

Stackable Credential Policy

TOOLKIT SUMMARY

PART OF NSC'S SKILLS EQUITY AGENDA



JOB-DRIVEN
FINANCIAL AID



SKILLS-BASED
SNAP E&T



ALIGNMENT

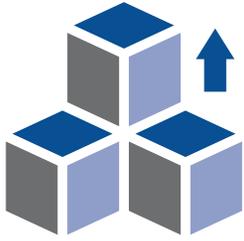


INTEGRATED EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



TANF





Stackable Credential Policy

WHY STATES SHOULD ESTABLISH STACKABLE CREDENTIAL POLICIES

Working learners often need to balance their education and training with job schedules, family needs, and financial resources. This may mean attending school on a part-time basis or temporarily “stopping out” to work or raise kids. Stackable credentials¹ address these needs by helping working learners find skilled jobs while preparing for the next step in their career. These industry-recognized, short-term credentials count toward education requirements for the next credential so that working learners can complete education or training that matches their resources and needs, receive a credential, and continue on at a later time without having to repeat what they’ve already learned. In the meantime, they have a credential they can show a potential employer.

By adopting a policy that supports the establishment of stackable credentials, states can:

- Expand the use of stackable credentials by institutions and students;
- Ensure the portability of stackable credentials beyond individual institutions so that students who transfer from one institution to another don’t lose credit for prior education;
- Help the state meet and exceed the credential attainment goals it sets under WIOA²; and
- More broadly increase postsecondary credential attainment, particularly among low-skill, low-income working adults.

COMPONENTS OF A MODEL STACKABLE CREDENTIAL POLICY

States can adopt policies that require public, two-year postsecondary institutions to offer and recognize stackable credentials. They can also allocate dedicated funding to encourage and support the creation of stackable credentials. States looking to establish robust policies should do both.

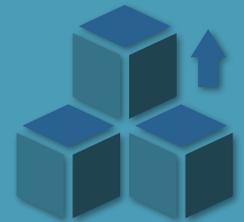
In states where institutions of higher education have a great deal of autonomy, it may not be possible to mandate that institutions offer stackable credentials. Such states, though, should still support stackable credentials by providing funding to institutions that offer stackable credentials.

In addition to requiring and/or funding stackable credentials, state policies should:

- Target strategic occupations that need more skilled workers;
- Require industry to validate credentials through direct employer engagement, using sector partnerships, and other means;
- Describe the types of credentials that will be awarded for completing short-term programs of less than a year (for example, a certificate of completion or a technical diploma);
- Include programs available to adult education students; and
- Include technical assistance to institutions from the state.

WHAT IS A STACKABLE CREDENTIAL?

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.



EXAMPLES FROM THE STATES

- In **MINNESOTA**, Statutes Section 136F.32 requires two-year colleges to offer diplomas or certificates in technical education programs. The law also requires credits earned for these diplomas or certificates to count toward any available degree in the same program.



- In **GEORGIA**, the 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.

- In **UTAH**, Senate Bill 103 (2016) creates the Strategic Workforce Investments Initiative – a competitive grant for regional career and technical education programs to create stackable credentials. Under the law, the stackable credential sequences must provide a pathway to a more advanced job or higher wage, lead to an associate or bachelor's degree, provide multiple exit and entry points for students, recognize interim milestones, and be part of a career pathway system. The initiative received an initial appropriation of \$1.5 million, with the stated intent that the sum be reallocated in the future.



ABOUT NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION'S SKILLS EQUITY AGENDA

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.

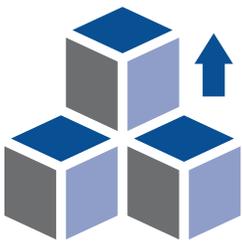
Read more about NSC's Skills Equity Agenda and download the full toolkit at nationalskillscoalition.org/skillsequity

ENDNOTES

¹ As used here, "credential" is a general term that includes degrees, diplomas, licenses, certificates, badges and professional/industry certifications.

² The fourth primary indicator of performance under WIOA is, "the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent ... during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program"

³ PL 113-128 references the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.



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LEGISLATIVE TEMPLATE

This template outlines key components of a robust stackable credential policy and can be used to develop legislation or to inform a state higher education administrative policy. States may wish to include additional detail.

SEC. 1: INTENT

The Stackable Credential Framework and Program are established for the purpose of supporting industry-recognized, short-term credentials and certificates that count toward a higher-level certificate or degree so that individuals can advance in employment and training over the course of their careers.

SEC. 2: STACKABLE CREDENTIAL FRAMEWORK

The Stackable Credential Framework is established in the community and technical college system.

- a. Definitions: A stackable credential is an industry-recognized credential offered by a certificate or other non-degree program, which articulates toward a higher level certificate or associates degree in the same occupational area.
- b. A community or technical college shall offer one or more short-term training programs of 9 to 36 credit hours in each vocational-technical education program of study, unless the [name of appropriate higher education body, hereafter referred to as the, "Board"] determines that a longer-term certificate or degree is the only acceptable credential for career entry in a specific field. Students who complete a short-term training program shall be awarded a [name of credential(s)]. All vocational and technical credits earned for a [name of credential(s)] shall articulate to any available certificate or degree program at a community or technical college in the same occupational area. The Board shall establish policies for the approval of short-term training programs and the award of [name of credential(s)].
- c. A community or technical college shall offer one or more training programs that award a certificate in each vocational-technical education program of study, unless the Board determines that a degree is the only acceptable credential for career entry in a specific field. All vocational and technical credits earned for a certificate shall be applicable toward any available degree program at a community or technical college in the same occupational area. The Board shall establish policies for the approval of certificate training programs.
- d. The Board shall establish policies for the inclusion of industry certifications in short-term and certificate training programs whenever valid industry certifications are available in order to recognize the mastery of skills attained in such programs.

The policies shall include the granting of credits for industry certifications that articulate to certificate and degree programs in the same field.

- e. The Board shall establish a process for the industry validation of short-term and certificate training programs. The process shall include the engagement of an industry or sector partnership established under PL 113-128,³ or any successor legislation, if such a partnership, or similar partnership, exists in the sector for which the program trains workers. The process shall also consider labor market information that demonstrates credential demand among employers, and consider information on the labor market outcomes of training programs.

SEC. 3: STACKABLE CREDENTIAL GRANT PROGRAM

The Board shall administer the stackable credential grant program. Grants shall be available to a community or technical college for the development of short-term or certificate training programs that meet the requirements established under Sec. 2 of this Act. Grants shall also be available to non-profit organizations that conduct short-term training programs that award an industry-recognized credential that articulates to a community or technical college certificate or degree program.

- a. The Board shall allocate the grants to community and technical colleges and non-profit organizations by a competitive process.
 - i. The Board shall prioritize the creation of stackable credentials in occupational areas where there is substantial employer demand for job applicants and where employer demand exceeds the supply of students completing training.
 - ii. The Board shall provide technical assistance to colleges and non-profit organizations on the establishment of stackable credentials.
 - iii. The Board shall report to the Governor and the legislative committees on higher education on the outcomes of the stackable credential program, including but not limited to, the number of training programs created and the number of credentials awarded, with information reported for each field of study.

SEC. 4: FUNDING

For the period ___ to ___ \$___ funds are appropriated to the Board for the Stackable Credential Grant Program. The Board shall allocate no more than ___ to any one college or non-profit organization. The Board may use of to 15 percent of the funds to administer the Grant Program, including the provision of technical assistance.

