

<b>TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE</b>	<b>NO.</b> 25-19
	<b>DATE</b> June 8, 2020

**TO:** STATE AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE WORKFORCE  
 INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT  
 STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES  
 STATE WORKFORCE ADMINISTRATORS  
 STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS  
 H-1B JOB TRAINING PROGRAM GRANTEES  
 INDIAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN (INA) PROGRAM GRANTEES  
 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM GRANTEES  
 NATIONAL DISLOCATED WORKER GRANTEES  
 STATE DIRECTORS, OFFICE OF APPRENTICESHIP  
 STATE APPRENTICESHIP AGENCIES  
 REENTRY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES (REO) GRANTEES  
 SENIOR COMMUNITY SERVICE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM  
 (SCSEP) GRANTEES  
 TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE (TAA) LEADS  
 YOUTHBUILD GRANTEES

**FROM:** JOHN P. PALLASCH   
 Assistant Secretary

**SUBJECT:** Understanding Postsecondary Credentials in the Public Workforce System

1. **Purpose.** The information in this notice is intended to assist the public workforce system in better understanding the key elements of credentials and identifying credentials that help individuals acquire and leverage the skills needed for quality in-demand jobs that meet the needs of the business community.
2. **Action Requested.** Employment and training grantees should share this notice with staff and federal, state and local workforce partners to assist job seekers and businesses identify, select, and promote appropriate credentials.
3. **Summary and Background.**
  - a. Summary –This notice complements Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) 10-16, Change 1, *Performance Accountability Guidance for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I, Title II, Title III and Title IV Core Programs* and TEGL 14-18 *Aligning Performance Accountability Reporting, Definitions, and Policies Across Workforce Employment and Training Programs Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)*, which provide policy guidance on credentials and reporting credential attainment. TEGL 15-10 *Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the*

*Public Workforce System*, has been superseded by TEGL 10-16, Change 1 and TEGL 14-18.

- b. Background – As part of WIOA, State and local workforce development boards (WDBs) and other DOL programs using WIOA performance indicators to evaluate their performance are charged with increasing credential attainment among jobseekers. Businesses are also increasingly focused on identifying credentials that will indicate workers have the skills they are seeking; however, new credentials are continually being developed and offered. This TEN seeks to provide up-to-date information on various types of credentials, attributes of high quality credentials, and ways the public workforce system can expand the use of credentials to meet America’s workforce needs.

#### **4. The Value of Credentials in Supporting a Workforce Talent Pipeline.**

- a. Businesses are looking to hire workers with relevant skill sets and postsecondary credentials can assist in identifying qualified workers, upskilling their current workforce, and helping them better compete in the marketplace. For job seekers, obtaining credentials can improve their employability by documenting the skills and competencies they bring to an employer, and 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, and well-paying jobs in high-demand industries generally require some form of postsecondary education or training. The earnings gains that accompany postsecondary credentials are well established.<sup>1</sup> A report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce also found earnings differentials for certain credentials:

*On average, certificate holders earn 20 percent more than high school graduates without any postsecondary education. However, the economic returns vary according to: the certificate holder’s field of study, whether the certificate holder works in field...For example, 44 percent of certificate holders work in field. Certificate holders who work in field earn 37 percent more than those who work out of field. On average, a certificate holder who works in field earns nearly as much as the median associate’s degree holder – only 4 percent less.<sup>2</sup>*

For many job seekers, certificates or certifications which can be earned in as little as six months to two years, offer viable alternatives to more lengthy and costly undergraduate degrees. These certificates and certifications can be valuable to

---

<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/emp/chart-unemployment-earnings-education>.

<sup>2</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P. *et al.* 2012. Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees. Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, page 4.

diverse populations including young adults entering the labor market, adults updating their skills to change careers, individuals with barriers to employment, or those who find the cost of an undergraduate degree prohibitive.

WIOA reinforces the workforce system's role in facilitating access to training options that help workers advance along a career pathway within a specific sector or occupational field. As all workforce development activities occur within the context of a regional labor market and its businesses, a well-designed career pathway leads to the attainment of stackable and portable credentials that are recognized by businesses and used in hiring decisions. Successful career pathway frameworks include: 1) strong partnerships with businesses of all sizes in the identification of skill gaps and the development of high-quality training programs, 2) strong coordination with other public agencies, including education, economic development, and human services, to effectively leverage public resources aimed at increasing the skills of American workers, and 3) thorough analysis of labor market information on industry staffing patterns and in-demand occupations and the related occupational or technical training credentials that will provide workers with greater employability. **ProTip:** *Technical assistance about career pathways programs and how to implement a successful framework is available on WorkforceGPS in the Career Pathways Community of Practice at: <https://careerpathways.workforcegps.org>.*

