National Skills Coalition is advocating for states to adopt a set of policies that expand equitable access to middle-skill training, credentials, and careers – particularly for those who have faced barriers to economic opportunity. This effort includes scans of all fifty states to ascertain whether states have the policies in place to expand access to skills. NSC has also developed toolkits that provide resources, including model legislation, for policymakers and advocates to advance a skills equity agenda in their state. NSC’s skills equity agenda includes state policies on Job-Driven Financial Aid, SNAP E&T, Stackable Credentials, Alignment, Integrated Education and Training, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Employment and Training. www.nationalskillscoalition/skillsequity
SUMMARY

State stackable credential policies are among a set of “skills equity policies” being promoted by National Skills Coalition (NSC). NSC has scanned each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia to identify which states have the policies in place. Stackable credential policies support industry-recognized postsecondary credentials which articulate toward a higher level certificate or associate degree in the same field. This scan finds that there are nineteen states with stackable credential policies in place. States without a policy in place can use NSC’s Stackable Credential Policy Toolkit to establish one. Many of the nineteen states with policies already in place can also use the Toolkit to further expand their policy.

NINETEEN STATES HAVE ESTABLISHED STACKABLE CREDENTIAL POLICIES
If our nation is to meet skill needs of employers and provide workers with skills required for higher levels of employment and earnings, more individuals must obtain postsecondary credentials. Middle-skill jobs, which require more than a high school degree but not a bachelor’s degree, account for 54 percent of United States’ labor market, but only 44 percent of the country’s workers are trained to the middle-skill level. This skill gap is not evenly distributed across the population. According to the Lumina Foundation, looking at all postsecondary levels, only 9 percent of those from the lowest income quartile attain a postsecondary credential. If we are to meet the nation’s skill needs, we must increase the attainment of postsecondary credentials, particularly among populations that have historically been left behind.

A central goal of the skills equity agenda is providing equitable access to postsecondary credentials. Stackable credentials are an emerging tool for providing equitable access and for increasing postsecondary credential attainment. They are particularly useful for increasing credential attainment among low-skill, low-income working adults.

Stackable credentials recognize the mastery of skills that are a subset of the skills that are typically achieved through a longer program of study. The shorter program articulates with the longer program, so that education and training for the shorter program does not have to be repeated should the credential recipient continue on in the longer program. For example, programs of study in which certificate credits are fully recognized by associate degree programs in the same field.

Often stackable credentials include what are characterized as “modules” or “chunks” that are shorter than certificate programs. An individual is awarded a credential in recognition of completing the module, and if the individual continues on in a longer certificate or degree program, they are granted credit for what they have already learned. Sometimes, stackable credentials include awards for very short-term programs that provide a gateway to entry level employment or college-level programs.

Stackable credentials may also include industry certifications. Industry certifications are awards by a third-party organization such as an industry or occupational association based on an examination that indicates the individual has mastered a certain set of competencies. These certifications may be recognized by certificate or degree programs at postsecondary institutions that grant credits for the certification, thus stacking the industry certification.

Stackable credentials offer certain benefits, particularly for low skill individuals and working adults. A shorter-term program may be easier to complete for academic or personal reasons. Low-skilled individuals may find a shorter-term program less intimidating and challenging than a longer program where more must be accomplished before receiving a credential. Working adults and parents with limited time may find shorter programs to fit better with their schedules. They can complete the education or training that matches their needs, receive an award, and continue on at a later time that suits them better without having to repeat what they already learned. In the meantime, they have an award that they can show a potential employer.

Stackable credentials can offer recognition for what individuals have attained, provide easier access to postsecondary training, are particularly useful for non-traditional students such as working adults and parents, and by definition offer transitions to more credentials. Consequently, stackable credentials can increase credential attainment, particularly among non-traditional populations.

