Report on Development of a Quality Credentials of Value Framework for the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership and the Governor's Workforce Development Board

Minnesota P-20 Credentials of Value Work Group

Spring 2023

Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership

In 2009, enacted legislation formally codified the Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership. The purpose of the Partnership is to "create a seamless system of education that maximizes achievements of all students, from early childhood through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, while promoting the efficient use of financial and human resources" (Minn. Stat. § 127A.70).

The P-20 Education Partnership is jointly managed by senior leaders from Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Office of Higher Education, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the University of Minnesota, and the P-20 Executive Director. The chair of the partnership rotates every two years between the state agency and higher education leaders. Dr. Robert McMaster (University of Minnesota) serves as chair through June of 2023. Dennis Olson (Commissioner, Office of Higher Education) is co-chair and will assume the role of chair in July 2023.

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Background

Between January 2022 and April 2023, members of the P-20 Credentials of Value (CoV) Work Group participated in the Quality Postsecondary Credentials Policy Academy led by National Skills Coalition and Education Strategy Group. This CoV Work Group sought to develop consensus for a quality criteria framework to identify credentials of value across both degree and non-degree credentials, discuss the policy and program areas where the framework could be applied, and understand the data needs to operationalize the criteria. The CoV Work Group met monthly and added members as additional stakeholders expressed interest in informing the criteria.

This work focused on two primary goals:

>**Goal #1:** Adopt a single statewide definition of a quality credential across P-20 and the workforce.

>**Goal #2:** Create a single list of all the credentials offered in the state, and highlight those which meet the state's definition of quality and have the greatest labor market value.

This report summarizes the CoV Work Group's progress on the two identified goals, presents the group's recommendation for a Credential of Value Framework, and discusses next steps. The work of this group and the creation of the Quality Credentials of Value (CoV) Framework for Minnesota demonstrated a need for more clarity and a well thought out implementation plan to achieve these goals. This process generated and will continue to generate conversation and consideration of changes to increase the value of the credentials offered to consumers. The increased value results from:

- better understanding of the scope and inter-relatedness of credentials across P-20 and the workforce,
- increased alignment to defined skill demand within the labor market,
- alignment or inclusion of industry recognized "certification exams", and
- incentivizing supportive services, including placement services, for non-credit students.

Process

The CoV Work Group met monthly between January 2022 and April 2023 to discuss each topic. Discussions were led by staff from the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota State). Meetings were co-chaired by staff from OHE and DEED. The CoV Work Group members also participated in meetings in National Skills Coalition's Quality Postsecondary Credentials Policy Academy to connect with other states undertaking similar efforts.

Goal #1: Defining Quality

The CoV Work Group developed consensus for a quality criteria framework that was based on the following work:

- discussed existing definitions of quality credentials in use at OHE, DEED, and Minnesota State,
- reviewed quality definitions and frameworks used by other states,
- addressed the challenges of establishing quality criteria that can apply across both degree and non-degree credentials,
- created draft criteria within a framework focusing on the quality elements of credentials, programs, and providers, and
- began evaluating the draft framework against existing programs.

Existing Quality Criteria and Frameworks in Minnesota

Office of Higher Education (OHE)

OHE policy conceptually operates on four levels:

1. which programs should be allowed to operate,
2. which programs should be eligible for financial aid to ensure access and affordability,
3. which programs should be prioritized for funding because they meet a specific need, and
4. which institutions' practices/programs/services that maximize student success should be promoted.

Regulating Program Operations

OHE is responsible for ensuring compliance with the two state laws that require private and out-of-state public postsecondary educational institutions to meet state standards to operate legally in Minnesota:

- degree-granting institutional registration, and
- private non-degree granting provider licensure.

Degree-granting institutional registration requires accreditation, academic degrees that meet state standards, financial resources sufficient to meet the school's financial obligations, appropriate faculty, sound institutional policies and practices, truthful advertising, and a plan for preservation of student records.

Private non-degree granting provider licensure provides oversight of training providers offering non-

degree programs. These providers must meet similar minimum standards as registered institutions, such as demonstrating appropriate resources for programs, financial surety, administrative capability, qualified faculty, and truthful advertising.

