

Designing Learning Ecosystems

A WISE Living Lab
Playbook



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WISE

من مبادرات مؤسسة قطر
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Real Learning for the Real World: A case for Learning Ecosystems and how they will help the future generation of learners to thrive

Whilst the world has globally charged forward into the 21st century, the formal education sector has seemingly been held back. How can we reinvent ourselves and our relationship to others, to the world and knowledge, if the base of our knowledge is rooted in antiquated methods?

Education is not just about delivering expertise and content, especially in an era when information and knowledge are abundant and at our fingertips. Today, education should be about learning how to learn, how to question and how to interpret – building and flexing our critical thinking muscle – rather than naively consuming available information.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic, while still essential, simply aren't enough to prepare learners to thrive in the digital age. Similarly, if the past two years have taught us anything, it is that we thrive when connected with each other. The sense of belonging to a community is incredibly important for the healthy development of individuals. Educational institutions need to connect young people's learning to their social lives, their communities, their interests, and their careers. That's where community-based, connected, life-long learning – and Learning Ecosystems – come in.

There is so much untapped potential in involving the community in a learner's journey: think about all the learning opportunities that could exist for our learners if we simply let ourselves think outside the box and get everyone involved in education. A neighbor could host sessions on the history of the neighborhood, someone else might be a gifted public speaker and help young

learners hone this same skill, another could have a hobby such as making candles from the beeswax of a local beekeeper, sharing not only their skill, but their connections too, with the community. The list is endless and could revolutionize the world of our learners whilst creating stronger, deeper connections between people in their communities.

Communities need to come together to build on the basics and connect learners with hands-on learning experiences that cultivate creativity, imagination, curiosity and grit. This new education system needs to provide learners with the skills to adapt, live and flourish in resourceful and resilient ways. Our globally networked world today calls for new kinds of teaching and learning – and new kinds of problem-solvers.

With all this in mind, WISE's Learning Ecosystems Living Lab was set up to present a path – or at the very least, some best practices for anyone interested in bringing to life a Learning Ecosystem within their own community.

For over one year, we spoke to many experts and practitioners to understand the tools and methodologies they used. The lessons are compiled in this playbook, in which we attempt to give a humble, but by no means exhaustive, answer to the question: How do you build a Learning Ecosystem? Through continued research, discussion and shared experience, we hope this publication will be the first of many iterations, incorporating new perspectives and new best practices and reflecting the societal changes it underpins.

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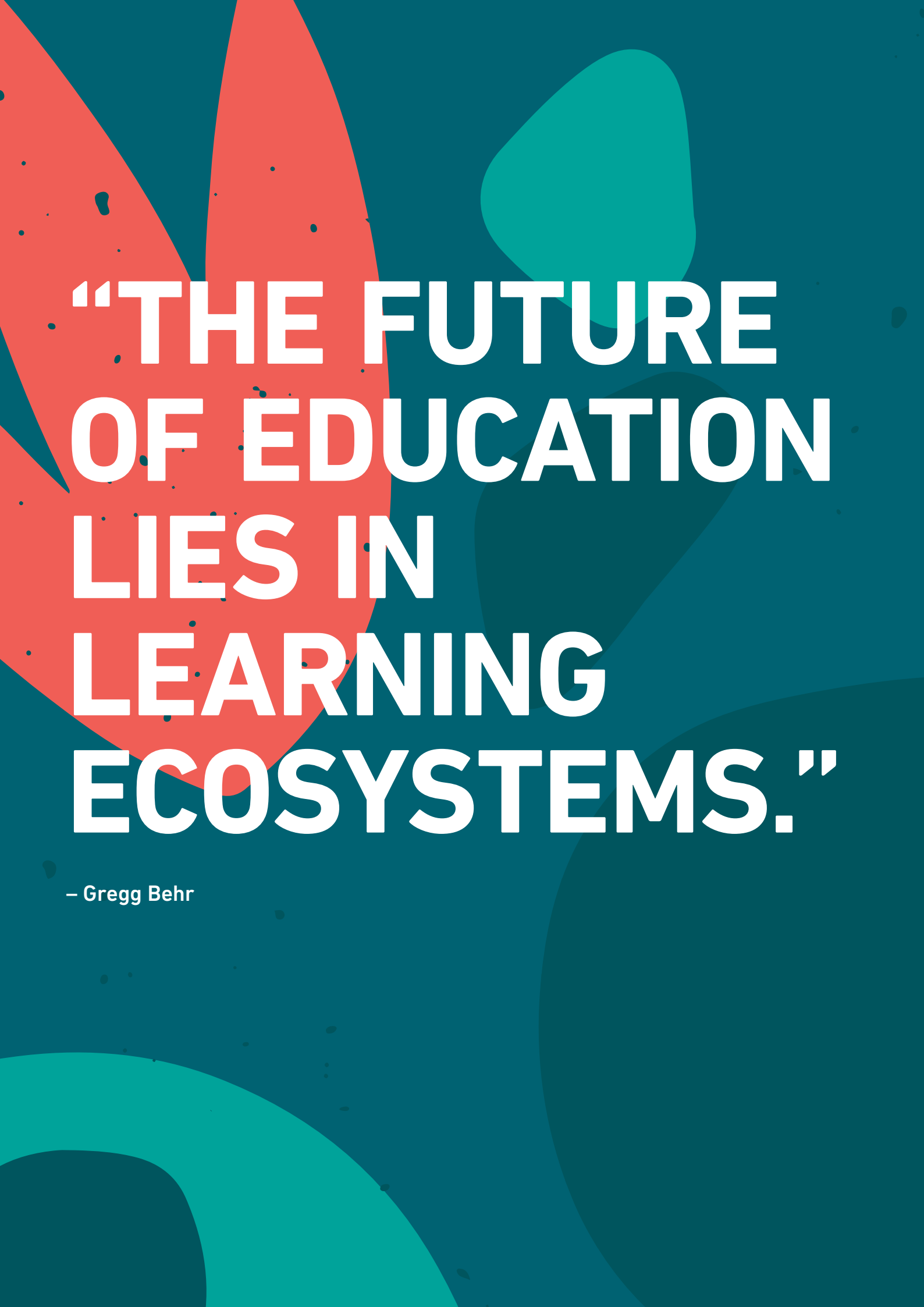
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**“THE FUTURE
OF EDUCATION
LIES IN
LEARNING
ECOSYSTEMS.”**

– Gregg Behr

A growing interest in Learning Ecosystems

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in researching and mapping Learning Ecosystems. Academics and researchers have sought to map actors and projects, as well as tried to understand trends and best practices to better define this concept. Indeed, since 2015 alone there have been many foundational papers and reports published including Learning Ecosystems, An Emerging Praxis for the Future of Education published by the Global Education Forum, The OECD Handbook for Innovative Learning Environments, Comprendre la dynamique des écosystèmes apprenants en Afrique published by l'Agence Française de Développement, the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities Guiding Documents, and Local Learning Ecosystems: Emerging Models published by the World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), to name but a few. To add to the academic research, policymakers have begun to explore and define the policy and legal frameworks within which Learning Ecosystems could be encouraged, as well as be able to flourish and thrive. Some examples include Day One Project in the USA, Vers une société apprenante in France, and most recently the report published by WISE: Developing Local Learning Ecosystems in Qatar to Advance Equity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion. ^{[1][2]}

The reason for this growing interest has come organically following the flourishing of initiatives labeled or referred to as 'Learning Ecosystems', across the globe. Some examples of these include; Ako Ōtautahi Learning City Christchurch, Cities of Learning, Big Picture Learning, RSA Cities of Learning, Remake Learning, Educació360, NET EDU Project, and the History Co:Lab. In fact, many of these projects have served as examples and case studies for the WISE Learning Ecosystems Living Lab, which has led to this playbook.

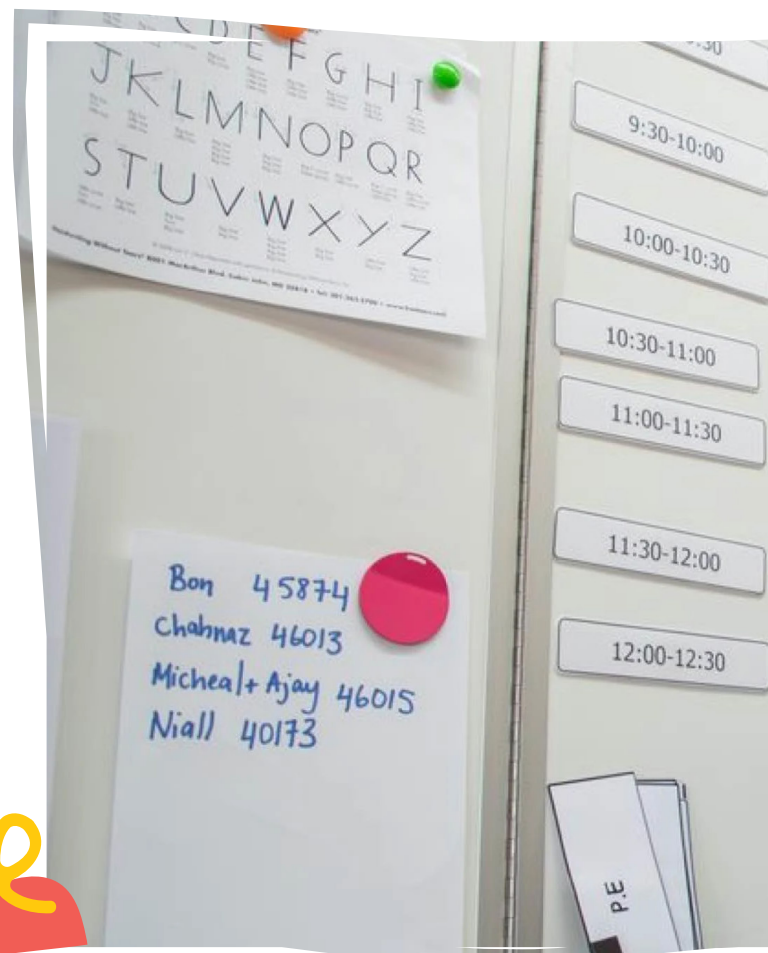
Thanks to the increasing research and interest, many definitions of Learning Ecosystems abound, each revolving around a similar theme – a system or group of people, coming together with their resources to support the evolution of learning within their community. This playbook is deeply anchored in WISE's and Qatar Foundation's effort to research Learning Ecosystems and is built upon the definition put forward by WISE in 2019 in the Local Learning Ecosystems: Emerging Models report by Valerie Hannon, Louise Thomas, Sarah Ward and Tom Beresford:

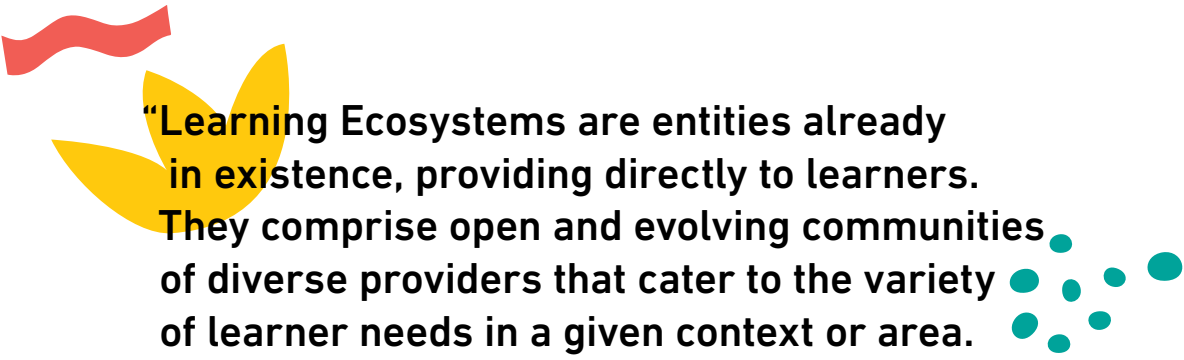
“Learning Ecosystems are entities already in existence, providing directly to learners. They comprise open and evolving communities of diverse providers that cater to the variety of learner needs in a given context or area. They are usually supported by an innovative credentialing system or technology that replaces or augments the traditional linear system of examinations and graduation.”

More concretely perhaps, a Learning Ecosystem is a network of people connected through their relationships and shared technology, resources, skills and tools, that work together to co-create and test solutions to enhance and advance learning within their community.

At its core, what is important to remember is that a Learning Ecosystem will aim to engage with a diverse pool of stakeholders – specifically integrating people who would not be considered “traditional” learning providers – to facilitate the discovery of new learning solutions and pathways. The work in a Learning Ecosystem is all community-based, effectively working to create a life-long learning society. Everyone can be a learner – at any age – therefore, each individual is systematically involved and invited to build and share their knowledge and discoveries with others. Similarly, a Learning Ecosystem also means that everyone can be a ‘teacher’ or more precisely, a learning provider; through the lens of a Learning Ecosystem. Everyone has learnings to share as well as a unique personal context.

Your neighbor, the local postman, and the librarian each have unique skills, knowledge and life experience that can be turned into a learning opportunity for someone else. Each step of the way, new pathways to learning are prototyped and tested with results shared to improve practices in the community and beyond.





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Learning Ecosystems as a way to rethink learning

Sometimes known as learning communities, cities of learning, or even campuses of innovation, Learning Ecosystems are vectors of pedagogical innovation that have already been successfully active in many places around the world and have played a key role in reinventing ways of learning and living in the world. No one has put it more plainly than Pavel Lushka and his team at Global Education Forward in their seminal report, from where we have sourced this table (see Figure 1). They made a strong case in demonstrating how Learning Ecosystems could allow us to move on from an industrial model of education.

Indeed, we are a far cry from the world that built the industrial model of education. We now live in a digital age, which has completely revolutionized the age of learning – learners can have access to any type of information, anywhere, anytime, whether it is factual or not. Every tiny bit of data is out there, at a learner's fingertips, effectively giving them the ability to be in charge of their own learning over the web. A disconnect happens when entering the formal education system: our traditional institutions have removed the agency from the learner, turning them into passive learners. This has led to a drop (if not stop altogether) of interest in learning and little has been done to update this system. This is why, central to the notion of a Learning Ecosystem is the notion of learner agency. In other words, it enables the learner to be the hero and leader of their learning journey. Re-positioning the learner at the center of their learning journey through a Learning Ecosystem can re-spark curiosity and enjoyment, ensure they feel fulfilled by the learning opportunities they are able to complete, guide them towards personalized pathways for their future and ignite an interest to become a lifelong, active learner.

As a Learning Ecosystem reflects the people within it and its regional context, there is no set model or template. A Learning Ecosystem can be organization

As a Learning Ecosystem reflects the people within

it and its regional context, there is no set model or template. A Learning Ecosystem can be organization based (a Learning Ecosystem put together by an NGO representing First-Nations), institution-based (a Learning Ecosystem led by a city, a museum or a school), thematic-based (a STEM Learning Ecosystem); it could also be learner and/or learning provider-centered and learner age-focused. It could also be all these things at once!

Many Learning Ecosystems do share some key characteristics, such as having a strong focus on leveraging informal and non-formal out-of-school learning opportunities. This is incredibly important as it has emerged that learners at the primary and secondary level spend 80% of their waking hours outside of the school environment. Learning Ecosystems therefore seek to connect learners with learning opportunities outside of the formal education system. Learning ecosystems revolve around a learner-centered approach with learner agency at the heart.

What is most interesting about Learning Ecosystems is their ability to flourish and thrive in a wide range of contexts; indeed, too often has innovative education been linked to the financial and political stability of a region. 'State-of-the-art' education is not often linked to areas of crises, inequality or remoteness. And yet, Learning Ecosystems could very well mark a turning point as research has shown how they have come to thrive and provide quality education for learners in under-privileged areas in South Africa, Senegal, Morocco, or even refugees in Lebanon and Turkey. In certain cities in America, Learning Ecosystems has meant bridging gaps in underprivileged neighborhoods - such as in the suburbs of Pittsburgh. The flexibility, adaptability and learner agency-centered approach of a Learning Ecosystem enables learners from all over the world to access education, where previously, the formal education sector was unable to support them. You can read more on this [here](#).

<p>Industrial Education</p>	<p>Learning Ecosystems</p>
<p>Institution-focused education driven by cognitive learning and passivation of learners (e.g. lecturing or memorizing)</p>	<p>Learner-focused education driven by experience based forms of learning and proactive learner engagement (e.g. project or play-based learning)</p>
<p>Education prepares learners for professional level</p>	<p>Lifelong learning blended at the personal, social, and professional levels</p>
<p>Learning occurs within specialized learning institutions (e.g. schools or colleges)</p>	<p>Learning occurs across networks of specialized and non-specialized learning providers and venues (e.g. workplaces and public spaces)</p>
<p>Learning is organized in a limited number of pre-set "trajectories" through standardized "batches" most often grouped by age and gender</p>	<p>Learning is organized as a personalized learning "journey", occurring individually and in various "peer" groups</p>
<p>Educational system is often disconnected from the needs of economy and society, driven by its own standards and practices.</p>	<p>Learning ecosystem is interconnected with, and co-created by various stakeholders within the economy and society</p>
<p>Educational system is predominantly governed by national governments</p>	<p>Learning Ecosystem is governed through an interaction of intentionally diverse and inclusive local and global stakeholders, including businesses, social movements, local and online communities</p>



Figure 1 - Table from GEF, Learning Ecosystems, An Emerging Praxis for the Future of Education, 2020

Why a playbook on Learning Ecosystems

As highlighted above and by the Wise Local Learning Ecosystems: Emerging Models Report, there is a clear growing academic interest in the concept of Learning Ecosystems, a growing number of projects and initiatives labeled as Learning Ecosystems, and an ongoing effort to model existing Learning Ecosystem initiatives. Theoretical foundations of Learning Ecosystems are steadily growing stronger, but many education and learning stakeholders say they still lack access to knowledge, a community of practice and practical guidelines on how to build and manage Learning Ecosystems.

Designing and building new ecosystems can seem intimidating at first glance; even more so when considering this more recent model of Learning Ecosystems as there is no clear-cut journey. Where should one start? What and how does one learn? What needs to be considered? Who and where to turn to? Who should be included? How do we engage them? All of these questions are the 'raison d'être' of the Learning Ecosystems Living Lab set up by WISE in 2019. The aim was to mobilize practitioners, experts, policymakers and innovators as a global community of practice and thought-leadership. More importantly, this knowledge and community was to come together to identify the design principles of Learning Ecosystems, from which this playbook was born.

In pursuit of this will to support our community, one key challenge we were faced with was that the design of a Learning Ecosystem seemed to happen very

organically: the champion-groups of individuals or organizations we spoke to very rarely followed a clear and intentional method to build their Learning Ecosystems. Instead, they speak of very iterative "messy" processes that led them to where they are today. In our desire for this playbook to be useful to our community in a very tangible and practical way, we had to make sense of this mess and offer an 'intentional' and 'logical model' that one could follow to design a Learning Ecosystem in their community. Of course, some of you may find that the ingredients for a Learning Ecosystems fall into place organically and your methodology will carve itself out. However, for those that may feel the need for more intentional guidance, this playbook is for you.

This playbook has tried to be as instructive and clear as possible, so as to make it accessible to any person who would want to launch a Learning Ecosystem. It is hoped that this playbook will be useful to those who make education their daily struggles, including teachers, extra-curricular educators, school principals or even local and regional councilors for education etc. But we hope this playbook will be as useful to those of you who aren't traditionally linked to formal education whether you are be museum directors, local business owners, librarians, or at the head of a youth employment network. So long as there is a passion to create change for learners in your community, we have written this playbook to be as of much help as you may need to get started.

