



Certification and
Licensure Advisory
Group (CLAG)

Credential Transparency for Certifications: Guidance for Publishers



This guidance represents the current thinking of Credential Engine's Certification and Licensure Advisory Group (CLAG) regarding best practices for publishing information about certifications to the Credential Registry. The CLAG provides independent, expert advice to Credential Engine on a range of issues affecting current certification and licensure policies, practices, and processes.

For more information about the Certification and Licensure Advisory Group, please contact Emilie Rafal at erafal@credentialengine.org. For more information on publishing certification data please contact Scarlett Jeckel at sjeckel@credentialengine.org. For general inquiries please email info@credentialengine.org.

Introduction and Background

Certification and licensing bodies, colleges, job training programs, employers and others offer all kinds of credentials that represent valuable knowledge and skills. But it is hard to find reliable information about credentials. With nearly a million credentials to choose from—and until we have consistent adoption of the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL), which is the data standard for describing and comparing them—people get lost and lose out on opportunities. Credential Engine is working to end the confusion and frustration by mapping out the credential landscape and building a linked open data network that everyone can access for timely and trusted information about credentials. This information fuels the creation of services and tools that allow students, employers, and workers to compare credentials and choose the best option.

Credential Engine carries out this mission in part through the establishment and maintenance of the Credential Registry—a cloud-based library that collects, maintains, and connects information on all types of credentials, from diplomas to doctorates and from badges to certifications to licenses.

Credential Engine allows credentialing bodies to describe their credentials through a common language so that students, workers, policymakers, and employers can access the data and determine quality for themselves. Credential transparency empowers everyone looking for education and training options with the data they need to make a well-informed decision, enables employers to better evaluate the credential holder's ability to meet industry needs, and allows organizations that service students, workers, employers, and other stakeholders to provide more accessible information about the value of various credentials.

Credential Engine's technologies allow credential providers to take information they already have about their offerings, map it to the CTDL, and publish it to the Registry to make the data accessible and transparent. To get the most value out of Credential Engine's technologies, credential providers are encouraged to publish data beyond the baseline minimum requirements. Providers should include richer information as described in Credential Engine's [Benchmark Data Models](#). Credential Engine's Advisory Groups provided input about these benchmarks to ensure they include the information that employers, students, regulators, and other key stakeholders find most valuable.

As part of continuing efforts to ensure data quality within the Registry, Credential Engine's Certification and Licensure Advisory Group (CLAG) has identified areas where publishers may benefit from receiving additional guidance. A subset of the CLAG—the Certification Working Group—spent time reviewing data about certifications published to the Registry to develop recommendations for how to improve the quality and depth of data about certifications in the Registry. The purpose of this document is to specifically provide publishers additional guidance on how to distinguish between certifications and certificates, and how to best represent certifications on the Registry.

The Credential Classes of Certificate and Certification

The first decision a credential provider must make when publishing to the Registry is determining the type of credential about which they are publishing information. The wide variety of credential types—as distinguished by their structure, properties, and critical data points—can create confusion when publishers first seek to determine how to publish their credentials.

One common point of confusion is the distinction between *Certification* and *Certificate*. While their names sound almost synonymous, it is important to understand general differences in their properties to promote a common understanding of these credentials and therefore a common use of the terms applied to describe them.

Definitions and Commentary

The following are definitions of *Certificate* and *Certification* as found in Credential Engine's Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL).

Below each definition are official comments and additional context found in the CTDL documentation. Comments were provided by **Credential Engine** with input from the **Certification and Licensure Advisory Group (CLAG)** and Credential Engine's other advisory groups to help further amplify the meaning of these Credentials by describing other common general properties and characteristics of each credential in order that they may be classified correctly when published to the Credential Registry.

Certificate—(CTDL Definition)—*A Credential that designates requisite knowledge and skills of an occupation, profession, or academic program.*

Additional Context—(CLAG)—A certificate program is typically associated with successful completion of a specified learning opportunity and achievement of a specific learning outcome. Those awarding certificates do not typically include ongoing requirements for maintenance once granted.

