

WIOA Young Adult Program

Chapter 13: Youth Credentials under WIOA

Summary

All states must report information to the Department of Labor on credential attainment in the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL). Credentials are awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an occupation. Work Readiness Credentials and those awarded by LWDBs are NOT included in this definition. Credential information is included as part of data validation, per [TEGL 7-18, Change 1](#), and [TEGL 23-19, Change 3](#).

Relevant Laws, Rules, or Policies

[Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(Public Law 113-128\)](#)

[WIOA Final Rule \(Dated 08-19-2016\)](#)

[WIOA Final Rule: Unified and Combined State Plans, Performance Accountability, and the One-Stop System Joint Provisions \(Dated 08-19-2016\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 23-14 \(Dated 3-26-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 19-14 \(Dated 2-19-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 08-15 \(Dated 11-17-15\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 21-16 \(Dated 3-2-17\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 14-18 \(Dated 3-25-19\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 22-19 \(Dated 4-3-20\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 25-19 \(Dated 6-8-20\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 21-16, Change 1 \(Dated 7-30-21\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-16, Change 3 \(Dated 6-11-24\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 07-18, Change 1 \(Dated 7-10-25\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 23-19, Change 3 \(Dated 12-1-25\)](#)

[U.S. Dept. of Labor Training and Employment Notice No. 04-26 \(Dated 8-27-26\)](#)

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Policy

Value of Credentials

Credentials offer job seekers the opportunity to improve their employability by documenting the skills and competencies they bring to an employer which can lead to higher earnings, greater advancement opportunities, and enhanced job security. Evidence shows that education and training beyond high school increases jobseekers' ability to attain family-supporting wages in today's economy.

Credentials- Post Secondary

For purposes of the credential attainment performance indicator, a recognized postsecondary credential is defined as a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State of Minnesota or the Federal government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree. A recognized postsecondary credential is awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an industry/occupation. These technical or industry/occupational skills generally are based on standards developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations. Neither certificates awarded by workforce development boards (WDBs), nor work readiness certificates, are included in this definition because neither type of certificate documents the measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation.

Likewise, such certificates must recognize technical or industry/occupational skills for the specific industry/occupation rather than general skills related to safety, hygiene, etc., even if such general skills certificates are broadly required to qualify for entry-level employment or advancement in employment.

Credentials- Secondary School Diploma and Equivalents

For purposes of the credential attainment performance indicator, a secondary school diploma (or alternate diploma) is one that is recognized by the State of Minnesota and that is included for accountability purposes under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A secondary school equivalency certification signifies that a student has completed the requirements for a high school education. The types of recognized equivalents, for those not covered under ESEA, that would satisfy this performance indicator are those recognized by the State of Minnesota (MN Statutes, 124D.518).

Examples of secondary school diplomas, alternate diplomas, and recognized equivalents recognized by the State of Minnesota include:

- Obtaining certification of attaining passing scores on a State-recognized high school equivalency test.
- Earning a secondary school diploma or State-recognized equivalent through a credit bearing secondary education program sanctioned by State law, code, or regulation.
- Obtaining certification of passing a State recognized competency-based assessment.
- Completion of a specified number of college credits.

Types of Acceptable Credentials: The following are acceptable types of credentials that count toward the credential attainment indicator:

- Secondary School diploma or recognized equivalent
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor 's degree
- Occupational licensure
- Occupational certificate, including Registered Apprenticeship and Career and Technical Education educational certificates
- Occupational certification
- Other recognized certificates of industry/occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment.

Note: Graduate degrees (Masters and/or PhDs) are not counted as credentials attained under any WIOA Title I-funded program. However, these credentials must still be captured and reported in Workforce One since DOL still requires these to be reported.

Examples of Credentials that DO meet the credential definition:

- Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) License (example of Occupational Licensure)
- Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Certification (example of Occupational Certification)

Examples of common certificates that do NOT meet the credential definition:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10 Hour Course that provides awareness of job-related common safety and health hazards
- Work/Career Readiness Certificates
- Completion of an Assistive Technology Training program (e.g. screen reading software)

- Completion of Orientation and Mobility Training

Approved Awarding Institutions

A variety of different public and private entities issue recognized postsecondary credentials. Below is a list of the types of organizations and institutions that award recognized postsecondary credentials (not all credentials by these entities meet the definition of recognized postsecondary credential).

