WGU's 10X Vision
Open Skills Network

Scott Pulsipher

President, Western Governors University

Open Skills Network

The Open Skills Network—another group of innovative partners—is paving the way for higher education and workforce innovation through its skills-mapping work.

The way previous generations thought about education and careers doesn't fit the realities of today's workplace. Under the old paradigm, students—mostly from privileged backgrounds—would leave high school and either enter a trade or enroll in a university, where they'd choose their lives' paths and spend four or more years laying the groundwork for the careers from which they would eventually retire.

Today's reality is different, and it points to a dramatically different future: The job a college graduate will have in 10 years likely doesn't exist today. They will work for many different organizations, have many job titles, and follow a career trajectory they can't possibly predict right now. Education will be an ongoing part of that path, part of a working-and-learning loop, as the changing workplace requires regular upskilling and reskilling to meet new realities. Skills-mapping will allow employers to recognize all of an individual's learning throughout their lifetime—be it through education, life experience, or work —helping to seamlessly connect talent to opportunity.

With initial funding from Walmart, and in partnership with the U.S. Chamber, universities and community colleges, major employers, and other leaders in workforce development like Emsi Burning Glass and Badgr, WGU established the Open Skills Network (OSN) in September 2020 to help support this important work. Since then, OSN membership has grown to include 731 unique organizations from various sectors such as education, technology, and large employers.

The network's membership from unique individuals also has grown to 1,175 and represents a global reach. These members collaborate collectively across several work groups that examine the skills world from every possible aspect, including technical, open recognition, and policy as well as the functioning of the coalition.

OSN initiated its first round of pilot projects in the spring of 2021. This cohort consisted of 14 groups, including representation from Canada. Their work focused on skill issues in healthcare, education, cyber security, and the development of 21st century skills.

In July of 2021, OSN conducted its inaugural Skills Summit to showcase and highlight the work of the pilot participants and to lay out

a national vision for its initiatives in the skills ecosystem. A vision emphasized by a keynote given by US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo.

OSN hosted an additional eight showcase events in 2021 that helped to engage and educate membership on current skill topics, new technology, and featured partnerships.

The network also was a key partner in promoting the adoption of the Open Skills Management Toolset (OSMT) through their Technical Work Group and via the OSN website.

OSN concluded 2021 by identifying and selecting the next cohort of participants of the Skills Collaborative Projects, which are led by seven groups, including international members from Australia and New Zealand.

In 2022, OSN looks forward to furthering the adoption of the Open Skills Management Toolset, applying the learnings and impact of the work of the Collaborative projects, hosting the second Skills Summit to further the work and community of the skills ecosystem, and ultimately establishing OSN as a member-run collaborative to design, develop, and enable the adoption of the standards and practices of a skills-based talent supply chain.

These are just a few examples of WGU's expanded vision, and collectively, these endeavors are helping us shape the future of higher education in far more impactful ways than WGU can do alone. We hope to have a tidal effect that benefits all participants in the education-to-opportunity space. We anticipate more will be introduced as WGU seeks to scale access to pathways to opportunity.