

Recognition Without Permission: Reclaiming Contribution Through WBLNS and Open Stewardship

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Recognition does not require permission. It does not need to be licensed or translated through formal institutions. The foundation of open recognition is this simple truth: people can freely, meaningfully, and without waiting for validation from an authority, recognize each other for their contributions. The Council Advancing Work-Based Learning (CAWBL) shares this belief and builds tools to make those recognitions visible, portable, and structurally supported.

This session explores how open recognition of contribution is not an outcome of CAWBL's work—it is the starting point. Work-Based Learning (WBL) is not created through institutions. It exists in the day-to-day contributions people make, such as organizing a food drive, orienting new colleagues, designing accessible tools, teaching a trade to youth, or caring for others. WBL is present anywhere people contribute with purpose.

What is often missing is not the learning but the recognition of contribution. The WBLNS is a robust schema, but it is not where recognition begins. It begins when we acknowledge the value of someone's effort, care, creativity, or leadership and choose to recognize it, whether or not a system is involved.

Work-Based Learning (WBL), as defined by CAWBL, occurs whenever individuals engage in purposeful contributions toward personal, organizational, or societal outcomes. This could be a municipal worker coordinating emergency housing, a cooperative member onboarding a new team, or a skilled tradesperson mentoring an apprentice. Yet, in every one of those scenarios, learning is often overlooked. Not because it is not real, but because our systems are not designed to see it.

The Work-Based Learning Numbering System (WBLNS) schema exists to help us see it. In this 20-minute session, CAWBL presented:

- An overview of how WBLNS functions as a public indexing system for Training Items (ti), Units (tu), Standards (ts), and End-Point Assessments (ea).
- A walkthrough of the current schema structure, including recent updates:
- 73 system root prefix (anchoring all WBLNS identifiers under CAWBL governance).
- Organizational type codes (replacing earlier occupational pillar designations).
- RecogCodes (codes indicating recognition status at the time of indexing).
- External metadata fields, including ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) pillars, ISCO (International Standard Classification of

Occupations) codes, and pathway tags, now support classification but are not embedded in the identifier itself.

Notably, the session distinguishes between recognition as a human act and recognition as a technical infrastructure. WBLNS is not a prerequisite for recognition—it is a system designed to support, rather than substitute for, the human decision to recognize.

Participants were invited into a guided reflection:

- What is a contribution I have made that remains unrecognized?
- What contribution by someone else have I witnessed but failed to acknowledge?
- What prevented me from recognizing that person's effort?
- What would shift if I did?

This reflective component is essential. Recognition systems fail not because the infrastructure is weak but because we are unpracticed in the social act of recognition itself. Without this self-awareness, the best-designed tools risk being used only for compliance, not for transformation.

The WBLNS is one model among many but it is a live, standards-governed infrastructure now in use across multiple programs and jurisdictions. It offers permanence, interoperability, and referenceability—qualities needed for recognition to become usable at scale. But it also insists on humility: it cannot replace the human act of seeing and honoring contribution.

This session was intended for recognition practitioners, badge system stewards, policy developers, and credential designers seeking ways to ground open recognition in shared public infrastructure without compromising the relational and participatory roots that open recognition must always preserve.

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