

# Aligning Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Emerging Forms of Credentials: Macro, Micro, and Maintenance Credentials

Christopher M. Mullin, Ph.D.

Nondegree Credential Research Network

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# Part 1. Introduction

## **Problem & Purpose**

- How can we revise current data collection practice to align existing and emergent credentials with degrees?
- The purpose of this report, therefore, is to reimagine how certificates, diplomas, and emerging forms of credentials align with existing degree level structures.

## **Structure**

- Part 1: Introduction
- Part 2: Postsecondary Credentials Collected by NCES
  - a. Methodology
  - b. Findings
  - c. Discussion
- Part 3: Credentials Across Federal Entities
  - a. Methodology
  - b. Findings
  - c. Discussion
- Part 4: Emergent Credentials
  - a. Methodology
  - b. Findings
  - c. Discussion
- Part 5: Recommendations



Credential: is a writ conferred by an entity that reflects the culmination of a learning experience under its direction.

## writ noun

'rit

[Synonyms of writ >](#)

1 : something **written** : **WRITING**

| Sacred *Writ*

2 a : a formal written document

*specifically* : a legal instrument in epistolary form issued under seal in the name of the English monarch

**b** : an order or mandatory process in **writing** issued in the name of the sovereign or of a court or judicial officer commanding the person to whom it is directed to perform or refrain from performing an act specified therein

| *writ* of detinue

| *writ* of entry

| *writ* of execution

**c** : the power and authority of the issuer of such a written order → usually used with *run*

| outside the United States where ... our *writ* does not run

— Dean Acheson

## Part 2. Postsecondary Credentials Collected by NCES

When and why were undergraduate and graduate certificates and other credentials included in the data collection efforts of NCES and its predecessor agencies?





## FIGURE 2: Organized Occupational Curriculum Criteria: 1955/56

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For the present study, the term “Organized Occupational Curriculum” has adopted, defined in the questionnaire circulated to all institutions of higher education, as follows:

“Criteria. For purposes of this survey, an organized occupational curriculum is one which meets all four of the following criteria:

- “a. High-school graduation (or equivalent, including maturity) is required for admission to the curriculum.
- “b. The curriculum is designed to prepare students for immediate employment in an occupation or cluster of occupations, rather than for further, advanced study leading to a bachelor’s or higher degree.
- “c. Completion of the curriculum requires at least 1 but less than 4 years of full-time (or equivalent) attendance. A ‘year’ means an academic year of approximately 9 months.
- “d. The curriculum leads to a certificate, diploma, associate degree, or other formal award, signifying that the students has completed an organized curriculum in an occupational area.”

Each of these four factors is important. Some curriculums which were reported by institutions have been eliminated before summarization of the data because one or more of the four criteria were not satisfied, especially the fourth.

## Part 3. Credentials Across Federal Entities

How do current definitions of certificates, degrees, and diplomas align with each other, within IPEDS, and across of other federal agency data collection efforts?





