



Learning can happen anytime, anyplace, at any age.

Learning happens in K-12 and college classrooms, adult education and in professional development programs. Learning also happens in an array of other online and in-person environments: in afterschool programs and online tutorials, through mentoring, playing games, interacting with peers in person and in social networks, with smart phone apps, in volunteer workshops, at sports camps, during military training, and in countless other ways and other places.

Badges

A badge is a validated indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality or interest that can be earned in any of these learning environments. Badges can support learning, validate education, help build reputation, and confirm the acquisition of knowledge. They can signal traditional academic attainment or the acquisition of skills such collaboration, teamwork, leadership, and other 21st century skills.

Badges are used successfully in games, social network sites, and interest-driven programs to set goals, represent achievements and communicate success. A digital badge is an online record of achievements, the work required, and information about the organization, individual or other entity that issued the badge. Badges make the accomplishments and experiences of individuals, in online and offline spaces, visible to anyone and everyone, including potential employers, teachers, and peer communities.

In addition to representing a wide range of skills, competencies, and achievements, badges can play a critical role in supporting participation in a community, encouraging broader learning goals, and enabling identity and reputation building. For a learner, a sequence of badges can be a path to gaining expertise and new competencies. Badges can capture and display that path, providing information about, and visualizations of, needed skills and competencies. They can acknowledge achievement, and encourage collaboration and teamwork. Finally, badges can foster kinship and mentorship, encourage persistence, and provide access to ever-higher levels of challenge and reward.

Digital Media and Learning Competition

The Fourth Digital Media and Learning Competition focuses on building digital badges for lifelong learning. The Competition is designed to encourage individuals and organizations to create badges – digital tools that support, identify, recognize, measure, and account for new skills, competencies, knowledge, and achievements for 21st century learners regardless of where and when learning takes place.

The success of badges as an alternative path to accreditation and credentialing for learners relies on a significant “ecosystem” of badge issuers, badge seekers, and badge displayers. The Competition aims to spur the development of that ecosystem through the creation of high quality, valuable individual badges and sets of badges. The Mozilla Foundation, with support from the MacArthur Foundation, is building an Open Badge Infrastructure to enable the interoperability and collection of badges. The infrastructure will support badges from any issuer across the Internet. It will allow learners to collect, carry, and display their badges across websites and experiences and from youth through adulthood. All badges and sets of badges developed through the Competition will be designed to plug into the Mozilla infrastructure—which will contribute, in turn, to the development of the larger badge ecosystem. In this ecosystem, each digital badge or collection of badges can inspire learning and translate “anytime, anyplace, any age” learning into a powerful tool for getting jobs, finding communities of interest, and demonstrating skills, competencies and achievements. For more on the Mozilla Open Badge Infrastructure, please see <https://wiki.mozilla.org/Badges>

An Open Conversation about Badges

As part of the Competition, HASTAC will also host a year-long open conversation about possible standards and protocols for a credible, coherent badge ecosystem. Throughout the year, open meetings will be convened, research conducted, and online conversations hosted to discuss topics related to the functioning of a badge ecosystem. Topics will include the validation and credibility of badges, as well as the elements of and best practices for creating badges.