Developing the Playbook

To develop this Playbook, the WISE Learning Ecosystems Living Lab team organized 4 global expert workshops, 4 high-level panels, 4 “Special Focus” article series and conducted over 60 interviews with Learning Ecosystems practitioners and experts.

(All content available [here](#))

About Living Lab

Learning Ecosystems Living Lab (LELL) is a new initiative anchored in a place-based and collective design approach to mobilize practitioners, experts, policymakers & innovators as a global community of practice and thought-leadership that will support the design of key components of Learning Ecosystems in different regional contexts. This initiative seeks to disrupt and spearhead the sharing of innovative ideas and support the design of Learning Ecosystems globally.

The global community of practice aims to:

- Identify shared challenges and contextualized solutions in designing and implementing Learning Ecosystems
- Serve as a springboard for content and research that captures and designs high-impact practices and policies in the community and beyond
- Serve as a knowledge hub of design principles and best practices
- Positively impact place-based learning and societal objectives in various contexts



As highlighted by the WISE Local Learning Ecosystems: Emerging Models report, there is a clear growing interest in the concept of Learning Ecosystems. Theoretical foundations of Learning Ecosystems are steadily growing stronger, but education stakeholders still lack access to knowledge, a community of practice and practical guidelines on how to build and manage Learning Ecosystems. The goal of LELL is to bridge this gap and to develop innovative and robust models of Learning Ecosystems to be applied in various global contexts.

How to read and use this playbook

The playbook was created and divided to resemble a 3-tiered cake. Each of the chapters combine to form key ingredients for the success of a particular layer. Each layer needs to be successfully baked for the next – more intricate – layers to be added on top. Much like this baking analogy, you and your core team need to feel confident you have done the groundwork for each part, before moving onto the next, as this will determine the success of your Learning Ecosystem. But this playbook would also like to offer a disclaimer if you will: very much like baking, undertaking the journey of bringing a Learning Ecosystem to life is messy. This is unsurprising, as Learning Ecosystems require so many people to work together, in many different ways, over a long period of time. Every expert we have spoken to over the course of writing this playbook has confirmed that, however well-planned and thought out you and your team may be, when you embark on this journey, prepare to be surprised and warm up your quick-thinking and adaptability muscles.



In Part 1: Preparing for your Learning Ecosystem,

you will understand the groundwork it will take for your core team to complete a solid base for your ecosystem. The various steps – which include building a logic model and mapping stakeholders and learning opportunities within your chosen region – will ultimately lead you to collecting the essential data you need, before even thinking about building your Learning Ecosystem. You need to understand the gaps at hand, your target audience and what solutions would be best. To complete these steps, you will only actively need your core team. Although every Learning Ecosystem journey is different, the steps in Part 1 should take you approximately 3 months to complete.

Part 2: Designing your Learning Ecosystem

is made up of 4 steps to guide you as you start getting into the nitty-gritty design stage. This is when you and your team will prototype, build an outreach plan, and collaborate heavily within the core team, but also with external stakeholders. Depending on the size and context of your community where you intend to build your Learning Ecosystem, we expect that you will be collaborating with between 10-30 people. This is a higher volume of people than what you needed in Part 1, but it is for good reason: in Part 2, you will need to decide on the leadership and governance of your Learning Ecosystem, as well as understand how to collaborate and create strong external networks.

Finally, in Part 3: The Learning Experience,

you will be tailoring the user experience of your Learning Ecosystem to its learners. This is where you will have a look at different ways of connecting the learner to the learning which will happen through your Learning Ecosystem. By definition, this step will require you to connect with potentially hundreds or thousands of people as you reach out for feedback from learners, their caregivers and anyone else coming into contact with the tangible product produced from your Learning Ecosystem.

Every chapter should be seen as an introduction to the questions being asked – indeed, once we dived deeper into the research chapter, it became apparent we could have written entire playbooks for each of them! Instead, these chapters were built as introductions to present a big picture in order to facilitate the reader - and future Learning Ecosystem leader - in building an understanding of the different paths you could take and the resources you would need. Every chapter has smaller toolboxes or resource boxes, full of links, further readings, some tips and even some downloadable worksheets for you to discover and dig deeper, if you so wish.

In addition to the resource boxes dotted along every chapter, you will find a bibliography where you can access further reading and research into each topic. We have done our best to give you helpful, accurate guidance on each step of the process, but this is by no means an exhaustive list; your Learning Ecosystem will be unique and tailored to you and your community's needs.

The authors would like to offer one last important note: we would like to insist on the idea that there are many more paths to building a Learning Ecosystem than the one we have suggested. Every Learning Ecosystem is unique, a reflection of the people and places that hold it up, and there is therefore no 'one size fits all' route to building one. However, we hope that this playbook is the beginning of further research and propose-designed methodologies for Learning Ecosystems, by WISE and its community, and that this playbook will be regularly updated in years to come.

Are you ready to embark on the journey of building your Learning Ecosystem?

[1] Gregg Behr, "Investing in Community Learning Ecosystems", Day One Project, February 8, 2021, <https://www.dayoneproject.org/ideas/investing-in-community-learning-ecosystems/>

[2] Becchetti-Bizot, Houzel et Taddei, mars 2017

[3] The Sprout Fund, 2015

Part 1:

Preparing your Learning Ecosystem



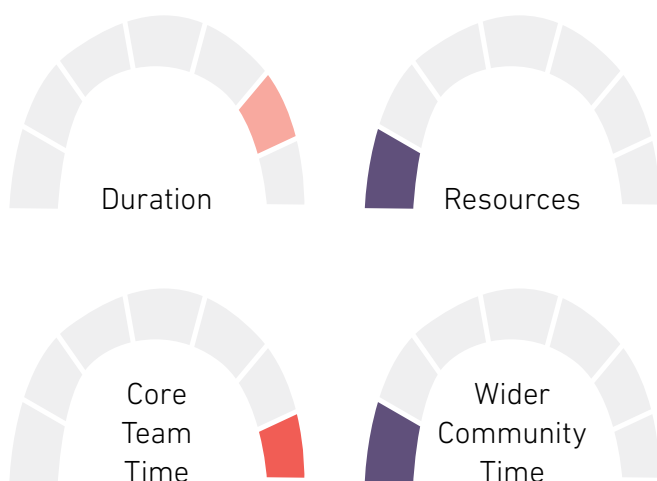
Welcome!

Welcome! If you're here, you are probably in the throes of thinking up a Learning Ecosystem, but you probably also have a lot of questions. Part 1: Preparing for your Learning Ecosystem seeks to get you slowly fired up to ensure you have a solid base for your ecosystem.

If you're starting from scratch, there is a certain amount of essential data that needs to be collected before going ahead and designing your Learning Ecosystem to ensure that whatever you create is most tailored and helpful to your community. Any intrepid explorer knows it is important to have a guiding compass to keep forging ahead - so first up, let's get you to build a logic model.

CHAPTER 1

Setting your Learning Ecosystem impact intention: The Theory of Change



The need for a logic model and why you should use a Theory of Change

A logic model can be viewed as a roadmap or blueprint for how a project, an initiative, or in our case a Learning Ecosystem, will roll out in order to reach the intended short, medium and long-term outcomes and overall goals. It is most often used to support project planning and monitoring. There exist many different kinds of models; some vary in number of steps, whilst others vary in how vague the intention goal is. Of all the types, this playbook would like to recommend a Theory of Change.

The Theory of Change is a tested approach in conceptualizing the overall goal for a project, social initiative, large-scale community change projects etc., and is considered by many as a useful and pertinent tool for project leaders to conceptualize eco-systemic approaches at large. We think a Theory of Change would be the most appropriate framework for your Learning Ecosystem as this is an outcomes-focused approach when prepping, designing, monitoring and evaluating your progress. Learning Ecosystems often have ambitious goals and a complex set of interventions, and a Theory of Change approach will help the ecosystem stewards to understand how and why their ecosystem works, through the creation of specific outcomes and indicators that will allow them to locate gaps and weaknesses in the ecosystem.

What does a Theory of Change look like?

A Theory of Change results in a diagram or chart – presented on a digital or paper worksheet, but a full theory of change process goes beyond this - this approach will allow you to define clear outcomes, deliverables and an idea of the resources involved. It should help you consider and articulate the assumptions and enablers that surround your Learning Ecosystem and explain why you think your activities will lead to the outcomes you want. It should also challenge you to develop clear aims and strategies and explore whether your plans are supported by evidence. By the end of a Theory of Change process, you should have a clear idea of what your Learning Ecosystem aims to achieve, the changes you want to see happen and have identified, the beneficiaries of the change and the strategy you have developed to attain the change.

Although it is comparatively more work when compared to other logic models, a theory of change is useful for planning the process and can be a good guide for your work.

What are the benefits of doing a Theory of Change in conceptualizing a Learning Ecosystem?

- Your team and the design process of your ecosystem will be more efficient
- Building a Theory of Change means stakeholders can agree on and visualize the journey it will take to build your Learning Ecosystem. It will also clarify roles and responsibilities, keeping everyone on the same page.
- You will have a logic model framework that promotes co-design
- A Theory of Change actively includes co-design in its building process which is incredibly useful for creating a Learning Ecosystem. Co-design is an integral part to building a healthy and innovative

Learning Ecosystem, as it ensures all stakeholders are heard. To learn more about co-creation and co-design, see Chapter 5.

- You will have a framework to check milestones and stay on course
- Building a Theory of Change will allow you to develop a physical diagram of your entire journey. Stakeholders, outcomes and overall goals are all detailed and actual dates can be added to give you an overall development plan.

Upon completing your theory of change, you will have:

- A clear and testable hypothesis about how change will occur, that not only allows you to be accountable for results, but also ensures your results are credible because they were predicted to occur in a certain way
- A visual representation of the change you want to see in your community and how you expect it to come about through this Learning Ecosystem approach
- A blueprint for evaluation with measurable indicators of success identified
- An agreement among core stakeholders about what defines success and what it takes to get there
- A powerful communication tool to capture the complexity of your ecosystem



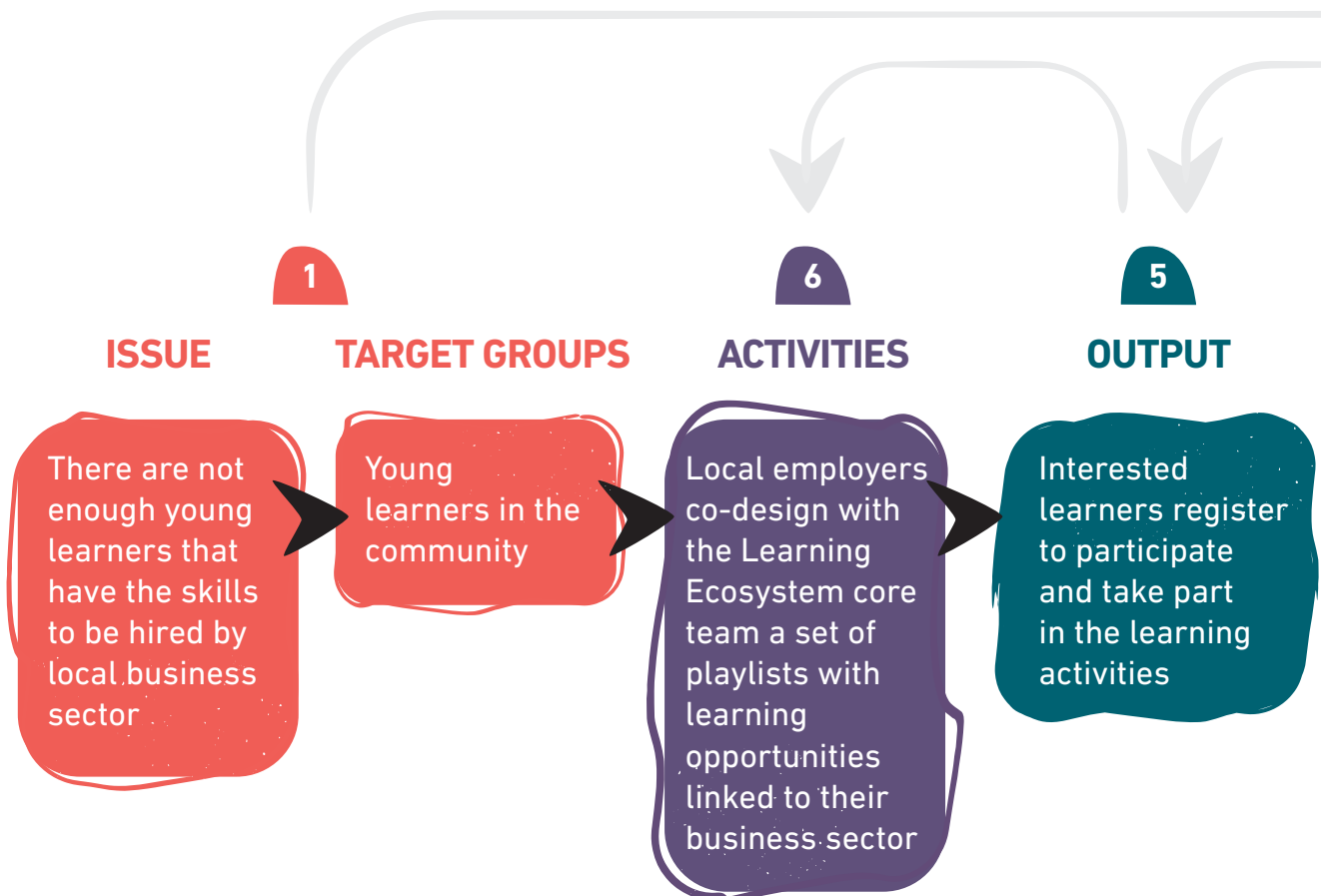
- You will be able to communicate your Learning Ecosystem’s aims
- Your Theory of Change diagram is an incredibly effective and simple way of communicating the entire journey to stakeholders.
- You will have a basis for reports to funders, policymakers, media, and will be able to document lessons learnt
- Reporting is something you might have to do for funders or policymakers, or it might be something you might want to do for yourself and your stakeholders. In any case, reporting and measuring is important and it all starts with having the right information to start with. Detailing overall goals to be achieved, and the short, mid and long-term outcomes you hope to generate are a great way to measure the success of your Learning Ecosystem.

How to build a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change has one particularity in that you will want to build it backwards - too often people want to start brainstorming very practical activities before realizing that these activities won’t necessarily benefit the long-term vision.

In addition, you are going to want to build your Theory of Change with your core Learning Ecosystem stakeholders. This means coming together (physically, if possible) and brainstorming together using templates and post-it notes.

1. Define long term goals/intentions for your Learning ecosystem.
Example: Lower unemployment rate of learners who have participated in your Learning Ecosystem
2. Mapping the pathway to change and write down the outcomes to lead to your intention. This step is the most time-consuming, as you will need to



Example of Theory of Change built on Mural (online platform):

identify and organize all the outcomes that will help you achieve your end vision. Outcomes are changes that must occur prior to the achievement of the long-term goal. Walking backwards from your end vision through each outcome, ask yourself: "What are the preconditions required for the outcomes at this stage?"

Example: 1st Outcome: Stronger relationships between employers and learners in your community.
2nd Outcome: Learners feel empowered to apply for junior jobs in their community.

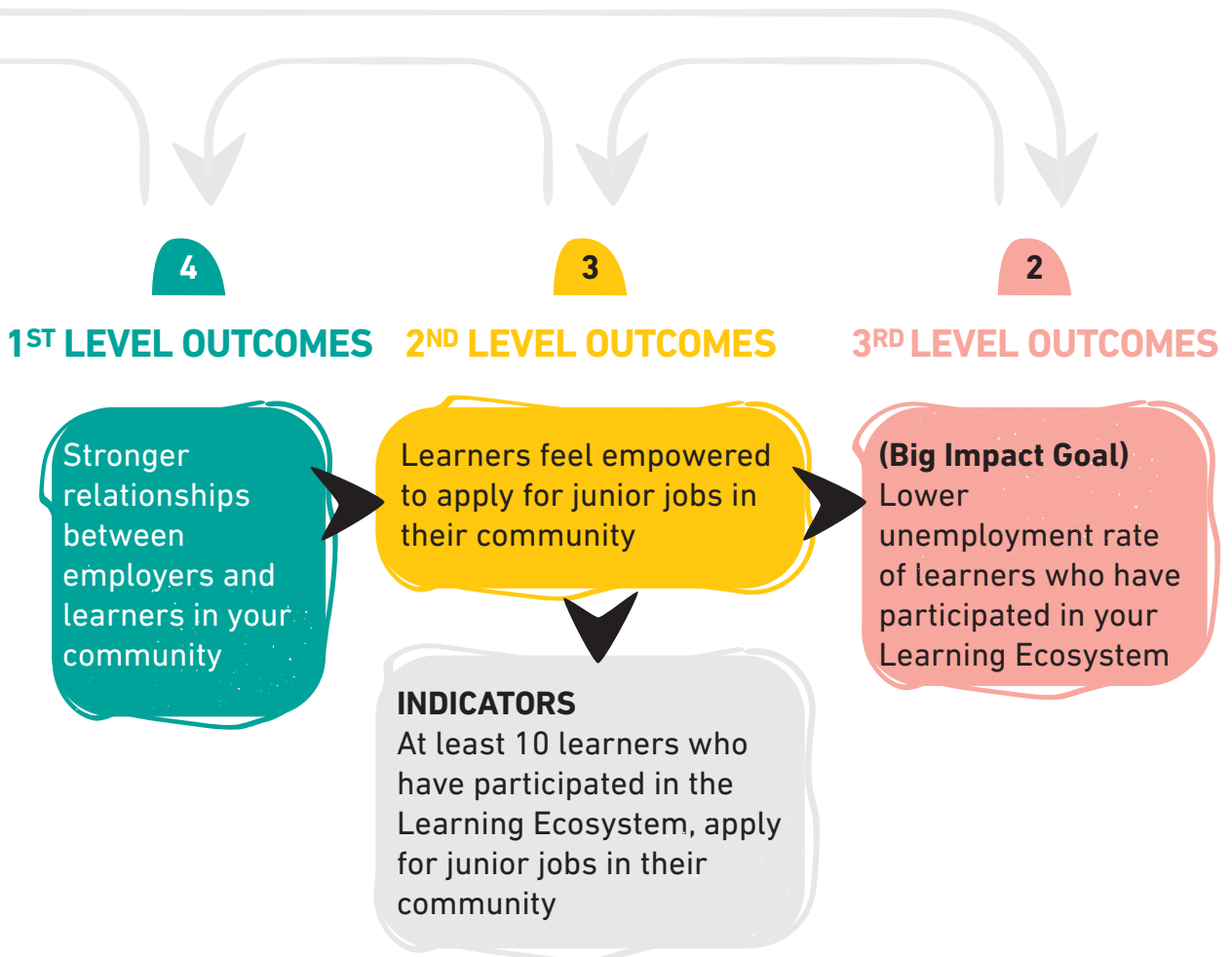
- 3. Identifying indicators to track progress. For each outcome, the project team must ask themselves "what evidence will we use to show that this outcome has been achieved?" Indicators are specific qualitative or quantitative variables used to track progress towards outcome achievement and to determine success of the project.

Example: An indicator for outcome would be that at least 25% learners etc. who have participated in the Learning Ecosystem, felt empowered to apply for junior jobs in their community.