Credential		Federal Entity			
		NCES	USDoL	NSF	Census
Degree					
	Doctoral – Research	IPEDS, B&B, AE			PSEO
	Doctoral - Professional Practice	IPEDS, B&B, AE			PSEO
	Doctoral – Other	IPEDS	O*NET		
	First Professional		O*NET, ORS, CES	NTEWS	ACS, CPS, ASEC, SIPP
	Doctoral		/EP, ORS, CES	NTEWS, NSCG	ACS, CPS, ASEC, SIPP
	Master’s	IPEDS, B&B, AE, ELS	EP, O*NET, ORS, CES	NTEWS, NSCG	ACS, CPS, ASEC, SIPP, PSEO
	Bachelor’s or Advanced degree				J2J, QWI
	Bachelor’s	IPEDS, B&B, AE, BPS, ELS, HSLS, NPSAS	EP, PIRL, ORS, CES	NTEWS, NSCG	ACS, CPS, ASEC, SIPP, PSEO
	Associate	IPEDS, B&B, AE, BPS, ELS, HSLS, NPSAS	EP, PIRL, O*NET, ORS, CES	NTEWS, NSCG	ACS, CPS, ASEC, SIPP, PSEO
	Associate - Vocational		ORS		CPS, ASEC
	Associate or Some College				J2J, QWI
Certificate					
	Post-Master’s Certificate	IPEDS, B&B, AE, ELS	O*NET		PSEO
	Post-Baccalaureate Certificate	IPEDS, B&B, AE, ELS	O*NET		PSEO
	Undergraduate	B&B, BPS, ELS, HSLS, NPSAS			
	Postsecondary nondegree award		OOH/EP		
	Postsecondary		O*NET		
	Educational		ORS		SIPP
	Vocational			NTEWS	
	Occupational		PIRL		
	Certificate of 2–4 Years	IPEDS			PSEO
	Certificate of 1–2 Years	IPEDS			PSEO
	Certificate less than a year				PSEO
	Certificate of 9–29 credit hours	IPEDS			
	Certificate up to 8 credit hours	IPEDS			
	Apprenticeship	AE			
Certification			ORS		
	Professional	B&B		NTEWS, NSCG	CPS, ASEC, SIPP
	Occupational		PIRL		
License			ORS		
	State	B&B		NTEWS, NSCG	CPS ASEC SIPP
	Industry	B&B		NTEWS, NSCG	CPS ASEC SIPP
	Occupational		PIRL		
Diploma		IPEDS			
	Vocational	AE		NTEWS	SIPP
	Technical	AE			

## Part 4. Emergent Credentials

How are current definitions of certificates, degrees, diplomas, and emerging credentials reported on by non-governmental agencies?



Credential		Report Publishers				
		WorkCred	Credential Engine	National Student Clearinghouse	UNESCO	AACRAO
Degree						
	Doctor – Research	X				
	Doctor - Professional Practice	X				
	Master’s	X		X		
	Bachelor’s	X		X		
	Associate	X		X		
	Title IV Degrees		X			
	Non-Title IV Degrees		X			
Certificate		X		X		
	Professional Graduate					X
	Undergraduate					X
	Certificate of Achievement	X				
	Certificate of Participation	X				
	Certificate of Completion	X				
	Assessment-based Certificate	X				
	Title IV Certificates		X			
	Non-Title IV Certificates		X			
	Course Completion Certificates		X			
	Coding Bootcamp Course Completion Certificates		X			
	Online Course Completion Certificates		X			
Certification		X				
	Occupational		X			
License		X				
	Occupational		X			
Badge		X				
	Digital		X			X
	Open					X
Credentials						
	Micro	X	X		X	X
	Macro				X	
Apprenticeships						
	Registered Apprenticeships		X			
	Unregistered Apprenticeships		X			

