# ALABAMA
# Talent Playbook

# Employer Engagement

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**Alabama's Talent Marketplace: Technology and Data Tools for the People of Alabama**

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## Alabama's Talent Marketplace: An Industry-Driven Strategy

The Talent Triad is a public-private partnership, now sponsored by the Alabama Department of Workforce, to increase the number of credentialed Alabamians, address industry needs, and increase the state's labor force participation rate. Unlike many other efforts where states are deploying technology to gather and connect workforce and education data for state-level research and reporting, the Talent Triad has been built to be a population-level solution.

The Talent Triad was designed to serve citizen stakeholders and facilitate the success of:

- Students and jobseekers grade 8 through retirement
- Employers across all industry sectors and in-demand jobs
- Education & training providers supporting degree and non-degree credentials and programs of value

Additionally, state agencies and economic development teams will benefit from the outcome data and insights gained from the Talent Triad. Currently, data access outside the Talent Triad is many times not available, is 12 to 18 months delayed, and/or misaligned.

The newly formed Alabama Department of Workforce has a mission to support alignment and drive economic growth throughout the state for its citizens and industries alike.  The Alabama Talent Triad offers the state the necessary infrastructure and a proven model to drive the alignment and outcomes needed to deliver a unified workforce ecosystem, an expanded credentialed workforce, and continuously increasing labor force participation for today's and tomorrow's economy.

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## The Talent Triad is a Three-Module Solution, Together Driving a Unified Talent Marketplace

- **The Alabama Credential Registry** is an online resource that enables Alabama's education and training providers to register their programs and affiliated credentials and skills learned and earned.  The Alabama Credential Registry includes both degree and non-degree programs and is inclusive of all credential awards: short- and long-term industry certificates, certifications & licenses; degree and non-degree issued credentials; apprenticeships; etc.  The Alabama Credential Registry creates a real-time outlook for the full array of programs available to learners in the state. Unlike other credential registries, Alabama's goes a step further to describe the skills and competencies that learners gain while in-progress and upon completion of these programs.  This work is organized to support the state's Competency Ontology, and results in what the state calls the "DNA" for in-demand jobs supporting industry relevance and alignment, as well as supporting stackable learning pathways and credit for prior learning.  The Alabama Credential Registry also supports the Compendium of Valuable Credentials review process, which is legislated in Alabama to ensure program relevancy, as well as the issuing of validated credentials and skills.

- **The Alabama Skills-Based Job Description Generator** allows employers to create or enhance job descriptions to more fully recognize the skills required to fulfill their in-demand job roles. Employers use the job Skills PACKs (professional abilities, competencies, and knowledge) as well as credentials they trust from Alabama's approved education & training providers to determineall potential skills associated for each job posting. Employers can then post jobs, matching with potential employees who have relevant in-demand skills, credentials, and/or experiences. At the same time, when including new skills and job descriptions to the market, employers can help signal their needs to their education partners in real-time.

- **The Alabama Digital Wallet** includes multiple tools: User profiles; Learning & Employment Records (LERs) supporting both validated and self-attested skills credentials, and experiences; digital resumes; and recommended jobs and learning opportunities. Students and jobseekers can capture their validated and self-attested learned and earned credentials, skills, experiences in multiple ways to develop a full profile of their education and training achievements, allowing them to match with both expected and unexpected career and learning opportunities due to the foundational work that is supported within the Alabama Credential Registry.  Further, students and jobseekers are able to tailor their digital resumes and are in full control of the information they share.

Because all modules of the Talent Triad share and assimilate data, a unified talent marketplace and robust data dashboard are possible.

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## Executive Summary

Like other states, employers in Alabama are reporting difficulty in finding the talent they need to fill open positions and advance business goals. Rather than continuing to rely on the ineffective workforce solutions of the past, Alabama forged a unification and alignment strategy that focuses on a skills-based economy as a solution and is facilitating a first in the US talent marketplace for employers, students, and jobseekers.

The Talent Triad prioritizes the needs of employers in the design of a solution to solve statewide talent shortages and demonstrates an emerging best practice for how states can support employers and jobseekers in a unified workforce economy. Alabama realized early on the importance of engaging employers in the design of a solution and set up both formal and informal opportunities for employers to engage with state legislators, state agencies, industry associations, and chambers of commerce, as well as the ability to test solutions and provide feedback. With a statewide and population-level strategy implemented, the Talent Triad is able to reach employers in all corners of the state and in every industry from small businesses to global companies.

Employers were clear about the solutions that could bring faster employment to individuals in Alabama and fill job openings. The solution they seek should maximize connections to skilled talent by creating transparency for the programs and credentials that have traditionally signaled job readiness and using new methods to validate skills, or rather, what an individual actually knows and can do.

Supporting this transition and maximizing connections requires new tools for both employers and job seekers. As such, the Alabama Talent Triad was born.

## Key Takeaways

The Alabama Talent Triad aligns and validates education and training programs as well as the credentials and skills achieved via Learning & Employment records so any employer in the state can implement recruiting, hiring, and advancing employees based on those program outcomes.

