



Happy [International Women's Day](#)!

Love data? Us, too!

Live to make better use of it? Us, too!

Move fast and break things? 🙅 Us...not so much.

Stewards of data for the public good need open, patient, collaborative approaches to shared data initiatives. This was the consensus of the nine state teams who participated in last week's convening of the US Department of Labor's Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) in Arlington, VA. It reflected a partial break from previous practice, which tended to emphasize collaboration early, and then openness around product release, typically a final step in a long process. After nearly a decade of working toward integrated longitudinal data systems, the most experienced state teams have learned that a succession of small-scale products that meet the needs of a range of stakeholders can add up to a lot of value and also invest ecosystem partners in the adventure that is longitudinal data system building.

What do we mean by small-scale products? Think prototypes.

- A report on a *single* program or for a *single* agency that functions as a model for additional or more sophisticated reports and invites user feedback.
- A secure process for submitting and managing individual-level student record data for adult students (even if not for students under 18 and subject to [FERPA](#) through a parent or guardian).
- An interactive report that offers dynamic visualization for *one* program element, even if not *all* program elements needed by data users.

These are all examples of products cited by WDQI data stewards that have helped demonstrate the capacity of emerging data systems and built trust among data providers. Such products have also helped stakeholders *generate better questions* and find common cause in understanding the nature of longitudinal data and what can be done with it to shape policy and improve programs and services and the opportunities available to people who count on them.

There's no shortage of advice about how to build innovative products around data. Participants in

this year's gathering leaned toward Stack Overflow founder [Joel Spolsky](#)'s practical wisdom, "Nothing works better than just improving your product." Simple and sage.

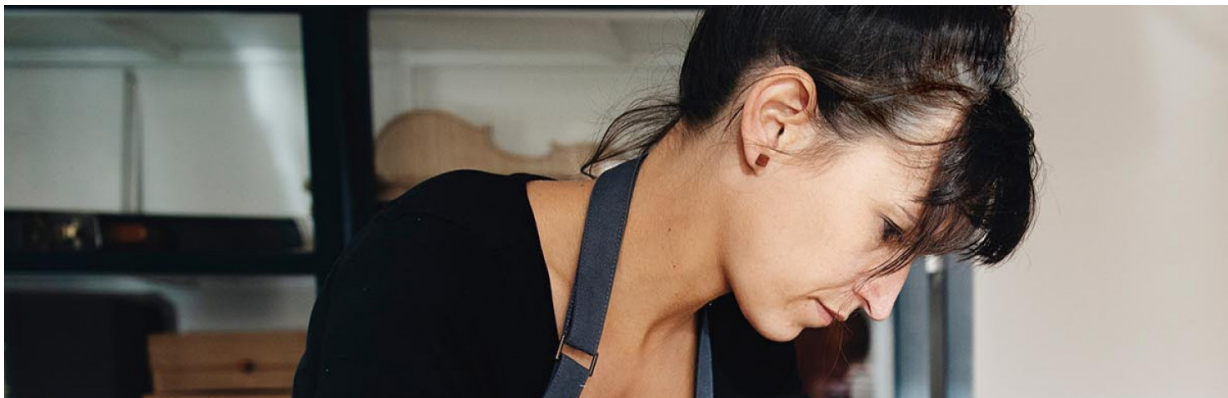
(Also, less breaking calls for fewer bandaids.)

For those who attended our event last week, wow. So much goodness. 🙏 We'll be processing, curating, and organizing all of the information, wisdom and resources shared and getting it to you in the next couple of weeks. Enjoy this month's newsletter in the meantime. It's a treasure trove.

Yours in data,
Kristin & Maureen

P.S. Hat-tip tip Clinton Flowers (MO) and Fran Valentine (IN) who helped us identify the need to expand our working definition of product!

Have a Look



What is the true nature of skills? Of a knowledge economy?

Before we dive into data, evidence-based policy, and the future of work, we're treating you to this beautiful documentary about knowledge, skill, and craft, presented by [The Craftsmanship Initiative](#) in collaboration with The Centre for Global Heritage and Development. A new framing of many issues at the heart of workforce – career pathways, apprenticeship, and the structure of work – it is audiovisual poetry. Get yourself a cup of tea, put on your headset, and click 'play.' You are most welcome.

 craftsmanship.net



The Future of *Prosperity* (not just *work*) Champions Better Data

[*Ladders to Success: Rethinking education and skills training for tomorrow's workforce*](#), a product of the Future of Prosperity Working Group and the subject of the Make Me Smart podcast episode cited below, points to specific challenges for policy makers. The first of these? *Improve data*. We thought you'd have some ideas about how to do that.

 politico.com



Aspen's Future of Work Initiative State Policy Agenda: The Top 10

No shrinking violets, recommendations on Aspen's new Future of Work policy agenda include portable benefits and paid family leave. Also on that list? Better state-level labor market data. And that's where WDQI, partners and data ecosystems come in.