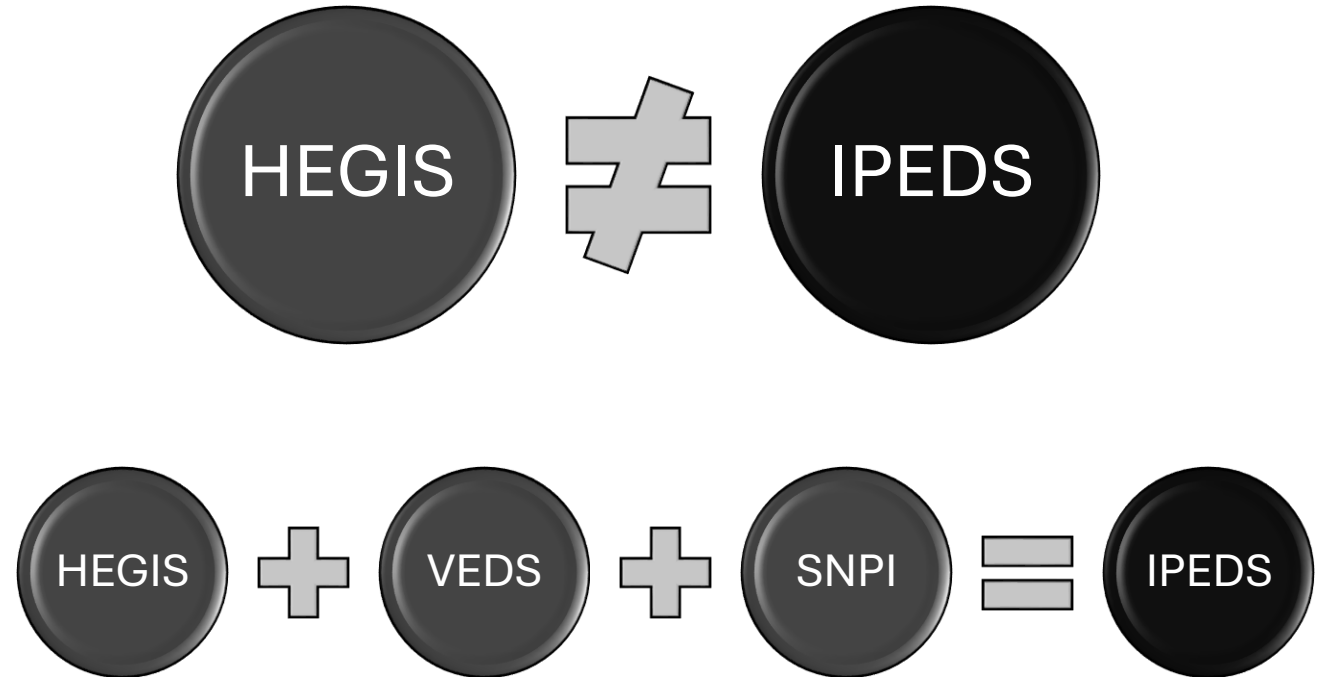
# Part 5. Recommendations

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# Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1.**

I recommend NCES conduct a legal review to affirm that IPEDS is a data collection system for both Title IV and non-Title IV institutions.

