

Greater Capital Region Essential Workplace Skills Final Report

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Greater Capital Region Essential Workplace Skills

Final Report

Introduction:

Throughout the 11 county region (Albany, Columbia, Fulton, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren, Washington) there are many schools, chambers of commerce, workforce agencies, and non-profit organizations that offer programs to improve the work readiness skills of youth and adults.

The Essential Workplace Skills are standards that have been developed based on the needs of businesses regarding the skills all work ready applicants should have.

The purpose of this Regional Certificate is to:

- Provide one set of identifiable standards for workplace skills that employers throughout the region can rely on when they interview someone with this certificate.
- Offer a place for work readiness programs to share thoughts, concerns, curricula and methods of administration that can help programs become even more successful.
- Develop a regional marketing message to the business community that will give job seeking graduates an edge in finding employment.

Project Objectives and Where the Results Can Be Found in This Report:

The Center for Economic Growth was responsible for acting as the Regional Work Readiness Credential Champion, and of driving the implementation efforts of the initiative by:

- 1. Developing the Programmatic Structure of the Regional Credential, including**
 - ◆ The minimum level of competence for each of the skills incorporated into the credential. (see pages 3-10 and 20-24)
 - ◆ An application and review process to certify local work readiness programs as participating members of the Regional Credential (see pages 3-6)
 - ◆ Quality assurance procedures to allow the Regional Credential to maintain quality standards. (see pages 3-10)
- 2. Meeting with Local Providers to Get Agreement and Approval for the Programmatic Structure** – including the standards set for each skill and the regional application process. (see pages 3-10 and 25-26)

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3. **Developing a Marketing Plan** that considers the following: (see pages 11-17)
 - ◆ Target various audiences; adopts a consistent message; and uses various media
 4. **Working with the Coalition’s Business Intermediary to Communicate the Value of the Credential to Employers – Due** to the fact that the certificate program will take awhile to ramp up to the point where it will have a large enough number of certificate holders to make outreach to the business community a sound strategy (see page 10), we have folded most of this into the marketing plan. We did do some initial outreach to employers and Chamber members to see what their response was to the proposed certificate and to help frame the standards for issuing the certificate. They indicated they would assist in marketing the certificate (see pages 27-29) *Strategies to consider:*
 - ◆ Regional presentations about how it enhances overall quality of the regional talent pool and is a strategy for reducing turnover and recruitment costs.
 - ◆ Joint press release of Chambers of Commerce within the region noting acceptance of the Regional Credential.
 - ◆ Utilize private sector WIB members to promote the Regional Credential.
 5. **Working with the Coalition’s Business Intermediary to Create Ongoing Business Involvement** – Again, this was not actively pursued, but was pilot tested in our conversations with employers while getting feedback about the project. (see pages 27-29) All of the employers we spoke with individually were very positive about assisting local work readiness programs in a number of ways, including:
 - ◆ Serving as guest speakers in programs or subject matter experts for curriculum development
 - ◆ Providing tours of their workplace to participants in work readiness programs to help reinforce the lessons.
 - ◆ Letting all those involved in the hiring process know about the certificate and emphasizing the value it offers to the company
- We did not pursue employer participation in the governance and strategic planning process since the WIBs agreed with our recommendation that they pull in employers from their area to serve in this capacity. We also did not pursue employers offering the certificate to incumbent workers, because it has less value – once the employee is hired, the employer does not need to have them certified as job ready. Employers might be interested in sending them to the programs to strengthen their job readiness skills, but that would need to be negotiated by individual programs, not all of whom are able to accept incumbent workers.
6. **Developing an Electronic Library** – we have established a web site as part of the Schenectady Chamber’s Certificate of Employability website that will enable programs to share best practices, materials and evaluation methods with each other, and to develop and maintain on line dialogues. (see pages 18-19)
 7. **Develop a Funding Strategy** – We have developed a program model that is easy to administer at very low cost. This reflects budget constraints and limited access to long term funding. Sustainability is a key concern, and as designed, once the process is up and running, very little administrative oversight is called for and much of it can be done by volunteer participants. (see pages 3-6)

I. Proposed Administrative Structure

The goal of this proposed structure is to provide a fair, rigorous accreditation process that is simple to manage with very limited staffing or funding needed.

The four Workforce Investment Boards will establish an Essential Workplace Skills Coordinating Committee staffed by a staff person in one or two of the WIBs who is involved in an essential workplace skills program (while this could lead to a conflict of interest, it provides expertise, and the potential conflict of interest is not substantial).

The committee should be made up of at least one business person from each WIB area, preferably from a company that hires a lot of entry level, un- or low skilled staff. In addition there should be an equal number (or fewer) of workforce development staff (WIB/WIA One Stop staff, DOL staff, educators, non-profit agencies, Chambers, etc.).

The role of the committee is to review and approve programs' initial and renewal accreditations, respond to any appeals or grievances, and oversee other issues related to the regional Essential Workplace Skills certificate. The committee should not need to meet more than 3-4 times per year. The committee's staff person (CSP) is responsible for maintaining a schedule of recertification accreditation on an annual or bi-annual basis as determined by the committee.

II. Proposed Accreditation Process

There was extensive discussion about what level to set for a program to be accredited as a program that can issue the regional Essential Workplace Skills certificate. The discussion focused in part on whether all programs should address all of the standards and whether a graduate had to meet all of these standards to issue the certificate. The final recommendation was to hold programs to address all the standards and for graduates to meet all the standards. The concern was that if we allowed variation, then an employer wouldn't know which standards the certificate holder met. This standard is very rigorous and as it's implemented there may need to be some adjustments to allow for some variations. Other options included allowing programs to address 16 of the 18 factors, and/or allowing graduates to meet 80% of those factors at the level specified.