In this way, the Talent Triad offers what other platforms and products do not by connecting Alabamians more efficiently and effectively with in-demand jobs using an industry-first approach, skills as the common currency, validated LERs, and a unified and interoperable solution.

The Talent Triad goes beyond other recruiting and job posting platforms in several important ways:

- The Talent Triad supports employers' ability to quickly translate and expand existing job descriptions into robust skill statements using predefined Skills PACKs (professional abilities, competencies, and knowledge) and trusted education program credentials. This not only enables employers to get specific about the skills they need but also sends a strong signal about in-demand skills into the marketplace.

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- The Talent Triad enables employers to adjust each position description according to their unique needs, filtering for candidates with certain skills, credentials, and experiences.

- The Talent Triad provides validated skills and credentials to employers using a digital LER. These new skills-based transcripts eliminate the need for jobseekers to spend hours searching for potential roles. The platform connects workers to employer job descriptions based on their validated skills and credentials and even suggests additional learning opportunities for workers to continue to build their skills and credentials for roles that are beyond their current skill sets.

- The Talent Triad reduces costs to recruit new talent and can eliminate cumbersome background checks for credentials and licensure. The jobseeker now has a digital, verified transcript of what they know and can do rather than sharing a resume with information that has to be verified by the employer producing extra costs and prolonging time to securing a hire.

In its initial phase, the Talent Triad focused on in-demand occupations and skills across the state, and it allowed this information to more easily be shared with education and training providers to ensure programs are aligned with industry needs. Alabama created the Committee on Credentialing and Career Pathways (ACCCP) in 2019 to identify growing occupations that pay competitive wages in each industry sector. The ACCCP provided structure and leadership for this state-wide analysis of in-demand jobs and identifying the credentials and competencies that are associated with the in-demand occupations. Alabama's Competency Ontology describes the competencies that employers are seeking in graduates of education and training programs. Meanwhile, the state's education providers use skills and credentials to design and offer academic and workforce programs and validate those in LERs so they can be shared instantly with employers. Moving beyond resume platforms and job sites, the Talent Triad is a true unified talent marketplace designed to reduce pain points for employers and jobseekers, while building a comprehensive systemic understanding for policy makers and system leaders of both the talent supply and demand in the state.

## Issue Overview

Over decades, many studies and reports point to a lack of shared language to explain communication breakdowns and poor alignment between academic and workforce programming and local labor needs. This misalignment is real and cannot be fixed solely with siloed programs and partnerships. The Talent Triad is powering deep connections between Alabama's employers and education providers using the shared language of skills.

States have a vested interest in creating deep alignment between employers, jobseekers, and education providers. Stronger, more productive employees are the key to contributing to a stronger tax base and economy. Fewer unemployed people, shorter-term unemployment, and higher labor force participation all drive lower public spending on benefits and safety net services. Higher employment rates also contribute significantly to improved quality of life for all residents, especially children. State policy leaders, as funders and stakeholders of public education, benefit from stronger alignment between employers and education providers, creating returns for students, and reinforcing trust in education providers and the public.

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A primary benefit to employers using the Talent Triad is the matching facilitated by the platform, which connects qualified candidates with validated skills to jobs. While "skills-based hiring" is a growing trend and the conversations have largely been focused on simply removing degree requirements from job descriptions, skills-based hiring does not solely base hiring decisions on skills.

Using the Talent Triad, employers have the opportunity to have the best of all worlds providing them with a wider range of relevant candidates. The Talent Triad's Skills-Based Job Description Generator enables employers to create job descriptions using enhanced and industry-aligned skill statements. In roles where specific credentials are required, employers have the ability toindicate which credentials and experience are necessary as well.

Regardless, the Talent Triad's matching capability still promises to save time and money for employers in Alabama, reducing the amount of time jobs remain open and shortening candidate searches. This capacity will also likely result in fewer "poor fit" hires, as workers will be matched with validated skills.

## Upskilling and Advancement

Employers using the Talent Triad may also benefit from having more discrete data and insights about employees' competencies once they are onboarded. Many companies spend considerable resources providing training and upskilling opportunities for employees. With validated LERs about what employees know and can do, employers may be able to create more tailored learning programs and use incumbent employees' talents more effectively. Improved development and advancement opportunities may contribute to increased retention and promotion, both of which are cost savers for employers.

Further, employers can use the Talent Triad data to provide concrete feedback to education providers, identifying where students are graduating without needed skills. Rather than relying on individual impressions or anecdotes, the Talent Triad data can show precisely where employer needs and education outcomes are misaligned. The Talent Triad can also show areas of strength and advantage, identifying centers of excellence.

Several design principles for employer engagement and value-add are emerging. The Talent Triad creates best practice in this area and offers these principles based on lessons learned early on.

- **Engage Employers Early.** Engage Employers early and intentionally. The Talent Triad prioritized employer needs in the planning, design, and early implementation of the platform, not after it was built. Specifically, the Talent Triad leverages existing industry relationships, business organizations, and nonprofits focused on economic mobility to understand specific needs for employers, complementing existing systems, and products to drive business impact. The Talent Triad also creates venues to collect substantive information, feedback, and insights from employers, which are supporting iterations of the platform itself.

