Accredible

2026 State of Credentialing Report

Introduction: A word from our CEO

Over the past several years, we've watched the conversation around digital credentials evolve. In 2024, we asked whether learners valued their credentials. They did, overwhelmingly, and kept using them long after they were issued. In 2025, we asked whether employers were paying attention. They were, factoring credentials into real hiring decisions.

While we still have a way to go with both of those credentialing stakeholder audiences (as you'll see in this year's report), today's challenge is different. Credentialing leaders are under growing pressure to demonstrate the impact of their programs. Credentials issued and completion rates are no longer enough when executives, boards, and other stakeholders expect evidence of learner, career, and organizational outcomes.

In fact, the share of issuers who report demonstrating program value as a top strategic priority doubled year over year, jumping from 22% in 2025 to 44% in 2026, making it both the #1 and fastest-growing priority in our research. So the question becomes: ***How can credentialing programs create and demonstrate more value?***

This year's report explores this question from two perspectives.

First, we examine the learner journey after a credential is issued, identifying practical opportunities for issuers to extend the value of their programs, from helping learners communicate their skills to employers to connecting credentials with long-term career outcomes.

Second, we examine the operational practices that distinguish the most successful credentialing programs. By understanding how these organizations define success, measure outcomes, and communicate impact, issuers can build programs that are better equipped to demonstrate value to learners, leadership, employers, and other stakeholders.

Our hope is that this report helps you build programs that not only create meaningful outcomes for learners, but also generate the evidence needed to demonstrate that impact across your organization.

— Danny King, *CEO and co-founder, Accredible*

Methodology

The "2026 State of Credentialing" report is based on two surveys conducted in the spring of 2026: one survey of 1,000 learners who participated in a course, certification program, or continuing education opportunity that awarded a credential within the past two years that helped them learn new skills to launch and/or help them with their career, and a second survey of 194 education and training leaders who work for organizations that issue credentials (i.e., certificates and/or badges) as part of their learning programs.

To view a detailed breakdown of both survey groups, see the Appendix.

Executive Summary

Section 1: Programs face mounting pressure to prove value

Credentialing programs have entered an accountability era. As expectations rise, organizations are increasingly expected to demonstrate the impact of their programs — not just issue credentials.

55% of issuers say pressure to demonstrate the value or outcomes of their credentialing program has increased.

Section 2: Credentials deliver, but the career payoff still lags

Learners clearly value their credentials, but career outcomes don't happen automatically. The greatest opportunity begins after a credential is issued.

93% of learners say credentials have been valuable for their career.

Section 3: Sharing is working; guiding what's next isn't

Organizations have made progress helping learners share their credentials. The next opportunity is helping them navigate what comes next.

85% of learners plan to take an additional course that offers a credential in the next 2 years.

Section 4: Learners are confident but need more help proving it to employers

Learners are confident explaining their credentials, but many still need practical tools to communicate the credentials' value to employers.

79% of learners say issuers could make it easier to communicate the value of their credentials.

Section 5: The career connection learners want, and the data issuers don't have

Learners want a stronger connection from their credentials to their careers, and they're willing to share career outcomes with issuers. The missing piece is a systematic way to collect and use that information.

93% of learners are willing to share their career outcomes, but only 13% of issuers know whether a learner got a job or promotion.

Section 6: Operational practices behind successful programs

The most successful credentialing programs distinguish themselves through a set of operational practices that help them measure, improve, and communicate impact.

Successful programs are 2X more likely to report that their credential program is highly visible to senior leaders.

Section 7: The path ahead

Turn these findings into action with practical recommendations.

This year's report includes insights and commentary from leaders at Credential Engine, UPCEA, McGraw Hill, IEEE, 1EdTech, Rutgers University, the University of Colorado Boulder, Penn State, Digital Credentials Ltd, Lifelong Learning Practice, and the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library — alongside other innovators shaping the future of credentialing.

Programs face mounting pressure to prove value

Credentialing programs are entering a new phase. While growth and adoption remain important, organizations are increasingly expected to demonstrate the impact their programs have on learners, employers, and the business. As expectations rise, proving value has become just as important as delivering it.

This shift isn't happening in a vacuum. As Scott Cheney, CEO of Credential Engine, told the House Education & Workforce Committee: "American families, employers, and taxpayers invest over $2.34 trillion annually in education and training programs but still lack reliable information about which programs develop skills that employers actually value and lead to strong employment outcomes."

