



Credential Attainment Cohort

Capstone Project

June 2020

Sponsored by:

Employment and Training Administration
U.S. Department of Labor

Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education

Rehabilitation Services Administration
U.S. Department of Education



Table of Contents

What is this resource?.....	2
Who might find this resource helpful?	3
How does Credential Attainment fit into the bigger WIOA picture?	3
Will every participant earn a credential that meets the standards of the Credential Attainment indicator?	4
What is recognized as a postsecondary credential under the WIOA Credential Attainment indicator?	5
Specific Scenarios	7
How should an earned recognized postsecondary credential be documented?.....	10
Where to go for more information?.....	11

What is this resource?

This resource focuses on Credential Attainment, one of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) six primary indicators of performance. The resource complements the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool and the accompanying narrative.

The Credential Attainment indicator measures the percentage of participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training (OJT) and customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program. A participant should only be included in the Credential Attainment indicator once per period of participation.

ETA designed the Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool to provide technical assistance to grantees in understanding the requirements of recognized education and training programs related to the WIOA Credential Attainment indicator, and in developing policies and procedures for applying previously released Federal joint guidance.

Who might find this resource helpful?

The 2020 Credential Attainment Cohort designed this resource to provide background and context for frontline and local program staff using ETA's Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool. It is relevant for staff implementing any program that uses the WIOA definition of the Credential Attainment primary indicator of performance, including programs across titles I, II, and IV.

How does Credential Attainment fit into the bigger WIOA picture?

WIOA establishes six primary indicators of performance. Five of the six indicators look at outcomes for job seekers, and one indicator looks at outcomes of services to employers. The indicators for job seekers measure participants' employment, earnings, educational attainment, and education/training progress, including Credential Attainment.

For further information on WIOA performance, see the following:

- Guidance: [TEGL 10-16, Change 1](#), [OCTAE Program Memorandum 17-2](#), and [RSA-TAC-17-01](#)
- Additional resources: [Workforce GPS Performance Reporting site](#), [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education Accountability and Reporting site](#), [Rehabilitative Services Administration Workforce](#)

The six primary indicators of performance under WIOA are as follows:

1. **Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit** measures whether participants are employed during the second quarter after exit.¹
2. **Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit** measures whether participants are employed during the fourth quarter after exit.²
3. **Median Earnings** measures earnings of participants who are employed during the second quarter after exit.

¹ For WIOA Youth, this indicator includes enrollment in training or education.

² For WIOA Youth, this indicator includes enrollment in training or education.

4. **Credential Attainment** captures the percent of participants in education or training who attain recognized credentials during participation and up to one year after exit.
5. The fifth job seeker indicator tracks progress during participation and after exit. The **Measurable Skill Gains** indicator is unique in that it captures education/training progress during every program year that a participant is participating and enrolled in education or training.
6. The sixth indicator focuses on outcomes of services to employers. Grantees may choose two of three pilot approaches for **Effectiveness in Serving Employers**.

Note: There is overlap between the Credential Attainment and Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) indicators. A credential earned that meets the criteria of the Credential Attainment indicator may potentially be used to document a MSG. Additionally, credentials earned that *do not* meet the criteria of the Credential Attainment indicator may still be applicable to the MSG indicator.

Will every participant earn a credential that meets the standards of the Credential Attainment indicator?

No. WIOA supports both credentialed and non-credential instruction. WIOA intends to connect participants with the appropriate training and skills to obtain sustainable employment. While ensuring participants are attaining recognized credentials is important, the critical focus should be on ensuring each participant receives the best possible services and support to obtain lasting employment and optimal earnings. The best service for a particular participant may be completing a course that does not lead to a recognized postsecondary credential (e.g., OSHA 10). Note that in many of these cases such a service would not be considered an education or training service (e.g., individualized career service), and if participants are not receiving an education or training service then they would not be included in the measure as a success *or* a failure.

What is recognized as a postsecondary credential under the WIOA Credential Attainment indicator?

A recognized postsecondary credential is defined in WIOA as a credential consisting of:

- ▶ An industry-recognized certificate or certification;³
- ▶ A certificate of completion of an apprenticeship;
- ▶ A license recognized by the State involved or Federal government;
- ▶ An associate or baccalaureate degree; or
- ▶ A graduate degree, but ONLY for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Joint guidance issued by the Departments of Labor and Education ([TEGL 10-16, Change 1, OCTAE Program Memorandum 17-2, RSA-TAC-17-01](#)) elaborates that a recognized postsecondary credential is awarded in **recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an industry/occupation**. These technical or industry/occupational skills are generally based on standards developed or endorsed by employers or industry associations. Such certificates must recognize technical or industry/occupational skills for the specific industry/occupation rather than general skills related to safety, hygiene, etc., even if such general skills certificates are broadly required to qualify for entry-level employment or advancement in employment.