- 4. Selecting a set of activities. Now the fun bit! Time to decide what interventions are needed to serve your outcomes and long-term goals. This could be a single activity or a multitude of events. Each activity in a Theory of Change must be linked to required outcomes.

Example:

- Local employers co-design with the Learning Ecosystem core team a set of playlists with learning opportunities linked to their business sector.
- Interested learners register to participate and take part in the learning activities.





Theory of Change and Learning Ecosystem Design

In this “Part 1: Preparing for your Ecosystem” of this playbook, you will look at preparing your Learning Ecosystem, engaging your core project group in the creation of the essence of the Learning Ecosystem, before reaching out to the wider community. Your Theory of Change, and most importantly, the long-term vision will guide you when undertaking key steps of your Learning Ecosystem design including: stakeholder mapping (Chapter 2), the readiness assessment (Chapter 3) and when you will map your learning opportunities (Chapter 4). The Theory of Change model will provide you with a blueprint for your Learning Ecosystem that you can always go back to, refine and follow.

In “Part 2: Designing and Activating your Learning Ecosystem”, you will finally get to co-design your Learning Ecosystem. If the chapters in Part 1 are your ingredients, co-designing your Learning Ecosystem will be the more refined product. You will be able to see how all the chapters - or your ingredients - mix together to “create” the cake. Your Theory of Change serves as the recipe you can go back and check throughout the process: it will be a useful tool in keeping everyone reminded about what the ultimate goal of your Learning Ecosystem is.

**Further reading resources:**

[How to construct a Theory of Change – Video – 3 minutes](#)

[Measuring your social impact: Theory of Change – Video – 2:25](#)

[Theory of Change – Reading](#)

[Open University, The Theory of Change – Reading](#)

Useful [vocabulary](#) when building theory of change

Tools to help you:

Online collaborative platforms that you can use to build your Theory of Change, save notes from workshop sessions etc...

[Mural](#)

[Miro](#)

[Jamboard](#)

If conducting live sessions and you prefer to build your Theory of Change on paper, you will need:

Post it notes

Pens

A3 or larger pieces of paper

We recommend you use an online cloud platform to store backup notes, presentations, online documents etc. This process will yield lots of documents that will need to be inventoried and shared with many stakeholders at different stages.

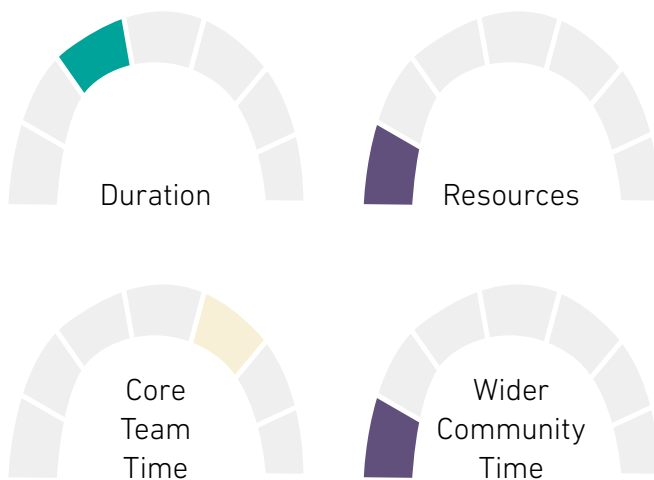
You can use:

Google Drive

Microsoft Office

CHAPTER 2

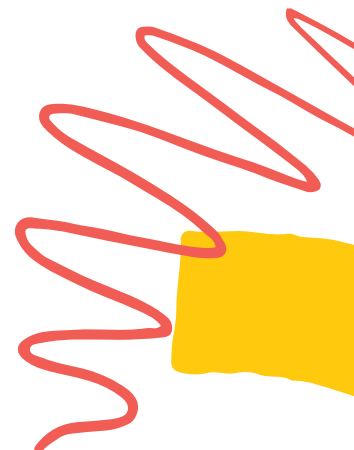
Stakeholder Mapping

**What is a stakeholder?**

Stakeholders are the people, or organizations, who will be directly or indirectly affected by the Learning Ecosystems, those who will be influential, and those who have an interest in the outcome of your Learning Ecosystem.

Those:

- With whom you can design and build your Learning Ecosystems
- Who could potentially be learning providers of your ecosystem
- Who can fund or bring resources to your ecosystem
- Who can help you engage communities and target participants of your learning ecosystem
- Who could be interested in collaborating/working with/hiring those who have participated
- Who will be learners and/or can encourage learners to participate



Examples of stakeholders

Learning providers

- Schools
- Individual teachers
- Higher education institutions/ representatives
- Cultural institutions (museums, youth centers, libraries, theaters, art galleries, music halls)
- Community gardens
- Hackathons
- Conferences
- Local & regional employers
- Skilled individuals: people with local historical knowledge, artistic skills, IT skills, with a passion for a subject matter, oral histories

Learners

- Young, in school learners
- Mature students
- Young and older professionals
- People in unemployment
- Career switchers

Governing Officials

- District representatives
- Policy makers & legislators
- Government officials
- City officials
- Funding organizations
- Principals
- School board members

Others

- Families and care givers of learners
- Business owners
- Community workers
- Representatives from indigenous groups
- Community residents unrelated to learners
- Neighborhood leaders
- Religious institutions

What is a stakeholder map and what do they look like?

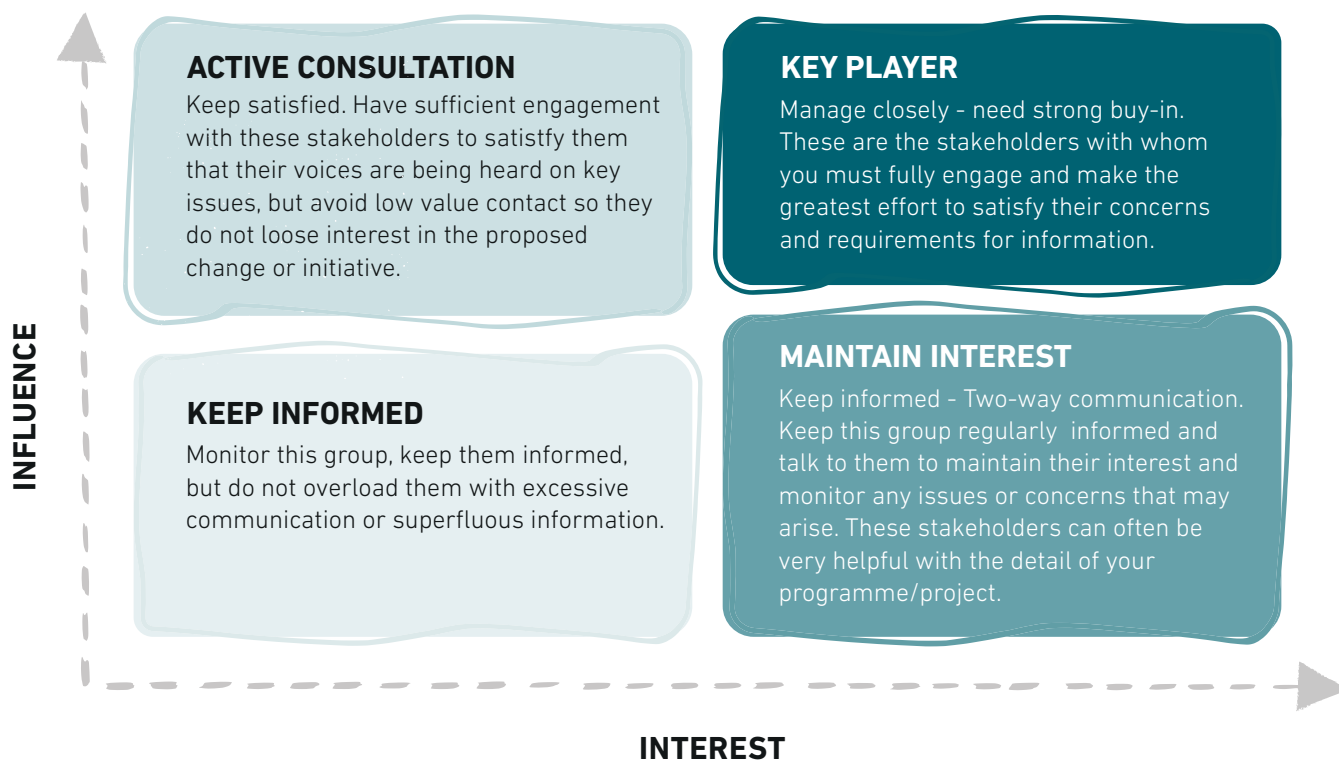
A stakeholder map will help you visualize all the different kinds of people and organizations that are directly and indirectly affected and influenced by your Learning Ecosystem. A map helps you visualize who your main collaborators are, where connections and exchanges are already happening and where collaboration will be most efficient. This exercise will also help you create a clear engagement and management plan and is key in your Theory of Change.

There are two ways to map stakeholders: by their level of interest and by their level of influence. By influence, it means stakeholders who have power in setting and modifying ecosystem requirements (such as local policy members or members of a school/educational board). On the other hand, interest means that stakeholders are affected by the outcome of the ecosystem but little influence (such as the caregivers of learners). Often,

stakeholders identified as high in the level of influence will be those with whom you collaborate the most.

Stakeholder maps can look a variety of ways - you can use a quadrant matrix or a series of concentric circles (both examples below). You can make your own or print off worksheets from resources - see the resource box at the end of this chapter for links). Whichever way you choose to present your map, make sure it is clear and you can easily identify your stakeholders in each category.





Why should you map your stakeholders?

At its core, a Learning Ecosystem is all about collaboration and co-creation, therefore engaging with your stakeholders is invaluable in creating these chains. The better you know who your stakeholders are, and the better engaged stakeholders are, the more efficient collaboration will be and therefore, the higher the success rate of your Learning Ecosystem!

Your stakeholder mapping will help you to:

- Focus your resources: Once you have a stakeholder map, you can organize your core team around who to prioritize and engage first, who will be the key players to engage and who will be potential roadblocks in your endeavors.
- Understand how many stakeholders you should engage with throwing yourself into building a Learning Ecosystem can seem overwhelming, so prioritizing your stakeholders will help you focus your energies on only engaging the stakeholders you need.
- Identify your core stakeholder team

How to lead a stakeholder mapping workshop

Doing a stakeholder mapping exercise is going to require you to lead a stakeholder mapping workshop. This can be done online or in person as is often mentioned throughout this playbook, we would highly recommend holding workshops in person if you are able. Learning Ecosystems are all about connecting to people and being in the same room as people facilitates the building of relationships.)

In both cases, you and your core project team will need to get together and work through a series of worksheets to be able to map your stakeholders. These can be downloaded and printed or shared through a screen - if you would like to know more about digital platforms you can use for online exercises, see the resource box below.

You will most likely need to have 2 or 3, 45 to 60-minute workshops with your core team in order to create an exhaustive list of stakeholders. Since this is the very beginning of your Learning Ecosystem, you want to make sure you can map as many stakeholders as possible to get a real sense of the scale your Learning Ecosystem could have.





Tip: If you want to push yourself one step further, try and sketch the value exchange between each stakeholder: using arrows or lines; draw what each stakeholder provides to each other: funding, resources, trust, support, love etc.

Once you have gathered your core team, you will need to:

1. Create a list of possible stakeholders (who are the people or organizations that will influence or be interested in the ecosystem)
2. Select which stakeholder map you prefer (matrix or concentric circle) and place your stakeholders within your map. Prompts to think about: which of your stakeholders are essential, important, interesting; what different levels of influence do each stakeholders have?
3. Depending on the number of stakeholders you have placed on your map, you might need to prioritize your most important stakeholders within each quadrant or circle to give you some direction for later exercises.

What's Next?

Now that you have identified your stakeholders, you have a clearer picture of the actors in your play. Thanks to the prioritization exercise you've done, you also know which actors you will need to engage as quickly as possible, whilst remembering that others can be brought onto the ecosystem later. The more you advance in building your Learning Ecosystem, the more you will keep referring to your stakeholder map: as new connections emerge between people, you will have to update the value exchange arrows whilst also updating your list of stakeholders themselves. The growth and success of your Learning Ecosystem will surely attract new stakeholders as time goes on too!

With your stakeholder map in hand, you are ready for the next step: analyzing the situation of your community and whether it is ready for innovative change and a Learning Ecosystem approach.

Readings and resources:

- [Examples of how to build your map and template worksheets](#)
- [The complete stakeholder mapping guide](#)
- [A quick and dirty guide on stakeholder mapping](#)

Worksheets:

- [Stakeholder matrix](#)
- [Stakeholder concentric circles](#)

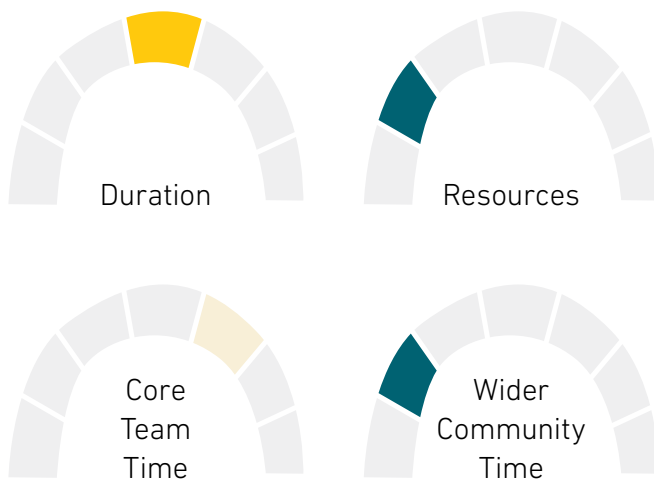
Online tools for online workshops:

- [Jamboard](#)
- [Mural](#)
- [Miro](#)



CHAPTER 3

Readiness Assessment



The importance of carrying out a readiness assessment

A Learning Ecosystem is a space where actors, such as teachers, school leaders, students, parents, technologists, civic entrepreneurs, designers, researchers, philanthropists, and policy makers can come together and collaborate to co-create different learning practices, building new learning models, encourage lifelong learning and generate learning outside of the formal educational system (Clayton 2016, Diaz et al 2020).

The key to creating a successful and efficient ecosystem is deeply understanding the linkages between all of the above actors before you actually get going. That is where doing a readiness assessment comes in; in this moment, it is important for you to understand these linkages and take a closer look at how open your ecosystem is to innovation and change. Adapting, throwing out the rule book and starting from scratch might sound good to you but do you know if the key players in your community feel the same way? Is your community motivated to change? Do they have the bandwidth to commit to this kind of project? Are they willing to communicate, manage expectations, flag gaps in relationships and indicate potential hurdles to your project?

A readiness assessment is like doing a general check up of the existing – if dormant – ecosystem before you: are other stakeholders ready for such an approach, where is there potential to grow, where does it hurt, what seems to be going well already? For many, activating a Learning Ecosystem will come with finite and limited resources, so being able to know where to efficiently spend these resources to best achieve success will be very useful.



**“It is as valuable to fix broken connections
as it is to create new ones.” – Jordi Díaz-Gibson**

What should you assess and who should you speak to?

When researching readiness assessment, we found that there was one tool that stood out for its groundbreaking innovation and results: The School Weavers Tool, developed by Jordi Díaz-Gibson (Blanquerna, Ramon Llull University) and international team in the NetEdu Project, fix connections between community players and engage the community in a change process. They identified several areas/topics that are key in assessing a school's readiness for change. (We have added prompt questions to every key topic to help you understand how to approach the topic when carrying out your readiness assessment.)

Empathy: Do stakeholders feel empathy for each other? Are they willing to understand where each of them is coming from? Is there enough empathy to bridge the diversity of your ecosystem?

Trust: Will stakeholders and participants willingly share experiences and resources with each other? Will participants be comfortable enough to be vulnerable? If you're wondering why trust is important and how to foster it, head to Chapter 8.

Purpose: Are participants on the same page regarding the purpose of the potential ecosystem?

Collaboration: Are the stakeholders you want to engage already collaborating, are there connections you can easily make, what relationships need to be fixed?

Innovation: Try to understand how innovative your surroundings/community are and how willing your community is ready to “change”

New forms of Learning: How does your community feel about innovative learning approaches (informal, personalized, projet-bases, out of school) and how do they assess learning needs and gaps

Equity: Is your community ready/open to diversity?

In addition to these key areas identified by NET EDU, we would like to put forward to more areas that we think would be beneficial to know about your community:

Mindset: What kind of mindset do your stakeholders have? Are they competitive?

Motivation: what is the driving force behind all your stakeholders?

Although the NET EDU tool was created for assessing the readiness of schools, we believe that it is a great tool and resource to catalyze discussion and thought around the readiness of your wider community of stakeholders for your Learning Ecosystem. We love this tool for its ease of use if you are a school entity thinking of building a Learning Ecosystem, but its format is also incredibly inspiring for any other organization to be able to keep a finger on the pulse of your community and its readiness for a Learning Ecosystem. Even if you don't end up using the NET EDU tool and prefer to build your own assessment framework and tool, we highly recommend you make these your priority areas when diagnosing your community as they are fundamental values that will carry your Learning Ecosystem to success.

Example checklist for the people you want to participate (this is not exhaustive and will depend on who is part of your community - refer to your stakeholder map to know who you should contact):

- Teachers
- Leaders
- Parents
- School staff
- Community collaborators
- District/ City leaders
- Policy makers
- Young, in-school learners
- Mature students
- Young and older professionals
- People in unemployment
- Career switchers
- Business owners
- Neighborhood leaders

How to carry out a readiness assessment?

There exists a multitude of self-assessment tools that can guide you to understand the state of relationships already at play. We will be looking in more detail at the School Weavers Tool created by NET EDU mentioned above. Their diagnostic tool works on a platform generated by NET EDU but a similar method can be applied to your context, without necessarily signing up to the School Weavers Tool - you could make your own surveys, carrying out your own research through questions relating to the areas you think are most appropriate to your context (you can find more resources on surveys and questionnaires in the resource box below).

If using the NET EDU School Weaver's tool, schools register themselves, share basic info and collect data from the community by assessing various behaviors through surveys. Each different type of participant - as seen above - will have a different survey, with questions specific to their group. The data collected is then mapped against a 6-point Likert-type scale, capturing to what extent groups of participants agree on each topic. This will then give the participating schools a grade breakdown with which they will be able to see how 'ready' their community is - in reality this, score is more of a representation of how established and well-functioning connections are in their ecosystem. This ultimately resembles a performance assessment; but instead of a final grade, schools get an understanding of how ready or not they are to undertake fundamental changes.

Talk of performance assessment and point scales might have made some readers a bit worried - this is not a test. There is no such thing as a 'negative assessment' in the same way as you can never actually be 'ready' to build a Learning Ecosystem. If a school had collected all its surveys and realized that the scores for how students, families and teachers felt about Trust in school were low, that would simply indicate that the



school and its stakeholders clearly have their work cut out. Through the platform, they have access to best practices from all around the world and can also reach out to experts in how to tackle the issue. But remember: a low score does not mean the complete scrapping of a Learning Ecosystem – a readiness assessment is merely here to let you know how much groundwork you’re going to have to put in.

If carrying out your own readiness assessment, it will work largely in the same way the NET EDU tool does - except on your platform. Your first goal will be to determine the key areas that are important and resonate with your vision for your Learning Ecosystem (you can inspire yourself from NET EDU or not). Within these categories, you will have to formulate questions that will test the knowledge you seek to find out. Once you have the skeleton of your questionnaire you will need to build it online using any kind of questionnaire software (see resource box below). Finally, similarly to the NET EDU tool, you’ll have to distribute your questionnaire to the people in your community - via email, online webpage with a link to the questionnaire, QR code scannable with a phone etc...

