



Digital Badge
Academy

Your Digital Badge Program Quick Guide!

Build a wildly successful program
(and avoid the pitfalls)



Executive Overview

The use of digital credentials based on the Open Badge standards has become increasingly popular as a means of recognizing and showcasing individuals' skills and achievements throughout academia and industry. A high-impact digital credentialing program can enhance the credibility of a company or organization as well as help individuals stand out in a competitive job market and to grow their careers.

To design a successful digital badging program, it's crucial to define the program's goals and objectives, identify the target audience, and select an appropriate badge platform. The badge platform should support features such as security, verification, and provide useful user and admin capabilities, while also being easy to use and integrate with existing systems.

Creating badge criteria and assessment methods that align with the program's goals and objectives is also essential. Badges should represent meaningful accomplishments and be based on evidence of demonstrated skills and knowledge. They should also be recognized and valued by employers and industry professionals.

Marketing and promotion are critical elements of a successful digital credentialing program. Utilizing communication channels such as social media, targeted messaging campaigns, and other creative assets can help reach the target audience and generate interest in the program. Collaboration with industry partners and influencers can also enhance program visibility and credibility.

Lastly, ongoing evaluation and improvement of the digital credentialing program are necessary for long-term success. Collecting feedback from badge earners and identifying measurements of success can help identify areas for improvement and ensure the program stays relevant and valuable over time.

In summary, designing a high-impact digital credentialing program for issuing badges requires careful planning, careful selection of appropriate badge platform, development of meaningful badge criteria, effective marketing and promotion, and ongoing evaluation and improvement. A well-designed program can enhance the credibility of an organization and provide individuals with a valuable tool for showcasing their skills and achievements.

Digital Badge Academy has outlined 10 essential elements within this quick guide representing time-tested strategies for achieving these outcomes (and more), enabling your organization to start issuing digital credentials sooner and more effectively.

Start with Why

Why do you want to create a badging program?

Starting with "why" is crucial when initiating a digital credentialing program. It helps you and your team understand the purpose and motivation behind the program. When you have a clear understanding of the "why," it can guide your decisions and actions throughout the establishment of the program, leading to more meaningful and successful outcomes.

When you start with "why," you're essentially defining the problem or opportunity that the program is intended to address. This helps ensure that you're solving the right problem or capitalizing on the right opportunity, rather than just jumping straight into the solution.

Additionally, starting with "why" can help you create buy-in and engagement from stakeholders and team members. By articulating a clear purpose and vision for the program, you can inspire others to join you in pursuit of that vision and keep them motivated and focused on the end goal.

Overall, starting with "why" can lead to a more focused, purposeful, and successful program outcome.



What's important to the Badge Earner?

- Receive Instant recognition for achievements
- Evidence-based credential
- Shareable skills currency to build personal brand and unlock opportunities



What's important to the Badge Issuer?

- Differentiate and promote your organization
- Increase / verify talent pool
- Promote continuous engagement, progression and advocacy



What's important to the Badge Consumer?

- Validate expertise of resources
- Trusted credential for recruiting and hiring
- Employee performance tool for upline management
- Peer Awareness

Enlist Executive Sponsorship

Building and launching a digital badging program can represent a significant departure from traditional methods of recognition within an organization. Explaining *why* such a change is necessary is critical, and explanations alone are not enough to gain buy-in. Executive sponsorship (change management champions) must create a desire for change by translating the *why* into organizational motivators. Executive sponsors are there to help answer the ultimate question, “What’s in it for me?”

What to look for in an executive sponsor

Business leader

Defines what the business needs are and ensures the initiative delivers value

Primary beneficiary

Stands to benefit significantly from the badging initiative

Badging believer

Has shown an aptitude and passion for digital credentialing

Influence & authority

Can leverage internal clout to rally support and add credibility

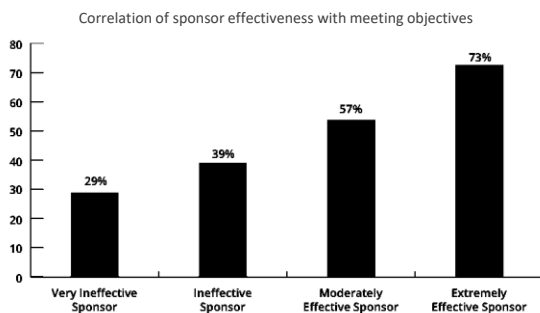
Continuity

Is committed for the long haul, not just the first 3 – 6 months



Better sponsorship = better results

Analysis of data from the 11th Edition research report from Prosci shows a direct correlation between the effectiveness of sponsorship and the likelihood of meeting project objectives.



