

Counting on Credentials: Approaches to State Credential Measurement Policy

Audio Update

November 18, 2011 | 1:00 – 2:15 PM EST

National Skills Coalition believes a state cannot assess whether its human capital investments align with the needs of its labor market unless the state is regularly tracking the full range of credentials attained across all of its education and workforce programs—including not only secondary and postsecondary degrees, but also non-degree, industry-recognized credentials, as well as individuals' basic skills progress in pursuit of those outcomes.

Cross Agency Credential Measurement (CACM) is one systemic approach to this challenge. CACM is implemented by a senior level cross agency council authorized by a governor or other senior state official to collect aggregate credential attainment data from all state education and training programs, and then to analyze if these investments are collectively producing the range of skilled workers needed to meet employer demand or to otherwise fill skills gaps documented by labor market or job openings data. CACM also allows a governor to establish a baseline of credential attainment, to set new goals for increased statewide postsecondary attainment, and to regularly measure and publicly report on the state's progress toward those goals over time.

Elements of a Cross Agency Credential Measurement Policy

While every state will approach this effort differently, there are several key elements to implementing a successful cross agency credential measurement policy.

- 1. Leadership from a senior policymaker, or policymakers, with authority over the multiple participating agencies and institutions is critical for leading and organizing this effort and in gaining the cooperation of agency heads, education leaders, and program directors.**
 - Ideally, this initiative will be overseen by a governor or a designee (e.g., lieutenant governor, secretary, commissioner, jobs commission, workforce commission, etc.) with authority over the multiple agencies and with the ability to set statewide interagency goals. This is the key link to getting state agencies and other stakeholders to the table, requiring their participation, and keeping all agencies accountable for their effort.
 - Some states may choose to have this effort led by a legislative committee or taskforce. This sort of high level legislative attention encourages agency participation, helps set partner expectations and supports the cross agency cooperation and collaboration.



- Other options for leading this strategy include leadership by a state commissioner or secretary, a state jobs council, a workforce cabinet, a state workforce board, or some other related commission.
- 2. Create a statewide administrative policy, executive order, or legislation to organize, plan and sustain this policy over time.**
- Instituting a cross agency credential measurement policy can be accomplished through a written policy from a governor’s office, through the issuance of an Executive Order, or through legislation proposed by the governor.
 - In some states, a legislative bill, resolution, or state code change initiated by advocates through the legislature, may be an effective way to institute a credential measurement policy and sustain the effort over time.
 - Although less effective, some states may choose to implement credential measurement strategies through departmental policies, administrative directives, or guidance letters and field instructions.
- 3. Set a bold goal for skill attainment and credential outcomes to establish agency expectations, bring public attention, and encourage a wide range of agencies to be jointly invested in the effort.**
- When chief policymaker(s), particularly a governor, sets a bold measurable goal, demands cross agency participation, and insists on attention to a set of educational and skill outcomes, state agencies and other institutions and stakeholders are more likely to engage and respond.
 - Setting a goal is a “call to action” critical to moving credential attainment forward—not only in bringing public attention to the initiative, but in getting otherwise independent cabinet agencies, educational institutions, workforce boards and other stakeholders to feel jointly invested in the effort.
- 4. Establish (or designate) a senior level cross agency council to collect, analyze and report credential attainment information to determine the credential outcomes of the myriad of programs that compose the state’s education and training pipeline.**
- Establishing a statewide cross agency workgroup creates capacity to look across a range of agencies and funding streams and designate responsibility for collecting the data with one entity.
 - The cross agency workgroup’s goal is to collect credential outcome data from the range of programs across the education and workforce system, measure credential outcomes over time and provide policy makers with this information for improved decision making.



- While states will approach this differently, cross agency workgroups can be newly appointed councils, or can act as standing committees of existing groups such as state workforce board, a P-20 Education Council, or some other task force or commission.

5. Determine what outcome, completion or credential data can be collected and measured.

- Ideally, states should measure credential completion outcomes generated by the state's human capital programs to get a sense of the total outcomes of those investments and number of credentialed workers entering the workforce upon program completion.
- Determining what you can or cannot measure will be the most significant challenge faced by cross agency workgroups. While some outcome and credential data may be easy to come by, other outcomes may not always be collected or reported.
- States will have to sort through and identify a myriad of programs, outcomes and systems to identify data and establish a process and methodology of collecting information and rolling up this data up to a central report. With a crowded and confusing credential landscape involving different programs, agencies and institutions, it may take some time to sort through these systems to find common data elements.

6. Institute a mechanism for reporting outcome data to policymakers on a regular basis and monitoring agencies progress towards meeting goals.

- States will have to determine a process for reporting this information to chief policymakers, measuring results and progress, and keeping agencies accountable. While some states have robust accountability and performance management systems, others will have to determine where the credential attainment effort fits with the governor's or legislature's accountability process.

7. Align credential outcome with labor market data to ensure the state is producing workers with the skills and credentials needed to meet labor market demand.

- Ultimately, the goal of cross agency credential measurement is to track credential attainment in the states across a range of public workforce and education programs, in order to assess if our education and training investments are aligning with demand in the labor market.
- Since many of these programs operate in silos, we typically never see the collective outcomes of these programs and how they relate to the labor market, job openings or the needs of certain industry sectors. Collecting this information begins to give policy makers a "snapshot" of education and training credential outcomes of their statewide "workforce system" and how this relates to labor market demand.



Additional Resources

Rachel Unruh and Eric Seleznow, *Beyond Degrees: Lessons Learned from Skills2Compete-Maryland*, National Skills Coalition, (Washington, DC, 2011).

Available at <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/assets/reports-/beyond-degrees.pdf>

Lindsey Woolsey, *Moving Beyond the Count – Maryland’s Skills2Compete Initiative*, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce for the State of Maryland, Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and National Skills Coalition (Baltimore, MD, 2011).

Available at http://www.skilledwork.org/sites/default/files/Moving_Beyond_the_Count.pdf

State of Maryland, Governor’s Delivery Unit, *Skills Policy Plan*, 2010.

Available at <http://www.statestat.maryland.gov/GDU/3SkillsDeliveryPlan.pdf>.

Rhode Island Article 24 Section 42-102-9 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-102 entitled "*Rhode Island Human Resource Investment Council*".

Available at <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText11/HouseText11/Article-024.pdf>

Minnesota’s Workforce Development Council’s key policy advisory addressing the growing skills gap within the state, 2011.

Available at http://www.gwdc.org/policy_advisory/All_Hands_on_Deck_2011.pdf

Evelyn Ganzglass, Keith Bird & Heath Prince, *Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: Creating a Competency-Based Qualifications Framework for Postsecondary Education and Training*, Center for Law and Social Policy, (Washington, DC, 2011).

Available at <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/Giving-Credit.pdf>

Brian Bosworth, *Certificates Count: An Analysis of Sub-baccalaureate Certificates*, Complete College America and Futureworks, 2010.

Available at http://www.completecollege.org/path_forward/certificates_count_release/

Training and Employment Guidance Letter no. 15-10, *Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the Public Workforce System*, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, December 2010.

Available at http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?docn=2967