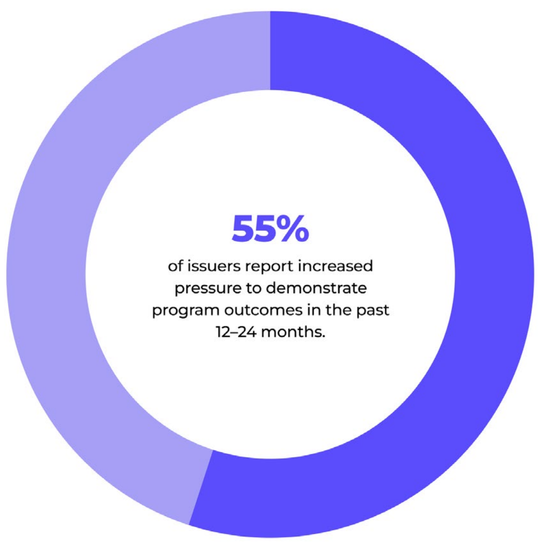
Credentialing has entered an accountability era

Demonstrating credentialing program value has become a much bigger priority. This year, 44% of organizations identify it as a top priority — twice as many as last year and the largest increase of any priority we measured.

Demonstrating value is issuers' fastest-growing priority

Sorted by year-over-year change, biggest gain to biggest decline

Priority	2025	2026	YoY
Demonstrating value	22%	**44%**	↑ +22 pts
Visibility into outcomes	13%	**23%**	↑ +10 pts
Learner/recipient experience	26%	**32%**	↑ +6 pts
Skills taxonomy	20%	**17%**	↓ -3 pts
Develop learner pathways	41%	**37%**	↓ -4 pts
Brand awareness	43%	**38%**	↓ -5 pts
Increase enrollments/renewals	55%	**43%**	↓ -12 pts
Grow revenue/profitability	54%	**30%**	↓ -24 pts

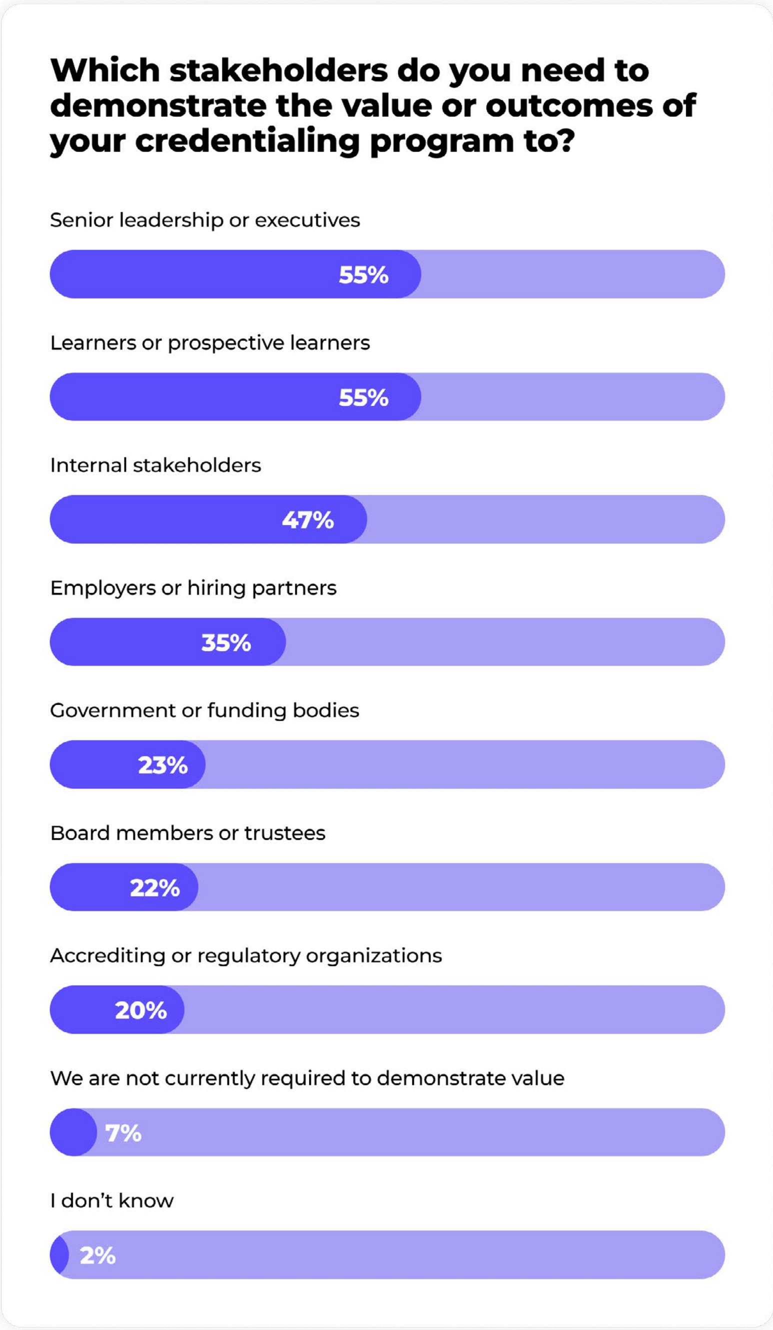


At the same time, 55% of issuers report increased pressure to demonstrate outcomes. Together, these findings suggest credentialing programs are increasingly expected not only to issue credentials, but also to show the impact those credentials create.

