

# Digital Badges in Expanded Learning

Developed by the Committee on Digital Badges in Expanded Learning Programs

**If the expanded learning movement is to continue to prosper, these programs must be recognized as important places of learning. The use and awarding of digital badges to recognize the learning that takes place within these programs represents an excellent strategy to accomplish this. Digital badges can be used to recognize exemplar programs, staff trainers, program staff, and volunteers who have completed professional development and youth who have acquired new knowledge and skills through participation in expanded learning activities.**

## What is a Digital Badge?

“Digital badges are an assessment and credentialing mechanism that is housed and managed online. Badges are designed to make visible and validate learning in both formal and informal settings, and hold the potential to help transform where and how learning is valued.”<sup>1</sup>

## What are the Benefits of Digital Badges?

The Center for Digital Badges (CDB) and our partners believe that by using digital badges to acknowledge the learning of staff and youth participants, these programs will benefit in the following ways:

- Because program leaders must think through and explicitly state what learning will take place in program activities or clubs that are to be recognized by a digital badge; this specificity raises the bar for learning accountability.
- The awarding of digital badges defines the learning that goes on within a program for outsiders, which is vital if expanded learning programs are to be recognized as important places of learning. Badges can become important, visible evidence that expanded learning programs take learning seriously and apply rigorous standards to learning outcomes.
- The adult program staff members often acquire important knowledge and skills through professional development and years of experience. Youth acquire valuable skills and knowledge through their participation in specific expanded learning activities. Both deserve an artifact that documents their learning and—importantly—can be shared with peers, future employers, and those allowing admittance to higher education.

<sup>1</sup> Digital Badges; MacArthur Foundation; [<http://www.macfound.org/programs/digital-badges/>]; April 2015

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## What are the Steps in Creating a Digital Badge System?

**1 - Ask “why?”:** The first step for an organization is to provide an orientation to staff to ensure that everyone has a common understanding of what digital badges are and the benefits that they can provide to those who receive them. All program leaders should meet to discuss the reasons to introduce digital badges. Is the aim of introducing badges to acknowledge learning, motivate recipients, or other reasons?

**2 - Determine which activities will be included in the first round of digital badges:** It is useful to start with those activities or clubs that have clear learning goals and products to demonstrate acquired skills. Digital badges can also be awarded solely based on attendance, where there is no final product or demonstration required. A good example would be a training or outing.

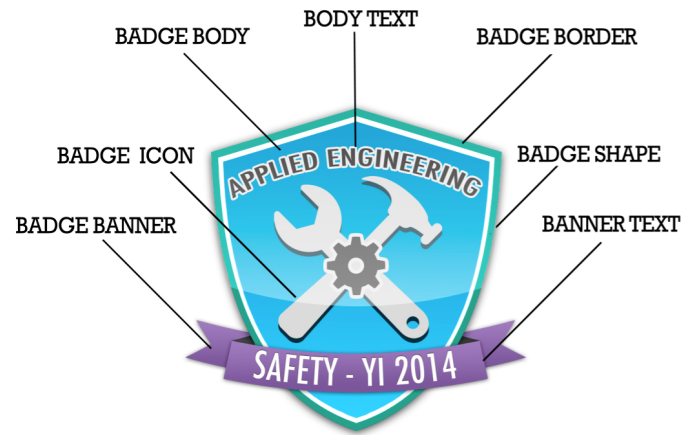
**3 - Determine the specifics - learning goals, criteria, and evidence:** It is important that the badge issuer think through the learning goals (knowledge and skills that will be acquired). The badge issuer also needs to cite the criteria that must be met in order for a participant to earn the badge, and evidence of meeting that criteria.

**4 - Determine how the badges will be awarded and managed:** There are several web-based software applications that have been developed to award and manage digital badges. Factors that should be considered in choosing a badge application are cost, ease of use, the system’s ability to “push” badges to a social media site and the Mozilla Foundation’s “digital backpack”, and compliance with local, state, and federal digital privacy laws.