To learn more about the **NET EDU** project click [here](#).

[NET EDU School Weavers Tool](#)

[NET EDU Local Weavers Tool](#)

[Example of readiness assessment tool from another industry](#)

Carrying out your own survey:

(Note: to access some features of certain softwares, you will need to pay a fee or monthly subscription)

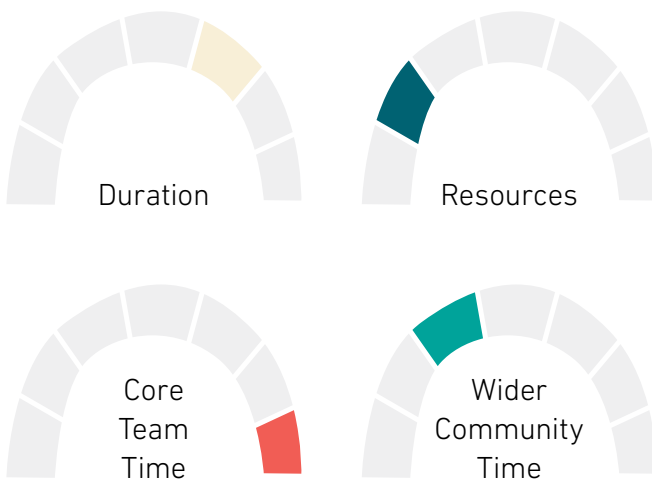
[SurveyMonkey](#)

[Survey Sparrow](#)

[ProProfs Survey](#)

CHAPTER 4

Learning Opportunities Mapping



Why you should map learning opportunities

“If you want to plan strategically for the future, you have to know where you’re starting from in the present”.

^[1] This was the view taken by the Chicago Learning Exchange when they embarked on their own “asset mapping”. Mapping your learning opportunities is at the heart of prepping for your Learning Ecosystem – where, what and how will your learners learn? What activities already exist out there in your community? What indeed constitutes a learning opportunity?

A learning opportunity is so much more than just an extra-curricular activity tied to a formal learning subject. They exist everywhere, for everyone – we just don’t always realize their educational value. At the root, a learning opportunity is a moment or place where any learner of any age, will learn. They can range from workshops, events, courses, hackathons, conferences, volunteer experiences, etc.

Although it can seem overwhelming and it might be difficult to know where to start, mapping the existing learning opportunities of your ecosystem is a crucial building block to your Learning Ecosystem journey: at the heart of every Learning Ecosystem is the want to identify new forms of learning to connect learners to.

The good news is, when mapping learning opportunities, you’ll most likely find that there is so much more that exists than you were originally aware of – therefore, your Learning Ecosystem will already start to take shape. However, this exercise is a time consuming one; you’ll have to map, verify and sort through a lot of data.

What is a learning opportunity?

A learning opportunity means any course or activity or experience of learning, study, instruction, training (including distance learning and correspondence courses) made available by a Learning Provider:

- Workshops (e.g. coding sessions, ceramics class, oral history sessions)
- Hackathons (A hackathon is an event, usually hosted by a tech company or organization, where programmers get together for a short period of time to collaborate on a project, for example: 2022 Circle Hackathon aiming to produce solutions for the future of finance)
- Events and conferences
- Courses
- Mentoring
- Guided tours (museums, factories, urban, nature and much more)
- Quizzes
- Online classes
- Bootcamps
- Internships
- Volunteering

Why map learning opportunities?

With no structure, no designated platform or spokesperson, informal learning opportunities often get comparatively overlooked. If you come from the formal educational sector, you might have a pretty good idea of what your extra-curricular map of opportunities look like. However, if you are not from the formal educational sector, this is probably the first time you'll dive into all the opportunities that are available out there.

Mapping these opportunities are essential for you to:

1. Cross-check learning opportunities with the vision and purpose of your Learning Ecosystem: identifying the needs of your learners and employers, as well as responding to societal challenges and therefore confirming the viability of your learning ecosystem.
2. Help identify which zones in your community are lacking connections and learning opportunities: In 2013, Chicago City of Learning mapped learning opportunities available to high-schoolers and were able to see to what extent some neighborhoods lacked opportunities.
3. Highlight learning opportunities that are being underutilized: conferences, for example, have huge untapped potential, as they have often done a lot of groundwork in creating satellite activities surrounding the main event. In 2018, Vancouver played host to the International Ornithological Congress and created bird-spotting tours within the city, in partnership with the Indigenous Tourism Association. How can you leverage these for your learners?
4. Help you design the learning experience for your learners within your Learning Ecosystem: can you group learning opportunities into playlists or learning pathways? (See Part 3 of the playbook for more on the learning experience)
5. All the data collected during this exercise is going to be useful when asking for funding: you will have clear data demonstrating the many learning opportunities are already available and therefore, how viable building the ecosystem will be.
6. Your stats can also help point you where you should allocate the most resources in order to fill inequality gaps: setting up, scouting and promoting learning opportunities in under-privileged, more marginalized areas.



Tip: Learning opportunities mapping will yield great foundational data that you can later use to demonstrate growth and progress over time!

If you are measuring and evaluating the growth and success of your Learning Ecosystem in order to report back to funders or the public - or even if you aren't - you will need baseline data to plot the evolution of your Ecosystem. Set yourself a target, every 6 months or yearly, and re-map your learning opportunities. Report on your findings and keep repeating this cycle!

Things to keep in mind before you map

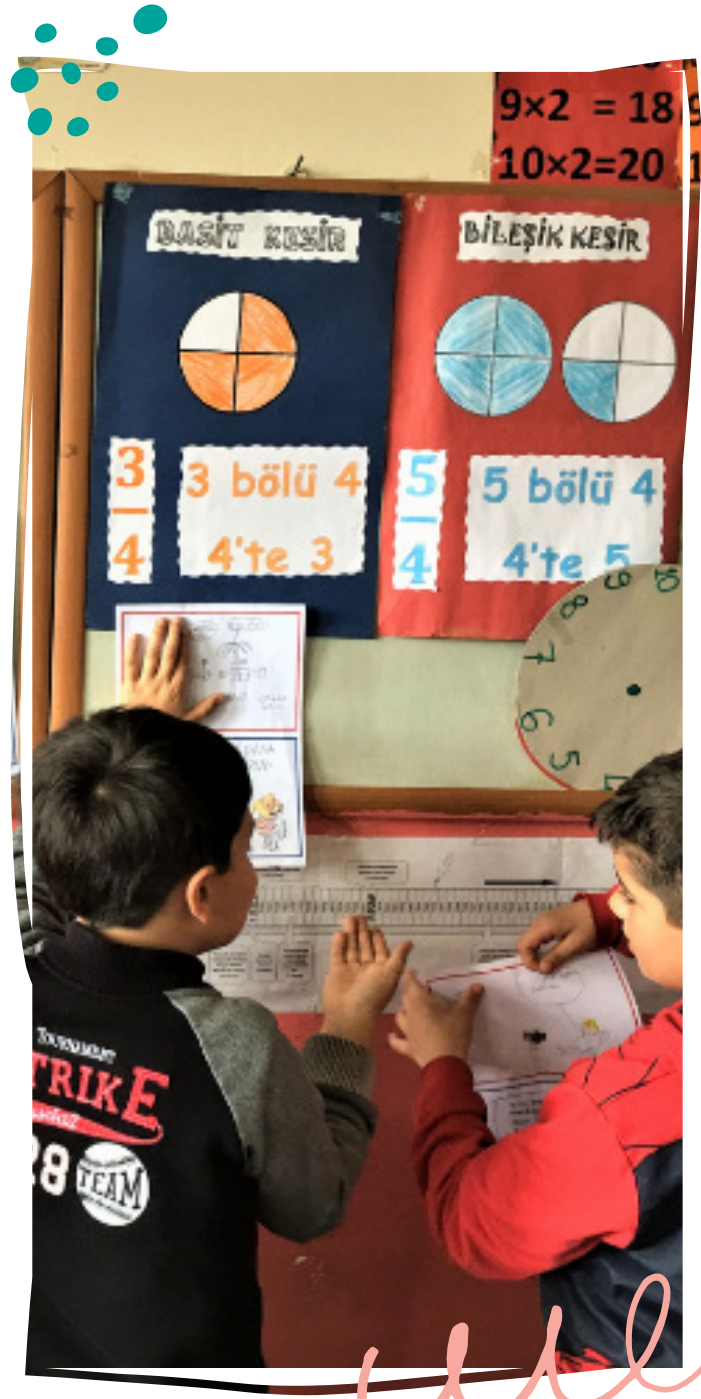
- The way your map looks depends on who will use it (more on this in a minute). Remember that your map will serve different purpose (internal knowledge map to understand what kind and where learning opportunities are happening, data to be presented to board members & funders, or public platform for learners and learning providers to be connected)
- Keep diversity, representation and inclusion in mind. For this kind of exercise to work best, all learning opportunities should be on your map. This just means that you should make sure you spend a lot of time getting to know the learning opportunities in your community, in order not to miss anything or opportunities for anyone.
- Mapping your learning opportunities does not have to be as daunting as it sounds. You won't be doing this alone and you don't need a huge budget.
- Mapping your learning opportunities will take about 1-3 months to complete, so make sure you build in this time into your workload.

Mapping existing learning opportunities

This list has been created as a guide, with key questions for you to answer that will help you build your learning opportunities map. The list is a reflection of many different sources and methods of mapping, some of which will be linked in the resources box if you want to take a deeper dive into learning opportunities mapping.

Determine your data:

1. Determine what qualifies as a learning opportunity within the context of your learning ecosystem. If you are looking to build an ecosystem for learners of specific ages, topic, type of format, this will infer the learning opportunities you map.
2. What data will you collect about each opportunity? Reach and number of people served? Length of time available? Cost?
3. How will you categorize your opportunities? (By location? By function or organization type?)



By population served? By expertise/ content area or services offered? By time? By topic? Who owns or controls the learning opportunity?)

Collecting your data:

1. In preparation, make a list of the people to reach out to: school staff, local experts, local museums and other cultural institutions, schools (targeting parents and learners), libraries, the city council, the tourism board for conferences, the community center, religious institutions, volunteering groups or any group relating to the learner at the center of your ecosystem (youth, senior citizen, disability groups etc)
2. Decide how to gather your data (you may want to use different mediums depending on who you are reaching out to): surveys, focus groups, interviews, community meetings
3. Who can participate in data collection with you? Core group of learning ecosystem ambassadors? Funders?

Present your data:

Most likely, your 'map' will not look like a Google map. Collecting your data, you will find using an online excel spreadsheet more efficient.

1. Who has access to your data?
2. Will it be protected?
3. If you were to present it, how can you transform it to make it more readable (can you turn your data into graphs, charts etc?)
4. Will it be filterable?

Maintaining your map

1. Who owns this map?
2. Will it be updated?
3. How often?
4. By who?

You're about to embark on your learning opportunities mapping, what now? As stated earlier, this step is crucial in understanding your community before launching your Learning Ecosystem. The data you have collected will help form your next steps as you advance to Part 2: Designing and Activating your Ecosystem. When in the co-creation and design phase, your data will inform certain decisions such as what the purpose of your ecosystem will be: will you try to bridge gaps you have noticed in certain zones of your communities? Will you stick to further activating and connecting the learning opportunities that currently exist? Where can you allocate funding? Will you just focus on activating one type of learning opportunity (subject/interest-based learning ecosystem)?

Resources:

[What is an asset map?](#)

[How to asset mapping?](#)

[Mapping experiences and access to opportunity in cities: Amy Hillier at TEDxPhilly](#)

Tools you can use to do a learning opportunities map:

[Microsoft Excel](#)

[Google Sheets](#)

[Zoho Sheet](#)

These spreadsheet databases will hold all your data for you to keep track of things.

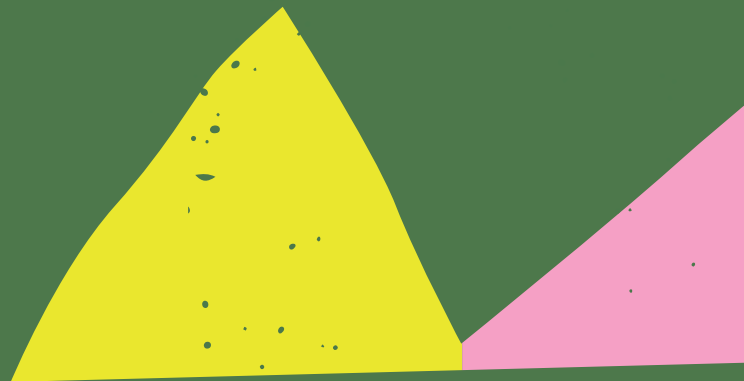
Create pins on [Google Maps](#) of each learning opportunity to turn your data into something digestible for your learners!




Part 2:



DESIGNING YOUR LEARNING ECOSYSTEM



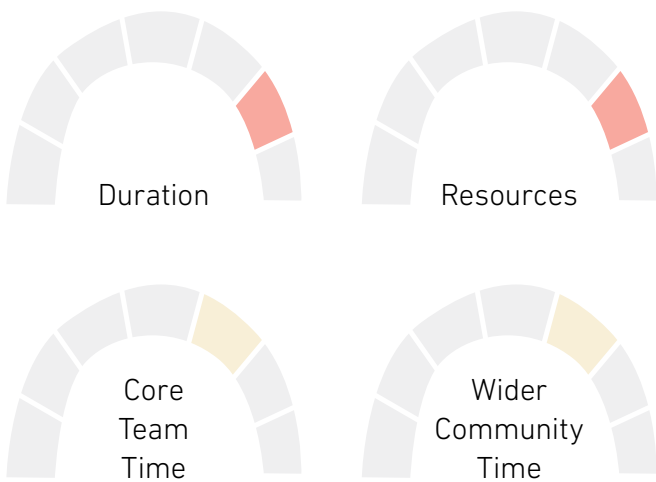


In Part 1: Preparing for your Ecosystem, the chapters got you to look at all the puzzle pieces you would need before even building your Learning Ecosystem. Now, Part 2: Designing your Ecosystem looks at helping you put all the building blocks together and get the wheel turning on your project! You'll look at different kinds of collaboration models, and thought about your leadership and governance, but how do you take all of the ingredients seen so far and turn this into a delicious Learning Ecosystem cake?

The answer – **co-creation**



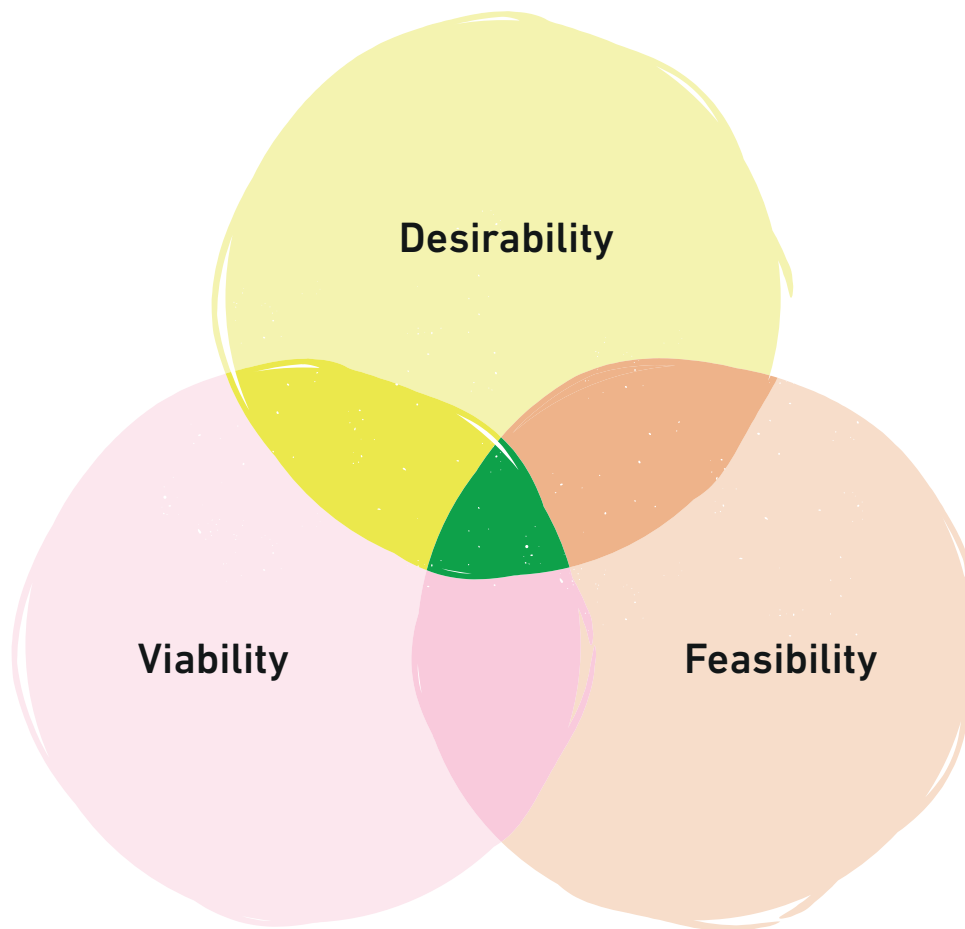
CHAPTER 5 Co-creation and Design



What do we mean by co-creation?

Co-creation, co-design, co-production, co-collaboration etc... The idea of 'co'- this idea of acting together - has become part of the way in which we live our lives and shape our society. It undermines top-down thinking, while not being entirely bottom-up. It has become an effective tool when producing social value through social innovation. The more people work together – drawing on wide-ranging insights from all involved - the more engagement there will be between all players in a community and therefore, the more effective new solutions become. Acknowledging that a design approach is a crucial component to social innovation, there is a growing number of social innovation labs, platforms and ecosystems that use the design thinking approach to enable their citizens to play an active role in shaping the environment. Although it might seem like a buzzword, this playbook would like to make the case that implementing co-creation - specifically design-thinking - within the workings of your Learning Ecosystem will be an effective mechanism to produce new solutions.





What is design thinking?

Design thinking is an iterative process in which you seek to understand your users (or in this case participants/learners), challenge assumptions, redefine problems and create innovative solutions which you can prototype and test. Design thinking has a human-centered core which is why it is perfectly suited to social innovation projects such as a Learning Ecosystem. It will encourage you to focus on the people, the learners, you're creating for, remembering their needs, understanding their challenges and tailoring solutions through your Learning Ecosystem just for them. Design-thinking is the meeting point between what's desirable from a human point of view with what is technologically feasible and economically viable.

In practice, design thinking means hosting workshops, and working together, with your stakeholders, in creating prototypes and testing these in a continually iterative process so that your Learning Ecosystem is an ever-evolving space.

NOTE: although we are dedicating a whole chapter to the questions and inner workings of design-thinking, it is important for you to know that many of the steps proposed by the playbook to build your Learning Ecosystem have required some form of design-thinking. For example: building your Theory of Change with your core team, creating impact intentions that should solve a challenge faced by the community.

Benefits of this approach

Besides the obvious tangible result generated through your Learning Ecosystem – producing some kind of platform with innovative approaches to learning – design-thinking also impacts the team in a more organizational, theoretical way.

