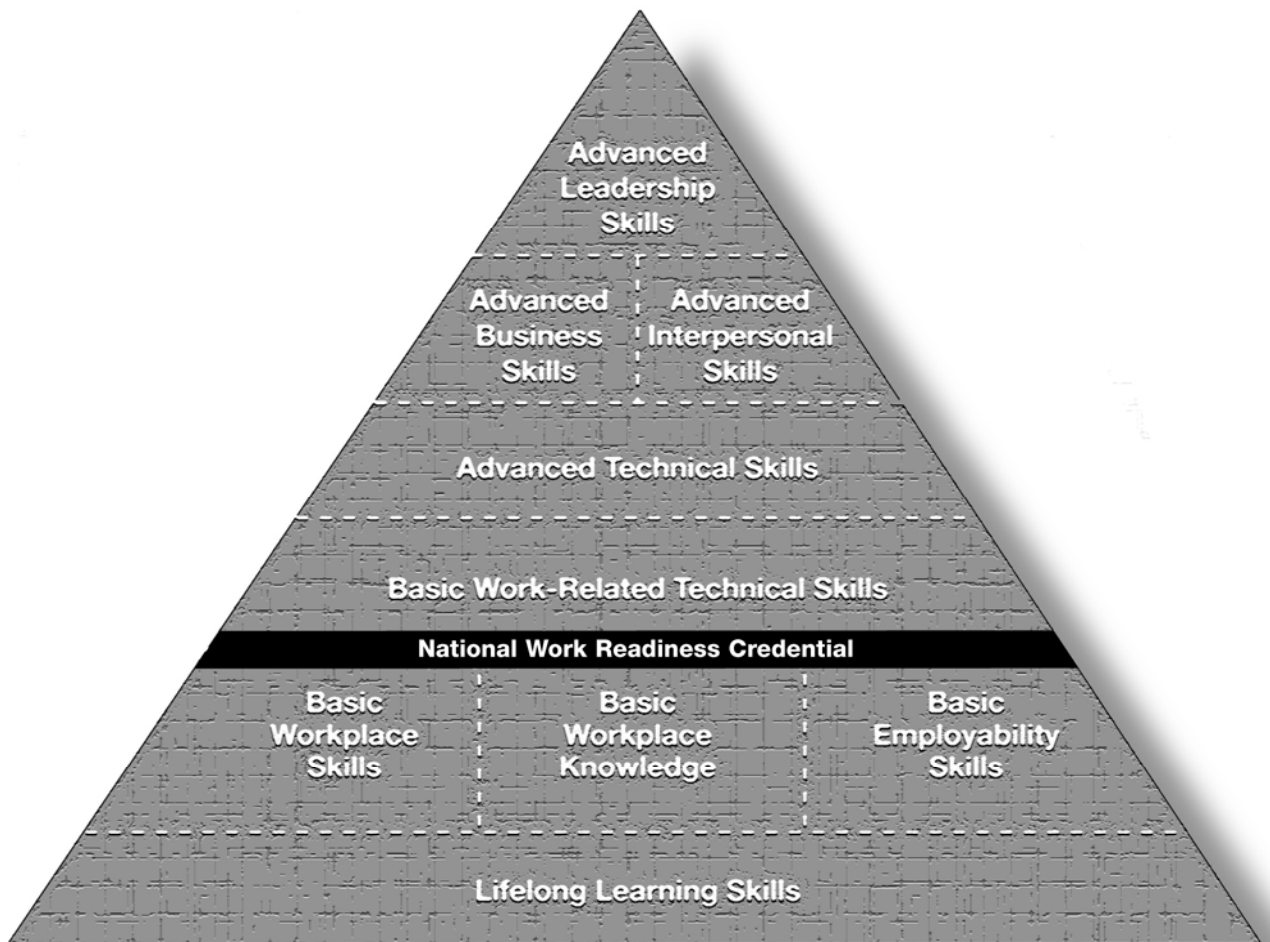


Looking for the Best Solution for Certifying Entry-Level Work Readiness?



Take a look at the **National Work Readiness Credential** – a standards-based approach to defining, measuring, and certifying readiness for entry-level work.

Created through a public-private partnership

In 2002 policy makers from four states joined together with the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) and national business leaders¹ to find a solution to a problem faced by businesses in our communities.

- Too many applicants for entry-level jobs lacked the basic academic and employability skills that enabled them to be productive, contributing workers.
- The businesses could not count on the state's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and one-stop career centers to reliably refer qualified entry-level workers to them.

The President's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was aimed at addressing the basic academic skills gap, not the employability skills gap facing businesses.

We asked business leaders from across industry clusters to define the solution to this problem. Their answer:

- a valid, reliable, assessment-based certification of work readiness skills
- an assessment based on a national, portable standard of what entry-level workers need to know and be able to do.²

Built to the specifications of business

To find out what mattered on the frontline, we conducted a year-long research process in businesses within Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Washington. Then we asked representatives of businesses, chambers of commerce, and industry associations from across the country to respond to our research results. The consensus was that entry-level workers needed *a strong foundation of critical employability skills*: the ability to cooperate with others, the ability to communicate orally in English as well as to read and write; the ability to solve problems, to resolve conflicts, to take responsibility, to learn and adapt to change.