Annual applications are required in order for institutions to maintain either degree-granting registration or private career school licensure.

Participation in State Financial Aid

Participation in state financial aid is another level of OHE policy with quality criteria. In order to eligible to participate in state financial aid, institutions must be located in Minnesota and be either a) operated by the state (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities) or the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota, or b) be operated privately, and meet conditions such as maintaining academic standards equivalent to comparable institutions.

In order to participate in state financial aid, public and private institutions must be participating in the federal Pell Grant program or have been participating in state financial aid prior to July 1, 2010. State financial aid eligibility can be terminated for several reasons including but not limited to loss of Title IV eligibility, failure to maintain adequate administrative and financial standards, or failure to comply with state law, among other reasons.

Promotion of Specific Programs that Meet a Need or Promote Best Practices

In addition, the state establishes grant programs to prioritize funding and promote best practices. Examples of state-funded programs that work in this area include but are not limited to Dual Training Grants (employment-based training grants in identified industries), Future Together Grants (grants for students in programs that lead to high demand occupations), and MN Reconnect (grants to students enrolling in institutions having implemented best practices in adult learner re-engagement).

Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

DEED, through its administration of federal and state workforce programs, also provides critical oversight for quality postsecondary training. The federal Workforce and Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA) requires states to establish an Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)[1] showing programs that meet identified standards to receive federal workforce training funds. This list is maintained publicly on the Minnesota Career and Education Explorer website. DEED establishes standards that providers must meet in order to be listed on the ETPL, based on federal WIOA parameters and criteria used by the

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[1] ETPL guidelines available here: https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/ddp/PolicyDetail.aspx?pol=565.

National Skills Coalition.

Providers must meet certain criteria in order to be listed as an Eligible Training Provider. In particular, the provider must be licensed, registered, or deemed otherwise exempt by OHE or the appropriate state agency overseeing program licensure. An Eligible Training Provider may have programs on the ETPL that are WIOA-certified, non-credentialed training, or neither of these. WIOA-certified trainings must provide a recognized postsecondary credential upon completion of the program or course. Recognized postsecondary credentials as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) include degrees, certificates, industry-recognized certificates or certifications, a certificate of completion of a registered apprenticeship, or a license recognized by the State or Federal Government. For-credit trainings on the ETPL should be industry-recognized, stackable, portable, and accredited. Short-term credentials should be part of an identified career pathway, show evidence of competencies mastered through credential attainment, show evidence of equitable and sustainable economic outcomes (employment and wage outcomes), and should stack to additional learning and career advancement.

Higher Education Institutions and Systems

The CoV Work Group also recognized that higher education institutions and systems themselves create and enforce quality criteria through the program approval process, which also closely relates to the standards maintained and enforced through accreditation processes. These criteria and processes may be more rigorous for for-credit programs than non-credit programs. However non-credit programs nonetheless undergo substantial quality review in many cases. The establishment of consensus quality criteria by the State may help provide institutions greater clarity in identifying the priority elements of quality to review as they create and approve both for-credit and non-credit programs.

As an example of institutional processes, the CoV Work Group reviewed the program approval criteria used by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (Minnesota State). Minnesota State's criteria for program approval include alignment to workforce and community needs, student interest and projected enrollment, fit with institutional mission and priorities, learning outcomes and assessment planning, and professional accreditations and certifications, among other criteria.

Criteria also include a demonstration of how the program will eliminate or address equity gaps by race/ethnicity, first generation status, and Pell eligibility status, along with criteria specific to access and inclusion of diverse student populations. Programs also undergo regular review aligned with accreditation considerations, such as assessment of learning outcomes, faculty qualifications, and data on retention, persistence, completion, and employment outcomes.

Quality Criteria Frameworks in Other States

The National Skills Coalition (NSC) recommends consideration of quality criteria in the following categories:

- evidence of substantial job opportunities,
- evidence of competencies mastered,
- evidence of employment and earnings outcomes, and
- potential for stacking to additional education or training

Many states have adopted non-degree credential criteria specific to these categories, along with additional criteria. These include Alabama, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Louisiana, Nevada, New Jersey, Oregon, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.