This pressure is arriving before many issuers have developed the systems that would respond to it. As Bruce Etter, Senior Director of Research and Consulting at UPCEA, puts it: "Accountability expectations move faster than infrastructure."

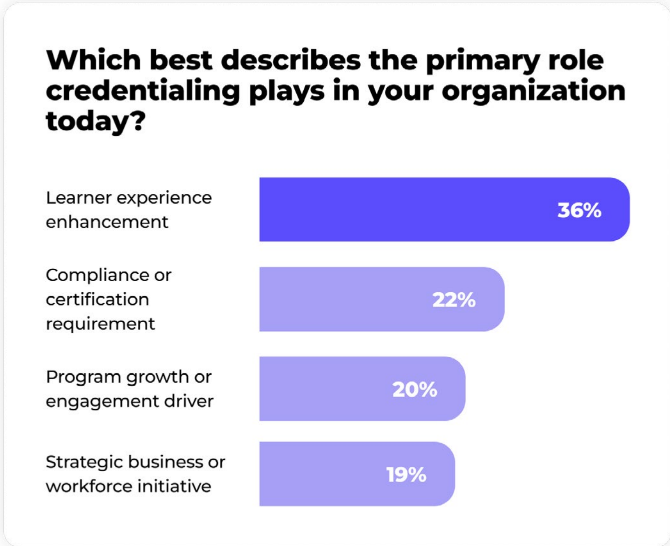
Proving value is more complicated than it sounds

The challenge isn't simply proving value — it's proving value to different audiences. Leaders, learners, employers, boards, and funders often care about different outcomes, making it difficult to rely on a single success metric. Instead, organizations increasingly need multiple forms of evidence that demonstrate value from different perspectives.



Credentialing has moved beyond implementation

Organizations describe credentialing as serving a variety of strategic purposes, from enhancing learner experiences to supporting workforce development and business objectives. The diversity of responses reflects the expanding role credentialing plays across organizations and reinforces why demonstrating value looks different from one program to the next.



Program maturity has remained relatively stable year over year, with most organizations describing themselves as growing (37%) or established (29%). Rather than being an emerging practice, credentialing is becoming an established organizational capability.

More than half of organizations (54%) use a dedicated, purpose-built digital credentialing platform. The rest rely on their Learning Management System (LMS), an in-house build, or another general-purpose tool.

That distinction is worth pausing on: Proving value to the range of stakeholders described above requires tracking, reporting, and credential metadata that general learning tools weren't built to produce. So the opportunity isn't simply adopting new technology across the board. It's making sure the technology in place can actually generate the evidence organizations are increasingly being asked for. For some, that means using a dedicated platform more fully. For others, it may mean recognizing that the tool itself is the constraint.

The challenge isn't launching credentialing programs anymore. It's scaling them and proving they work. That starts with understanding whether credentials are delivering the outcomes stakeholders expect — beginning with the learners who earn them.

Credentials deliver, but the career payoff still lags

Credentials are delivering meaningful value for learners. Most begin their credential journey with a clear understanding of what they hope to achieve, use their credentials after earning them, and say those credentials have benefited their careers. At the same time, learners increasingly recognize the importance of credentials in today's workforce. Yet earning a credential is only one step in the journey. Turning that credential into career advancement often requires additional support.

Learners see real value in credentials

Learners enter credentialing programs with clear goals, and for most, those credentials deliver meaningful value. Nearly all learners (97%) use their credentials after earning them; the vast majority (93%) say their credentials have been valuable for their careers; and most (82%) believe credentials have become even more important for demonstrating skills and qualifications than they were just a few years ago.

Learners see real value in credentials

86%
were clear on what their credential would help them achieve

97%
have used their credential after earning it

93%
say their credential has been valuable for their career

82%
think credentials matter more now than a few years ago

As Stephen Buckley, Consultant at Digital Credentials Ltd and former leader of IBM's Open Badges program, puts it: "When we first started the Open Badge Program at IBM, we researched the value of credentials. It showed that learning programs with credentials attracted more learners — learners who were more likely to finish the program, come back for more, and download an associated product… Credentials make a real difference to learners' careers."

