



NATIONAL  
CAREER READINESS  
CERTIFICATE®

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>  
ISSUED BY ACT

**TAKE A STAND**

**STAND UP FOR A SKILLED WORKFORCE**

**NATIONALCAREERREADINESS.ORG**

**STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD**

## **EMPLOYER HANDBOOK**

© 2010 by ACT, Inc. All rights reserved.

This handbook, and all the materials it contains, are the property of ACT, Inc., which maintains sole ownership of the handbook, information and materials, and all other intellectual property related to the National Career Readiness Certificate and the WorkKeys® system. Any reproduction or use of this handbook or the information it contains without written authorization by ACT is expressly prohibited.

WorkKeys is a registered trademark of ACT, Inc., in the U.S.A. and other countries. The National Career Readiness Certificate emblem is a registered trademark of ACT, Inc.

## Table of Contents

Getting Started with the NCRC . . . . .	1
Section 1—Quick Start Guide . . . . .	2
Section 2—Resources . . . . .	8
Section 3—Details . . . . .	16
A. Statement of Use . . . . .	16
B. The NCRC Methodology . . . . .	17
C. Expanded Methods for Implementing the NCRC . . . . .	18
D. National Credentialing Principles . . . . .	19
Section 4—Frequently Asked Questions . . . . .	20

## Appendices

Appendix A—Testing Procedures . . . . .	24
Appendix B—WorkKeys® System Information . . . . .	26
Appendix C—Applying the WorkKeys System . . . . .	27
Appendix D—WorkKeys Personal Skills Assessments . . . . .	28
Appendix E—Competency Models . . . . .	29

## Acknowledgments

The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) directly addresses the interests of the U.S. workforce, as well as the needs of employers, trade and labor organizations, economic and workforce development organizations, and educational systems and institutions. Employers, state educational systems, state workforce development agencies, and economic development organizations have provided ACT with substantial assistance since we launched the certificate in October 2006. Their ongoing contributions have been highly beneficial in the establishment and refinement of this key workforce initiative. We greatly appreciate the assistance of the individuals and organizations helping to advance the meaning, utility, and adoption of the NCRC across the country.

## Help us improve the handbook

Employer engagement will drive change in the workforce. The success of this national initiative relies on its wide-scale application to work settings across the country. We welcome your input and invite you to e-mail your comments and feedback to **NationalCareerReadiness@act.org**.

## Legal Notice

This handbook contains information regarding use of the WorkKeys system and the National Career Readiness Certificate (collectively “the Tools”) by an employer. It is not intended to be legal advice, and employers should consult their own legal counsel regarding the federal, state, and local laws (collectively “Laws”) that may be applicable to such employers. ACT is not responsible for employers’ use of the Tools in a manner that is in violation of such Laws, and use of the Tools does not ensure compliance with such Laws.

# Getting Started with the National Career Readiness Certificate

Congratulations on your organization's decision to participate in the National Career Readiness Certificate program!

This handbook is designed to help you maximize the benefits of the program by assisting the people who will be responsible for implementing the NCRC at your company. It offers guidance to enhance your knowledge of the credential and describes processes that will accelerate program implementation.



The handbook is arranged in four sections to facilitate a fast and effective launch of the program.

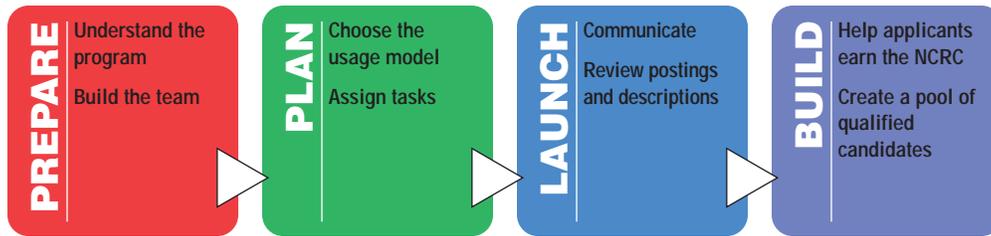
**Quick Start Guide:** An overview of the implementation steps that will help you get started immediately and will demonstrate how easily the system can be integrated into your practices and processes.

**Resources:** Documents included for your use in the Quick Start, such as training outlines, sample announcements, and brochures. Resources are marked throughout the Quick Start section with a red star. ★

**Details:** A deeper look at the various components and principles of the NCRC to help you more fully appreciate the benefits that can be realized.

**Frequently Asked Questions:** Answers to questions that are commonly asked about the National Career Readiness Certificate.

Once again, congratulations...you are joining ranks with some of the most respected companies in the nation as you begin to draw on the national standard in career readiness certification, the National Career Readiness Certificate.



Four steps to faster implementation at your company

## Section 1—Quick Start Guide

The employer handbook will help you quickly launch your company's program, enabling you to move the focus to achieving long-term gains. We suggest these steps:

### Prepare

- Understand why your organization is using the NCRC
- Learn to explain the program to others with clear, consistent statements
- Get the appropriate people at your company involved with your NCRC team

### Plan

- Decide how your company will use the NCRC
- Assign tasks to appropriate team members
- Review key steps and prepare to implement

### Launch

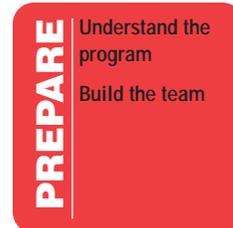
- Communicate with internal and external audiences
- Train internal stakeholders who will work with the program
- Integrate the credential into job postings and descriptions

### Build

- Help applicants earn the National Career Readiness Certificate
- Build a pool of qualified applicants

## Prepare

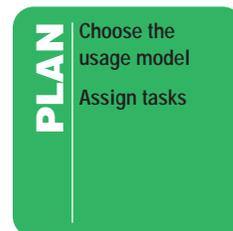
A small amount of initial organization will ensure a smooth introduction. Organizing the right group of core people is an essential step to educating key stakeholders, building support within your organization, and launching the program.



- a. Obtain, sign, and submit the employer Letter of Commitment. A sample letter is on page 9. ★
- b. Understand the reasons for your company's commitment to the NCRC and how it addresses current needs. Be prepared to explain these decisions in concise, consistent terms. Keep track of messages that seem to be the most effective.
- c. Establish an implementation team and coach members to participate and communicate. They need to master the handbook content, the Details section, and the FAQs. Understanding the program and its benefits will speed implementation.
- d. Get the appropriate people involved with your team. Organizations differ, but every team needs a leader and the full participation of its members. Look for representation from the following areas as you begin to form your team:
  - Executive level (program sponsor, decision maker)
  - Human Resources staff
  - Heads or representatives of major departments
- e. Assign the leader of your team the responsibility for receiving all information related to the use of the NCRC and disseminating this information throughout the organization. The leader should have clearly defined responsibilities for tracking and reporting results and evaluating progress.