In many cases, states have required alignment to occupations that meet specific demand and wage thresholds in order for the non-degree credential to meet the states definition of quality. For example, the Louisiana Board of Regents criteria require the aligned occupations to meet a 3, 4, or 5-star demand rating as established by the state's workforce agency, and to demonstrate a 20% wage premium over a high school diploma.[2]

States have used these criteria frameworks for multiple purposes. In Louisiana, the definition is used for inclusion in state attainment goals. In Iowa, a quality non-degree criteria framework is used to determine eligibility for the GAP tuition assistance program.[3] In Hawaii, the state promoted credentials that meet its quality criteria framework by publishing a list of Promising Credentials to recommend.[4]

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[2] Louisiana Board of Regents. (2020). Board of Regents Policy: Quality Postsecondary Credentials of Value. Available here: https://www.laregents.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PRP-VII.E.2-Quality-Postsecondary-Credentials-of-Value-Exec-Summary-Removed.pdf.

[3] Program eligibility requirements available here: https://educateiowa.gov/adult-career-comm-college/community-colleges/gap-tuition-assistance-program-gap#Eligible_Programs.

[4] Hawaii Chamber of Commerce et al (2020). Available here: https://www.hawaiip20.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Promising-Credentials-in-Hawaii-FINAL-REPORT-10.20.20.pdf

Including Both Degree and Non-Degree Credentials

The CoV Work Group decided early on to approach this project with a broad base, rather than create separate standards for different types and levels of education. Our goal is to provide a quality framework (CoV Framework) that reflects both a need for consumers to have more information and to validate responsible use of public dollars.

There is increasing pressure from policy makers and employers to expand the concept of a credential of value beyond traditional college and university degrees. Additionally, there is increased likelihood at a federal level, and interest at a state level, in expanding the type and length of credentials eligible for financial aid support as a means of increasing access to postsecondary education and increasing the stackability of credentials.

Given the increased scrutiny that the value of higher education is facing, creating criteria only for non-degree credentials would create an unequal standard and miss out on the opportunity to demonstrate the value of the full range of postsecondary credentials. Considering the full range of credentials will allow for a more complete picture, as described by the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce:

> "Not surprisingly, as the relationship between education and jobs becomes more textured, the number of different credentials, including degrees, certificates, professional and industry-based certifications, occupational licenses, and badges has grown in number and diversity. Understandably, with no learning or earning data on postsecondary outcomes in place, there is growing uncertainty about quality and value of credentials and confusion about how they compare to and relate with each other."
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> Source: Carnevale, A. P. (2016). Credentials and competencies: Demonstrating the economic value of postsecondary education.

The varied skills, knowledge, and experience gained through a variety of postsecondary pathways give individuals essential training for careers. By emphasizing the economic relevance of postsecondary credentials, this effort can highlight one important aspect of the value of postsecondary education to individuals, institutions, and society as a whole.

Challenges of Creating a Quality Criteria Framework for both Degree and Non-Degree Credentials

Developing a framework that is sufficiently flexible to provide meaningful quality standards for credentials and programs that ranged from small workforce development training to degree and even graduate programs was a challenge. The CoV Work Group's early processes, in addition to viewing

models from other states, included facilitated discussions to surface topics and categories important to the CoV Work Group – and then find agreement and common definitions or descriptions of these key criteria. Early iterations moved toward a simple matrix or rubric for the CoV Framework, but continued confusion regarding which criteria related to:

- a credential (set of learning goals, certificate, or degree offered across providers),
- a program (delivery of the credential), and
- a provider (organization offering program and validating credential).

This confusion resulted in a move to a CoV Framework with specific criteria under each area of responsibility (credential, program, or provider). The framework is presented in Appendix B. While providing clarification, this added complexity increases the need for good communication regarding the purpose, process, and key definitions within the CoV Framework.

The Draft Quality Credentials Framework for Minnesota

A Credentials of Value (CoV) Framework for Minnesota establishes criteria for understanding the robustness of a credential, program, or provider based on five criteria areas:

1. evidence of job opportunities,
2. evidence of competencies mastered,
3. evidence of employment and earnings outcomes,
4. evidence of stackable learning sequences or enhanced career pathways, and
5. additional criteria related to evidence of learner support, and equity and inclusion.