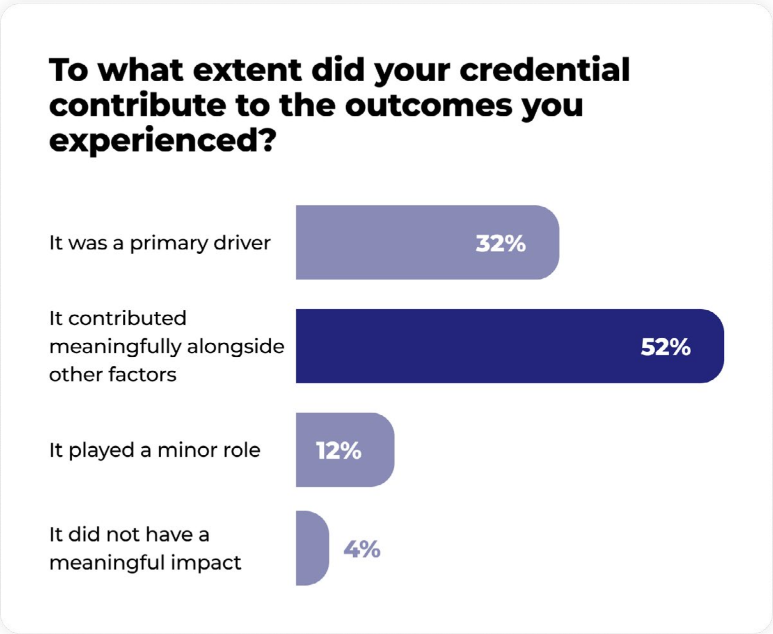
Together, these findings reinforce that credentials are making an impact. But they also raise an important question: If credentials are valuable, what could help more learners use them to achieve the outcomes they hope for?

Career outcomes don’t happen automatically

Credentials contribute to a wide range of learner outcomes, but not all outcomes are equally likely. Learners most consistently report outcomes that credentials can influence directly, such as feeling more confident in their skills (89%) or proving their expertise to employers (82%).

Career outcomes — including earning more money (66%), receiving a promotion (58%), changing jobs (53%), or moving into a new field (52%) — are also common, but they take more time to materialize. While credentials clearly create value, translating that value into measurable career advancement is still unfolding for many.

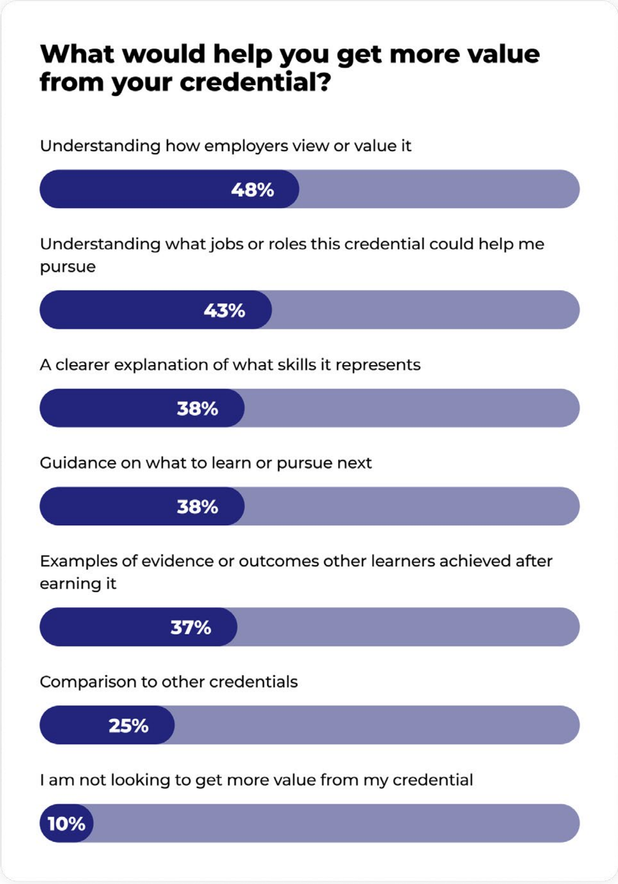
This complexity represents an opportunity for issuers. Most learners (84%) describe their credential as either the primary driver or a significant contributor to the outcomes they experienced — not the entire reason those outcomes occurred. That suggests learners already recognize credentials as one part of a broader career journey.



Programs can extend their impact by helping learners bridge the gap between demonstrating their capabilities and translating those capabilities into career opportunities through employer engagement, guidance, and continued support.

