Midwest Credential Transparency Alliance (MCTA)

August 19, 2021
Table of Contents

2  Agenda
3  Presenters
5  Extended MHEC and Credential Engine Team
5  About MHEC and Credential Engine
6  Working Draft Charter
8  MCTA Key Terms and Common Acronyms
10 MCTA Participants

Agenda

Thursday, August 19, 2021
All times are listed in Central Time.

2:00 p.m. - 2:10 p.m.
Opening Remarks, (Re)Introductions, and Charter Approval
  • Susan Heegaard, President, MHEC
  • Scott Cheney, CEO, Credential Engine
  • Jeff Grann, Solutions Lead, Credential Engine

2:10 p.m. - 2:50 p.m.
Midwestern State Partners Panel Discussion
  Moderator:
  • Emilie Rafal, Director of Programs, Credential Engine
  Panelists:
  • Marcia Black-Watson, Industry Engagement Division Administrator, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity-Workforce Development
  • Dan Tesfay, Education Team Data Strategist, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
  • Ken Sauer, Chief Academic Officer, Indiana Commission for Higher Education
  • Tracy Korsmo, Program Manager, North Dakota Information Technology

Please review the Indiana Success Story as an example of how a state is advancing credential transparency.

2:50 p.m. - 3:05 p.m.
Share-out of State Initiatives
  • Jennifer Briones, Project Manager, Credential Engine

3:05 p.m. - 3:25 p.m.
Pathways Action Team Update
  • Jeff Grann, Solutions Lead, Credential Engine

3:25 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
Closing Reflections and Next Steps
  • Jeff Grann, Solutions Lead, Credential Engine
Marcia Black-Watson, Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity-Workforce Development

Marcia S. Black-Watson serves as the Industry Engagement Division Administrator for the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity-Workforce Development (LEO-WD). Ms. Black-Watson leads a team that promotes demand-driven workforce development strategies to help attract, retain, and develop talent in high growth, high wage industry sectors. The LEO-WD Industry Engagement Division engages employers, the Michigan Works! System; educational entities; economic development, other local, state, and federal partners to execute programs and initiatives that produce successful recruitment, training, placement, and retention outcomes. The division administers programs such as the Apprenticeship State Expansion Grant, Michigan Registered Apprenticeship Innovation Network (MiRAIN), Michigan Youth Apprenticeship Readiness Network (MiYARN), Michigan Statewide Targeted Apprenticeship Inclusion & Readiness System (MiSTAIRS), Business Resource Networks (BRNs), Community College Skilled Trades Equipment Program (CCSTEP), Carl D. Perkins Postsecondary, Going PRO Talent Fund, Michigan Learning & Education Advanced Program (MiLEAP), Michigan Industry Cluster Approach (MICA), Michigan Rural Enhanced Access to Careers in Healthcare (MiREACH) and Talent Development Liaisons (TDLs).

Marcia has worked in the workforce development field since 1998, spearheading a number of state-level taskforces, projects, and initiatives focused on meeting the workforce demands of industry. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Materials and Logistics Management with a minor in Accounting from Michigan State University. She is a Certified Business Solutions Professional and serves on several boards and advisory committees, including Center for Advanced Automotive Technology (CAAT) National Visiting Committee; Baker College – College of Business Advisory Board; Flint Genesee Job Corps Industry Advisory Council; and Michigan Academy for Greater Mobility Advancement Governance Board; Michigan Apprenticeship Steering Committee, Inc. (MASCI); and the Michigan Talent Pipeline Management Academy Steering Committee.

Scott Cheney, Credential Engine

Scott Cheney is Credential Engine’s first chief executive officer where he leads the organization’s efforts to bring transparency to credentials and reveal the marketplace of credentials. Scott has over 25 years of experience in and brings a multi-faceted perspective to, developing the skills of the U.S. workforce to meet the needs of the economy.