As it currently stands, to be accredited as a program that can issue the regional Essential Workplace Skills certificate, a program needs to meet the following accreditation standards:

1. The curriculum and assessment process used by the program to decide if participants are "work ready" addresses **all elements** of the regional certificate's standards and are targeted at the standards on the attached rubric.
2. A certificate is not awarded unless the participant meets **all of the minimum standards** of the regional certificate and achieves the overall level set for the certificate (see attached definitions).

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3. Program is designed so staff have an opportunity to observe participants *demonstrating* essential workplace skills as part of the assessment (assessment is behavior based, not based on a written test – except for math). Certificate is only awarded after a participant demonstrates *all* criteria.
4. Program tracks and documents participants' time and attendance; there are at least 9 opportunities for participant to be present and on-time before the certificate is awarded. This can include class time, individual meetings/interviews, going to work, etc.
5. The assessment tool documents reasons for participant failure/attainment and includes evaluator comments.
6. The program graduates who are interviewed by the accreditation team meet the standards that are tested. (See short sample questionnaire - attached - to serve as a behavior based/situational assessment.) This will be waived for brand new programs.

Optional, but desired elements:

7. Employers who have hired program graduates are interviewed/surveyed by the accreditation team and report that the program fully meets the standards (waived for brand new programs and those whose participants are in school and do not seek employment). (See attached sample.)
8. Program maintains direct contact with participants after the end of the program or provides a vehicle for participants to get back in touch with staff as needed.
9. Program maintains direct contact with employers who hire program graduates or provides a vehicle for employers to send feedback to the program.

Accreditation Process:

Accreditation will be done annually at first. After two consecutive years with no significant concerns or conditions, a program can move to bi-annual recertification. The accreditation process is designed to be an independent, objective review of programs to assure that each program only issues certificates to participants who are fully ready for work, as defined by the WIBs. The accreditation review is not designed to provide technical assistance or make recommendations on how to improve the program.

A local Essential Workplace Skills program (EWS) that wishes to be accredited applies to the committee for a review. The CSP does an initial review to be sure the EWS staff understand the standards for accreditation and the EWS staff feel they fully meet these standards. The CSP informs the program of the nature of the accreditation visit and the information they will have to provide (see below). The CSP then recruits a team to conduct the accreditation and facilitates the scheduling of the visit.

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A team of one business person and one Essential Workplace Skills staff person, from a different county than the applicant program, schedule an on-site visit. The visit will include:

- an interview with the EWS director and other relevant staff
- a review of the program's curriculum, assessment tools, past and present participant records, to assess how they evaluate participants, and the rigor with which they award certificates
- an interview with 2-3 current students (selected by the assessment team) to get more information about how the program is delivered (see attached sample questions)
- the selection of at least 3 recent program graduates' names (selected by the assessment team) and contact information for a possible follow-up interview.
- a review of the program's employer satisfaction data, or job placement and retention information (if available), and/or the names and contact information for employers who have hired program graduates (if the program has this information). This is to assess how well the graduates meet the standards.

The visit can also include (at the discretion of the accreditation team) observing part of the classroom program.

Note: Brand new programs who wish to apply before they have students enrolled or before they have graduates who are employed can receive provisional approval without having interviews with current students, graduates, or involved employers.

After the site visit, the team debriefs, makes an initial determination, and completes an assessment form (see attached sample). If the program appears to meet all the criteria, then the team contacts program graduates and participating employers to collect further data and completes that section of the rubric. Employers may be contacted by phone, email or by use of an on-line survey. (See attached sample.) If enough employers respond, then there is no need to contact program graduates, as an employers' assessment of someone they work with daily is more valid than the assessment a certification team can complete based on a short conversation with a graduate.

If program graduates are interviewed in person or by phone, the reviewers need to assess how well the graduates meet the core criteria of being job ready. (See attached sample)

The team sends the completed rubric with their recommendation to accredit or not to the CSP who in turn brings it to the committee at their next meeting. Any decision to not accredit must include a detailed rationale and a description of what has to be done to be accredited in the future. The committee makes the final decision and the CSP contacts the program to inform them of the decision. Programs that are rejected may reapply in six months.

Membership:

Accredited programs have the right to issue the Regional Essential Workplace Skills Certificate to qualified program graduates and/or to add the regional essential workplace skills logo/name to their program certificate for qualified graduates. They also have access to the electronic library and discussion board, which includes contact information about all other accredited programs in the region.

Accredited programs are obligated to:

1. Adhere to the regional essential workplace skills certificate standards and to only issue the certificate to participants who have fully earned it.
2. Provide a staff person to participate in accreditation visits, no more frequently than once every six months (and probably much less frequently).
3. Provide access to an accreditation team on an annual basis at a time that is mutually agreeable.

Other than that, there are no obligations, expenses, or responsibilities for being accredited with the regional essential workplace skills certificate.

III. Accreditation Tools:

- Short sample questionnaire to assess program graduates.
- Short sample questionnaire to solicit evaluative feedback from employers who have hired program graduates.
- Short sample questionnaire with 2-3 current students to get more information about how the program is delivered
- Accreditation team assessment form
- Essential Workplace Skills rubric to identify desired standards for issuing the certificate

A. To assess program graduates (in person or by phone, not via survey)

1. What did you like most about the ____ program? (warm up question)
2. What did you learn that was especially helpful? (warm up question)
3. Are you working now and/or are you in school? (If working, use work as the context for the next 2 questions, if not, use school, if neither, use life in general.)
4. How is your attendance at work? (If not working, ask: what do you think an employer expects of you in terms of your attendance at work?) (Follow up if needed: How many absences or latenesses in a month would be acceptable? How important is it to call ahead if you are going to be late or absent?)

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5. Tell me about a time when someone pointed out a mistake you made and how you felt about it and how you handled it.
6. How do you feel about your employer changing your schedule or your work assignment at the last minute if something important came up at work and you were needed to work extra?
7. Tell me about a time when you had to work with a team of people where at least one person was difficult to get along with. (If they can't think of a time, ask: "What's important to make a team effective?")