## **5. The Role of the Public Workforce System in Credential Attainment.**

- a. The public workforce system has a vital role to play in developing a skilled workforce that meets the needs of business; and credentials can play an important role in this endeavor. A strong workforce development strategy should offer training that provides the skills needed for in-demand jobs and leads to credentials that attest to an individual's skills and competencies. Such credentials can serve as an important signal to businesses that they are hiring qualified individuals. It is important to conduct a thorough assessment of a candidate's basic and occupational skills and provide services that support the successful completion of postsecondary credentials. **ProTip:** *Integrated education and training (IET) programs provide basic skills instruction contextually and concurrently with workforce preparation and occupational training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster. Partnerships with adult education programs can effectively establish IET programs that meet regional needs and provide pathways to educational and career advancement.*

However, identifying all the relevant credentials in a local area may be challenging. Credential Engine (<https://credentialengine.org>), for example, has identified hundreds of thousands of different credentials available in the U.S. from certificates to degrees, certifications to licenses; and yet new credentials emerge regularly. It can be challenging for jobseekers, workers, and workforce professionals to identify which credentials and which training programs are the best fit. Employment and training grantees will need to consider local economic conditions, local employer need, and the skill gaps in the local workforce, which

also change over time. **ProTip:** *The information in Attachment I can help establish guidelines for identifying relevant credentials.*

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. Some basic issues to consider when selecting credentials to address local workforce skill needs include:

- **What type of credential is it?** (Associate's degree, occupational license or certificate, or a career and technical education certificate, for example)
  - If the credential is a *certification* has it been endorsed by a relevant industry association, or been accredited?
- **What type of organization is offering the credential?**
  - If it is offered by an educational institution, is the institution accredited?
  - Is the training provider offering the credential included on the WIOA Eligible Training Provider (ETP) list?
- **Is the credential valued by industry?**
  - Is the credential endorsed by an industry or professional association?
  - Do employers prefer job seekers who have earned the credential?
- **Does the credential result in occupational or technical skills that prepare for entry into or advancement in an occupation?**
  - WIOA funds can be used to provide training for credentials attesting to general skills such as work readiness, hygiene or safety, but credentials can only be counted toward recognized postsecondary credential attainment if they prepare a person with the competencies required to perform a specific occupation.
  - Is the credential cost-effective, readily available, and can it be completed in a reasonably short period of time?
- **Is there evidence that the credential leads to positive employment outcomes and earnings?**
  - Performance data that is reported under WIOA for ETP may provide relevant information regarding credential attainment and/or other outcomes.
- **Is the credential portable to other employers or other geographic areas?**
  - While state occupational licenses may not always be portable to other states, they still have high value as they are typically required to obtain employment in the licensed occupation.

An important element in identifying appropriate credentials is learning what competencies and/or credentials businesses need. Some employers may be very clear on their needs for specific credentials; however, others may need assistance in tying the competencies they are seeking to a particular credential. Workforce boards are particularly well-positioned to convene diverse stakeholders, including local community colleges, to identify which credentials may be of greatest value to the local/regional economy, and that will meet the skill needs of employers.

State and local WDBs can incorporate credential attainment strategies in their state and local plans, local sector strategies, and career pathway models. For example, the State of Florida publishes three lists of high-quality, in-demand industry certifications that have been vetted by the state education and workforce agencies for various purposes related to career and technical education, academic credit, and state reimbursement criteria that includes demonstrated demand from businesses in the state, among others.<sup>3</sup>

Effective credit for prior learning policies can shorten the time it takes to earn meaningful credentials. Credit for prior learning has been particularly helpful for adult workers who already have work experience and need to reskill or upskill quickly. Attachment II includes a brief summary of “credit for prior learning” and available resources.

6. **Inquiries.** Questions regarding postsecondary credentials and credential attainment should be directed to the appropriate ETA Regional Office, or to the Office of Workforce Investment ([DOL.WIOA@dol.gov](mailto:DOL.WIOA@dol.gov)).
7. **References.** See Attachment IV.
8. **Attachments.**
  - Attachment I: Credential Resources
  - Attachment II: Credit for Prior Learning
  - Attachment III: Some Models of Existing Industry-Recognized Stackable Credentials
  - Attachment IV: References

---

<sup>3</sup>Prebil, Michael and Mary Alice McCarthy. September 2018. Building Better Degrees Using Industry Certifications: Lessons from the Field. New America Foundation.  
<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/building-better-degrees-using-industry-certifications/>.

## Credential Resources

- a. **Defining Credentials.** Section 3(52) of WIOA defines “recognized postsecondary credential” as *a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree.*

Recognized postsecondary credentials are awarded in recognition of an individual’s attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an industry/occupation (see TEGL 10-16, Change 1, *Performance Accountability Guidance for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV Core Programs*). These technical or industry/occupational skills generally are based on standards developed or endorsed by businesses or industry associations. Certificates awarded by LWDBs are not included in this definition, nor are work readiness certificates, because neither type of certificate is recognized industry-wide, nor do they document measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation. Recognized postsecondary credentials reflect 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.

