MCTA Credential Transparency Request for Information (RFI)

Date of issue: June 6, 2022

Response Guidelines

RFI Scope:
Education-technology products that deal with the credentialing life-cycle

Key Dates:
Issue Date: June 6, 2022
Due Date: **June 30, 2022**
Demonstrations/Discussion: TBD

Issuance:
This RFI and any related notices will be posted at http://www.mhec.org/news. In the event MCTA finds it necessary to change any of the dates or events related to this RFI, the information will be posted at http://mhec.org/news.

Contact/Questions:
MCTA Contact for RFI:
Deb Kidwell, Director of Technology Initiatives
Midwestern Higher Education Compact
debk@mhec.org

Response submission:

Submit response at: **MCTA Credential Transparency Request for Information (RFI) Response Submission Form**

Submission should include the following files, in the specified format:

1. Credential Transparency Capabilities (word or pdf file)
2. CTDL Publishing Support File (excel file)

Confidentiality
Information submitted in response to this RFI will not be considered trade secret materials or confidential information. If information is submitted that is believed to be trade secret materials, the submission must:

- Clearly mark all trade secret materials;
- Include a statement justifying with specificity the trade secret designation for each item

The respondent must defend any action seeking release of the materials it believes to be a trade secret, and indemnify and hold harmless MHEC, its Commissioners, agents and employees, from any judgements awarded against MHEC in favor of the party requesting the materials, and any and all costs connected with the defense. In submitting a response to this RFI, the respondent agrees that this indemnification survives as long as the trade secret materials are in possession of MHEC.

In the event a request is made for information which the respondent has identified as trade secret, MHEC agrees to notify the respondent of said request and provide its determination as to whether disclosure is legally required, in addition to anticipated dates, if any, and to allow the respondent provider an opportunity, in its discretion and at its sole expense, to seek a protective order or otherwise protect the confidentiality of the information.

General Overview

Purpose of the RFI

The Midwest Credential Transparency Alliance (MCTA)[1], acting through the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) and Credential Engine, is soliciting information on education technology products pertaining to credentialing life-cycles. This information will be used by the MCTA to guide further discussions on the capabilities and tools that are available now, and that might be available in the future.

Each vendor is being asked to identify the credential-related products they have in this space, along with essential information about managing and disseminating credential information using those products.

The information, data, comments, or reactions obtained may be used as research for future solicitations. This RFI does not constitute an Invitation for Bid, Request for Proposal, or Informal Request for Bid or Proposal and is not to be construed as a commitment by MCTA, MHEC, or Credential Engine.

Background

MHEC (https://www.mhec.org) MHEC brings together Midwestern states to develop and support best practices, collaborative efforts, and cost-sharing opportunities. Through these efforts it works to ensure strong, equitable postsecondary educational opportunities and outcomes for all. MHEC works with and for a variety of stakeholders within and across member states, including higher education system leaders, state policymakers, legislators, and institutional leaders, while always maintaining a focus on students and their success. MHEC is statutorily-created in each of its member states which include: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Credential Engine (https://credentialengine.org) is a non-profit whose mission is mapping the credential landscape with clear and consistent information to fuel the creation of resources that make it easy for people to find the pathways that are best for them.

Together they formed the MCTA, a collaborative initiative focused on advancing credential transparency across the Midwest. MCTA uses a regional community of practice to advance credential transparency by ensuring that information about all credentials in the region is transparent, connected, comparable, comprehensive, and usable. All twelve MHEC member states have participated in the MCTA, whose goals are to advance a linked open data strategy to consistently describe for the public the key attributes of about 150,000 credential offerings, such as their associated competencies, quality indicators, costs, transfer value, occupational codes, pathways, outcomes, and more.

[1] The Midwest Credential Transparency Alliance (MCTA) is a regional alliance focused on advancing credential transparency in service of learners, workers, educators, employers and policymakers across the Midwest. See https://www.mhec.org/policy-research/midwest-credential-transparency-alliance

The MCTA works as a group to identify technical and business requirements for the procurement of tools and services related to credential transparency, such as the issuing of digital credentials, career planning and pathway services, transfer and prior learning assessment services, credential data management services, and more. Prioritized contract opportunities will be advanced through competitive RFP processes in order to spur supportive technologies at negotiated prices.

The U.S. Credential Marketplace

Credential Engine's research report, *Counting U.S. Postsecondary and Secondary Credentials*[2], finds that there are nearly 1 million credentials offered in the U.S. While these represent important opportunities for people to get ahead, the current landscape is not easily navigable. With so many credentials to choose from—and without widespread adoption of standards for comparing and evaluating them—people get lost and lose out on opportunity. People need better information to navigate pathways to credentials, into the workforce, and toward their goals. Credential transparency[3] can illuminate paths to a better future by shining a light on available pathways through education and training into careers. Transparent credential data can also help education and training providers, policy makers, employers, and state agencies to discover areas of need so they can better allocate resources to create missing pathways or to fill gaps in existing pathways. This way people can have equitable, reliable, and accessible paths to fill their needs and everyone can find the best avenues to success.

