

Statement before the House Committee on Education and Workforce
Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development
Hearing on Building a Talent Marketplace: How LERs Empower Workers and Expand
Opportunity
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Thank you, Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Greg DiDonato, Vice President of Business Development for EBSCOed, a division of EBSCO Information Services.

EBSCO is a trusted partner in education; our mission is to make all learning count. Our products and services support lifelong learning, streamline digital experiences, and efficiently connect education to workforce opportunities. We develop a connected ecosystem to facilitate better decision-making and further economic mobility for those entering and advancing in the workforce.

Today, I am here to share the story of the Alabama Talent Triad and the value of a full talent marketplace implementation. This statewide initiative demonstrates how talent marketplaces strengthen economies, transform how Americans leverage education to connect with employment, supports data-driven decision making, and leverages big data to inform smart and responsible AI capabilities.

Talent marketplaces, of which LERs are an essential piece, can operationalize and address many of the guidelines, executive orders, and initiatives of this Administration and Congress and can advance the bipartisan workforce development priorities this Committee has championed.

Talent marketplaces bring together learners and earners, education and training providers, and employers. Talent marketplaces have been defined by the Department of Education and within Secretary McMahon's supplemental grant priorities as meaning a digital, interconnected system of technologies maintained by a State or State Workforce Agency, as defined at 29 U.S.C.

3225a(a)(8), that is

- publicly available
- includes an integrated Learning and Employment Record, Credential Registry, and Skill-Based Job Description generator
- utilizes artificial intelligence to enable students and jobseekers, employers, and education and training providers to transform, transcribe, and transact earned learning assertions, job descriptions, and degree and non-degree credentials into discrete competency statements
- may be curated into interoperable individual records of achievement and learning and employment recommendations.

Simply put, properly implemented and effective talent marketplaces connect education and workforce (learners and earners) to in-demand jobs, by aligning data, information, technologies, and objectives to drive informed decision making and increased opportunities for everyone.

What Alabama Built: A Unified Talent Marketplace

The Alabama Talent Triad is the nation's first comprehensive statewide talent marketplace. Its goal is to strengthen Alabama's workforce by making it easier for people to find in-demand jobs and for employers to fill those roles by focusing on skills and credentials rather than just traditional degrees. It serves anyone and everyone, from high school students to retirees, across all industries and education levels.

The Talent Triad consists of three integrated components that work together to bridge the gap between education and the workforce to form a unified and actionable talent marketplace.

Learning and Employment Records

Actionable talent marketplaces provide students and jobseekers with the ability to capture their skills, competencies, credentials, and experiences via their validated LERs and secure digital wallets. LERs provide students and jobseekers with an accurate online portfolio of the assets they have learned and earned, which can then be transacted to receive personalized learning and upskilling recommendations, career pathway recommendations, and/or open job recommendations. They provide students, jobseekers, and employers with insights into the relevance and validity of one's skills, competencies, credentials, and experiences that traditional resumes are unable to offer. LERs utilize skills and competencies as the common denominator to translate degree and non-degree learning achievements, certifications, certificates, micro-credentials, military transcripts, and work-based learning opportunities. They are interoperable with systems of record, such as student information systems, to support validation of achievement. LERs democratize traditional and non-traditional career pathways, thereby making all learning count. As such, LERs should be available to every American to privately and securely collect and grow their digital learning assets with the objective to transact them into in-demand, high-skilled, and family-sustaining employment.

Credential Registry

Actionable talent marketplaces provide education and training providers with the ability to support alignment, transparency, relevancy, and accountability of their programs to both students and employers via a credential registry. To support an actionable talent marketplace, credential registries not only catalogue degree and non-degree credentials, they support transparency and accountability of all programs, credentials, and work-based learning opportunities, pathway development, and demonstration of the skills, competencies, and experiences earned and learned. Credential registries support the issuing of validated skills, competencies, credentials, and

experiences to LERs and provide credential and program review workflows demonstrating those that meet state and federal criteria for alignment with industry demands and program funding such as Workforce Pell. Credential registries offer administrative workflows and interoperability to support program and credential uploading, additions, and edits. Credential registries that are actionable enable an aligned talent marketplace.

Skills-based job description generator

Actionable talent marketplaces provide employers with the ability to connect with a relevant, validated, robust talent pipeline through the creation of skills-based job descriptions that utilize skills data embedded in trusted and aligned education and training programs and credentials. Talent marketplaces enable employers to signal their needs in real-time to education and training providers via their job descriptions, supporting candidate recommendations with or without the use of an ATS and HRIS system to engage employers from main street to Wall Street.

Implementing responsible AI

Actionable talent marketplaces harness and train AI on real, trusted big data to produce smart and responsible AI results. AI is the key to supporting and sustaining real-time data and terminology alignment, analysis, and recommendations that have been historically missing in the education and workforce reports and systems.

The Triad's components create a unified and actionable talent marketplace for students, job seekers, employers, and education providers. All parties can see and understand the same information about skills, credentials, and workforce needs.

A student in high school can explore career pathways while seeing which skills are in demand for different careers and then choose training programs that teach those skills. Likewise, a mid-career worker can identify additional credentials needed to transition into a growing industry. A veteran can translate military training into civilian credentials that employers recognize.

This is not about replacing traditional hiring practices; it is about giving Americans more pathways and transparency to demonstrate their education and capabilities while giving employers better tools to find the talent they need. An employer can post a job and immediately see qualified candidates whose verified skills match their needs.