Scoring Rubric: (0= poor/failure; 1 = minimal, 2= good, 3 = excellent; passing = 10)

1. Understands time and attendance standards in the workplace. (standard 1)
2. Has good interpersonal skills – carries on discussion, speaks clearly, listens well, is pleasant, makes eye contact (if in person), (standards 4, 5)
3. Able to handle a mistake well – asks questions, listens, “owns” mistakes, stays calm (standard 6, 11)
4. Is flexible, willing to change and adapt within reason (standard 10)
5. Understands the importance of teamwork and has some skills to handle a difficult team situation. (standard 14)

Note: if the program graduate is very nervous about the interview, take that into account when scoring this and do not penalize the program for that.

B. To get input from employers who have hired program graduates (can be done via phone, written survey, on-line survey)

1. How many graduates from the _____ program have you interviewed and/or hired?
2. Have you found any differences between certificate holders and other applicants/employees?
3. Are certificate holders “work ready” in your opinion?

Please comment on any areas in which they are especially strong or weak.

4. Would you be interested in having other graduates from this program apply for work with you?

Scoring Rubric: Employer finds value in the program/program graduates – yes / no

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C. Short questionnaire to use with current students to get more information about how the program is delivered

1. Tell me about some of the key lessons you learned in this program. (Should address at least 3-4 of the regional certificate’s standards.) Explore to make sure the lesson was correctly learned. (Use some of the questions from tool “A” above if needed to draw the participant out.)
2. Tell me about what you had to do to demonstrate during the class that you were learning some of these skills. (Program should be designed so staff have an opportunity to observe participants *demonstrating* essential workplace skills.)
3. What was the expectation in terms of time and attendance? (No more than one absence in 9 or more sessions; 95% on time attendance in a longer program.) How often could you be late or absent and still get the certificate? What were you expected to do if you were going to be late or absent? (Call in advance.)
4. Did you get feedback from the program staff when you successfully or unsuccessfully demonstrated a work readiness skill?

D. Accreditation team assessment form

Standard	Achieved?
1. The curriculum and assessment process used by the program to decide if participants are “work ready” address all elements of the regional certificate’s standards at the levels required.	
2. A certificate is not awarded unless the participant meets all of the minimum standards of the regional certificate and achieves the overall level set for the certificate.	
3. Program is designed so staff have an opportunity to observe participants <i>demonstrating</i> essential workplace skills as part of the assessment (assessment is behavior based, except for math). Certificate is only awarded after a participant demonstrates <i>all</i> criteria.	
4. Program tracks and documents participants’ time and attendance; there are at least 9 opportunities for participant to be present and on-time before the certificate is awarded.	
5. The assessment tool documents reasons for participant failure/attainment and includes evaluator comments.	

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6. The program graduates who were interviewed meet the standards that are tested.	
Optional, but desired elements:	
7. Employers who have hired program graduates report that the program fully meets the standards.	
8. Program maintains direct contact with participants after the end of the program or provides a vehicle for participants to get back in touch with staff as needed.	
9. Program maintains direct contact with employers who hire program graduates or provides a vehicle for employers to send feedback to the program.	
Overall recommendation: Approve/disapprove. If disapproved, please attach a detailed explanation for that determination	

E. Essential Workplace Skills rubric to identify desired standards for issuing the certificate.

(Note #5 and 15 were not part of the original model, but have been left in due to strong endorsement by employers and work readiness program staff.)

Factor	Standard of Performance
1. Attendance and timeliness	Is present and on time for all sessions or calls in advance when late or absent and has a “legitimate” excuse. <i>Excused</i> lateness and absence is no more than 10% of the time. (Some allowance can be given on a case by case basis for extraordinary circumstances – serious illness, accident, etc. if all other standards are highly met.)
2. Math	Is able to pass a short math test demonstrating that they can make change; work with fractions and percents.
3. Language skills - written	Can express themselves clearly and accurately in writing. (Does not have to have perfect spelling and grammar.)
4. Language skills – oral	Can be easily understood, speaks clearly and with sufficient volume
5. Interpersonal skills	Makes regular eye contact, carries on a conversation, listens well, is pleasant to interact with
6. Feedback	Is able to ask a clarifying question when receiving critical feedback; is somewhat able to “own” mistakes; is able to explain situations in a constructive manner.
7. Computer skills keyboarding and internet.	Is able to use a keyboard and mouse to type or fill in a document on a computer; can access email and conduct a basic search on the internet.

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8. Uses time effectively	Always attends to assigned tasks
9. Follows instructions	Always completes tasks as instructed, asks questions if confused, and makes very few mistakes in understanding and following instructions
10. Flexibility	Is willing to change and adapt as instructed.
11. Accountability	Takes responsibility for mistakes when they are pointed out, takes on additional work when asked.
12. Customer Service	Is polite, respectful and friendly towards customers. Does not get upset when confronted by a difficult customer.
13. Conflict	Stays calm and can offer some suggestions for positively resolving conflict.
14. Team work	Works cooperatively with others. Is willing to help and ask for help as needed. Demonstrates respect for others.
15. Decision making	Carefully weighs alternatives and considers the consequences of each when making a decision.
16. Diversity	Is respectful of people from different backgrounds, and makes an effort to engage them.
17. Career awareness	Is knowledgeable about career opportunities, and does some active exploration.
18. Job seeking skills	Knows how to fill out an application and respond effectively to questions in an interview.

IV. Additional Recommendations:

There needs to be a large increase in the number of certificates offered so the program gains “critical mass”. While it’s important to fully develop the certificate and the accreditation process, it might be helpful to delay the launch of the regional certificate until there is a strong network of accredited essential workplace skills programs throughout the region.

In the same theme, it would be helpful to provide technical assistance to agencies wishing to start an essential workplace skills program. Providing small start up grants would also help increase the number of programs that could quickly get started.