Source: Best Practices in Change Management - Prosci

Executive sponsorship for projects is crucial for success for several reasons:

- **Resource allocation:** Digital badging programs require resources, including financial, personnel, and time resources. Executive sponsorship ensures that these resources are allocated appropriately and that the program receives the necessary support to succeed.
- **Strategic alignment:** Executive sponsorship ensures that the program is aligned with the organization's overall strategy and goals. This ensures that the program is not only successful but also contributes to the organization's long-term success.
- **Authority:** Executive sponsors have the authority to make decisions and remove obstacles that may impede program success. This allows the program team to focus on executing the program's plans without being bogged down by bureaucracy or red tape.
- **Accountability:** Executive sponsors are ultimately responsible for the success of the program. This creates a sense of accountability that motivates the program team to work harder and take ownership of their work.
- **Visibility:** Executive sponsorship can provide visibility to the program, which can help attract more resources and support from other stakeholders within the organization. This can help the project gain momentum and achieve success more quickly.

Define Your Badge Program Framework

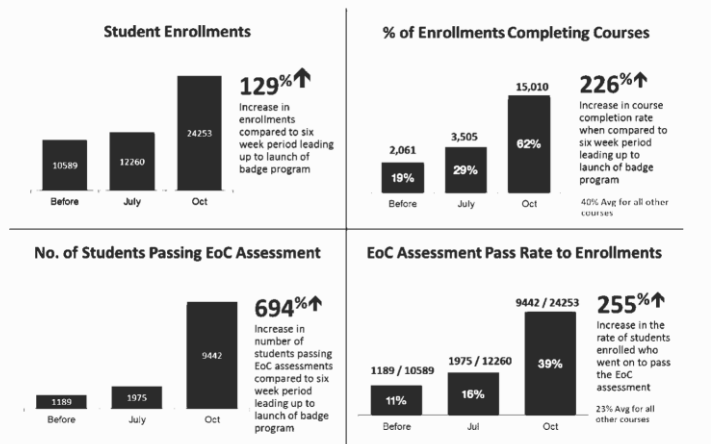
What is program governance and why should you care?

Governance frameworks are essential for digital badging programs because they ensure the integrity, security, and validity of the credentials being issued. Digital badges are used by employers, educational institutions, and other organizations to make decisions about the skills, qualifications, and achievements of individuals. This makes it essential that the credentials be reliable, accurate, and trustworthy. A governance framework provides the policies, standards, and guidelines that govern the issuance, use, and management of digital badges. Without a governance framework, there is a risk that digital badges could be issued incorrectly, manipulated or misused, leading to a loss of trust in the credentials issued by the organization and the overall badging program.

Establishing a sound governance model for digital badging programs can make a significant difference in how credential earners perceive and value the badges they are issued. The IBM digital badging program serves as a prime example of how thoughtful badging governance helped improve engagement and completion rates for online learning.

¹IBM (2019, June 1). *Do digital badges really provide value to businesses?* IBM Training

IBM saw triple digital growth in online learning metrics¹



Six essential elements of digital badge program governance

Standardization:

Governance can help to standardize badge design, criteria for awarding badges, and the process for issuing badges. This standardization ensures consistency and fairness in the program and helps to ensure that badges are recognized and valued by employers and other organizations..

Stakeholder engagement: Effective governance requires engagement with all stakeholders involved in the digital badging program. This includes credential issuers, recipients, verifiers, and regulators.

Transparency: The governance framework should be transparent, with clear policies and procedures that are accessible to all stakeholders. This ensures that everyone understands the rules and regulations governing the program.

Accountability: There should be clear lines of accountability and responsibility for the management of the digital badging program. This includes mechanisms for addressing issues and concerns, and for enforcing compliance with the policies and guidelines.

Security: The governance framework must include robust security measures to protect the integrity, confidentiality, and availability of the digital badges. This includes measures such as encryption, access controls, and data backup and recovery.