Prior to Credential Engine, he served as the policy director for Workforce, Economic Development, and Pensions for Senator Patty Murray and the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee. He led the reauthorization of the country’s central workforce development legislation, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Scott also led the Senator’s work to reauthorize Perkins, expand registered apprenticeships, provide training for ex-offenders to support successful re-entry, formalize research and evaluation standards at the Department of Labor, enhance services and resources for dislocated workers, modernize unemployment insurance, and better align workforce and economic development in distressed regions around the country. Previous positions with the Senator’s office include serving as a senior advisor on the Senate Budget Committee, and as her staff director for the HELP Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety.

Scott holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy from Carleton College, and a Master of Public Policy degree from Georgetown University.

Jeff Grann, Credential Engine

Jeff Grann is the Credential Solutions Lead for Credential Engine, where he advances systems of trust that incent adult development and empower learners to reach their potential. He currently works with the higher education industry to advance the goal of publishing to the registry, setting standards, improving data integration and interoperability, and realizing use cases that improve credential decision making.

Previously, Jeff worked at Capella University on a synergistic mix of academic and technical projects related to competency-based education. From 2005 to 2018, he defined and led the implementation of Capella University’s fully-embedded assessment system and its competency map, and most recently served as Academic Director of Assessment and Learning Analytics. He also has several years of teaching experience with traditional college students, adult learners, and higher education professionals. Jeff holds a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology from the University of Minnesota, and works remotely for Credential Engine from White Bear Lake, Minnesota.
Susan G. Heegaard, MHEC
Susan Heegaard is the president of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC). She represented Minnesota, serving on MHEC’s Commission as a commissioner alternate from 2004-2009, during her time as commissioner of the Minnesota Office of Higher Education. From 2013-2018, she worked as a senior consultant with HCM Strategists, a public policy firm, primarily with the Lumina Foundation Strategy Labs, connecting state and system leaders with effective approaches aimed at improved postsecondary education approaches and outcomes. She was also a vice president and education team leader for the St. Paul based Bush Foundation.

Susan has guided policy under two governors and a U.S. senator, worked for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, the Minnesota Private College Council, and the Minnesota Planning Agency. She holds a law degree from Mitchell Hamline College of Law and a bachelor’s in economics and government. She began working for the Compact in November 2018.

Tracy Korsmo, North Dakota Information Technology
Tracy Korsmo is the ND Statewide Longitudinal Data System Program Manager for the Information Technology Department. His background with the State spans 25 years including software development, data warehousing and IT Director for Public Instruction. The past 10 years specifically with the SLDS team which built a successful K12, postsecondary and workforce data warehouse; integrating the systems and providing services such as Educator and Student/Parent portals, a statewide eTranscript system, public reporting sites and is currently leading the initiative to publish K12 transcripts as digital credential to a student wallet.

Ken Sauer, Indiana Commission for Higher Education
Ken Sauer is Senior Associate Commissioner and Chief Academic Officer of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education and Executive Director of the Indiana Board for Proprietary Education. He also is a member of the Governor’s Health Workforce Council, leads Indiana’s inter-agency effort to scale up Credential Engine, serves on numerous Credential Engine work groups and advisory committees, and is a recent past Chair of the Midwestern Higher Education Compact. Previous employers include the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. He holds a Ph.D. in Government/International Relations from the Claremont Graduate University.

Dan Tesfay, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
Dan Tesfay is the Data Strategist on the Education Team at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. He is working to reimagine education data collection and analysis in the Kansas City metro to support the Foundation’s Real World Learning Initiative. Prior to joining Kauffman, he was Director of Data and Analytics at Education Cities where he led data management and website design for the Education Equality Index. Dan’s previous experience conducting market research for Fortune 100 companies informs his belief in data as the most powerful tool for collective learning and personal decision making. He has a Master of Public Affairs from the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin and a Bachelor of Arts in government and sociology from the University of Texas at Austin.
Extended MHEC and Credential Engine Team

Sara Appel, MHEC
Sara Appel serves as the Associate Director, Policy and Research Initiatives, in this role she manages the Multi-State Collaborative on Military Credit and the Midwest Student Exchange Program. She has been working with student service members in higher education for over 20 years and has experience in grant writing and program management. Prior to her working for the Compact, Sara was the academic programs manager at the Indiana Commission for Higher Education. She has an undergraduate degree in Secondary Education and a master's degree in history with an emphasis on research. Both degrees are from Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau.