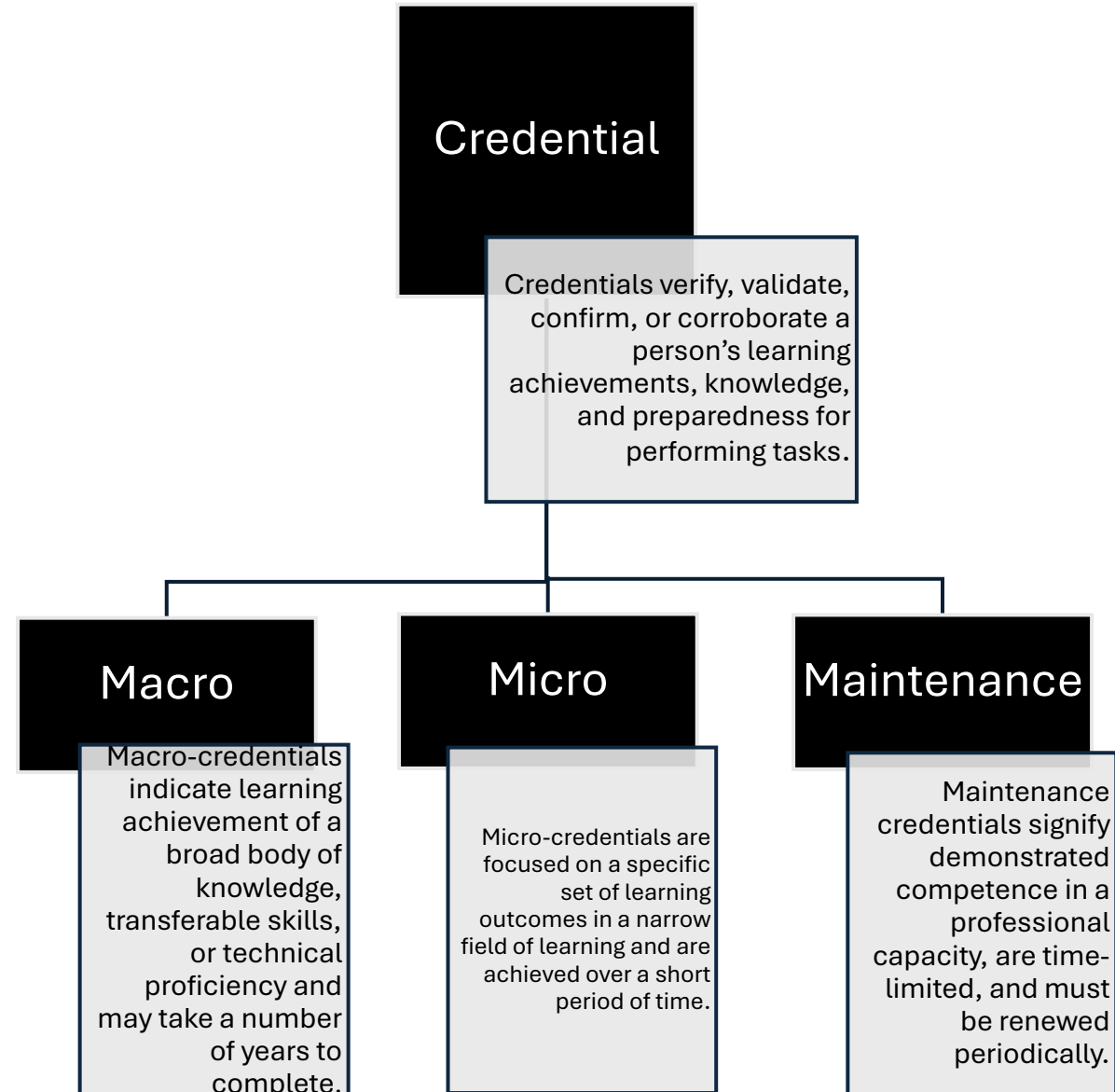


## Part 5.

# Recommendations

### Recommendation 2.

I recommend that NCES adopt an organizational framework of credentials that includes the credentials IPEDS has collects and those it does not to allow for greater clarity to the public.



Name	Detailed Name	Definition
<b>MACRO-CREDENTIALS</b>		
Doctor's Degree	Doctor's Degree – Professional Practice Doctor's Degree – Research/Scholarship Doctor's Degree – Other	
Master's Degree	Master's Degree	
Graduate Certificate	<b>Post-Master's Certificate</b> <b>Post-Bachelor's Certificate</b>	*> 12 credit hours *> 12 credit hours
Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	
Associate Degree	Associate Degree	
Undergraduate Certificate	Long-term Moderate-term <b>Short-term</b>	*13-29 credit hours/equiv.
<b>MICRO-CREDENTIALS</b>		
Skill-building Certificate	<b>Skill Building Certificate</b>	*4-12 credit hours/equiv.
Badge	<b>Continuing Education Units (CEU)</b> <b>Course Completion Certificates</b> <b>Badges (Open &amp; Digital)</b>	*1 second to 3 credit hours/equiv.
<b>MAINTENANCE CREDENTIALS</b>		
License	Professional or Occupational License	Not collected in IPEDS
Certification	Professional or Occupational Certification	Not collected in IPEDS

## Examples of Credential Names

### Part 5.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 3.**

I recommend that NCES convene a cross statistical agency workgroup to share research and agree on common terminology for credentials.