Learners still need support after earning a credential

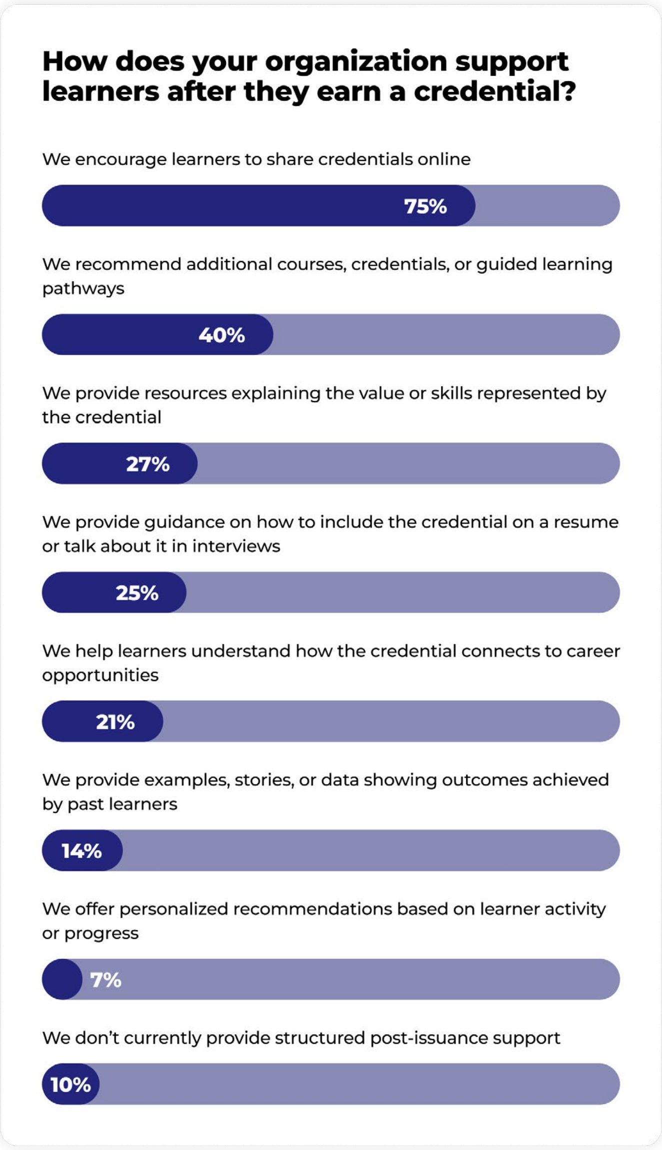
Issuers recognize that earning a credential is not the end of the learner journey. They identify several common challenges learners face after completion, from communicating the value of their credentials to employers to understanding what to do next.



Learners echo this need, identifying additional guidance, employer recognition, and clearer next steps as ways credentialing programs could deliver even greater value.

The biggest opportunity begins after issuance

Most organizations provide some level of support after learners earn a credential, but that support varies considerably. Encouraging learners to share their credentials is common (75%), while personalized guidance and recommendations (7%) are far less prevalent.



The learner perspective is encouraging: Credentials are valued, widely used, and increasingly important in today's workforce. But the data also shows that issuing a credential is not the finish line. Learners see credentials as an important part of their career journey, not the entire journey.

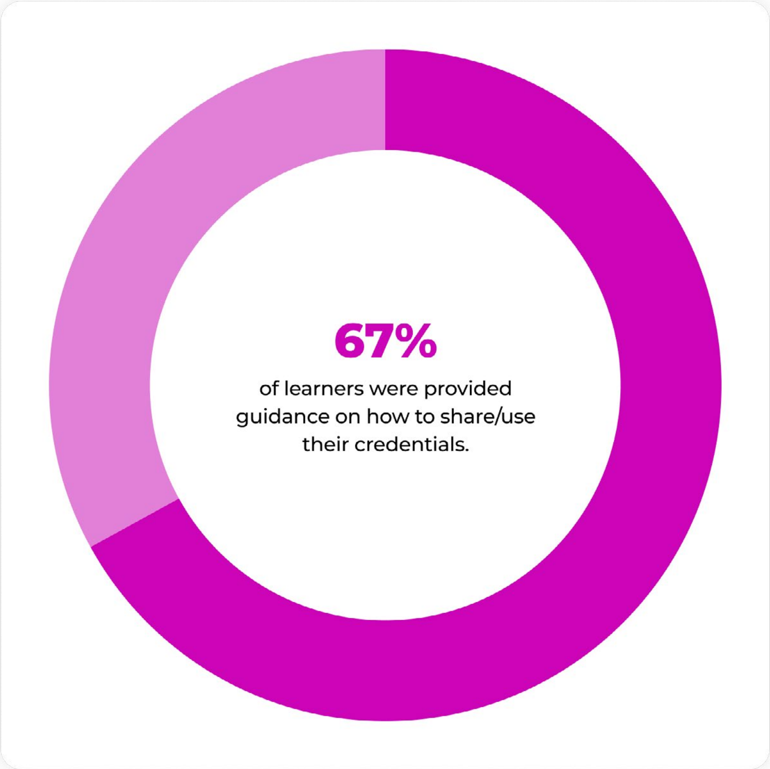
That creates an opportunity for issuers to extend their impact beyond issuance by helping learners share their credentials, connect with employers, navigate what's next, and ultimately translate credentials into stronger career outcomes. We'll cover each of these in more detail in the upcoming sections.