For this RFI, credentials are broadly defined using the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL)[4] schema, which includes definitions for multiple credential types[5], specifically badges, certificates, apprenticeships, certificates of completion, certifications, associate degrees, bachelor's degree, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, professional doctorates, diplomas, general education development (GED), licenses, and microcredentials. Information about a specific credential offering, such as an Associate's Degree in Energy Technology from Ivy Tech Community College, can be richly described using the CTDL schema. With over 700 terms defined, and multiple connections supported amongst these terms, the CTDL schema can be used to describe many different aspects of a credential in a consistent manner across providers. Publishing this information to the Credential Registry enables credential providers to connect into linked open data networks and products for career exploration and pathways, transfer options, competencies and skills, assessments, digital learning records, outcomes reporting, quality assurance, and more.

The Lifecycle of a Credential

This RFI focuses on the capabilities of technical products to manage information across a credential's lifecycle with a particular focus on the features most relevant to advancing the

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[2]Credential Engine. (2021). Counting U.S. postsecondary and secondary credentials. Washington, DC: Credential Engine. https://credentialengine.org/counting-credentials-2021/

[3]See https://credentialengine.org/credential-transparency/

[4]See https://credreg.net/ctdl/terms

[5] See https://credreg.net/page/typeslist

MCTA's goals. As a guide, we have segmented the credential lifecycle to include the following sequential phases:

1. Credential ideation (reports on local credential offerings and job offerings, skill and competency analysis, labor market projections, employer panels, learner personas, stakeholder interviews, assessment profiles, analysis of competitive offerings)
2. Credential design (program and course descriptions, controlled credential types, curriculum design strategies, pathway requirements, skill and competency frameworks, skill and competency statements, student-learning assessment strategies, equity-centered design, prior learning assessments, course sequencing, costs, credit values, transfer articulation agreements)
3. Credential development (unique identifiers, integrations with student information systems, integrations with competency management tools, CASE certification, integrations with learning management tools, integrations with assessment tools, development processes, documented approvals,controlled statuses and versioning)
4. Credential marketing (marketing templates, content management system integrations, alignments to external frameworks, exports in structured formats, connections with recommender software, search engine optimization)
5. Credential operations (visualization of pathways, student progress tracking, suggestions for user-specific learning opportunities, globally unique identifiers for credentials, transcripts, issuing of digital credentials to students, print options, blockchain options, mailing service, verification service, revocation, talent management system integrations, OpenBadge certification, Comprehensive Learner Records, Learning and Employment Records, W3C Verifiable Credentials and Wallets)
6. Credential revisions (maintenance and expiration processes, documented approvals, unique identifiers, controlled statuses and versioning)

Many products will have capabilities that span multiple credential lifecycle phases and may pertain to multiple tools, including curriculum authoring tools, course catalogs, content management systems, student information management systems, assessment tools, learning management tools, accreditation workflows, and more.

Response Content

Respondents are asked to provide a response to the following. Response documents should be clear and concise, and conform to the requested format.

Credential Transparency Capabilities (word or pdf file)

1. How does your product or service support users during the described credential lifecycle phases (see background section)?
2. How does your product or service support users in transmitting information across the described credential lifecycle phases (see background section)?
3. Many institutions struggle with cross-product integrations. Describe how your product or service connects with other tools, the extent of any API developments, compliance with published open standards, and any third party certifications for interoperability.
4. How developed is your product or service with regard to supporting credential transparency? Include in your response a brief timeline of significant milestones and implementations.
5. Credential Engine's Minimum Data Policy[6] requires specific data in order to publish information to the Credential Registry. Which of the following types of data can your product or service assemble the minimum data required for publishing to the Credential Registry?
    a. Credential
    b. Organization
    c. Course and/or Program (Learning Opportunities)
    d. Assessments
    e. Competency Framework and Competencies
    f. Pathways
    g. Transfer Value Profile
6. What beneficial outcomes have been documented in relation to your product or service? In particular, please highlight any relevant evidence or case studies concerning equity outcomes with historically-excluded populations.

CTDL publishing support (excel file)
Credential Engine's Recommended Benchmark Models for Publishing[7] encourage organizations to publish more comprehensive data that includes information valuable to different consumers, providers, employers, and agencies. Please use the CTDL Publishing Support spreadsheet to indicate which of the benchmark model data your product or service can support publishing to the Credential Registry.

[6] https://credreg.net/registry/policy#mindata
[7] https://credentialengine.org/publish/benchmark-models/