Mozilla Open Badges

Guide for Adult Education Organizations

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Open Badges
for adult education

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Introduction

Learning today can take place anywhere and at any time. . We learn not just in a school, in the traditional classroom, but also in informal and non-formal educationa settings, i.e. after-school activities, adult education centers, workplace, or community settings. We acquire a wide range of competences, knowledge and skills such as organizational and time management, conflict resolution, interpersonal communication, intercultural awareness, teamwork, logical thinking, creativity, which plays an important role in the workplace as well as in professional and personal development. In many cases, the competencies acquired in non-formal learning environments are not well recognized and assessed. The recognition of this is essential to facilitate access to employment and to acquire a better job. It shows that potential employees have the required skills which are transferable to a new working environment.

Many education providers and different organizations see Open Badges created by Mozilla Foundation (2011) as a useful and creative tool to value and recognize the accomplishments and competences of individuals acquired in and out of formal education, on-line as well as support lifelong learning.
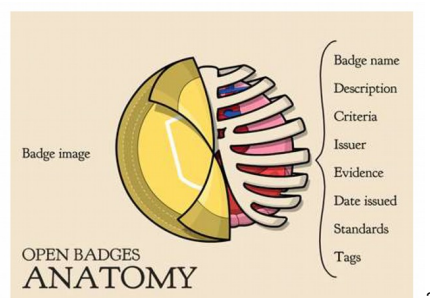
What is an Open Badge?

A badge is a digital image of different shapes and colors which certifies learning achievements, skills, competences or a quality of an individual.

What makes Open Badges interesting is the detailed metadata that is contained in the image, e.g.

- information on the badge issuer,
- name of the badge earner,
- description of requirements an individual has to fulfil in order to gain it,
- issue date and possibly an expiry date.

The metadata allows anyone to verify the achievement, this being a trustworthy credential.[1]

Data embedded in an Open Badge

1   https://openbadges.org/get-started/understanding-badges/

2https://goo.gl/images/3ArZZG

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Badges are digital rewards issued at all levels of education and training as well as in practical contexts. Some badges are awarded for rather simple tasks, like participating in a workshop, attending class regularly, studying in autonomy or basic use of websites for specific purposes. Others require more efforts like organising a seminar, being a mentor of a group, obtaining a good test result or completing an on-the-job training, etc. They can be used as real credentials. Thus, badges offer an important way to recognize little achievements of learners and encourage them to keep up with learning by accumulating several badges. Badge earners can display and share them on their online portfolios, on social network profiles, on other web sites, export them to Europass CV or attach to mail signatures.

Who issues Open Badges?

A diverse range of organizations, communities and people worldwide issue Open badges for learners, employees and customers[3], including:

- Schools and universities

- Non-formal training providers

- Online courses

- Teachers, tutors and coaches

- Communities of practice and non-profit organizations

- Civil society organisations

- Employers

- Professional associations

- Companies and groups focused on professional development.

- Government agencies.

- Libraries and museums.

- Event organisers and science fairs.

Issuing your own Open Badges

To start creating, issuing and verifying digital badges, you need to use an appropriate technology platform. There are many online services that issue badges some of them are free. Mozilla Open Badges[4] provides a list of issuing platforms that supports the specification of Open Badge Infrastructure. All issuing platforms include technical instructions, describing step-by-step how to create and issue a badge providing appropriate tools in many languages. Thus, you do not have to be a technical expert, but have an open and curious mind. To create a badge, the issuer:

- chooses a platform;

- designs or selects from the platform applications a graphic image and entitles it;

- defines the metadata, including the criteria for earning the badge;

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3   http://openbadges.org/participating-issuers/
4https://openbadges.org/about/participating-services/#open-source

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- sends the awarded badge to recipients by email;

- makes the badge available for earner via a website;

- offers the badge earners the possibility to put their new badge to a Backpack, that is a store on a platform for collecting and managing badges;

- gives the code to claim the badge that is part of marketing for the issuing organization

More information about technical steps to issue badges and selecting tools to automate the process you can find at: https://openbadges.org/developers/

Benefits of Open Badges for educational organizations

Numerous education organizations adopted Open Badges to recognise achievements or skills developed like communication skills, teamwork, analytical and problem-solving skills, learning skills and so on.[5] A badge is an innovative certification tool to value competences, attitudes and learning outcomes. There are a lot of benefits of issuing Open Badges for education providers. These include:

Online marketing: The details about the issuing organization embedded in the badges are automatically shared in the digital environment by badge earners generating brand vitality of the education providers.

