

G U I D A N C E

Industry Recognized Credentials (IRCs)

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Regionally Vetted, Industry-Valued Qualifications



MVA DEFINITION

IRC programs partner with industry, colleges, or third-party technical training providers to award credentials, including current lists published by state education departments as well as regionally customized and vetted credentials. Credentials might be paired with college credit or credit towards a training program.

MVA-Level IRCs Include:

- Employer awareness and industry value.
- Hireability (high demand in the job market).
- Stackability (if it does not have as much value on its own, it can be combined with other credentials to increase viability).

Why?

Relevance to Employers

Ideally, IRCs offered to students should align with the needs of local employers. These credentials should act as actionable hiring signals, reflecting the specific skills or expertise they certify. It's important to evaluate the value and relevance of each IRC. This will help educators as they avoid simply "checking the box" for counting any certification as an MVA experience without their own due diligence. It is ultimately up to the school team ensure quality.

Verified Competence

Issued by a third party such as an industry council, government or company that has developed a particular methodology, IRCs serve as verification of a person's qualifications or competence in a technical area. Additionally, other IRCs certify that a learner went through a rigorous curriculum or training program that provided an authentic work-based learning experience.

Career Head Start

Earning certificates, certifications, or licenses in high school allows students to get a head start on their chosen career path, making them more prepared and competitive in the job market. These credentials are a cornerstone of Career and Technical Education (CTE), which is defined and funded by "Perkins V," ensuring students gain valuable skills and qualifications before they graduate.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN PLANNING

- The RWL collective recognizes all IRCs sponsored by the state boards of education in addition to “regionally-vetted” IRCs.
- The most pressing consideration for local, “home-grown” IRCs is that they certainly have immediate value to local employers and therefore should be considered MVAs. The team that developed them should seek sustainability, typically involving recognition by the state board of education, to retain their ongoing viability.
- IRC assessments should culminate in a comprehensive assessment to test skills that represent real-world scenarios or evaluation.



Pre-MVA Opportunity

CTE programs often have a entry-level or pre-requisite courses supporting advanced courses that result in MVA-level IRCS. Students should take advantage of course offerings that support their path of interest in addition to workplace tours, job shadowing, career fairs, and other methods of exploration.

STUDENT PREPARATION

Research and explore jobs/careers and potential career paths.

Work with counselor to determine course of study including complementary experiences or prerequisites.

Develop workplace etiquette and communication skills.

DISTRICT PREPARATION

Include community partners in the design of the program by creating a team composed of administration and representatives from industry, colleges, and third-party technical training providers.

Ensure teacher credentials are current and offer teacher relevant professional development opportunities.

Support the teacher to develop a curriculum plan that meets the rigor of an equivalent experience in a workplace environment.

Develop a plan to offer authentic opportunities to showcase and receive feedback for growth of POG traits.

What is “Regionally Vetted?”

Ideally, IRCs offered to students should be relevant to local employers and act as actionable hiring signals based on the skills or credentials they certify. When selecting which IRCs to offer, schools should consider the following:

- Industry Demand: Choose IRCs with strong employer awareness and demand.
- Rigor and Assessment: Select IRCs with comprehensive, real-world experiences and skill assessments.
- Immediate Job Value: Prioritize IRCs that lead directly to employment or can be stacked with other credentials for enhanced employability.



01 Assembling the Team

RWL COORDINATOR OR RWL-INFORMED COUNSELOR

An educator that can refer students to IRC opportunities and communicate the value to a specific career(s).

TEACHER/EDUCATOR

A teacher supervising implementation

INDUSTRY, COLLEGES, THIRD-PARTY TECHNICAL TRAINING PROVIDERS

Organizations support IRC implementation by offering job shadowing, career fairs, informational interviews, and classroom visits. They contribute expertise and resources to ensure IRC programs align with industry standards and provide students with practical, real-world experience.



02 Planning

IDENTIFY AND ALIGN IRCs

Research and select IRCs that align with both the course content and local job market demands, ensuring they are relevant to the industry and students' career goals.

COORDINATE WITH EXTERNAL PARTNERS

If the IRC involves collaboration with industry partners or requires external verification, make the necessary arrangements well in advance.

IRC SUBMISSION AND TESTING

Ensure that all necessary documentation, portfolios, or other requirements are completed and ready for submission. If the IRC involves a final test, ensure students are registered and prepared for the testing date.



03 Quality Considerations

- Does the IRC have high value to employers?
- Does the IRC align with an in-demand career?
- Does the IRC "stack" to allow the student to progress to a more advanced industry credential within a specific field?



04 Student Voice, Agency & Support

Refer to Student Centered Practices on Page 24 - 27, but a few things to consider:

- Students report increased exposure to career options and pathways as a result of IRC coursework.
- Students would recommend IRC coursework to other students.
- Students can describe their experience and the value of their achievement.



05 Assessment & MVA Completion

- Passing the IRC exam and receiving the credential.
- Note: Some programs may result in additional college credit or credit towards a training program.



Is [INSERT CREDENTIAL HERE] a regionally-vetted IRC?

For the purposes of documenting MVAs, RWL recognizes all IRCs sponsored by the state boards of education. This is a recognition of the fact that “regionally-vetted” is aspirational guidance, not a formulaic definition.

Factors that schools should consider as they direct students to different IRCs include:

- Employer awareness, or if employers in the related industry value the credential.
- Employer demand (e.g., number of jobs seeking this credential).
- “Stackability”— whether the credential can stack with other credentials to increase viability.
- “Hireability”—the extent to which employers would hire an applicant largely based on this credential.

What about “home-grown” or new IRCs?

There have been instances of regionally created IRCs in recent years. These offerings were created by direct partnerships between schools and employers—implying a direct value that employers will see in the given IRC. Provided these IRCs are immediately valuable to local employers, these credentials are certainly worthwhile for students, and therefor MVA-worthy. The biggest consideration with this is sustainability - which would typically involve recognition by the state board of education (different processes depending on which side of the state line you fall on).

Is there a definitive list of regionally-vetted IRCs?

No. Based on the above guidance, if the five factors for an IRC experience are met, it should be counted. All IRCs may rise up to the level of “regionally-vetted” if they can provide value to employers, and thereby to students.



LINK TO IRC RESOURCES

Kansas KSDE Pathway Assessments and Credentials
Missouri DESE-approved IRCs
Regional Jobs Snapshot