Jennifer Briones, Credential Engine
Jennifer Briones is the Project Manager for Credential Engine where she manages state and regional scale-up projects, explores expansion opportunities, and supports program and partnership development. Before joining Credential Engine, she was a Policy and Advocacy Associate at the Data Quality Campaign (DQC)-a nonprofit organization that works to ensure students, parents, educators, and policymakers have the right information to make decisions.

Jennifer holds a Bachelor’s degree from Loyola University Maryland in Political Science and Writing and a Master of Public Policy degree from the George Washington University, where she co-founded the Women's Leadership Fellows program.

Emilie Rafal, Credential Engine
Emilie Rafal is the Director of Programs for Credential Engine. In this capacity, she develops and manages state and regional scale-up projects, oversees sector transparency initiatives, and leads special projects. Emilie began her work with this project as a Research Associate for the Credential Transparency Initiative through the George Washington University Institute of Public Policy, where she worked with credentialing organizations to test the CTDL and prototype search application during its pilot phase. She holds Bachelors degrees from the College of William & Mary in Psychology and Women’s Studies and a Master’s of Public Policy from the George Washington University, where she served as co-chair of the diversity & inclusion committee.

About MHEC
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 is comprised of member states from the Midwestern United States. 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 a 501(c)3 entity 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. MHEC’s office is headquartered in Minneapolis.

https://www.mhec.org

About Credential Engine
Credential Engine 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.

https://credentialengine.org
Working Draft: Charter

Please note that this is a working draft of the MCTA Charter. We are seeking your feedback and input as we refine and update the document.

What is it?
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. Credential transparency is an approach to making essential information about credentials and competencies public, easily accessible, and actionable so that credentials can be better understood and pursued based on what it takes to earn them, what they represent, and the jobs they can lead to. We seek to reduce barriers to information, ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to the full range of learning, advancement, and meaningful career opportunities in the region.

The MCTA operates by hosting regular convenings to

1. Network (identify common challenges, project consulting, mentorship)
2. Create new resources (guidance, blogs, webinars, reports)
3. Form action teams (technical & business requirements, policy, research)
4. Advance dissemination (celebrate accomplishments, presentations, articles, social media).

The MCTA welcomes a wide range of participants, whether new to this effort or well underway, including individuals representing state agencies, secondary education providers, postsecondary education providers, employers, quality assurance organizations, workforce development agencies, and more.

Why does it matter?
America is searching for ways to help students and workers find the most efficient and cost-effective pathways to secure the right skills and credentials that lead to good jobs, but right now the learn and work ecosystem is fragmented and information about credentials is confusing and inconsistent. In the Midwest, states are working to break down data silos to empower an estimated 35 million workers in the region. This work entails advancing 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. This information is critical for answering many basic questions, such as:

- **Career pathways:** What do I want to do? What are my options? How can I get started? What's the sequence? What are the benefits? Will this be a good fit for me?
- **Enrollment decisions:** What's the experience like? How much will it cost? How long will it take? How are these programs different? How effective has this offering been for people like me?
- **Transfer and prior learning assessment:** What are my options for transferring? How can I obtain advanced standing? Will my existing credits apply to program requirements? Will I lose any time or money?
- **Verifiable achievements:** Are my demonstrated skills and competencies valuable to employers? How can I communicate my achievements to others? How can I secure or advance my career?

The work of defining, accessing, combining, describing, sharing, and comparing information about credentials is difficult and too often falls upon isolated individuals with limited context, resources, or support. Credential transparency reduces barriers to information and makes opportunities more equitably attainable. For too long, gaining information about credentials has depended on personal social networks, wealth, and access to institutions, compounding structural inequities. Transparent access to information about credentials and their value can be a crucial element of working to dismantle systems that have created the racial bias we see today. The MCTA accelerates the midwest region’s ability to ensure the public can access the information about credentials that opens their eyes to the full range of opportunities for learning, advancement, and meaningful careers.

Who does it?
The MCTA is an alliance of people working toward credential transparency – at all stages and steps – from across the Midwest region. Given the broad range of work required to advance credential transparency, the community is intentionally eclectic and open so that it can collectively build a fully-informed, end-to-end network of aligned practitioners. Anyone can be a credential transparency champion.