1. Better decisions

- a. Generally, design-thinking will get you to collaborate with a variety of stakeholders – which is vital for the functioning of a Learning Ecosystem. This means you have more brains to pick when analyzing the issues within your community, generating your impact intention (see Chapter 1 on the Theory of Change) and putting together actions and activities for change.
- b. The more stakeholders you collaborate with, the less blind spots you have! More points of views = better chance of finding a solution that includes everyone in your community.
- c. Sharing and co-creating amongst stakeholders will also reduce the fear of change. When more issues are shared, the broadening points of views and angles enable everyone onboard to understand each other, reducing resistance to creating change.

2. A more dynamic team

- a. Building and activating your Learning Ecosystem isn't going to happen overnight; this is a long process that will take time and effort from many stakeholders. It isn't sustainable to think that your whole team will be working at 200% the whole time, but the more collaborative your approach, the more dynamic and energetic your team will be. Design-thinking infuses energy, motivation and empowerment into the team.

3. Higher chance of success

- a. Design-thinking goes hand in hand with collaboration resulting in new relationships within your network. A successful Learning Ecosystem will bring together a diversity of internal and external stakeholders, experimenting and promoting opportunities for exploring a variety of solutions. People challenge themselves more and seek more feedback, which moves the Learning Ecosystem faster in terms of learning, engagement and risk management.

4. Catalyst for trust

- a. If it wasn't obvious throughout most chapters, trust is one of the most – if not the most – important key to the success of your Learning Ecosystem. In design-thinking processes, openness and transparency are valued. Experiences, opinions, failures and successes are shared, strengths are recognised in each other and the result in a healthier ecosystem and a stronger sense of belonging within the community. (For more on trust, see Chapter 8).

5. New skills

- a. You might be creating a Learning Ecosystem to fill a gap for the learners in your community, but did you ever think that this project could also be a learning opportunity for the team leading this project? Design-thinking and the activities used to dynamize your team will lead to skills increase, improved creative reflexes and systemic innovative states of mind.

The five steps of design thinking

Although there are 5 steps to co-design, remember that this is an iterative, non-linear process. These steps do not have to be carried out in order, you can do them in parallel, you can repeat them as many times as you want and you can circle back and start again whenever you want/need to!

Empathize

As a design thinker, the problems you are trying to solve are rarely your own—they are those of a particular group of people; in order to design for them, you must gain empathy for who they are and what is important to them. Observing what people do and how they interact with their environment gives you clues about what they think and feel.

To empathize you must:

Observe: Observe the people in your community and their behavior in the context of their lives. As much as possible do observations in relevant contexts in addition to interviews. Some of the most powerful realizations come from noticing a disconnect between what someone says and what they do. You will be able to observe when doing stakeholder mapping sessions (see Chapter 2). In addition, you'll be able to observe your community through doing your readiness assessment (see Chapter 3); the results you'll get from the questionnaires and surveys you carry out will give you key insights into your participants.

Engage: Going one step further than just observing, it's important for you to engage. You will have plenty of opportunities throughout the steps carried out during Part 2 of this playbook to be able to discuss and listen to your stakeholders. You will have identified target groups thanks to your Theory of Change, and these should be the first people you talk to when in the design phase. Have your stakeholders talk you through their learning journeys, keep the interview loose and always try and ask "Why?". The final product of your Learning Ecosystem will only be as successful as it is useful to your participants.

Define

When building your Theory of Change, you should have identified one (or more) gaps/challenges that your learners face that you want to address. In addition, you should have identified the chain going from this gap/challenge all the way to the final impact intention that will guide you throughout your whole process. The Define step in co-design is essentially the moment where you clarify your logic model, as you make sense of all the widespread information you have gathered throughout all the steps so far.

Top tip: At the Define stage, you come up with a specific challenge ailing your community and at the Ideate stage, you will be coming up with solutions to address this challenge. A useful transition exercise is to already create a list of "How-Might-We...?". When interviewing stakeholders or discussing with your core team, have a space (a worksheet, an online document, post it notes) where you are able to write down possible answers to your problem brought forward in conversation.



Ideate

The fun bit! (At least, it is in our opinion!) What is more fulfilling than being able to hear the ways in which your stakeholders would address the challenge posed by your Theory of Change? This stage is all about idea generation – you need to “go-wide” and think outside the box. Your Learning Ecosystem exists because no formal system has been able to address your challenge – so you will only be able to successfully find innovative answers at the fringes of what already exists.

How to ideate:

It's time to bring everyone together and workshop! You will need everyone to be on board, in a safe space where trust has been built (see more in Chapter 8) in order for ideas to flow.

Ideation workshops will occur over half or full days, with a variety of stakeholders. If you can hold them in person (which is ideal, as interaction is much more organic between many people in-person) then this will mean organizing the logistics: venue, food and beverages, staff, tech equipment etc... You will

also need equipment for your activities; however you choose to animate them: A3 paper for group work, Post-it notes to stick to walls or posters, exercise worksheets and pens. You should also remember to have a facilitator present - design-thinking is born from stakeholders feeling on the same level playing field but it is important that you still have a strong facilitator to lead your workshop to keep everyone on track.

As well as having a facilitator to keep time and prompt, remember to set out the aim of your session ahead of time. That way, stakeholders can have some time to think about what they could contribute to the workshop. This also helps keep the workshop useful – it can be easy to fall off-topic when you have so many stakeholders discussing a variety of topics.

For example: The aim for your workshop is to map the learning gaps within your community, whilst also coming up with some solutions that stakeholders want to see.





Top tip: don't worry yourself too much right now about the rate of success or feasibility of an idea – get it down, whatever it is. The testing stage that comes later will determine what is the best solution.

There are a number of ideation techniques that you can use as your actual activities: bodystorming, mind mapping, and sketching to name a few (more resources on ideation techniques in the resources box below). Essentially, they all revolve around getting all your participants comfortable and creative, throwing ideas around and capturing these ideas in a way that your core Learning Ecosystem team can then go back and prioritize them for the prototype and testing stages. (See the resource box for more information on ideation techniques)

Prototype and Test

Although a Learning Ecosystem at its core is a network or like-minded people working together to solve and advance learning, there will still be some sort of tangible representation of your Learning Ecosystem. You'll need a place to gather all your information, visualize your activities map, possibly reach out to your local community – that could be an online webpage, an app, an online portal etc...

How to: When creating some form of online platform, you will either need someone on your team with the skills or outsource them (depending on your budget).

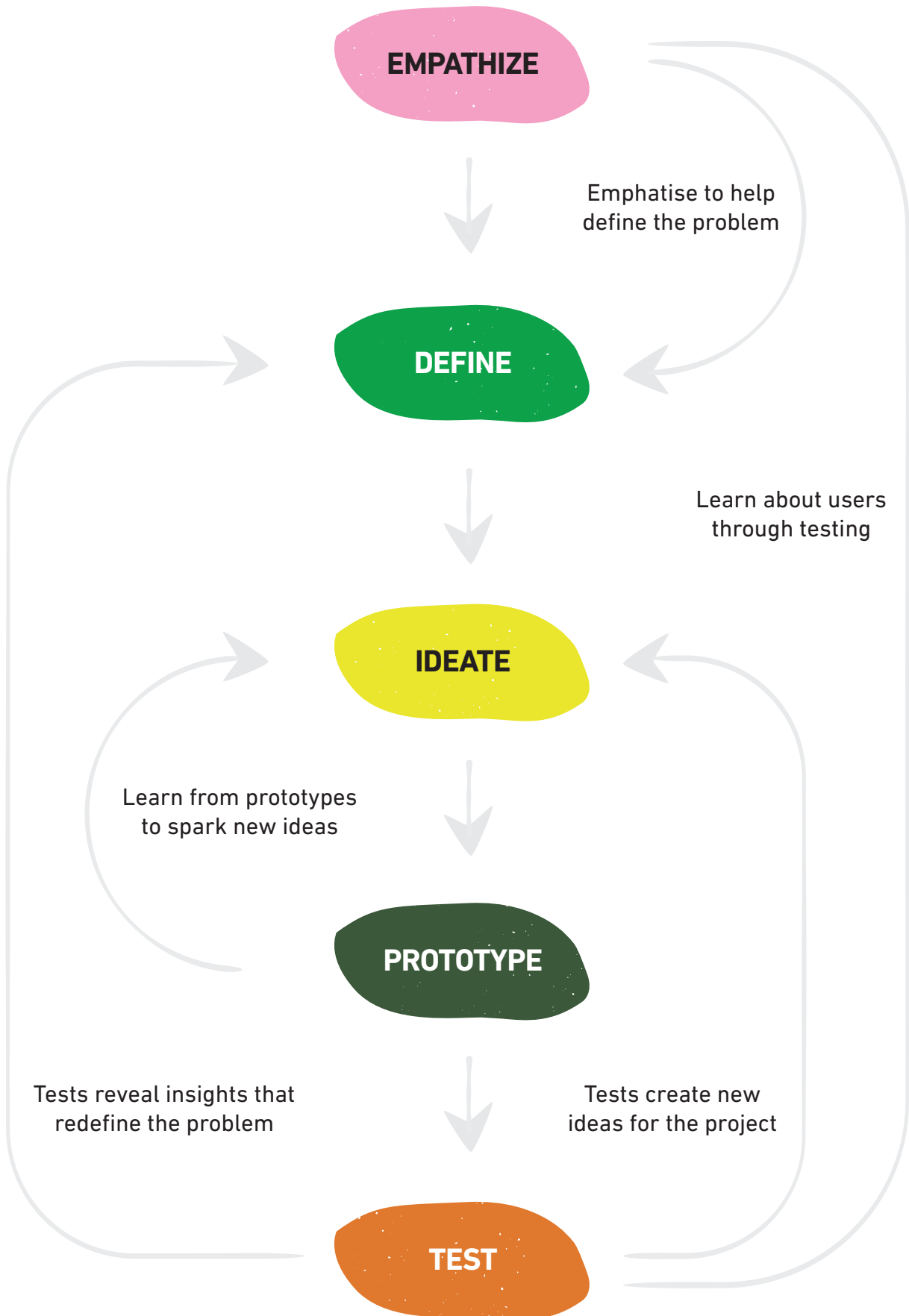
There exists various online website building softwares such as WIX, Webflow, Squarespace and many more. These can be free, or subscription based and give you access to professional support when needed. Your platform could include: an online forum for learners and learning providers to share thoughts, activities map leading to sign up pages for these activities, learning playlists (if using them, see Chapter 10), a personal log in space for learners and learning providers where they could see the activities they have participated in and any badges (if using them, see Chapter 11). The platform could also hold a space for you and your core team to explain the aim of your endeavor, and post regular updates of how the project is going.

Once created, regularly check back in with your users (learners, learning providers, family and others) to gather their feedback through surveys, questionnaires or comment boxes. This will infer the iterations of your platform in order to make a product that is most useful for all.

You'll also be prototyping and testing actual connections and the learning provided; it might be slightly less tangible but it's just as important to prototype and test seeing as the aim of your Learning Ecosystem will most likely revolve around enhanced learning. You might want to test online badging, or curated playlists; you could also be testing how learners respond to certain activities, or programs available. Every time you test out an update, remember to ask for feedback: do your learners like curated playlists or would they rather make their own? Do learning providers like the badging system? Is it too time consuming?

Top tip: In the early days, you'll find that creating a low-resolution representation of your final-product will be quicker and cheaper but will be incredibly useful as you receive feedback from users.





What's next?

As stated earlier, although we have outlined the steps in a linear way here, remember that most often, design thinking is an organic, iterative and cyclical endeavor. You will be constantly going over your steps, getting feedback and updating your Learning Ecosystem. Co-creating your Learning Ecosystem with your stakeholders will ensure that you create something that suits them and solves their issues! But collaboration with so many stakeholders can also be tricky – so we have highlighted some types of collaboration models in the next chapter.

Resources:

Videos

[Key principles of successful co-creation](#)

[What is co-design?](#)

[Design Thinking - TED TALK](#)

Co-creation Guide

[Designing a co-creation session](#)

[Designing and running a workshop](#)

Steps to design thinking extra resources

[Introduction to Ideation](#)

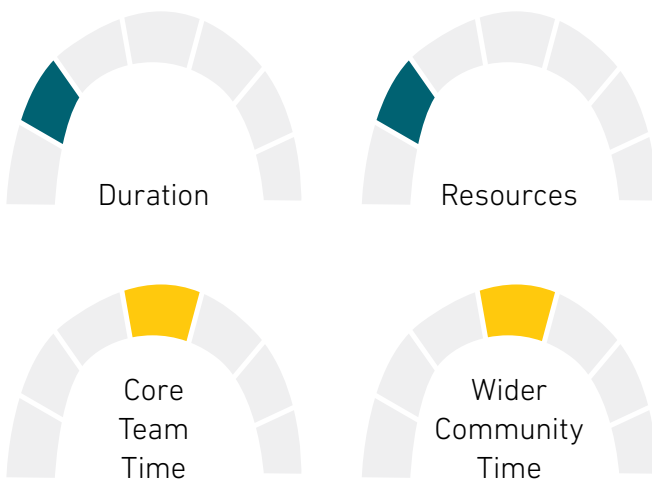
[8 ways to prototype](#)

[Building Collaboration From the Inside Out](#)



CHAPTER 6

Collaboration Models



Getting a lay of the land and putting together the moving parts of your Learning Ecosystem is one thing but activating it and managing it is another. Now that you have an idea of who is on board and what groups need to intervene where, you might want to (re)think how you are all going to work together. Learning Ecosystems generally tend to federate all kinds of stakeholders and depending on how broad the intention of your Ecosystem is, it's likely you'll be working with a variety of stakeholders.

By nature, Learning Ecosystems lead to a collaborative approach of working – effectively, you are trying to coordinate an organized, yet organic conversation of change or innovation. You'll be collaborating with partners, funders, learning providers, caregivers and learners themselves to curate your Learning Ecosystem, many of whom will never have worked together, let alone collaborated with so many different people and organizations. A good collaborative plan will help instill trust within your network and its relationships, which is key to your success (read more about Trust in Chapter 8).

But although collaboration might be the standard approach, this doesn't mean that it's easy, nor is it a 'one size fits all' situation. There exist many different kinds of collaborative approaches that can be used to structure your efforts – and whichever approach you choose ends up coloring the leadership and governance of your Learning Ecosystem (more on that next chapter). Here, we have taken a look at some of the most appropriate ones for a Learning Ecosystem and broken them down for you.

3 kinds of collaborative models: collaborative learning, communities of practice and collective impact

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning (sometimes referred to as collaborative rationality) is a technique designed to facilitate shared understanding of complex issues. It is most often used when developing strategies or implementing solutions to public policy problems – for example, developing a Learning Ecosystem to answer public policy challenges your community faces. This approach is an alternative to the expertise-driven, linear, top-down model that tends to dominate public policy decision-making. This approach focuses on forging an alliance between many interdependent stakeholders thanks to its communication techniques – your Learning Ecosystem will be made up of community members, learners, school teachers, policy makers etc who will all need to be able to trust, listen and communicate with one another.

There are three conditions for successful collaborative learning to be successful:


- Diversity
- Interdependence
- Authentic Dialogue

Diversity in organizational function and philosophical viewpoints is necessary for collaborative learning because if people or organizations are all alike in their needs from a resource, problems are unlikely to be complex – and so will be the answers thought up by your collaborative efforts. For example, residents of a city neighborhood might all agree that better learning opportunities need to be provided, but they will all think this for different reasons; so too will be their

solutions. You're going to want to get representatives of all the people that live in your community - diversity in backgrounds, social status, education, age etc...- to best serve your learners.

The necessity of interdependent stakeholders for collaborative learning is based on the idea that a group of people with interdependent needs will ultimately arrive at a solution that is most rational for all if they are able to engage in authentic dialogue. Authentic dialogue is the last necessary feature of a collaboratively rational process: it requires that all participants in the conversation must be fully informed, with mutual assurance of the legitimacy, comprehensibility, accuracy, and sincerity of what is brought forward by all.

This technique is designed to stimulate creative discussion despite conflict and controversy. The surprising goal of collaborative learning is not consensus but group-generated strategies for improving a situation.



**“A do-it-alone
mentality will
not result in
meaningful impact.”**

– Lori Bartczz



Communities of Practice

A Community of practice is an organized group of people who meet regularly around areas of common knowledge and interest. The goal of these conversations and meetings is to share knowledge and experiences and learn best practices for the benefit of the community as opposed to completing a task. For a Learning Ecosystem, you would bring together pre-selected participants from every stakeholder group and have discussion workshops. Each participant would share concerns and ask questions, receiving feedback and advice. This could be a teacher asking how they could engage their learners in more informal learning opportunities or an extra-curricular learning provider asking how to align their activity with the curriculum to attract more learners ;

in answer to this, the organized group would discuss what activities could be implemented within the Learning Ecosystem to increase learning engagement. They would then return to their stakeholder groups and share the acquired knowledge with their teams.

Formally, a community of practice assumes that the people who participate in them are highly knowledgeable and skilled in the domain in question. In this type of collaboration model, participants should be at the same level – there is no hierarchy and no leader, all participants are 'experts' in their field and are expected to help each other out. The idea is that eventually, all members of the group benefit from their association with each other.

Collective Impact

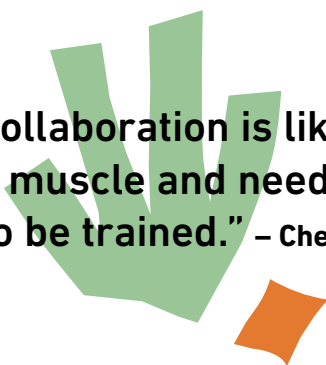
Finally, our playbook would like to propose the collective impact collaboration model. Similarly to collaborative learning, this type of collaboration is used to address complex social issues with multifaceted causes, requiring the coordinated actions of multiple actors to achieve lasting, community-wide change. Collective impact collaboration can refocus, transform, and strengthen any target field (in this case, the education and learning sector) and your Learning Ecosystem's efforts to address the issue by generating alignment and cohesion toward long-term solutions that work.

In a collective impact model, the participants are often a combination of individuals, organizations, grant makers, and even representatives from the business community and government. This is most appropriate for Learning Ecosystems as we recommend you surround yourself with a broad range of stakeholders, to enable you to have the most impact on your community (see Chapter 2).

A collective impact model will also be appropriate if you choose to create a Theory of Change (see Chapter 1) as the backbone (or logic model) or your Learning Ecosystem. Although a collective impact is a collaboration technique, whilst a Theory of Change is ultimately a project framework tool – the two easily go hand in hand as they require the same values from stakeholders:

- Stakeholders should share a vision of change and a commitment to solve your problem by coordinating their work; they agree on shared goals, which is a key component to the creation of your Theory of Change.
- To be most effective, the activities of all the stakeholders are coordinated by a “backbone,” which could be a single organization, a single person, or a steering committee that represents all the participants. This is the core team of your Learning Ecosystem, that will be responsible for “building public will” and making sure that the initiative stays focused and moves forward. To do this, they will be using their project map (Theory of Change).
- Your core Learning Ecosystem team will also focus on building a culture that encourages information sharing and trust and doesn't shy away from resolving conflicts so that trusted relationships emerge and stay strong among the stakeholders (see chapter 8). Typically, the core team plays an administrative role such as convening meetings, coordinating data collection, connecting participants with each other, and facilitating the activities of the Learning Ecosystem. They lead inter-stakeholder relationships, so that they can work together, be efficient and easily get past barriers. The core team will also be the team that facilitates or attracts financial resources for your Learning Ecosystem (see more at Chapter 7)
- The activities put together by your Learning Ecosystem will be described as “mutually reinforcing” because they are designed to remind all participants that they depend on each other to move the initiative forward. It is important for your core team to continually remind stakeholders their role in your Learning Ecosystem, as well as the impact they will have on the learners and the wider community at large.
- “Collaboration is like a muscle and needs to be trained” – Cheryl Doig

“Collaboration is like a muscle and needs to be trained.” – Cheryl Doig



Building your collaboration model

The methodology to effectively build your collaboration model - regardless of the model you chose (see above) will very much overlap with all the steps of building a Learning Ecosystem you have seen so far in this playbook.

