**Industry Credentials Initiative and Demonstrate Value  
Through Linking Data Network**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Background and Partners**

**Q: What is the Industry Credentials Initiative?**

A: This is a landmark initiative developed by the National Student Clearinghouse (the Clearinghouse) in partnership with the National Association of Manufacturers Manufacturing Institute and the U.S. Census Bureau (Census Bureau). The overarching goal of the initiative is to create a public-private data infrastructure that connects education attainment data with industry recognized credential attainment data (e.g., certifications and certificates) and, aggregate labor-market outcomes for the purposes of understanding successful career and credential pathways to the workforce.

**Q: What is the Demonstrate Value Through Linking Data Network?**

A: Workcred is convening a network of certification bodies to explore the potential for data-linking efforts to improve understanding of the value of certifications, the labor-market outcomes of individuals who hold them, and insights into successful career pathways into the workforce. The network is working with the Clearinghouse to match data from certification bodies, educational attainment and enrollment data from universities, and aggregate wage data from the Census Bureau.

**Q: What is the problem that this initiative is trying to solve?**

A: There is no complete, centralized source of data on the outcomes or impact of certifications. While there have been isolated efforts to collect this data by states, as well as self-reported data from certification bodies, outcomes data are fragmented and incomplete. If this information was available, we could understand successful student pathways between education and the workforce.

**Q: What is the National Student Clearinghouse and why did the organization get involved in this initiative?**

A: Founded in 1993 by the higher education community, the Clearinghouse relieves the administrative burden and costs related to student data reporting and exchange. The Clearinghouse is a non-profit and leading provider of educational reporting, data exchange, verification, and research services. Education leaders rely on the Clearinghouse’s unique national student data resources to better understand student pathways and outcomes in order to help students succeed.

This initiative allows the Clearinghouse to add industry recognized credentials to its national student data resources to expand the understanding of successful career and credential pathways and outcomes from education to workforce. This expanded reporting will inform education leaders, policy makers, credentialing bodies, accreditors, and eventually, parents, and students about the variety of pathways that lead to an individual’s success.

**Q: What is Workcred and why did the organization get involved with this work?**

Founded in 2014, Workcred is a non-profit affiliate of the American National Standards Institute. Workcred focuses on the strengthening workforce quality by improving the credentialing system, ensuring its ongoing relevance, and preparing employers, workers, educators, and governments to use it effectively.

Workcred got involved in this initiative because certifications are frequently misunderstood by policymakers, funders of research, state officials, consumers of certifications, and education and training providers. One of the challenges to improving understanding is that there is no complete, centralized source of administrative data on the outcomes or impacts of certifications. In addition, there is a growing need to understand the role of certifications in career and credentialing pathways, including the impact on wages, which can help the certification bodies serve their clients better.

**Benefits and Value Proposition**

**Q: What are the benefits for credentialing bodies that participate in this initiative?**

A: When credentialing bodies submit their individual credential attainment data to the Clearinghouse, it is matched with enrollment and degree attainment data, and returned to the credentialing bodies in a student-level detail file. In addition, an aggregate-level report that provides insights into the education and credentialing pathways of certification holders is created. The aggregate report provides information about the most common types of institutions where certification holders were enrolled, the most common programs of study, the highest education credentials attained, and demographic information. In addition, aggregate labor-market outcomes from the Census Bureau are analyzed and produced through our pilot process with the agency.

**Q: What are the value propositions for credentialing bodies that participate in this initiative?**

A: The value proposition to the certification bodies is seen in five areas:

1. Visibility – Bring increased awareness and visibility to the certification and the profession
2. Credibility – Use third-party, validated data to provide evidence about the value of the certification
3. Strategic planning – Use data to improve strategic planning, support decision making, gather information to inform the development of new products, and obtain a more complete picture of the certification holders
4. Marketing – Identify gaps in certifications earned by underserved populations; refine outreach to new and existing markets; show wages before and after earning the certification; and use data to advance the industry and/or occupation
5. Career pathways – Understand career pathways and earnings of certified persons; gather information on what certification holders studied, how they prepared for their career, what other certifications they hold; understand tangential careers and how to better target those audiences; and identify people interested in the occupation earlier in their education or career

**Q: How will industry credential attainment information help the educational institutions participating in** **Clearinghouse services?**

A: From K-12 to postsecondary education, institutions are clamoring for industry credential attainment information, particularly, when those successful outcomes can be used for metrics related to program performance and student outcomes or related to higher education performance funding formulas used by, at least, 36 states.

**Privacy and Data Protection**

**Q: How does the Clearinghouse protect student data?**

A: All Clearinghouse services are designed to facilitate compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Higher Education Act, and other applicable laws. The Clearinghouse is a signatory to the [Student Privacy Pledge](https://studentprivacypledge.org/privacy-pledge/), an official supporter of [Student Data Principles](https://studentdataprinciples.org/), meets the requirements of a [trusted commerce vendor](https://sealserver.trustwave.com/cert.php?customerId=w6ordzWietNVpWYZrnaQ7dOFgYY8Ww&size=105x54&style=invert) for verification transactions, and complies with AICPA’s Trust Services Principles through its SOC 2 report. Further information about the Clearinghouse’s privacy commitment is available [here](https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/about/our-privacy-commitment/).