Where there is a program that provides a “train the trainer” service for other programs who provide the essential workplace skills program directly or where the same provider offers the program in multiple locations (e.g. the Schenectady Certificate of Employability and the BEST program in Columbia/Greene), the Essential Workplace Skills Coordinating Committee can decide on a case by case basis whether the central training/coordinating entity or program model can be assessed and the overall program accredited, or whether each individual program provider will need to be individually accredited.

V. Marketing Plan

The Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate has three distinct target audiences; employers, programs, and job seekers. This marketing plan outlines a four phase strategy to provide consistent, long-term messaging to the three target audiences.

- Phase 1 is to finalize the core message and marketing infrastructure.
- Phase 2 focuses on potential program sponsors to promote the establishment and growth of certificate programs in the region. This is needed in order to generate a critical mass of successful certificate holders so businesses across the region have regular contact with this initiative.
- Phase 3 focuses on bringing job seekers into the programs to earn the certificate and again build critical mass.
- Phase 4 of the plan focuses on outreach to businesses to promote the certificate in order to create a “pull effect” for sustainable growth of the program.

Phase 1 – Develop an overall plan and the marketing materials that will convey the benefits of the program to the target audiences.

1. Create logo and message
 - a. Develop logo and color scheme, perhaps used in conjunction with other similar programs currently in effect (i.e. Tech it out).
 - b. Create a message that highlights the value proposition for each target audience
2. Identify key partners in each target audience
 - a) Businesses – focus on those businesses that would most benefit from this certificate, such as: retail, grocery, tourism, and healthcare.
 - b) Agencies – identify organizations that currently provide or could provide a work readiness training program that could meet the criteria for this certificate. Recommendations: one stop centers, GED programs, high schools, rehabilitation services, youth development agencies, poverty related agencies, Chambers, unions, and agencies serving people with disabilities.
 - c) Job seekers – identify populations who would most benefit from receiving such a certificate. Recommendations: people registered with one stop centers, participants in the programs noted in (b) above. Also target parents and professional staff who could refer clients to these programs.

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3. Develop a website
 - a. Develop a 'brochure' style website with sections for each of the three main target audiences. Incorporate consistent messaging and themes.
 - b. Provide links to community organizations that offer training for the certificate.
 - c. Provide signup form where potential certificate candidates can sign up to receive more information or be contacted about a program in their area.
4. Develop physical marketing materials
 - a. Tri-fold Pamphlets – create to convey messaging to each group, program basics, and who to contact for more information. (see attached sample)
 - b. Magnets – magnets with logos are a cost effective giveaway to include the logo and promote awareness of the program. They can be given to employers when making presentations to business groups.
 - c. Pens & Paper – include logo and certificate name, these can be given to program organizers to give to participants in the program and encourage others to sign up.

Phase 2 - Reach out to agencies to promote the establishment of more programs offering the regional certificate:

This phase will rely heavily on leveraging partnering with the existing networks of agencies, organization leaders who participate in the regional effort, and word of mouth advertising.

- a. Mass email messaging – collaborate with agencies will existing networks – BOCES, United Ways, WIBs, School Boards, Superintendents of Schools, NYS DOL, OASAS, OMRDD, OMH, VESID
- b. Community outreach - give presentations for the networks noted above, ask to speak at scheduled meetings, participate in community outreach events
- c. Direct calls to One Stop Centers and other key agencies in each county
- d. Press releases (see attached sample)

Phase 3: Reach out to job seekers and their support network

This phase focuses on the social outreach to provide awareness and recognition to potential certificate recipients. It will include elements of standard mass marketing targeted at potential participants to encourage them to enroll in a participating program. The goal is to create a critical mass of participants graduating from the programs in sufficient number to be noticed by employers. This will involve an integrated marketing campaign:

- a) TV – commercials or PSA’s to provide awareness of the certificate’s value. To be aired during network television geared toward target market including daytime television, evening news, and sporting events.
- b) Radio – conversational dialogue commercial/PSA. Person 1 asks person 2 how they managed to get a great new job. Credits the certificate for helping them beat out other less-qualified candidates.

Can be aired on stations such as Janz 96.3, WGNA 107.7, B95.5, PYX 106, and others.

- c) Newspaper – Contact local newspapers to get articles written about the program. Get writer to focus on the ability of program to highlight how participants are more qualified in the eyes of employers. “The Capital Region has a new standard for the job seeker.” (see attached sample)

Place advertisements/announcements in the jobs section of the paper providing logo, URL, and catchphrase.

- d) Local news – radio and television – contact news stations to get interviews with successful program graduates and employers. Need to develop success stories. Or play off the news: “Unemployment is going down, help accelerate it by getting an Essential Workplace Skills Certificate.”
- e) Billboards – Use space on I-787 and I-90, or in towns with target demographic or in the immediate vicinity of program providers. Include logo and website URL.
Examples:

1. “Are you ready to get back to work?”
2. “Trouble finding a job – Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate can help!”

- f) Bus stops – Advertisements in bus stop shelters that include logo, web URL, and ‘tickler’ question. Examples:

1. “Ready to get back to work? Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate can help!”
2. “Get the edge in your next job interview – Get Work-Ready Certified”

- g) Write articles/announcements/ads to run in free papers (jobs weekly)

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- h) Craigslist – post information in jobs section
- i) Use social networking – create facebook, linkedin, and twitter accounts to will provide additional awareness, and reach the target population.

Phase 4 - Communicate to Businesses

This phase focuses on taking the critical mass of program participants, developing success stories, and informing the employers of why they should be looking out for this certification. Encourage employers to ask applicants if they have this certificate.

- a. Develop testimonials from participating employers and from agency success stories
- b. Get stories in the Business Review or business sections of the newspapers that outline the program's standards and give a case study or two. (see attached sample)
- c. Seek businesses willing to give special consideration to certificate holders
- d. News stories – of successful hiring
- e. Community outreach (give talks, hold meetings, etc.) – local chambers, economic development forums, WIBs, JSEC, regional Human Resources Associations.
- f. Engage existing business networks and ask them to inform their members of the benefits of the program. Ex. CEN, Technology Roadmap, retail organizations, etc.
- g. Do direct mailing to HR Directors

Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release

Date:

Contacts:

WIB & One-Stops to Provide Regional Work Readiness Certificate

Capital Region businesses and employees to benefit from newly standardized certification.