Certification—(CTDL Definition)—*Time-limited, revocable, renewable credential awarded by an authoritative body for demonstrating the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform specific tasks or an occupation.*

CTDL Comment—Certifications can typically be revoked if not renewed, for a violation of a code of ethics (if applicable) or proven incompetence after due process. Description of revocation criteria for a specific Certification should be defined using Revocation Profile.

Additional Context from CLAG—Certifications are generally characterized by a combination of eligibility requirements that may include elements such as education, training, experience, and an examination. Certification holders are typically granted the restricted right to use a post-nominal letters to signal their certified status. Certification status awarded to a certification holder is typically time-limited, in which case they must be renewed at specific time intervals. Renewal is predicated on meeting ongoing requirements that may include continuing education, retesting, and renewal fees.

Distinguishing Properties of Certifications

To provide guidance to publishers for the accurate classification of a credential, we encourage certification sponsors to publish information regarding the following distinguishing properties for Certifications:

Renewal Frequency—(CTDL Definition)—Frequency with which the credential needs to be renewed.

Additional Context from CLAG—Certifications are distinguished by a time for which a certification holder's status as certified is valid. If a credential is granted without any limitation of the time period for which it is valid, it may be a Certificate credential.

Renewal—(CTDL definition)—Entity describing the constraints, prerequisites, entry conditions, or requirements necessary to maintenance and renewal of an awarded credential.

CTDL Comment—Generally, renewal applies to certifications and licenses; however, it may occasionally apply to other types of credentials.

Additional Context from CLAG—Certifications once granted, must be maintained, and renewed by the credential holder in accordance with the renewal frequency requirements of the credentialing body. Renewal describes the applicable conditions someone who has attained this credential must meet to renew their status as certified by the holder. These requirements may consist of any or all of the elements associated with initial eligibility.

Revocation—(CTDL definition)—Entity that describes the processes and criteria for ending (revoking) the validity or operation of an awarded credential.

CTDL Comment—Generally, revocation applies to certifications and licenses; however, it may also apply to other types of credentials under extraordinary circumstances.

Additional Context from CLAG—If the credential being described has a revocation process whereby the awarded credentials can be revoked due to violations or failure to renew, this can be described in the 'Revoke Process'. The 'Revoke Process' profile can be found in the 'Process' tab, located in the 'Extra Information' tab if publishing via Credential Engine's manual publishing tool.

Generally, revocation criteria should not be confused with failure to meet initial eligibility requirements such as required education, training, experience, criminal background check, or confused with revoking a candidate found cheating or committing any form of academic dishonesty prior to award of the credential.

Revocation conditions should be reserved for describing how an individual who has already achieved certification status may have their certification status revoked by the credential sponsor. Typically, these types of requirements can include violation of a professional code of conduct, criminal violations, or a failure to meet other maintenance requirements such as continuing education or timely payment of required renewal fees. Revocation can also be a function of the subsequent discovery of fraudulent actions related to the documentation of initial eligibility requirements.

Publishing and Mapping Issues Identified

As a result of a data audit by members of CLAG the following were among the most common publishing issues identified for *Certification* and *Certificate* credentials.

- Certificate credentials being classified as Certifications were the most common issue rather than Certification programs being incorrectly described as Certificate programs. For some programs, the problem of accurate classification is exacerbated by using these two terms interchangeably on the sponsoring organization's website.
- Web links to the certification sponsor are not provided or updated. It is the provider's obligation to keep data—including weblinks—updated per Credential Engine's [publisher's agreement](#).
- Requirements for revocation for credentials identified as certification are not published to the Registry but are available on the certification body's website.
- Renewal criteria for certification credentials were not published to the Registry but are available on the certification body's website.
- Information found in the published data is mapped incorrectly or has better alternatives; for example, Renewal Frequency found in the text description of the assessment. It is recommended that credential providers map their data to the most specific CTDL terms to avoid confusion and allow for consistency across credentials.

By following the above recommendations for publishing, credential organizations should be able to avoid these issues.

Recommendations

- Take care to classify your credentialing program correctly—*Certification* or *Certificate*.
- Strive to enter data beyond the minimum requirements ([Benchmark Data Models](#)) to support the fact that you have correctly classified your credential.
- Review examples from other programs identified as exemplars within this guidance document.