## Plan

A number of early decisions and key assignments will dictate how the program is introduced.



- a. Determine how your company will introduce and use the credential. Study the Details section and Frequently Asked Questions in this handbook.
- b. Review implementation steps provided in the next two phases (Launch and Build) on pages 4 and 5.
- c. Assign tasks to appropriate team members.

## Launch

Clear, unambiguous communication about the NCRC and the implementation process is an important key to a smooth and trouble-free launch. Here are steps to help accomplish this:



- a. Incorporate NCRC language into job postings, descriptions, and other documentation. Review your company's job descriptions and, for each position, add text describing the use model that applies. Some companies apply different language to different positions. When this step is completed, job postings can include language such as "We recommend a National Career Readiness Certificate for all applicants to this position."
- b. Integrate the certificate with internal hiring practices. Consider the following steps as you strive to establish a program that will become an important part of your organizational processes and culture.
  - Include NCRC language as part of your job posting process.
  - Incorporate an overview of the NCRC into training conducted for newly hired employees. Brief managers, supervisors, human resources representatives, and training personnel on the importance of this step.
  - Establish reporting procedures that measure success. Demonstrating measurable gains to the organization will sustain the program.
  - Begin with simple metrics based on clearly defined data that can easily be collected and analyzed. Plan to add detail to your evaluation methods as the initiative moves forward.
- c. Educate and engage the organization. Many people won't support concepts or initiatives they don't fully understand. Your team will need to work hard to inform the organization about the value and meaning of the credential. Be sure to emphasize the importance of your organization's participation.
- d. Identify all stakeholders who will be "touched" by the program as you develop the communications plan. They will likely include:
  - Human Resources representatives
  - Recruiters or other partners involved in the hiring process
  - Managers and supervisors
  - Members of the training department and your training partners
  - Executive sponsors
- e. Develop an internal communications plan and include these steps:
  - Introduce the program to key personnel. The introduction can take place via e-mail or as part of employee meetings. You need to provide a full explanation of the initiative and the goals that will be achieved. Members of the internal audience should be asked to identify others who would benefit from the information. A sample e-mail with key introductory points is included in the Resources section. ★

- Conduct training sessions for staff. Sessions should cover the basics of the program and the benefits of participation. The audience should include key stakeholders and other personnel who will be working with the NCRC and will benefit from training. A sample training outline is provided in the Resources section. ★
  - Announce the program companywide once key personnel are fully briefed. E-mail is an effective means of accomplishing this. A sample message is included in the Resources section of this handbook. ★
  - Prepare for questions. Communications and training activities can be based on material provided in the Resources section, appendices, and the FAQs in Section 4. The Resources section also includes materials that will help you explain the program. ★
- f. Communicate with external audiences. Your adoption of the National Career Readiness Certificate creates benefits that extend beyond your company and can lead to much broader gains for your community, regional workforce, and local economy. A public announcement of your decision will demonstrate your company's vision, motivate prospective applicants for your jobs, and spur further adoption of the movement. Everyone benefits when workforce skills improve.

Messages need to focus on the benefits to your company. For example:

Our firm has adopted the National Career Readiness Certificate. We will use this credential to:

- Improve employee retention, performance, and productivity;
- Identify and target training needs; and
- Facilitate communication among educators, workforce developers, and employers.

You can base messages on information provided in this handbook and its appendices. A sample press release is included in the Resources section. ★

## Build

Once the program is operating, you can shift your focus to building the program and maximizing benefits to your company. Success will be achieved when large numbers of applicants for your jobs earn National Career Readiness Certificates and present them with their applications. At that point, you will have access to a pool of applicants who are fully prepared for opportunities at your company.



When your company recommends that applicants present the NCRC, you need to provide direction to individuals who have not earned the credential. To earn the NCRC, individuals must successfully complete three assessments of work-related skills. This means applicants need to find a testing site and arrange for testing. The Resources section provides an example of a one-page document that can be supplied to applicants. It includes space to provide the location of local testing sites and times when tests are available.

a. Help applicants earn the NCRC

Most businesses rely on one of two options to make assessments available to their applicants:

- Partner with established testing sites. The tests supporting the NCRC are widely administered throughout the United States and delivered by a broad range of organizations, including many in the public sector. Hundreds of ACT-approved testing sites offer the assessments leading to the NCRC. Some sites (such as WorkKeys Solutions Providers) administer tests for the general public while others provide tests only to the populations they serve. WorkKeys Solutions Providers are listed at [www.act.org/workkeys/locations.html](http://www.act.org/workkeys/locations.html).

Employers who rely on public testing sites benefit from establishing solid working relationships with test centers in their area. Test site personnel need to be aware that your job applicants will be completing the tests. Companies can also invite local agencies to establish test sites on their behalf.

- Administer assessments at their own locations. Many business users prefer to establish test sites and administer tests in their facilities. This requires them to invest extra time and energy, but they receive a number of important advantages in return. For example, the use of computerized tests enables employers to test applicants at any time and review results immediately after a test is completed. The assessments on which the NCRC is based are used by hundreds of companies and are frequently administered in business settings. Test protocols (Appendix A) are designed to accommodate a wide variety of locations. Employers that are interested in establishing a testing site at their facility can contact **NationalCareerReadiness@act.org** or 800/967-5539. An ACT representative will guide you through the process.

b. Build a pool of qualified applicants

In order to build a pool of candidates who already possess the NCRC, some employers have implemented special incentives to encourage individuals to earn a certificate. A partial list follows:

- Reimburse candidates who present an NCRC and are hired by your company for the cost of the certificate (assuming the applicant paid for it).
- Award bonuses to candidates who present certificates.
- Recognize newly hired employees with certificates in internal communications.

c. Implementation support

The following resources can be contacted regarding questions about the NCRC.

**NCRC Help Desk:** 800/967-5539 (toll-free phone)

**National Career Readiness Certificate website:**  
[www.nationalcareerreadiness.org](http://www.nationalcareerreadiness.org)

We invite your feedback and suggestions for improving this employer handbook. Please e-mail your comments and suggestions to **NationalCareerReadiness@act.org**.

## Section 2—Resources ★

Resources provided in this section are designed to support the launch of the NCRC program in your company. All of these resources are identified in the Quick Start section of this handbook.

