

Centering Care: How Might We Mitigate Harm in the Design and Deployment of Digital Credentialing?

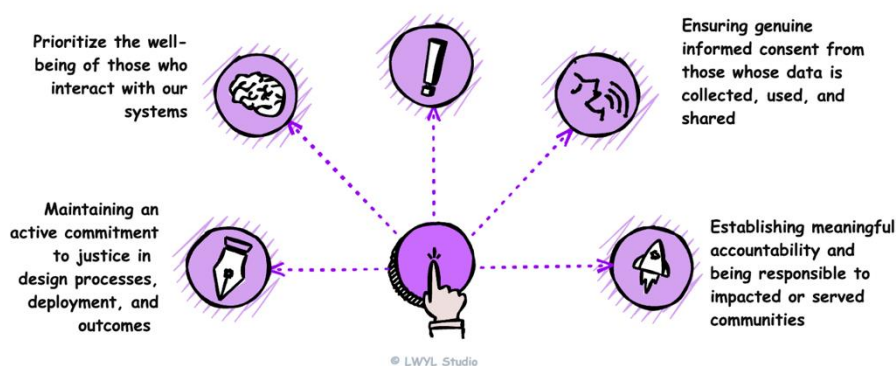
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As digital credentials and verifiable records become central to systems of education, employment, identity, and access, the urgency to mitigate the harm they may cause is growing. While these technologies often promise empowerment, inclusion, and access to opportunities, they can also reproduce the very inequities they claim to resolve, particularly for marginalized, racialized, and justice-impacted communities.

This session offered a care-centered and participatory space to pause, reflect, and strategize together. Led by Dr. Kelly Page, author of *When Credentials Cause Harm*, the session provided a facilitated caring environment where participants engaged in mutual learning, storytelling, and collaborative ideation around one guiding question: "How might we mitigate harm in the systems we build, use, and influence?"

The session began with a grounding practice with Principles of Care (Figure 1) and an invitation to care and share stories of perceived risk and harm. This opening moment was an intentional shift away from typical rhetorical technology or techno-optimism discourse and into a space that centers people, emotions, and lived experiences of risk, harm, and mitigation.

Figure 1. Principles of Care



From there, participants worked collectively through a tool designed by LWYL Studio to identify and unpack sources of harm across systems, from surveillance and bias to inaccessibility, vendor-lock-in and revocation risks. In small breakout groups, participants chose a focal area of concern and together developed mitigation strategies rooted in consent-driven and justice-first design, care ethics, and community

accountability. Groups reconvened to share strategies and explore how to move from conversation to practice in their own work.

To close, Dr. Page introduced a new ongoing initiative on mitigating harm for designers, policy leaders, researchers, and community advocates working at the intersection of credentialing, equity, and digital trust.

This session centered on:

- Reflection and mutual care: Honoring lived experience, positionality, and emotional labor
- Collective strategy: Designing practical, human-centered harm reduction approaches
- Resource-sharing: Offering tools and guidance for immediate and ongoing use
- Commitment to care: Introducing a long-term support structure for those building better systems

By the end of this clinic, participants were able to:

1. Articulate at least three potential sources of harm in digital credentialing and record systems
2. Identify a set of harm mitigation strategies applicable to their context
3. Understand how ethical design principles can be applied in practice
4. Engage with a framework for collective care and harm reduction
5. Join an ongoing network for shared learning and ethical accountability

Keywords: when credentials cause harm, harm mitigation, consent-driven design, justice-centered design, learner impact