There is no comprehensive national list of approved credentials. However, this attachment provides detailed information on understanding and defining credentials, tools for identifying credentials, acquiring and leveraging credentials, available indicators of quality and value, and examples of existing credential models. The following sections include information on a variety of online resources and tools for identifying and evaluating specific credentials.

### Recognized Postsecondary Credentials

Recognized postsecondary credentials are an attestation of qualification or competence issued to an individual by a third party (such as an educational institution or an industry or occupational certifying organization) with the relevant authority or expertise to issue such a credential. The terms most commonly used for educational credentials are: *diploma, certificate, and degree.*

A variety of different public and private entities issue recognized postsecondary credentials, and examples include, but are not limited to:

- A state educational agency or a state agency responsible for administering vocational and technical education within a state;
- An institution of higher education described in Section 102 of the Higher Education Act (20 USC 1002) 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 Information Technology certifications, 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;
- Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) 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; or
- Job Corps, which issues certificates for completing career training programs that are based on industry skills standards and certification requirements.

Examples of recognized postsecondary credentials include:

- Associate's degree;
- Bachelor's degree;
- Occupational licensure;
- Occupational certificate, including Registered Apprenticeship Programs and career and technical education educational certificates;
- Occupational certification; and
- Other recognized certificates of industry/occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment.

### Recognized Secondary Credentials

A secondary school diploma (or alternate diploma) (commonly referred to as high school diploma) is one that is recognized by a State consistent with the requirements of 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 the credential attainment performance indicator are those recognized by a State.

Examples of secondary school diplomas, alternate diplomas, and recognized equivalents recognized by individual states 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; and
- Completion of a specified number of college credits.

b. **Characteristics of Credentials.** Four characteristics that strengthen the value of credentials to individuals and businesses are industry-recognition, stackability, portability, and accreditation.

- **Industry-Recognized:** An industry-recognized credential is either 1) developed and offered by, or endorsed by, a nationally- or regionally-recognized industry association or organization representing a sizeable portion of the industry sector, or 2) a credential that is sought or accepted by companies within the industry sector for purposes of hiring or recruitment, which may include credentials from vendors of certain products. See Attachment III for additional examples of industry-recognized credentials.

In some industry sectors there may be more than one major industry association, and these groups may endorse or promote different credentials. Credentials that are sought by individual companies within an industry may also vary by geographic region, by company size, or the specific product or equipment the company uses. Consequently, there may not be a single readily identifiable national credential for all industry sectors or occupations. For example, there are hundreds of certifications that exist within the information technology (IT) industry. There are multiple industry associations, and there are multiple product vendors that offer occupational certifications. The workforce system operating in a local area needs to work with businesses to determine what credentials are in demand by local businesses. However, industry-recognized credentials must be occupationally-specific to ensure they recognize technical or occupational skills rather than general skills for any occupation or industry.

- **Stackable:** A credential is considered stackable when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual's qualifications and help them to move along a career pathway or career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs. For example, an individual can stack a high school diploma, an associate's degree, and then typically take two more years of appropriate postsecondary education to attain a bachelor's degree. An individual can also stack a certificate with an apprenticeship, and later earn a degree or advanced certification. Some postsecondary institutions

are embedding certifications into their 2-year and 4-year degree programs, providing academic credit for the certifications toward degree completion.<sup>4</sup> Information on identifying career ladders and lattices and related credentials is covered in a later section of this TEN, along with examples of some existing industry sectors that are working to identify stackable credentials.

- **Portable:** A credential is considered portable when it is recognized and accepted as verifying the qualifications of an individual in other settings—such as other geographic areas across the country, other educational institutions, or other industries or businesses. For example, Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) Certificates of Completion are considered to be nationally (and in some cases internationally) portable.
- **Accredited:** Accreditation by an independent, quality-review body is a valuable attribute and is often required for educational institutions or for specific educational programs in order for students to be eligible for Federal financial aid. Certificates and certifications can be accredited by a variety of accrediting organizations (cited below); however, some valuable credentials offered by industry or professional associations, or by product vendors, may not be accredited, so it is important to look for additional markers of quality or labor market value, such as industry-wide recognition, professional association acceptance, or local demand.

The goal of educational program accreditation is to ensure that the education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality. The U.S. Department of Education maintains a website on “Accreditation in the United States” at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/index.html>, which provides lists of regional and national accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as reliable authorities concerning the quality of education or training offered by the institutions of higher education or higher education programs they accredit.