Innovative and creative way of validation: Open badges allow education institutions to award credentials beyond the traditional transcripts. They can be tailored to the needs and features of the learners. Therefore, badges trigger pedagogical creativity appreciated by learners.

Complements a certification: A badge offers recognize learning outcomes, skills and experiences not represented in a course and not documented in other certificates or supported through formal education programs. They empower individuals and support skill development and lifelong learning.

Determine the needs of learners: Badges give education providers the opportunity to recognize individuals who have completed in-house training and identify the individual's learning pathway.

Advantages of using Open Badges for an educator

Badges have great pedagogical potential for you as an educator to:

Motivate and encourage participation in the learning process: They are a good remedy to motivate continued engagement in the learning process and encourage attitudes and behaviors. They support skill acquisition through performance and give learners of all ages the possibility to demonstrate their skills.

Recognize informal learning: You can use badges as an alternative tool to validate and recognize skills, competences and achievements of learners that regular grades don not acknowledge. Thus, they are very useful for validating soft skills, recognize behavior and provide a more complete picture of an individual.

Build pathways towards learning goals: badges are task-oriented and can be used to build pathways to support individuals to work towards learning goals without feeling overwhelmed by a

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5   https://openbadges.org/about/participating-issuers/

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task by having a clear sense of their progress in the competency development. It allows them to reflect and document the learning progress, thus, strengthening participants' awareness of the learning process.

Identify individual's talents: you can use badges to highlight specific abilities and qualities that may not appear on traditional certificates, hence giving the learners confidence to perform a task.

Support disadvantaged learners: A badge provides visible recognition that can support dropouts and adult learners, for whom the traditional education system has not worked. They provide an alternative way to get validation for accomplishments in completing a project, mastering a skill, or documenting an experience and demonstrate skills useful for being employed.

Introduce gamification elements in education: badges add playfulness in the educational atmosphere, allowing learners to compete with themselves or others, and to know how close they are to accomplishing a goal. Pedagogical work seems more enjoyable, because learning is fun and fosters the learners' engagement.

Foster social esteem of badge earner: badges serve as mechanisms to show and communicate with a broader audience, what an individual is capable of, or if an individual belongs to a group or is member in a community. Achievements become more transparent and transportable to their peers.

Foster the development of digital skills: Badge earner learns how to collect them on their online backpack and include them in an e-portfolio or display them on their online profile.

Develop self-management of badge earner: Badges allows the individuals to decide, which badges will be displayed for a specific workplace, so that s/he can signal their professional suitability to the employers. This could have a positive impact on jobs and career advancement.

Valorize Open Badges

The concept of issuing Open Badges to recognize diverse kinds of skills and achievements is an innovative one and often a new experience for learners, educators and other audience. For this reason, some may be cautious by using and recognizing badges as "credentials". Education institutions can overcome this by defining and using meaningful and transparent criteria when creating a Badge and linking it through the code embedded to documented evidences on learning outcomes, so that the skills represented by a badge can be verified. [6]

The use of evidence is usually an optional element, because the badge can be granted for a simple task like attendance or punctuality. The criteria behind the badge are very important. They have to be very specific and clearly defined. A useful approach to write badge criteria is SMART-method. It stands for:

- **Specific** - what will the badge earner have accomplished by earning this badge?

- **Measurable** - how will the assessor know when the level at which the badge is awarded has been achieved?

- **Achievable** - in what ways can the badge be achieved?

- **Relevant** - is this badge worth earning? What opportunities does it unlock?

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[6] https://openbadge.wordpress.com/faq/#A21

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- **Timely** - should this badge expire after a certain period of time? [7]

The learners can be motivated also to earn and display badges using success stories and ensuring that badges present a more complete picture of their interests, skills and competencies to various audiences, including employers and peers. This could have a positive impact on obtaining a job and career advancement.

Example of the use of badges

The Open Badges for Adult Education project will develop a set of 50 badges related to behaviors and attitudes evidenced by attending adult education courses and 50 badges related to key competences. These 100 badges will cover various domains of knowledge, skills and attitudes e.g. communication in mother tongue, foreign languages, digital skills, numeracy, literacy, sciences and technologies, learning to learn, social and civic responsibility, initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and creativity. Thus, all educators have the opportunity to certify learners' skills and awarding badges through platform. For the Open Badges project we recommend using the online backpack platform badgr.io

Here are two samples of the Badges which will be issued through the project.

Effective Communication   Resilience

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7   http://badges.thinkoutloudclub.com/modules/how/do/