1. To begin with, your core team of your Learning Ecosystem will need to build their Theory of Change, defining your intention of impact and the key goals (see Chapter 1: Theory of Change). You will then need to go out and map your learning opportunities and stakeholders, noting who could get on board.
2. Once you've engaged stakeholders, you'll want to assign roles to everyone. The best collaborations come when everyone knows the role they play and what they need to contribute. Where do stakeholders add value? Where do you need partners to enhance the skills your Ecosystem already has?

Examples of roles within your Learning Ecosystem:

- Developing partnerships
- Fundraising
- Communications
- Onboarding learning providers
- Building online platform
- Curating playlists (see Chapter 10)
- Outreach to wider community and learner recruitment

3. Finally, it's time to get together and build relationships. Organize workshops, getting your stakeholders in the room and discussing your Learning Ecosystem and the activities to complete for its success. As mentioned before, your Ecosystem will only be as successful as the strength of the networks that exist between each player.

The real impact of your collaboration model will be felt within the leadership and governance (see Chapter 7) of your Learning Ecosystem. Ultimately, each method of collaboration is relatively straightforward – it all depends on what kind of environment surrounds your Learning Ecosystem and how you want to lead it. Do you prefer to have a core team at the head of your Ecosystem that keeps everyone in check, or would you rather this was a free flowing, completely level project? Many factors impact what your leadership and governance will look like, so read on to the next chapter!

Resources:

Reading

<https://www.issuelab.org/resources/22852/22852.pdf>

[The International Handbook for Collaborative Learning](#)

[The NGO Handbook](#)

[The Collaboration Playbook](#)

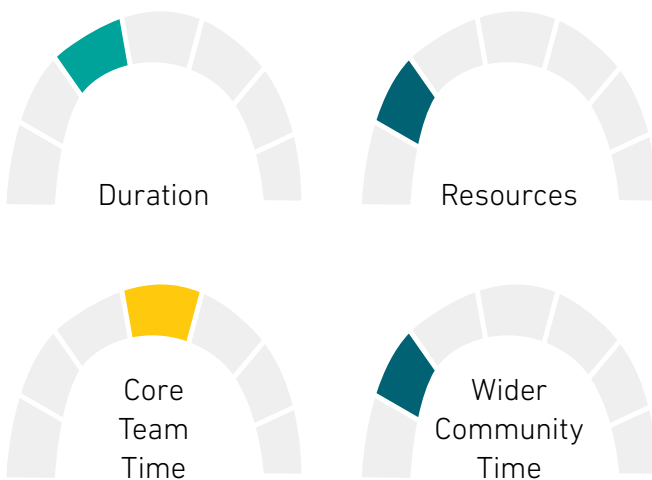
Videos

[Collaborative Learning](#)



CHAPTER 7

Leadership and Governance



A key concern when it comes to the creation of a Learning Ecosystem is related to governance - balancing the need for centralized coordination of the various ecosystem elements with the flexibility to allow the ecosystem to grow organically. At its core, your Learning Ecosystem is a network amongst a whole host of stakeholders with the goal of creating great atmospheres for learning, where the learner will feel they belong, safe and trusted. You and your core team will have to address several questions relating to the ecosystem members focusing on aligning the content, the technologies, and the processes with the context, mission, vision, and strategy of your ecosystem.

“Learning Ecosystems provide an understanding of education from an ecosystemic perspective of actors in their relationships; they challenge traditional organizational boundaries while providing place-based focus on local schools, neighborhoods, cities, or transnational networks; They are based on systemic and cross sectoral collaboration; And pursue systemic impact.” (Jordi Díaz-Gibson) You might want to tend to the question of governance by putting a traditional model of governance in place. From having an advisory board, to the patron governance model or even the cooperative governance model - there is a long list of governance models that have been used for NGOs for example, that are appropriate to put in place for a Learning Ecosystem. To know more about these kinds of model, head to the resource box at the end of the chapter.

“A network landscape is a beautiful chaos - there needs to be many layers of leadership.” – Gregg Behr

However, a Learning Ecosystem is a place of collaboration, innovation and thinking outside the box. With the idea of challenging traditional formal organizational learning, this playbook would like to put forward the network weaving model as a suggested framework for your governance. What does network weaving mean and how can you apply it to best ensure the success of your own Learning Ecosystem?

Network weaving

Network leadership is a kind of leadership where everyone involved is considered a network weaver; it is also assumed that everyone within the network can benefit from each other to become a better network weaver. In theory, network weaving steers away from putting just some people on ‘display’ as leaders, but rather focuses on the large number of stakeholders that it takes to create successful and impactful change. It aims to prove that it really takes all of us working on a network to make it more effective. Josh Schachter of CommunityShare, explains that network weaving is “essential to uncover the influence of members of their community that would have otherwise gone unnoticed”. The most influential network weavers in his opinion were often under the radar, not necessarily in traditional positions of influence or hierarchy; a math teacher at a local school was quicker to engage and connect learners with other learning providers than someone in an official position.

You might be thinking that network weaving might sound great in theory, but what does it actually look like when I am juggling funders, policy makers, governing bodies and my community? To begin with, it’s important to understand why you have started the journey towards activating a Learning Ecosystem: chances are, you have noticed the same issues regularly crop up in your

community and are trying to find solutions in a different way. Hopefully, anyone coming on board to your Learning Ecosystem, on whatever level, understands this too: networks are most effective when experimental and when people take initiative. Experience has shown when talking to experts that stakeholders taking a greater active role in their ecosystems have been quintessential network weavers, ready to check status and hierarchy at the door, preferring to bring their valued expertise and problem solving to the project. An added bonus to network weaving? It can be used as an educational tool within your Learning Ecosystem. Josh Schachter from Community Share explains: “We wanted to see educators leading the change, so we made sure to help empower them and realize the potential leader they had within them.” This idea of everyone within a Learning Ecosystem helping to highlight and emphasize the skills and strengths in each other is an excellent example of the great power collective collaboration has on a community.

What are the key characteristics of a network weaver?

- They reach out to people within their network/ have great listening skills
- They are natural connectors between people
- They help to problem solve
- They are brave
- They are great communicators

What to do if a network weaving approach isn't really an option

In some contexts, due to many factors, having a network weaving approach as the main form of leadership in your Learning Ecosystem just isn't viable. Maybe it's because you are part of a committee funded by the national government or maybe you need change to happen faster, with experts leading the impact. Or maybe some of your stakeholders really don't feel comfortable in such a space. Whatever the issue, it's important to keep in mind that you will still need to carry forward some values seen in network weaving to truly form a successful Learning Ecosystem. But governance is not the only area of disseminating a free flowing model of leadership.

Indeed, however big or small your Learning Ecosystem will be, it is likely that you will have various leaders in different places to help carry the Ecosystem. As we have seen before, the hallmarks of an impactful Learning Ecosystem rely on trust, collaboration and co-creation, all of which need to thrive to empower learners.

These can be 'lofty' ideals that are difficult to instill within such a large network with so many stakeholders as a Learning Ecosystem. These leaders - or stewards - will be those that subscribe fully to what your Learning Ecosystem is trying to achieve and will lead by example, consequently activating the people around them to align themselves with your Learning Ecosystem too! To take a deeper dive into Learning Ecosystem Stewards, read our interview with Josh Schachter below.



The question of stewardship

In conversation with Josh Schachter, Founder and director of CommunityShare on leading and stewarding Learning Ecosystems, interviewed by the WISE team.

As someone who teaches storytelling, I think that all too often we get absorbed through media and societal narratives around the “heroes’ journey.” That “a hero” is going to lead us out of the latest challenge, crisis, pandemic... I think of that political cartoon in which the speaker at the microphone says “Who wants change?” and everyone in the audience raises their hand. Then the speaker asks “Who wants to change?” and all hands drop down.

If we are truly going to address the root causes of the systemic issues we face today in education and beyond, we need to shift the narrative of change. We must become the stewards of our own narrative and the collective narrative we want to create in the world. This requires that we not only shift our own mindsets but also create opportunities for everyone in a community to see that each of us has unique gifts and lived experiences that are essential to creating resilient, vibrant learning ecosystems and communities.

This thinking deeply informed the development of CommunityShare, as I have felt we needed to create spaces and pathways for community members to engage in activities that enable them to discover (and in some cases rediscover) their unique gifts, beyond what might be on their business card and beyond what society might have defined for them. A grandfather, gardener, neighborhood historian, first generation college graduate...When you expand people’s sense of identity and purpose you can develop the will for people to contribute to something larger than themselves. That is stewardship.

In a healthy learning ecosystem everyone is a steward. Having said that, there are critical roles in a learning ecosystem that contribute to health, vibrancy and resilience.

- *Cultural translators*: They build bridges between worlds – cultures, institutions, lexicons, histories. In an education context, this person might be the PK-12 teacher who used to work in industry who can help other teachers develop effective work-based learning partnerships with industry. It could be the neighborhood grandmother “wisdom bearer” who can help neighborhood kids see how stories of the past have shaped the realities of today.
- *Pollinators/weavers*: We all know these people, who are energized by connecting people, resources and ideas across institutional, geographic and/or socioeconomic lines. Sometimes they are formally recognized as the “community outreach coordinator” and sometimes they are weaving invisibly.

- *Conveners*: These folks bring together individuals and organizations who exist in diverse socioeconomic, institutional and geographic spaces in ways that enable each member in a learning ecosystem to see their unique role and how they can add value to other member's work and the health of the whole. Imagine a business education coalition convening educators, youth, parents, and businesses to co-create work-based learning pathways for students inside and outside school to grow the future workforce.
- *Disruptors/Pioneers*: These catalysts are going to ensure that their learning ecosystem is a living system that is dynamic, versus the calcified bureaucratic processes we often experience in the current educational paradigm. This may look like students speaking up at their school board meeting, an artist exploring the purpose of school through theater or an educator pushing for her students to get college credit in high school for work-based learning projects.
- *Surveyors*: They see the trees and the forest, scanning the landscape for gaps, opportunities, and energy in the larger learning ecosystem. They look at the ecotones, the space where two ecosystems overlap and where often the greatest diversity and innovation is invisibly manifesting. Like permaculturalists, they also look for opportunities to "stack functions." This might be a neighborhood organizer or PK-12 educator who sees a community urban forestry project not merely as a "tree planting" but as an opportunity for youth to learn urban ecology, become more physically active, engage in mitigating climate change and build relationships with multiple generations in their neighborhood.
- *Storytellers*: They search for what voices and narratives are being heard or not, what stories are emerging at the margins, and how narratives are defining our perception of individual and collective agency and our measures of success. They serve as a mirror, inviting members of a learning ecosystem to reflect on their own assumptions, perceptions and roles, and as a window, highlighting our collective potential to create new narratives and policies foster a sense of stewardship to contribute to something larger than ourselves. At CommunityShare we engage teachers, youth, parents, school administrators, business leaders and others in multimedia storytelling processes. They reflect on their own education experiences and their current role in the education system, with the goal of developing their collective will to become advocates for systemic change.

An individual or organizational can undoubtedly hold one or more of these stewardship roles. And it is not necessarily superfluous if there is some redundancy in these roles, as that is what fosters resiliency. There are likely many other roles essential to growing dynamic learning ecosystems. Every day, these roles are practiced by students, educators, school administrators, parents, local business owners, elders and others. They are largely invisible and, in most cases, not explicitly valued or recognized by society. Their actions often fall outside of traditional job descriptions and into the sphere of stewarding “public good.”

There are no recipes, lists or templates for what makes a robust steward or learning ecosystem, as every community and place holds its own story. Having said that, my colleagues and I have found that learning ecosystems seem to thrive when members practice an abundance mindset, a willingness to test assumptions and experiment with new ideas with humility and curiosity, and see that systems change is only possible if we are willing to commit to our own development as educators and learners in community.

What's next?

This chapter, you have heard a lot about how trust is a huge factor in the success of the network weaving and leadership that will occur in a Learning Ecosystem. Indeed, through out the playbook, we have stressed that your Learning Ecosystem will only be as solid as the trust you manage to instill between all your actors. It can be a tough concept to grasp but now that you have got all your ingredients lined up, its time to take a look at the final one before baking!

Resources:

Reading

[The Most Common Non-Profit Models of Governance](#)

[Non-Profit Governance Best Practices](#)

[Forward focused learning](#)

[NET EDU and their approach to networks](#)

Case Study

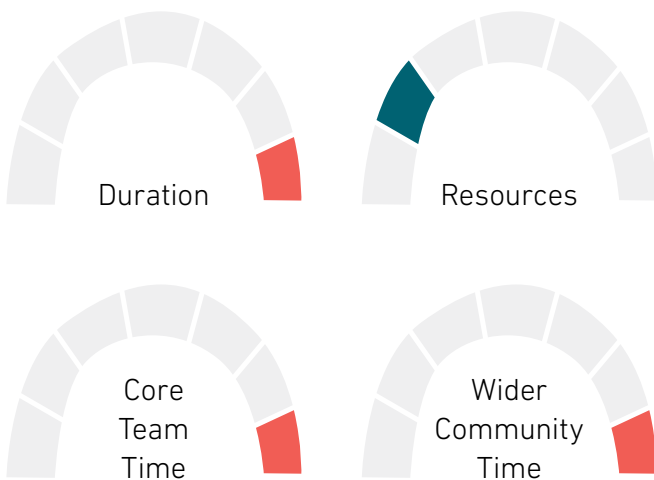
[CommunityShare](#)

Guide

[NetworkWeaver online resources](#)

CHAPTER 8

Trust in a Learning Ecosystem



Over the past couple chapters, you might have seen the word trust crop up quite frequently. In fact, trust is a key pillar of the tool presented to you in Readiness Assessment developed by NET EDU. Some experts in the field have gone so far as to say that it is by far, the most important ingredient for a Learning Ecosystem. What is trust? Why is it needed in a Learning Ecosystem? What can it do and how can you make it thrive once you have it? This chapter has been written as a sister piece to one already published by WISE, written by Ross Hall from the Jacobs Foundation. If you would like to read it, you will find the link [here](#).

What do we mean by trust?

To begin with, we must establish a definition of the word trust. The general definition of the word states that trust is a firm belief in the character, strength, or truth of someone or something or a person or thing in which confidence is placed.^[1] Ross Hall from the Jacobs foundation stated in an essay for WISE that trust is a “willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another personal group, based on the feeling, judgement, belief, expectation, and confidence that the other personal group will be benevolent, reliable, competent, honest and open”.^[2] So how does this translate to a Learning Ecosystem?

For NET EDU, who work in developing tools for schools and communities to assess their readiness at building ecosystems, trust “intends to generate the necessary cohesion among community actors in order to nurture social relationships. An example of action to improve it is the creation of spaces for informal social interaction, in order to encourage the development of new ways of relating to each other”.^[3]

To have trust is to be vulnerable

As we have seen so far, a healthy Learning Ecosystem will function around a collaborative process and is made up of many moving parts and stakeholders, that continually work in symbiosis to refine the ecosystem. Each individual participant in this web brings to the ecosystem their strengths and weaknesses, opinions, needs and wants. As mentioned throughout this playbook, for a Learning Ecosystem to be successful, the ecosystem must reflect the community it serves - therefore must reflect its needs and wants as well as play on its strengths and weaknesses.

Vulnerability, and more importantly, feeling safe to be vulnerable is a huge player in reaching a Learning Ecosystem's highest potential. Individuals from all kinds of different groups will interact in fluid ways within an ecosystem, and in creating a space where people feel trusted, celebrated and safe to be vulnerable and open, then the collaborative process to build a learning ecosystem that will reflect all the facets of the community it serves will be fully achieved.



“Understanding trust is understanding that in creating trust, a space will be created in which people will feel safe and display vulnerability”

– June Holley

Across conversations with Learning Ecosystem leaders it was found that, overwhelmingly, the most mentioned element that... can help education ecosystems flourish is trust.

When talking about education, Alan Daly stated that vulnerability was the new capacity of the 21st century. Watching our leaders be vulnerable is freeing, he says, as it indicates to other individuals in the network that there isn't one set place or person that comes up with answers to obstacles – there is greater power and higher efficacy when working collaboratively to problem solve.^[4] The chapter on Leadership & Governance (see Chapter 7) touches on what constitutes successful leadership of an ecosystem, and no surprise – trust features right at the top.

Trust within an operational Learning Ecosystem

Trust isn't only a key ingredient in the creation of a Learning Ecosystem – it needs to be deployed at all levels, all the time. Indeed, every chapter within this playbook requires trust for its success: from the conception of your Learning Ecosystem, where you need your learners and community to be open and vulnerable to trust you with their needs and wants about learning, to choosing to deploy a digital badging system (Chapter 11) where you will need to trust your learners when they complete tasks and earn badges – trust permeates every step of the way.

Trust can also affect who you manage to get on board your Learning Ecosystem; when trust is felt, people are generally more willing to get involved in high-stake projects where their reputation and resources could be tested.^[5] You might be able to successfully involve people with greater resources, leadership or power from within your community that might not have otherwise felt the pull towards your Learning Ecosystem. Trust will also mean a higher rate of diversity within your stakeholders as they will feel welcomed to participate. For every collaborator, contributor, funder and community member, there ideally should be a deep rooted and continual exchange of trust in order to yield the best results.

How to generate trust?

In some cases, you will start building your ecosystem in a place where there are already strong networks and connections – therefore you might be lucky enough to discover that this is a space where trust is already an implicit practice. In other circumstances, you might have to start from scratch. Dr Cheryl Doig, team member of [Grow Waitaha](#), a New Zealand Ministry of Education funded program that aimed to transform Christchurch education explained that the core learning team that leads this program was made up of people and institutions that did not know each other. Individuals had applied to the RFP, each bringing forward their own answers and the Ministry of Education put the core team together. Dr Doig explained that the absolute first thing the team did upon connecting for the first time was emphasise trust between each other must come first above all else.

How does one achieve trust? Or even ‘create a space’ for trust? When talking about something as intangible as trust, it can often seem a lofty subject. Your intention to build trust might be there, but how do you actively push for it? Throughout all our conversations with experts, the one word that cropped up consistently was communication. Having easy access to channels of communication, whether they be personal (Whatsapp groups, text chains, Facebook groups, online forums etc...) or through a more professional medium (Slack, Teams, Google Meet), a network will only be successful if it is able to easily communicate with one another.

Tool box for you to work on trust with your ecosystem

Professional internal communication platforms (with core team)

[Slack](#)

[Jive](#)

[Yammer](#)

Video communication platforms

[Microsoft Team](#)

[Google Meet](#)

Document collaboration tools

[G Suite](#)

[Office 365](#)

File sharing tools

[OneDrive](#)

Making time for in-person workshops, brainstorming sessions and general get-togethers will also generate a feeling of belonging amongst your network. Over the course of the past two years, we have become only too aware of how important connecting on a human basis is for our relationships. Spotting shortcomings in the functioning of your relationships is incredibly easier when in the same room – body language, reactions and involvement of individuals are all key indicators of the strength of the relationships and trust at play.

