

EXPLORING MICRO-CREDENTIALS WITH STAKEHOLDERS: A Conversation Guide

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Exploring Micro-Credentials With Stakeholders: A Conversation Guide

Background

During the 2018–19 academic year, four states in the Midwest and Great Lakes region—Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Ohio—engaged in a collaborative project designed to deepen states’ collective understanding of the potential benefits and challenges associated with expanding access to professional learning through micro-credentials.

Micro-credentials represent a new approach to professional learning that recognizes the learners’ mastery of specific competencies when they provide evidence to meet rubric-based performance criteria associated with the application of the specific skill.

Representatives from the four states organized themselves into three workgroups and met in a series of virtual and in-person meetings from October 2018 to September 2019 to craft tools to support states interested in advancing micro-credential use. These tools included a micro-credential participant survey, a set of draft micro-credential quality criteria, and a stakeholder conversation guide.

This document is the micro-credential stakeholder conversation guide. Included in this guide are identification of key stakeholder groups to reach out to when exploring micro-credential opportunities within states, targeted purpose for conversations with these stakeholders, question categories, and sample questions.

Rationale for Stakeholder Conversations

Many groups are interested in exploring micro-credentials within their state. Yet, to be successful, micro-credential opportunities necessitate coordination and integration with existing systems of professional learning. The workgroup identified two key stakeholder groups as high-priority partners in this work: state licensing departments and professional associations (e.g., Regional Offices of Education in Illinois or Area Education Agencies in Iowa). The following lists suggest potential purposes for engaging in conversations with these two key stakeholder groups.¹

Staff From Licensing Departments

- Identify current understanding, perceptions, and questions that licensing staff may have about micro-credentials.
- Learn more about how the current licensing system works and how micro-credentials might fit into the current system.
- Explore licensing staff perceptions regarding micro-credential currency equivalents when compared with traditional measures of professional learning.
- Engage licensing staff in shaping potential pathways for integrating micro-credentials into the current professional learning system.
- Find out if there are other departments or agencies in the state whose work relates to licensing and how best to involve these groups.

Staff From Professional Associations

- Learn about professional associations' current experience and practices related to micro-credentials.
- Find out what criteria professional associations think define a high-quality micro-credential.
- Learn what criteria a micro-credential would need to have to be recognized by the association and their partner organizations (e.g., for re-licensure or graduate credit).
- Learn about perceived obstacles (e.g., costs or perceived limitations in state or local code) to providing, issuing, or recognizing micro-credentials.

¹ While this workgroup identified two key stakeholder groups; we recognize that there are other important stakeholders in this space, including higher education, legislators, and local education agencies.

- Learn about professional associations’ levels of interest in developing, providing, recognizing, or partnering with other organizations to offer micro-credentials.

Exploring Micro-Credentials: Conversation Question Areas

On the following pages, we provide a set of question areas as well as sample questions that can help groups of state or local education agency staff explore the subject of micro-credentials with staff from licensing departments and professional associations. If desired, groups of state or local education agency staff might want to craft a more formal interview or focus group protocol using this set of question areas and sample questions to guide these conversations.

Question areas	Sample questions by stakeholder group	
	Staff from licensing departments	Staff from professional associations
Overall perceptions of micro-credentials	<p>At start of conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you hear the term “micro-credential,” what comes to mind? (Probe for positive/negative perceptions and any assumptions about quality or currency.)</i> 	<p>At start of conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you hear the term “micro-credential,” what comes to mind? (Probe for positive/negative perceptions and any assumptions about quality or currency. Also probe for any perceived limitations in state or local code.)</i>
Experience with micro-credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you know about micro-credentials?</i> • <i>What prior experience have you had with recognizing (or being asked to recognize) a micro-credential?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you know about micro-credentials?</i> • <i>What experience do you have with offering, supporting, issuing, or recognizing a micro-credential?</i>
Evaluating proficiency for micro-credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What <u>criteria</u> do you currently use to determine whether someone receives credit toward professional development hours or re-licensure?</i> • <i>Who assesses the evidence submitted by educators and administrators to determine whether they meet your criteria?</i> • <i>What are the assessors’ credentials or prior training?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What <u>criteria</u> do you currently use to determine whether someone participating in a professional learning session or course would receive credit toward professional development hours, re-licensure, graduate credit, or other currencies?</i> • <i>If you offer micro-credentials, what criteria are used?</i> • <i>Do you have differing sets of criteria you use depending on the type of currency that an educator is trying to earn (e.g., professional development credit hours, graduate credit, re-licensure)?</i>