- **State government officials** (Legislators, leaders, Governor’s office staff, and staff connected with state education and workforce departments, agencies, & commissions) can set policies, procedures, and strategic guidance to facilitate publishing credential information to the Registry.
Secondary and postsecondary credential providers (Presidents, chief academic officers, superintendents, principals, provosts, deans, career services staff, academic affairs staff & faculty) can use the many tools available for publishing detailed credential information to the Registry.

Data managers (Chief technology officers, chief data officers, business analysis, institutional researchers, registrars) can advance interoperability and benchmark their technical systems for emerging use cases.

Business community (Hiring managers, human resources staff, economic developers, workforce training professionals, & chambers of commerce) can discover aligned credential and competency pathways to fill critical positions.

The MCTA welcomes a broad range of practitioners interested in this type of work and benefits from everyone’s perspective.

How does it work?

The MCTA builds on, and accelerates, the Midwest region’s focus on credential transparency by providing a loose structure for connecting distributed practitioners. The MCTA meets quarterly using Zoom and intends to host an annual in-person convening. Some topics require focused small group discussions, and the MCTA also supports volunteer action teams that meet more frequently between quarterly meetings. All convenings are open to the entire MCTA community.

There are many ways to connect with the MCTA. Simply attending the convenings regularly helps increase awareness of the value of credential transparency and its benefits for students, workers, employers, educators, policymakers, and others. Volunteers can also engage in more substantive ways by sharing their own credential transparency successes and challenges with others, such as by giving a presentation, writing a blog article, or contributing to a new shared resource. The MCTA supports all of these advances by providing a helpful forum and supportive network for your credential transparency efforts. All contributions are valued, needed, and celebrated.

The MCTA also 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 master contract opportunities will be advanced through competitive RFP processes in order to spur supportive technologies at negotiated prices.
MCTA Key Terms and Common Acronyms

Application Programming Interface (API)
A computing term used in this context to denote how data are transferred between computers on the web. An API permits data to be exchanged automatically based on predetermined business rules and thereby reduce the amount of work required to publish and/or consume data.

Commissioner
MHEC is governed by a 60-member commission. Each member state has five appointed commissioners: the governor or the governor’s designee; two legislators, one from each house; and two other at-large members, at least one of whom shall be selected from the field of higher education.

Consuming
In this context consuming refers to pulling data from the Credential Registry, often via an API. This is a fairly common activity for many technical applications and usually involves integrating the data with an existing user interface for display.

Convening
MHEC convening empowers the member states of the Compact to connect for the purpose of exchanging expertise, sharing ideas and experiences, and collaboratively pursuing efforts that help further higher education. This convening builds cooperation around important and emerging issues in higher education and leads to many initiatives and activities that produce a variety of outcomes and results ranging from the dissemination of knowledge and expertise about practical solutions, to leveraging the collective purchasing power of the region to achieve efficiencies and savings.

Credential
Credential Engine uses the term “credential” broadly. It refers to diplomas, badges, certificates, apprenticeships, licenses, certifications and degrees of all types and levels. Each credential represents unique competencies that signal what a holder can do in the workforce.

Credential Engine Technical Site
Credential Engine maintains an extensive set of resources including handbooks, term definitions, projects, release histories, and more at https://credreg.net.

Credential Finder
A web application maintained by Credential Engine for viewing the data in the Credential Registry. For more information, visit https://credentialfinder.org.

Credential Registry
A cloud-based repository that collects, maintains and connects information on all types of credentials—from diplomas, certificates and apprenticeships to certifications, licenses and degrees of all types and levels. The registry holds detailed information in an easily-accessible format. Users can explore competencies, learning outcomes, up-to-date market values and career pathways.

Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL)
An open-source language that lets states identify, describe, organize and compare credentials with uniformity, making it easier to match educational programs with careers. The CTDL is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License and publicly available at https://credreg.net/ctdl/terms.

Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL)
Every state is required to develop a list of training providers that have been approved for federal funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. This list must be accessible to the public so consumers interested in postsecondary education can find those opportunities.