As mentioned previously and indeed by Ross Hall himself, there is no 'one size fits all' way to building trustful relationships. But in his article for WISE, Ross suggested 7 approaches to build or 'weave' trust between actors that we would like to share here.

1. Build weaving capacity: Name and train weavers whose explicit responsibility it is to weave trustful relationships.
2. Take your time: Don't expect trustful relationships to emerge overnight. People need time to trust each other. And trust is alive, easily lost, and needs continuous attention.
3. Talk about trust: Make space to discuss and reflect on trust. But make sure that in talking about trust, you don't inadvertently create the feeling that trust is an issue when it's not. Be precise when you discuss trust. Be playful. And celebrate trustful relationships openly.
4. Measure trust: For inputs to your discussions and reflections, capture data about trust. Creating survey questions with members of your community will itself stimulate dialogue about what trust means to your community.
5. Address mistrust early: Call out feelings of mistrust before they have time to grow. Do this in a way that allows everyone to explore the root causes of mistrust. Encourage curiosity over blame. Create safe spaces. Listen empathically. Use non-violent communication techniques.
6. Model trustworthiness: It is unreasonable to expect others to create trustful relationships if you don't model it yourself. It is important, then, to show benevolence and fairness; reliability and consistency; competence and integrity; honesty and authenticity; openness and transparency.
7. Give trust: Give people the benefit of the doubt. Assume positive intent. Share decision-making power. Give people a voice. Listen empathically.

Lastly, as with most subject matter discussed in this playbook, once trust has been built, it must be continually supported to enable it to thrive. Trust can easily be broken if not consistently strengthened, which could be damaging for the growth and functioning of your Learning Ecosystem. Depending on the relationship, daily, weekly or monthly check-ins and regular biopsies of how things are going are important to keep everyone accountable and ensure a healthy environment for trust to grow.

What's next?

Part 2 has seen you prototype your tangible Learning Ecosystem product, build collaboration models and put together an outreach plan. Knowing why it is important to build trust and how to sustain trust within your network is incredibly important as Part 3: The Learning Experience will see outreach to learning providers, learners and their caregivers as you launch your Learning Ecosystem, see the learning journey unfold and require feedback to continually adapt your Learning Ecosystem.

[1] Merriam-Webster definition

[2] <https://www.wise-qatar.org/trust-and-thriving-learning-ecosystems>

[3] <https://www.neteduproject.org/lic-analysis-tool/the-model/>

[4] <https://www.neteduproject.org/learning-ecosystems/>

[5] Holley, June (2011) Network Weaver Handbook, pg. 150

Part 3:

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE



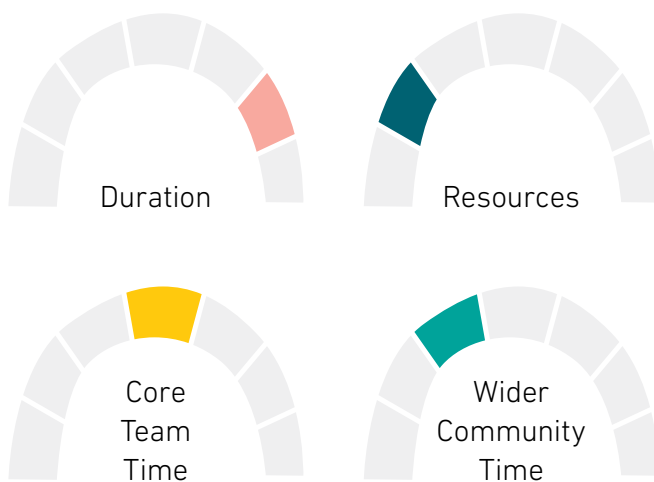


The moment is finally upon us

It's time to get your Learning Ecosystem out of the kitchen and onto your learners' plates! But wait, how does one go about engaging hundreds or thousands of people within a community to come and play around with a Learning Ecosystem? Are there ways of tailoring the learning experience to a learner? Never fear, Part 3: The Learning Experience is here to help and answer exactly those questions. Up first? How to tame the beast that is Community Engagement...

CHAPTER 9

Community Engagement



We've often heard the phrase "it takes a village to raise a child", but less often do we seek to understand who makes up that village, why they're important and how to engage them. At the core of Learning Ecosystems is the goal to build a network and offer formative learning experiences that will empower learners to gain knowledge, skills, experience, self-confidence and agency, pride and autonomy within their community and the world at large. There are many steps to get there, but the key at the center of it all is community engagement. Without the community on board, a Learning Ecosystem can only fail: community members provide and run learning opportunities, community members will be the learners and community members will share their experiences with one another. For a Learning Ecosystem to be successful it must also co-create the learner journey with its community and share accountability for learning outcomes – the community is no longer a passive beneficiary but rather an active participant and catalyst in supporting learning, wellbeing and developmental outcomes.

What is meant by community?

The first thing to do is identify what is meant by community. A community is a broad term that encompasses many different groups of people. These can be citizen groups, stakeholders or interest groups. These groups can also be divided by geographic location, whether big or small. Your community will be unique to your learning system, your cultural context, your location and it is vital to outline this for yourself before going out to engage your community.

Ultimately, what is meant by community here is: all those who will have influence and or interest in your Learning Ecosystem. The good news is, by this stage, you will most likely have a pretty good idea of who your community is. In 'Part 1: Prepping for your Learning Ecosystem' you mapped your stakeholders, identifying those who would most likely want to get involved, as well as collected data on the learning opportunities in your community. In addition, you've conducted a readiness assessment, and in doing so, have exchanged with a lot of different types of people and have a better idea of who is willing and motivated to join the journey.

Why do you need to engage your community?

You might be wondering: But I have already communicated with all of the stakeholders of my community during the mapping and co-design phases, so why do I need to engage them again?

Although some stakeholders will have actively participated in the building of your Theory of Change (see Chapter 1) or during the co-design phase (see Chapter 5), most usually, you will have come into contact with your stakeholders to collect data on their learning opportunities. The next step is to activate and widen your network. For your Theory of Change, you will have engaged around 10 stakeholders. For the co-creation and design phase you would have engaged around 20 to 50 stakeholders. In activating your community, you will have engaged with hundreds, if not thousands, of possible learning providers, supporters and learners. Think of it like a play: you have cast all your actors, they're set in position, now it's time to take the curtain up and start the show!

Engaging and activating your community is a two-phase process with each phase being critical to the success of your Learning Ecosystem. Phase 1: Engaging your community of learning providers and Phase 2: Engaging your community of learners.

First, you need to get the learning providers on board. Are they willing to step up to the challenge and commit time and resources to your platform and the Learning Ecosystem? If you decide to badge or create learning playlists, are learning providers willing to spend time credentialing their activities and building learning pathways together? Are they willing to report back to your core Learning Ecosystem and keep iterating with you to enable a successful growth for your Learning Ecosystem? Signing on to be a learning provider within an active Learning Ecosystem is not the same as just running their learning activity by themselves - being part of a network requires effort and energy. Do not get disheartened or discouraged if some learning providers within your community are not willing to commit to being active - it does require a lot of work and is not for everyone.

Once you've engaged your learning providers, you have another challenge: engaging the learners within your community to participate in your Learning Ecosystem. Hopefully, all the work you have done so far hasn't entirely been a blind gamble. If the learners have been implicated in the co-creation of your Learning Ecosystem, you will have put in place a network of people and activities that answer some gaps and challenges brought forward by the learners. Nonetheless, for your Learning Ecosystem to truly benefit the learners in your community, you'll need to engage more learners than you have so far. Are the activities in place what they want to see? Is your platform easy to use and will it catalyze an exploration of learning? Is the overall learning journey you aim to create with your Ecosystem enough to retain learners over the years? Do you need to consider communication and marketing strategies and products?

How to engage your community

Engaging your community will look somewhat different whether you are engaging your learning providers or whether your aim is to engage the learners. In either case, you should note that engaging your community will be labor and time intensive and will (probably) require funding, a systematic framework and necessary skills.

Engaging learning providers

As mentioned above, when mapping the existing learning activities in your community, you will already have done some of the work. You have connected to learning providers, enticed them enough to share their activity and its details with you and most importantly, created a relationship between your core team (representing the Learning Ecosystem) and themselves. As mentioned in Chapter 4, when starting this relationship, you should have put in place a channel to facilitate easy communication between every learning provider post-

learning opportunity mapping. You should have been regularly updating your learning providers as you moved forward with the co-designing and prototyping of your Learning Ecosystem, in order to keep them informed and engaged with your project. The more they feel you are working for and with them to find solutions to the learning challenges posed, the more likely they are to participate in your Ecosystem.

Once it is time, you will need to go back to your learning providers in order to confirm that they are willing to place their activity within your network whilst also engaging with many new learning providers (this could mean engaging with around 100 stakeholders). You will need to confirm all activity information to be able to relay it to the learners (for example, dates, times, duration, location, age range of learner, prior skills needed, equipment needed etc.).



Things to do:

- Set the meeting. Return to your list of learning opportunities. Schedule a call or in-person meeting to share the progress of your Ecosystem and remember to reiterate how both parties will benefit from this partnership. Clearly outline what the learning provider will need to do next if they are interested in following through.
- Follow up with materials. Send forms you need them to complete and relay any information you agreed to send. Schedule next steps for moving the partnership forward. It is really key to keep the momentum going.
- Share the activity on your platform. Once the learning provider has confirmed their active participation in the Ecosystem, don't forget to share this news on your platform! Access to previously inaccessible learning activities might just be the reason another learner will sign up to participate so share, share, share!

- Support is key. Once partners are on board, check in with them regularly throughout the year. Having partner workshops every couple of months can also help get feedback from your partners and generate greater trust and communication. You will also want to be able to share any feedback received from learners and their carers with the learning providers.

Engaging learners

The ultimate goal here is to engage learners from all over your community (and even beyond). In order to do this, you will need to communicate to the learners, their families and caregivers and reach out to these groups on many different platforms (social media, mainstream media, online, radio, podcast, news boards etc), in many different places (school newsletters, educators, youth centers, local businesses etc.)



Much like a traditional communication and marketing campaign, you'll want to be strategic and thorough, in order to have the most success. This endeavor will be resource heavy, so you want to make sure you have a plan in place to avoid wasting time and resources. Our colleagues from Remake Learning suggest creating a recognizable identity for your Learning Ecosystem that can be easily deployed on all platforms (whether print or online) as well as having a 'homebase' for yourself online that will work as the destination anyone can go to for information regarding your Ecosystem. You'll want to communicate about upcoming events, activities available, general administrative information about your Learning Ecosystem as well as share any available resources for learning providers or learners. This homebase can be host to articles, blog posts and collect feedback from participants of your Learning Ecosystem. Remember that whatever your homebase looks like, it needs to be as user-friendly as possible to drive learners to your page and encourage them to discover and use the platform. Remake Learning also suggest adding in a network directory, collecting basic information and contact details for people, programs and organizations that can serve as a public catalog.

In addition to your homebase, you are going to want to reach out, far and wide, to cast your net and hopefully catch learners. Using photo, video and audio to support any written information that you hand out or present to learners is a great asset. To support the marketing of your Learning Ecosystem, commission professionals if you have the budget, collect stories and images that reflect the work, learning and innovation born from your Ecosystem. You'll find learners engage more when they see stories of other learners who recount their experiences.



Top tip: Learning festivals are a great way to tick many of the boxes all at once. Like a music or an arts festival, learning festivals enable learners and their caregivers to discover a wide range of learning opportunities within their community. Learning festivals serve as an innovative hub to bring together learning providers and learners. For more information, see the resource box.

Things to do:

- **Strong and obvious media strategy:** Whether it's online or through traditional media, the main order of business is building a communication's strategy. It needs to be clear and catchy and appeal to the audiences you want to reach. Do not forget to leverage your partners and learning providers within your network! Chances are, many of your stakeholders will have communication teams - work with those to spread your message around. Through them you could have access to city and district websites, social media and even local chambers of commerce.

- Get different forms of media on board: As well as using social media effectively, it's best to reach out to other forms of media and spread awareness through their platforms. Think: local newspapers, newsletters, local radio and tv stations. There might even be podcasts, YouTube channels and social media influencers whose platforms you could use leverage too. Don't just promote your Ecosystem on these channels - think about creating media partnerships, sometimes even paid partnerships, to keep your message out in the public.
- Lots and lots of groundwork: The main way you'll activate and engage this group of stakeholders though is through word of mouth. You'll want to try and get trusted ambassadors that will spread your message through shared cultural spaces: school boards, museums, community centers, sports centers, local shops, meet-ups events etc. Large live events are crucial too because they will likely be reported in the wider press, enabling more coverage.

Congratulations - if you have made it this far. Your Learning Ecosystem is mere steps away from kicking off and producing its magic, watching new connections flourish between learning providers, learners and the surrounding community. What you have achieved so far is no mean feat! However, do not be fooled, we still have a couple more steps to follow if you want to curate the learning experience and create learning playlists and badges to credentialize the learning that will happen in your Ecosystem.

Examples of platforms or other resources

[RemakeLearning Playbook](#): see appendix page 80 for more resources on communicating and marketing

[Pittsburgh online platform](#)

[Kidsburgh online platform](#)
- example of resources page

General community engagement resources

These are resources that are not directly linked to Learning Ecosystems, but their methodology or approaches were deemed appropriate, insightful and inspiring for this playbook to share.

[The Community Planning ToolKit](#)

[CitizenLab: The beginners guide to digital community engagement](#) (downloadable resource)

[Engaging citizens in social innovation](#)

More on Learning Festivals:

[Wave Learning Festival](#)

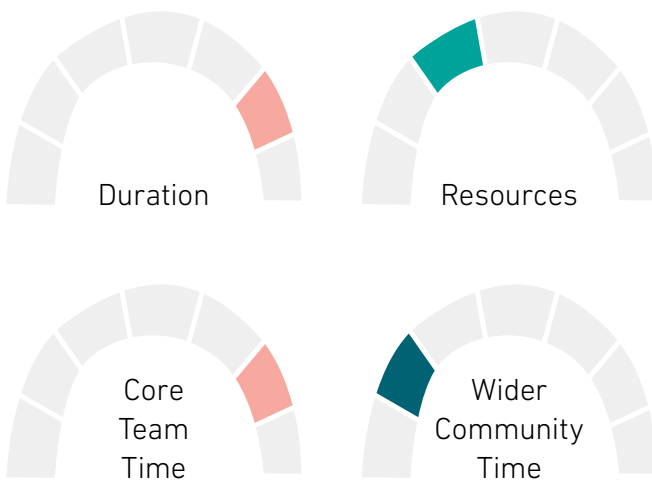
[Remake Learning Days](#)

Reading

[The Learning Festival](#)

CHAPTER 10

Learning pathways and playlists



In Parts 1 and 2 of the playbook, you built a Theory of Change, mapped your stakeholders as well as the learning opportunities available in your community and got together with active members of your community to co-create your Learning Ecosystem. So much has been achieved and yet, one thing might be lacking – the connection between all of these learning opportunities, their stakeholders and the learner!

Learning Ecosystems are “messy” places, and with the abundance of learning opportunities within your Learning Ecosystem: how do you envisage your learner navigating this? In addition, this chapter faces the question: how much or how little freedom do you give the learner to navigate these learning opportunities?

The notion of learner agency is one we have often encountered as we’ve spoken to experts whilst building this playbook. The formal education system sets out a clear curriculum that must be followed by everyone until they leave the education system. Experts argue that a Learning Ecosystem, in wanting to offer a space outside of the formal education system, should be about giving the learner the power to completely curate their own personal learning journey. In this scenario, your Learning Ecosystem is a platform to enable the learner to fully form a colorful mosaic of activities; Each activity, however unlinked to each other as they might be, represent the wide-ranging interests of an individual learner.

Except that doesn’t always suit everyone – some learners, especially young learners, might like the idea of semi-guided informal learning opportunities to make sense of all the choices available. Often, learners will be accessing your Learning Ecosystem, having previously experienced the more traditional, formal education system. This could mean that some learners prefer



to stay in their comfort zone, only going for activities in certain fields and therefore not taking full advantage of the potential of a Learning Ecosystem - although it might seem more interesting to be the full master of their learning journey, this might still feel like a foreign concept to certain learners. In addition, learning playlists with a more curated approach would be more appropriate to your Learning Ecosystem if your intention (set out through your Theory of Change in Chapter 1) is to help communities solve or address specific problems and challenges - for example: employment, sustainability or addressing SDGs.

On a more practical note, learning playlists can be a nice compromise when building your ecosystem and finding funding. If the aim of your Learning Ecosystem is to link learners to the job market, you may want to build 'job-specific' playlists. The more successful your playlists are and the more they connect learners to the job market, the more opportunities you will have to get funding from employers or local public employment related agencies (for example, trade unions or chambers of commerce) . Your playlist of activities become a bridge between funders and the business sector (with their needs, skill gaps etc.) and the interests of the learner.

What is a learning pathway?

Learning pathways describe a route taken by a learner, in which the learner engages with learning opportunities offered by the community and by doing so, will progressively build their knowledge and skill set. They are usually designed to help learners achieve a specific learning goal, acquire a skill or experience an industry. By looking at learning as a process rather than one single event, learning pathways or playlists enable the learner to embark on a broader, more stimulating and more personal learning journey.

In a Learning Ecosystem, these learning pathways are often presented through the medium of an online platform. On this platform, learners will have access to several pathways or playlists, each with their own list of activities to complete. In order to create this, you will either need to hire someone on your team to build this interface or approach third parties that can host your platform. If this is interesting to you, see the resource box below for some links to some of our favorite learning pathway hosts.

Examples of types of learning pathways:

Learning pathways function similarly to playlists in that they can cover a wide range of topics and angles and can be curated for all types of learners.

They can be:

- Age specific – for Example: a playlist of activities for 10-year-olds
- Linked to formal education curriculums – Example: playlist of activities linked to middle-school history class
- Focused on Higher education – Example: a playlist to prep learners for first-year science at university
- Future-job specific – Example: playlist of skills identified as useful by the local automotive or gaming industry
- Competence specific – Example: playlist to train learners in photo-editing skills

You might even give your learners the ability to curate their own personal playlists that they can then share with their peers!


In addition, you might want to think about whether some activities will be mandatory for your learners or not. This will often depend on the motivation for creating the learning pathway in the first place: if partnering with a future employer who is building a playlist with learning opportunities that link to the skills needed for a job in their company, they might make certain learning opportunities a mandatory requirement. When looking at learning pathways in general, Badgecraft recommends that at least 1 activity should be mandatory.

Top tip: Playlists can and should be an iterative process; try and engage your target audience from the very beginning of the design process & encourage feedback to continually curate your playlists. An option can also be to encourage the learners to create their own personal playlists that they could share (similar to the way Spotify playlists work).



Some examples of what playlists look like:

Activities to complete
Complete the following activities, earn badges and you will see your playlist progress updated




YES challenge

- ▶ Mandatory
- 🕒 3 hours

[View full activity](#)

[View content](#) ▾




HERO challenge

- ▶ Mandatory
- 🕒 3 hours

[View full activity](#)

[View content](#) ▾



IDEA challenge

- ▶ Mandatory
- 🕒 10 hours

[View full activity](#)

[View content](#) ▾

An example from the [Campania Cities of Learning](#) playlist for the Entrepreneurship Lab Pathway:

Entrepreneurship Lab Learning Pathway [Join](#)

[Overview](#) [Badges](#)


Content

Set on the learning journey to become more entrepreneurial and career ready!