Note that accredited educational institutions may offer both for-credit, and not-for-credit programs. Generally, institutions are accredited as a whole; however, some specialized programs require separate *program* accreditation, in addition to being offered by an accredited educational institution.

Accreditation also exists in the realm of occupational certification but is less common. There are two main organizations that accredit such certifications or certificates. The accrediting organizations refer to these as *personnel* certifications or certificates, since they are awarded to people, rather than to products or equipment (which can also be certified).

---

<sup>4</sup> Prebil, Michael and Mary Alice McCarthy. September 2018. Building Better Degrees Using Industry Certifications: Lessons from the Field. New America Foundation.

- The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) provides accreditation of personnel certifications and certificates. ANSI maintains a Directory of Accredited Personnel (ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024) Certification Bodies, Applicants, and Suspended Certification Bodies online at:  
<https://www.ansica.org/wwwversion2/outside/PERdirectory.asp?menuID=2>.
  
- ANSI also maintains a Directory of Accredited Certificate Issuers, Applicants, and Suspended Issuers, online at:  
<https://www.ansi.org/Accreditation/credentialing/certificate-issuers/Directory>.
  
- The Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE)/ National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) provides accreditation of personnel certifications and certificates and maintains a listing of Accredited Certification Programs at:  
<https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=121D=2>.
  
- ICE/NCCA also has a program to accredit Personnel Certificates, online at: <https://www.credentialingexcellence.org/p/cm/ld/fid=288>.

There are many different types of credentials offered or awarded by various types of organizations and within each category there may be thousands of individual credentials available in the marketplace. Therefore, it is important to understand key attributes to compare, evaluate, and make decisions about selecting credentials to meet business and jobseeker demand. The following sections provide an overview of the various types of credentials and their most significant characteristics including industry-recognition, portability, stackability, and accreditation.

**c. Characteristics of Educational Diplomas, Degrees and Certificates:**

In today’s labor market individuals often need to accumulate or “stack” credentials to build their competencies to advance within their careers. However, educational diplomas, degrees, and certificates can vary significantly in terms of the extent to which they are stackable.

If an individual earns educational credits for various courses at different institutions, not all of the credits may be accepted toward a certain degree - so stacking of educational credits depends on a number of variables, including the subject matter, how recently they were earned, and whether they fulfill key program requirements.<sup>5</sup> There are also non-credit certificates, which may have limited stackability with other educational credentials. Accumulating credit hours outside of an accredited

---

<sup>5</sup> Educational courses are usually expressed in terms of credit hours. A credit hour is defined by the National Center for Education Statistics for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Survey as, “A unit of measure representing the equivalent of an hour (50 minutes) of instruction per week over the entire term. It is applied toward the total number of credit hours needed for completing the requirements of a degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award.”

educational program may mean that not all of the hours will be counted toward an eventual educational credential. For example, an associate's degree from a junior or community college may not always be equivalent to the first two years towards a bachelor's degree; and some associate's degree programs that are occupation-specific may not always include all of the general education requirements necessary for full transfer credit to a bachelor's degree program. Similarly, if an individual has an associate's degree and then seeks a bachelor's degree in a different field, it may require more than two years of additional postsecondary study. This is because there may be prerequisites or other core requirements that need to be fulfilled to obtain the degree in a different concentration.

Educational certificates and degrees from accredited institutions are typically portable throughout the United States.

### **On-line Tools to Find Educational Programs:**

- National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator website: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
- ETA's CareerOneStop Local Training Finder: <https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-local-training.aspx>
- College Scorecard: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>
- Credential Engine: <https://credentialengine.org/>
- State Eligible Training Provider Lists (ETPL): The list of ETPs is prominently posted on state and local workforce websites and there is a tool in CareerOneStop to help locate those sites: <https://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/EmploymentAndTraining/find-WIOA-training-programs.aspx>
- Apprenticeship.gov Partner Finder: <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/partner-finder>

### **d. Characteristics of Other Certificates**

Professional or industry associations may award occupational certificates. The terms "certificates" and "certifications" are often confused. Some of the major distinctions are:

- Certificates are completion-based and denote participation in a defined course of study.

Certificates are often related to discrete skills within one or more industries or occupations (such as writing, leadership, etc.). Such certificates may have value and are occasionally required; however, as explained in TEGl 10-16, Change 1, they are typically not eligible to be counted towards the credential attainment indicator since they do not prepare individuals with the competencies required to perform a specific occupation. Examples include certificates for discrete skills such as general hygiene (handwashing), general safety, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), work readiness, and food-handling certificates.

- Certifications attest to attainment of competence through a rigorous examination or demonstration, and may also have a work experience requirement.

Certifications are usually considered to be more rigorous and indicate a higher level of competence or proficiency than a certificate.