- Letter of Commitment
- Sample e-mail message to internal stakeholders
- Suggested training outline
- Internal company announcement
- One-page statement for applicants who need to earn the NCRC
- Press release about your company and the NCRC
- Support materials for your internal campaign

# Letter of Commitment

## National Career Readiness Certificate Letter of Commitment (LOC)

This letter communicates our commitment to use the *National Career Readiness Certificate* (NCRC) as our credential to document essential work-related skills.

Please check the boxes that apply to your organization.

### Employer Commitments:

- We will recommend the *National Career Readiness Certificate* in hiring and/or promotion practices for one or more positions in our organization.\*
- We give ACT and the National CRC Advocates permission to use our name in public awareness efforts to promote the *National Career Readiness Certificate*.

### Employer Information:

Employer Name \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact Name \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact Title/Role \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Key Contact E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ County \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Employees \_\_\_\_\_ Industry \_\_\_\_\_

Employer Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please fax this letter without a cover page to **877/226-8809**.

Your letter will be posted on the website within 24 hours.  
View all employer commitments at <https://www.ncrcadvocates.org>.

\*NOTE: Please refer to the NCRC *Employer Handbook* published by ACT.



NATIONAL  
CAREER READINESS  
CERTIFICATE®

[www.NationalCareerReadiness.org](http://www.NationalCareerReadiness.org)

The National Career Readiness Certificate logo is a registered trademark of ACT, Inc.

Visit **NationalCareerReadiness.org** to download the employer Letter of Commitment.

## Sample E-mail Message to Internal Stakeholders

[Organization] has decided to participate in the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) program. The NCRC is a nationally recognized measure of career readiness that documents an individual's qualifications in terms of essential skills associated with success in the workplace. Based on the experience of other companies, we believe that implementing this system will enable us to achieve improvements in many areas, including employee turnover, quality, training efficiency, and others. A short overview of the program is attached. (Attach the brochure shown later in this section of the handbook.)

In the coming weeks, we will be scheduling training sessions to outline the program and to answer questions about our implementation. It is vital for you as a [hiring manager, department head, human resources staff, recruiter/partner, etc.] to understand the program in detail. In addition, I am asking that you suggest other members of your staff who should be involved in the training sessions. Please send the names of these individuals to me by \_\_\_\_\_.

Your participation and cooperation will be essential in helping this program become part of our company culture. Your support represents an important contribution to our success. I will be happy to schedule a meeting with you to discuss the program further and to answer any specific questions.

## Suggested Training Outline

In order to maximize your success with the program, it will be important to make sure key personnel fully understand the program and its potential benefits. Here is some suggested content. Your presentation should touch on all of the main points, if only briefly.

### a. The basics

- The skills gap in applied workplace skills
- The WorkKeys system
- Essential skills common to most jobs
  - Reading for Information
  - Applied Mathematics
  - Locating Information
- The National Career Readiness Certificate—objective and portable

### b. Benefits of the system

- Information about candidates for jobs
- How skills affect turnover, productivity, and quality
- Using the system to reduce training costs

### c. Using the credential at your company

- Areas targeted for improvement
- Implementation plan and team
- Initial phases—introduction and launch
- Measuring results, reporting outcomes
- How hiring manager/key stakeholders participate and benefit

### d. Q&A and handouts—Use the materials in this handbook for your training sessions. It can help to review and hand out:

- The FAQ section
- Part or all of the Details section
- Appendix B and Appendix C—WorkKeys information
- The brochure about the NCRC

## Sample Internal Announcement for Your Company

To: All Employees

From: Human Resources

Re: The National Career Readiness Certificate

In the coming months, you will hear more about our company's participation in the National Career Readiness Certificate program. The NCRC is a nationally recognized credential that helps identify the presence of essential skills that are common to many jobs and are associated with achieving success in the workplace. Higher levels of skills in such areas as Applied Mathematics, for example, are an important part of many of today's jobs.

Our company decided to participate in this national movement to help identify skill gaps with current and prospective employees.

This program will be apparent to you in several ways in the near future:

- You will begin to see our job postings ask for the NCRC
- We will announce our participation in the program to the community
- We will have various internal training sessions about the program
- [Optional] We may encourage current employees to get a certificate

The NCRC program promises to be a very positive initiative for our company. If you have questions about the program or if you are interested in finding out how you can test for the NCRC, please contact Human Resources at \_\_\_\_\_.

## Statement for Applicants Who Need to Earn the NCRC

The following sample illustrates how you can refer job applicants to organizations that administer NCRC assessments, so that applicants can submit their NCRC as part of the application process.

Dear Applicant:

Our company recommends that you submit a National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) along with your application for employment. You can learn more about the NCRC at [www.nationalcareerreadiness.org](http://www.nationalcareerreadiness.org).

The NCRC is based on scores achieved on three WorkKeys assessments:

- Reading for Information
- Applied Mathematics
- Locating Information

Three organizations in our region administer the tests. Their representatives will be pleased to help you complete the testing process and earn a certificate.

1. ABC Community College

Address

Phone

Hours for testing: Monday and Wednesday, 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

2. The XYZ One-Stop Center

Address

Phone

Hours for testing: Tuesday and Thursday, 8 a.m. to noon

3. ABC High School—Adult Education Department

Address

Phone

Hours for testing: Tuesday and Thursday, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Training and skill development programs are available at these locations should you need additional preparation or want to increase your scores and certificate level.

## Sample Press Release Announcing Your Company's NCRC Adoption

### [Company] Announces Participation in the National Career Readiness Certificate Movement

Date, City, State—[Company] announced today its intention to participate in the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) program, a nationwide initiative to improve the quality of the U.S. workforce. It features a nationally recognized credential of essential workplace skills that enables individuals to document their readiness for careers. The company will ask its future job candidates to acquire and submit the skills credential with their applications.

[Quote from appropriate person]

“We see this program as a very positive move for our company and for the community,” said \_\_\_\_\_. “While we anticipate realizing benefits from the program, by encouraging our applicants to acquire the NCRC we feel that the community will begin to establish a pool of highly skilled candidates for many future jobs. We believe that this step will ultimately contribute to the quality of the regional workforce, as well as the future growth of the economy in general. We hope many other companies in our community will consider joining us in adopting the NCRC in order to accelerate this process.”

[Consider including testing and training locations in your community]

[Company background]

The National Career Readiness Certificate is issued by ACT, an internationally known assessment and research company, best known for the ACT® college entrance exam. The NCRC verifies to employers anywhere in the United States that an individual possesses essential employability skills in reading, math, and locating information. The certificate is an easily understood and nationally valued credential that documents the attainment of these critical workplace skills.