Continuous improvement: The governance framework should be designed to facilitate continuous improvement, with regular monitoring and evaluation of the program's effectiveness, and the implementation of corrective actions where necessary.

Choose Your Badging Solution

Choosing the right digital badging solution is important because it ensures that the platform meets the specific needs and goals of an organization. There are many digital badging solutions available in the market, each with different features and functionalities. By carefully evaluating different solutions, an organization can determine which platform best fits their needs and goals.

What to look for in a digital badging system



Customization: The ability to customize the badges with your organization's branding and design is essential. This allows you to create a unique and recognizable visual identity for your badges.



Badge types and levels: Look for a solution that allows you to create a variety of badge types and levels to recognize different achievements and skill levels. This can help motivate learners and provide a clear progression path.



Evidence-based: A good digital badging solution should allow for evidence-based assessment of skills or competencies, as well as provide verifiable proof of the learning or achievement.



Accessibility: Digital accessibility is important to ensure everyone has equal access to badging tools and services. Make sure the solution you choose is accessible to all earners, regardless of their device, location, or ability.



Integration: A solution that integrates easily with your existing learning management system (LMS) or other platforms can help streamline the badging process and make it easier to issue and track badges.



Security and Privacy: Look for a solution that provides secure storage and verification of badges to prevent fraud or misuse. Protection of badge earner personal details is also essential.



Analytics: The ability to track and analyze badge data can provide valuable insights into learner behavior and progress, as well as help you measure the effectiveness of your training programs and adoption of badging.



OpenBadges Standards Certified: Make sure the digital badging platform has been independently verified by the OpenBadges Certification Program through 1EdTech as meeting the proper technical standards and specifications.

Establish Measures of Success

Measuring the success of a digital badging program is essential for evaluating its effectiveness, motivating learners, establishing accountability, and demonstrating ROI. By tracking metrics and using data to inform program decisions, you can ensure that your digital badging program is meeting its goals and contributing to learner success.

IBM Digital Badge Program Metrics



Engagement
87% increase



Certifications
57% pass rate increase



Product Trial Downloads
64% increase



Employability
92% say verifies job skills



Enrollments
125% increase



Completions
694% increase



Social Media
~\$39K/month in marketing value



Skills Registry
195 countries

LinkedIn profiles with IBM badges receive 6x profile views.

Source: Metrics Matter - Strategic Planning, Analytics, and Alignment. Tice Virtual Conference February 2018
<https://trainingindustry.com/tice/learn-ibms-secrets-how-can-digital-badges-improve-your-training-metrics/>

Four essential reasons for measuring badge program success

1. Evaluation:

Measuring success allows you to evaluate the effectiveness of your digital badging program. By tracking metrics such as badge issuance, learner engagement, and skills development, you can determine whether your program is meeting its goals and identify areas for improvement.

2. Motivation:

Measuring success can also help motivate learners. By providing learners with clear goals and feedback on their progress, you can encourage them to engage with the program and strive to earn more badges.

3. Accountability:

Measuring success helps to establish accountability. By tracking badge issuance and other metrics, you can ensure that learners are meeting the requirements and expectations of the program.

4. ROI:

Measuring success helps demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) of your digital badging program. By tracking the impact of the program on learner outcomes, you can show the value of the program to stakeholders and justify the investment in the program.

Create a Visual Design Language

The graphic design of digital badges provides an excellent opportunity to communicate value and promote an organization's brand. Effective visual designs can also reflect the credential's place and purpose in the context of the broader credentialing program. For example, is one digital badge part of a series or a stack that leads to a larger certification or achievement? Does a digital badge represent a particular level of mastery? Is it associated with a category of knowledge, skill or experience? Whatever is represented by the digital badge will benefit significantly by creating a visual design language that helps amplify the earner's achievement and the brand / organization responsible for issuing the badge.

