



# Elevating Your Programming With LERs: A Guide for CBOs

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# LER Field Guide Overview



This resource is meant to be used as a foundational tool as you begin considering how your organization can develop a verifiable, digital credential and pilot learning and employment records (LER) technology for the first time. The guide is written for nonprofits and community-based organizations (CBO) but can be used by any organization interested in embedding LERs into its process. We encourage organizations and practitioners to be agile and collaborative in their approach throughout design, delivery, and adoption phases.

## IRC's Regional LER Demonstration Pilot

In fall 2023, Jobs for the Future launched a regional pilot program with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to test the adoption of verifiable credentials (VC) as a type of LER. JFF was excited to partner with IRC given their enthusiasm in the skill-first movement, track record of running pilot programs, culture of innovation, focus on collaboration and continuous process improvement, existing employer relationships, and JFF's alignment with IRC's long-term strategic goals. The pilot was designed to build, test, and assess LER adoption for job readiness, unlocking pathways for IRC participants (referred to as clients) facing employment barriers and enhance hiring efficiency by fostering greater transparency for both workers and employers. JFF provided technical assistance, coaching, and subject matter expertise, while IRC staff ran the implementation and captured observations from the field across three stakeholder groups: IRC staff, IRC clients, and employers. Excitingly, IRC staff as early adopters and IRC clients as new users felt positively about all the possibilities of this new tool for immediate job searches and beyond.

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**What sets this pilot apart** **Human-centric approach.** The pilot assessed whether LERs could address human problems by evaluating behavior changes rather than relying on just technological solutions.

**Community-based involvement.** It engaged a CBO, which have been underrepresented in other LER field pilots that often focus on academic or large institutions.

**Focus on population.** It was designed with and centered on the needs of immigrants and refugees, who face significant barriers to accessing quality jobs.

Together, JFF and IRC developed a simple, but scalable, use case: a verifiable credential (i.e., a digital record of achievement) to validate and signal new skill attainment through IRC's trusted Job Readiness Training (JRT) program. Two of its field sites—Des Moines, Iowa, and Tucson, Arizona—would issue and award the verifiable credential to participating clients, orient employers with the new tool, and observe adoption successes and challenges. IRC clients learned how to download digital wallets and share the newly awarded credential with employers as they pursued local employment opportunities. Additional insights were captured through robust user design research efforts by [We Are Open Cooperative](#) (WAO), to better understand the credential's value across the three critical stakeholder groups.

**i**  
For more details about the pilot, click [here](#).

## Understanding LERs and the Role of Verifiable Credentials

More than simply a digital resume, LERs are a digital tool that captures and organizes an individual's skills and experiences from various sources—such as education, work, and life experiences—into a secure, flexible wallet. The technology empowers users to own, control, and share verifiable credentials, such as academic records, work history, and skills, with employers or institutions. LERs support the skills-first movement, helping individuals powerfully showcase their competencies beyond traditional degrees, ultimately improving access to job opportunities and career pathways

**i**  
To read more about skills-first models and sustained adoption, click [here](#).

CBOs like IRC play a critical role in the community they work with. If used successfully, LERs can reduce barriers and improve access to employment while solving operational efficiency for CBOs and employers. The pilot allowed IRC clients to share their newly attained credential directly and safely with employers, without having to rely on a caseworker to manually send a resume. Ultimately, this streamlined process empowers the client and creates operational efficiencies for IRC.

Read on to understand how JFF and IRC together came up with a use case, designed the credential, and socialized the new tool with staff, clients, and employers.



## Purpose of This Guide and How to Use It

This field guide is a resource for CBOs and nonprofits that are interested in integrating LERs and verifiable credentials into their programming or operations. Alternatively, it can help those who already have a specific idea of how to do this but are looking for guidance on how to adopt the technology. While geared toward a CBO and nonprofit audience, other learn-to-work ecosystem partners, such as workforce development boards and community colleges, can also take these insights into consideration for their own purposes.

The guide assumes some foundational knowledge about what LERs and verifiable credentials are. If those are unfamiliar topics, we suggest starting with the recommended reading list at the end of the guide for background information. Please note this guide is not a technical instruction manual; we focus instead on how people (CBOs, learners and workers, employers, etc.) are adopting it. It's also not a report focused solely on pilot findings. Those findings are mentioned only to provide concrete examples of the practice being addressed.

This guide is organized by programmatic steps. Each step is reflected with its own section, which begins with an overview, followed by a discussion of IRC pilot experiences and insights, and ends with key takeaways.

Finally, IRC is our example CBO in this guide, but we recognize that many CBOs are not international in scope, are not structured as multisite organizations, and don't have a comparable operational budget. However, elements in IRC programming that we find translatable at the field-site level exist, such as a direct service orientation, having a small and constrained program staff with competing priorities, and experience conducting local employer engagement. Throughout this resource, we tried to call out and focus on such elements to offer replicable insights and learnings that resonate with a broad coalition of CBOs.

# Assess Readiness

Prior to a CBO engaging in an LER pilot implementation, an internal audit should be conducted to understand and assess organizational readiness. Assessing CBO readiness means understanding your organization's current capacity, resources, and potential challenges that could impact the implementation of the pilot. This assessment is crucial because it ensures that the organization is adequately prepared to meet the demands of the pilot, thereby increasing the likelihood of success and sustainability. (*Note this is not an exhaustive list, and your organization does not need to meet all these criteria to implement and issue LERs successfully.*)

## Criteria to Assess Readiness

### 01 A clear why

To ensure preparation, it's essential to articulate why you're embarking on the pilot, including ideas on the problem an LER could solve for your organization or participants. Without a clear why driving the pilot, successful implementation may be challenging. Identify the primary beneficiaries (your organization, learners/workers, employers, or a combination) at this stage as well.

### 02 Organizational buy-in

Ensure the skills-first movement is a priority within your organization. Leadership should identify and align this initiative with strategic goals, emphasizing its importance and commitment to innovation. It's crucial that some staff members are willing to learn more about LERs specifically. Identifying an organizational champion who can generate enthusiasm and morale among staff will be vital for the initiative's success.

### 03 Organizational capacity

Running a successful pilot requires both staff and organizational capacity. Your team needs sufficient time and resources to familiarize themselves with LERs, design a use case, and build relationships with employers. This also involves having a well-organized structure with clear roles, responsibilities, and defined workflows. Ensuring your organization has the tools and support needed for the initiative, along with regular check-ins and communication channels, will help keep the project on track and ensure accountability from start to finish.

## **04 Robust data practices and infrastructure**

Ensure your organization has a strong track record of collecting, managing, and leveraging data effectively in the context of skills development and employment. This includes secure data management systems, protocols for data integrity, and the capacity to analyze and utilize data for informed decision-making.

## **05 *Optional:* Employer partnerships and engagement**

Implementation may require an employer willing to engage and test. This could be a significant request, so be mindful of existing relationships. Employers may or may not be familiar with LERs or verifiable credentials, making education a critical part of the process. Having strategies in place at the onset to onboard and involve employers in the pilot is crucial to building initial buy-in.

## **06 *Optional:* Staff familiarity and experience with LERs**

Determine if staff has experience or exposure to verifiable credentials, digital wallets, or LER infrastructure. If your staff is largely unfamiliar, there will likely be a learning curve. It's important to plan for the necessary time to upskill existing program staff about LERs and verifiable credentials before moving into the design phase.