The Greater Capital Region Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) are rolling out a new certification program today in response to the upcoming demand for a stronger workforce throughout the area.

The Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate will provide area employers a consistent set of standards to show that a job candidate is “work ready” and has the employability skills necessary for successful employment at all levels.

The Regional Certificate can be issued by any local program that agrees to the set of job readiness standards set by the four Regional WIBs. Programs can use their own curricula, but would assess candidates based on a common set of evaluation criteria. The criteria include demonstrating high standards in attendance, customer service, communication, accountability, and team work.

“This certificate will unify the existing career development programs the Capital Region currently has to offer,” states _____, WIB Director from _____. “We see this as a way to make things easier for both employers and employees in the area.”

Employers are looking for people who are good team players, communicate well, and are extremely reliable. It is difficult to fully get to know a candidate in an interview. Those who possess the Greater Capital Region Essential Workplace Skills Certificate have been through a training program and assessment process that ensure they have many of the key work readiness skills employers are looking for.

A number of area employers are already involved in this program. “It’s good to see a program like this being put in place,” says ____ of _____ (company). “It makes me much more comfortable hiring an employee knowing that they have these basic set of credentials.”

Sample brochure is on the following 2 pages – note this is scanned; the original is much higher quality and is available as a pdf and publisher file.

Program Features

This certification covers a variety of skills and abilities that translate into highly desirable employees. The Essential Workplace Skills Certificate ensures each applicant is well versed in a number of business and life skills. As part of the certification process, each participant demonstrates skills in the following areas:

attendance

work ethic

customer service

**communication &
interpersonal skills**

basic math & literacy

computer skills

**career exploration &
awareness**

This dynamic program allows Capital Region job seekers to prove their readiness to be successful in a new career. It helps employers in their hiring process. It allows program providers to increase their ability to create more qualified applicants.



Contact

If you are interested in learning more about the program please contact:

M.A. Wiltse

Columbia-Greene One Stop Director

tel: 518-828-4181, x5510

email: wiltse@sunycgcc.edu

**Greater Capital Region Essential
Work Place Skills Certificate**



*Greater Capital
Region Workforce
Investment Boards*



**Are you ready for
21st century
employment?**

Employers

FIND THE RIGHT HIRE

It is difficult to fully get to know a candidate in an interview. Those who possess the Greater Capital Region Essential Workplace Skills Certificate have been through a training program and assessment process that ensures they have many of the key work readiness skills employers are looking for.

There are many local work readiness programs across the Greater Capital Region, each with a different curriculum and each holding participants to different standards. The Regional Essential Workplace Skills Certificate provides employers with a standardized assessment that shows candidates have *demonstrated* that they have the employability skills necessary for successful employment.

Save time and effort in your search for new employees.

Don't waste time and money on unqualified applicants anymore!

Program Coordinators

DEVELOP BETTER WORKERS

The single most important criteria for many employers in a candidate for a job is that they are "work ready". Reliable, good with people, and understanding the workplace are traits that employers don't want to have to teach. They want their employees to already possess them.

The Greater Capital Region Essential Workplace Skills Certificate is a document that lets employers know that a job candidate has been through a training program and assessment process that ensures they have many of the key work readiness skills employers are looking for.

There are many effective curricula to use in developing a work readiness program and many regional models to look at. By participating in the Regional Essential Workplace Skills Certificate program, a local work readiness program can design their own approach to training and provide their graduates access to a wide range of employers who are knowledgeable about and supportive of this certificate.

Increase your program success rate.

Make job skills training and accreditation easier to provide.

Develop better candidates.

Job Applicants

GAIN THE ADVANTAGE

It's a tough job market out there and anything you can do to make your application stand out in a positive way could be crucial to getting a job.

The Region Essential Workplace Skills Certificate is a document that lets employers know that you have completed a training program and assessment process that ensures you have many of the key work readiness skills employers are looking for.

Employers throughout an eleven county region are being told about this certificate and what it means when a job applicant shows up with one. Many employers have been very enthusiastic about this and look forward to getting applications from people who have earned this certificate.

Stand out in your next interview.

Impress potential employers with the skills and education received from the certification program.

Gain the advantage over other candidates.

VI. Electronic Library and Discussion Board

This is a web site developed for the staff of any work readiness program in the region. It is available only to registered users, but there is currently no limitation as to who can register. It is designed to be mostly self-administered by participants.

It includes:

- A brief overview of the Essential Workplace Skills Certificate program and who to contact for more information.
- A listing of each registered Essential Workplace Skills program with a brief description including contact information. This list will be updated by the four WIBs or the Essential Workplace Skills Coordinating Committee as information changes or new programs come on line. This listing should be alphabetical by program name (this keeps multiple sites of the same program together such as CoE and BEST), and as the list gets long, it should be sorted by county and then by program.
- A data base of shared documents for downloading or reading where programs can post assessment tools, tips, sample forms, effective classroom activities, and other information that may be of assistance in conducting an effective work readiness program. Documents can be easily uploaded and downloaded by users. (See list below of the data base categories.)
- A discussion board to allow people with access to the site to ask questions and share information with each other via a web discussion that includes the option for email notification of new postings; a place to store and access these discussions when archived; a “poll” feature to conduct a simple survey of programs.