What is Evaluated using the CoV Framework?

The CoV Framework on pages 11-12 is organized based on three areas of responsibility related to each opportunity for formal learning and instruction – Credential, Program, and Provider. The parameters of each are described below.

Credential

A *Credential* is documentation of attainment of a predetermined set of learning outcomes.

The *Credential* may be developed by a single provider, but more often is standardized across programs and providers. *Credential* is the measure of quality related to the design of an education experience. Quality standards for credentials include validation that the *Credential* contributes to employment and wage growth. The CoV Framework provides flexibility in that employment outcomes may be occupation specific, directly tied to the *Credential,* or they may be more general, indicating the *Credential* prepares learners for a range of occupational outcomes. Additional criteria for the *Credential* category include verification that learning goals (knowledge and competencies) are to be assessed, i.e. based on observed mastery; and validation that access, including examination and assessments are designed with flexibility to accommodate differing learners, including those with disabilities and learners of English. An additional criterion encourages evidence of *Credential* stack-ability.

Wage and demand data at the *Credential* level is a measure of the value of the learning outcomes – it demonstrates that the *Credential* is designed with consideration of labor market demand. It is not aligned with quality delivery or validating learners have mastered the outcomes.

A Credential may be assessed for quality designations statewide, without looking at provider- or program-specific criteria. For example, the State may wish to publish a list of *Credential*s aligned to

occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds for the purposes of highlighting quality *Credentials* with high economic value for individuals and the State.

Program

Program measures are aligned to how a credential is delivered.

Employment demand and wage data requested is results data specific to the *Program* as delivered. As possible, for historical *Program*s, this section will be pre-populated or completed using emerging public data tools (SLEDS). Additional *Program* criteria are best practices to ensure prospective learners (purchasers) have sufficient information including:

- published learning outcomes and assessment methods,
- instructors are knowledgeable within the field they are teaching,
- *Program*s are culturally inclusive and entry requirements do not result in bias or inequitable access, and
- if relevant, *Program* delivery is aligned to external examinations or *Credential* criteria.

Provider

Provider measures are aligned to how mindful and prepared a given organization or entity is in delivering the credential.

Key quality criteria exist that are specific to the *Provider* promoting and hosting education experiences. Many of these have to do with State of Minnesota requirements and basic consumer protection or information, such as being an approved education *Provider* as determined by the Office of Higher Education or accreditation through a U.S. Department of Education authorized accreditation agency, or other state agency, board or designated authority. Provider measures also include compliance with state standards such as the requirement that *Provider*s participate in mandated data collection.

Additionally, to provide *Credential* of value, it is expected that *Providers* have both a published statement and resources to support diversity, equity and inclusion – as well as wrap-around supports to contribute to student success. Further, it is encouraged that *Providers* are connecting to services and pathways that support learner growth and mobility across areas of education and employment.

How are Credentials, Programs, and Providers Evaluated?

Across *Credentials*, *Programs*, and *Providers*, the CoV Work Group developed criteria within five categories – Demand, Wages, Knowledge and Competencies, Access, and Encouraged.

Demand

Demand criteria ask for evidence that the *Credential* or *Program* are aligned to occupational demand, result high prevalence of employment or self-employment, or represent the attainment of skills valued across employers.

Wages

Wages criteria asks for evidence that the *Credential* or *Program* aligns to an occupation that pays a family-sustaining wage, results in economic mobility for an individual, or meets essential community needs.

Knowledge and Competencies

Knowledge and Competencies criteria asks for evidence that the *Credential* results in knowledge and competencies that are demonstrated, assessed, and aligned to occupational demand.

At a *Program* level, the Knowledge and Competencies criteria asks for evidence that learner outcomes are published (made available to prospective students), result in skills and knowledge needed in the aligned occupation, have a clear strategy for assessment, are taught by knowledgeable instructors, and prioritize culturally-inclusive practices.

At a *Provider* level, the Knowledge and Competencies criteria asks for evidence that the *Provider* is vetted by an agency, board, or other designated authority; intends to and has resources to address diversity, equity, and inclusion; provides wrap-around services for individual success; and participates in data reporting needed to measure individual outcomes after participation.

