivan, F., Mawhinney, J., Nahar, A. (2021)

[The Big Blur: An Argument for Erasing the Boundaries Between High School, College, and Careers- and Creating One New System that Works for Everyone](#). JFF.