- A State educational agency or a State agency responsible for administering vocational and technical education within the State of Minnesota.
- An institution of higher education described in Section 102 of the Higher Education Act (20 USC I 002) that is qualified to participate in the student financial assistance programs authorized by title IV of that Act. This includes community colleges, proprietary schools, and all other institutions of higher education that are eligible to participate in Federal student financial aid programs.
- An institution of higher education that is formally controlled, or has been formally sanctioned or chartered, by the governing body of an Indian tribe or tribes.
- A professional, industry, or employer organization (e.g., National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence certification, National Institute for Metalworking Skills, Inc., Machining Level I credential) or product manufacturer or developer (e.g., recognized Microsoft Information Technology certificates, such as Microsoft Certified IT Professional (MCITP), Certified Novell Engineer, a Sun Certified Java Programmer, etc.) using a valid and reliable assessment of an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities.
- ETA's Office of Apprenticeship or a State Apprenticeship Agency.
- A public regulatory agency, which awards a credential upon an individual's fulfillment of educational, work experience, or skill requirements that are legally necessary for an individual to use an occupational or professional title or to practice an occupation or profession (e.g., Federal Aviation Administration aviation mechanic license, or a State-licensed asbestos inspector).
- A program that has been approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs to offer education benefits to veterans and other eligible persons.
- Job Corps, which issues certificates for completing career training programs that are based on industry skills standards and certification requirements.

Minnesota's [Eligible Training Provider List](#), including WIOA-certified training, is available to view online.

Occupational Licenses

- Granted by federal, state or local governmental agencies;
- Mandatory in the relevant jurisdiction;
- Intended to set professional standards and ensure safety and quality of work, such as medical licenses for doctors;
- Required in addition to other credentials (educational awards, apprenticeship, or certification);
- Defined by laws and regulations;
- Time-limited: occupational licenses must be renewed based on meeting on-going requirements to maintain the license;
- Violation of the terms of the license can result in legal action;

Personal Certifications

- Granted by third-party non-governmental agencies – usually associations, and by companies;
- Intended to set professional standards for qualifications, such as a certification for a crane operator, or a Novell Network Certified Engineer;
- The standards for certifications are not defined by government laws or regulations;
- Usually require successful completion of an examination or assessment, which indicates mastery of competencies as measured against a defensible set of standards;
- Usually must be renewed in some way after a certain time period based on meeting certain requirements for renewal;
- Voluntary – although state licensure boards and employers may specify certification as part of their requirements; and
- Violation of standards or requirements can result in suspension or revocation of certification.

High-quality Credential

There are four main qualities to look for in any high-quality credential:

1. Industry Recognized

- Either created or endorsed by industry, a nationally-recognized industry association or organization that represents a large portion of the industry with clear preference among local employers and regional training programs. (e.g. Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification.)
- A credential that is sought or accepted by companies within the industry for hiring or recruitment.
- Includes credentials from vendors (e.g. Microsoft)

2. Portable

- Recognized and accepted in settings which it was earned:
 - a. In other geographic locations
 - b. At other educational institutions
 - c. By other industries
 - d. By other companies
- Recognized broadly (not only locally), among both employers and educational institutions, for the purposes of further education leading to additional advanced certificates.

3. Third Party Validated/Accredited

Credentials are held to a higher standard of quality when they are accredited, for much the same reasons that the federal government requires third-party accreditation of colleges to be financial aid eligible.

There are two main organizations that do this work: the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. These agencies focus primarily on validating that the assessments used in the credentialing process accurately assess the skills and experiences that are preferably embedded within the credential.

4. Stackable

A credential that is a part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build an individual's qualifications and help them move along a career path to different and potentially higher-paying jobs.

In the most basic sense, this refers to the career pathways concept that credentials should be linked, with lower-level content stacking to upper-level content, allowing an individual to earn further education and progress to higher paying jobs over time.

Examples include a high school diploma or GED, or an associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees.

Action

- Local areas should refer to [TEN 25-19](#) for assistance in determining whether a training certification received by a WIOA participant or Partner Funded training service constitutes a credential for the purposes of inclusion in the WIOA performance measures.
- Local staff should use follow up to identify those WIOA exiters who have attained a credential by 365 days after exit. WDAs should verify the authenticity of the credential and retain relevant records (including a photocopy of the credential itself) in the participant's case file for purposes of monitoring, record retention, and/or data validation requirements.
- Local staff must note that if a participant obtains a secondary school diploma or equivalent, in order to count, the participant must also be employed or in post-secondary credentialed education within 365 days after exit.
- Employment and training grantees should identify and regularly review valuable credentials that meet the needs of the local economy. While many credentials are valuable in many economic areas, grantees should analyze local labor market information and job postings data and consult with local employers to validate which credentials are valuable. Department of Labor [TEN 04-26](#) provides additional information to help workforce development professionals understand the importance of high-quality industry-recognized credentials.

Tools and Resources Around Skill Standards

1. Access the [Competency Model Clearinghouse](#) within the CareerOneStop website. It has a searchable database that includes skill standards, and it is also searchable by industry.
2. The [WorkforceGPS](#) website contains various resources related to competency models, career pathways and credentials.
3. [Credential Engine](#) has identified hundreds of thousands of different credentials available in the U.S. from certificates to degrees, certifications to licenses, with information available in the [Credential Finder](#).

Related Links

[CareerOneStop Certification Finder](#)

[Department of Labor Post Secondary Credential Attainment Tool](#)

[DEED Young Adult Website](#)