Sharing is working; guiding what's next isn't

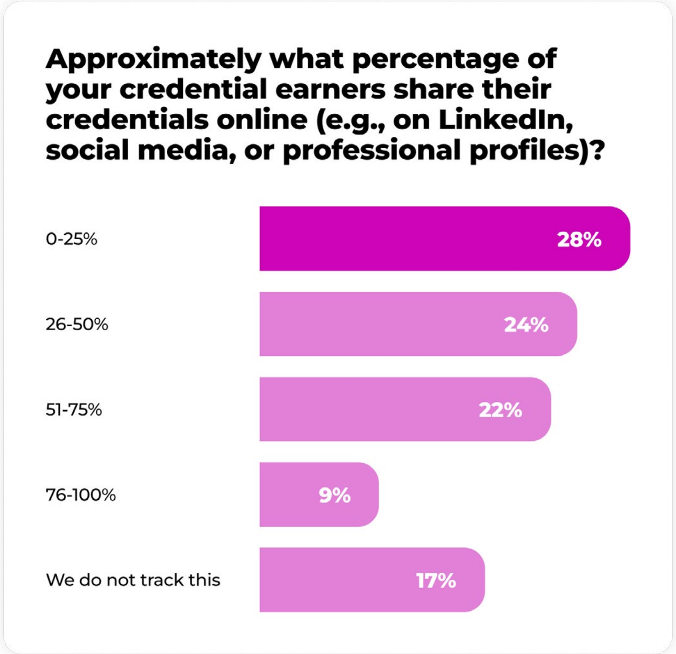
The learner journey doesn't end when a credential is issued. Encouraging learners to use and share their credentials is an important first step, and it's one where the industry continues to make progress. But sharing alone isn't enough. As learners continue building their skills and credentials, many are left to navigate what's next on their own, creating an opportunity for issuers to extend their impact beyond issuance.

Learners are sharing their credentials

Organizations have made meaningful progress helping learners activate their credentials. More learners report receiving guidance on how to use and share their credentials than in previous years (67%, up from 57% in 2024), and relatively few report significant barriers to sharing. As a result, credential sharing has become an increasingly common part of the learner experience.



The percentage of learners who share their credentials also serves as a useful industry benchmark. While many organizations see strong sharing rates, the most successful programs consistently outperform the average, suggesting that encouraging and enabling sharing remains an important opportunity to increase credential visibility and impact.



ServiceTitan built its 90%+ credential share rate on purpose: Every certified user who shares a screenshot or link to their shared digital badge gets access to a swag store, and top certification earners receive a custom varsity jacket at the company's annual conference. Learners' shared digital badges have become an unexpected sales channel — now driving more than 11 click-throughs a week to ServiceTitan's product demo page.

"I was absolutely amazed at the number of click-throughs we get on credential referral links to our prospect demo site," says Danielle Combs, Senior Program Manager for Customer and Partner Relations at ServiceTitan. "We're actually getting deals; we're getting sales from it."

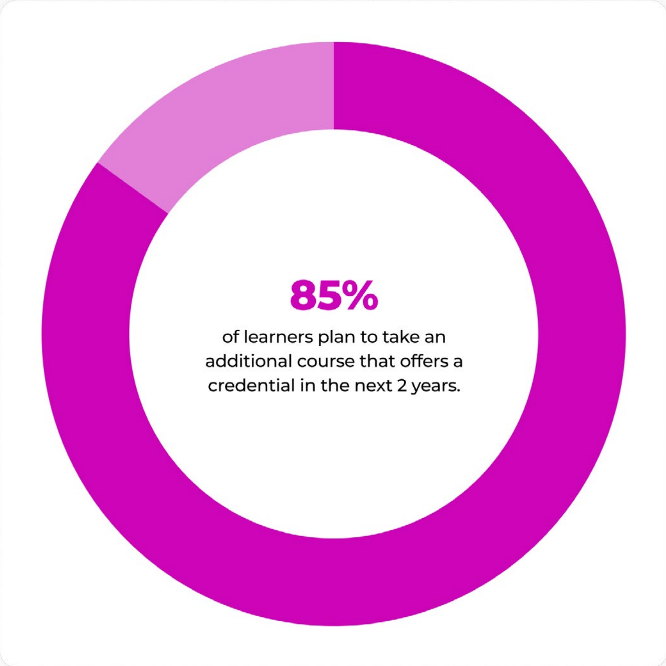
How to Increase Credential Sharing: The Practitioner's Guide to Visibility, Referrals, and Program Growth

Walk through the exact tactics — credential design, delivery emails, and incentive structures — that programs like ServiceTitan use to turn sharing into a growth channel.

Read the guide

The learner journey doesn't end with sharing

For most learners, earning one credential is the beginning — not the end — of their learning journey. The vast majority (85%) expect to pursue additional credentialed learning over the next two years, reflecting continued investment in developing new skills throughout their careers.