**5 - Determine who will create and how the badges will be created:** Badges can be created by program staff or youth with online badge creation software, or by an outside organization.

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**6 - Design the badge by considering image, shape, color, etc.:** In designing badges, one can choose from a number of traditional badge shapes. The look and feel of digital badges can carry a wealth of information for recipients and individuals and organizations that will view and ascribe value to the badges.



**7 - Deliver the digital badge to the recipient using a “digital backpack”:** In order for people to receive their badges, they must create a Mozilla “digital backpack”. To create your backpack, visit <http://backpack.openbadges.org>.

**8 - How recipients can make use of the digital badges:** Once a badge recipient “pushes” an earned digital badge into a Mozilla backpack, a link to that badge can easily be shared with others via social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or placed on a résumé or included with applications for higher education. One can also share a badge’s metadata, which cites who issued the badge, what was done to earn it, and sometimes links to digital evidence such as a video, sound, or image file that demonstrate learnings and skills.

## What Expanded Learning Programs Are Using Digital Badges?

**California School-Age Consortium** [https://calsac.org/projects/digital\\_badges](https://calsac.org/projects/digital_badges)

CalSAC awards digital badges to their trainers and the afterschool staff that participate in their professional development training and programs.

*“Given the breadth, scale and depth of training and leadership development opportunities that staff and programs access from CalSAC any given year, it seemed clear that there should be a way for them to capture the investment they’re making toward providing quality services for children and youth.”* - CalSAC Executive Director, Ruth Obel-Jorgensen

**Central Valley Digital Badge Project** <http://bit.ly/centralValleyELPs>

This group used digital badges to recognize high school afterschool programs that are exemplar in demonstrating the Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) learning principles.

*“Based on anecdotal evidence, the digital badge program assessments assisted program leaders and youth identify strengths and weaknesses in activity content and delivery.”* - Lori Carr, Fresno County Office of Education

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## Youth Institute (YMCA of Greater Long Beach) and Replication Sites

<http://www.lbymcayi.org/> The use of digital badges by the Youth Institute acknowledges the learning of their program alumni and newer youth participants who complete program courses, projects and experiences.

*“We saw digital badges as a perfect opportunity for our youth to be recognized for their knowledge and expertise in digital media and to provide mastery of skills in a workforce setting. Every activity in the summer and year-round is product-based; the youth need to show expertise of a subject matter by completing the project. Our program and curriculum model blend perfectly with the badge system.”* – Les Peters, Executive Director, Youth Institute

## Other Expanded Learning Programs Awarding Digital Badges

- **Temescal Associates** <http://temescalassociates.com/>
- **Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Project** <http://www.learninginafterschool.org>
- **Los Angeles Unified School District/Beyond the Bell** <http://citiesoflearning.org/>

## For More Information

**The Center for Digital Badges** serves as a clearinghouse for information and research on digital badges. It also offers a number of case studies on the use of digital badges by expanded learning programs. It was created by Temescal Associates and offers implementation support for expanded learning programs.



<http://www.temescalassoc.com/db/>

**The Badge Alliance** is a network of organizations and individuals working together to build and support an open badging ecosystem, with a focus on shared values including openness, learner agency and innovation. <http://www.badgealliance.org/>

**Open Badges** is a new online standard to recognize and verify learning and lets you take your badges everywhere. It offers users an easy and comprehensive way to collect their badges in a single backpack, and display their skills and achievements on social networking profiles, job sites, their websites and more. <http://openbadges.org/>

Members of the **Committee for Digital Badges in Expanded Learning Programs** include After School Division at the CDE, Badge Alliance, CalSAC, Central Valley Afterschool Foundation, Youth Institute (YMCA of Greater Long Beach), Fresno County Office of Education, Los Angeles Unified School District, and Temescal Associates.