Advancing Institutional Policy, Practice, and Quality Assurance for Microcredentials in West Virginia

A Toolkit for Creating and Offering Microcredentials

Credential WV is West Virginia's statewide initiative to expand access to high quality, workforce-relevant credentials that help learners gain skills and advance their careers while strengthening the state's economy. Based on conversations and feedback from a statewide convening in February 2025, three areas of focus were identified with three workgroups created to address the following topics:

1. Transcription and Data Management
2. Institutional Policy, Practice, and Quality Assurance
3. Workforce Connections

The efforts of these groups have led to a set of recommendations that reflect both the shared vision and the practical steps needed to advance credentialing innovation in West Virginia.

This report presents the work of Workgroup 2: Institutional Policy, Practice, and Quality Assurance. This report also highlights suggested components necessary to implement microcredentials at individual institutions.

Co-led by Dr. Beez Schell (WVHEPC/CTCS), Dr. Jason Best (Shepherd University), Dr. Angela Hawk (West Virginia Northern Community College), Dr. Brandon Mills (New River Community and Technical College), and Dr. Amanda Sauchuck (Concord University), this group was charged with exploring how institutions can scale microcredential offerings with both urgency and integrity. The focus: ensuring that microcredentials developed in West Virginia are high-quality, transparent, aligned with workforce needs, and implemented through sound institutional processes.

Guided by questions such as *"How do we create microcredentials at scale and with deliberate speed?"* and *"How do we know when a microcredential meets minimum thresholds for quality and trustworthiness?"*, the team examined national frameworks, institutional practices, and emerging quality standards to create a set of resources for West Virginia institutions.

This report is organized into the following sections:

Section 1: Definitions of microcredentials, digital badges, and related terms to ensure clarity and shared understanding.

Section 2: WV Quality Framework that outlines key dimensions for microcredential development and approval based on both national best-practices and the specific needs of West Virginia learners and employers.

Section 3: Proposed HEPC Policy - Series 11 - for Approving Microcredentials outlines the approval process, in policy, for microcredentials, emphasizing that internal governance is sufficient, with no external approvals required, and provides guidance on submitting documentation to WVHEPC using the recommended (or adapted) Quality Framework template.

Section 4: Flowchart of the Microcredential Approval Process outlines the key stages of microcredential development, including idea generation, program design, institutional review, final approval, and submission to the WV Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC).

Section 5: "Microcredential Curriculum Proposal Form" - Template (Based on WV Quality Framework) is designed for use by institutional curriculum and governance bodies to develop, review, and approve microcredentials.

Section 6: Additional Suggestions to help institutions navigate microcredential creation, oversight, and policy.

SECTION 1: DEFINITIONS

This section offers a common vocabulary for the key terms that define West Virginia's approach to microcredentials. The definitions were first developed using national and state-level resources and then refined through feedback from a broad group of stakeholders.

Refer to these definitions when in the process of creating or designing new microcredentials to ensure alignment with West Virginia's statewide framework and to determine how to follow the recommended approval process.