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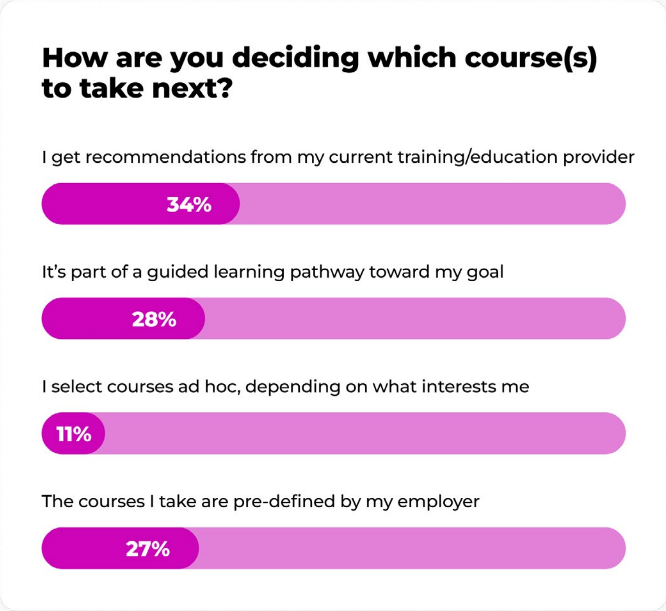
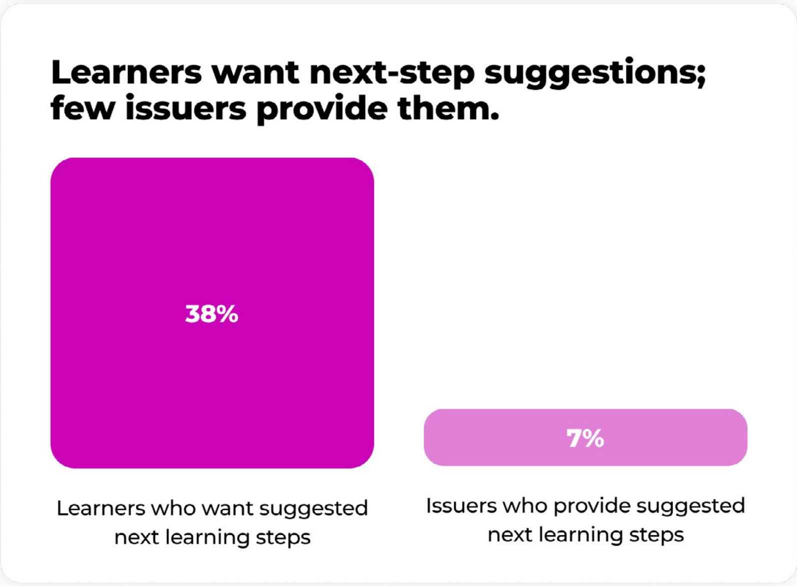


Learners want guidance on what comes next

While learners are eager to continue learning, relatively few organizations actively help them navigate that journey. Although 85% of learners plan to pursue additional credentialed learning, only a small percentage of issuers provide personalized recommendations for what learners should do next.

This represents an opportunity to extend the value of credentialing beyond completion. By recommending relevant learning pathways, complementary credentials, or career-aligned next steps, issuers can help learners build momentum while strengthening long-term engagement with their programs.



The opportunity is to treat completion as a launch point, not a finish line. As Wendy Palmer, Founder and Principal Consultant at Lifelong Learning Practice, writes: “The completion of a microcredential should mark the beginning of new opportunities rather than an endpoint.”

One professional education program at a major research university put this into practice. The program surfaced relevant next courses on credential pages (its own and other issuers’ pages, via Accredible’s Recommendations engine) and prominently at the top of CourseFinder, a course search platform, instead of leaving learners to figure out what comes next on their own. Since launching the recommendations, they’ve generated over 5 million impressions with current and future learners — generating over 18,500 additional program referrals — and the share of credential earners who went on to take an additional course grew from roughly 35% to over 50%.

Earning a credential is only the beginning of the learner journey. Organizations have made meaningful progress in helping learners share their credentials, increasing visibility and reinforcing the value of their achievements. But learners aren’t stopping there — they’re already planning what to learn next. The opportunity now is to build on that momentum by helping learners navigate future learning pathways and continue progressing toward their career goals.

Learners are confident but need more help proving it to employers

Most learners feel confident explaining what they've earned, but confidence alone isn't enough. The opportunity isn't helping learners earn credentials — it's helping them explain and apply those credentials throughout their careers.