Certificates awarded by workforce development boards (WDBs) and work readiness certificates are *not* included in this definition because neither type of certificate is recognized industry-wide, nor documents the measurable technical or industry/occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advancement within an occupation.

The following are some examples that do NOT meet the criteria for a recognized credential under the Credential Attainment indicator:

³ Industry-recognized credentials may include those awarded by a professional, industry, or employer organization or product manufacturer or developer using a valid and reliable assessment of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities.

- ▶ General computer and security
- ▶ Good safety practices
- ▶ Good hygiene and health practices
- ▶ Work and career readiness certificates

As a point of reference in determining whether a credential meets the criteria for a recognized credential, keep in mind that a variety of different public and private entities issue recognized postsecondary credentials, including the following:

- ▶ A State educational agency or a State agency responsible for administering vocational and technical education within a State;
- ▶ An institution of higher education qualified to participate in Federal student financial aid programs;
- ▶ An institution of higher education that is formally controlled, or has been formally sanctioned or chartered, by the governing body of an Indian tribe or tribes;
- ▶ A professional, industry, or employer organization or product manufacturer or developer using a valid and reliable assessment of an individual's knowledge, skills, and abilities;
- ▶ ETA's Office of Apprenticeship or a recognized State Apprenticeship Agency;
- ▶ A public regulatory agency, which awards a credential upon an individual's fulfillment of educational, work experience, or skill requirements that are legally necessary for an individual to use an occupational or professional title or to practice an occupation or profession (Federal Aviation Administration aviation mechanic license, or a State-licensed asbestos inspector). These agencies typically award occupational licenses;
- ▶ A program that has been approved by the Department of Veterans Affairs to offer education benefits to veterans and other eligible persons; or
- ▶ Job Corps, which issues certificates for completing career training programs that are based on industry skills standards and certification requirements.

Note: given the differences in individual states' regulation of educational institutions, there may be variations across states in which institutions may issue recognized credentials.

Elements of the [Joint Participant Individual Record Layout \(PIRL\)](#)⁴ provide further clarity on who would be included in the Credential Attainment indicator. For instance, if a participant is "yes" for either of the following, they are included in the indicator:

⁴ The Joint PIRL was developed collaboratively by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education, and represents a set of data elements with common definitions that are shared across all titles for WIOA performance reporting.

- ▶ Participated in Postsecondary Education During Program Participation (PIRL 1332): The participant was in a postsecondary education program that leads to a credential or degree from an accredited postsecondary education institution at any point during program participation. Note: This data element relates to the credential indicator denominator and those who are recorded as having been in a postsecondary education program leading to a credential during program participation are included in the credential rate denominator.
- ▶ Enrolled in Secondary Education Program (PIRL 1401): The participant was enrolled in a secondary education program at or above the 9th grade level, whether already enrolled in education or training at the time of application to the program OR became enrolled in an education or training program at or above the 9th grade level at any point while participating in the program. A secondary education program includes both secondary school and enrollment in a program of study with instruction designed to lead to a high school equivalent credential. Examples may include adult high school credit programs and programs designed to prepare participants to pass recognized high school equivalency exams such as the GED, HiSET, or TASC. Programs of study designed to teach English proficiency skills or literacy skills below the 9th grade equivalent are not considered secondary education programs.

Specific Scenarios

In specific situations, it may be challenging to determine whether a recognized postsecondary credential has been earned. The following scenarios address a few of those gray areas.

Scenario 1:

In partnership with a local workforce board, CVS Health offers a 20-hour unpaid pharmacy technician pre-apprenticeship program.

Does this pre-apprenticeship program meet the definition of a recognized education program leading to a postsecondary credential?

NO. Following the Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool's Credential Checklist, the program IS offered by a professional, industry, or employer organization, but the program DOES NOT lead to a credential resulting in measurable technical or industry/occupational skills.

A participant enrolls in, and completes, the pre-apprenticeship program.

Is this participant included in the Credential Attainment indicator?

NO. Unless the pre-apprenticeship is provided as a component of a larger program of study, pre-apprenticeship is considered a type of work experience (and therefore, an individualized career service) and the participant is not included in the denominator and therefore, is neither a success nor a failure under the indicator.

Additional consideration:

- ▶ The participant could be included in the cohort for the Credential Attainment indicator if they ultimately enroll in a full apprenticeship program, and considered a success if they complete the full apprenticeship program or attain an interim credential that meets the criteria for Credential Attainment as part of the apprenticeship program.

Scenario 2:

A community or technical college offers a training program meant to prepare students for the Java SE 11 Programmer I certification test.

Does this training program meet the definition of a recognized education program leading to a postsecondary credential?

YES. Following the Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool's Credential Checklist, the program IS offered by an institute of higher education, and the program DOES lead to a credential resulting in measurable technical or industry/occupational skills.