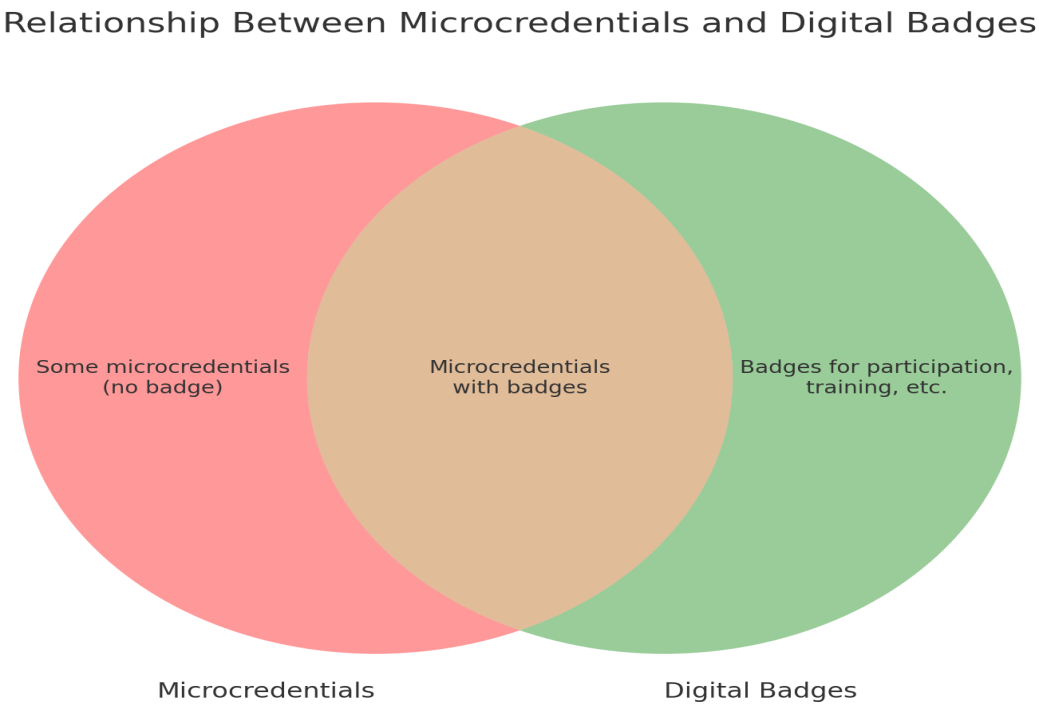
Digital Badge: A digital badge is a digital symbol that affirms acquired competence in a specific skill or area of knowledge. The digital symbol includes embedded metadata that verifies the issuer, outlines the earning criteria, and provides evidence of achievement, making it a credible and shareable record of learning. Each institution sets its own

criteria for awarding digital badges to students for either credit or non-credit experiences.

"Micro-credential" (current Series 59 definition) is a short, focused credential designed to provide in-demand skills, knowledge, and experience. Micro-credentials may be earned through a course or short series of courses that culminate in a "digital badge," which offers verified proof of competency and documentation of specific skills gained through the coursework, which is assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria.

[Proposed revised definition to update Series 59 and add to Series 11]

A **micro-credential** is a short, focused academic award designed to provide in-demand skills, knowledge, and experience that can enhance a student's employability. Microcredentials may be earned through a short series of courses, a combination of courses and work-based learning, or through verified proof of competency and documentation of specific skills gained, which is assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. All microcredentials, whether offered for-credit or non-credit, must be aligned with the statewide Quality Framework for Microcredentials, including guidance on credit-hour equivalency where applicable.



Stackable Credential: A stackable credential is part of a sequence of academic or workforce-focused achievements that build upon one another. Each credential within the stack provides a discrete, measurable set of competencies that align with industry or

academic standards and that move an individual along a career pathway or up a career ladder. Stackable credentials may lead to an associate, bachelor's, or graduate degree.

WV Quality Framework: The quality framework outlines the essential elements that make microcredentials meaningful and valuable to learners in West Virginia, ensuring they are academically robust, industry-aligned, workforce-driven, accessible, stackable, portable, and transparent. Microcredentials must be designed to address the following principles:

- Academic Quality
- Industry Alignment
- Workforce Demand, Economic and Social Mobility
- Accessibility
- Stackability
- Portability and Recognition
- Transparency

SECTION 2: WV QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The WV Quality Framework was developed by synthesizing national models (including those from SUNY, Colorado, and the National Skills Coalition) with West Virginia's higher education priorities around workforce alignment, accessibility, and learner mobility.

This quality framework outlines the essential elements that make microcredentials meaningful and valuable to learners in West Virginia, ensuring they are academically robust, industry-aligned, workforce-driven, accessible, stackable, portable, and transparent. Microcredentials must be designed to address the following principles:

Credentials should provide a meaningful return on a learner's investment of time and money. While "value" may look different for each individual, it should ultimately open doors—whether to better jobs, higher salaries, opportunities for advancement, or further education—and foster a sense of personal growth and accomplishment. Credentials of value support economic, social, and personal mobility, and can stand alone or combine with other credentials and work experience to create clear, rewarding pathways forward.