The Results Speak for Themselves

The Alabama Talent Triad launched statewide in 2024 and in just 14 months of full deployment, Alabama has created the infrastructure to support a skills-based economy. Nearly 132,000 workers have demonstrated their capabilities and skills in ways traditional resumes never captured. Plus, hundreds of employers have access to a deeper, more qualified talent pool. Nearly

19,000 training programs have been documented, made transparent, and available to be issued to learners and earners.

This is not a pilot program serving a narrow slice of the population. This is a statewide system serving all Alabamians, all industries, and all education levels ... and it is just getting started.

Learners and Earner Adoption

The following numbers represent real Alabamians who now have a verified record of their skills and credentials that travels with them throughout their careers.

- 131,980 candidates have created validated LERs.
- 239,739 validated credentials within candidate digital wallets.
- 2,157,651 skills associated with validated credentials.

Employer Engagement

Employers ranging from small local businesses to major manufacturers are using the system to find qualified talent.

- 239 companies registered and 1,296 employer profiles created.
- 7,000 to 10,000 open jobs are available on the platform at any given time.
- 14,120 candidate recommendations generated.
- 31,660 job recommendations provided to job seekers.

Education and Training Provider Participation

- 18,854 education programs, credentials, and work-based learning opportunities submitted to the credential registry
- 1,628 credentials have been evaluated and met Alabama's rigorous "compendium of valuable credentials" review process
- 135 credential contributor profiles from schools, colleges, technical programs, and training providers
- 108 case manager profiles supporting job seekers in their journey

Why This Matters Nationwide

The Alabama Talent Triad demonstrates how talent marketplaces create real-time feedback loops that strengthen connections between employers and the workforce system.

Advancing Workforce Pell and Short-Term Credential Programs

The bipartisan Workforce Pell Act recognizes that many Americans need access to high-quality, short-term training programs in high-demand fields. But how do students, employers, and policymakers know which short-term programs are high-quality and lead to good jobs?

Talent marketplaces provide the answer. Alabama's credential registry and review process evaluates programs against rigorous quality standards and measures alignment with employer needs/employment outcomes. This is the quality assurance infrastructure that can make Workforce Pell successful and efficient at scale.

When students can see which short-term credentials are validated as high-quality and in-demand, they can make informed decisions about where to invest their time and Pell dollars. When workforce boards can track whether credential holders are finding employment and at what wages, they can direct funding to programs that work.

Improving Transparency and Accountability in Higher Education

This Committee has held multiple hearings on transparency in education, noting that transparency is not just about cost, but also outcomes. What skills and credentials do programs actually provide? Do graduates find employment and at what wages?

Actionable credential registries support this transparency and issuing of validated skills, credentials, and experiences. Every program in Alabama's registry has the opportunity to document and validate the specific skills and competencies it teaches, alignment with industry needs, and what credentials students earn. This allows prospective students to compare programs on measured substance. It allows employers to understand what a credential actually represents.

This level of transparency has been difficult to achieve with traditional approaches. Talent marketplaces offer a new system that makes transparency a fundamental standard practice.

Addressing Critical Workforce Shortages

The 43 million Americans with some college but no degree represent a vast underutilized talent pool. With effective LERs, these individuals can demonstrate the skills they already have, even without completing a degree. Workers in declining industries can identify transferable skills that may allow them to enter a growing sector. Similarly, veterans transitioning to civilian careers can translate military training into credentials employers recognize.

Talent marketplaces enable efficient upskilling and reskilling by documenting which skills are required for in-demand jobs and which training programs teach those skills. The system creates direct pathways for workers to fill gaps in their training. The credential registry makes credit for

prior learning practical at scale. Thus, experienced workers can build on what they already know rather than starting from scratch.

Chairman Owens specifically highlighted Alabama's success during a hearing earlier this year on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), noting how state flexibility enabled the Talent Triad to thrive despite significant cuts to federal workforce funding. The Talent Triad demonstrates that smart infrastructure investments can stretch limited resources further. The Talent Triad has been implemented to address Alabama's industries, workforce challenges, and education landscape. Other states can adopt the same architecture while customizing it to their unique needs.

Preparing for Technological Change

The Committee has emphasized the need for digital literacy training and preparing workers for the impact of artificial intelligence on the workforce. Talent marketplaces are inherently part of this solution.

Digital wallets and LERs familiarize workers with managing their professional credentials and skills in digital formats, a baseline digital literacy requirement for modern employment. The actionable credential registry encourages education providers to clearly articulate which programs teach AI-related skills and digital competencies, making it easier for workers to find relevant training. This adaptability, responsible AI innovations, and personalized recommendations are essential as technology reshapes the workforce faster than ever before.

The Alabama Talent Triad is the realized vision of how talent marketplaces can strengthen economies and transform how Americans leverage education to connect with employment.

I would like to thank the members of this Subcommittee for your time, your questions, and your bipartisan support for strengthening America's workforce. By sharing the story of our successes as well as the as-yet unfulfilled potential of this model, we hope that Congress will more closely examine opportunities that can help states grow their economies, as well as more efficiently educate and prepare students to transition into well-informed job seekers who can connect with greater compatibility to employers in need of their skill sets. Seeing this model implemented at the Federal level is something EBSCO would be proud to assist with as more Americans seek a trusted and reliable resource for finding employment in which they are best qualified. EBSCO looks forward to partnering with states, federal agencies, and Congress as we work together to make all learning count and connect every American to the opportunities they deserve.

Thank you.