

Credential Action Planning Tool for Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities



By Judy Shanley, Cate Weir and Meg Grigal

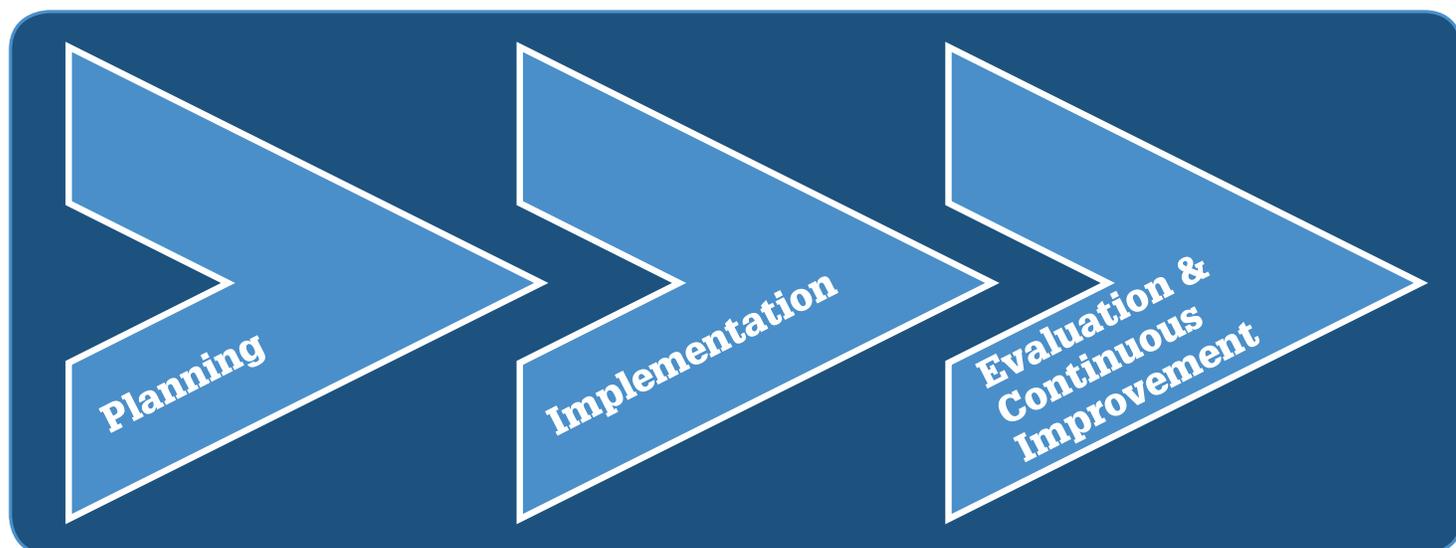
As more and more colleges begin to include students with intellectual disabilities (ID) in their classes and communities, it is becoming crucial to evaluate what these students are achieving in college. Meaningful credentials are an important part of measuring the effects of a college experience, as well as proving qualifications to employers after graduation.

This Credential Action Planning (CAP) tool supports postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities in the development of a meaningful credential that can be earned by the students attending their program.

The CAP tool assists program staff to address each step in the credential development process. A thoughtful and systematic approach toward developing a credential, consisting of planning, implementation, and evaluation, will enhance the likelihood that the credential earned will have personal value for students and their families, and will be valued externally by employers and the community.

A credential is a verification of qualification or competency issued to a student by an accredited institution of higher education—typically a diploma, certificate or degree. Students earn the credential by following and completing a prescribed course of study.

Credential Action Planning Process



I. PLANNING

Convene a team to develop the credential.

Involve institutional partners such as college deans, financial aid, and other relevant staff at the institute of higher education (IHE), as well as business leaders, community agencies, vocational rehabilitation professionals, and other community partners during the planning process. It is useful to assure that your internal credential development team is clear about the purposes of the credential prior to inviting external members to the team.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
I.1.1 Ensure you have the right people on the credential development team.	<p>Is there a clear understanding of the role of each team member – with clear expectations for their contributions?</p> <p>Are all key roles in the credential development process addressed by the current membership? Include representatives of academics, career, independent living, and university advising/supports departments.</p>	Yes	No	
I.1.2 Establish communication protocols and meeting norms, and define anticipated outcomes.	<p>Have communication protocols such as meeting minutes and rules for meeting participation been developed and reviewed?</p> <p>Are anticipated outcomes clearly outlined and recorded?</p>	Yes	No	