Based on SCANS, O*NET and Equipped for the Future Standards

In 2002 the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) was a logical convener for this effort. A small federal organization created by Congress in 1992, it had supported a 10-year national research effort in partnership with 17 states and the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor to develop the Equipped for the Future (EFF) applied learning standards. These standards addressed more than traditional literacy skills: they addressed the full range of skills individuals needed to carry out their responsibilities as citizens, family members, and workers.

¹ The original investing partners in the Work Readiness Credential were the National Institute for Literacy, Workforce Florida, Inc., New Jersey Department of Labor, New York Department of Labor, and Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. Additional investing partners include: District of Columbia, JA Worldwide, and Rhode Island Economic Policy Council. National advisors include: Institute for Educational Leadership, National Association of Manufacturers Center for Workforce Success, National Association of Workforce Boards, National Governors Association, National Retail Federation Foundation, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce Center for Workforce Preparation.

² Entry-level jobs are non-supervisory, non-managerial, nonprofessional positions. These may be unskilled positions or they may be skilled positions where the required job-specific skills can be learned while on the job.

The National Work Readiness Credential (NWRC) is built on this solid standards-based foundation, as well as more than a decade of work at the U.S. Department of Labor on SCANS and O*NET, and years of work in states across the country building industry-specific skill standards. The NWRC updates this work by asking businesses to define the critical tasks and behaviors that new entry-level workers need to carry out—and the knowledge and skills most important to carrying them out.

No other assessment tool addresses entry-level work readiness.

Once we knew how businesses defined entry-level work readiness, we set out to find assessment tools that would address the critical employability gap.

We discovered many good tools—but not for certifying the skills of applicants for entry-level jobs. We discovered there were no existing tools that could be used to certify the full range of employability skills that businesses agree are critical to success on the first rung of the career ladder. If we were going to meet the needs of the businesses in our states, we needed to build our own assessment package.

The NWRC assessments measure nine skills employers agreed were critical to successful performance of entry-level work:

- **Oral Communication Skills:** Speak so others can Understand; Listen Actively
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Cooperate with Others, Resolve Conflict, and Negotiate
- **Problem-solving Skills:** Solve Problems and Make Decisions
- **Self Management and Learning Skills:** Take Responsibility for Learning
- **Applied Foundation Skills:** Read with Understanding; Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate; and Observe Critically.

These nine skills are organized into four assessment modules:

- Reading,
- Math,
- Situational Judgment, and
- Oral Language.

The first three are multiple choice assessments based on short work-based scenarios. The Oral Language Test is a state-of-the-art listening and speaking performance test. The test is not timed; however it takes most test takers two to two-and-one-half hours to complete all four modules. Each module (30-45 minutes) can be completed separately.

Designed to work within the public workforce system.

The assessments are designed to be delivered by computer, through a web-based system, to assure maximum accessibility, ease of use, and the necessary security to support a high stakes employability test. Testing sites can be in any kind of organization—from one-stop career centers to community colleges to businesses—that has a small computer lab and someone to serve as a proctor for test takers. No specialized assessment knowledge is necessary.

Rigorously developed to ensure a valid, reliable, legally defensible certification of entry-level work readiness

The assessment package we have developed to assess our business-defined work readiness standard will result in a credential which promises to be as universal as the GED. The difference is that while the GED certifies a range and level of skills development equivalent to high school completion, the National Work Readiness Credential certifies a level and range of skills development necessary for entry-level work.

When the credential assessments are released in June 2006 you will be able to count on them to reliably identify individuals who are work ready. We have just completed a field test of these assessments that will enable us to affirm with confidence that they reliably and validly measure work readiness according to this business-defined standard.

We will continue to collect data on results once the credential is operational so that we can be sure that it really does make the difference that matters to individual jobseekers and to businesses seeking qualified, work ready entry-level workers.

Better Accountability to Customers

In building the National Work Readiness Credential we identified four critical system needs:

- Streamlining the hiring and training process for businesses by identifying a work-ready pool of job applicants.
- Providing a strong “first rung” work readiness certification for jobseekers—including immigrants, out-of-school youth, adults with low literacy skills, TANF recipients and ex offenders.
- Building a more efficient, more accountable pipeline for preparing individuals for work.
- Improving the ability of state and local WIBs to refer qualified applicants for entry-level jobs.

A more efficient pipeline for entry-level workers

Because the National Work Readiness Credential is based on a business-defined work readiness standard, states, local WIBs and their partners can use it to build a more effective pipeline for producing well-qualified workers for current and new businesses in the region. Local WIBs can hold education and training vendors accountable for assuring that program participants are work ready when they leave a program. This means WIBs and education and training providers can be more accountable to their business customers—delivering the quality they need to be competitive in a global economy.

A strong foundation for moving up the career ladder

The National Work Readiness Credential is designed to complement the tools already being used by employers and the workforce development system to assess how well job applicants are prepared for specific jobs in specific industries or companies. The NWRC assessments measure the skills needed to step with confidence onto the first rung of the career ladder.

States that are already using Work Keys as part of their services to match individuals to jobs will find that the National Work Readiness Credential adds the ability to assess entry-level employability skills like working with others, problem solving, and listening and speaking.

When it comes to assessing the technical skills needed to progress within specific sectors—from retail to health care to financial services to manufacturing—there are a range of excellent assessments already built to industry specific skill standards that states and employers will want to rely on.

For more information about the National Work Readiness Credential

Visit www.uschamber.com/cwp/strategies/workreadinesscredential.htm or contact:

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