### **What this looked like for IRC:**

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE FOR IRC
A clear <i>why</i>	Understand why embedding an LER is related to your mission. Identify where LERs may be able to solve operational or programmatic issues or increase efficiencies.	IRC had a clear vision from the outset, aiming to test the new technology to determine if it could help clients better articulate their skills to employers.
Organizational buy-in	Prioritize the skills-first movement by aligning it with strategic goals and engaging staff through a champion to drive innovation.	IRC leadership had prior knowledge about LERs and was enthusiastic about testing an innovative, new tool to scale impact. Field sites poised to be quickly set up for success were selected.
Organizational capacity	Committing to an LER pilot requires adequate time, budget, and organizational capacity, with clear processes, defined roles, and a structured timeline that includes a learning phase before pilot design.	IRC allocated national and local staff to run the pilot; weekly checkpoints were conducted and relevant resources shared.

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE FOR IRC
Robust data practices and infrastructure	Ensure your organization has a strong track record in managing and utilizing data, including secure systems, data integrity protocols, and the ability to analyze data for informed decision-making.	IRC was well versed in data collection, as its case managers were accustomed to reporting both quantitative and qualitative data on clients' work progress. This familiarity facilitated an easy transition to reporting for the pilot program. Additionally, case managers found it straightforward to document their clients' progress, as they regularly took notes throughout the process.
<i>Optional:</i> Employer partnership and engagement	Implementing this process likely requires an engaged employer, so leverage existing relationships and plan early to educate and onboard employers.	IRC used one-pagers to clearly define the opportunity, outline the goals of the pilot, and present the reasons for participation. These documents enabled various employers to quickly understand the pilot and its requirements from the outset.
<i>Optional:</i> Staff familiarity and experience with LERs	Assess your staff's familiarity with verifiable credentials and LER infrastructure, and allocate time to upskill them if needed before designing your pilot.	IRC staff received LER 101 training that covered the basics of LERs, verifiable credentials, and digital wallets.

## SUMMARY TAKEAWAYS

**Having a clear why is fundamental.** Organizations must be able to articulate their specific purpose for implementing LERs and identify who will benefit (learners, employers, or the organization itself). Without this clear motivation and theory to test, the pilot is less likely to succeed.

**Organizational capacity and buy-in are essential prerequisites.** Success requires both leadership commitment and adequate resources (staff time, infrastructure, data systems). The organization needs a champion to drive enthusiasm, clear workflow structures, and ensure sufficient capacity for learning and implementation.

**Data capabilities matter significantly.** Organizations should have robust data management practices already in place, including secure systems, protocols for maintaining data integrity, and the ability to analyze and use data effectively for decision-making. This foundation supports successful LER implementations.

# 2 STEP

# Design the Pilot

Once the decision to commit to an LER pilot has been made, it's time to start the program design process. This critical step focuses on establishing foundational goals, aligning project objectives, and preparing stakeholders for implementation with a human-centered approach. For this pilot, we understood trust and relationships were vital for IRC clients and kept that at the center of our processes, including the deployment of the credential.

To ensure intentional and thoughtful design, IRC extended design work from three months to five months, to guarantee all stakeholders were adequately prepared and aligned before moving forward. Below, you'll find operational and programmatic considerations, as well as use case and stakeholder engagement guidance, that can help make your organization's pilot launch as effective as possible.

## Design and Identify an LER Use Case

Embarking on an LER pilot begins with clearly identifying the use case. How do we want pilot participants to interact with the LER and solve what problem? Think about the challenges your organization or community has faced or barriers to employment that an LER could help alleviate. Concretely answering this question will help you shape a solution-oriented use case to design the LER pilot around.

### Use case framework:

JFF created the following framework template to explore various use cases.

PROBLEM	IDENTIFIED SKILLS BARRIER	HOW AN LER CAN ADDRESS BARRIER	ANTICIPATED OUTCOME <i>(individual, CBO, employer)</i>	POTENTIAL EMPLOYER PARTNER
Start with a one-to-two-sentence description of the problem you hope to address with the LER.	Identify obstacles experienced by individuals in your programs that LERs could address. Consider barriers related to skills recognition, access to employment, or pathways to further education and training.	For the barrier(s) identified, how do LERs mitigate this gap?	What outcomes do you expect for the individual user (e.g., learner, worker)? For your organization and staff? For your employer partner? Put differently, what does success look like for each stakeholder?	Will employers participate in the pilot? If so, which employers?

For large or multisite organizations, consider evaluating and selecting specific sites that are well positioned to pilot the LER. What program offerings, staff expertise, and community needs do you see in locations that may be supported or enhanced with an LER?

## What this looked like for IRC:

JFF hosted several design workshops to identify various employment barriers and use-case options for IRC to address using LERs. We crafted the following use cases:

1	PROBLEM	IDENTIFIED SKILLS BARRIER	HOW AN LER CAN ADDRESS BARRIER	ANTICIPATED OUTCOME <i>(individual, CBO, employer)</i>	POTENTIAL EMPLOYER PARTNER
	Transportation, distribution, and logistics; translating preexisting skills	Due to documentation differences, IRC clients cannot easily translate their skills to U.S. employers' standards, which leads to them getting matched to lower level jobs.	Verify preexisting skills	<b>Client:</b> Secure more interviews, improved job outcome <b>CBO:</b> Reduce manual labor required to translate clients' preexisting skills to employers. <b>Employer:</b> Verification of preexisting skills	Medium-sized and local employers around IRC field sites
					
2	PROBLEM	IDENTIFIED SKILLS BARRIER	HOW AN LER CAN ADDRESS BARRIER	ANTICIPATED OUTCOME <i>(individual, CBO, employer)</i>	POTENTIAL EMPLOYER PARTNER
	Transportation, distribution, and logistics; validating employer-endorsed training program	Employers and the client sometimes must communicate back and forth to verify that the client completed relevant training programs.	Automatic, streamlined verification of IRC-branded training program	<b>Client:</b> Saved time during the application and interview process. <b>CBO:</b> Reduced the manual labor required to authenticate the client's completion of the program <b>Employer:</b> Verification of training program completion	Medium-sized and local employers around IRC field sites Employers familiar with IRC's training program

IRC focused on sectors in which it had strong employer partnerships, specifically transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL). Within the TDL industry, employers often struggled to correctly assess skills and experiences for many IRC clients, the majority of whom are immigrants and refugees, resulting in IRC clients being hired for overqualified roles.