Categories for storing documents:

1. Assessment / Evaluation Tools and Processes
2. Sample Program and Administrative Forms
3. Curriculum Information
4. Strategies for Working With Employers
5. Other Program Strategies and Tips

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Illustrative description of categories for storing documents: (to be posted on the web to guide users where to upload documents and where to look to download documents)

1. **Assessment / Evaluation Tools and Processes**, such as:
 - Pre and post samples
 - Discussion about what standards you screen to (TABE, others)
 - Types of questions, format of assessment, evaluation processes
2. **Sample Program and Administrative Forms**, such as:
 - Applications / learning contracts
 - Recruitment flyers
 - Sample of certificates
3. **Curriculum Information**, such as:
 - Curriculum outlines/topics covered, best practices
 - Classroom activities, simulations, role play/skits, interactive activities
 - Suggested text books, workbooks, resources
 - Training of trainer resources
4. **Strategies for Working with Employers**, such as:
 - Recruiting employers
 - Job / internship development techniques/ tips
 - Using employers as program or participant evaluators
 - Information about employer tax credits or incentives
5. **Other Program Strategies and Tips**, such as:
 - How you recruit participants
 - Other credentials you use
 - Additional support mechanisms; how to maintain participant engagement
 - “Wrap around” services you provide or refer participants to (e.g. GED, mental health, health, etc.)
 - Others with whom you collaborate
 - Career information resources

On both the database (library) and discussion board there is a file that provides instructions for users to fully access the features of each tool.

VII. Additional Tools for Program Operators

- More detailed rubric to use when assessing participants.
- Sample math test to use when assessing participants.

Essential Workplace Skills rubric to identify desired standards for issuing the certificate.

The following may be adapted by any programs wishing to develop a rubric for evaluating the performance of their participants in relation to specific standards. The column with the bold text is the minimum standard for awarding the Regional Essential Workplace Skills credential.

Programs do not have to change their assessment practices to match the sample rubric. They simply have to show how they evaluate participants against these standards and that the standards they use are at least as rigorous as these. However, programs can feel free to adopt the attached rubric in whole or in part to help staff more specifically assess participants' performance and to help participants better understand the standards against which they will be evaluated.

See next three pages.

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Standard	Not satisfactory (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Excellent (3)
1. Attendance and timeliness	Is absent or late more than once without calling ahead and/or without a legitimate excuse.	Is present and on time for all sessions or calls in advance with a legitimate excuse, with one exception. <i>Excused</i> lateness and absence is no more than 20% of the time	Is present and on time for all sessions or calls in advance when late or absent and has a “legitimate” excuse. <i>Excused</i> lateness and absence is no more than 10% of the time. (Some allowance can be given on a case by case basis for extraordinary circumstances – serious illness, accident, etc. if all other standards are highly met.)	Is present and on time for all sessions or calls in advance when late or absent and has a “legitimate” excuse. Excused lateness and absence is no more than 5% of the time.
2. Math	Can not accurately do basic computation	Can add, subtract multiply and divide.	Is able to pass a short math test demonstrating that they can make change; work with fractions and percents.	Understands and is able to use algebra and geometry
3. Language skills - written	Can not read or write at all	Can read and write at a very basic level	Can express themselves clearly and accurately in writing. (Does not have to have perfect spelling and grammar.)	Can construct a well-written document
4. Language skills – oral	Can not be easily understood when speaking	Can be understood, but not every word is clear – mumbles, mispronounces words	Can be easily understood, speaks clearly and with sufficient volume	Has excellent command of language. Articulates well, Speaks with appropriate tone, volume, and speed for the situation.
5. Interpersonal skills	Is not able to relate to others	Communicates with others, but makes minimal eye contact, does not carry on a conversation	Makes regular eye contact, carries on a conversation, listens well, is pleasant to interact with	Has excellent eye contact and listening skills, is able to engage with people who are somewhat difficult to talk with

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Standard	Not satisfactory (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Excellent (3)
6. Feedback	Gets very defensive when given feedback; does not give feedback constructively	Is able to receive critical feedback without becoming offensively defensive; does not give feedback constructively	Is able to ask a clarifying question when receiving critical feedback; is somewhat able to “own” mistakes; is able to explain situations in a constructive manner.	Is able to receive critical feedback constructively (ask clarifying questions, own the mistake, give clear explanations) and give corrective feedback to others in a constructive manner.
7. Computer skills keyboarding and internet.	Is not able to use a computer keyboard and/or is unable to access the internet	Is able to use a keyboard and mouse and can access the internet	Is able to use a keyboard and mouse to type or fill in a document on a computer; can access email and conduct a basic search on the internet.	Is able to use to use some features in word processing or spreadsheet to format or add data to a document; is able to conduct complex searches on the internet
8. Uses time effectively	Often has periods where does not attend to tasks	Generally attends to assigned tasks	Always attends to assigned tasks	Always attends to assigned tasks and when no task is assigned finds something constructive to do.
9. Follows instructions	Often does not complete tasks as instructed.	Usually completes tasks as instructed, and makes a few mistakes in understanding and following instructions	Always completes tasks as instructed, asks questions if confused, and makes very few mistakes in understanding and following instructions	Always completes tasks as instructed, asks questions if confused, and makes no mistakes in understanding and following instructions
10. Flexibility	Is rigid and unable to adapt to changing situations	Will change or adapt, but requires significant effort.	Is willing to change and adapt as instructed.	Is willing to change and adapt as instructed and often anticipates the need to change
11. Accountability	Does not take responsibility for mistakes, is unwilling to take on additional work when asked	Takes responsibility for mistakes when directly confronted, takes on additional work when asked repeatedly.	Takes responsibility for mistakes when they are pointed out, takes on additional work when asked.	Takes responsibility for mistakes without the need for someone else to point them out, willingly takes on additional work, often without being asked
12. Customer Service	Is disrespectful of customers. Is not able to handle difficult customers.	Is neutral when working with customers. Is not able to handle difficult customers.	Is polite, respectful and friendly towards customers. Does not get upset when confronted by a difficult customer.	Is outgoing and engaging with customers. Is able to defuse difficult customers and attempt to resolve the problems.