WV Quality Framework Principles:

1. Academic Quality

Similar to undergraduate degrees, microcredentials must be designed to uphold high academic standards, ensuring that learning outcomes are clearly defined, measurable, and assessed appropriately. Institutions must establish quality assurance processes like those used for traditional credentials. Course content and assessments must be designed using evidence-based instructional strategies and aligned with recognized frameworks for skill development.

2. Industry Alignment

Microcredentials must be developed in collaboration with industry partners to ensure they address workforce needs and equip learners with relevant, applicable skills. They must reflect current and emerging trends in various industries and professional fields. This alignment increases the value of microcredentials for employers, ensuring that individuals who earn them are job-ready and competitive in the labor market.

If a direct industry partnership is not currently in place, the microcredential must be designed to align with widely recognized industry standards, skills frameworks, professional certifications, or employer-identified competencies. The credential must be designed to prepare learners with relevant, transferable skills valued by employers, and, if applicable, include plans for developing future industry partnerships to enhance ongoing alignment.

3. Workforce Demand, Economic and Social Mobility

Microcredentials must be designed to support economic mobility by targeting in-demand and growing industries in West Virginia, or provide general skill sets in demand in a variety of industries and professional roles. Labor market data, employer feedback, student demand, and workforce projections must inform their development to ensure that learners gain skills that lead to enhanced employment opportunities. Given West Virginia's broad population needs, microcredentials must be designed to support individuals looking to enter the workforce, advance in their current careers, or transition to new industries.

4. Accessibility

West Virginia’s microcredentials must be designed to meet the needs of learners from various backgrounds, including working adults, veterans, rural populations, and those facing financial or time constraints. Ideally, these programs will be designed to offer flexible learning options, including online and hybrid formats, to accommodate non-traditional learners.

5. Stackability

Microcredentials are expected to provide both immediate value and opportunities for continued education. When possible, they must be designed to "stack" into larger credentials, such as certificates or degrees, allowing learners to build their skills progressively. If not stackable, the institution should explain why and describe how the microcredential still offers meaningful standalone value or has the potential to be stacked in the future.

5. Portability and Recognition

Microcredentials must be designed to have value beyond the issuing institution, meaning they can be recognized by multiple educational institutions, employers, and industry organizations. This requires collaboration across sectors to develop shared standards and transferable credentials.

6. Transparency

Institutions must provide detailed descriptions of the skills and competencies demonstrated, the criteria used to assess proficiency, and any alignment with industry standards or certifications. They should also clearly indicate whether and how the credential transfers or articulates to other academic programs at the institution or at another institution. Transparency ensures that earners understand the credential's value and that employers can confidently evaluate its relevance.

SECTION 3: PROPOSED HEPC/CTCS POLICY FOR APPROVAL OF MICROCREDENTIALS

[Proposed language for Series 11]:

The president or designee shall provide final approval for each new microcredential at the institutional level after the institution completes its established curriculum review process; no external approvals (e.g., Council or accreditor) are required. Upon final approval, the institution must submit a Microcredential Inventory Form (see section 5) to the Council for inclusion in the statewide Microcredential Inventory.

While use of the WV Quality Framework template is encouraged, institutions may adapt the template to meet internal requirements if all seven core principles are addressed. Before launching any microcredentials, institutions must submit their intended template to WVHEPC for review and to be kept on file.