- Certificates
  - Undergraduate, graduate, postsecondary, educational vocational, occupational, apprenticeship
- Certifications
  - Professional
  - Occupational (Labor only)
- License
  - State
  - Industry
  - Occupational (Labor only)
- Diploma
  - Vocational
  - Technical (Adult Education only)





## Part 5.

# Recommendations

### **Recommendation 4.**

I recommend NCES create the **Program Characteristics Survey** to complement the current Institutional Characteristics Survey of IPEDS.

Example of certificate titles that speak to how it was earned:

- of Achievement
- of Participation
- of Completion
- Assessment-based Certificate
- Title IV
- Non-Title IV
- Course Completion
- Coding Bootcamp Course Completion
- Online Course Completion

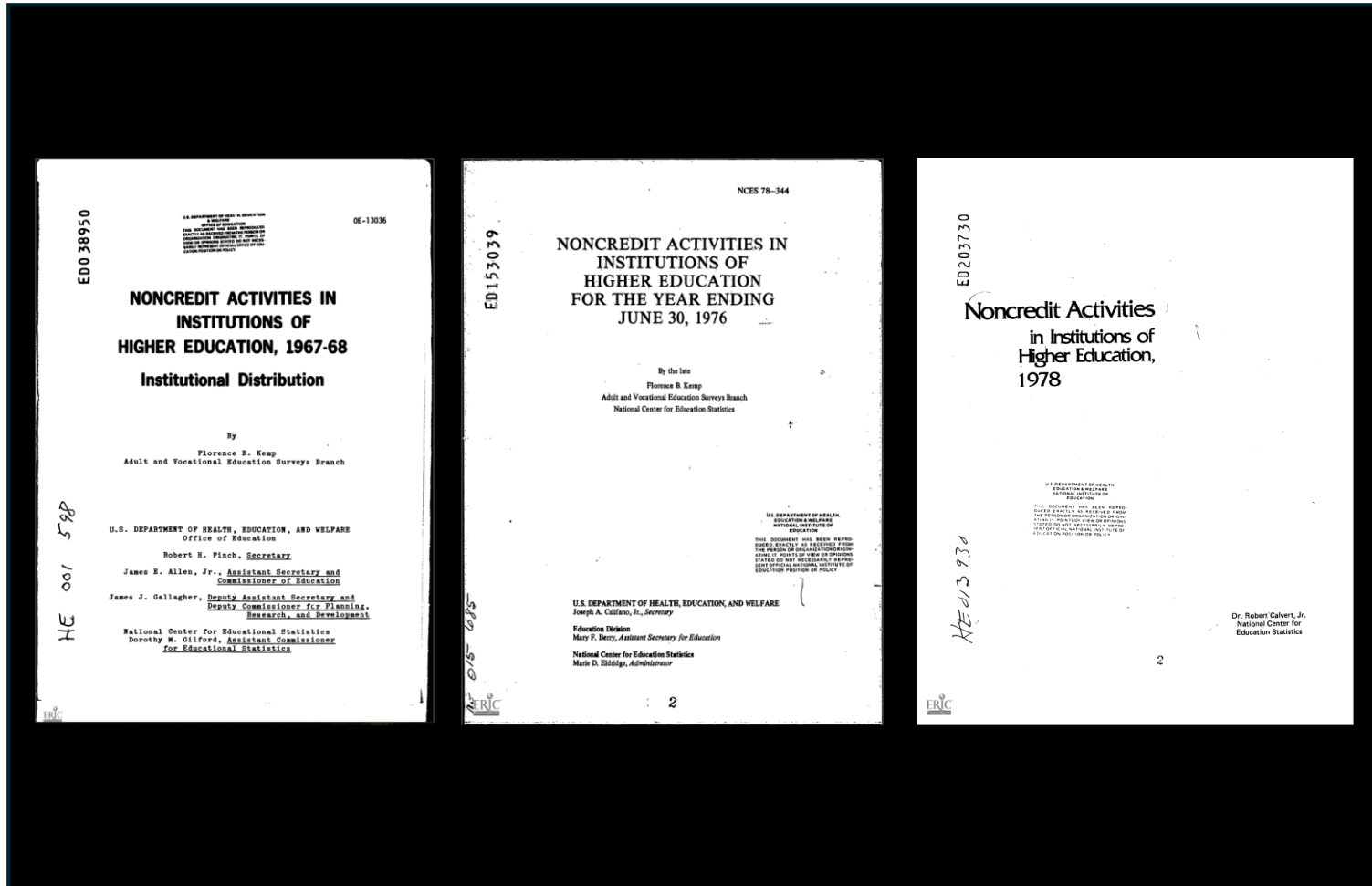




# Part 5. Recommendations

## Recommendation 5.

I recommend NCES replicate its 1977/78 survey measuring noncredit activity to understand how noncredit has changed over time while adding a few questions relevant to current practice and new knowledge.