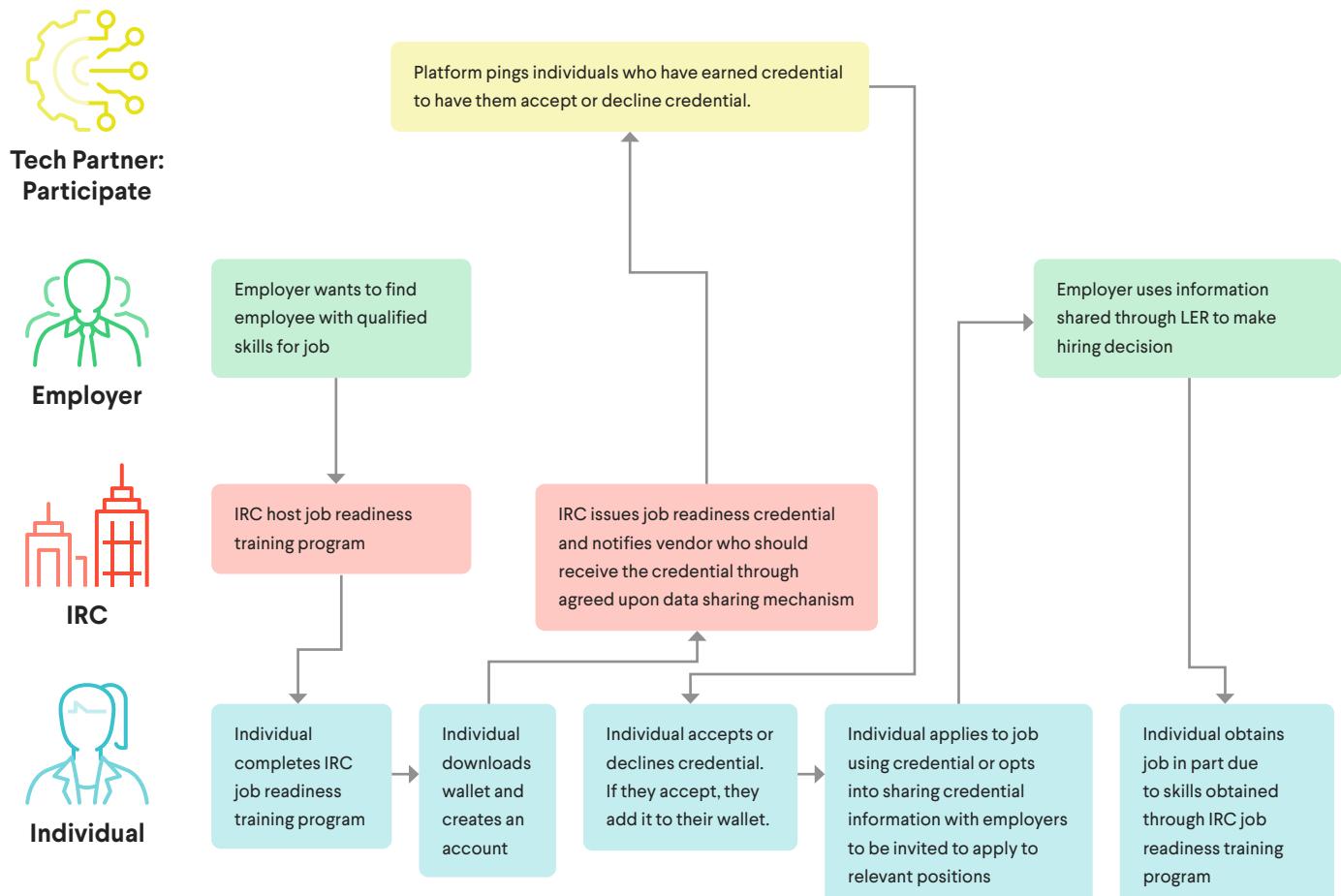
IRC considered two LER use cases within the TDL sector. The first was to use LERs to validate the clients' existing skills and competencies and align them to competencies that TDL employers in the United States understand. In such a pilot, IRC would use the LER to validate a client's skills during intake, map the skills to job requirements for different TDL occupations, and provide a streamlined way to verify the skills match to employers. However, this use case required the IRC to build a skills mapping tool and a validation process from scratch (i.e., a way to validate that the client in fact has the skills that align to the job requirement).

The second use case was to use LERs to validate the skills and experiences gained through the completion of IRC's Job Readiness Training program. The LER would help authenticate the completion of IRC training with a trusted, verifiable credential. It would also enhance IRC's existing programming by creating a way to authenticate at scale the IRC-branded training experience. However, the value of this LER relied heavily on the employer's knowledge and opinion of IRC's training program.

While IRC was interested in exploring the first use case, after careful consideration, the organization ultimately decided to pursue the second, due to feasibility issues and the reality around the pilot timeline. This option also allowed IRC to introduce the concept of LERs to staff, IRC clients, and employer partners prior to embarking on a more intensive and ambitious LER effort. This foundational use case also well positions a future large-scale adoption across IRC. For all CBOs working on LER exploration, it's important to thoughtfully consider their working reality (e.g., staff, experience, infrastructure) when determining their use case.

Below is a visual representation of IRC's final LER pilot use case. The process flow shows the vital role each stakeholder plays in the pilot.

### Completion of an IRC Job Readiness Training Program (IRC credential)



## Stakeholder Experience Design

Once a use case is determined, identify stakeholder groups that must be engaged throughout the pilot. For IRC, there were three clear stakeholder groups: IRC staff, IRC clients, and employers. In addition, IRC recognized local workforce ecosystem partners, such as community colleges, nonprofits, and workforce boards, that it wanted to be aware of the pilot, but primary focus was on the former groups throughout design and implementation.

The following outlines IRC's specific design approach for each stakeholder group:

### IRC Staff

Staff will be the most critical contributors for the LER implementation. They manage the day-to-day, translate learnings, and provide insight into how stakeholders engage with the technology. In our pilot, IRC staff included IRC's headquarters staff, who provided strategic and project management, and direct service providers working at the two field sites in Arizona and Iowa.

**Staff structure** The cross-organizational collaboration between IRC HQ staff and field site staff allowed the IRC to understand how LERs would be received by its clients, employer partners, and organization as a whole. It was also helpful to have a dedicated staff member serve as the liaison between IRC leadership and the implementation team to project manage and synthesize multiple perspectives.

**Staff training** At the onset of the pilot, IRC leadership and JFF hosted a kickoff session for program staff to build relationships and clarify objectives for staff who would be engaging in the initiative. Additionally, introducing LERs and verifiable credentials required significant groundwork, as these concepts were new to most staff. To bridge the gap, a one-hour LER 101 training by JFF provided foundational knowledge on LERs, verifiable credentials, and digital wallets before implementation meetings. Then, using a train-the-trainer model, staff were equipped to guide clients effectively, with practical examples and screenshots to make the unfamiliar technology more accessible. This intentional approach ensured staff were prepared both to launch and adapt during the pilot. Establishing a structured, relationship-focused training process is essential for building familiarity as well as aligning adjacent staff with what the initiative is trying to achieve.

**Developing pilot materials** LERs and verifiable credentials are often new concepts for clients and employer partners. Your staff will be designated socializers of this technology. To support the field staff, IRC worked with JFF to develop outreach email templates, talking points, and FAQs for site members to use in client and employer meetings. These resources also ensured similar messaging across sites and signaled to the program staff that they were supported as they navigated this new tool.

**Establishing Communication Channels** Regardless of whether you’re implementing directly on the ground or supporting satellite sites, it is important to build a consistent communication channel for collaboration. Since IRC decided to implement this pilot across two sites, cross-site communication was virtual. We created a JFF-IRC Teams channel to ask questions and provide real-time updates. We also organized bimonthly calls with all field staff to collaborate and gather implementation insights. These communication channels helped identify necessary pivots and provided sites the opportunity to engage with leadership. As you build your communication channels, consider the purpose, cadence, and design for each. How you use your communication channels may evolve as the pilot unfolds; you may find it helpful to communicate more frequently at the beginning of the pilot.