A participant who is enrolled in the training program completes the training but gets hired by an employer before taking the certification test.

Does this participant count as a success under the Credential Attainment indicator?

NO. Since the participant did not take the test that would earn them the credential, the participant is not considered to have earned a credential.

Additional considerations:

- ▶ The participant IS a success under the MSG indicator for completing the training program (i.e., satisfactory or better progress report towards established milestones).
- ▶ The participant may be a success under the Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit indicator if the participant is still employed two quarters after exit.

Scenario 3:

A community or technical college offers a welding degree program. Upon successful completion of the program, a student will have earned multiple welding certificates (i.e., Welder's Helper, Shielded Metal Arc Welder, Gas Metal Arc Welder, Gas Tungsten Arc Welder).

Does this training program meet the definition of a recognized education program leading to a postsecondary credential?

YES. Following the Postsecondary Credential Attainment Decision Tree Tool's Credential Checklist, the program IS offered by an institute of higher education, and the program DOES lead to credentials resulting in measurable technical or industry/occupational skills.

A participant enrolls in the welding degree program, but only completes the Shielded Metal Arc Welder Certificate.

Does this participant count as a success under the Credential Attainment indicator?

YES. Since the participant completed a credential resulting in measurable technical or industry/occupational skills, the participant is a success under the indicator.

Additional considerations:

- ▶ The participant IS a success under the MSG indicator for completing the Shielded Metal Arc Welder Certificate (i.e., successful passage of an exam that is required for a particular occupation or progress in attaining technical or occupational skills as evidenced by trade-related benchmarks).
- ▶ The local board may want to review the welding degree program against current employer demand to determine whether they want to enroll participants in the full degree program or rather in discrete components of the program that lead to credentials most needed by local employers.
- ▶ The local board may want to consider additional factors than Credential Attainment rates only when deciding whether they are willing to continue funding programs. For example, if programs have low completion rates, even if the participants are technically receiving credentials, some locals may choose to encourage participants to enroll in programs that have higher completion rates.

How should an earned recognized postsecondary credential be documented?

Joint guidance issued by the Departments of Labor and Education ([TEGL 07-18, OCTAE Program Memorandum 19-1, RSA-TAC-19-01](#)) provides that the following may be used to document that a participant in education or training services earned a recognized postsecondary credential:

- ▶ Match to education/training data system where credential was earned;
- ▶ Paper or electronic copy of credential itself (e.g., diploma);
- ▶ Paper or electronic copy of school record showing credential earned;
- ▶ Follow-up survey from program participants attesting to credential earned; or
- ▶ Case notes documenting information obtained from education or training provider regarding credential earned.

WIOA requires that grantees (e.g., program administrators) establish procedures to ensure the information contained in their quarterly and annual reports is valid and reliable. As it relates to the Credential Attainment indicator, participants in the 2020 Credential Attainment Cohort recommended that grantees establish the following:

- ▶ Central location to store data on credentials earned by participants;
- ▶ Process for identifying whether a given credential meets the Credential Attainment criteria as a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent;
- ▶ Process for documenting that a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, was earned;
- ▶ Prioritized list of sources of documentation, identifying administrative data match as the most reliable; and
- ▶ Prompt to determine whether the credential earned also counts under the MSG indicator.

Where to go for more information?

[TEGL 10-16, Change 1, OCTAE Program Memorandum 17-2, RSA-TAC-17-01:](#)
Performance Accountability Guidance for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I, Title II, Title III, and Title IV Core Programs

[TEGL 07-18, OCTAE Program Memorandum 19-1, RSA-TAC-19-01:](#)
Guidance for Validating Jointly Required Performance Data Submitted under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

[TEGL 14-18:](#)
Aligning Performance Accountability Reporting, Definitions, and Policies Across Workforce Employment and Training Programs Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor

[Joint Participant Individual Record Layout \(PIRL\):](#)
Set of data elements with common definitions shared across all titles for WIOA performance reporting, developed collaboratively by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education

WorkforceGPS Credential Attainment Resource Page:
<https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/12/18/18/43/Credential-Attainment-Resource-Page>

WorkforceGPS Credential Attainment E-Learning Module:
<https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2018/07/02/19/10/Credential-Attainment-E-Learning-Module>

WorkforceGPS WIOA Desk Reference—Credential Attainment Indicator Decision Path:
<https://performancereporting.workforcegps.org/resources/2017/10/10/17/25/WIOA-Desk-Reference-Credential-Attainment-Indicator-Decision-Path>

[Credential Attainment Guide for State VR Agencies: http://wintac-s3.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/topic-areas/t05_CommonPerformance/t05_resources/Credential-Attainment-Guide-Final-Accessible.pdf](http://wintac-s3.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/topic-areas/t05_CommonPerformance/t05_resources/Credential-Attainment-Guide-Final-Accessible.pdf)