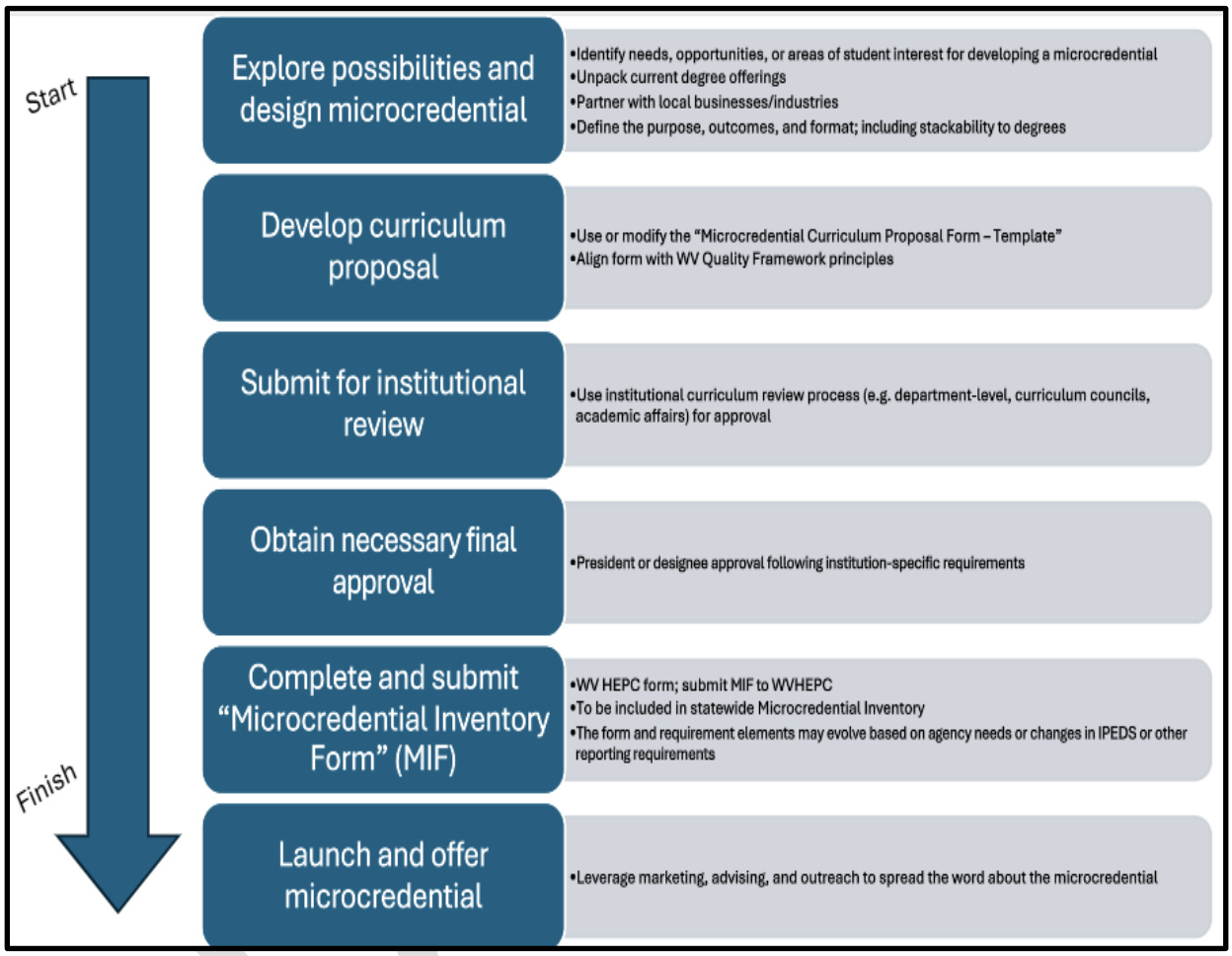
Credential Type	Definition	Credit / Hour Range	Relationship
Microcredential	Short, focused academic award providing in-demand skills, knowledge, and experience. May be earned through courses, work-based learning, or verified competency against clear criteria. Credit or non-credit, with credit-hour equivalency guidance.	Flexible; credit and non-credit	Serves as the **umbrella definition**. Skill Sets and Advanced Skill Sets that meet the Quality Framework are recognized as microcredentials.
Skill Set Certificate	Series of courses or competencies preparing individuals for a specific skill.	Fewer than **12 credit hours** (or non-credit equivalent)	Considered **equivalent to microcredentials** under Credential WV.
Advanced Skill Set Certificate	Series of courses or competencies preparing individuals for more advanced skills.	**12–29 credit hours** (or non-credit equivalent)	Considered **equivalent to microcredentials** under Credential WV.