When employers ask for the National Career Readiness Certificate for jobs in their workplace, they tap into the most qualified labor pool available. Applicants with a National Career Readiness Certificate can provide an objective measure of their foundational skills in the core areas of Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information.

For more information, please see [www.act.org/certificate](http://www.act.org/certificate).

# Materials for Internal Communications

**STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD**  
FOR CAREER SEEKERS

**WHAT IS THE CERTIFICATE?**

Employers receive stacks of applications for only a handful of open jobs. With the *Issue National Career Readiness Certificate*, issued by ACT, you can show the skills for the job. The Certificate is the work-related skills assessment you're looking for a job or want to enhance your resume. The Certificate provides proof of your job skills for employers. It is composed of three WorkKeys® assessments that measure skills needed for the job career.

**EARN MORE WITH THE CERTIFICATE**

Demonstrating higher job skills means you have access to higher-paying jobs. Employers are willing to pay higher salaries for higher skill levels.

According to ACT research, higher Certificate levels lead to higher pay.

ANNUAL SALARY	Bronze Certificate	Silver Certificate	Gold Certificate	Platinum Certificate

**GET STARTED—FIND A TEST CENTER**

Take the first important step toward standing out from the crowd of job applicants by earning The Certificate. Contact a test center near you:

**Illness Island**  
Program Manager  
Northwest Iowa Community College  
David Beck Center for Professional Development  
400 Main Street  
Dubuque, IA 52002  
(319) 267-6211

**Przy Marry, MA**  
Business Marketing Specialist  
New York  
1000 Main Street, Second Floor  
Dubuque, IA 52001  
(319) 266-0880 ext. 130  
przy.marry@iawcc.edu

**See WorkKeys Development**  
This job placement and skill development tool is a system of strong learning and measuring.  
[Learn more at \*\*workkeys.com\*\*](#)

**ACT, Inc.**  
ACT is an independent not-for-profit organization that provides a broad range of assessments, research, information, and program development services in the areas of education and workforce development.  
[Learn more at \*\*act.org\*\*](#)

**Issue Association of Community College**  
Business and industry education organizations building workforce competencies through workforce and economic development and the representation of business interests through quality educational opportunities.  
[Learn more at \*\*issac.com\*\*](#)

**WorkKeys**  
The WorkKeys system, developed by ACT & IAWCC, provides a workplace assessment and the resources to improve workforce through the world.  
[Learn more at \*\*workkeys.com\*\*](#)

**PREPAREDNESS.ORG**

**STAND UP FOR A SKILLED WORKFORCE**  
FOR EMPLOYERS

**WHAT IS THE CERTIFICATE?**

More than ever, American businesses need a strong, skilled workforce to meet today's challenges. When you ask for the *Issue National Career Readiness Certificate*, issued by ACT, at your business you'll find only the most qualified employees. The Certificate is the work-related skills assessment, providing demonstration of employees' skills that can be accepted nationwide. It is composed of three WorkKeys® assessments that measure skills critical to success.

**A PROVEN SUCCESS**

The Certificate is a proven, successful program because it is based on the WorkKeys system that employers have used for nearly 30 years to document real results, including decreased turnover and training time. Along with other education and background information, The Certificate serves as a valuable tool in making employment and training decisions.

**ASK FOR THE BEST FOR YOUR BUSINESS**

Take the first important step toward standing up for a skilled workforce at your organization by asking for The Certificate. Once you do, you'll be on your way to finding the most skilled applicants.

As a result of how The Certificate can best be utilized by your organization, please contact:

**Diane Harris**  
Business Advisor  
Issue WorkKeys Development  
1400 N. Kalamazoo  
Burlington, Iowa 52601  
(319) 733-8872 ext. 31413  
(800) 949-8972 ext. 31413  
(319) 733-8893 fax

**See WorkKeys Development**  
This job placement and skill development tool is a system of strong learning and measuring.  
[Learn more at \*\*workkeys.com\*\*](#)

**Issue Association of Community College**  
Business and industry education organizations building workforce competencies through workforce and economic development and the representation of business interests through quality educational opportunities.  
[Learn more at \*\*issac.com\*\*](#)

**ACT, Inc.**  
ACT is an independent not-for-profit organization that provides a broad range of assessments, research, information, and program development services in the areas of education and workforce development.  
[Learn more at \*\*act.org\*\*](#)

**WorkKeys**  
The WorkKeys system, developed by ACT & IAWCC, provides a workplace assessment and the resources to improve workforce through the world.  
[Learn more at \*\*workkeys.com\*\*](#)

**PREPAREDNESS.ORG**

## Section 3—Details

### A. Statement of Use

The National Career Readiness Certificate can contribute to the full range of human resource functions and requires only a minimum investment on the part of employers. These functions can include recruiting, hiring, promotion, training, succession planning, mentoring, performance evaluation, and other areas. Individual employers must ultimately determine the best means of using the credential to achieve their business goals.

The starting point for all employers is to “recommend” that applicants for all or some of their jobs possess the NCRC. This means that an employer will reference the NCRC in job descriptions, postings, and advertisements. Suggested language might include “XYZ, Inc., recommends the National Career Readiness Certificate,” or “Completion of the National Career Readiness Certificate is recommended.”

For employers that choose to use the NCRC as a qualifying credential, the NCRC, along with other criteria, will be considered as part of the selection process. Criteria that are often considered for this purpose include education, academic credentials, prior work experience, reference checks, background checks, interviews, and internal or external recommendations. Using the NCRC as one of these multiple criteria adds new information to hiring practices. Essential skills become one in a series of factors that help employers determine whether an applicant is qualified for a job.

Employers are not encouraged to specify a credential level as the singular qualification for a job. The level of NCRC earned, absent any other information, will not determine whether an applicant is qualified; instead, the NCRC augments and confirms criteria that are commonly used to inform hiring decisions.

Opportunities for employee development represent another important benefit provided by the NCRC, and it is particularly true when the local applicant pool is limited. In such cases, an employer sometimes needs to hire individuals who might not possess a skill set that is sufficient for their new jobs or for expanded responsibilities in the future. The NCRC can help employers identify skills gaps and tackle the most pressing training needs of their newest employees.

This guidance recognizes that employers are ultimately responsible for maintaining fair and equitable hiring practices. The NCRC is a useful tool for hiring and promoting employees; like any other credential or qualification, however, its use within selection processes must be appropriate, relevant, and justifiable.