Question areas	Sample questions by stakeholder group	
	Staff from licensing departments	Staff from professional associations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What kinds of information would you need to have about a micro-credential to determine whether it would meet your standards for earning professional development or re-licensure credit?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What information do you need to have to determine whether a micro-credential can be issued and recognized for one or more of these currencies?</i> <p>If professional organization evaluates micro-credential submissions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What kinds of evidence are required for participants to show mastery and earn a micro-credential?</i>
Issuing of micro-credentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Which organizations do you feel (either state or national organizations) would be qualified to issue micro-credentials?</i> • <i>What qualification would these organizations need to have for you to be confident of their capacity to issue a micro-credential worthy of recognition by your department?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What has your experience been with issuing micro-credentials—or partnering with other organizations to issue micro-credentials?</i> • <i>[If no prior experience] If your organization was to issue micro-credentials what criteria or standards might you use? Do you feel your organization should or could issue micro-credentials?</i> • <i>What criteria or standards did your organization, or the issuing organization, establish beforehand to ensure sufficient quality, depth, rigor, and breadth?</i> • <i>Of the micro-credentials your organizations offers or has some connection with, what actual form has this recognition taken, if any (e.g., designation on a license, clock hours, graduate credit)?</i>
Recognition of micro-credentials (currency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you hear the term “micro-credential,” what kind(s) of currency come to mind?</i> • <i>When compared with traditional metrics used to gauge teacher learning and achievement, what do you believe is the equivalent value of most micro-credentials?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When you hear the term “micro-credential,” what kind(s) of currency come to mind?</i>

Question areas	Sample questions by stakeholder group	
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	<p><i>For instance, how many clock hours do most represent? How many graduate credits? Other certification equivalents?</i></p> <p>For states that are implementing particular micro-credentials: [Share the profile of the specific micro-credential.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What kinds of currencies do you think best fit with this particular micro-credential?</i> • <i>Would this micro-credential satisfy the requirements for professional development (PD) credit? If so, for how many hours? If it falls short, how does it fall short?</i> • <i>Theoretically, could this micro-credential help to satisfy the requirements for re-licensure or license renewal? If it falls short, why does it fall short? What would need to change for micro-credentials to be counted toward license renewal? Would having the micro-credential be part of a “stack” of micro-credentials create an equivalent learning experience to other re-licensure credit experiences?</i> • <i>If you were able to use micro-credentials toward meeting this requirement, how might you track accumulated micro-credentials as progress toward re-licensure?</i> • <i>In your opinion, do you believe this micro-credential would satisfy the requirements for graduate credit? How many credits? If it falls short, how does it fall short?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>When compared with traditional metrics used to gauge teacher learning and achievement, what do you believe is the equivalent value of most micro-credentials (i.e., “grain size”)? For instance, how many clock hours do most represent? How many graduate credits? Other certification equivalents?</i> <p>For states that are implementing particular micro-credentials: [Share the profile of the specific micro-credential.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What kinds of currencies do you think best fit with this particular micro-credential?</i> • <i>Would this micro-credential satisfy the requirements for professional development (PD) credit? If so, for how many hours? If it falls short, how does it fall short?</i> • <i>Theoretically, could this micro-credential help to satisfy the requirements for re-licensure? Would it be counted at all? If so, how much would this “count” toward re-licensure? If it falls short, why does it fall short? What would need to change for this to be counted? Would having the micro-credential be part of a “stack” of micro-credentials create an equivalent learning experience to other re-licensure credit experiences in your state?</i> • <i>If you were able to use micro-credentials toward meeting this requirement, how might you track accumulated micro-credentials as progress toward re-licensure?</i>

