

# Michigan National Career Readiness Certificate (MI NCRC) Implementation Plan

---

## CLEG Recommendation

We recommend that the State of Michigan adopt a national career readiness certificate ("MI NCRC", based on ACT WorkKeys), to be implemented statewide. The MI NCRC will be delivered through the Michigan Works! system, in partnership with the K-12 educational system, community colleges, economic development agencies, employers, business associations, and other local partners.

All Michigan Works! Agencies (MWAs) shall offer the MI NCRC to their customers enrolled in training and programs<sup>1</sup>, and may provide it to others where it is deemed appropriate. The MI NCRC will be made available to a broader population over the four year implementation period with the intent of maximizing the number of Michigan citizens achieving a credential.

In addition, we recommend that the State of Michigan establish standards for soft skills training to be used throughout the Michigan Works! system. The MWAs will offer soft skills training programs based on state standards and local employer input to customers throughout their service areas.

## Outcomes of the MI NCRC

- Michigan will be able to quantify the skills of its workforce and will use this information to compete with other states in attracting new businesses.
- Michigan employers will have validated certification of applicant and existing employee skill levels.
- Individual certificate holders will have recognized and validated proof of their ability to apply knowledge to work and future educational endeavors.
- The MI NCRC will be integrated with No Worker Left Behind and other key workforce development strategies by helping to ensure that Michigan workers are prepared for postsecondary education, occupational training, and lifelong work and learning.
- Michigan's workforce and education departments will be strategically aligned allowing for maximum use of limited resources.
- Assessments will identify skill gaps and provide the opportunity to develop and deliver remediation in preparation for work or additional education and training.
- Stakeholders statewide will be speaking a common language regarding worker skill levels.

---

<sup>1</sup> Statewide targets for each year of implementation are detailed on page 3 of this plan. Specific targets by MWA will be established as part of state policy implementation.

- Assessments will be portable statewide and nationally recognized.

## **Core Elements of Success**

- Statewide implementation requires state and local champions representing the full range of stakeholder groups.
- Employer education, outreach, engagement and commitment will drive acceptance and expanded use of a statewide certificate.
- Michigan's state standards for soft skills training will be responsive to employer demand and help increase employer support for the national career readiness certificate.
- Remediation opportunities, accommodations for disabled populations, alignment with bridge programs, and inclusivity for all individuals will prevent the creation of "haves" and the "have nots" and allow everyone to advance and succeed at work and learning.
- The MI NCRC must be seen not as a replacement for the high school diploma, but a reinforcement of the new Michigan high school standards and a portal to tutorial learning, remediation, post secondary education, and work. The certificate is a meaningful achievement along the continuum of lifelong learning.

## **Implementation Strategy**

The CLEG committee members and other MI NCRC implementation work group participants recognize the opportunity for Michigan to be a leader among states with the alignment of universal assessments for both high school graduates and adult workers. To achieve this universality, we must add the third WorkKeys assessment to the Michigan Merit Exam, provide MI NCRC certificates to high school students who have qualified for them, and use the same three WorkKeys assessments throughout our workforce system.

We also acknowledge that successful implementation will require serious commitments at the state and local levels, particularly in terms of time and funding. It is our recommendation that the implementation plan be scoped using a four-year timeframe and a collaborative approach involving the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG), Michigan Works! Agencies, education (K-12 and postsecondary, including community colleges and M-TECs), the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, as well as local economic development partners, and representatives from the business community (individual employer champions as well as business associations and chambers of commerce).

A four-year plan will allow for significant collaborative building, establishment of the necessary state and local systems, and a reasonable level of data collection, review, and analysis to enable the state to evaluate whether or not intended outcomes are being achieved.

At a macro level, in order to reach the goals of a statewide MI NCRC, we must:

- Maximize the population of Michigan citizens receiving WorkKeys assessment certificates and soft skills training with a four-year target of 560,000<sup>2</sup> certificates (combined high school and workforce participants);
- Maximize employer engagement<sup>3</sup> with and promotion of the MI NCRC by continuously increasing employer commitments to using NCRCs as a part of their hiring process over the four-year implementation period; and
- Align state education, workforce, and economic development strategies, policies, funding streams, and systems to increase the likelihood of achieving the maximum number of certificates and employer engagement.

To achieve statewide success, Michigan needs to combine grassroots local leadership and collaboration with statewide marketing and promotion.

## Proposed Implementation Plan

Our research and conversations with other state leaders make clear that successful implementation of a statewide national career readiness certificate requires a two-pronged approach with clear state and local roles.

### *State Responsibilities*

The primary role for the state in implementing the MI NCRC is to coordinate state level activity and ensure maximum cost savings. Specifically, the state will:

- Issue grants to Michigan Works! Agencies, which would be intended to support the set up of local assessment sites and implementation protocols, and development of local employer engagement plans and activity.
- Coordinate contracting for assessments and remediation tools to ensure that all partners benefit from bulk pricing discounts.
- Establish a full-time staff position to oversee all state aspects of implementation and evaluation.
- Develop marketing materials for statewide communication and outreach.
- Promote statewide branding of MI NCRC as an important indicator of Michigan's workforce education and training efforts.
- Establish database and tracking systems for certificate holders.
- Ensure coordination of relevant strategies, policies, and systems across state agencies (DLEG, MEDC, and the Michigan Department of Education (MDE)).

---

<sup>2</sup> Based on 380,000 high school students over 4 years (95,000/year) and 180,000 workforce participants over 4 years (30,000 in year 1, 40,000 in year 2, 50,000 in year 3, and 60,000 in year 4).

<sup>3</sup> Measurable expectations for each MWA will be established as a part of state policy implementation.

- Through CLEG, initiate development, approval, and implementation of an evaluation plan for the MI NCRC.
- Develop state standards for soft skills training.

The state will provide funding for MWA implementation grants; a statewide media and marketing campaign; staff support for statewide coordination; and data management.

### ***Michigan Works! System Responsibilities***

Michigan Works! Agencies will be charged with establishing assessment sites, serving individual certificate seekers, and maximizing employer participation. Specifically, MWAs will:

- Establish local testing sites for the MI NCRC.
- Develop a service delivery model and working partnership that builds upon WorkKeys/NCRC efforts already in place through other local stakeholders, including:
  - ◆ Community Colleges/M-TECs
  - ◆ Literacy and Adult Education providers
  - ◆ Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies
  - ◆ Area Agencies on Aging
  - ◆ Local School Districts/Intermediate School Districts
  - ◆ Employers
  - ◆ Economic Development Agencies
  - ◆ Business/Education Partnerships
  - ◆ Apprenticeship & Training Programs
  - ◆ Business Associations
  - ◆ Other Stakeholders
- Assure adequate access within the local area for individuals (irrespective of employment status, age, literacy level, or disability) wishing to earn a MI NCRC.
- Establish a plan for remediation/training for low-skill job seekers.
- Once state soft skills standards are developed, implement soft-skills training curriculum and programming that meets these standards and local employer demand.
- Develop and implement a plan for education, outreach and engagement of employers.
- MWAs will be expected to maximize:
  - ◆ The number of certificates granted in their local area; and
  - ◆ The number of local employers committed to using NCRCs as a part of their hiring process.

The MWAs will fund (from existing/continuing federal and state funding streams and NCRC implementation grants) the establishment of local test sites; the assessments and NCRCs issued; remediation program implementation; soft skills training; and education/outreach/engagement of employers.