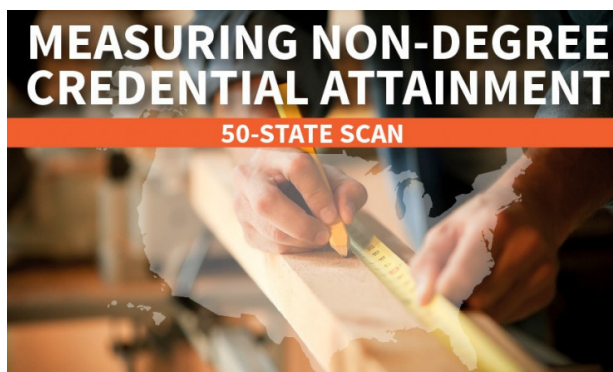
 aspeninstitute.org



How colleges are preparing students for jobs that don't exist yet

Last month, we featured the new [PBS series on the Future of Work](#). This piece is one component of that project. It suggests policy questions and choices longitudinal workforce data will be called upon to inform. This kind of context is increasingly important in shaping the content and design of data systems, and in crafting the questions we ask of them.

 pbs.org



Measuring Credential Attainment Comprehensively: States Making Progress, Still Struggling

This new 50-state scan from WDQC reveals that states are making progress collecting data about non-degree credential attainment, including certificates, industry certifications, and licenses. States differ in their approaches – how they integrate administrative data, for example – and the majority are working towards identifying "credentials of value" to help focus financial aid, workforce or other investments in talent development.

 [nationalskillscoa...](#)



Alternative and Independent: The Universe of Technology-Related "Bootcamps"

Caren A. Arbeit, Alexander Bentz, Emily Forrest Cataldi, and Herschel Sanders

Alternative and independent, A New Report on Coding and Other Technology Training Bootcamps

Speaking of alternative credentials, nontraditional technology training programs in the form of bootcamps and their kin have proliferated in recent years. Hailed by policymakers as key to training skilled workers, they typically do not report outcomes in the same way public programs do. But do they work? [RTI](#) wanted to know (we do, too!), so they conducted one of the first independent reviews. Spoiler alert: there are some surprises.

 [rti.org](#)



Beyond Disruption

How Tech Shapes Labor Across Domestic Work & Ridehailing

A Qualitative Look at the Gig Economy?

Research intended to reveal the size, scope, and nature of the gig economy is an increasing area of interest to states and regions – and a thorny data problem. *Beyond Disruption* suggests potential taxonomies that could be used to better understand the how these labor markets work. Drawn from the



Evidence-Based Policymaking at the State Level

Building capacity is no mean feat. The goal of this brief is to equip governors — especially new governors and their policy teams charged with developing first-term agendas — to build a foundation for evidence-based policymaking into them. Updated in late fall, we're sharing the brief now in light of the

experiences of U.S. ridehail, care, and cleaning platform workers, *Beyond Disruption* (Data & Society) reveals how technology is shaping the future of work.

 datasociety.net

[Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act](#) (federal legislation signed into law in January 2019) on which several states are already modeling their own approaches. Longitudinal data systems like WDQI and SLDS are key resources in building this new capacity for collecting and managing data and supporting research and evaluation.

 urban.org



Automation and AI will disrupt the American labor force. Here's how we can protect workers.

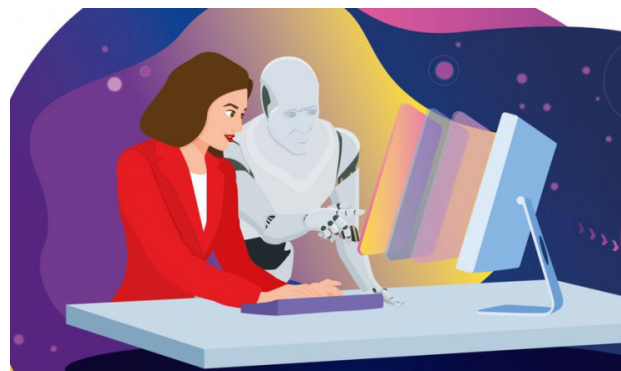
Thank you Mark Muro! Last month you brought us an insightful [place-based look at where automation would likely change employment conditions most significantly](#). This month, you worked with Robert Maxim to provide an impressively rich and mercifully brief look at key policy and program investments we can make to help protect workers from the most severe consequences of rapid automation and help them take advantage of new opportunities. Most are simple in concept, and herculean to implement – like most things worth doing. If we lay the foundation for data and data sharing early, we'll know what works as we transition.