## B. The NCRC methodology

The National Career Readiness Certificate helps employers identify whether individuals possess the skills commonly associated with success when entering employment, advancing to a new position, or starting a training program. The credential documents the presence of essential work-related skills that are important across a wide range of jobs. It confirms the relationship between an individual's skills and skill levels associated with on-the-job performance set by the employer.

Four certificate levels differentiate skill levels among individuals. Higher levels of certificates signify readiness for a wider range of jobs. Certificates are issued to individuals who successfully complete three work-related assessments.

The NCRC is meaningful to employers, current and prospective employees, educators, and trainers. It is based on research data compiled by ACT and linked to education and training programs that enable individuals to improve their skills. The credential relies on highly reliable skills assessments and represents a nationally recognized standard for career readiness. The National Career Readiness Certificate is issued by ACT, a global leader in measurement and research.

The national credential is based on a set of principles that demonstrate its capabilities, benefits, and value. These principles also help define the relationship between the NCRC and other career readiness credentials issued by state and local entities across the country. Like the NCRC, many of these credentials rely on WorkKeys assessments. ACT is fully committed to supporting all career readiness credentials that are based on the WorkKeys system, although it encourages these initiatives to adopt all national principles and join the national system.

Establishing a system that is truly national is important to employers because it ensures credentials are recognized and transportable across the nation. Each National Career Readiness Certificate carries a unique registration number that enables employers to electronically verify its authenticity when presented by an applicant. As noted earlier, this handbook applies only to the NCRC and credentials that adopt all national principles.

### NCRC Credentialing Principles

- Based on three WorkKeys assessments:
  - Reading for Information
  - Applied Mathematics
  - Locating Information
- Assessments completed under standard conditions
- Awarded at four levels:
  - Bronze—requires minimum scores of 3 or above
  - Silver—requires minimum scores of 4 or above
  - Gold—requires minimum scores of 5 or above
  - Platinum—requires minimum scores of 6 or above
- Certificates display issue date and registration number
- Certificates do not display scores or other endorsements
- Certificates can be electronically verified by employers

## C. Expanded Methods for Implementing the NCRC

The National Career Readiness Certificate is an objective measure of essential skills related to employment and is designed to serve as a freestanding credential. Given its association with the WorkKeys assessment system, many employers express interest in using this connection as the basis for expanding its application and achieving additional benefits.

Most companies choose to rely on the credential as an effective means of establishing and building a local talent pipeline. At the “essential skills only” level, the National Career Readiness Certificate is positioned as a single credential used to document the presence of skills that are directly related to the widest range of jobs, occupations, and work roles. It also serves as an important connecting point for businesses, educators, and workforce developers who are pursuing common goals related to raising skills and improving performance.

Higher levels of adoption are possible and can prove to be beneficial, but they require substantial additional effort and preparation. Combining the credential with other WorkKeys system components positions the National Career Readiness Certificate as a cornerstone supporting a comprehensive range of human resources management functions, including recruitment, training, succession planning, mentoring, and performance evaluation.

These expanded options clearly create the potential to improve hiring processes and enhance return on investment. To implement them, however, each individual employer will need to complete substantial additional steps that pertain to research, planning, and preparation. An employer must ensure that the methodology it chooses to implement is fully aligned to the requirements and responsibilities that are specific to an employer’s jobs and work environments.

The substantial additional effort each individual employer must undertake to implement these types of methods puts them beyond the scope of this handbook, which describes standard applications that can be utilized by the broadest range of employers.

Additional information on the WorkKeys system, which has led to measurable improvements in business performance for hundreds of employers across the nation, is provided in Appendices B–D. Employers who wish to learn more about the system can contact WorkKeys representatives by e-mailing **workkeys@act.org** or phoning **800/WORKKEY** (967-5539).

## D. National Credentialing Principles

Principles established for the National Career Readiness Certificate serve as a framework for aligning all credentials that use the WorkKeys system. These principles include:

1. Certificates are awarded based on qualifying scores achieved on three WorkKeys assessments:
  - Reading for Information
  - Applied Mathematics
  - Locating Information
2. Assessments must be completed under standardized conditions that include proctored administration in secure testing environments
3. Certificates are awarded at four levels—Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum
4. Certificates are awarded based on these results:
  - **Bronze** certificates require minimum scores of 3 or above on all three tests
  - **Silver** certificates require minimum scores of 4 or above on all three tests
  - **Gold** certificates require minimum scores of 5 or above on all three tests
  - **Platinum** certificates require minimum scores of 6 or above on all three tests
5. Certificates display issue date and national registration number
6. Certificates do not display test scores or other endorsements
7. Certificates are registered and can be verified by employers

### The certificate is awarded at four levels:

#### Platinum

Skills for 99% of the jobs in ACT's database of occupational profiles—the largest of its kind.



#### Gold

Skills for 90% of the jobs in the ACT database



#### Silver

Skills for 65% of the jobs in the ACT database



#### Bronze

Skills for 35% of the jobs in the ACT database



## Section 4—Frequently Asked Questions

### Why do individuals need the National Career Readiness Certificate?

The NCRC is designed to complement other traditional credentials, such as a high school diploma, community college degree, or certificate of technical proficiency. While these educational credentials mark the fulfillment of an individual's classroom learning experiences, the certificate confirms competence in a specific set of workplace skills.

### Why is the NCRC based on the Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information skills?

ACT has analyzed nearly 17,000 individual jobs across the country to determine the skills and skill levels needed to succeed in them. According to our findings, three skills are highly important to most jobs.

- **Reading for Information**—comprehending work-related reading materials, from memos and bulletins to policy manuals and governmental regulations.
- **Applied Mathematics**—applying mathematical reasoning to work-related problems.
- **Locating Information**—using information from such materials as diagrams, floor plans, tables, forms, graphs, and charts.

A solid foundation of these three skills is associated with a well-qualified workforce.

### What benefits do employers receive by using the NCRC?

The NCRC can reduce hiring time and costs. Improvements in the skills documented by the NCRC have been shown by research to improve the quality of new hires, reduce training time, reduce turnover, and increase productivity.

### What makes the NCRC unique?

The NCRC is based on highly reliable WorkKeys tests that have been used by thousands of employers across the nation since they became available nearly two decades ago. The development and maintenance of the WorkKeys assessments involve intensive research and data analysis that is performed in accordance with formal industry standards. ACT is guided in the development of WorkKeys assessments by the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999; developed by the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education). Development of the WorkKeys system is similarly guided by standards established in the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures. Because the WorkKeys system assesses essential foundational skills, its assessments can be applied to virtually any job. As such, these essential foundational skills represent the bedrock of a skilled workforce.