- Innovating with Skills. The most important and transformational aspect of the Talent Triad compared to other workforce or economic development efforts is the creation and use of a common language for skills. Underpinning the platform is the statewide competency ontology. Based on real job descriptions, trusted education and training programs, and industry sectoral partnerships, the Talent Triad creates shared skills that can connect learning gained through Alabama's educational institutions with skills required for employment. This enables accurate matching of candidates with roles, supports analysis of skill demands within companies and across industries, and, importantly, enables education and employers to speak the same language. This removes barriers for candidates without sacrificing specificity, context, and unique situations for employers.

- Close the Loop. Learning & Employment records themselves are important because they are portable, transparent, and often verified accounts of learner experiences and learning. However, unless these records are connected to employers' needs—jobs, skills, and other needs— they do not necessarily add more value to learners and workers than a well-done LinkedIn profile. The Talent Triad was built with the intent that the platform would create a true connection between employers, candidates and learning systems, enabling all three sectors to work in response to each other.

- Employer Practices Matter. While the Talent Triad was built to streamline talent acquisition and upskilling for employers, businesses must continue to shift their practices to benefit fully. Whether building more robust job descriptions or creating upskilling and advancement opportunities for incumbent employees, to use the Talent Triad to its best potential, employers need to adapt their workflows and methodologies. For now, the Talent Triad is working to interoperate within existing employer workflows and systems like human resource information systems and firms that conduct background checks. The leadership team continues to explore how best to support the needs of employers, with the philosophy that interoperability is key to the success of any future needs identified.

To support these early findings, Alabama implemented the Alabama Trailblazer initiative (https://www.trailblazer-alabama.com/). The trailblazer initiative was a direct outreach to employers via the regional workforce councils, business associations, and chambers of commerce to meet with employers individually and in group settings to accomplish the following:

- Explain the benefits of the Alabama Talent Triad for all users (employers, jobseekers, and education providers) in developing a skills-based economy to support the labor force participation rate
- Demonstrate the value of developing skills-based job descriptions while also continuing to value credentials and degrees when required
- Provide training on the Skills-Based Job Description Generator tools
- Listen to feedback and the needs of employers of all sizes, across all industries, and across all recruitment and workflow use-cases
- Support onboarding and explore interoperability with employer job boards and applicant tracking systems

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Within 6 months, the Alabama Trailblazer initiative produced the following engagement results within the Alabama Talent Triad:

- 919 skills-based jobs
- 91 contributing employers
- 402 employer user accounts
- All 16 sectors and regions are represented

Key lessons learned/validated during the Alabama Trailblazer initiative:

- There is a wide-range of understanding and use of skills-based hiring practices
- Employers are more trusting of skills when associated with credentials of value
- Sustainability, scale, and transformation to skills-based job descriptions will be more effectively achieved through interoperability with employer job boards
- Employers of all sizes across all industries find the benefits of the Talent Triad to be important and useful for their onboarding efforts
- Employers need to trust that building a skills-based economy will be a long-term investment by the state, so their time and efforts are warranted
- Employers are not only concerned with filling today's jobs today, but tomorrow's jobs tomorrow. Employers need to know that the workforce and/or upcoming students possess the skills that will allow them and their industry to grow as needed.

After a full year of employer engagement, the Talent Triad has consumed and implemented more than 10,000 open jobs from 1,585 employers.  The employer engagement has also produced 13,180 candidate recommendations and 26,240 job recommendations.

## Action Items

For Alabama-based employers, we encourage you to visit https://www.alabamatalenttriad.com/ and sign up as an employer partner. https://www.alabamatalenttriad.com/ and sign up as an employer partner.

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## Research and Resources

AMERICA'S TALENT STRATEGY: BUILDING THE WORKFORCE FOR THE GOLDEN AGE, US Department of Labor, US Department of Education, US Department of Commerce. https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OPA/newsreleases/2025/08/Americas-Talent-Strategy-Building-the-Workforce-for-the-Golden-Age.pdf.

UpSkill America, in partnership with the Talent Triad leadership team, facilitated a convening of Alabama employers in March 2023 to discuss the use cases, opportunities and challenges in creating value for employers through the Talent Triad. The report from that convening is forthcoming.

Credentials to Employment: The Last Mile from the Digital Credentials Consortium highlights the role of interoperability in creating incentives and value specifically for employers, noting, "merely digitizing academic/university credentials alone does not bring enough value to employers for them to show much active interest in them."

Hire Standards: A Hiring & Advancement Playbook from Learning Economy Foundation emphasizes how learning and employment records can improve hiring and advancement systems and practices. The Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute hosts the Job Quality Tools Library, which includes a wealth of information and resources for understanding and improving job quality.

Brookings Institution produced a report entitled "Going digital: How learning and employment records shape access to quality education and jobs" that provides an effective framework for implementation and highlights the role of interoperability in effective implementation.

T3 Innovation Network, led by the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation released Skills-Based Hiring and Advancement Project Report discussing use cases and failure analyses for implementation of skills-based hiring and advancement strategies, underpinned by learning and employment data and technology innovations.

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