

Midwest Credential Transparency Alliance (MCTA) Charter

August 19, 2021

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.