Recognizing Relevant Skills and Competencies

Badges for Vets offers veterans the opportunity to register their military skills and training and receive badges in a wide variety of different fields, from artillery to engineering to translation.

All badges are based on the certifications veterans received during military service. U.S. military training programs are widely recognized for their high quality, verifiability, and uniform standards.

“There’s very little variance,” said Robert Sparkman, a cofounder of the project and a veteran himself, in this article from Inside Higher Ed. Employers can search a database of participating veterans by ZIP code or skill set to find local vets who meet their needs.

While Badges for Vets concentrates on showcasing veterans’ credentials and translating them for a civilian audience, Who Built America’s badges project allows US history teachers to build their skills and competencies as they teach, revise, and ultimately design their own units for middle school and high school students.

Who Built America was created by the American Social History Project, an award-winning producer of historical media and provider of professional development located at the City University of New York.

The badge system allows teachers to progress from teaching prepared units to creating and designing their own units following Who Built America guidelines. Participating teachers create an online community of learners who comment on one another’s work and collaborate to develop and test classroom materials.

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) is also building community among participants as they earn badges. Since librarians often work in relative isolation, the badge system will allow them to see one another’s practice in new and interesting ways.

YALSA’s badges are linked to professional competencies. Teen librarians must complete real-world tasks and present an artifact of their work to peers before a badge is issued.

Veterans often possess highly refined skills, from technical competencies to problem solving and teamwork. Badges can help translate these skills to civilian employment.
YALSA’s seven badges are linked to the group’s professional competencies for teen librarians. A librarian must complete real-world tasks related to the competency and present an artifact of the work online, to be reviewed by colleagues according to a specific rubric.

The badge is earned when the artifact receives sufficient positive feedback from other librarians. Librarians can also offer constructive critique to each other and, if necessary, repost revised artifacts to earn a badge. YALSA’s badge system is expected to soft-launch this winter.

Linda Braun, badges project manager at YALSA, told the School Library Journal that many librarians pushed for the tough criteria.

“Everyone said, ‘Yes! You have to make sure we’re challenged. You have to make sure you’re asking us to do something meaningful, difficult, time-consuming and thoughtful because this is going to be a credential, and we want to make sure it means something.’”

**Lessons Learned**

Expect badge development to take real time and money. To get the most from a badge system, it’s worth investing the time to design the learning pathway, build a management system to track the learning, and create an infrastructure to help users showcase what they’ve learned. Some competition winners found themselves scaling back their plans due to budget constraints or changing technology partners to get the support they needed.

**Find the right tech partner.** Look for a developer with a real passion for the project, a strong work ethic, and deep knowledge of Open Badges. Talk through the process and goals for the badge development early on. If you’re not in agreement with your tech partner from the start, keep looking until you find a more compatible one.

**Get the word out—and listen, too.** Messaging is a critical to successful badge projects. Explain how badges work and why they are relevant and useful. Help both earners and issuers understand the value of badges by including both kinds of stakeholders in the design of the experiences and the establishment of the badge credentials themselves. This early engagement will create high-quality badges ready for immediate, real-world usage.

Badges that involve community input require special effort. Ensure that there are enough qualified people to help rate the work of large audiences of prospective badge earners.

Learn more about how Open Badges can unlock opportunities for all and enable Connected Learning experiences at reconnectlearning.org.