Question areas	Sample questions by stakeholder group	
	Staff from licensing departments	Staff from professional associations
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In your opinion, do you believe this micro-credential would satisfy the requirements for graduate credit? How many credits? If it falls short, how does it fall short?</i>
Stacking of micro-credentials	<p>For states that are implementing particular micro-credentials: <i>[Share the profile of the specific micro-credential.]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you had experience with micro-credentials that are linked to a set of related micro-credentials (e.g., “stack”)?</i> • <i>Does a “stack” of micro-credentials lead to additional pathways or certifications for educators?</i> • <i>Should a “stack” have different currency than a single micro-credential?</i> • <i>How does a “stack” of micro-credentials compare to alternative pathways adults take to enter the teaching professional as a second career or in high-need areas?</i> • <i>To what degree is it possible that stacking micro-credentials might increase educators entering high-need fields in your state?</i> • <i>What form of recognition is typically granted for the successful completion of the entire set of micro-credentials (e.g., license renewal, credential)?</i> 	<p>For states that are implementing particular micro-credentials: <i>[Share the profile of the specific micro-credential.]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Have you had experience with micro-credentials that are linked to a set of related micro-credentials (e.g., “stack”)?</i> • <i>Does a “stack” of micro-credentials lead to additional pathways or certifications for educators?</i> • <i>Should a “stack” have different currency than a single micro-credential?</i> • <i>How does a “stack” of micro-credentials compare to alternative pathways adults take to enter the teaching professional as a second career or in high-need areas?</i> • <i>To what degree is it possible that stacking micro-credentials might increase educators entering high-need fields in your state?</i> • <i>What form of recognition is typically granted for the successful completion of the entire set of micro-credentials (e.g., license renewal, credential)?</i>

Question areas	Sample questions by stakeholder group	
	Staff from licensing departments	Staff from professional associations
Wrap-up	<p><i>What do you feel are the most important opportunities and benefits associated with [our state] offering and recognizing micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>How, when, and for whom do you think micro-credentials work best?</i></p> <p><i>[Potential probe] In addition to the currencies we have talked about so far, what other benefits could participants derive from having a micro-credential to document a newly acquired expertise (e.g., promotions, salary increases)?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent do you think the offering of micro-credentials might help [our state] fulfill its priorities (e.g., capacity of educators to serve English learner [EL] students)?</i></p> <p><i>What do you see as the most important challenges, downsides, and obstacles associated with [our state] offering and recognizing micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>What have you seen that concerns you about micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>What is your (and your department's) current level of interest in micro-credentials right now? Would you be open to discussing micro-credentials further?</i></p>	<p><i>What do you feel are the most important opportunities and benefits associated with [our state] offering and recognizing micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>How, when, and for whom do you think micro-credentials work best?</i></p> <p><i>[Potential probe] In addition to the currencies we have talked about so far, what other benefits could participants derive from having a micro-credential to document a newly acquired expertise (e.g., promotions, salary increases)?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent do you think the offering of micro-credentials might help [our state] fulfill its priorities (e.g., capacity of educators to serve EL students)?</i></p> <p><i>What other benefits do educational organizations (i.e., schools, districts, and state education agencies) derive or identify as a potential benefit associated with having a micro-credential to document staff member's newly acquired skills and knowledge (e.g., inform hiring decisions, better grasp of school and district capacity and needs, new strategy for tracking progress in reaching desired professional shifts among staff)?</i></p> <p><i>What do you see as the most important challenges, downsides, and obstacles associated with [our state] offering and recognizing micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>What have you seen that concerns you about micro-credentials?</i></p> <p><i>What is your (and your organization's) current level of interest in micro-credentials? Would you be open to discussing micro-credentials further?</i></p>

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