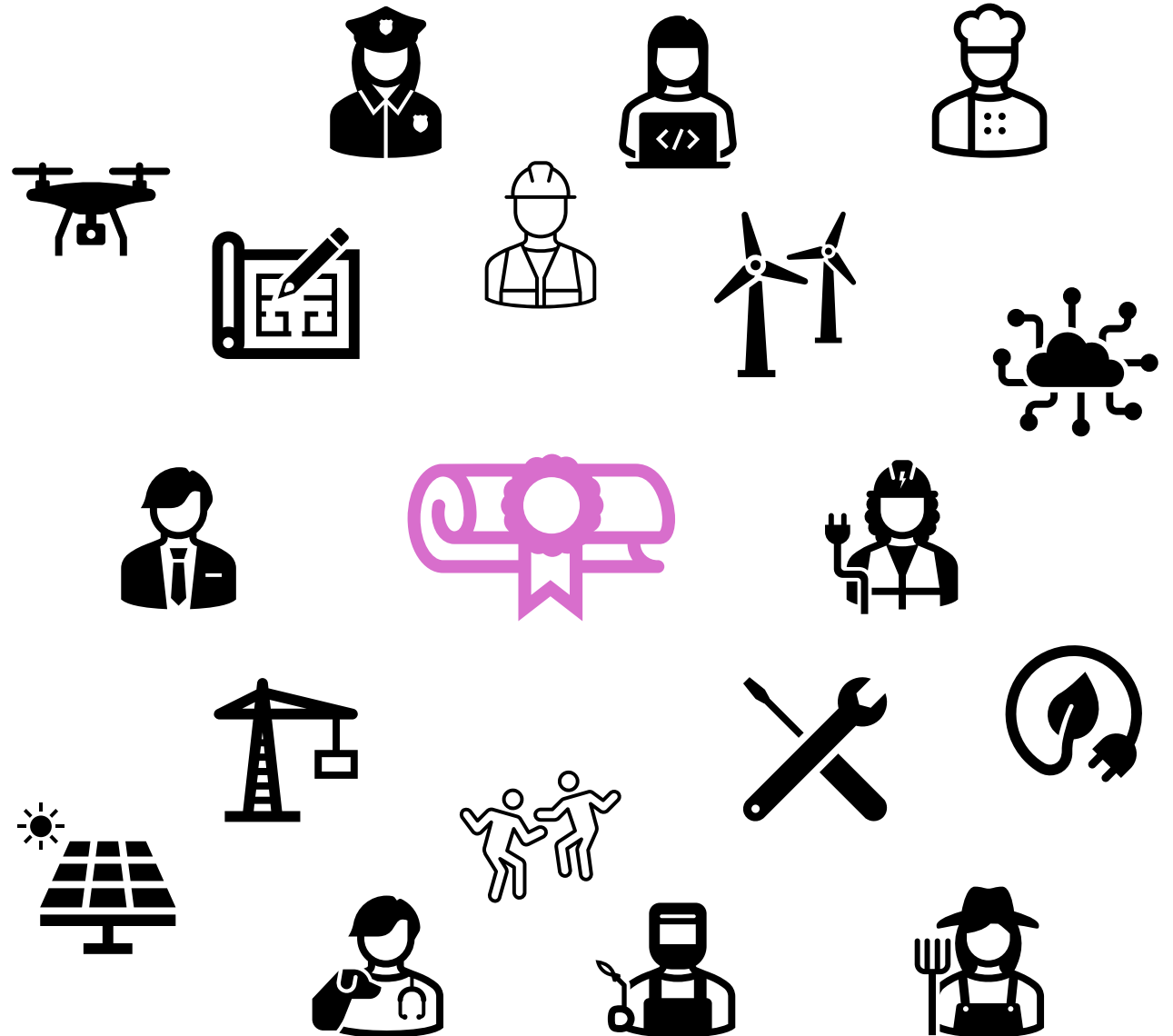


## Part 5.

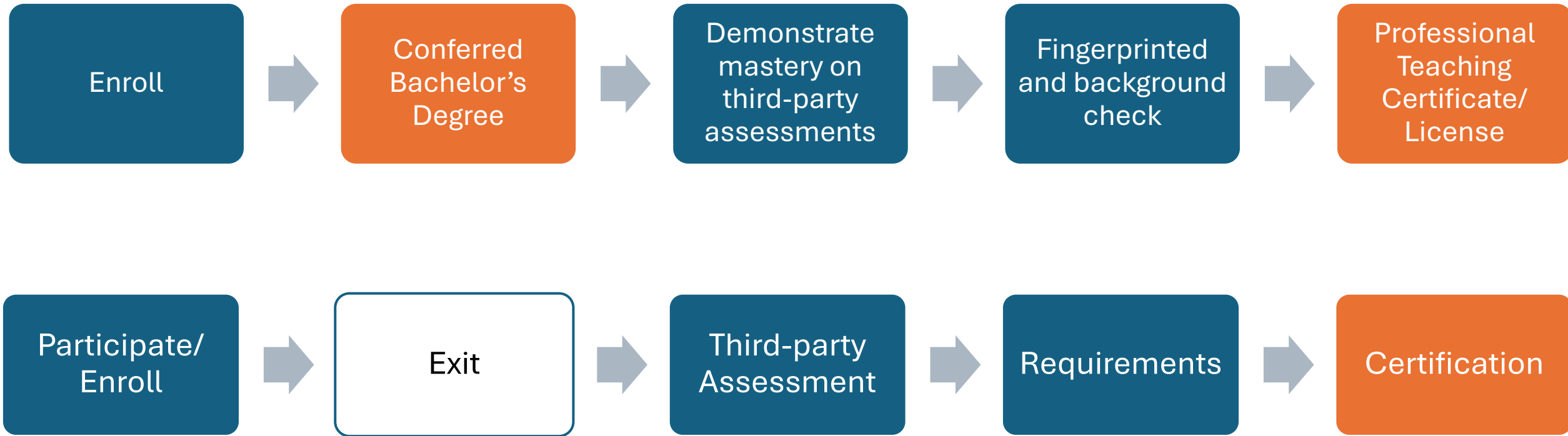
# Recommendations

### Recommendation 6.

I recommend NCES play a consultative role to federal governmental agencies and departments funding apprenticeships, workforce training, and career and technical education (CTE) when they revisit their performance metrics to ensure providers confer a credential upon completion.



# “Leads to” (for illustrative purposes only)



# Conclusion

If accomplished, *and adopted*, the collective enterprise can move toward a common vocabulary that **supports learner ambitions, employer needs, and collaboration across entities conferring each credential** so that each credential becomes interoperable, transferrable, and additive rather than disjointed.





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Lumina's [Christopher M. Mullin](#) spent months digging into the history of credentialing in this country — and emerged with six recommendations to reduce the chaos.



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