The Clearinghouse has a Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) and a well-established internal program focused on information security and data privacy. Credentialing bodies are welcome to request an onsite audit of the information security and data privacy program with the CISO. Email [industrycredentials@studentclearinghouse.org](mailto:industrycredentials@studentclearinghouse.org) to arrange that meeting.

**Q: What other protections are offered to students around data privacy?**

A: Under FERPA, students can request to block their records, which institutions report to the Clearinghouse, and that information will not be shared in student level detail reports. Credentialing bodies can also block any individual-level data submitted to the Clearinghouse through a flag and that individual-level credential attainment information will not be shared in reporting going back to institutions or other education stakeholders.

**Data Requirements and Outcomes**

**Q: What data about certification holders is required to participate in the Industry Credentials initiative?**

A: Credentialing bodies must collect the following minimum data to participate: first name, last name, credential name, credential type, credential purpose, credential award data, and credential expiration date. To improve the data matching process, it is helpful if credentialing bodies collect data of birth. For credentialing bodies to receive more insights, it is encouraged to collect data on race/ethnicity, gender, and military status.

The industry credential data specifications are outlined in the implementation [guide;](https://studentclearinghouse.info/onestop/wp-content/uploads/IndustryCredentials_ImplementationGuide.pdf) there is a sample file formatted to that specification titled “Data Fields with Examples” in the resources section of the [industry credential service overview](https://www.studentclearinghouse.org/workforce/industry-credentials/) on the Clearinghouse website.

**Q: Are there other data fields that if provided to the Clearinghouse would result in more robust information being provided to the certification bodies?**

A: If certification bodies provide information about the race/ethnicity, gender, and disability status, the certification bodies will receive more detailed data reports. In addition, matching of records can be improved if certification bodies provide some additional data such as: date of birth, name of educational institution, middle initial or name, previous first name, previous last name, address, zip code, cell phone, or email; date of birth is the data field that helps to improve data matching accuracy.

**Q: What is the status of integrating aggregate labor-market outcomes into the Industry Credentials service and what will credentialing bodies receive back related to aggregate labor-market outcomes?**

A: The Census Bureau, the Clearinghouse, and the National Association of Manufacturers have been working together since early 2019 on processing and analyzing the link between education, industry certification data from the pilot participants, and aggregate labor-market data. This pilot project has produced preliminary aggregate labor-market outcome results for entry-level manufacturing certifications. [This](https://www.studentclearinghouse.info/onestop/wp-content/uploads/IndustryCredentialsWhitepaper.pdf) white paper discusses those pilot results. Those results were released after going through the disclosure review board process at the Census Bureau. Please note that only aggregate-level information will be released from the Census Bureau.

**Process to Participate, Costs and Other Clearinghouse Services**

**Q: What is the process for a certification body to participate in the Industry Credentials Initiative?**

A: The process for certification bodies to participate in the Industry Credentials Initiative is as follows:

* Assess process to pull minimum data and historical data
* Set up SFTP/application credentials for certifying body
* Work with Clearinghouse to submit test data
* Submit cohort data including historical data
* Generate student-level and aggregate education outcomes reports
* Create file to submit to the U.S. Census Bureau
* Review and analyze U.S. Census Bureau aggregate labor-market outcomes

**Q: What will the Clearinghouse charge for this service?**

A: Today, this initiative is a pilot and the Clearinghouse is not currently charging for this service. The eventual pricing model will be based on recovering the Clearinghouse’s costs for providing the service. An example of Clearinghouse pricing is the $1,995 per year subscription pricing the Clearinghouse charges the largest institutions, based on enrollment, for the StudentTracker® for Colleges and Universities reporting service. This service is like the Industry Credentials service. The Clearinghouse also offers product bundle pricing where institutions pay for Verification Services, for example, and receive the StudentTracker® reporting service for free. Product bundle pricing may be leveraged in the Industry Credential service pricing model.

**Q: What is the Clearinghouse’s Verification Services?**

A: Verification Services provides the institutions participating with the Clearinghouse the opportunity to reduce their administrative burden of responding to background screeners, as one example, to verify the degrees of students for employment purposes. That service allows the processing of multiple degree verification requests in one session. Participation in this service for credentialing bodies is not required as the Clearinghouse understands many credentialing bodies provide that service today. More information on that service is [here](https://nscverifications.org/degreeverify/).

**Contact for Additional Information**

**Q: Who can I contact about participating in the Industry Credentials initiative?**

A: If you would like more information about the Industry Credentials Initiative, please contact Karen Elzey, associate executive director, Workcred, [kelzey@workcred.org](mailto:kelzey@workcred.org) or Melissa Buckley, relationship management director of resources & analytics, National Student Clearinghouse, [buckley@studentclearinghouse.org](mailto:buckley@studentclearinghouse.org).