**DEFINITION OF A STACKABLE CREDENTIAL:** For purposes of the scan a stackable credential is an industry-recognized credential offered by a certificate or other non-degree program, or a third-party certification or occupational license, which articulates toward a higher level certificate or associates degree in the same occupational area. The stackable credential may be offered by an institution of higher education or another type of organization, so long as the credential articulates to a higher level certificate or associate degree offered by state-recognized institutions of higher education.
The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, moreover, establishes an additional reason for building stackable credentials. One of the primary indicators of performance for five of the six core programs is, “the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential”. States and local areas can increase the percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential by increasing the availability of industry-recognized certificates or certifications, and by modularizing longer certificate or associate degree programs into chunks that offer awards recognized by industry.

State Policies Supporting Stackable Credentials

Sometimes postsecondary institutions develop stackable credentials on their own or in collaboration with other institutions or partner organizations. Many states, however, have adopted policies to advance stackable credentials. There are two basic forms of state policies that support stackable credentials. The first is a policy which requires community or technical colleges or other postsecondary training providers to offer stackable credentials. For example, the state may require its postsecondary system to offer short and longer-term certificate programs and require that credits earned in certificate programs be accepted by longer certificate or associate degree programs in the same field.

The second form of state policy is for the state to appropriate funds that provide resources to institutions or other non-profit organizations to support stackable credentials. Such funding is typically, but not always, part of a more comprehensive alignment policy that requires recipients to offer other elements, such as support services, that create pathways for low-skill, low-income adults to attain postsecondary credentials and higher levels of employment.

Because our emphasis is on skill equity for adults, to be counted for the scan, the policy or funding must apply to adult learners. Not meeting the definition are state policies limited to articulation between secondary and postsecondary programs of study. Also given our focus on middle skills, NSC is looking only at policies at the sub-baccalaureate level. The scan also focuses on policies that cover multiple fields of study and are effective statewide (subject to sufficient funding) in order to get to scale.

States may also support stackable credentials without establishing a state requirement or providing state funding. States may explicitly authorize institutions to offer stackable credentials and encourage them to do so, without issuing a requirement. This is most common in states where authority is generally decentralized to the institution level. States may also apply for and receive federal or philanthropic grants to support stackable credentials without providing state dollars. The scan, however, does not count these other types of state support as constituting a state policy.

These other types of support, however, can be important and perhaps lead to more authoritative state policies. The scan, therefore, notes examples of these other types of state support when a state does not have a stackable credential policy. Other forms of support are not counted as constituting state policies supporting stackable credentials and the scan does not provide a comprehensive accounting of these other types of state support.

KEY FINDINGS

As shown in the table on the following page, there are nineteen states with stackable credential policies in place that meet our definition.

REQUIREMENT: Ten of these states require postsecondary institutions to offer stackable credentials.

FUNDING: Seventeen of these states provide funds to support stackable credentials.

REQUIREMENT AND FUNDING: Eight of these states both require postsecondary institutions to offer stackable credentials and provide funding to support stackable credentials. These eight states that both require and fund stackable credentials have the most robust policies in place.
### SUMMARY OF STATE STACKABLE CREDENTIAL POLICIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Stackable Credential Policy</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Requirement</td>
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<td>Mississippi</td>
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*SKILLS IN THE STATES: PART OF NSC’S SKILLS EQUITY AGENDA*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Stackable Credential Policy</th>
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<td>Vermont</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Stackable Credential Policy: State by State

## Alabama
- Policy in Place?: ✗
- Program Requirement: ✗
- Funding: ✗
- Other: ✔

Stackable credentials are part of some certificate and degree programs in the Alabama Community College System.

## Alaska
- Policy in Place?: ✗
- Program Requirement: ✗
- Funding: ✗
- Other: ✗

## Arizona
- Policy in Place?: ✗
- Program Requirement: ✗
- Funding: ✗
- Other: ✔

Under the Arizona Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (AZ I-BEST) program, the Arizona Department of Education used a mix of state and federal adult education funds to make pilot grants in nine of the state’s fifteen counties during program year 2014-15. Some of the pilot sites continued their work in 2015-16.