Visual design principles for digital badges

Emphasis

- Makes the badge design more purposeful
- Draws attention to specific elements
- Reflects thoughtful use of color
- Uses shape to separate badge types
- Considers size of badge elements

Balance & Contrast

- Distribute badge design elements properly
- Use complimentary colors
- Ensure alignment of text elements
- Font type, size, and weight matter
- Use both graphic and text elements

Repetition

- Uses patterns to make the design 'active'
- Incorporates your organization's logo
- May use color to differentiate levels
- May use shape to identify badge types
- Governs placement of badge elements

Proportion & White Space

- Badge elements placed with purpose
- Avoids needless distractions
- Makes it easier to read
- Improves understanding
- Looks more professional

Start with Badging What you Have

We already know digital badges are a popular and effective way for organizations to recognize and showcase the skills, achievements, and contributions of their employees but it can still feel like a daunting task to determine what will be badged. The easiest way to decide on what to badge during the early stages of launching a badging program is to look for existing activities that lend themselves to being represented through badging. There are more opportunities than you may think. Below are just a few examples of activities that make excellent candidates for including in a digital badging program.

Organizational opportunities for digital badging

Training completion



Training completion is a common activity for digital badging

Rewarding progression



Use digital badging as a way to recognize job promotions

Engagement & contribution



Recognize those who go above and beyond to give back to the org

Performance programs



Reward those who exceed performance-based objectives

Stand and deliver



Show appreciation for those who pay it forward by speaking at events

Award programs



Show appreciation for noteworthy work milestones and achievements

Academics and internships



Issue badges as part of internship programs upon completion

Professional certification



Badges are an ideal way to validate certification status

Educate, Communicate, Promote

Simply creating and issuing badges is not enough to ensure the success of a digital badging program. Communication and marketing play a crucial role in driving adoption, engagement, and recognition of digital badges within an organization as well as being viewed positively outside the organization. The importance of communication and marketing for a digital badging program can't be overstated. The following guidance provides some of the best practices to ensure success.

Key elements for digital badge program communications and marketing



- Pre-program launch communications
- Landing page messaging
- Pre-issuing notifications
- Infographics and explainer videos
- Issuer / earner resources
- Social media messaging

Purpose, value and benefits

Badge earners should understand what badges represent, how they can earn them, and how they can use them to demonstrate their skills and achievements. Clear and concise messaging, through email, company intranet or other internal communication channels, is critical to ensure that employees understand the value of digital badges and the expectations of their role in the program.

Awareness and interest

Effective marketing strategies (internal and/or external) can help generate enthusiasm and excitement around digital badges. This can help increase the visibility and recognition of badges, as well as drive participation and engagement among those who can earn the badges. Organizations can use a variety of marketing strategies such as targeted email campaigns, social media, in-person training sessions, and gamification tactics to promote their digital badging program.

Motivation and enthusiasm

Marketing efforts can help increase the perceived value of digital badges. For example, highlighting the recognition and rewards that come with earning badges, such as opportunities for career advancement, promotions or even just bragging rights, can motivate employees to participate in the program. Additionally, it is important to ensure that the digital badges are visually appealing, and that they convey the significance of the achievement they represent.

Integrity and transparency

Effective communication and marketing strategies can help establish credibility and trust in the digital badging program. Employees need to be confident that the badges they earn are credible and recognized by the organization and possibly even the broader industry or professional community. Organizations should provide transparency on the criteria and standards required to earn badges, as well as make sure that they are aligned with the goals of the organization and the needs of the employees.

Issue Badges Timely

Recognition is an important aspect of learning and achievement, and it is beneficial to give recognition sooner rather than later when issuing digital badges. Overall, timely issuing of digital badges can be a powerful motivator and can help individuals build on their accomplishments to achieve even greater success. By issuing a digital badge soon after an achievement, you can reinforce positive behaviors, enhance learning, boost morale, and create new opportunities for growth and development.

Where's my badge?



- Set clear expectations on timing of issuing
 - Issue badges in real-time if possible
 - Use API capabilities to automate issuing
 - Send reminders to drive badge acceptance
 - Use caution when retroactively issuing badges
-

The importance of timely recognition

Reinforcement: When recognition is given soon after an achievement, it reinforces the behavior or skill that led to the accomplishment. This can motivate the individual to continue their efforts and strive for further accomplishments.

Memory: Recognition given soon after an achievement helps the individual remember the details of what they did to earn it. This can reinforce the learning and help the individual retain the knowledge or skills they acquired.

Morale: Prompt recognition can boost morale and increase confidence in one's abilities. This positive reinforcement can lead to increased engagement and motivation.