Access

Access criteria asks for evidence that the assessments and examinations required to obtain the *Credential* provide appropriate accommodations for individuals with need, including learners of English. A *Program* must demonstrate that entry requirements are realistic, appropriate, and do not result in bias or inequitable access. A *Provider* must have a statement of intention and resources to address diversity, equity and inclusion, and have wrap-around supports for student/trainee success.

Encouraged

The CoV Framework includes criteria that are encouraged. A *Credential* is encouraged to be stackable to additional training or upward career mobility. A *Provider* is encouraged to be collaborative, especially in connecting services and pathways for individuals between workforce systems, education systems, and employers or employer representing organizations.

The Quality Credentials of Value Framework

Purpose: This document provides a recommendation for quality criteria that the State should consider when establishing quality designations for degree and non-degree credentials and programs. The criteria were developed by the Minnesota Quality Credentials of Value Work Group.

Content: These criteria include 1) evidence of job opportunities, 2) evidence of competencies mastered, 3) evidence of employment and earnings outcomes, and 4) evidence of stackable learning sequences or enhanced career pathways, as well as additional criteria.

Criteria organized by credential, program, and provider: These criteria vary whether considered at the level of the credential, program, or provider:

- *Credential* includes degree and non-degree credentials, including education credentials and industry-recognized credentials (whether certificates, licenses, registered apprenticeship completion certificates, or other certifications). A *Credential* is typically approved by an external body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (e.g. Higher Learning Commission), U.S. Department of Labor, a state agency (e.g. Office of Higher Education), or an industry body (e.g. Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA)). A *Credential* may be assessed for quality designations statewide, without looking at provider- or program-specific criteria. For example, the State may wish to publish a list of credentials aligned to occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds for the purposes of highlighting quality credentials with high economic value for individuals and the State. In that case, the only relevant criteria in this framework would be under the *Credential* column (see the framework table on page 12).
- *Program* includes any published offering by a degree-granting institution, private career school, approved registered apprenticeship program, or workforce training provider recognized in state law. A *Program* may be assessed for quality designations for various purposes. For example, the consideration of expanded financial assistance to non-credit programs, or "badging" programs with a quality designation when communicating to prospective learners.
- *Provider* means any degree-granting institution, private career school, registered apprenticeship training provider, or workforce training provider recognized under state law.

(framework on next page)

Credential	Program	Provider
Demand: The credential meets one or more of the following demand criteria: a) It is aligned to occupations that are in demand statewide or regionally, as verified by job posting data, employer engagement, or other evidence. b) The credential represents the completion of a program that prepares individuals for a range of employment and further education opportunities and represents the attainment of essential learning outcomes valued across employers. c) The credential is associated with strong self-employment outcomes for credential holders. **Wages:** Credential is aligned to occupations that provide a family-sustaining wage either regionally or statewide, opportunity for economic mobility, or meet essential community needs. Wage outcomes should be demonstrated through job posting data, historic employment outcomes for individuals with this credential, or provider-demonstrated evidence. **Knowledge and competencies** are demonstrated/assessed and aligned with demand. **Access:** Assessments and examinations required in order to obtain the credential provide requested delivery method and appropriate accommodations for individuals with need, including but not limited to learners of English. **Encouraged – stackable credentials:** The credential is stackable to additional training or upward career mobility (academic ladder and/or enhanced career path).	**Demand:** Evidence that individuals completing the program find employment at high rates in a field/profession that utilizes the skills and long-term learning outcomes gained in their education, including successful self-employment or pursuit of additional related education* if relevant. **Wages:** Evidence that individuals completing the program achieve a family-sustaining wage either regionally or statewide, have economic mobility, or are working in occupations that meet essential community needs. These measures should account for individual's part-time/full-time status and job tenure. **Knowledge and competencies:** a) Learning outcomes are published and meet the skills and knowledge needed in the aligned in-demand occupations. b) Programs include a clear strategy for assessing learning based on published outcomes and/or are aligned to an external examination/credential. c) Instructors are knowledgeable in program of study and teaching methods. d) Programs prioritize culturally-inclusive practices. **Access:** Programs demonstrate entry requirements are realistic, appropriate, and do not result in bias/inequitable access	**Knowledge and competencies:** Providers are approved by OHE, accredited, or otherwise vetted by an agency, board or designated authority. **Access:** Provider has a statement of intention and resources to address diversity, equity and inclusion. Provider has wrap-around supports for student/trainee success. Providers participate in required data collection. **Encouraged – collaboration:** Prioritize state investment in providers and programs that connect services and pathways between workforce agencies, higher education and employers for the benefit of students and trainees.