## Arkansas
- Policy in Place?: ✔
- Program Requirement: ✗
- Funding: ✔
- Other: ✗

The Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) for low-income adults includes stackable credentials. CPI is administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education and is available at community colleges. Funding is from TANF dollars. CPI was codified by state law in 2005 (Act 1705) and in 2007 (Act 514). In 2015, Arkansas enacted the Workforce Initiative Act (Act 1131). Under the Act, the Department of Higher Education administers Regional Workforce Grants to community colleges to support pathways including stackable credentials.
The California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office has adopted the Doing What Matters for Jobs and the Economy framework that includes stackable credentials. The 2015 California Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (AB 1270) directs local workforce development boards to facilitate the development of career pathways that include stackable credentials. The 2016 Legislature appropriated $200 million for the Strong Workforce Program to implement the recommendations of the Task Force on Strong Workforce, including the development of modularized curriculum and stackable credentials at community colleges.

The Colorado legislature enacted House Bill 13-1165 and House Bill 15-1274 requiring the state Workforce Development Council and the state Department of Higher Education to develop pathways including stackable credentials in manufacturing, construction, healthcare, and information technology industries, and two additional pathways each year. The legislature also appropriated funds to support the effort.

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The Florida Career and Professional Education Act (CAPE) allocates incentive funds tied to students’ attainment of industry certifications. Colleges receive $1,000 for each industry certification earned by a student, up to a maximum allocation of $5 million. Statewide articulation agreements make it possible for students to receive college credit toward an associate’s degree for successfully earning a nationally recognized industry certification.

The Georgia State Board of Technical and Adult Education adopted a statewide policy that technical colleges must offer technical certificates and diplomas that stack to associate degrees in the same occupational area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Policy in Place?</th>
<th>Program Requirement</th>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Idaho**

Stackable credentials are part of Idaho’s program of study curriculum framework for career and technical education, “To the extent possible, credentials should be “stackable,” creating a uniform system of short and long term certificates and degrees that lead to progressively higher levels of education and employment, within a program of study.”

**Illinois**

The Illinois Career and Academic Preparation System (ICAPS) offers pathways for low-skill adults at approximately half of Illinois’ forty-eight community colleges. Essential elements include stackable credentials. ICAPS started as part of the national Accelerating Opportunity Initiative with funding from philanthropic foundations.

**Indiana**

Many programs of study at Ivy Tech, Indiana’s community college system, offer certificates, technical certificates, and associate degrees, and courses in certificate programs apply toward technical certificates and associate degrees in the same subject area. Students can also earn industry recognized certifications along the way.

**Iowa**

Iowa Code 2014, Chapter 260H establishes the Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE) Fund, authorizing up to $5 million per fiscal year from the general fund that is available to community colleges to support pathways, including modularized program delivery and stackable credentials.
Kansas’ Post-Secondary Technical Education Authority’s (TEA) Program Alignment Initiative establishes postsecondary programs of study with multiple entry and exit points and stackable credentials. Once adopted by the Kansas Board of Regents, institutions have one year to implement the aligned program. Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K) provides low skilled adults integrated education and training, career coaches, support services, and stackable short term certificates. Originally part of the national Accelerating Opportunity initiative funded by six philanthropies, Kansas now provides state support for AO-K.

Kentucky statutes (164.580) direct the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) to: Facilitate transfers of credit between certificate, diploma, technical, and associate degree programs. Kentucky’s system of stackable credentials involves: modularization of occupational programs into short term, credit bearing certificate programs; and awarding of fractional credit for customized training provided by the colleges; awarding of credit to students who pass a standard certification exam administered by an industry authorized testing center. In addition, KCTCS career pathway initiative provides multiple entry and exit points spanning secondary, postsecondary, adult, and workplace learning.

Louisiana and Maine do not have policies in place for program requirement, funding, or other initiatives.
MARYLAND

- **Policy In Place?**: No
- **Program Requirement**: No
- **Funding**: No
- **Other**: No

General laws, Chapter 15A, Section 15G directs that stackable credentials shall be available across the commonwealth and administered through higher education institutions with the assistance of the Department of Higher Education. H 4377 authorized funding to develop, implement and promote stackable credential programs at public higher education institution, and the Stackable Credential Programming Grant program committed $800,000 for qualifying workforce training projects in FY15.