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Standard	Not satisfactory (0)	Fair (1)	Good (2)	Excellent (3)
13. Conflict	Gets caught up in conflict and makes the situation worse.	Stays calm in a conflict situation, but is not able to help resolve it.	Stays calm and can offer some suggestions for positively resolving conflict.	Stays calm, engages the other person in a problem solving process.
14. Team work	Does not work well with others.	Can work in the same place as others, but does not engage them in cooperative efforts.	Works cooperatively with others. Is willing to help and ask for help as needed. Demonstrates respect for others.	Works collaboratively with others, will offer to help without being asked, will accept and offer ideas and suggestions. Demonstrates a high degree of respect for others.
15. Decision making	Does not follow a thoughtful decision making process.	Looks briefly at alternatives when making a decision.	Carefully weighs alternatives and considers the consequences of each when making a decision.	Uses criteria to weigh alternatives, seeks input from others where appropriate and selects effective choices when making a decision.
16. Diversity	Is not able to work with people from different backgrounds.	Is respectful of people from different background, but does not readily engage them.	Is respectful of people from different backgrounds, and makes an effort to engage them.	Works very effectively with a wide diversity of people.
17. Career awareness	Is not knowledgeable about, does not explore, career opportunities.	Is minimally knowledgeable about career opportunities, but does not actively explore.	Is knowledgeable about career opportunities, and does some active exploration.	Is very knowledgeable about several career opportunities, but actively explores.
18. Job seeking skills	Has very poor job seeking skills.	Knows how to complete an application.	Knows how to fill out an application and respond effectively to questions in an interview.	Has a resume, references, is able to respond effectively to interview questions and to ask appropriate questions of the interviewer.

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Sample math test to use when assessing participants.

{Passing score = 8 correct out of 10; it's OK to use a calculator for this.}

- 1a. If you had 8 apples and 12 oranges what would your bill be if the apples cost 22 cents a piece and the oranges 54 cents each?
- 1b. If you gave the cashier a \$20 bill, what would your change be?
- 2a. You have a recipe for baking that calls for $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of milk and 1 and $\frac{1}{3}$ cups of water. You want to double the recipe. How much flour will you need?
- 2b. How much water will you need?
3. You have 5 items to purchase. They cost \$1.50; \$2.75; \$5.47; \$8.29 and \$12.67. What is the total bill?
4. You need to cut a board and it currently measures 4 feet 10 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches. It has to be 3 feet 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches when finished. How much wood do you have to cut off?
- 5a. A pair of jeans costs \$34, but is on sale with a 15% discount. How much money do you save?
- 5b. What will be the final discounted cost of the jeans?
6. You decide to buy a shirt that cost \$22.90 and a pair of shoes that cost \$65.50. If the sales tax is 8%, what will be the total cost of the bill, including tax?
7. If the total bill for lunch is \$5.62 and someone hands you \$6.12 how much change would they get back?

VIII. List of People Interviewed

A. Work Readiness Program Staff

Of the ten programs cited in the Miller Report, Rensselaer One Stop does not have a program, the program at the Rensselaer EOC is on hold due to funding cuts, and the Employee Enhancement Program did not feel that the EWS was appropriate for them since they are working with incumbent workers on a more narrowly focused program. With one other exception, all of the other local work readiness programs interviewed endorsed the Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate and have signed off on the accreditation process and the standards for the certificate. The one exception was Stephen Traver’s program at the Workforce Development Institute, and this was due to the fact that they work with very high need and fragile individuals and don’t want to set up something in which they might fail.

If there was a cost to the program, that would be a major barrier. Some programs’ current range of topics do not fully line up with the EWS, but all indicated that they would be willing to modify their program to adapt to this model. For most, it does not involve significant changes, with math and computer skills being the two most do not directly address.

Here is a list of the work readiness program staff we met with:

Agency	Program	Contact Person	Title
Albany United Methodists (AUMS)	Career Pathways / Work Keys	Rev. Maurice (Mick) Drown	Program Director
Capital District Educational Opportunity Center (CD EOC)	National Work Readiness Credential	Jaime Mackey	Career and Employment Services Specialist
Capital District Educational Opportunity Center (CD EOC)	National Work Readiness Credential	Tina Mone	Employment Services Coordinator
Capital Region Workforce Development Center	Building Bridges	Ada Lynn Martinez	Coordinator
Columbia Greene Community College	Columbia Greene Workforce NY	Maureen Boutin	Business Services Representative
Columbia-Greene Community College	Workforce Investment Office	Mary Alane Wiltse	Director
Columbia-Greene Educational Center	Questar III Career Pathways Consortium	Lakia Walker	B.E.S.T. Program Coordinator
Fulton, Montgomery, and Schoharie Counties	Workforce Solution Center	Natalie Russo	Youth Services Coordinator
Fulton, Montgomery, and Schoharie Counties	Workforce Solution Center	Jennifer Swart	Senior Youth Coordinator

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A. Work Readiness Program Staff (continued)

Agency	Program	Contact Person	Title
Northeast Parent & Child	YouthBuild	Jennifer Lawrence	Director of Career Services
Peter Young Housing, Industry & Treatment (PYHIT)	The Altamont Program	Judy Cocca	Director of Vocational, Educational and Employment Services
Peter Young Housing, Industry & Treatment (PYHIT)	The Altamont Program	Gregory Bellcourt	Job Developer
Peter Young Housing, Industry & Treatment (PYHIT)	The Altamont Program	Jessica Barrone	Assistant Director
Schenectady Community Action Program (SCAP)	Career Readiness	Chari Jones	Director of Career Readiness Programs
Schenectady Community Action Program (SCAP)	Career Readiness	Jessie Myers	Program Staff
Schenectady Community Action Program (SCAP)	Career Readiness	Jennifer Steele	Program Staff
Schenectady County Job Training Agency	Schenectady Job Training (youth program)	Jennifer Bargy	Workforce Investment Youth Coordinator
Schenectady County Job Training Agency	Temporary Assistance and Employment	Edward Bittig	Director
The Chamber of Schenectady County	Workforce Development & Public Affairs	Leesa Perazzo	Director, Workforce Development & Public Affairs
Washington County One Stop Career Center	Work Readiness	Katie Foster	Program Staff
Washington County One Stop Career Center	Work Readiness	Natalie Williams	Employment and Training Program Director
Workforce Development Institute	Building Bridges	Penny Hill	Regional Director, Capital Region
Workforce Development Institute	Vocational Services	Stephen Traver	Director of Vocational Services

B. Employers Interviewed about the Certificate Program

Employers were very supportive of the Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate. Ellis Hospital has been involved with CoE for many years, but has not seen any job applicants with the certificate. They emphasized the need for large numbers of certificate holders to make the program viable. All the employers indicated that they would definitely take note of this certificate and it would add value to an applicant.