### **What is the life cycle of the NCRC?**

Each NCRC includes a date of issuance. Generally, certificates should be renewed after five years. The skills measured by any credential tend to change with time.

### **Who developed WorkKeys and the NCRC?**

WorkKeys and the NCRC were developed by ACT, an internationally recognized assessment and research company. ACT is best known for the ACT test, which helps students transition into college. ACT is equally committed to helping individuals transition into and within the workplace using the NCRC.

### **Is training available to improve the skills documented by the NCRC?**

Yes. The skills documented by the NCRC are tied to targeted curricula, enabling educators and trainers to help individuals increase their skills and enhance job prospects. More information is available by contacting the NCRC Help Desk (800/967-5539 or [NationalCareerReadiness@act.org](mailto:NationalCareerReadiness@act.org)) or visiting [www.act.org/workkeys/sktrain/index.html](http://www.act.org/workkeys/sktrain/index.html).

### **How will I know credentials presented by applicants are valid?**

All individuals who earn the NCRC can provide a certificate registration number that can be verified at [www.nationalcareerreadiness.org](http://www.nationalcareerreadiness.org) when credentials are included with the application materials requested by your company.

### **Are there multiple ways to use the NCRC?**

The essential employability skills documented by the NCRC serve to position the credential as the cornerstone for a wide range of applications and initiatives that can address the full spectrum of human resources processes. From the external perspective, the NCRC represents an effective means of helping individuals prepare for meaningful employment and careers. At the same time, however, employers can choose to implement the credential as part of internal programs that are specific to their needs and objectives. Adopting expanded strategies and additional assessment tools is necessary to move beyond the NCRC-only option.

### **Can other WorkKeys elements be incorporated with the NCRC?**

The NCRC and the WorkKeys system are closely related by virtue of the assessments and skill areas that the credential encompasses. However, they differ greatly in terms of the breadth of their capabilities and the manner in which employers use them. The NCRC serves as a widely recognized credential that signifies the presence of three foundational skills that are relevant to a broad range of jobs. The WorkKeys system, on the other hand, supports a much wider range of applications, including the capability to evaluate the relevance of additional skills that can be more important to some occupations and to assess individuals for these skills. The system also offers a research-based methodology for identifying the skills and skill levels that are relevant to jobs and their work environments. The methodology is

based on job profiling processes that employers use to identify job applicants with skills and skill levels that pertain directly to their jobs. Many employers choose to fully implement the WorkKeys system in order to expand on the fundamental benefits of the NCRC. Additional information is presented in Appendix B and Appendix C, and can also be obtained at [www.act.org/workkeys](http://www.act.org/workkeys).

### **What is the Talent assessment?**

Although the WorkKeys system is most widely recognized for its capability to assess knowledge and skills that are related to jobs and work, it also includes a suite of instruments—WorkKeys Personal Skills assessments—that measure non-cognitive attributes and characteristics. The Talent assessment is one of these instruments. It measures personality and behavior in terms of 12 work-related personality characteristics that include cooperation, discipline, and stability. Talent also uses four compound scales that combine characteristics related to workplace roles, such as work discipline.

### **Why do some employers use the NCRC with Talent?**

Most employers recognize that cognitive skills are not the only factors that help to predict job performance. Non-cognitive factors—personality characteristics, behaviors, and work-related interests and values—also play an important role in job performance. The WorkKeys Talent assessment can help employers understand the type of behaviors that are shared by successful performers and identify applicants with personality characteristics that are likely to lead to success. Knowledge, skills, and abilities are the factors that can most accurately predict on-the-job performance. However, non-cognitive factors such as those measured by the Talent assessment can be incorporated into selection processes in order to provide a different perspective on a job applicant's prospects for success. Integrating these factors with the essential skills documented by the NCRC gives employers a broader view of an applicant's qualifications.

### **What are the other Personal Skills assessments?**

The other two Personal Skills assessments are:

- Performance, a measure of personal integrity that is commonly used by employers as a prescreening test that assesses job applicants' tendencies to practice unsafe behaviors, as well as their general attitudes about work.
- Fit, an inventory that assesses an individual's work-related interests and values. Individual results from the assessment are compared to profiles developed for a wide range of occupations.

More information about all three assessments is provided in Appendix D.

**Is the NCRC incorporated into skill certification systems?**

Yes. The Manufacturing Skills Certification System that has been established and endorsed by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) incorporates the NCRC and WorkKeys Personal Skills assessments as its uniform entry point. More information is provided in Appendix E.

# Appendix A

## Testing Procedures

The WorkKeys assessments that support the NCRC can be delivered at an established WorkKeys testing site or at your company, provided that appropriate facilities, equipment, and staff are available. Companies and other organizations can establish their own test centers by following the guidelines set by ACT. Here is an overview of the testing methods and procedures followed by approved WorkKeys test centers.

### 1. Test delivery methods

WorkKeys assessments are available for delivery in two formats—as computerized assessments delivered via the Internet and as paper-and-pencil assessments. The requirements for each of these delivery modes can vary, and the specific program for which the examinee is being tested commonly determines the format under which tests are delivered.

### 2. Internet-based testing

Personal computers that meet hardware/software requirements and have sufficient broadband connectivity are needed to support computerized delivery. Examinees are not permitted to bring writing instruments or scratch paper into the testing room, but local site administrators can provide these materials to them. Scratch paper is collected at the end of the testing session and must be shredded when it is no longer needed. The use of dictionaries and other aids is not allowed. Examinees are not permitted to bring cellular phones, pagers, or other communication devices into the testing room. Approved calculators can be used by examinees completing WorkKeys Applied Mathematics.

### 3. Paper-and-pencil testing

Testing sites must provide examinees with a work area that offers adequate writing surfaces and seating space, sufficient lighting, comfortable temperatures, a quiet atmosphere, and freedom from distraction. The use of scratch paper, notes, or dictionaries is not permitted. Examinees can perform calculations and record notes in their test booklets. Cellular phones, pagers, and other communication devices cannot be brought into the testing room. Approved calculators can be used by examinees completing WorkKeys Applied Mathematics.

### 4. Supervising examinee activities

Careful attention must be devoted to selecting the appropriate testing staff. People who are selected for these responsibilities need to be responsible individuals who are familiar with testing practices and capable of detecting and addressing prohibited behaviors and emergency situations. Individuals who might eventually take any of the WorkKeys assessments should not serve on the testing staff. All testing staff, room supervisors, and proctors are to remain attentive to responsibilities throughout the test event. Examinees must feel that the staff are taking all steps needed to provide an

irregularity-free administration. To protect the validity of the individual test scores and maintain the security of test materials, the testing staff must:

- Walk around the room during testing to be sure that examinees are working on the correct test and to help prevent prohibited behaviors.
- Avoid engaging in any task that is not related to test administration.
- Avoid engaging in conversation during the testing.
- Prevent unauthorized personnel from entering the testing room.
- Not leave the testing room unattended at any time.
- Complete detailed documentation of any irregularities observed during the testing session.