MASSACHUSETTS

- **Policy In Place?**: Yes
- **Program Requirement**: Yes
- **Funding**: Yes

Under Massachusetts General Laws, the Stackable Credential Policy has been implemented and funding has been allocated for stackable credential programs.

MICHIGAN

- **Policy In Place?**: No
- **Program Requirement**: No
- **Funding**: No
- **Other**: No

MINNESOTA

- **Policy In Place?**: Yes
- **Program Requirement**: Yes
- **Funding**: Yes

Under Minnesota Statutes Section 136F.32, “A technical college or consolidated technical community college shall offer students the option of pursuing diplomas or certificates in each technical education program, unless the [Board of Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities] determines that a degree is the only acceptable credential for career entry in a specific field. All vocational and technical credits earned for a diploma or certificate shall be applicable toward any available degree in the same program.” Also, legislature appropriates funds for the Pathways to Prosperity program that funds grants to local providers to train adults with low basic skills for entry level employment. The training provides college credits that are applicable toward certificate and degree programs in the same field. The program has $11 million in state funding in FY 2016.
Nebraska’s Gap Assistance Program (Legislative Bill 519, 2015) offers financial aid to students enrolled in a program offered by a community college that is not offered for credit but is aligned with training programs with stackable credentials that lead to a program awarding college credit, an associate’s degree, a diploma, or a certificate in an in-demand occupation. Funding for 2016-17 is about $1.4 million.
NEW HAMPSHIRE

**POLICY IN PLACE?**

![x]

**PROGRAM REQUIREMENT**

![x]

**FUNDING**

![✓]

**OTHER**

Career pathways and stackable credentials are offered at individual community colleges and in some fields of study (e.g., advanced manufacturing).

---

NEW JERSEY

**POLICY IN PLACE?**

![x]

**PROGRAM REQUIREMENT**

![x]

**FUNDING**

![✓]

**OTHER**

Individual community colleges in New Jersey offer stackable certificates in at least some fields of study. For example, Passaic County Community College offers some career certificate programs (30-36 credits), along with associate degrees. As reported in the 2015-17 college catalog, “the career certificate programs offer training for employment, and the credits earned can be applied to a related degree program.”

---

NEW MEXICO

**POLICY IN PLACE?**

![x]

**PROGRAM REQUIREMENT**

![x]

**FUNDING**

![✓]

**OTHER**

New Mexico is one of the states that, with philanthropic support, piloted the Accelerating Opportunity model, one key element of which is stackable, industry recognized credentials.

---

NEW YORK

**POLICY IN PLACE?**

![x]

**PROGRAM REQUIREMENT**

![x]

**FUNDING**

![x]

**OTHER**
North Carolina provides funding for Basic Skills Plus at community colleges. Basic Skills Plus offers adult education students the opportunity to co-enroll in adult education and occupational courses and to earn a high school diploma or equivalency and “industry recognized marketable and stackable credentials, certificates and degrees that have value in the labor market.”

HB 699 in 2007 included a provision requiring the Ohio Board of Regents and the Department of Education to develop a system of pre-college and college level stackable certificates. Ohio’s performance based funding system includes the attainment of technical certificates that articulate to longer-term credentials.
OREGON

**Policy in Place?**

Program Requirement: ✔
Funding: ✔

In 2006, the Oregon Presidents Council signed a Career Pathways Resolution affirming the community colleges’ commitment to career pathways, including stackable credentials. The Presidents have renewed their commitment every two years since then. For the 2015-17 biennium, there is $2 million for a statewide coordinator and college grants to support career pathways.

PENNSYLVANIA

**Policy in Place?**

Program Requirement: ×
Funding: ×
Other: ✔

The Division of Adult Education provides extensive technical assistance resources for the development of career pathways, including stackable credentials. Pennsylvania was awarded a $6 million USDOL Workforce Innovations Fund grant in 2015 that focuses on development of micro-credentials that are stackable and part of career pathways for those with barriers to employment. Community colleges will offer education and training programs resulting in micro-credentials.