* additional education building off the skills and long-term learning outcomes gained in the program

Evaluating the CoV Framework against Existing Programs

The CoV Work Group gathered examples of existing *Programs* and applied the CoV Framework. These *Programs* included:

- three welding training *Programs*:
  - a drop-in continuing education course,
  - a skill-based certificate, and
  - a credit-based welding program;
- an organizational development non-credit certificate program;
- a long-term care management non-credit certificate program;
- a Bachelor's of Arts degree with an English major offered at a private college; and
- a Google project management certification program offered through an online vendor with a credit equivalency of up to nine college credits as determined by the American Council on Education (ACE).

Generally, the CoV Work Group found that the CoV Framework criteria made sense for evaluating these *Credentials* and *Programs*. However, implementation will require greater specificity on the evidence needed to meet different criteria. The CoV Work Group noted that evaluating credentials and programs against these criteria will require significant administrative capacity. The CoV Work Group expressed concerns that sufficient capacity to implement this review may not exist at state agencies currently. Also, institutions and training providers may not have the capacity to supply the required information.

Challenges and Limitations

Challenges encountered by the CoV Work Group in developing the CoV Framework include:

- Vision and scope

  - Developing a forward-looking CoV Framework that embraces access, equity, cultural inclusivity, and early use of program "success" data aligning credential completion to employment and wages at a time when standards have not been formally put in place and access to these relatively new concepts is not yet available.

  - Historic measures of quality related to demand and wages do not account for the changing scope and nature of work in Minnesota, including emerging occupations, interdisciplinary education that is not occupation specific, and rising trends in self-employment at all levels of professions.

- Implementation

    - Concerns and considerations related to implementation of the CoV Framework, standardization of data to accompany submitted CoV Frameworks, standards for "sufficient evidence", and review/approval process.

    - Identifying an agency assigned to lead CoV Framework implementation while continuing to have diverse engagement. Program implementation will need endorsement and support of both the P-20 Education Partnership and the Governor's Workforce Development Board.

    - Engage other agencies and boards that "certify" credentials and education programs, such as Department of Transportation, Department of Health, Department of Agriculture, etc.

- Stakeholder engagement and commitment

    - Consistent representation across agencies and partners on the CoV Work Group.

    - Commitment for cross-agency adoption of the quality standards developed through the CoV Framework. Implementation to enhance existing credential repositories, such as the ETPL, WIOA approval process, accreditation, etc.

    - Outreach with business and industry will need to be a continued priority as they play a significant role in sharing what credentials are valuable to their industries.

The majority of *Program* examples reviewed by members of the CoV Work Group reflected education and training offered through higher education institutions. Additional outreach is needed to review the CoV Framework in collaboration with smaller education and workforce training providers. Key to this review is whether the CoV Framework process will be onerous and if an understanding of the level of research and labor market data expected as part of the review process can be achieved. Will smaller providers be required to use labor market data tools such as Lightcast, or is it feasible to use DEED reports or easy to access information such as Zip-Recruiter? The complexity of the request for evidence within the CoV Framework will need to be balanced with potential return, such as ability to support training through public funding.

A review of sample programs using the CoV Framework demonstrated a need for increased clarity and a well thought out implementation plan. The process undertaken generated conversation and resulted in suggested changes to increase the value of the Credentials identified to consumers. The increased value results from better understanding of the scope and inter-relatedness of credentials across P-20 and the workforce, increased alignment to defined skill demand within the labor market, alignment or

inclusion of industry recognized "certification exams", and incentivizing supportive services, including placement services, for non-credit students.