Notes on Existing Skill Sets

- All *skill sets* or *advanced skill sets* offered by community and technical colleges can be recognized as micro credentials provided they meet the Credential WV Quality Framework criteria. These programs will be formally recognized and included in the statewide Microcredential Inventory. This approach ensures that the work already underway at institutions is honored and provides a clear pathway for integrating existing offerings into the Credential WV framework.

- The current definition of skill sets and advanced skill sets are considered equivalent to the proposed definition of microcredentials in the Credential WV Quality Framework. This alignment will be reflected in Series 11, and future discussions will determine whether *microcredential* should replace the terms *skill sets* and *advanced skill sets* to ensure consistency across the system and alignment with national standards.

SECTION 4: FLOWCHART OUTLINING MICROCREDENTIAL APPROVAL PROCESS: DESIGN TO LAUNCH



STEPS:

1. **Explore & design the microcredential**
   Begin by identifying opportunities for a new microcredential through conversations with faculty, students, industry partners, and workforce stakeholders. This may include unpacking existing degree or certificate programs, identifying in-demand skills, or responding to regional workforce needs. Consider industry certifications and other third-party awards and how these can be combined with academic experiences to create new microcredentials.

2. **Develop curriculum proposal using your institution's "Microcredential Curriculum Proposal Form" or other document that aligns with WV Quality Framework principles)**
   Draft a microcredential proposal that includes outlining learning outcomes, assessment methods, alignment to workforce and learner needs, and how it meets the WV Quality Framework (or adapted template with all seven principles).

3. **Submit for institutional review**
   Submit the microcredential proposal through your institution's internal curriculum governance structure for review (e.g., department-level committees, curriculum councils, academic affairs).

4. **Obtain final approval**
   Once approved through internal governance and review processes, obtain final approval from the designated institutional agent. No HEPC or accreditor approval is required.

5. **Complete and submit the "Microcredential Inventory Form" to HEPC**
   After institutional approval, fill out and submit the Microcredential Inventory Form so the credential can be included in the statewide Microcredential Inventory.

6. **Launch & offer the microcredential**
   With all approvals and documentation complete, the microcredential may now be offered to students.

SECTION 5: MICROCREDENTIAL CURRICULUM PROPOSAL FORM (TEMPLATE BASED ON WV QUALITY FRAMEWORK)

This microcredential curriculum proposal form template is intended to be a guide for submitting proposals for new microcredentials to undergo the institution's vetting and approval process. The template may be modified to fit the specific needs and governance structures of each institution.

Items in red are required, as they will be reported to the HEPC through the Microcredential Inventory Form.

Section 1: General Information

- **Institution name:**
- Department/Division:
- **Primary Contact (Name & Title):**
- **Email:**
- **Phone:**
- **Proposed Micro-Credential Title:**
- **CIP Code:**
- **Total Credit Hours:**
  - **Or Contact hours**
- **Undergraduate or graduate**
- **Is this a stackable microcredential at your institution? Y/N**
- **HEAPS eligible (CTCs) only**
- **Credit or Non-Credit**
  - **If non-credit, what is the credit equivalency?**
- Modality – online, F2F, hybrid
- Proposed Launch Date:
- Overview of the microcredential: *Provide a summary of the microcredential, including its purpose, target audience, and the skills or competencies learners will acquire*

Section 2: Microcredential Proposal Narrative

1. Academic Integrity Criteria

- Clearly state measurable learning outcomes of the microcredential
- Assessment: Describe how the outcomes will be assessed.
- Summarize the instructional strategies and curriculum design approach.

2. Industry Alignment

- If applicable, identify the specific industry partners consulted during development.
- Describe how the microcredential addresses specific workforce needs or professional skills.
    - If there is not a specific industry alignment, map knowledge, skills, and abilities outcomes to specific industry skills
- Provide evidence (LMI data, Program Advisory Board minutes, etc.) of relevance to current or emerging industry trends.

