

Taking Action to Connect Learning and Work

Mission

The National Network of Business and Industry Associations (the National Network) will improve economic opportunity and quality of life for Americans by better connecting the working world and the learning world.

Foundational Product: Blueprint for Navigating the World of Work

As a primary order of business, the National Network is developing a blueprint of the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to succeed in today's and tomorrow's jobs and careers. This blueprint is intended to enable millions of students and workers to navigate their personal path through an ever-evolving economy.

As it develops, the blueprint will lay out the personal, academic and work-readiness skills every worker needs to succeed. It will also catalog the professional or technical skills in a variety of industry credentialing programs to give people valuable information on how to prepare for specific jobs and transfer skills from one industry to another.

Our Five-Point Plan

1. Developing the blueprint of knowledge, skills and abilities needed to succeed in today's and tomorrow's jobs and careers, beginning with a set of foundational skills necessary for employment in major economic sectors

Employers in every sector emphasize the need for people with a strong academic foundation, particularly in reading and math, and skills like teamwork, problem solving, work ethic and integrity. But each sector may label these fundamental skills differently, making it difficult for prospective employees and educators to interpret what's really needed and what's common in jobs across industries and career paths. The National Network is "solving for the common denominator" of employability skills that are vital in all major economic sectors, agreeing to a common set of fundamental skills and competencies and a common language to define them. These skills can serve as the foundation from which industries can add their specific skills standards, credentials and career paths. Attainment of the core employability skills will make individuals eligible for careers in every sector of the economy and ready to further their educational goals. Initial products scheduled for release include:

- A Graphic Profile of the U.S. Common Labor Market Employability Skills: Personal Qualities, Applied Knowledge, People Skills and Workplace Skills
- Common Definitions for Required Personal Qualities, Applied Knowledge, People Skills and Workplace Skills

2. Defining clearly the attributes of quality, valid industry credentials, making it easier for students, learning centers and employers to know which credentials and certifications matter

In a large and chaotic marketplace of skills and credentials, which ones matter for today's and tomorrow's jobs and offer real value to students, workers and employers? The National Network has set out to reduce confusion and promote adoption of credentials that matter by clearly defining the attributes that make up quality and validated industry credentials, making it easier for students, learning centers and employers to know which credentials and certifications to use. The National Network is also creating a guide that lays out key steps for developing new standards-based credentials so they can have optimal value for students, workers and employers. Products scheduled for release include:

- A Blueprint for Organizations to Create Standards-Based Credentials
- Articulating the Quality Criteria: Attributes of Quality Industry Credentials
- Recommendations on Designing an Organization That Recognizes Quality Industry Credentials

3. Expanding business-led work-and-learn models that give people the hands-on skills and real-world work experiences they need to prepare for a successful career and an improved quality of life

In today's world, learning (i.e., education, training or experiences) and working are no longer independent, stand-alone domains. Rather, our innovation-driven economy demands that individuals weave learning opportunities throughout their careers and lives to upgrade their skills, acquire new competencies and apply them across multiple jobs and industries. Because of this compulsory integration of the "learning world" and the "working world," employers increasingly need to play a role in defining, evaluating and delivering learning opportunities. This is even more important as it is widely understood that when students can apply knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios, they are more engaged, learn more completely and end up better prepared for life and the workplace. The National Network is focused on expanding these types of business-led work-and-learn models, like competency-based apprenticeships, by defining the attributes of effective models, mapping these models across a continuum from middle school through mid-career, and developing tools and guidebooks that will make it easier for employers to build and participate in work-and-learn opportunities. Initial products in development include:

- A Graphic Profile of the Continuum of Work and Learn Models
- The 21st Century Competency-Based Apprenticeship Model

4. Increasing 21st century competency-based human resource practices across industry sectors, job functions and career levels

As competency-based education pathways and industry-recognized credentials increasingly become the solution for individuals to prepare for careers, employers need to respond to this shift in the way they recruit, screen, hire and advance employees. If learning success is measured by mastery of competencies, in lieu of time or credits, employers must measure job eligibility by the competencies, not the degree, that someone has earned. The National Network is exploring ways to make these new 21st century competency-based hiring practices more commonplace across industry sectors, job functions and career levels. The starting place is documenting best practices and creating guidebooks for human resources professionals. Initial products in development include:

- The Guidebook for Hiring on Competencies

5. Expanding awareness of, and participation by, students and workers in work-and-learn pathways that lead to industry credentials and employment

As the right solutions – those resulting in employment outcomes – are built, how are they promoted to increase their "market share"? The National Network is exploring the role that a national communications campaign would play in driving a widespread movement toward competency-based education pathways that result in industry-recognized credentials and employment. A key focus area is how to better connect supply and demand – how do companies directly engage with future talent? Initial products in development include:

- Telling Success Stories: Motivating Industry, Empowering Working Learners
- Informational Packages on 21st Century Career Pathways and Credentials for the Nation's Youth Organizations