## IRC Clients

The end goal of the pilot has always been to eliminate employment barriers for IRC clients and increase transparency throughout the job search processes. IRC has been guided by its understanding of its clients: immigrants and refugees who are actively adapting to a new language, entering the U.S. workforce, and supporting themselves and their families. JFF and IRC wanted to understand if clients liked using the digital wallet, what they thought of the credential, and how it impacted their employment prospects. To equitably and effectively engage IRC clients, we followed these guidelines:

**Keep the ask short and simple** In this case, we conducted a one-time survey at the beginning of the pilot and requested a one-time download of the digital wallet, with IRC support, and honest feedback about the clients’ use of the tool. This way, participants were able to make an informed decision on whether they would like to engage in the pilot. As you consider the role your end user will play in your pilot, it will be essential to identify expectations and time commitment prior to recruiting participants.

**Allow adequate time for client outreach and recruitment** Before beginning outreach, take time to develop a comprehensive engagement plan. IRC focused on new or recently graduated clients from the JRT program for the pilot, with a goal of recruiting 30 clients for the pilot across both sites. Case managers reached out to recent graduates, explained the pilot, and obtained client consent through a waiver.

**Compensate for time** Most likely you are embarking on this pilot because you believe implementing LERs within your organization will provide a benefit to the lives of your end user. To show your appreciation for participation and avoid extractive policies, budget for monetary compensation such as cash or gift cards or nonmonetary things such as small gifts or refreshments. In the case of this demonstration pilot, IRC clients who participated in interviews were compensated with Amazon gift cards.

## Employers

Employers are an essential stakeholder for the LER ecosystem. It's important to get employers' support by understanding what employers think about the process and want to achieve from it. At the start of the pilot, IRC hoped to recruit at least one employer partner for each pilot site, ideally employers familiar with IRC's training program and hiring for the TDL sector. We hoped the employers would be recruited in time to help design the pilot as well as test and provide early feedback on the new verifiable credential.

In practice, employer recruitment was more challenging than anticipated. JFF and IRC expanded the employer pool to all industries and organization sizes and those that are new to IRC but enthusiastic about hiring immigrant and refugee talent. These employers looked at the credential and offered feedback via an online survey and interviews with design researchers.

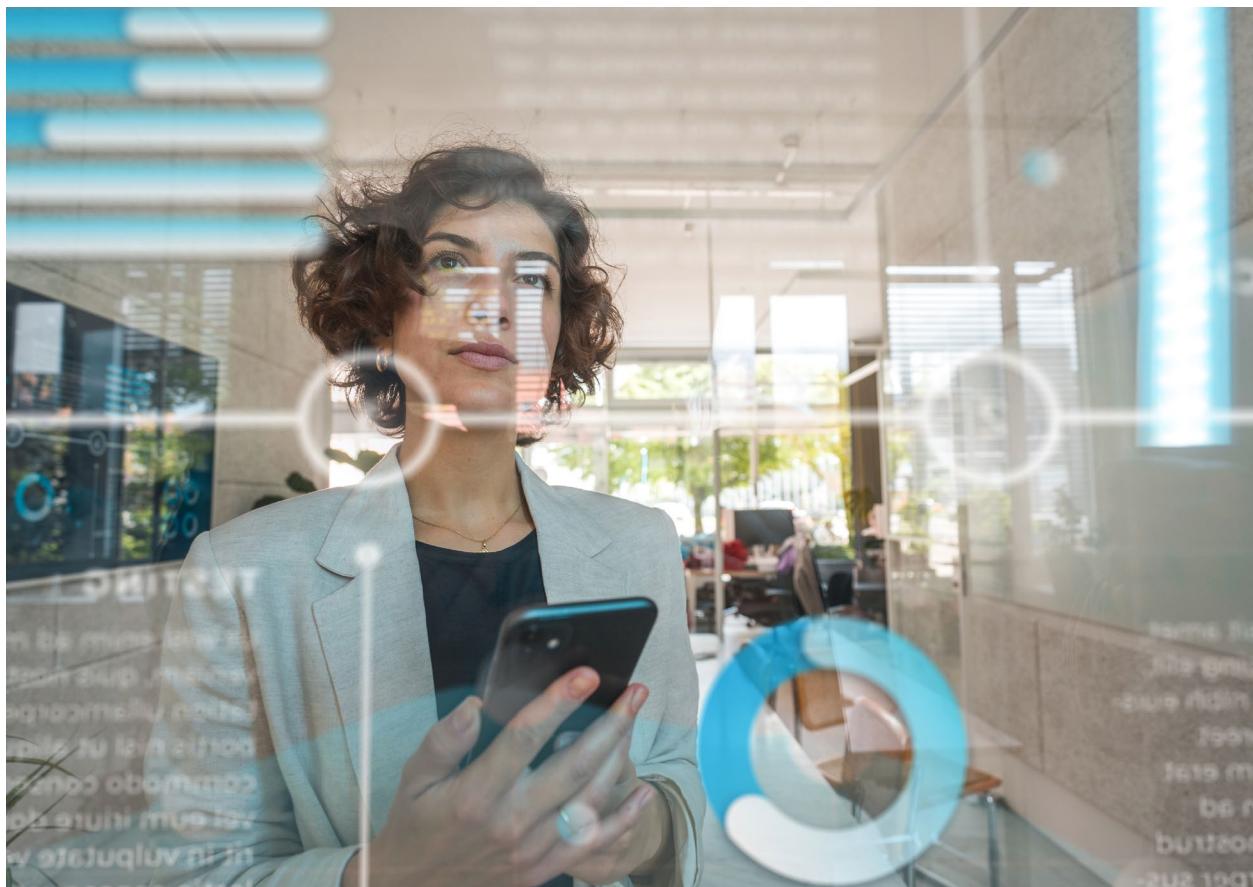
Employer engagement can be challenging. It is often hard for employers to commit to the capacity and responsiveness needed to thoughtfully participate. Additionally, organizational staff structure plays an important role, notably in determining how employer engagement will be conducted, who owns the relationship, and how adequate time and resources for employer engagement will be built in while the pilot is designed.

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JFF and IRC developed tools and resources to engage employers from the onset and found the following practices helpful:

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>Material development</b> | We created a one-pager outlining the opportunity to accompany the email outreach to employers; this message included information about the pilot, our goals, reasons to participate, and a clear ask.   |
| <b>Talking points</b>       | We developed internal talking points for program staff who maintain consistent messaging across employers. Key talking points included program goals, credential definition, expectations for employers, and an explanation about the value proposition of LERs for employers unfamiliar with the technology. |
| <b>Introduction call</b>    | JFF and IRC hosted an exploratory call with interested employers. Staff explained the benefit of participating and provided additional context by demonstrating the credential and the wallet. This helped make potentially abstract ideas more concrete.   |

<b>Formalization of the partnership</b>	After the employer agreed to participate, IRC and JFF hosted a kickoff to generate excitement, clarify roles, lay out expectations, and answer questions. Another way to formalize the partnership would be through a memorandum of understanding. <i>Although JFF and IRC didn't mandate an MOU, we observed that the employers' participation wavered as the pilot went on due to several factors, including not giving employers enough time to prepare for a full lifecycle engagement.</i>
<b>Communication</b>	IRC maintained a consistent feedback loop with employers, providing updates on the credential design and opportunities to test the tool. It also offered to schedule regular check-ins to build employer relationships and troubleshoot issues, and hosted a pre- and post-pilot check-in with employers.
<b>Contingency plans</b>	Another best practice is to identify other ways to engage with the local business community, in the event that employers' participation changes. This could include engaging with local industry associations or chambers of commerce, which IRC Tucson staff thought could be an effective strategy.



