

Conclusion

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In this report, we provided a comprehensive deep dive into micro-credentials, digital badges, and related topics and technologies. At the beginning of the report, we listed some potential benefits of badges, such as data richness and access to education. As with any new technology, it should be noted that the list of benefits is not exhaustive, and they are sure to change as the badging ecosystem becomes more developed and robust. We mentioned a few of the key players in the current environment when it comes to badging platforms. These commercial vendors are just one aspect of digital badges, but as the vendor platforms become more feature-rich and integrated into things like our learning management systems, they may begin to play a larger role in the adoption rate and use of digital badges.

The adoption of digital badges was slower than many educators had anticipated, but this slowness is likely because of the paradigm shifts involved in such a big change and the orchestration between the different players: learners, educators, and employers. Implementing a digital badge system is complex and requires several decisions, partners, and actions. All of these factors can slow down the rate of adoption. Although technology seems to change quickly, the disruption to established systems can take quite a bit longer. Chapter 4 of this report discusses the design of digital badges and how design can either cause barriers or open doors for implementation. In our experience, design choices are extremely critical to the success of a digital badge program.

Equally critical are the collaborations and partnerships you potentially establish for your digital badge program. Finding earlier adopters or evangelists for your program is going to be key to developing

a successful program as well. It is important to tie the badges into the larger context or learning environment. In addition, without providing a framework or larger structure for your badges to feed into, it will be hard for people to see their relevance. Thankfully, with the OBI, the open nature of badges has been baked in from the beginning, and thus there are a few built-in ways to share badges earned with a larger audience.

In later chapters, we dug into the details of deployment, sustainability, and assessment in the hopes of giving you some concrete considerations for your program before it was fully underway. Since much of this type of work may be new, it's helpful to think through some of the day-to-day concerns you might be dealing with to anticipate any issues. As we wrote Chapter 6: Deployment, implementing your program by way of a pilot is a recommended path forward with a digital badge program; however, a deep dive into the design of your badges and the larger system at the beginning of your work is potentially very beneficial, and we sought to discuss those details throughout this report.

It bears repeating that the badging ecosystem is complex and digital badges and micro-credentials are already causing ripples of disruption. The players involved have the potential to change the playbook for things like how job applicants get evaluated for jobs—by flipping the script and giving job seekers more control and power over the representation of their skills. Libraries have the power to be a partner in this disruption, which we believe has the potential to not only transform education and employment, but also showcase the power of information literacy as part of lifelong learning.