



Accelerating Credential Attainment in Connecticut through the CTDL & Credential Registry

The content in this blog is an excerpt from an [article](#) in *Forbes*, "Can Connections Between Data Systems Propel Economic Recovery: Three States Say Yes," by Alison Griffin.

This blog is the second in a three-part series exploring how [Alabama](#), [Connecticut](#), and [Florida](#) are involved in credential transparency.



Listen to the article [here](#).

Niall Dammando and Sean Seepersad explain how credential transparency — through the Credential Registry and Credential Transparency Description Language — is helping Connecticut achieve its goals for credential attainment and the workforce.

With nearly [1 million credentials](#) in the U.S. alone — and with each credential representing an opportunity to earn valuable skills, advance on a pathway, and enter the workforce — state leaders play a vital role in ensuring their residents, employers, and credential providers have the information they need to make informed decisions. But the data used to inform policies and practices are often insufficient and siloed, leading to duplication and frustration.

[Credential transparency](#) is a valuable initiative for states to undertake as they work to boost their economies. As states make key decisions, it's important that they have efficient data practices that increase transparency about available credentials, their competencies, and the jobs they lead to.

Recently, Niall Dammando, chief of staff for Connecticut's Office of Workforce Strategy, and Sean Seepersad, chief academic officer for Connecticut's Office of Higher Education, sat down with Alison Griffin, senior vice president at Whiteboard Advisors, to discuss Connecticut's work toward credential transparency and the initiative's impact.

What prompted the state of Connecticut to explore credential transparency to address the intersection of education and employment? How do you believe credential transparency is going to help Connecticut?

Niall: It started when we revamped Connecticut's state workforce board, now known as the [Governor's Workforce Council](#). The council is a highly charged, highly energized group of senior business leaders and higher education presidents that has developed a strategic plan outlining the state's core workforce development priorities. The main goal is creating the highest performing workforce in the country. It's ambitious, but we have amazing academic institutions that will help deliver training and educational programs aligned to the needs of Connecticut businesses.

One of the initiatives advancing that strategic plan is the Credential Registry project. The goal is supporting our students and jobseekers by developing new programs in K-12, higher education, private occupational schools, and elsewhere that give students and jobseekers the opportunity and resources to make informed decisions about what programs are right for them. We want people to take paths that align well with their skill sets, career ambitions, socioeconomic status, and other important variables. Our goal is making sure there's as much information as possible on the Credential Registry for students and jobseekers to make informed decisions.

While there are a lot of other exciting initiatives in Connecticut's strategic plan, credential transparency is especially important because it's a fundamental infrastructure component that helps students and jobseekers make informed, educated decisions.

While the original project came out of the council, the ongoing lead was the [Connecticut Office of Higher Education](#), where Sean Seepersad is helping move the project forward. It has been a collaborative effort across 10 state agencies. While the Office of Higher Education is the lead, we regularly speak with the Department of Labor, for instance. It maintains our Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) — which has significant implications for our goals — with a Credential Registry. We're having additional conversations on the K-12 side, as well.

How does credential transparency support the state's completion agenda? The U.S. and states have talked about increasing credential completion for 10 years. How are these related?

Niall: Connecticut drafted our post-secondary credential attainment goal [in 2015](#). Literally, the world has changed in those seven years. But this credential transparency project is uniquely positioned to move the needle on our [completion goals](#).

This project is uniquely positioned to expedite and support that work. One of the things we've seen in other states — and even in Connecticut, to some degree — is people getting dropped out of the process. If they don't graduate high school, often

they don't know where to go. There's a lack of information in high schools — and that's no fault of guidance counselors. This initiative provides an intuitive, customized, and easy-to-use navigational system. The onus is on how we market this effectively, how we promote it so that it's spread out effectively and that people are actually using it. We feel strongly that we not only need to make something that's really easy to use, but we need to promote it across all channels: the Office of Higher Education, the Governor's Office, the Department of Labor, our regional workforce development boards, our community colleges, and others.

Sean: In terms of completion rates specifically, the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) helps us think about the information that we need to collect. Because the CTDL is a uniform language, it puts us on a national platform for comparison with other credentials.

Connecticut is trying to help the public make more informed decisions about career paths and educational ways to get there. If somebody's interested in a certain career or not quite sure about what career they want, then they can explore that through the CTDL and Registry. They can understand how much they might expect to earn in a particular career. They can understand what kind of educational programs they need to get into that career or what the licensing requirements are.

If individuals can make more informed decisions about their careers and what educational experiences are needed to get there, then they might become more successful.

Niall: We're embedding this within a larger system modeled on other states like Colorado and Virginia. For example, another initiative of the Governor's Workforce Council is developing an end-to-end workforce development system from a technological perspective. This system would be tailored to the needs of different users. Someone using this portal would fill out a needs assessment: what are you looking to do right now? Are you looking to upscale in your existing role? Are you looking to change careers? Are you unemployed? They'll get a report with everything they need to do, a checklist to help them make progress that tell outline possible education and training programs to consider based on their career interests. It will route them to the Registry and show 10 additional programs we encourage them to explore. Once people are in the system, we can provide them with supports along the way.

It obviously comes with a big resourcing need, but there's a lot of funds available for education and workforce development. It's a big need. Now is also the time to do these initiatives and not get bogged down by the initial resource cost.

What's the work ahead for policymakers, educators, workforce boards, and others?

Niall: What's unique is that we're really doing everything. Our legislation has all providers from secondary and post-secondary education uploading to the Registry. We felt strongly that we need to encourage multiple options for students — not just college. That's one of Connecticut's fundamental beliefs: a pathway to a career is not just a four-year degree. There are so many other options. Our Office of Higher Education does a lot of work with occupational schools, trade schools, and others. Surprisingly, we didn't run into a lot of political pushback, which I know was very surprising to other states doing this. One reason is because we marketed this as a college *and* career tool. It's not just a college tool. It's a tool to get people from all walks of life to be able to make decisions and that resonated with our legislature.

The challenge is that it's a lot of work, but we are well equipped for the task. We've taken a phased approach to supporting credential providers and getting information uploaded to the Registry.

Sean: It's important to detail the arch of how this work came about. Some of it was already happening before this credential transparency initiative. For example, the Office of Higher Education was already collecting credential information from our higher education institutions and post-secondary occupational schools, putting it into an inventory, and making it available to the public and other agencies. The Connecticut Department of Labor used that data for a career connections tool helping people explore careers and track those jobs to credential programs.

When this initiative was proposed to the legislature, it wasn't new. We weren't asking credential providers to do something they had never done before. Working with Credential Engine has been an enhancement. This is a "let's take this to the next level" type of initiative. The CTDL provides the necessary framework. It gives us a good way of pushing this work forward and making it more relevant, making it more accessible for individuals to make more informed choices about where to go.

We're in the building phase but need a solid infrastructure. Moving forward, we need to have more parties involved, more providers populating the Registry, and ensuring that information is available. Then we'll integrate the Registry into a larger one-stop tool.



To learn more, please visit www.credentialengine.org or contact info@credentialengine.org