Opportunity: Recognition can create opportunities for individuals to further develop their skills, pursue new opportunities, and advance in their careers. By giving recognition sooner rather than later, individuals have more time to capitalize on these opportunities.

Iterate for Improvement

By implementing specific strategies, a digital badge program can be continually improved to better meet the needs of learners and other stakeholders, and surface new opportunities for meaningful recognition and validation of skills and achievements.

MONITOR EVALUATE ADJUST



Opportunities for improvement

Clear and meaningful criteria: It's important that the criteria for earning a digital badge be reviewed and updated as required. This will ensure your badges are clear, meaningful, and relevant to the intended audience. The criteria should be based on specific learning outcomes or competencies, and should be communicated clearly to potential earners.

Ongoing evaluation and refinement: The digital badge program should be regularly evaluated and refined to ensure that it remains relevant, meaningful, and effective. Feedback from earners and other stakeholders should be solicited through surveys and used to inform improvements to the program.

Integration with other learning initiatives: A digital badge program should be integrated with other learning initiatives to provide learners with a comprehensive learning experience. For example, a digital badge program could be integrated with a learning management system or with other educational resources.

Consistency and standardization: To ensure that digital badges are valued and recognized by employers and other stakeholders, it's important to maintain consistency and standardization in the badge design and criteria for earning the badge.

Verification and authentication: To ensure the validity and authenticity of digital badges, it's important to have a system for verifying and authenticating the badges. This could involve using a third-party platform for badge issuance and verification, including implementing blockchain technology.

Collaboration and partnerships: Collaboration with other organizations or institutions can help to enhance the credibility and value of the digital badge program. Partnerships with industry associations or other organizations can provide opportunities for learners to connect with like-minded professionals or mentors.

Summary

- **Start with why**
 - Drivers
 - Stakeholders
- **Executive sponsorship**
 - Strategic alignment
 - Outcome visibility
- **Badge program framework**
 - Critical
 - Start with a pilot
- **Badging Solution**
 - Simple, easy, scalable
 - Trusted
- **Measures of success**
 - Engagement
 - Progress toward objectives
- **Badge visual design**
 - Simple and flexible
 - Memorable
- **Badge what you have**
 - Training completion
 - Contribution & give back
- **Educate, Communicate, Promote**
 - Tailor to each stakeholder
 - Expectations are essential
- **Timely issuing of badges**
 - Improved badge acceptance rates
 - Improved ongoing engagement
- **Monitor, Evaluate, Adjust**
 - Badging is evolving
 - Be prepared for change

About the experts:

These insights for building and launching a digital badging program are based on real world experiences and pressure-tested best practices of this guide's authors, David Leaser and Jim Daniels.



David Leaser
Credential Strategy



Jim Daniels
Credential Operations

David and Jim are credited with development of one of the world's leading digital badge programs and have helped countless other organizations launch successful credentialing initiatives using digital badges. Now they are bringing this expertise to the masses through a range of offerings, which includes the Digital Badge Academy Masterclass containing over 10 hours of in-depth education covering all of these topics – and more!

Visit www.digitalbadgeacademy.com to learn more about what it takes to design and launch a digital badge program or to enhance an existing badging program.

[Learn more](#)

Interested in learning more?

Our proven five-step approach for developing and launching successful digital badging programs establishes a solid foundation and rapidly delivers measurable results. Click [here](#) to download our infographic for an overview.



Digital Badge Academy offers **workshops, online courses and personalized coaching**, virtually or onsite:

End-to-End Workshops

Establish a fully operational badge program in twelve weeks

Workshops delivered over a twelve-week timeline to teach you everything you need to know to plan, design and implement a successful digital badge program. At the end of this workshop, you should have an operational-ready badge program fully defined.

Online Certificate Program

The most complete online training in the industry

The Digital Badge Masterclass is the most comprehensive program in the industry, including more than 600 minutes of content, templates, workbooks and private one-on-one coaching. Many of our classes can be completed in a day or less.

Consulting and coaching

Work one-on-one with the world's leading badge authorities

Whether you need virtual coaching or onsite consulting, we can help you build a world-class program in rapid time. We can host and deliver everything from onsite design-thinking workshops to one-on-one consulting using web conferencing.

Get in touch and let's start building your best digital badging program today!

Contact Us