Golub, Hannaford and Target also felt there was great value in this program and as regional employers especially liked the consistency across a large region. All of the above employers felt that the certificate set a very appropriate standard of “job readiness”. State Farm and Key Bank also liked the certificate and felt the standards were at a minimum rather than optimum level for their entry level jobs. Home Depot endorsed the standards, but they have their own pre-application test which would test for many of the same criteria. The test is their primary screening tool.

One challenge for many of these employers is that the application process is on-line and there is no easy place to indicate that the applicant has this certificate. One employer suggested adding it in to the educational history as an additional line. For those cases where it can’t be fit in, they encouraged the applicant to bring it with them to the interview.

All of the HR managers I spoke with said they would inform their local managers about the certificate once it is launched and encourage them to take it into consideration when making hiring decisions. They also said they and their local managers would be happy to come to programs in their local area to give presentations to work readiness programs and to arrange tours of their business and discuss the essential workplace skills they look for in employees. I didn’t raise this with any of them, but they would all be good candidates for the Essential Workplace Skills Coordinating Committee.

Employers we met with individually:

Company	Contact	Title
Ellis Hospital	Megan Feuz	Employment Representative, HR
Ellis Hospital	Pete Jones	Senior Employment Representative, HR
Golub Corporation	Paul White	Director, Talent Acquisition
Hannaford	Barbara Barford	HR Representative
Home Depot	Vicki Goodyear	HR District Manager
Key Bank	Adam Lawrence	HR Business Partner
State Farm Insurance	Brandy Pascazio	Operations Recruiter
Target	Nick Pisani	Executive Team Leader of HR

In addition, we did a brief presentation at a meeting of the Chief Executives Network about the certificate and received feedback that was generally supportive, especially from employers who hired people without a college degree. Some of those who hired people with a BA degree or

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higher, felt that going through college was enough of a “job readiness” certificate. One employer felt that the standards were too high for an entry level person in manufacturing, especially in a setting where they don’t work in teams. Most employers felt the standards were right on target and addressed many of the key skills and traits they screen for when hiring. Those present at the meeting include:

Contact	Company
Bill Sumner	Arcadia Mfg.
Brian Helf	Stone Management, Inc.
Charles Dumas	Lemery Greisler LLC
Charles R. Haviland, Jr.	Whiteman Osterman & Hanna LLP
Clint Binley	Pallets Inc
Danny J. Wheeler	BST
Danny Wheeler	BST
Dave Mahoney	AWESCO
Dave Vener	imPress Printing
Denise Padula	Alchar Printing
Dick Cunningham	Passonno Paints
Gary Balfour	Solid Sealing Tech
Joe Murray	Frank Murken Products
John Corey	CFIC-Qdrive
John Tattersall	FMP-Frank Murken Products
Kerry D Marsh	Marsh, Wassermann & McHugh, LLC
Les Lak	Blasch Precision Ceramics
Martin Wawrla	Centrotherm Eco Systems
Michael Boskin	EXECControl Global Solutions
Mike Dagle	Zak Incorporated
Mike Tucker	Sonoco Molded Plastics
Paul DiCaprio	Specialty Silicone Products
Peter Piusz	Beckmann Converting
Reid Anthony	SuperPower
Robert Nadal	Pine Ridge Industries
Robert Witko	Fort Orange Press
Sarah Halliday	M&T Bank
Steven Eгна	Teal Becker & Chiamonte, CPAs, PC

C. Chamber Leaders Interviewed about the Certificate Program

The Chamber Leaders were concerned about the sustainability of the program and how many local work readiness programs would be established and would continue to operate over the long term. They felt that if this were done well, it would be of value to employers and would be something they would be willing to help promote.

Chamber	Contact	Title
Southern Saratoga	Peter Aust	Chamber President
Saratoga	Joe Dalton	Chamber President
Albany - Colonie	Mark Eagan	Chamber President
Schenectady	Leeza Perazzo	Director, Workforce Development & Public Affairs, representing Chamber President Charles Steiner

D. Additional contacts

We also met twice with staff from the NYS Department of Labor, including Doug Reamer, Workforce Innovations Bureau Chief; and Vicki Gray, Chris Myers and several other staff from the Career Development and Youth Initiatives Office. They are working on the National Work Readiness Credential (NWRC) and provided helpful background about how that credential was developed and how it is rolling out. We discussed the legal technicalities of a “credential” that employers can use and they provided helpful wording for us to use since this is not a validated credential. Employers can say that they look for applicants who can demonstrate they are work ready by having a successful prior job, strong references and/or a work readiness certificate.

They see the Essential Workplace Skills Regional Certificate (EWS) as a companion to the NWRC. The EWS is a behavioral assessment that compliments the NWRC which is more of a knowledge based assessment. They want us to encourage programs to aim for both. The cost of the NWRC and the higher level of math it demands are both roadblocks for many local programs. The NWRC is being managed by divisions of Houghton Mifflin that focuses on GED materials, so they expect it to have a big promotional push behind it in the near future.

In addition, we met with many staff from One Stop Centers as part of the Business Intermediary Project and spoke with them briefly about work readiness programs. Other than the ones directly operated by the one stops they were for the most part unaware of other work readiness programs in their region.