A verbal announcement of time remaining is read five minutes before the end of each assessment.

#### 5. Using external test sites

There are a variety of ACT-approved testing sites that deliver the three NCRC assessments. Some of these sites offer testing for anyone, while others may offer testing only for students in their schools or for employees in their company. A full list of approved sites that administer tests for the NCRC in your state or region is available at [www.act.org/certificate/locations.html](http://www.act.org/certificate/locations.html).

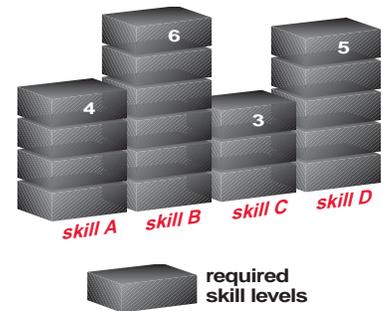
## Appendix B

### WorkKeys System Information

WorkKeys foundational skills assessments measure cognitive abilities. These “real world” skills are valuable for virtually any occupation—skilled or professional—and at any level of education.

#### Benchmarking

Linking WorkKeys results to job requirements enhances the system’s power, value, and utility. Our online database at [www.act.org/workkeys/analysis/occup.html](http://www.act.org/workkeys/analysis/occup.html) provides results from studies of nearly 17,000 jobs. ACT consultants and authorized profilers can analyze the needs of specific jobs for organizations, or studies can be developed using hands-on tools available from ACT.

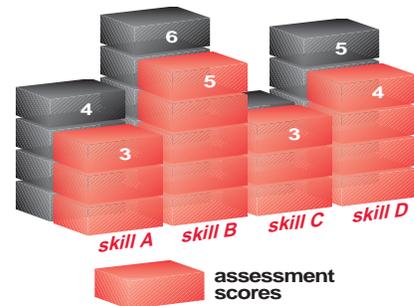


#### Assessments

Once you know what skills levels are needed for your jobs, WorkKeys assessments are used to assess employees and applicants to predict their likelihood for success in your organization. WorkKeys measures foundational skills in the following areas:

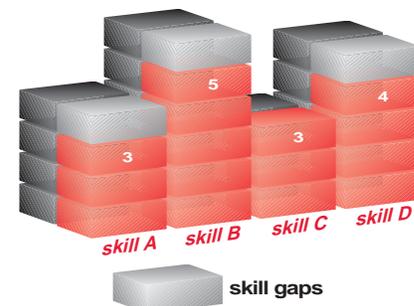
- Applied Mathematics\*
- Applied Technology\*
- Business Writing
- Listening
- Locating Information\*
- Workplace Observation
- Reading for Information\*
- Teamwork
- Writing

\* Also available in Spanish



#### Training

Because our benchmarking and assessment tools use the same scale, a simple comparison between the benchmark job requirements and employee assessment scores will identify skill gaps. This allows you to apply training dollars very precisely—to just those employees who need it, in the specific areas where they need it.



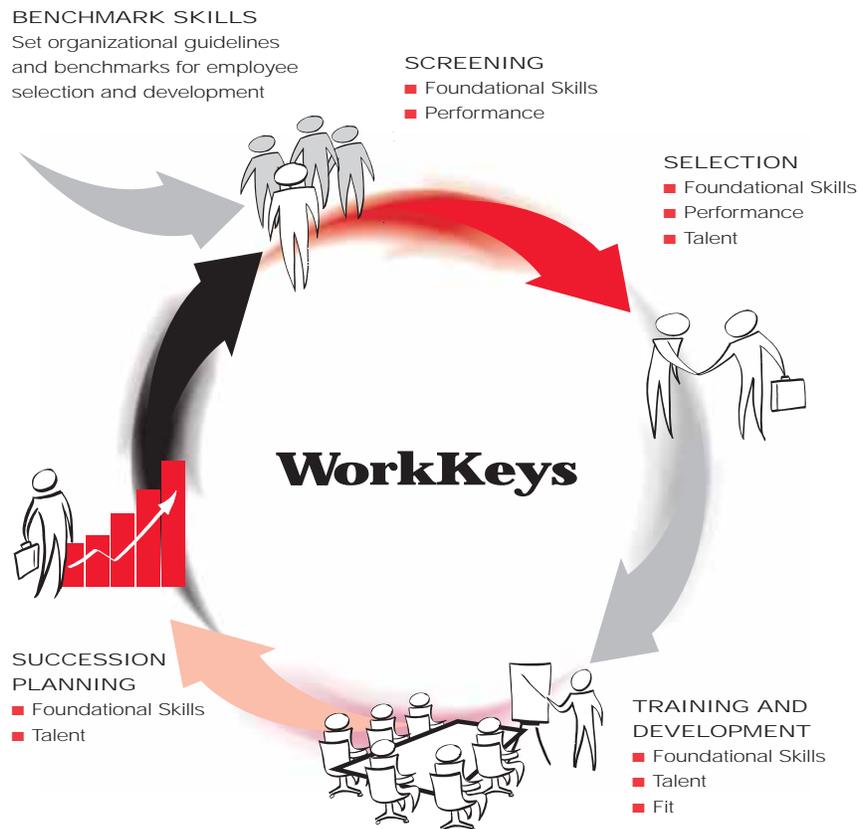
## Appendix C

### Applying the WorkKeys System

The WorkKeys system is used by individuals, educators, and government agencies to identify, measure, and develop skills needed for success in a wide range of jobs and occupations. Its greatest strength is its common language, which serves as the basis for its assessment, research, and development components.

The vision for the WorkKeys system emerged in the late 1980s, when a series of research reports were predicting that the U.S. workforce would experience dramatic change and worker shortages. The WorkKeys system was designed as a methodology for identifying and assessing skills and skill levels that, through research techniques, could be related to work and shown to be essential to performance in a specific job.

The three components on which the system is based—research, assessments, and skill development tools—enable users to apply WorkKeys capabilities at all stages of the employment cycle, as shown in the diagram below.