I. PLANNING

Formalize the course of study upon which the credential will be based, and identify a credential title.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
1.2.1 Review your program goals and mission statement.	<p>Does the current course of study align with program goals and mission statement?</p> <p>Does the credential align with or relate to other credentials offered by the institution?</p>	Yes	No	
1.2.2 Review current student outcomes and compare them to desired student outcomes.	Is the purpose of your program to prepare students for specific jobs or occupations, such as office skills training? Or is the intent to provide students with a flexible range of knowledge and skills to prepare them for a range of occupations?	Yes	No	
1.2.3 Review program policies related to satisfactory academic progress, including significant milestones or performance benchmarks.	Is it clear how a student progresses through your program? Are the requirements for credential attainment logical, aligned with your program mission, and transparent?	Yes	No	
1.2.4 Choose a credential name that has meaning to students, families, and employers and fits with the program and IHE mission.	<p>Does the title of the credential reflect the intended outcomes of a particular course of study?</p> <p>Did you solicit feedback from university colleagues, students, and employers regarding how the credential title will be perceived?</p> <p>Can you articulate the rationale underlying the credential title? Is this title universally understood?</p> <p>Will the credential be identified as a certificate, diploma, or something else?</p>	Yes	No	

I. PLANNING

Learn what other postsecondary programs for students with ID are doing to create a credential.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
1.3.1 Identify colleagues across your community, state, or region that have developed a credential or are in the process of developing one.	Do you know of colleagues who can share their examples and experiences in credential development?	Yes	No	
1.3.2 Review examples of credentials that are being awarded by PSE programs for students with ID to determine if they offer any guidance for your program's credential.	Do you have access to a variety of examples of credentials awarded by PSE programs for students with ID?	Yes	No	

Review guidance for credential development provided by the Higher Education Act.

For college programs for students with ID to be eligible for federal financial aid, they must meet statutory requirements in the Higher Education Act (HEA)

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
1.4.1 Ensure that your program's course of study aligns with the requirements provided in the Higher Education Act.	Does your credential adhere to the statutory requirements of the HEA, including a focus on inclusive academics, gainful employment, and independent living skills development?	Yes	No	
1.4.2 Due to the focus on person-centered planning and individualized goal setting, the course of study must be flexible enough to allow for the individual goals of each student while still providing a common experience.	Is person-centered planning a key factor in the development of each student's individual course of study?	Yes	No	

I. PLANNING

Understand your institutional policies and procedures related to establishing a credential. Consider adapting an existing credential for use in your program.

Consider how your program credential aligns with existing credentials. If an existing certificate can be adapted to fit the goals and structure of the program for students with ID, it should be used. Use of existing credentials that have already been approved by the IHE offers credibility and has the benefit of being known and understood by the community.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
1.5.1 Identify the office at your institution that is responsible for student credentials.	Are you aware of which offices and staff are involved with the creation and monitoring of student credentials (provost's office, academic affairs, professional and continuing studies, etc.)?	Yes	No	
1.5.2 Determine if the IHE has an existing credential that can be adopted or modified to serve as the credential that is offered by your program to its students.	Is there an existing certificate can be adopted, or perhaps modified to fit the goals and structure of the program for students with ID?	Yes	No	
1.5.3 Speak with staff involved with institutional accreditation to determine how the credential you are developing may relate to program and/or institutional accreditation policies and procedures at your institution.	Do you know who at your IHE is knowledgeable about and involved with program and institutional accreditation? How will your program credential be integrated into existing college/university accreditation procedures?	Yes	No	
1.5.4 Gather information about how the student credential you are developing may affect the participation of your program in Title IV Federal Student Aid Programs.	Have you spoken with your financial aid officials about Title IV and its implications for student credentials? Review the Think College Learn online module on "Becoming a Comprehensive Transition Program" for specific guidance related to meeting Title IV requirements.	Yes	No	

II. IMPLEMENTATION

Determine and create marketing and informational communications about the credential.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
<p>2.1.1 Identify communication channels within and outside of your institution, such as Faculty Council meetings, Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Development Forums and other places where higher education connects with the community at large.</p>	<p>Can you identify why these channels are important to your program? Why would the audiences affiliated with these channels want to know about your program? Can you connect with communications colleagues from your institution?</p>	Yes	No	
<p>2.1.2 Develop an internal communication and marketing strategy.</p>	<p>Have you sought guidance from colleagues regarding communication messages and channels?</p> <p>Are you aware of internal institutional communications such as academic meetings where you can share information about the credential?</p> <p>Are there mechanisms for you to share programmatic information with academic advising, admissions, and student services departments?</p>	Yes	No	
<p>2.1.3 Develop an external communications and marketing strategy.</p>	<p>Are there external communication strategies that your IHE uses regularly that may be appropriate?</p> <p>Are your messages in multiple formats that can be understood by a wide range of audiences?</p> <p>Do you have a way to tap into local media?</p>	Yes	No	

3. EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Establish and implement an evaluation plan.

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
<p>3.1.1 Define the purposes of the credential evaluation plan and how this aligns with your overall program evaluation.</p>	<p>How will the impact of the credential be measured?</p> <p>Does it provide access to certain types of jobs, or enable students to attend another higher education institution, or to live in a different community arrangement?</p>	Yes	No	
<p>3.1.2 Define the credential evaluation plan measures, indicators, and protocols.</p>	<p>What are the steps and sequence the student takes to progress towards the credential?</p> <p>Does the course of study build appropriately toward the desired credential outcomes?</p> <p>How and when will student outcome data be collected?</p> <p>How long will you collect student data relative to integrated employment and community outcomes after they exit your program?</p>	Yes	No	

Establish and implement an evaluation plan (continued)

Action Step	Questions to Consider	Accomplished?		Notes/Next Steps
<p>3.1.3 Use credential evaluation data to determine the value of the credential for students, the college, and the community. Data collection sources may include follow up interviews with graduates, interviews with college admissions staff and alumni associations, review of community labor participation data, interviews with employers and business networks.</p>	<p>What is the value of the credential for students? How did attainment of the credential result in measurable student outcomes relative to integrated employment, continued education, or living independently?</p> <p>What is the value of the credential for the institution? Does it have a measurable impact on recruitment and/or revenue? Does it result in any other benefit to the institution – such as community or national recognition?</p> <p>What is the value of the credential for the community?</p> <p>Are you collecting data that show that students who graduate from your program are contributing to economic and community growth by procuring jobs? Are employers better able to find skilled employees to fill employment gaps?</p>	Yes	No	
<p>3.1.4 Use evaluation data in a continuous quality improvement process for your program.</p>	<p>How is evaluation data reviewed and discussed?</p> <p>How do data result in recommended changes in practices or policies of the program?</p> <p>Will the credential change over time?</p> <p>How do other programs at your institution address changes in requirements?</p>			
<p>3.1.5 Incorporate evaluation data in ongoing communications.</p>	<p>Are there evaluation data about the performance of your program that can be integrated into messages? For instance, will sharing information about the credentials that students receive and the types of employment they attain after they leave your program help with recruitment?</p> <p>Can data about the types of jobs students procure assist you in developing relationships with new employers or connect with new industries in your community?</p>			

This document is one tool that PSE program administrators can use to develop and implement a student credential. This is a complex topic that involves many academic and administrative offices on a college campus. As PSE program leaders advance their work to develop a student credential, a thoughtful and systematic plan, incorporating the steps above, can help to ensure that the credential reflects the intent of the program, is meaningful for the student, and can serve as a catalyst for the procurement of employment and further education.

For questions about this tool, contact us at thinkcollege@umb.edu.

Selected Resources

Career One Stop. (2001). Credentials: Essential in finding and keeping a good job. www.careerinfonet.org/crl/CRL_RRSearch.aspx?docn=8065&strSword=CREDENTIALS&radioChoice=ALL

Carnevale, A. P., Rose, S. J., & Hanson, A. R. (2012). Certificates: Gateway to gainful employment and college degrees. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.

US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. Credential resource guide. Retrieved from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGLI5-10a2.pdf>

Education Commission of the States. (2012). Producing quality credentials: Why data and analytics matter. Retrieved from http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/04/52/10452.pdf?utm_source=11-2012+eNEWS&utm_campaign=10-2012+eNEWS&utm_medium=email

Will future college degrees be based more on experience than classroom time? (Issue 20). Smartplanet. <http://www.smartplanet.com/blog/bulletin/will-future-college-degrees-be-based-more-on-experience-than-classroom-time/>

Youth Community of Practice

<https://youth.workforce3one.org/page/credentials>

Discuss and share promising practices, offer and receive technical assistance, and network with colleagues in the workforce systems and youth development fields.

Career OneStop

<http://www.careeronestop.org/EducationTraining/KeepLearning/GetCredentials.aspx?frd=true>

Information about certification and credentials, sponsored by the U. S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

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