Best Practices: Examples of Certifications Published to the Registry

The below examples demonstrate certifications published to the Registry with sufficient information about their assessments, renewal, and revocation processes. In addition to those details, they also include information about costs, competencies, quality assurance, and other important details.

- CCO Mobile Crane Operator Certification: https://credentialfinder.org/credential/331/CCO_Mobile_Crane_Operator_Certification
- Certified Information Systems Security Professional: [https://credentialfinder.org/credential/9/Certified_Information_Systems_Security_Professional_\(CISSP\)](https://credentialfinder.org/credential/9/Certified_Information_Systems_Security_Professional_(CISSP))
- Associate Safety Professional: [https://credentialfinder.org/credential/1590/Associate_Safety_Professional%2%AE_\(ASP%2%AE\)](https://credentialfinder.org/credential/1590/Associate_Safety_Professional%2%AE_(ASP%2%AE))

Frequently Asked Questions

Credential Engine and the CLAG have received several questions about how to classify and accurately publish information about certifications and other credentials. Some frequently asked questions can be found below.

NOTE: The answers to these questions come from the CLAG, experts in the field of certification, and not from Credential Engine itself.

1. *On what basis can a certification be revoked?*

Revocation of certified status describes removal or cancellation of the certified status from a person for whom certification has been awarded. It is most associated with a violation of a code of conduct, ethics, failure to maintain competence requirements or misuse of the intellectual property rights associated with the Certification mark. Failure to renew may be cause for revocation depending on specific circumstances. For example, if a certification holder has been granted certified status but later fails to pay the required fees, the certified status may be revoked from the holder by the sponsoring organization. Many programs without a specific code of ethics or other formal disciplinary processes fail to recognize that in addition to possible revocation due to timely payment of renewal fees, a credential holder who is found to have obtained credentialed status through fraudulent actions should have their credentialed status revoked under any certification program structure or design.

Voluntary non-renewal however is simply a decision by the certification holder to not continue to maintain active status as a credential holder. This means the current active certification period has expired. An individual who chooses not to renew is no longer a holder of the certification and therefore cannot have their certification revoked. A certification holder who chooses not to renew has essentially given up their certification status and may not legally present themselves as certified. A certification holder who has let their status expire and continues to present themselves as certified could face legal action by the certification body for misrepresentation or misuse of a certification mark but would not face revocation as they do not legally possess certified status.

2. *Can certificate programs be time limited?*

Yes—Certificate programs possess the properties typically associated with certificate programs such as prescribed training. But some certificate programs may also have additional properties such as limitation of the time for which it is valid established by the certificate program sponsor after which the competence represented by the certificate may be viewed as out of date.

3. *Do certifications require the use of post-nominal letter of recognition of some kind to be considered certification?*

No—while many certifications result in some type of allowable use of post-nominal letters, this is not a defining characteristic of a certification.

Additional Resources and Support

We encourage certification bodies and other credential providers to publish additional information relevant to their organization and credential(s). In addition to the minimum data policy, there are additional data that can be published. The below resources include information about the benchmark data models and instructions for publishing rich information. For further instructions or questions, please contact Scarlett Jeckel at sjeckel@credentialengine.org.

Benchmark Data Model Certification and Licensure:

<https://credreg.net/registry/benchmarks?benchmark=certificationlicense>

Credential Engine Publishing Guide – Approving Organization and Credential Data:

<https://credentialengine.org/2019/03/04/credential-engine-publisher-guide-approving-organization-and-credential-data/>

Entering Minimum Required Data:

<https://credentialengine.org/2019/03/04/credential-engine-publisher-guide-entering-minimum-required-data/>

Entering Required if Available Data:

https://credentialengine.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Required-if-Available_Publisher-Instructions_Jan.2019FINAL.pdf

Entering Recommended Data:

<https://credentialengine.org/2019/03/04/credential-engine-publisher-guide-entering-recommended-data/>

Reviewing and Approving Data:

<https://credentialengine.org/2019/03/04/credential-engine-publisher-guide-approving-organization-and-credential-data/>



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