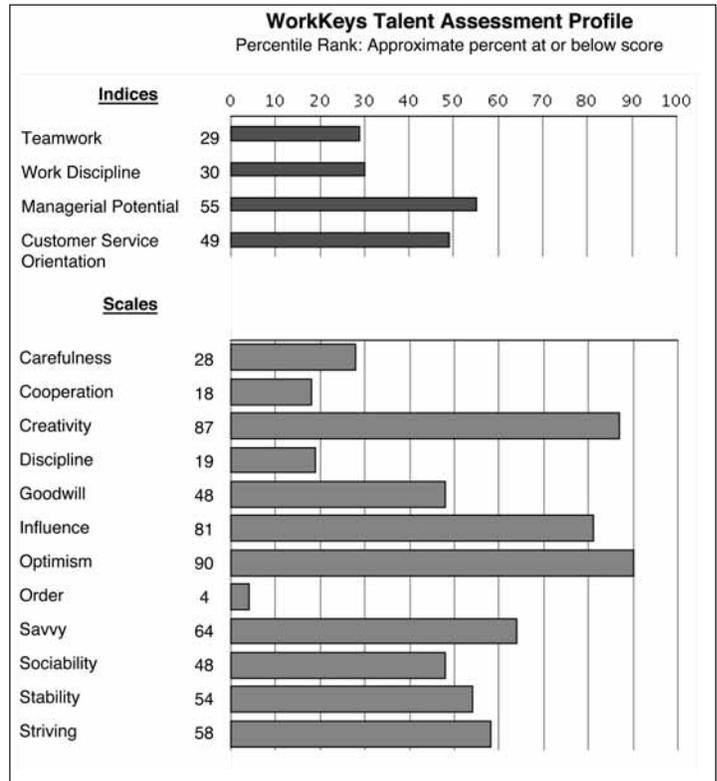
## Appendix D

### WorkKeys Personal Skills Assessments

The presence of knowledge and skills that relate closely to job requirements represent the most valid predictor of job performance. However, interest in the role non-cognitive factors—personal interests and behaviors—play in work performance continues to grow, particularly among employers.

In response to this interest, the WorkKeys system provides three measures of non-cognitive factors. One of these is the **Talent** assessment. It assesses work-related behaviors in terms of 12 personality attributes and four compound scales called Talent Indices, which show the impact of personal attributes on common work roles and responsibilities. Results are reported in percentile terms, as shown in the sample of the score report at right.

The Talent assessment is a survey of 165 items that pose statements related to personal beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In addition to percentile scores, the report offers feedback that helps people understand their strongest characteristics and the areas in which improvement is needed.



The other two WorkKeys assessments of non-cognitive factors are:

- **Performance**, an integrity measure that focuses on work attitudes, organizational citizenship, and inclinations for risky behavior. Performance is designed to identify less desirable candidates, particularly those who are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors.
- **Fit**, a survey that aligns individual work-related interests and values with those of more than 900 job families documented by the U.S. Department of Labor in the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET), the nation's most widely recognized occupation classification system. Fit uses a 102-item survey to measure work-related interests and to develop and match an individual's profile to specific occupations.

Learn about these assessments at [www.act.org/workkeys/assess/personal.html](http://www.act.org/workkeys/assess/personal.html).

## Appendix E

### Competency Models

The universal importance of the essential skills documented by the National Career Readiness Certificate gives a variety of users the opportunity to position the NCRC as an important component of comprehensive career preparation and planning programs.

Competencies are job-related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform critical work tasks in a defined work setting. They serve as the basis for skill standards that specify the level of knowledge, skills, and abilities required for success in industry sectors and specific jobs. A competency model is a collection of competencies that, taken together, define successful performance in a specific job or work setting.

Models are expressed as images—a pyramid, for instance—that encompass levels beginning with essential skills and advancing to competencies used throughout industries and sectors. Skills that are pertinent to a particular employer and job appear at the top of the pyramid.

The U.S. Department of Labor, through the Competency Model Clearinghouse, has worked with businesses and associations to construct models for many industry sectors. The model for the advanced manufacturing sector is the basis for ACT's partnership with the National Association of Manufacturers. ACT is now working with other groups to help them deploy the NCRC in their industries.

### NCRC anchors NAM Skills Certification System

The National Association of Manufacturers, through The Manufacturing Institute, has launched a new Manufacturing Skills Certification System that “will revolutionize education and training for the 21st century manufacturing workforce,” according to NAM President John Engler.

The initial focus of the NAM system, which was launched in March 2009, involves the core basic skills required for entry-level workers in all manufacturing sectors. It relies on the National Career Readiness Certificate to document essential employability skills that are needed to perform in today's manufacturing jobs.

Once they document essential skills, individuals will focus on higher levels of the competency model, addressing:

- personal effectiveness competencies, such as dependability and the willingness to learn;
- academic competencies;
- workplace competencies; and
- industry-wide technical competencies.

The new system maps to both career pathways in the manufacturing economy and postsecondary educational pathways. Pathways are deployed through community colleges to provide students and transitioning workers with industry-recognized skills certifications that are educational credentials with real value in the workplace.

For more information about the NAM-Endorsed Skills Certification System, visit [www.manufacturingskills.org](http://www.manufacturingskills.org).





# TAKE A STAND—WE DID!

“At a time when millions of Americans face unemployment, manufacturing jobs with excellent salaries—and across all skill levels and sectors—are unfilled because of the lack of qualified applicants. These tough economic times call for clear pathways to skills in demand to help new and transitioning workers prepare for good jobs. The National Career Readiness Certificate is an ideal tool for ensuring that individuals have the essential skills they need for the workplace today.”

**JOHN ENGLER, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MANUFACTURERS (NAM)**

“Employers work to make things predictable, uniform, and certain. Predictability, uniformity, and certainty are universal goals of executives. The National Career Readiness Certificate does this for the hiring process.”

**MAC MACILROY, PAST PRESIDENT, MICHIGAN MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION**

“This program allows us not only to identify whether potential employees are available and affordable, but also to determine if they are capable of performing the work. It is an innovative response to the workforce issue.”

**RONALD R. REED, PRESIDENT & CEO, MERCY HOSPITAL IOWA CITY**

“During the employee hiring and placement process, the National Career Readiness Certificate is an effective measure of foundational skills that are often ignored until the employee is on the job. It will assist both the employer and the employee in assessing an individual’s growth potential and matching the skill sets required by the job.”

**MICHAEL WAPP, DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS/IT SOLUTIONS, AEGON**

**[NATIONALCAREERREADINESS.ORG](http://NATIONALCAREERREADINESS.ORG)**



\* 0 4 1 3 3 5 1 3 0 \* Rev 1