JSON-LD
A specification that enables a standardized way to express RDF data. All Credential Registry information is in JSON-LD format.

Master Agreement
A master agreement is a contract made available across the region that leverages the expertise and buying power of the eligible organizations within the region and is competitively solicited using a team comprised of multiple institutional subject matter experts. Higher education institutions (public and private not-for-profit) within the member states of MHEC are eligible to use all MHEC contracts. Additionally, most of the technology contracts are available for use by member state K-12 districts and schools; cities, counties, local subdivisions; state government; and non-profit organizations (education-related only).

Production
A computer software term referring to the environment used to deploy or deliver applications to their intended users.

Publishing
In this context publishing refers to pushing data into the Credential Registry. This is a common activity for many technical applications and usually involves integrating the data with an existing user interface for display.
MCTA Key Terms and Common Acronyms

**P-20W Data System**
Infrastructure that securely brings together specific data so leaders, practitioners and community members can better understand educational opportunities and pathways. Key sectors include early childhood, K–12 and postsecondary education and the workforce.

**Regional Education Compacts**
For more than half a century, most states have been collaborating with other nearby states through interstate higher education compacts. While many people within American higher education may not be familiar with these collaborative activities, four regional compacts – the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) – have helped states, and the public and private institutions within the states, work cooperatively to expand access and excellence within their regions. These regional compacts provide a range of programs and services, including student exchange programs that provide lower-cost access to programs present in one state but not another; collective purchasing initiatives for computer hardware and software, institutional property liability insurance, and student health plans; and policy analysis and research, including comparative economic and demographic analyses. The compacts have worked together where their partners -- states or the institutions within states -- deem collaboration to make sense. From [https://nc-sara.org/regional-education-compacts](https://nc-sara.org/regional-education-compacts).

**Resource Description Framework (RDF)**
A standard model for data interchange on the web developed by W3C. The “triple” is the basic grammatical construct in making RDF data assertions about “things” and consists of three components: a subject, a predicate and an object. CTDL is built on the principles of RDF.

**Request for Information (RFI)**
A Request for Information (RFI) is a common business process whose purpose is to collect written information about the capabilities of various suppliers. For more information, visit [https://www.naspo.org/Toolbox%20Issue%204.pdf](https://www.naspo.org/Toolbox%20Issue%204.pdf).

**Request for Proposals (RFP)**
The Request for Proposal (RFP) is a document that solicits proposals, often made through a bidding process, by an agency or company interested in procurement of a commodity, service, or valuable asset, to potential suppliers to submit proposals. For more information, visit [https://www.naspo.org/Toolbox%20Issue%204.pdf](https://www.naspo.org/Toolbox%20Issue%204.pdf).

**Roadmap to Credential Transparency for States**
A sequence of 10-steps to help state leaders begin and advance credential transparency. The roadmap is supplemented by a detailed Action Guide, Exemplars, Policy Briefings, and a Toolkit of resources that includes guiding materials to inform the work. For more information, visit [https://credentialengine.org/state-partnerships](https://credentialengine.org/state-partnerships).

**Sandbox**
A technical resource, or “environment”, for IT programmers to test publishing and consuming data with the Credential Registry. The sandbox is configured to mimic the production environment. The data in the sandbox environment is not public or preserved as it is often “test” data used for developmental purposes.

**Stackable Credentials**
Stackable credentials allow people to accumulate (or “stack”) learning experiences and credentials over time to help them earn a higher-order credential or four-year degree. Stackable credentials can help individuals move along education and career pathways that lead to higher-paying jobs. (Also referred to as “embedded” credentials when these stacking opportunities are intentionally integrated into college curricula).

**Standards**
The word “standards” is used in at least two distinct ways with regards to educational technology; 1) an intended academic or curricular objective for students, and 2) a consistent, and often certified, implementation of a technical or business process.
MCTA Participants

*Denotes Pathways Action Team

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**WISCONSIN**
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Join the conversation on social media using the official hashtag: #MidwestCTA!
MHEC: @mhecl2
Credential Engine @credengine

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact and Credential Engine would like to thank Ascendium Education Group for their generous support of the Midwestern Credential Transparency Alliance.