Goal #2: Implementation and Use of the CoV Framework

The CoV Work Group discussed the ways the CoV Framework could be used to highlight quality credentials, and to qualify programs for additional resources. These include, but are not limited to:

- Leverage the CoV Framework to expand access for individuals enrolled in quality programs to state financial aid administered by OHE as recommended by Minnesota's State Financial Assistance for High Quality Non-Degree Credentials team supported by the National Skills Coalition. This effort will utilize the CoV Framework. Minnesota was selected as one of three states to participate.

- Research available data to understand the state's capacity to identify credentials and programs that meet the CoV Framework criteria, including demonstrating high labor market value.

- Create a process for "badging" programs that meet the state's CoV Framework to create a signal for prospective students and trainees.

Each of these would require additional resources, including funding and staffing. Each would also require specific implementation of the CoV criteria – including establishing clear requirements.

Expand State Financial Assistance for Quality Non-Degree Credentials

The first use case for the CoV framework is to expand financial assistance to providers that offer programs that lead to quality non-degree credentials (QNDCs) that are not currently eligible for state financial aid. Currently, institutions seeking to participate in state financial aid programs must be eligible for federal Title IV programs. This creates substantial financial and logistical barriers for providers wanting to become eligible for state financial aid, particularly smaller training providers. However, if quality programs demonstrate strong labor market outcomes, the State has an interest in supporting participation in these programs. Beyond financial aid, the State could also expand supportive services for individuals enrolled in these programs, as well as ways to create more non-credit-to-credit pathways.

Staff from Minnesota State, OHE, DEED and others began participating in the State Financial Aid for Quality Non-Degree Credentials initiative with National Skills Coalition in the fall of 2022. Initial planning for this effort includes the following steps, now underway:

- complete the CoV Quality Credentials Framework,
- identify opportunities for expanding financial aid for Quality Non-Degree Credentials (QNDCs),
- build a state governance and leadership foundation for adopting QNDC definition for expansion of state financial aid options, and
- develop recommendations to address data gaps.

Publish Data on Credentials that Meet Demand and Wage Thresholds

The second use case is to publish a list of *Credentials* offered in Minnesota that align to occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds. As the credential landscape continues to grow and evolve, there is an increased need for clarity about which credentials are associated with the strongest labor market outcomes. This is true for degrees and non-degree credentials, including non-credit workforce training. By creating analysis showing which credentials align to strong labor market outcomes, the State can provide clarity to individuals seeking training and also form a baseline of data necessary for implementation of the CoV framework.

The CoV workgroup reviewed examples from other states that have analyzed alignment of credentials to labor market outcomes. States have combined labor market data with employer engagement to help make sense of the alignment for a wide range of non-degree credentials. One interesting case is Hawaii, where the Promising Credentials[5] report used labor market data to identify non-degree workforce credentials aligned to occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds, and then categorized the credentials according to the level of education they are associated with. This approach points to ways individuals can stack short-term credentials with longer term degrees to enhance skills and improve career outcomes.

This analysis would require additional resources and data. Minnesota already publishes employment outcomes by academic program for institutions and programs participating in state financial aid.[6] This analysis ties program completion data collected by OHE to wage records submitted to DEED by employers for the purposes of administering the State's unemployment insurance program. Beginning in 2022, OHE and DEED partnered to expand OHE's data collection to include all programs listed on the State's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). This will enable analysis of employment outcomes for all programs on the ETPL. While this expansion provides further progress in collecting data on the full

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[5]Hawaii Chamber of Commerce et al (2020). Available here: https://www.hawaiip20.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Promising-Credentials-in-Hawaii-FINAL-REPORT-10.20.20.pdf

[6] Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development. Graduate Employment Outcomes. Available here: https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/lmi/etd/Results.aspx.

range of credentials in Minnesota, more is still needed. Non-degree, non-credit programs that are not listed on the ETPL will be absent, as will credentials valued by employers but not currently offered in Minnesota.

In other states, these analyses were accomplished in two steps: 1) identifying a list of occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds, and 2) using job posting data to identify credentials required for those occupations. DEED's Occupations in Demand tool accomplishes the first of those two steps. However, the second step would require funding and staff time to access data and conduct analysis.