**e. Characteristics of Apprenticeship Certificates:**

The Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAPs) model has traditionally been used by the construction industry for the past 80 years in the United States, but has expanded to a multitude of industries over the past 10 years due to its success. RAPs include two types of credentials for workers: 1) Certificates of Completion of Apprenticeship, and 2) Interim Credentials.

*Certificates of Completion of Apprenticeship* for RAPs are issued by the DOL or a federally recognized State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) and convey occupational proficiency, signifying that the apprentice has successfully completed all training requirements associated with the occupation. RAP Certificates of Completion of Apprenticeship possess the following characteristics:

- **Industry-Recognized** – RAP Certificates of Completion of Apprenticeship are widely recognized by employers because the qualifications and training content are defined and verified by the specific industry and sponsoring company.
- **Stackable** – RAP Certificates of Completion of Apprenticeship address stackability in several ways:
  - 1) Through the utilization of interim credentials in some circumstances;<sup>6</sup>
  - 2) Through the transition from an apprentice to a skilled worker who has completed occupational training requirements;
  - 3) Through the attainment of educational credit for portions of apprenticeship programs;
  - 4) Through the attainment of college credit in certain instances;<sup>7</sup> and;

---

<sup>6</sup> Issuance of interim credentials is determined by the apprenticeship program sponsor’s training approach; there are three types of training approaches – time-based, competency-based, and hybrid (a combination of the two). Interim credentials are only issued in competency-based and hybrid training approaches; however, not all competency-based or hybrid programs will include interim credentials.

<sup>7</sup> Over 335 institutions of higher education are members of the Registered Apprenticeship College Consortium (RACC). These institutions have agreed to accept the RAP Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship towards the attainment of a specified number of college credits. In some cases, therefore, an individual with a Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship may only need a few more courses in order to satisfy requirements for an Associate’s degree. For more information on the RACC, please see <https://www.doleta.gov/oa/racc.cfm>.

5) Through the attainment of related occupational licenses or occupational certifications as part of a RAP.

- **Portable** – RAP Certificates of Completion are nationally portable. They have relevance throughout the United States, Canada, and in some European countries.

Interim credentials are also issued by the Registration Agency (either DOL or a federally-recognized SAA), upon request of the appropriate sponsor, as certification of competency attainment by an apprentice. These credentials allow for incremental recognition of an apprentice’s increasing knowledge, skills, and abilities, which may be particularly important in longer-term RAPs. The utilization of interim credentials also recognizes the fact that not all apprentices will complete their apprenticeship program and offers opportunities for recognition of what these individuals have learned. (Note that if an apprenticeship program’s “Standards of Apprenticeship” do not include provisions for the issuance of interim credentials for specific components of the occupation, the Registration Agency with which the program is registered may not issue interim credentials to apprentices registered with that program.) RAP interim credentials possess the following characteristics:

- **Industry-Recognized** – RAP interim credentials are issued by the Registration Agency, upon request by the sponsor, as certification of competency attainment by an apprentice.
- **Stackable** – Interim credentials represent a pathway to the RAP Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. They also can translate into employment opportunities because interim credentials specifically convey competency in a particular area(s) of the occupation.
- **Portable** – Interim credentials are portable because they convey a level of competency and proficiency, allowing a worker to broaden employment prospects in the industry.

Attainment of an RAP interim credential is considered a positive outcome on the WIOA Credential Attainment Rate performance indicator.

In March, 2020, DOL introduced the Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP), a new model for apprenticeship. IRAPs are high-quality apprenticeship programs recognized as such by a Standards Recognition Entity (SRE) pursuant to the DOL’s standards. These programs provide individuals with opportunities to obtain workplace-relevant knowledge and progressively advancing skills. IRAPs include a paid-work component and an educational component and result in an industry-recognized credential. An IRAP is developed or delivered by entities such as trade and industry groups, corporations, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, unions, and joint labor-management organizations. To learn more about IRAPs, please visit the IRAP website at <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/industry-recognized-apprenticeship-program>.

The DOL website <http://www.apprenticeship.gov> provides comprehensive information for employers, job seekers, educators or others seeking information on apprenticeships.

**f. Characteristics of Occupational Licenses:**

An occupational license is a credential awarded by a government agency that constitutes legal authority to do a specific job. Licenses are based on some combination of degree or certificate attainment, certifications, assessments, or work experience; are time-limited; and must be renewed periodically. Occupational Licenses are typically:

- Granted by Federal, state or local governmental agencies, or government-authorized boards;
- 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 (e.g., educational degrees/credentials, certificate of completion of a registered apprenticeship);
- Defined by laws, regulations, and administrative procedures;
- Time-limited - occupational licenses must be renewed based on meeting ongoing continuous learning or other requirements to maintain the license; and
- Violation of the terms of the license can result in legal action, including loss of the license.