## Additional Design Considerations

The following outlines other key elements that were instrumental in the design of this pilot.

### Pilot duration

Defining the duration of your pilot early allows the mapping of key milestones and deliverables. For IRC and JFF, biweekly checkpoints kept us on track and ensured accountability for each step of the process.

### Partnership kickoff meeting

Bringing all stakeholders together at a kickoff meeting helps establish clear roles and goals. For IRC, this provided a shared understanding of the pilot's purpose and allowed for efficient resource allocation across field sites.

### Evaluation and data collection

Determine your success metrics and the data collection tools needed to capture those metrics. JFF and IRC held monthly peer learning calls to discuss qualitative insights case managers collected from clients and engaged a robust user design research process. More information related to evaluation can be found in the [Bonus Step](#) section of this guide.

### Technology timeline

Build in flexibility for any tech-related adjustments, such as a vendor switch, troubleshooting, and additional testing time, as IRC experienced. More information can be found in the [Step 3](#) section of this guide.

### SUMMARY TAKEAWAYS

**Invest in building your use case.** The use case informs the rest of your pilot, so take time to assess different possibilities that will help you build a feasible and impactful LER implementation.

**Develop tailored support.** Customized training and resources for all stakeholder groups is necessary to generate buy-in and prepare for a successful launch and implementation.

**Identify key design elements.** Additional considerations outside of stakeholder engagement can support a comprehensive and intentional LER pilot design process.

# Set Up the Technology

How do you begin addressing the technical aspects of an LER implementation? First, it's important to clarify what *technology* means in the context of an LER demonstration. In the context of JFF and IRC's pilot, it refers to both the digital wallet, which is where the verifiable credential is stored, and the newly created credential. However, implementing LER technology is not solely about software—it's a blend of technology and human roles and processes. Key components like the issuer (who provides the credential) and verification (the process of ensuring authenticity) are integral to the process, even though they are not strictly technological. Understanding these elements, described below, is crucial for successful implementation.

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<b>Credential issuer</b>	The organization responsible for distributing the verifiable credential to end users. For our pilot, that organization is IRC, which issued the JRT verifiable credential to its clients. The choice of issuer will depend on the decision-making process, which is likely to be informed by the specific use case for the verifiable credential.
<b>Verifiable credential</b>	A digital representation of an individual's skills, achievements, or qualifications. For this pilot, <a href="#">Participate Inc.</a> software supported IRC in building and issuing its Job Readiness Training as a verifiable credential (using Obv3). The earner then pushed this credential to the <a href="#">Learner Credential Wallet</a> (LCW).
<b>Digital wallet</b>	An app or online service used to make payments electronically or to store electronic tickets, documents, etc. For our pilot, we used the LCW to store the credential.
<b>Verification</b>	The process of confirming the validity and currency of credentials, within the context of LERs verification, ensuring they're authentic and up to date. Verifiable credentials help employers trust the skills of candidates, knowing that each credential accurately represents their abilities and aligns with industry standards. <a href="#">VerifierPlus</a> allows users to verify any supported digital academic credential. The site is hosted by the <a href="#">Digital Credentials Consortium</a> , a network of leading international universities designing an open infrastructure for digital academic credentials. In addition, a verifiable credential includes a digital signature from the issuer that adds an additional tech-enabled trust layer.

*The JRT credential is considered verifiable because it is issued by an authorized provider, ensuring authenticity.*

# Choosing a Technology Solution: Existing Product vs. Custom Build

Organizations can choose from two primary categories of technology solutions to implement an LER, depending on budget, staff capacity, program goals, and strategic priorities:

## 1 Existing product (fit for purpose)

Prebuilt and vendor hosted, this option offers quick implementation with minimal adjustment. While there may be limitations in customizable functionality over time, it provides a practical starting point for organizations new to LERs. *For organizations that want to test LERs within their programmatic operations, this is likely the most feasible option to start with.* Over the long term, the technology can be brought in-house and transitioned from the tech vendor. IRC opted for this route, allowing the vendor to build, host, and issue the credential to IRC clients on its behalf, without the need for complex integration into its existing systems.

## 2 Custom-build solution

This approach lets organizations develop tailored LER technology that integrates with their existing systems. While providing greater flexibility and control, it requires significant up-front investment, longer development time, and ongoing management. Organizations must carefully consider data security, limiting vendor access to essential information only, and maintain close collaboration with IT and executive teams to ensure alignment with security standards and organizational mission.

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Identifying the right technology vendor is essential for a successful LER implementation, as it determines who will issue the credentials and how they will be managed. This collaboration not only streamlines pilot initiatives and optimizes data sharing but also enhances user experience, ensuring that participants can easily access and validate their skills in the job market.



## How IRC Selected Tech Vendors

Selecting the right tech vendors is a critical step. The decision-making ethos for this pilot was based on feasibility and efficiency, due to budget and timeline constraints.



To learn more about W3C VC standards, click [here](#).

For the digital wallet, JFF and IRC chose to partner with the Learner Credential Wallet, which complies with the World Wide Web Consortium's Verifiable Credentials standards. These standards ensure that verifiable credentials are tamper-evident and cryptographically signed, making them reliably verifiable even if the issuing institution ceases to exist. This adherence to VC standards is crucial for ensuring the long-term validity and security of LERs. JFF highly recommends prioritizing this wallet solution for your LER deployment.

Choosing Participate Inc. as a vendor took more time. Originally, JFF and IRC explored IRC being the host, on its organizational IT systems. While that would have enabled more long-term programmatic sustainability, we found that it would cause significant delays to our timeline. Instead, JFF and IRC reached out to Participate Inc. for an exploratory conversation about building the credential as a third-party option. Together, IRC and JFF were enthusiastic about choosing Participate Inc. as a vendor for the following reasons:

- Immediate access to a sandbox
- Ability to build the credential quickly and easily
- Familiarity and knowledge with the LCW
- Customized, one-on-one customer success support for JFF and IRC field sites
- Option for IRC to take the technology in-house, post-pilot, if desired

While choosing Participate Inc. as the builder and host for IRC's JRT credential made the most sense for this pilot, we recommend collaborating with your IT department to develop a timeline for exploring the risks and benefits of hosting your credential in-house. Embedding the technology into your organization's internal systems will better position you to seamlessly sustain your efforts beyond the pilot phase.