This playlist provides key resources linked to 6 Entrepreneurship Labs, 6 challenges: YES challenge, HERO challenge, IDEA challenge, EMPATHY challenge, STORYTELLING challenge, DEBATE challenge.


Each step in this learning pathway is a residential (or online) workshop with some videos to watch, some material to read, some tasks to do.

Badges 7



A page from the Entrepreneurship Lab Learning Pathway from [Campania Cities of Learning](#)


CAMPANIA region of learning [Search...](#) [About](#) [Playlists](#) [All activities](#) [Login](#) [Sign up](#)



Entrepreneurship Lab Learning Pathway

Confartigianato Imprese Salerno


[Join](#)



Migrant empowerment

Confartigianato Imprese Salerno

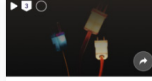
[Join](#)



Entrepreneurship Lab Learning Pathway

Confartigianato Imprese Salerno

[Join](#)



Empowerment Pathway

Confartigianato Imprese Salerno

[Join](#)

[Campania Cities of Learning](#) website where you can see different playlists

IDEAS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Network of Cities and Regions of Learning

#Design value, #Be accountable, #Go

[Join](#)

Find another way, look out!

Associazione Interculturale NUR

#Team-working, #Be curious and open

[Join](#)

GLOBAL YOUTH SKILLS PLAYLIST

Network of Cities and Regions of Learning

#assessment processes, #adjust to

[Join](#)

Netiquette Level 1 - Introduction to Technology

Think Forward

#have computer literacy, #cyber security

[Join](#)

Digital Youth Work TIC Playlist

Europäische Jugendbildungsstätte

[Join](#)

The Entrepreneurial Resource Box

Youthopole NGO

#Stay driven, #Follow your aspiration

[Join](#)

Irakliai Interaktyvūs mokymai organizavimui

Nectarus

#digital communication and collaboration

[Join](#)

Keukenhuis.nl/v

Leer- praktijkcentrum gemeente Rott

#cutting technologies, #wort boiling

[Join](#)

[Cities of Learning European](#) platform where you can see different playlists across participating cities

To build your playlist:

- Map the learning opportunities in your ecosystem that you can offer
 - You need to know what is already available out there and who you can approach to participate! You will have already mapped out your learning opportunities and stakeholders in Chapters 2 and 3
- Either within your core co-creation team, or in partnership with interested stakeholders, decide on theme/topic/goal of your playlist
 - Remember to focus on the interests of learners: spend time to research your learners, understanding their needs
 - Skill, age, subject, diversity of experiences, academic or not. You should already have an idea of the learning gaps in your community, as well as have an understanding for what the learner wants from having carried out your readiness and learning needs assessment in Chapter 3
- Set goals for your playlist
 - Make it realistic/achievable. This will also help create a common language and ground with all co-designers
 - Now is the time to decide whether students will receive a badge upon completion of a pathway
- Design Experience
 - Set the order of the activities, thinking about if learners should complete them in a strict or flexible sequence. This often relates to what theme you have chosen and the goals you have established for your playlist
 - 5-7 learning experiences per playlist are recommended ^[1]
- Aim to combine physical and digital experiences in the playlist. If you are going to integrate badging, it comes in here! This could look like an actual digital badge, certificate, and/or certification. They are a great way to enhance the value of your online learning programs and increase the loyalty of learners. See more on badging in Chapter 11
- Get a cover photo and description for your playlists (you might want to integrate tags into your descriptions for your platform)
- Assemble a playlist and hit publish!

Some case studies as examples and help on how to go deeper into designing learning pathways:

[RSA](#)

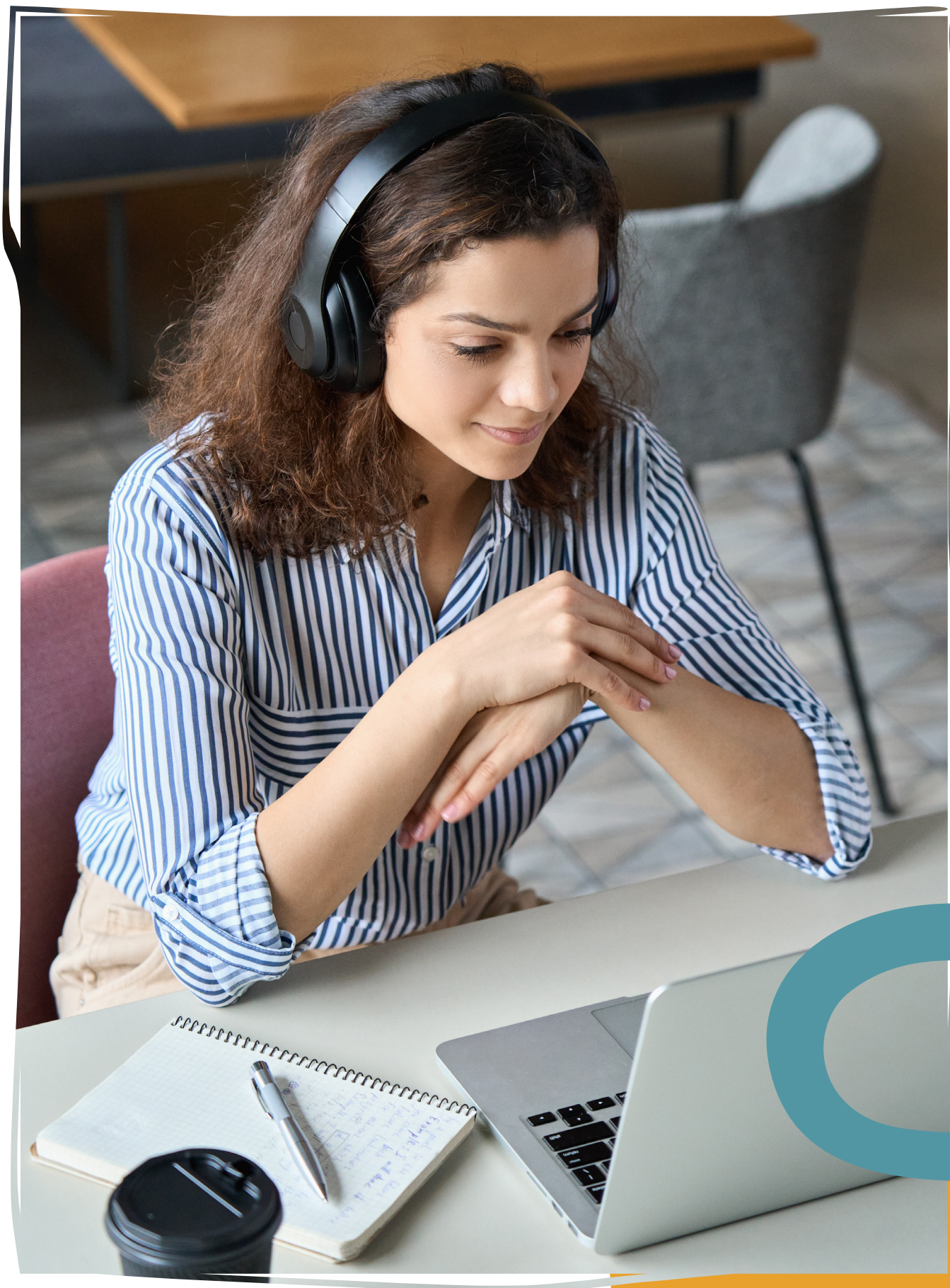
[Vilnius City of Learning](#)

[Campania Region of Learning](#)

Explore the Future Makers playlist in more detail [here](#).

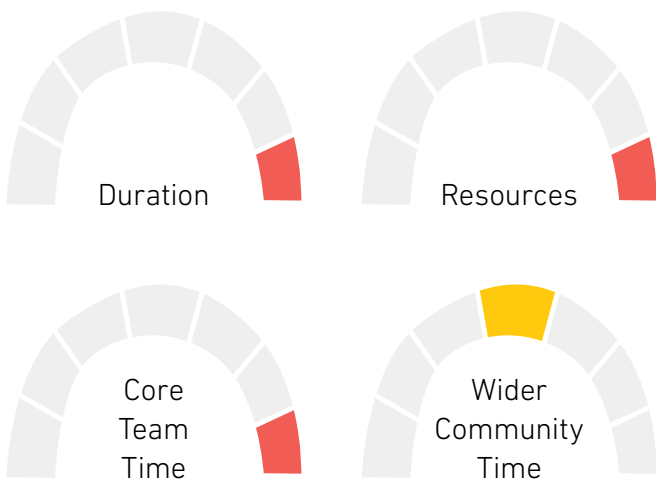
Resources to build your learning playlists

[Cities of Learning Deck](#)



CHAPTER 11

Badging



To badge or not to badge? The eternal question that a Learning Ecosystem will have to face at some point. So far, in this playbook, you have been able to map opportunities and stakeholders, activate your community, co-create your Learning Ecosystem, and set up systems to keep refining it, whilst deciding whether or not to create specific learning pathways – all of which relates back to your main impact intention set out when you first did your Theory of Change. In addition, you should have reached out to learners themselves and gotten them onboard. But looking further than the purpose of your Learning Ecosystem, is there a way that you can certify and recognize the learnings experienced by your learners?

With a Learning Ecosystem standing outside of formal education, some experts believe it goes against the very purpose of a Learning Ecosystem to create any type of certification – learners do not need that added pressure.



Others argue that creating certification is a way of better integrating the informal learning environment of a Learning Ecosystem with its formal education counterpart.

What are badges?

Typically, badges have been used in corporate, company learning settings, recognizing learning units focused on skills or competencies. Today, in this playbook, we understand digital badges as a way of recognizing and certifying any accomplishment earned in any informal learning environment, whether that be, online learning, training programs, workshops, boot camps, certifications, internships, volunteer work, continuing education, etc. They often carry the logo, the subsequent credibility of the learning provider, awarding the badge and some information explaining the actual achievement. The RSA – Cities of Learning define badges as: “Digital representations of a person’s learning or experience, designed to be shared on social media and online CVs for maximum visibility and recognition.” These badges are packed with data, providing context about the achievement – including details of the issuer and the skills and knowledge developed (and at what level), all of which can be digitally verified in real-time.^[1]

Should I badge or not?

Although it might not seem like it, deciding whether to incorporate badging into your Learning Ecosystem is an important decision to make, as it will lead to operational needs as well as infer how you promote your Learning Ecosystem platform.

Some schools of thought believe that badging goes against the very notion of creating a Learning Ecosystem, as it carries the same recognition of ‘achievement’ as seen in the formal education setting – why put effort in expanding the learning outside of the formal educational system if it is to be ‘marked’ in a similar fashion, albeit online?

Others see badging as a motivator. They recognize the necessity of tapping into the learner’s notion of earning achievements – therefore hooking the learner in – but putting an emphasis on the creation of badges for skills and competencies not usually recognized in formal learning (recognizing skills such as: independent researcher, career scout, digital skills etc.

Some argue that badging is simply an essential part of learning for the upcoming generations.^[2] They emphasize the importance of ‘praising’ the learning that has occurred, as a way of ensuring its commitment to memory from the part of the learner - if a learner is praised for their learning, they will connect a positive memory to the learning, ensuring that the learner’s memory will remember this experience. Badging is also a great answer to the essential need of capturing the learning that has occurred within your Learning Ecosystem. Learners should be able to effectively and easily communicate the learning they have done and a potential new skill they have learnt.^[3] If Learning Ecosystems become regular features across regions of the world to enhance learning - as we hope they do - then there will most definitely come a time when employers themselves seek to understand and evaluate the learning that has taken place. As enticing as it may be to create a Learning Ecosystem without badging, how can you ensure your learners that their time and effort will be recognized if there is no reward?



The need for trust

It is important to note that the main ingredient when integrating badging into your learning ecosystem is trust. As discussed previously, trust is a huge player in the creation of any Learning Ecosystem (for more on trust and Learning Ecosystems, see Chapter 5). Specifically, badging requires trust, between the learners and the creators of any given badge, as well those the badge will be presented to (e.g., employers). Whilst there exist ways of applying external assessments to the process of earning a badge, this route is often time and resource consuming, something that budding Learning Ecosystems just can't commit to. It is more realistic to imagine badging to be self-assessment centered or participatory centered – a learner might

just need to say they have participated to an activity to earn the badge. The learning ecosystem and all its stakeholders – learners, facilitators, employers, funders etc. - must trust that this system is not being exploited.

Ultimately, as always, it comes down to listening to your core group of stakeholders and trial and error. Being open-minded and remembering to frame your ecosystem around your learners will infer the platforms and tools you use.

To help simplify all these arguments, we've put together a list of pros and con's, in no particular order.

PROS

- Extremely flexible and can be used to certify many types of learning
- Great marketing tool – badging can get funders interested as well as attract a wider range of learners
- Can be used as credits for already-established student award schemes (for example, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards in the UK)
- Badges are not just for learners: they help promote the work done by educators, facilitators or any other learning providers in the ecosystem, and demonstrate the impact that their learning opportunities have
- Learners have a visual representation of their achievements and can articulate these
- Can be recognized by employers or higher education settings
- Enables your Learning Ecosystem core team to track skills & activity trends
- Enables your Learning Ecosystem core team to track the impact your ecosystem has on learners

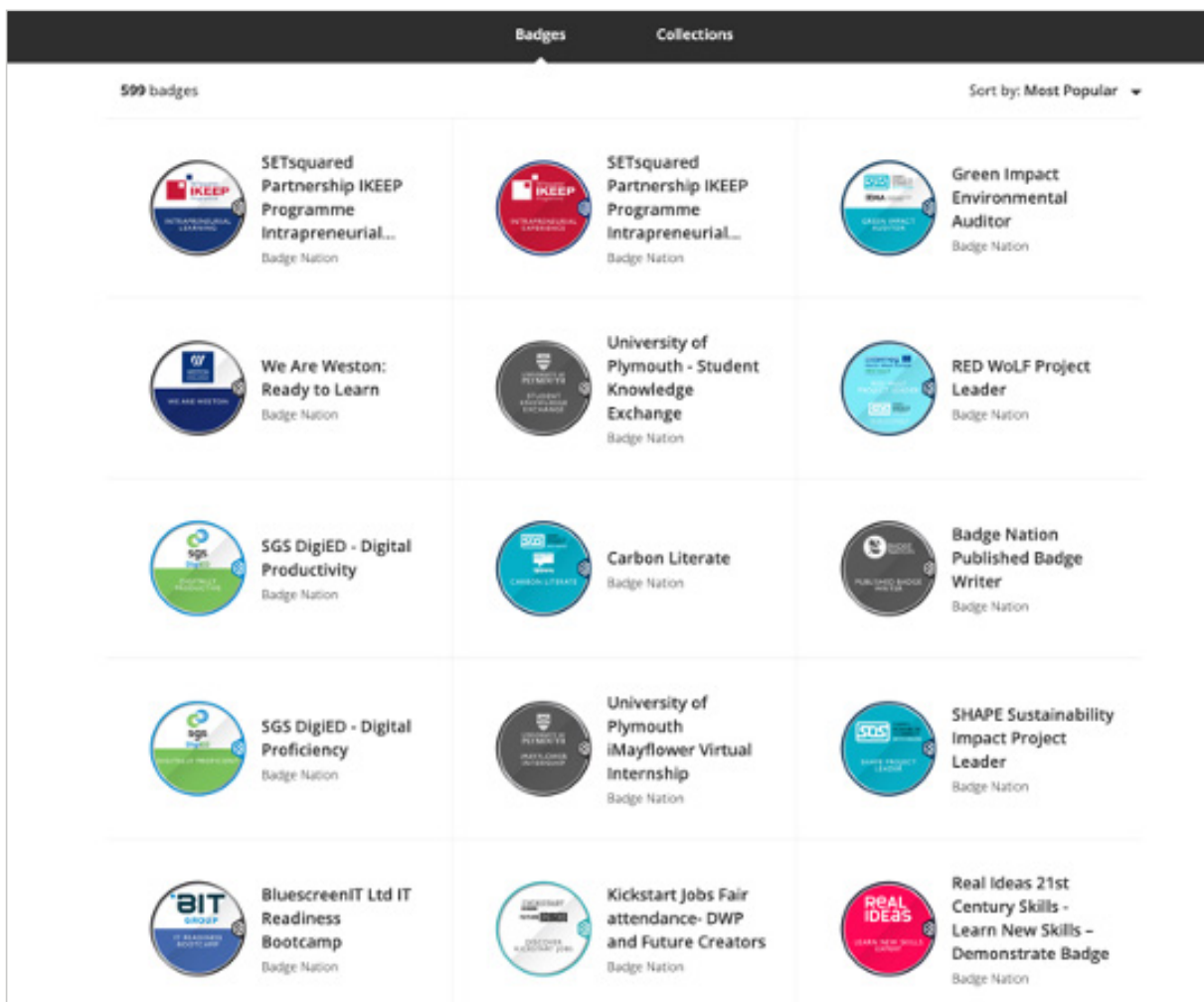
CONS

- Learners scamming the system and not turning up to activities
- Risk of turning your Learning Ecosystem into competition-based ecosystem
- Removes the fun & freedom of the platform
- Currently no global framework for badging
- Runs the risk of furthering inequality for those who do not have online access
- Risk of only having badges for certain activities, creating a divide between learning opportunities

What does a badge look like?

Ultimately, a badge can look like anything you want it to look like, there are no rules. You could be creating real-life badges by creating stickers or pins that learners can wear or take home. You could also probably find personalizable badges and pins on websites such as Amazon or Etsy.

When creating online badges to be viewed on a platform, badges tend to hold similar information: name of activity, a logo, an icon, maybe even the name of the place the learning took place. You can also make an individual badge page so that when clicked on, more information is available about the learning that has happened (see the image below).



See more badges created by Credly, an online badging platform, [here](#).

How to badge

Although badges may look and sound good and relevant, they are a potentially time-consuming addition to your Learning Ecosystem - creating the badge is not complicated, but the main difficulty lies in identifying and valuing the learning linked to an activity. Although you will already have done a huge part of the work when mapping the existing activities of your Learning Ecosystem (see Chapter 4), and might have done a great job engaging many learning providers (see Chapter 9), you are still going to need to actively engage learning providers onto a platform, discuss and co-design badges and finally get a certified credentialing company to give their stamp of approval (if you wish your badging to be recognized more widely).

Co-designing with learning providers means you will want to discuss with learning providers or facilitators, and your ecosystem, what must be accomplished for a learner to earn the badge, so as to ensure the learners are satisfied with their experience (see more about co-design at Chapter 5). For some Learning Ecosystems carried by specific types of funding, you'll want to sit down with any funder or sponsor of a playlist, to understand what skills and competencies they want rewarded at the end of a given playlist.

To create an actual badge, you have two options: partner with a host company or create your own online badges. Creating your own badges from scratch will necessitate an online platform, with a portal for learners and learning providers – this will be time consuming and require skilled resources.

To make this process easier, there currently exists “host companies” that will help you create badges for your activities. By simply paying a yearly fee, you can access their platforms that will either generate badges for you, or help you easily create your own. Examples of these include: Credly, Badgenation, Open Badge Factory, and Badgecraft..

Resources:

Read

[Read about Cities of Learning and their approach to badging](#)

[5 reasons digital badges are great for students and jobseekers](#)

Watch

[Badges for Lifelong Learning: An open conversation](#)

[Using digital badges – a short guide](#)

[1] <https://www.thersa.org/cities-of-learning/how-it-works>

[2] <https://realideas.org/2020/08/07/young-people-and-their-digital-badges/>

[3] Finkelstein et al., 2013, p. 1, quoted in Mah, 2016

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