Occupational licenses are required by governmental entities (typically state regulatory bodies) before an individual is allowed to be employed in and practice a trade, profession or other occupation. Although most occupational licenses are granted by state governments some are granted by certain Federal agencies. State licenses often are not portable since states tend to have state-specific licensing standards. Some states do have reciprocity agreements to recognize licenses from other states, often only for specific occupations and specific states.

For veterans, separating military members, and military spouses, as well as dislocated workers who relocate from one state to another, portability of occupational licenses can be a particular issue. Because licensing requirements vary from state to state, individuals often have to obtain additional training or re-test to qualify for a license in the new state. There are several interstate licensing compacts for certain occupations, where states have joined together to recognize the licenses and permit the employment of individuals who are licensed in other states that are members of the compact. For example, 32 states are members of the Nurse Licensure Compact, under the sponsorship of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, and 18 states are members of the Physical Therapy Compact, led by the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy.

The Department of Labor has provided support for initiatives in a number of states to review and streamline occupational licensing, through a series of ETA grant awards made in PY 2016, 2017, and 2018. The objective of these efforts is to reduce a range of barriers to entry into licensed occupations, and to increase portability of occupational licenses from state to state. A grant to a partnership formed by the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Council of State Governments, and the National Governors

Association supported formation of an Occupational Licensing Multi-State Consortium. The partners provided technical assistance, consultation with subject matter experts, convening's, and facilitation for teams from the 15 states participating in the consortium. The partners also conducted research and created databases of information on occupational licensing. These resources can be found at: <https://ncsl.org/stateslicense>. Eight states also received individual grants to address occupational license access and portability. Most of those states also participated in the consortium. Finally, grantees in Kentucky, Indiana, and Pennsylvania also received grants with a specific focus on expediting the qualification and civilian licensing of transitioning military members. Resources and promising practices from the work of these grantees will be shared with the public workforce system by ETA. Several of these grant efforts continue through June 30, 2022.

The following examples illustrate some of the circumstances that pertain to occupational licenses. At the time of the drafting of this TEN, there are approximately 65 federally licensed occupational titles, mostly from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Communications Commission. These Federal occupational licenses are typically portable within the U.S. At the state level there are some occupations that are licensed in virtually every state and some that are licensed in only a few states. The occupation of Licensed Practical Nurse is licensed in virtually every state, although the title used in some states is Licensed Vocational Nurse. Home Health Aides on the other hand are licensed in a handful of states. There may be slight variations in the licensure requirements among these states that would impact potential portability of the credential among them. However, if a person licensed in one of those states moves to a state that does not license Home Health Aides, portability will not be a concern. (There are national occupational certifications available for Home Health Aides also.)

Since licenses are occupation-specific, they are not stackable, except to the extent that experience in that occupation serves as a prerequisite or a step up to another occupation in a career ladder. However, the new occupation may also require its own occupational license with its own specific requirements. For many occupations, an individual can continue to stack certifications and other training on top of a license. Licensed nurses, for example, can gain additional credentials beyond the initial license.

### **On-line Tools for Licenses**

- CareerOneStop Licensed Occupations Finder:  
<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-licenses.aspx>.

This online tool contains federal and state-provided information including: License title (also coded to Occupational Information Network Standard Occupational Classification (O\*NET-SOC)), licensing agency name, address, and contact information, including Internet links if available; license description and applicable fees; and examination requirements, where available.

- The Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard each have established Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (COOL) programs to help Service members identify, pay for, and attain civilian credentials

(occupational certifications, licenses, and apprenticeships) that may be relevant to their military training and experience. Information about the programs is disseminated on each of the Services' own COOL websites and the Department of Defense (DoD) has an umbrella site providing a single point of access to the Services' COOL websites. The COOL websites:

- Provide background information about civilian credentialing and how it relates to military training and experience
- Identify occupational credentials related to military occupations, including detailed credential requirements and exam preparation resources
- Identify gaps between military training and experience and civilian credentialing requirements along with resources to fill gaps and facilitate credentialing
- Provides information to non-military stakeholders on credentialing of Service members and Veterans

The Department of Defense has also created a COOL website for DoD civilian employees that provides similar information.

- DoD COOL – <https://www.cool.osd.mil>
  - DoD Civilian COOL – <https://www.cool.osd.mil/dciv/index.htm>
  - Army COOL – <https://www.cool.osd.mil/army>
  - Department of Navy COOL – <https://www.cool.navy.mil>
    - Navy COOL – <https://www.cool.navy.mil/usn>
    - Marine Corps COOL – <https://www.cool.navy.mil/usmc>
  - Air Force COOL – <https://afvec.us.af.mil/afvec/Public/COOL>
  - Coast Guard COOL – <https://www.cool.osd.mil/uscg>
- Military Spouse License Recognition:  
<https://www.veterans.gov/milspouses>

Many states help licensed military spouses by allowing for expedited applications, temporary licenses, or license reciprocity. This website provides information to look up applicable provisions by state, as well as additional information on the process for a military spouse in a licensed occupation to follow when relocating to another state.