## Building the Verifiable Credential

As mentioned, JFF recommends using the LCW to house the credential. The second piece is building the credential itself. Having this information on hand is crucial for development, as it ensures the proper structure and functionality for issuance and verification. To provide the digital wallet and the credential, prepare to provide the following information:

	<b>Credential information metadata</b>		<b>Earner (program participant) information</b>
	Title		Name
	Description		Email
	Criteria met to earn credential		
	Issuance date		<b>Misc. data</b>
	Expiration date		Language preferences
	<b>Issuer information</b>		Additional program information
	Org. URL		Organization staff
	Org. logo		Contacts engaging in the pilot

### What this looked like for IRC:



#### CREDENTIAL INFORMATION

**Title:** Job Readiness Training for New Americans

**Description:** The recipient of this credential has been trained in best practices in workplace culture in the United States, including communication and navigating common human resources systems; searching and applying for jobs, including developing interview skills; and best practices in starting a job, including completing onboarding procedures and understanding workplace safety and rights. The recipient has practiced these skills through vocabulary activities, speaking and communication practice activities, role play activities, resume writing and job search activities, and interview practice and training. The recipient has demonstrated these competencies through oral and written comprehension assessments, a mock interview assessment, a job application practical examination, and an on-the-job role play assessment. Job Readiness Training

for New Americans is a six-module curriculum delivered by trained IRC instructors, designed to ensure that individuals have a strong foundation of work skills that can reinforce job success and retention. Competencies and skills attained: Proficient Understanding of U.S. Work Culture and Professional Attire, Effective Communication Skills, Demonstrated Reliability, Demonstrated Punctuality and Time Management Skills in the Workplace, Adaptive Attitude and Receptive to Feedback, and Team Collaboration.

**Criteria met to earn credential:** Successful completion of this certification requires the individual to pass a comprehensive assessment of job-readiness skills by qualified IRC staff. Assessment mechanisms for each module are outlined above. Individuals are scored by two IRC staff members on a detailed rubric with a 0 to 3 scale for each piece of the assessment. Recipients of this certificate have scored an overall 2 or higher, reflecting successful demonstration of requisite skills.

**Issuance and expiration date:** February 2025



## ISSUER INFORMATION

**URL:**

International Rescue Committee

**Logo:**



## EARNER (PROGRAM PARTICIPANT) INFORMATION

**Name:** Justin Smith

**Email:** Justin@email.com



## MISCELLANEOUS DATA

**Preferred language:** Arabic

**Organization staff:** Nadine Johnson (Nadine@email.com)

Allow sufficient time to determine your organization's technical and functional requirements, which will be helpful when building out the credential with your technology partner. Important requirements for the JFF and IRC demonstration follow; consider which would apply to your organization's LER effort:



#### Desktop and mobile applications

Ensure compatibility across both desktop and mobile platforms to provide accessibility and flexibility for all users.



#### Security and privacy

Implement robust security measures and privacy protocols to protect user data and maintain trust.



#### Simple UI/UX

Prioritize a user-friendly interface and experience to ensure ease of use and adoption by staff and the populations served.



#### Accessible language

Use clear and simple language to make the system easy to understand and use for users of all digital literacy levels.



#### Multiple language translation

Include support for multiple languages to cater to user groups from different backgrounds and national origins to enhance inclusivity.



#### Scalability

Make sure the technology is able to grow and adapt as your organization's needs change over time.



#### Cost effectiveness

Choose a solution that is affordable and provides good value for the investment, considering both initial and ongoing costs.



## Tech Partnership Do's and Don'ts

During this pilot, JFF and IRC collaborated with their tech partner, Participate Inc., and discovered several helpful tips and tricks along the way. When your organization partners with technology vendors for the pilot, following these best practices can ensure a successful collaboration:

### DO

**Assess compatibility and conduct exploratory calls.** Before engaging with a partner, thoroughly evaluate its solutions, schedule initial calls, and establish rapport, as this can clarify expectations and build a foundation for collaboration. Also, ensure its technology aligns with your organization's goals, budget, needs, and existing infrastructure. JFF provided IRC with detailed information on both LER technology solutions, outlining impact and implications for each; JFF and IRC conducted exploratory calls with vendors to facilitate informed decision-making.

**Foster open communication.** Maintain clear and consistent communication with your partners throughout the collaboration process. Regular check-ins will help address any challenges early and ensure alignment with objectives and expectations. IRC established an open communication channel with its tech vendor, facilitating on-demand training and troubleshooting. This proactive approach allowed IRC to provide valuable feedback to the vendor on how to improve both the digital wallet and the credential.

**Engage key stakeholders early and often.** Involve both executive decision-makers and implementation teams, including IT and program staff, from the outset of any partnership. Their combined perspectives are crucial for ensuring technical alignment, addressing security concerns,

and building leadership buy-in for future scaling. This early engagement is particularly critical: As learned during the pilot, IRC engaged stakeholders too late in the process, which necessitated a switch in tech vendors. Involving stakeholders from the beginning will help prevent similar issues in the future.

### DON'T

**Overlook due diligence.** Avoid rushing into partnerships without conducting thorough research. Assess the partner's track record, customer support capabilities, and commitment to data security to minimize potential risks.

**Neglect training and support.** Ensure that your staff receives adequate training on the new technology. Lack of familiarity can hinder adoption and effectiveness, so prioritize onboarding and ongoing support.

**Ignore feedback.** Be receptive to feedback from both your internal team and the partner. Constructive input can help improve processes and outcomes, fostering a more productive partnership.

**Assume one size fits all.** Recognize that each organization has unique needs and that solutions should not be applied universally. Customize your approach based on specific organizational contexts, whether using existing products or developing custom solutions.

## Training and Technical Support

While selecting the right technology is crucial, investing in your team's comfort and capability with the tools is equally important. IRC's experience showed the value of a people-first approach to technology implementation. It ensured its tech vendor provided comprehensive train-the-trainer sessions, allowing staff to both master the tools and effectively train others. The team created practical resources such as step-by-step guides for client credential access, while maintaining ongoing vendor support for troubleshooting.

Take time to assess your team's technology comfort levels early and provide multiple support channels, whether through vendor office hours, one-on-one sessions, or detailed written guides. This human-centered approach ensures your staff feels confident using the technology and can effectively support your target population, even when immediate vendor assistance isn't available.

### SUMMARY TAKEAWAYS

**Identify key pilot components.** Successful LER implementation requires a balance between technology and human roles and understanding four key components: the credential issuer, the verifiable credential itself, the digital wallet for storage, and the verification process to ensure authenticity.

**Tech vendor selection is critical.** This decision is essential for the success of LER initiatives. Vendors can provide either prebuilt solutions or custom builds, each with different levels of flexibility, integration, and cost, depending on the organization's needs and goals.

**Establish strong communication channels.** Ensuring a consistent feedback loop with technology vendors and involving key stakeholders from the start ensures alignment, addresses potential challenges early, and helps secure leadership buy-in, ultimately leading to more successful implementation and adoption of the technology.

# 4<sup>TH</sup> STEP

## Run the Pilot

After taking five months to design and set up the pilot, IRC launched the pilot and observed its findings for seven months. During this time, IRC focused on adapting to the evolving needs of clients and keeping a diverse range of employers engaged.

