



# Centering Equity in the Use of Open Credential Data

## DATA USE PRINCIPLES

To ensure that equity is fully considered and approached as both an essential input to transparency of credential and skills data, as well as a critical element of a new generation of better tools and services built around the benefits of linked, open data, there must be equal focus on both transparency and use. This implicates not only the owners and providers of credentials and competencies, but also commitment from companies, states and other entities that play a role in putting data into the hands of people to best equip them to make their most informed decisions with the goal of helping them reach equitable outcomes.

The first set of recommendations from the Equity Advisory Council focuses on identifying what data elements should be made transparent in support of advancing equity. And our call to action of the owners and providers of credentials and skills is to have them make those data elements open, linkable, and interoperable through the use of the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL). But realizing that transparency only gets us half the way to our goal. Truly equitable data practices should create transparency for the most important users - students, workers and job-seekers. Without understanding all the nuances of inputs and outputs, students should be able to easily digest relevant information to aid them in selecting credential pathways best poised to support their desired goals and success.

As data practices become intentionally anchored in equity, there must be a willingness to hold entities accountable to make adjustments if data trends show consistent shortcomings and unintended consequences.

Equitable data practices cannot be maintained without clear guiding principles and the identification of critical data points. Such principles allow for appropriate and effective use of these data to support students' discovery and successful navigation of pathways and transfer to achieve optimal and equitable outcomes.

Therefore we are calling on the developers of tools, services, platforms and resources that deliver exploration, guidance, counseling, or navigation of educational or occupational credentials and skills in any way to examine their fundamental approaches to the use of all data, including but not limited to those data elements identified above. We also call upon them to leverage the fundamental and intentional benefits of linked, open, interoperable data in order to address and advance equity.

Finally, those entities purchasing and using such tools, services, platforms and resources, such as schools, education systems and districts, city, county and state agencies, colleges and universities, workforce boards, and community-based organizations, should include the following principles as requirements or considerations in their procurement, evaluation, and reevaluation processes.

Through its work, the EAC identified the following key principles. The EAC is mindful that this list of principles is not all encompassing. Based on organizational context and who is being served, additional principles may be needed to ensure an equitable approach.

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## PRINCIPLE 1

An intentional focus on equity is required to create an environment that **improves outcomes for all learners**

- Use data to confirm or indicate that improvements are occurring and creating the intended outcomes.
- Commit to long-term equitable data use and consistently review and assess data equity practices to ensure they reflect a commitment to equity and a keen understanding of how to apply an equity lens.
- Manage workflows in ways that consistently elevate attention to equity in data use and ensure ongoing intentionality about how to use data to mitigate inequities.

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## PRINCIPLE 2

Disaggregation of data is essential to understand outcomes for both key populations (e.g., adults, local/regional residents) and all learners served.

- Ensure that appropriately disaggregated data are publicly available (in ways that protect student privacy) so that learners, workers and job-seekers can see information that is relevant to their individual experiences (e.g. credentials, skills, programs, or pathways that are relevant for certain populations such as adults and student parents; the specific earnings and employment outcomes of credentials, programs, or pathways for different specific populations, such as black women in a particular region; credentials, programs, or pathways that align to particular employment requirements).
- Elevate a clear emphasis on racial equity. Finely disaggregate data, name specific populations of focus, and avoid using proxies (e.g., low-income) that do not reveal disparate outcomes even when learners have similar types of experiences.
- Establish baselines around racial equity outcomes and transparently chart growth over time.
- Provide contextual data that allows users to understand if providers are serving their target populations well. For example, when providing information on racial outcomes via disaggregated data, consider including the context regarding what is possible.

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## PRINCIPLE 3

Credentials must be **relevant and valuable** for learners

- Ensure that data make clear and transparent:
  - The range of credentials and pathways available to learners (e.g., certificates, apprenticeships, certifications, licenses, two- and four-year degree programs, and the various combinations of those that constitute high quality and effective pathways), including ensuring local/regional availability for learners.
  - The full value of credentials (e.g., labor market value, interest alignment, range of occupations to which the credential can lead, stackability and transfer options, etc.).
- Focus on credentials of value, including connecting credentials to common career pathways that are locally/regionally available.
  - Ensure that users accessing the data are able to view and understand all the performance measures and indicators of value available, relevant, valid, and used.

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## PRINCIPLE 4

Clear user **design practices**<sup>1</sup> must be identified and followed

- Listen to learners and other data users to understand what they want and need from data and consistently respond to feedback.
- Avoid jargon, use clear and concise language, and use standardized language (when possible/appropriate).
- Ensure tools are designed to be accessible and inclusive.
- Incorporate advanced technology into tools to assure the tools are learning and adapting to user identity (e.g., an equity audit algorithm).

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## PRINCIPLE 5

**Guidance and/or professional development** is required for professionals interacting with, presenting and/or using the data for an intentional culture and commitment to equitable approaches.

- Approach equitable data use and analysis practices with a positive view of learners and the assets they bring (e.g. use data terms such as “high-priority” as opposed to “high-risk”).
- Ensure that counselors/advisers are able to explain a range of critical information to learners (e.g., how salary increases interact with benefits cliff; any prerequisites/ foundational skills needed).
- Provide ongoing anti-bias and asset-based professional development, and embed guidance and professional development into daily activities, for those interacting with the data and in particular for those who counsel student populations.

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## PRINCIPLE 6

Leverage the value of CTDL and **linked, open data** to help counselors, students, workers and others search for, discover, explore, understand, build and navigate pathways that lead to equitable outcomes

- Commit to the integration and use of data using linked, open, interoperable formats in student, worker and employer-facing tools, services and platforms.
- Ensure that such use of linked, open data maximizes the ability of students and workers themselves to search, discover, understand and navigate providers, programs, credentials, skills, and pathways for themselves.
- Utilize the inherent connectivity of linked, open data to allow for the expansive customization of equitable pathways consisting of high quality credentials and skills from a wide variety of sources to give students and workers a wide range of options to meet their goals, given life circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Universal Design for Learning Framework, Accessed April 5, 2023, <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>