**g. Characteristics of Occupational Certifications from Industry or Professional Associations:**

An occupational certification indicates that the individual has acquired the necessary competencies, including knowledge, skills, and sometimes, personal attributes, to perform a specific occupation.

Occupational certifications are generally:

- Granted by third-party, non-governmental agencies – usually associations – and by companies (which may offer certification on use of their own products – either software, hardware, or equipment);
- Intended to set professional standards for qualifications, such as a certification for a crane operator or a Novell Network Certified Engineer;
- Required to be renewed in some way after a certain time period based on meeting certain requirements for renewal;
- Voluntary (although state licensure boards and businesses may specify certification as part of licensing requirements);
- Revocable – violation of standards or requirements can result in suspension or revocation of certification;
- Based on standards that are not defined by government laws or regulations;
- Set through a defensible, industry-wide process of job analysis or role delineation that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills;
- Based on successful completion of an examination or assessment, which indicates mastery of competencies as measured against a defensible set of standards; and
- Predicated on a set amount of work experience or professional/practical experience.

Certifications issued by national industry or occupational/professional associations are typically portable, although there can be regional preferences for some certifications based on regional requirements or local business needs. Many occupational certifications require work experience and can only be earned by stacking learning and work experiences and then taking a certification examination and submitting documentation of the pertinent work experience. Certifications are often stackable with educational credentials, and with other certifications, and are typically portable.

### **On-line Tools for Certifications**

- CareerOneStop Certification Finder:  
<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-certifications.aspx>.

This tool provides information including the certifying organization's name, address, and related Web links; certification description; and certification details such as examination and/or work requirements.

The tool also contains additional information about each certification to help users evaluate the quality and relevance of various certifications. On the results page in Certification Finder, under the right-hand column headed Type is an indication of whether the certification is a Core, Advanced, Specialty, or Product/Equipment certification:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-certifications-help.aspx>.

In addition, there are icons to indicate various characteristics of certifications:

- “A” indicates those certifications accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI);
- “N” indicates accreditation by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence/National Commissioner for Certifying Agencies (NCCA);
- “M” indicates certifications related to military occupations and skillsets as identified by the service branch Credentialing Opportunities On-Line website (COOL);
- “I” indicates certifications endorsed or recognized by a third-party industry association such as the Manufacturing Institute or the Health Professions Network; and
- A red chile pepper symbol indicates that the certification is frequently mentioned in online job postings at the national level.

## Credit for Prior Learning

Adult learners often face challenges in obtaining credentials because of competing demands on their time from work, family responsibilities, and continued learning. It can take a long time to accumulate credits and credentials in order to build a career pathway when education and training are being pursued on a part-time or intermittent basis. The workforce system is encouraged to provide information on avenues available to individuals supporting the attainment of credit for prior learning and work experience.

Gaining postsecondary educational credit for prior learning or experience can help individuals earn credentials more quickly and can reduce total tuition or training costs since an individual may not be required to take certain courses.

### National Resources on Credit for Prior Learning:

- **The Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)** has resources to assist educational institutions, businesses, and workforce development programs incorporate prior learning to help their customers achieve credit toward educational credentials. CAEL also catalogs an array of technical assistance on prior learning assessment resources to support the granting of credit for prior learning or work experience, online at: <https://www.cael.org/higher-education/prior-learning-assessment-services>.
- **American Council on Education (ACE) College Credit Recommendation Service** connects workplace learning with colleges and universities by helping adults gain access to academic credit for formal courses and examinations taken outside traditional degree programs. ACE provides reliable course equivalency information to facilitate credit award decisions. Participating organizations include corporations, professional and volunteer associations, schools, training suppliers, labor unions and government agencies. More information is available at: <https://www2.acenet.edu/credit/?fuseaction=transcripts.main>.
- **ACE National Guide to College Credit for Workforce Training** publishes credit recommendations for formal instructional programs offered by non-collegiate agencies, both civilian businesses and the military. For more information, see: <http://www2.acenet.edu/credit/?fuseaction=browse.main>.

### Credit by Examination:

- **The College Level Examination Program® (CLEP)** gives individuals the opportunity to receive college credit by earning qualifying scores on any of 34

examinations for knowledge acquired through independent study, prior course work, on-the-job training, professional development, cultural pursuits, or internships. See: <https://clep.collegeboard.org/>.