The following are example protocols IRC adopted to manage the pilot phase:

- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Data collection</b>                | To track our recruitment goals, IRC and JFF implemented a client tracker to monitor the number of clients recruited, the number of clients who successfully set up their digital wallet, and the number of responses to the pre-pilot survey. This data collection helped measure progress and informed adjustments.  |
| <b>Evaluation and feedback</b>        | Ongoing, frequent evaluation was vital. During the pilot, IRC and JFF gathered data to understand how the experience was for clients and staff. These reviews were coupled with intervals in the project timeline so that IRC could adjust as needed to improve outcomes.   |
| <b>Continuous program improvement</b> | It became important to expect the unexpected. For example, IRC planned at the start of the pilot to engage employers from a specific industry. As the pilot continued, it was difficult to maintain those connections, so IRC pivoted to collaborating with other industries. In this and other ways, IRC stayed nimble, adjusting plans to meet stakeholder needs. |
| <br>                                  |   |
| <b>Wrap-up time</b>                   | During the pilot design, IRC and JFF set aside time in the project timeline for pilot reflection, wrap-up, and feedback collection. IRC conducted wrap-up sessions with field sites to review successes, challenges, and future improvement opportunities, to identify actionable insights for future projects.   |
| <b>Reporting and documentation</b>    | We focused on thorough documentation of qualitative and quantitative observations so that the lessons learned can inform future initiatives.  |

## Case Studies

The following are two case studies, spotlighting a client's and a staff member's experience of the pilot.

## IRC Client Case Study

In 2021, Justin\* and his three family members embarked on a life-changing journey from Sudan to the United States, seeking refuge and new opportunities. Before their arrival, Justin first connected with IRC while still in his home country, laying the groundwork for the family's resettlement. In Sudan, Justin worked in retail and restaurants, experiences that significantly shaped his work ethic and skills. Now in the United States, he hopes to leverage his background in the hospitality industry, where he can build upon his previous experience.

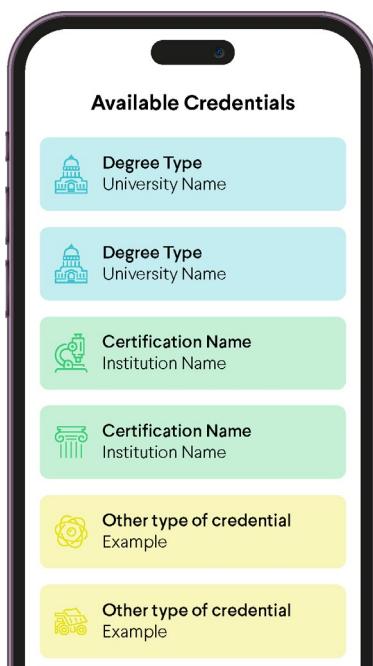
New to IRC, Justin completed IRC's Job Readiness Training program, which equips clients with tools and knowledge to be successful in a U.S.-style work environment. Upon completion, Justin's caseworker introduced him to IRC's JRT verifiable credential and the concept of a digital wallet. Initially, Justin found the transition challenging, as he had never encountered verifiable credentials before. However, IRC staff provided step-by-step guidance on how to download a digital wallet and use the credential. He mentioned that having the instructions translated into his native language would have made the process easier, although he found the app easy to download and use. Despite the language barrier, Justin appreciated how easily and efficiently the verifiable credential could be shared with employer.

Justin believes the verifiable credential will help employers understand that his JRT training is valid and accredited,



**"When I show an employer the app, I want them to know that it's real because it's from IRC and that they know I have learned the skills,"**

Justin shared, expressing his optimism that employers understand the value of the JRT verifiable credential.



as he can present verified evidence of his skills. He has shown the verifiable credential to potential employers and feels confident that they recognize the authenticity and validity of his training due to the credential being validated by IRC, a trusted partner in the community.

Justin and his caseworker continue to work together to identify employment opportunities that align with Justin's skill set and goals, sharing the credential with employers throughout the process. This experience has given Justin optimism and confidence and is a testament to the resilience of refugees and the transformative power of verifiable credentials in opening doors to new opportunities.

\* Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

## IRC Practitioner Case Study

In the spring of 2024, Nadine, an IRC staff member, was recruited by her supervisors to participate in the LER demonstration by leading the client recruitment process, introducing them to the pilot, and awarding them the verifiable credential. Nadine understands the struggles immigrants face when they first arrive in the United States. IRC clients are challenged to build a foundation of new achievements, experiences, and contacts. This level of awareness and empathy enabled Nadine to envision instantly how a digital wallet and credential could make life easier for her clients. The digital wallet would provide a centralized location in which clients could easily store, access, and immediately display their achievements to employer partners.

At the start of the pilot, Nadine considered what her clients would need to thrive. Drawing on both her own experiences and insights from her clients, she recognized the importance of familiarizing them with the technology and creating a comfortable, supportive environment for its use. To help clients become more familiar and comfortable with the tool, she embedded the introduction of the download into her already scheduled working sessions.

Typically, these sessions focused on supporting clients in resume building, job applications, and identifying potential employers. By embedding the introduction of this technology into these sessions, she was able to bridge clients' thinking of the verifiable credential and wallet as an additional tool, similar to their resume, that would support them in their career journey.



\*Name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

## IRC PRACTITIONER CASE STUDY (CONTINUED)

As more clients began to participate in the pilot, Nadine observed her clients' level of confidence gradually increase. For IRC staff, the credential offered the ability to signal to employers that their clients were prepared to enter the workforce. For IRC clients, it served as an opportunity to see their skills on paper and empowered them to begin their job search journey in the United States. Reflecting on the future of the pilot, Nadine said the wallets and verifiable credential have the potential to validate clients' skills and capabilities in lieu of obtaining references from their home country. This belief and optimism in the technology's potential to transform her clients' job search process is what continues to fuel Nadine's commitment to awarding the JRT credential to her clients.

For those interested in launching an LER pilot, Nadine offers four key pieces of advice for other direct service providers:

1. **Maintain ongoing communication.** Stay in regular contact with clients to reinforce their understanding of the process and identify any issues or barriers, such as losing access to the technology.
2. **Provide step-by-step training.** Break down instructions into clear, manageable steps. Screenshots or visual aids should be used to guide clients through each step of the process.
3. **Offer real-time support.** For clients who benefit from hands-on assistance, conduct sessions in real time to address questions as they arise.
4. **Track client progress with shared documentation.** Use shared spreadsheets or tracking tools for your implementation team so that everyone can view which clients are part of the process and provide consistent support.

## How Did IRC's LER Pilot Go?

The following are learnings and insights from IRC's pilot:

- 1 For IRC, the pilot's purpose was to introduce new users to LERs and to explore how a larger scale adoption of LERs would work for a CBO.
- 2 IRC staff, clients, and employers all saw the potential of LERs; they felt positive about LERs' ability to eliminate hiring barriers.
- 3 IRC clients were overwhelmingly positive about the credential; many interviewees found the digital format beneficial but required guidance from trusted IRC staff to use it.
- 4 IRC staff felt confident about using and explaining the credential; they could see how an LER can reduce the time needed to match clients with employers.
- 5 Providing multilingual support, self-identification, peer recognition, and staff training were key to improving program delivery and employer satisfaction.
- 6 It was helpful to use different terms depending on the audience (e.g., referencing the credential as "an app").
- 7 The credential design could be improved to more effectively communicate clients' identities, qualifications, and skills.
- 8 Employers said more detailed skill descriptions within the credential, shared baseline understanding of the program being validated (i.e., IRC's JRT program), and workshops focused on educating employers would help LERs become a part of the hiring process.

### SUMMARY TAKEAWAYS

**Perform continuous improvement through data collection.** Once the pilot is launched, frequent assessment of the pilot's progress through steady data collection can help you course correct when things don't work out as planned.