(Attach letters of support or statements from industry partners, if available)

3. Workforce Demand, Economic and Social Mobility

- Provide labor market data, employer feedback, or workforce projections supporting the need for this microcredential.
- Explain how the microcredential will support employment opportunities or career advancement, particularly in West Virginia's economic context.
- Will this impact the wages of the employee? If yes, how so?

(Attach data or employer feedback, if available)

4. Accessibility

- Describe how the microcredential will be accessible to a variety of learner populations (e.g., working adults, rural learners, veterans).
- Outline the delivery methods and scheduling options.

5. Stackability

- Describe how the microcredential fits within a broader academic or workforce pathway.
- Identify whether the microcredential can stack into an existing certificate, degree, or other credential.
- If a standalone credential, explain any plan for future stackability or reasons why stackability is unnecessary in this instance

(Include a diagram or pathway map, if applicable)

6. Portability and Recognition

- Explain how the microcredential will be recognized beyond the institution (e.g., by employers, professional associations, other institutions; transcript, LER, digital badge, etc.)
- Provide information about the digital badge metadata (skills, competencies, issuing authority).
- Describe any partnerships or collaborations supporting portability.

7. Transparency

- Describe how information about the microcredential (learning outcomes, assessment methods, industry alignment) will be made accessible to learners and external stakeholders.
- Indicate where this information will be published (e.g., course catalog, website, digital badge metadata, Microcredential Inventory).

Section 3: Required Attachments

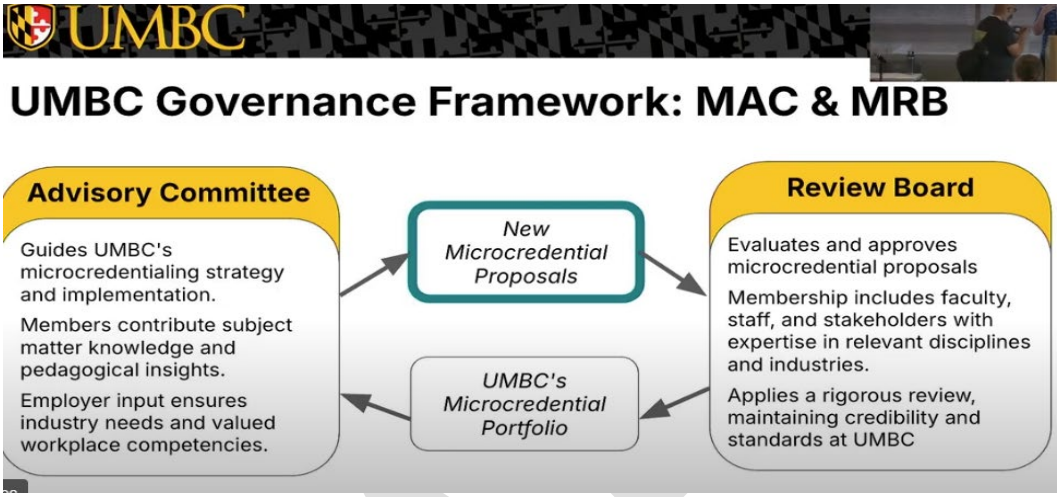
- Sample syllabus or course outline
- Curriculum map showing alignment of learning outcomes and assessments
- Letters of support from industry partners (if applicable)
- Labor market data or employer feedback (if applicable)
- Pathway diagram (if stackable)

Section 4: Approvals (institutional process) – must include signature of institutional president or designee

Once approved at the institution, complete the Microcredential Inventory Form and send to HEPC/CTCS

SECTION 6: ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

1) Consider creating a microcredential advisory committee and review board. For example from the University of Maryland Baltimore County:



2) Consider a “short form curriculum proposal” to generate ideas and seek input before completing the formal curriculum proposal form.

3) Consider a “microcredential evaluation rubric” (based on the WV Quality Framework) to score proposals for microcredentials. Refer to Quality Matters, 1EdTech Trusted Credential Framework, or your own AI tool.

4) Invite workforce partners to participate in reviewing microcredential proposals to ensure the credentials align with current industry needs, meet employer expectations, and prepare learners with skills that are relevant and valued in the workplace.