Credential Engine

Focus Group Research Services Request for Proposals

Partnerships for Credential Transparency

For the Development of a Standardized Credential Information Label

Submission Deadline: February 17, 2026

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background: The U.S. credential marketplace includes over 1.85 million unique credentials offered by more than 134,000 providers. Stakeholders across the education and workforce ecosystem face significant challenges in determining the relative value of these credentials. Different federal and state laws require different information disclosures and use varying outcome measures, making meaningful comparisons exceptionally difficult for learners, workers, employers, educators, counselors, and policymakers.

Project Objective: Credential Engine, in partnership with the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) and the Education and Employment Research Center (EERC) at Rutgers University, and in collaboration with the American Council on Education (ACE) and the University of Colorado - Boulder, are seeking to develop and promote a common "nutrition label" for all credentials in the U.S.

This scope of work is to gather information from identified stakeholders and user groups to support the initial development of a standardized "nutrition label" for credentials of all types and levels that will improve clarity and comparability in the U.S. This label is intended to provide essential information about credentials to facilitate better decision-making for learners, employers, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders.

The term "credentials" is understood to include high school diplomas, digital badges, certificates, apprenticeships, certifications, occupational licenses, and degrees of all types and levels, regardless of the provider or issuing agency.

2. SCOPE OF WORK

We are seeking a qualified organization or person to design, recruit, facilitate, and analyze focus groups with key stakeholder populations to inform the development of a standardized credential "nutrition label".

Primary Deliverables:

- Design focus group protocols and discussion guides tailored to each target audience in collaboration with the project partners
- Recruit participants across all specified target populations, and work with project partners and others to arrange the focus groups of the target populations
- Facilitate focus group sessions (virtual and/or in-person, as appropriate)
- Provide comprehensive analysis and reporting of findings
- Identify common themes and data elements valued across all stakeholder groups
- Provide recommendations for label design based on focus group insights

3. TARGET AUDIENCES

Potential target populations for focus groups include:

1. High School Guidance Counselors
2. Community College Students (to include relevant sub-populations, like Veterans)
3. Four-Year College/University Students (to include relevant sub-populations, like Veterans)
4. Incumbent Workers
5. Hiring Managers
6. Chief Human Resources Officers (CHROs)
7. State and Federal Policymakers and staff
8. Education and Training Organization Representatives

We do not assume that this scope of work and budget will allow for focus groups of all these groups, so we request recommendations for the selection of focus groups.

4. REQUIRED VENDOR QUALIFICATIONS

Proposals should demonstrate:

- Proven experience conducting focus groups with diverse stakeholder populations
- Experience with education, workforce development, or credential-related research or work
- Expertise in both qualitative research design and analysis
- Capability to recruit participants across multiple states/regions, in coordination with the project partners, other collaborators and supportive organizations.
- Ability to facilitate discussions with senior executives and policymakers
- Sufficient analytical capabilities to synthesize findings across disparate stakeholder groups

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5. METHODOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Vendor proposals must address:

Focus Group Design:

- Proposed number of focus groups and for which target audience
- Group size recommendations with rationale
- Format (in-person, virtual, or hybrid) with justification
- Duration of sessions
- Discussion guide development process
- Approach to ensuring comparable data collection across different audiences

Recruitment Strategy:

- Recruitment methods for each target population
- Timeline for recruitment
- Incentive/compensation structure for participants
- Screening criteria to ensure appropriate participant selection
- Strategies for achieving demographic diversity

Facilitation Approach:

- Qualifications of facilitators
- Approach to creating inclusive, productive discussions
- Methods for ensuring all voices are heard
- Technology platforms (if virtual)

Analysis and Reporting:

- Analytical framework and methods
- Approach to identifying cross-cutting themes
- Deliverable formats (written reports, presentations, data files, etc.)
- Timeline for delivering findings

7. PROJECT TIMELINE

(Note that these dates are aspirational, and may be adjusted to ensure careful consideration of proposals, selection of a partner, and successful preparation for the kickoff.)

- **RFP Release Date:** February 2, 2026
- **Proposal Due Date:** February 17, 2026

- **Vendor Selection:** February 27, 2026
- **Project Kickoff:** March 6, 2026
- **Final Report Delivery:** November 20, 2026

Proposals should include a detailed project timeline as part of their submission.

8. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Proposals must include:

A. Technical Proposal (up to 1,000 words):

1. Understanding of project objectives and approach
2. Demonstration of content knowledge
3. Detailed methodology for each phase of work
4. Focus group protocols and sample discussion guides
5. Recruitment strategy with specific tactics for each target audience
6. Project timeline with key milestones

B. Cost Proposal (up to 1,000 words):

1. Detailed budget broken down by:
    - Project management and design
    - Recruitment costs (including participant incentives)
    - Facilitation
    - Analysis and reporting
    - Travel (if applicable)
    - Other costs
2. Payment schedule tied to deliverables
3. Any assumptions underlying cost estimates

C. Required Supplementary Materials:

1. Company overview and relevant experience
2. Resumes of key personnel
3. Sample work products (redacted as necessary)

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Contract Provisions

This budget for this work shall not exceed $125,000 in total.

How to Apply

Submit proposals to info@credentialengine.org using the Subject Line “Focus Group Proposal” by February 17, 2025.