- **Advanced Placement (AP) Exams** are a series of tests, intended for AP High School courses, with 34 exams in 19 subject areas. More information is available at: <https://ap.collegeboard.org/>.
- **Defense Activity for Nontraditional Education Support (DANTES) Subject Standardized Test (DSST) Credit by Exam Program.** These exams test knowledge of both lower-level and upper-level college material through 38 exams. DANTES is designed to assist military personnel in obtaining civilian educational credit for military training. For more information, see: <http://www.dantes.doded.mil/#sthash.45L9jEMM.dpbs>.

Local:

- **Experiential Learning Assessments:** also known as individualized student portfolios or interviews.
- **Evaluation of Local Training:** program evaluations done by individual colleges of non-collegiate instructional programs.
- **Challenge Exams:** local tests developed by a college to verify learning achievement.

### Some Models of Existing Industry-Recognized Stackable Credentials

There are a number of sectors using industry competency models as a framework for identifying a national system of stackable credentials. Three examples are described below:

- **Advanced Manufacturing:** The Manufacturing Institute has an initiative to develop career ladders within the manufacturing sector by identifying and endorsing a set of stackable credentials. The Manufacturing Institute has endorsed a Manufacturing Skills Certification System that it intends to implement through community colleges to enable participants to advance along a career pathway in manufacturing, beginning at entry-level work readiness and employability skills into specific technical competencies associated with certain types of manufacturing. The system begins with basic skills required for entry-level workers in all sectors of manufacturing, from alternative energy and computers to aerospace and pharmaceuticals. The skills certifications address personal effectiveness competencies, foundational academic competencies, general workplace skills, and industry-wide manufacturing technical skills. Entry-level science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) skills are included in the system. See depictions of the career pathways and stackable credentials at <http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/Skills-Certification/Certifications/NAM-Endorsed-Certifications.aspx>.

These certifications fit into the framework of the Advanced Manufacturing Competency Model developed in collaboration with ETA along with other industry, education, and labor partners. The model is co-sponsored by the Manufacturing Institute, the National Council for Advanced Manufacturing, and the Society of Manufacturing Engineers. The competency model is available within the CareerOneStop Competency Model Clearinghouse at:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/competencymodel/pyramid.aspx?HG=Y>

- **Healthcare/Electronic Health Records:** Lord Fairfax Community College (LFCC), a past Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grantee, partnered with the AHIMA Foundation, the 501(c)3 charitable affiliate of the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA), to develop a new national competency framework and credentials related to information technology in health information management. AHIMA and the AHIMA Foundation served as industry champions in the development of ETA's Electronic Health Records Competency Model. AHIMA used comprehensive job analyses and the competency model to update and /or develop new health information certifications. See <http://www.ahima.org/certification>.
- **Hospitality:** In the fall of 2016, the Department of Labor awarded a \$1.8 million contract to the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF) and the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA) to develop the Hospitality Sector Registered Apprenticeship (HSRA) – the first-ever apprenticeship program registered

specifically for the restaurant, food service, and hospitality industries. NRAEF and AHLA drew on the Food and Beverage Service and Hospitality and Tourism competency models that they had developed in collaboration with DOL as a starting point for the development of apprenticeship standards and related technical instruction for an apprenticeship program.

DOL officially approved and signed the apprenticeship standards for HSRA in June 2016, specifying the requirements necessary for businesses to offer apprenticeships to their employees.

## References

Detailed performance reporting specifications and methodologies for programs that are reporting WIOA Credential Attainment can be found in the applicable guidance:

- TEGL No. 15-10, *Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the Public Workforce System: Credential Resource Guide*, dated December 15, 2010
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Pub. L. 113-128, 2014
- Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act Final Rule, 81 Fed. Reg. 56071 (Aug. 19, 2016)
- TEGL No. 10-16, Change 1, *Performance Accountability Guidance for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I, Title II, Title III and Title IV Core Programs*, dated August 23, 2017
- TEGL No.14-18, *Aligning Performance Accountability Reporting, Definitions, and Policies Across Workforce Employment and Training Programs Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)*, March 25, 2019
- Employment and Training Administration – Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act: <http://www.doleta.gov/wioa>
- Employment and Training Administration – Performance and Results: <http://www.doleta.gov/performance>
- Office of Apprenticeship’s Bulletin 2015-10, *Program Performance–Calculation of Registered Apprenticeship Program Completion Rates* <https://www.doleta.gov/OA/bul15/2015-10.pdf>;
- Apprenticeship Programs, Labor Standards for Registration, Amendment of Regulations Final Rule, 85 Fed. Reg. 14294 (May 11, 2020)
- Credential Attainment E-Learning Module: <https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/07/02/19/10/Credential-Attainment-E-Learning-Module>;
- Credential Attainment Resource Page: <https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/12/18/18/43/Credential-Attainment-Resource-Page>; and
- WIOA Desk Reference - Credential Attainment Indicator Decision Path: <https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/10/10/17/25/WIOA-Desk-Reference-Credential-Attainment-Indicator-Decision-Path>.