Create a Process for "Badging" Programs that Meet the CoV Framework

The third use case is to create a process for badging programs meeting the State's definition of quality. Minnesota already publishes lists of postsecondary education and training programs. Examples include the MyHigherEd website maintained by OHE (www.myhighered.mn.gov), and the MN Career and Education Explorer website maintained by DEED (https://apps.deed.state.mn.us/lmi/cpt/home). A badging process would allow for institutions and training providers to earn a quality designation that could be published in lists like these, as well as published by the institutions or training providers.

The first two use cases described above would lay useful groundwork for the creation of a larger badging process. The process of qualifying programs for financial aid eligibility requires rigorous implementation of the CoV framework in a way that is specific, transparent, and consistent. Assembling the data and analysis required to identify all credentials aligned to occupations that meet demand and wage thresholds in Minnesota provides the necessary data for institutions and training providers to answer those aspects of the CoV criteria. With those steps in place, a larger process of badging programs that meet the State's definition of quality would become more realistic.

The CoV workgroup identified the following questions for creating this process – among others:

- Who would administer this process?
- How would institutions and training providers apply for the designation, and how much work would the process require for institutions and training providers?
- Who would further develop the CoV framework with enough specificity that institutions and training providers could know what evidence is required to meet the criteria?
- Would the process allow flexibility of granting preliminary designations while more of the required evidence is gathered and assessed?
- Would the designation or badge be a single designation or would there be a range of designations (one to five stars for example, or bronze/silver/gold)? More discussion of how the designation would be used could inform this point.

More work is needed to answer these questions.

Additional Considerations

The CoV Work Group reviewed and discussed the existing quality assurance work performed through state agencies, program review processes, and accreditation processes. The group recommends that implementation of the CoV Framework should be done in a way that avoids duplication of existing efforts.

In 2022, the Office of Higher Education (OHE) partnered with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) to expand person-level enrollment and completion data collections to all education and training programs listed on the state's Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). This partnership will allow for analysis of employment outcomes for more individuals attaining non-degree and non-credit credentials, especially those offered by non-institutional providers.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the effectiveness of the CoV Framework.

- Data and resource limitations may impact the ability of state agencies to implement the CoV Framework in a meaningful way.

- The non-degree and non-credit credentials offered in the state that are not listed on the ETPL and are not participating in state financial aid are still not subject to data reporting requirements. Therefore, employment outcomes for completers of those credentials will not be known. Expanded data partnerships would be required to collect the data needed to understand outcomes for individuals completing those programs.

- Successful implementation of the CoV Framework will require funding to staff and support the infrastructure needed for the goal areas identified by the CoV Work Group.

Appendix A: Credentials of Value Work Group, 2022-23 Meetings

First Name	Last Name	Affiliation
Ben	Baglio	Governor's Workforce Development Board - MN DEED
Deb	Broberg	RealTime Talent
Jennifer	Byers	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Julie	Dincau	Minnesota Department of Education
Meredith	Fergus	Office of Higher Education
Megan	FitzGibbon	Office of Higher Education
Scott	Godfrey	Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Brad	Hasskamp	Minnesota Department of Education
Bryan	Helminiak	University of St. Thomas
Robin	Hemenway	Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Wanda	Jensen	Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards
Kay	Kammen	Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Katie	McClelland	Minnesota Technology Association
Jacquelynn	Mol Sletten	Office of Higher Education
Jess	Niebuhr	Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
Ingrid	Nuttall	University of Minnesota
Erin	Olson	RealTime Talent
Christen	Pentek	Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Mitchell	Radtke	Minnesota Private College Council
Steve	Rogness	Office of Higher Education
Mary	Rothchild	Minnesota State Colleges and Universities
Megan	Rozowski	Minnesota Private College Council
Bob	Rubinyi	University of Minnesota
Lauryn	Schothorst	Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Erin	Slattengren	University of Minnesota
Dan	Solomon	Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry
Bob	Stine	University of Minnesota
Ryan	Torma	University of Minnesota
Amy	Walstein	Minnesota Business Partnership
Carrie	Wandler	Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Jena	Zangs	University of St. Thomas
Julie	Zilka	University of St. Thomas
Dennis	Olson	Executive Committee Lead