**Conduct thoughtful pilot wrap-up.** Once the pilot is complete, consider setting aside time for an in-depth pilot reflection and wrap-up discussions with the stakeholders who participated.

# Consider Adding Research and Evaluation

Depending on your capacity and resources, you could consider adding a research and evaluation component to your pilot. A methodical research and evaluation effort can help you gain a clear understanding of what is working, what is not, and where improvements can be made. With a consistent evaluation process, your organization can make targeted adjustments to enhance program effectiveness and decisions about how to scale the program in the future. Your research would also contribute to the growing body of knowledge and real-life examples in the field of LERs.

If you pursue an intentional research and evaluation effort, you can leverage surveys, focus groups, interviews, case studies, and several other methodologies. While you may rely heavily on one method to receive feedback, you may find that a mixed methodology, such as combining surveys and interviews to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, will serve you best. For this demonstration project, IRC and JFF partnered with We Are Open Cooperative to launch a user design research study that focused on assessing and evaluating the value of the JRT credential across employers, field staff, and clients through both surveys and virtual interviews. WAO intentionally engaged employers, staff, clients, and LER field experts around predetermined questions to ensure the assessment was balanced and encompassed perceptions across the ecosystem, including stakeholders who were familiar with IRC and its JRT program and those who were not.

## Research Considerations

Choosing the right research methodology is one thing; conducting research in an equity-centered way is another. Achieving the latter requires you to actively involve your partners and participants in your assessment and ensure their voices and needs are being represented. As you engage in this process, consider a few techniques IRC used:

### 1 Recognize power dynamics.

In its research, IRC interviewed or surveyed staff from headquarters and local sites, employers, and clients and intended to share the findings of the research with its funder and executive leadership staff. This had the potential to cause stakeholders to be selective in what they shared and potentially hold back critical feedback. To help alleviate this, WAO anonymized all results to ensure privacy and authenticity. This approach allowed stakeholders to share honestly and provided strong insights that IRC could use to make meaningful adjustments. As you launch your research, take a moment to consider the power imbalances that may impact participation and design solutions to provide a safe space for honest feedback.

**2**

## **Focus on culturally relevant data collection.**

IRC designed a series of pointed questions relevant to the perspectives of each stakeholder group. However, as it worked with staff and conducted interviews, IRC discovered that the questions were more applicable to clients when they translated the questions into scenarios. As you develop your question protocol, think intentionally about your stakeholders and tailor your approach to honor their contexts rather than maintaining a preset methodology.

**3**

## **Share findings and acknowledge role.**

For every deliverable that was created based on research, such as this guide, there was an intentional callout of all those who supported its creation. This nod toward their contribution signals to stakeholders that their voice is valued and their contributions meaningful. Additionally, IRC shared its findings back to its staff to gather their reactions and consider next steps. This collaborative approach is one way to include your stakeholders in forward planning.

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By embedding equity throughout the evaluation through these techniques, your research will not only gather valuable data but also empower stakeholders to see themselves as contributors rather than subjects.

### **SUMMARY TAKEAWAYS**

**Consider adding a research and evaluation component.** If capacity allows, consider adding a research and evaluation component for a rigorous analysis and to contribute to the growing field of LER knowledge.

**Ensure an equity-centered methodology.** Ensure all research conducted puts people first and takes an equity-centered approach, so that participants' perspectives are presented fairly and accurately and with dignity.

# Conclusion



Throughout this guide, we have provided key considerations for launching your pilot within your organization. However, the most critical piece of advice that we can offer is to embrace a learning mindset, as it is essential for driving continuous improvement. While designing and launching an LER pilot may feel daunting, the potential to use LERs to empower learners and workers makes the seemingly impossible possible. Your pilot is only the beginning of giving learners and workers the agency to share their experiences and articulate their skills to secure quality jobs. If you're interested in staying up to date with JFF's LER engagements, please sign up for updates at [jff.org/subscribe](http://jff.org/subscribe).

## RECOMMENDED READING: Resource Repository

Check out the following articles to learn more about the world of LERs and verifiable credentials. All were used to inform the design and delivery practices of the pilot and may be helpful in supporting your programming pursuits.

[Community Connections: Building Effective Partnerships for Improved Learner Employment Record Outcomes \(JFF\)](#)

[Credential Engine Learning and Employment Records Action Guide \(Credential Engine\)](#)  
[LER Ecosystem Map](#)

[Creating Clear Messages: Early Lessons for LER Leaders \(Aspen Institute\)](#)

[Messaging Guide: Making the Case for Learning & Employment Records with Employers \(Aspen Institute\)](#)

[Digital Learning Records Make the Job Market More Equitable and CBOs Can Help \(JFF\)](#)

[Federal Policy Unlocks for a Skills-First Economy \(JFF\)](#)

[All Learning Counts: Why Data Mobility Is the Key to Skills-Based Talent Management \(Aspen Institute\)](#)

# Glossary of Terms

The following are terms that were used throughout the planning and implementation of IRC and JFF's pilot:

<b>Digital wallet</b>	An app or online service used to make payments electronically or to store electronic tickets, documents, etc.
<b>Issuer</b>	The organization responsible for distributing verifiable credentials to end users.
<b>Learning and employment record</b>	A collection of digital records documenting a worker's skills and competencies, regardless of where and how they are earned. Examples include academic transcripts, licenses, joint services transcripts, skills certifications, work records, and scout badges.
<b>Learner Credential Wallet</b>	A cross-platform mobile application for storing and sharing digital learner credentials developed by the <a href="#">Digital Credentials Consortium</a> .
<b>Metadata</b>	Data providing information about one or more aspects of a digital badge, such as the issuer, criteria for issuance, and evidence. It's embedded within the badge and ensures its validity and authenticity. <i>In other words, metadata is like the detailed label inside your clothing that tells you where it was made, by whom, and how to take care of it.</i>
<b>Technology</b>	In the context of this LER pilot, refers to both the digital wallet, which is where the verifiable credential is stored, and the newly created verifiable credential (JRT).
<b>Validity</b>	Ensures that an assessment accurately measures what it claims to measure. In the context of verifiable credentials, this means the assessment process leading to the badge should accurately evaluate the abilities, knowledge, or competencies it is intended to certify.
<b>Verifiable credential</b>	A set of tamper-evident claims and metadata that cryptographically prove who issued it. Examples of verifiable credentials include, but are not limited to, digital employee identification cards, digital driver's licenses, and digital educational certificates.
<b>Verification</b>	Evaluation of whether a credential is an authentic and timely statement of the issuer or presenter, respectively.
<b>World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)</b>	The main international standards organization for the World Wide Web.

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# About JFF

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)

## About JFF's Language Choices

JFF is committed to using language that promotes equity and human dignity, rooted in the strengths of the people and communities we serve. We develop our content with the awareness that language can perpetuate privilege but also can educate, empower, and drive positive change to create a more equitable society. We will continually reevaluate our efforts as language usage continues to evolve.

[info.jff.org/language-matters](http://info.jff.org/language-matters)

## About International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee's (IRC) mission is to help people who have been affected by conflict and disaster regain control of their lives, survive, and recover including through the economic opportunity programs that help diverse communities develop the knowledge, skills, and assets they need to thrive in the US economy.



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That Works  
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