RHODE ISLAND

**Policy in Place?**

Program Requirement: ×
Funding: ×
Other: ×

SOUTH CAROLINA

**Policy in Place?**

Program Requirement: ×
Funding: ×
Other: ×

SOUTH DAKOTA

**Policy in Place?**

Program Requirement: ×
Funding: ×
Other: ×
The legislature has appropriated funds to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ($3.8 m for FY 2016-17) for a grant program to community colleges and public technical institutes to implement pathway programs for adult education students, known as Accelerate Texas. Accelerate Texas includes stackable credentials. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s “Guidelines for Instructional Programs in Workforce Education” strongly recommends but does not require that short term certificates at community colleges and technical institutes stack to longer-term certificates and associate degrees.

Utah enacted SB 103 in 2016, the Strategic Workforce Investments Initiative, creating a competitive grant program to establish regional programs of study that lead to the attainment of a sequence of stackable credentials. The Initiative received an initial appropriation of $1.5 million, with the stated intent that the sum be reallocated in the future.
## Virginia

**Policy in Place?** ✓

PluggedInVA is a six month career pathways program for adult learners with low basic skills. Program completers leave with a high school equivalency credential, an industry-recognized credential, and at least twelve transferrable community college credits. In 2016, state funding totaled $465,375. In 2016 Virginia enacted SB 576 establishing the New Economy Workforce Credential Grant Program. The Program provides financial aid, college credits, and credentials to students completing certain short-term training programs.

## Washington

**Policy in Place?** ✓

Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) provides adult education instruction along with professional-technical training at community and technical colleges. I-BEST programs are credit bearing and credits earned apply toward a certificate and degree in the related program of study. I-BEST programs receive enhanced formula funding (1.75 times normal funding per student FTE).

## West Virginia

**Policy in Place?** ✗

Under rules adopted by the West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, noncredit training activities may be converted to college level credit, if noncredit courses are delivered using the same competencies as college level courses, and the competencies have been met.
The Wisconsin Technical College System Board awards funds to create, expand and/or implement career pathways, “a series of connected education and training strategies and support services that enable individuals to secure stackable industry relevant credentials …” The pathways are not required by the state; however, they exist at each of the sixteen technical colleges.

**WYOMING**

**POLICY IN PLACE?**

- **PROGRAM REQUIREMENT**
- **FUNDING**
- **OTHER**

The documentation was unclear, state officials were contacted for follow-up information. However, NSC recognizes that no matter the effort, it is possible that there is some information not included in this scan.

**METHODOLOGY**

To conduct this scan, National Skills Coalition reviewed a variety of documents and communicated with state officials. Specifically, NSC reviewed state statutes and key documents for each of the fifty states and the District of Columbia that were available through the websites of the state workforce development board, the workforce administrative agency, and state postsecondary agencies. When the documentation was unclear, state officials were contacted for follow-up information. However, NSC recognizes that no matter the effort, it is possible that there is some information not included in this scan.

**ENDNOTES**

1 National Skills Coalition, “Middle-Skill Job Fact Sheets” http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/state-policy/fact-sheets. Middle-skill jobs are jobs that require some form of postsecondary education or training but not a bachelor’s degree.

2 WIOA defines a “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.”

3 For more information on state Stackable Credential Policies, see National Skills Coalition, “Skills in the States: Stackable Credential Policy Toolkit.”


5 It would be challenging at best to define what constitutes “encouragement” or to separate out the normal authority of institutions to grant credits for prior education from a state policy supporting stackable credentials.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

National Skills Coalition would like to thank Robert Watrus for his assistance with the Stackable Credential Policy 50-State Scan.
National Skills Coalition organizes broad-based coalitions seeking to raise the skills of America’s workers across a range of industries. We advocate for public policies that invest in what works, as informed by our members’ real-world expertise. We communicate these goals to an American public seeking a vision for a strong U.S. economy that allows everyone to be part of its success.