The Era of Learner and Worker Opportunity: Understanding the Landscape of America's 1.85 Million Credentials

New report reveals the scale of the U.S. credentials market — and how digital transformation makes credentials more valuable for learners, workers, and employers

The United States has one of the world's most diverse ecosystems for education and workforce development: **1,850,034 unique credentials** are available through more than **134,000 providers** across the country. This snapshot of the country's evolving credential marketplace represents, despite an initial picture of chaos, a fundamental benefit to how learners and workers can build careers and demonstrate their skills and capabilities.

The findings, detailed in Credential Engine's *Counting Credentials 2025* reports, paint a picture of opportunity. Yet the numbers tell only part of the story. As the most accurate count ever completed, the findings **reflect a better ability to see and understand what credentials are available**, particularly with regard to digital credentials.

By the Numbers

The report identifies **seven major categories of credentials**, each serving distinct purposes in documenting learning and skills:

- **Badges** (1,022,028) represent the largest category, driven by increased digitization of learning recognition
- **Certificates** (486,352) encompass everything from bootcamp completions to academic certificates and apprenticeships
- **Micro-credentials** (3,384) represent focused learning achievements
- **Certifications** (6,892) are industry-driven credentials validating specific competencies
- **Degrees** (264,099) include associate's through doctoral programs from higher education institutions
- **Licenses** (14,331) are government-issued authorizations to legally practice a particular occupation or trade
- **Secondary School Credentials** (52,948) cover secondary school seals and endorsements, public and private school diplomas, and alternative diplomas and equivalencies

Together, these credentials represent the economic significance of the U.S. education and training system — an annual investment of **$2.34 trillion** across educational institutions, employers, and government programs.

The Digital Credential Transformation That Empowers People

The U.S. credential market has experienced a fundamental shift as validation of learning moves from paper to digital formats. Whether issued by private corporations, education institutions, government, nonprofits, or training organizations, credentials are increasingly issued digitally. This digitization of the credential marketplace elevates visibility of the full range of ways learners and workers develop and demonstrate their capabilities and skills — something that was previously hidden.

This visibility matters because it reflects a transformation in how learning is recognized and validated. Digital credentials are fundamentally different from their paper predecessors. They have the potential to be searchable, verifiable, and shareable. A digital badge for cybersecurity skills can empower a person to show which competencies were demonstrated, how they were assessed, and how they connect to job roles and career pathways.

And due to the increased digital availability of all types of credentials, *Counting Credentials 2025* is able to account for credentials that existed but were previously unfindable, making this report the most accurate credential count ever completed.

The increased availability and use of digital credentials redistributes the ability to validate learning. No longer limited to registrars and superintendents, credential-issuing capability now lies within reach of teachers recognizing specific competencies, supervisors validating on-the-job skills, professional organizations certifying specialized knowledge, and platforms documenting online learning achievements. This distributed authority means credentials can be more specific, timely, and relevant to actual learner, worker, and employer needs.

Why This Matters Now

This comprehensive report on the U.S. credential landscape arrives at a critical moment. The World Economic Forum projects that 39% of workers' skills will be transformed or become outdated between 2025-2030. The median job tenure in the U.S. is just 3.9 years. Reskilling and upskilling are increasingly constant realities for everyone, across the entire span of their work life.

Simultaneously, employers are rethinking how they identify talent. ManpowerGroup reports that 71% of U.S. employers can't fill open positions, even as millions seek work. A Harvard Business School study reveals the disconnect: 88% of employers acknowledge filtering out qualified candidates simply because they lack bachelor's degrees or specific previous job titles. Skills-based hiring has emerged as a solution — but it requires transparent, trusted credentials to function at scale.

The 1.85 million credentials counted in this report represent millions of ways for learners and workers to develop valuable skills and advance their careers. However, sheer numbers create their own challenge. How can learners, workers, and employers navigate such a vast marketplace?

From Counting to Connecting

Understanding the scale of the credential and skills landscape is the essential first step. The next step is to make these credentials and skills discoverable, comparable, and actionable. This requires infrastructure. Specifically, standardized data structures that allow different systems to communicate, credential verification mechanisms that build trust, and transparent descriptions of what each credential represents.

This is where structured and linked data systems like the Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) become critical. As an open source data standard, CTDL provides a common vocabulary that describes credentials in ways that both humans and machines — including AI systems — can understand. CTDL enables credentials to tell complete stories, such as what skills they represent, who issued the credential, how the achievement connects to jobs, and even what employment outcomes are associated with the credential and skills.

When credentials exist as transparent, linked data rather than isolated documents, complexity becomes navigable:

- Job seekers can understand which credentials employers value.
- Employers can identify candidates with the exact skills they need, regardless of how those skills were developed.
- Educators can design programs that respond to current labor market demands.
- Policymakers can identify gaps and opportunities in their regional credential ecosystems.

Transparency Fuels Opportunity

The United States' credential diversity is a competitive advantage. It represents unprecedented flexibility and choice in how people develop and validate their skills and advance their careers. The digital transformation of credentials, combined with transparent data infrastructure, enable a rich marketplace of opportunity.
The 1.85 million credentials counted in the *Counting Credentials 2025* report signify the myriad avenues to economic mobility, national competitiveness, and individual success. When we make all these credentials transparent and navigable, we will unlock the full potential of America's workforce.