 brookings.edu

Strategies for the New Economy: Skills as the Currency of the Labour Market



Skills as the Currency



Time for a chat? How the Future of Work Will Influence

We try not to share too many (very) big-picture [World Economic Forum](#) and other Davos-set reports, but this one will be of particular relevance to many of you. "Skills-as-the-new-currency" – and measurement of said skills – is a regular topic of debate within the workforce data community. *Strategies for the New Economy* offers an ecosystem-centered look new approaches to learning, workforce, and the enabling environment that will be familiar to many of you. In addition, case studies from the US and elsewhere ground these approaches, making them accessible, and potentially useful in your own work. We hope so. We think it's pretty important work.

 weforum.org

the Future of Learning #DLNchat - EdSurge News

Twitter chats can be a terrific source of crowdsourced intelligence on specific topics. Digital Learning Network has hosted some sweet ones lately under the hashtag "DLNChat. #FutureofWork, #automation, skills and credentials, portability, and new roles for higher education have all been discussed. The next one is March 12 (on community support for online learners). Summaries of previous chats are also available. Thank you kindly #DLNChat community!

 edsurge.com

Have a Listen



"I'm sorry, it should be *stackable*?" Understanding Credentials, Skills, Debt, and Other Mysteries in the Education-to-Work Journey

Are you a [Make Me Smart](#) listener? Episode #97 (*Think Before You Major*) is a concentrated dose of all things #SkillsGap, #credentials, #wages, #studentdebt, #apprenticeship, #futureofwork, and a world-view debate about what higher education is for. Featuring Maura Reynolds, senior editor at Politico and coordinator of [The Agenda's Future of Prosperity Working Group Report](#) (see report summary above), it's a fast and furious listen, and the first time we have ever



Love longitudinal (data)? The Future of Work needs you.

Sometimes taking a step into the past lends unforeseen clarity to the present. In this episode of [Recode Decode](#), host [Kara Swisher](#) talks with Ellen Shell about her new book *The Job*, in which we are reminded just how recent an invention "the job" is – and that it is not only one way to structure what we understand to be "work." For folks who wake up thinking about jobs, learning, and the future of work as we do, it is riveting.

 recode.net

heard the word "stackable" (as in credentials) used in a public media context – evidently, it was a first for Kai and Molly too.



It's here! Our Very Own #WDQI #MakingBetterWork Podcast Has Landed!

If you have not subscribed already, pull out your mobile device and do it now!

[iTunes](#) * [Stitcher](#) * [GooglePlay](#)

Search for **Making Better Work** (or for **SPRA** on Google Play, a quirk of the platform).

Episodes featuring state workforce data teams in IA, IN, KY, and RI are available now, as well as interviews with labor market expert, [Dr. Greg Weeks](#), and [Jobs for the Future](#) Innovator-in Residence, [Josh Copus](#).

Again, we hope these new communication channels will bring work happening in server rooms or on GitHub into the public domain so that kindred spirits in different parts of the growing public data ecosystem can find each other. It's a big job but somebody's got to do it. Why not the WDQI community?



Information Wants to Be Shared

This is the second beta version of our WDQI newsletter.

We'd love your help in making it great (and your generosity of spirit when we don't quite get there). Our interviews and conversations with you over the past few months, together with our observations and encounters with the field, have led us to three themes we plan to emphasize as we launch:

- **Impact** (Products, legislation, key policy decisions and more – what difference is WDQI making in your state, community?)
- **Governance** (In the words of one of our subject matter experts, "It's *everything*.")

- **Ecosystem** (How do we better align public data efforts and work with nonprofit, foundation, university, and other partners more effectively to address critical workforce and education issues? How do we do this consistently, ethically, and responsibly?)

We'll start there and can't wait to hear from you about what you like (and don't like).

You know where to find us, but just in case you've received this from a friend or colleague, we've provided our contact information below.

Kristin Wolff (Editor): Kristin_Wolff@spra.com

Maureen Sarver (Chief WDQI TA Architect): Maureen_Sarver@spra.com

The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the US Department of Labor or other public agencies (state, federal, or local) participating in the Workforce Data Quality Initiative. Mentions of trade names, commercial products or organizations does not imply endorsement of same by the US Government or representatives. Click for information about [WDQI](#).

Know someone who needs this newsletter? Forward it or send them here.