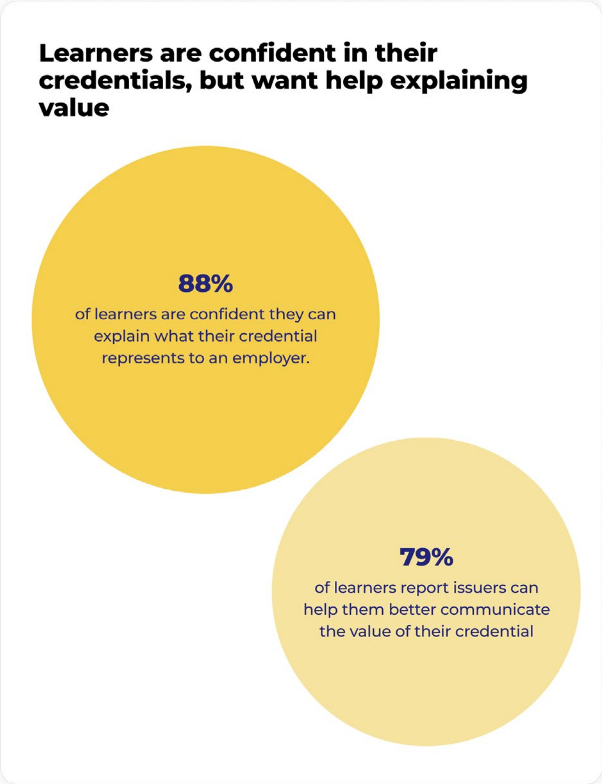
Credential holders are expected to demonstrate their qualifications

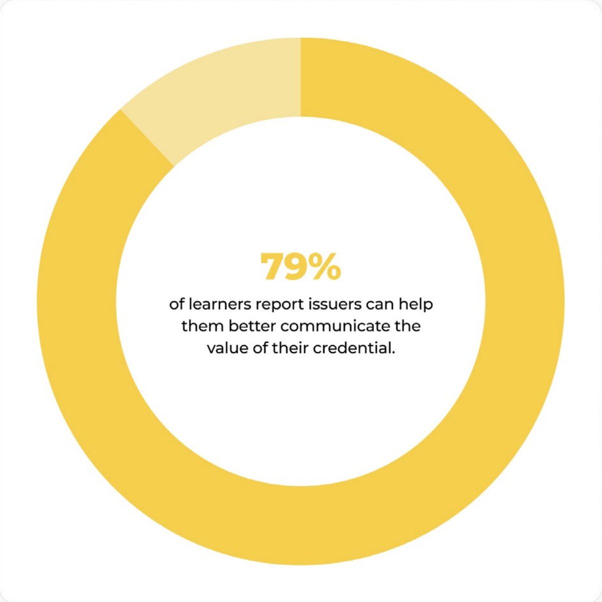
Nearly six in ten learners (59%) have been asked to verify their credentials, showing that credentials are already part of hiring and professional conversations.

Learners want practical support communicating the value of their credentials to employers

88% of learners understand what they've earned and feel confident explaining it to employers. Even so, nearly eight in ten say additional support from issuers would make it easier to communicate the value of their credential.

The data pinpoints specific opportunities issuers can take.

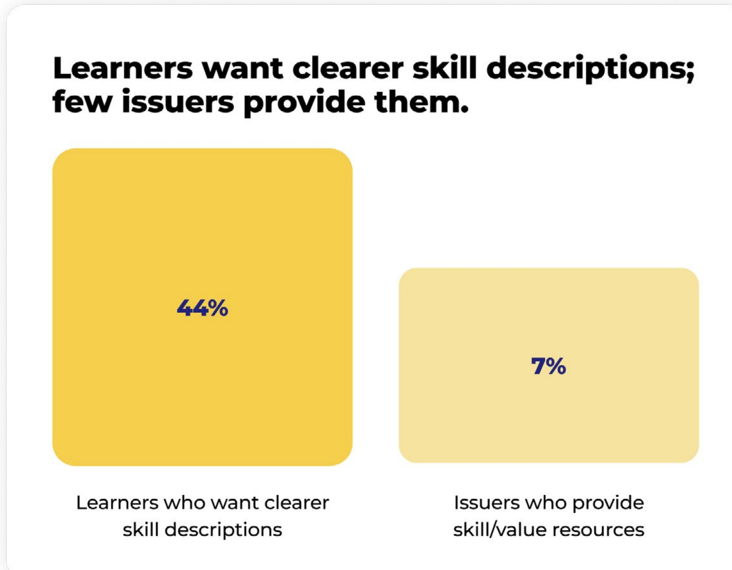




Opportunity #1: Help learners communicate their skills

Even though learners are confident they can explain their credential, 44% report it could be easier to communicate the value of their credential if issuers included a clearer description of the skills they learned.

Helping learners understand — and explain — what a credential represents should be a foundational capability of every credentialing program. Yet only 27% of issuers provide resources explaining the skills or value represented by a credential.

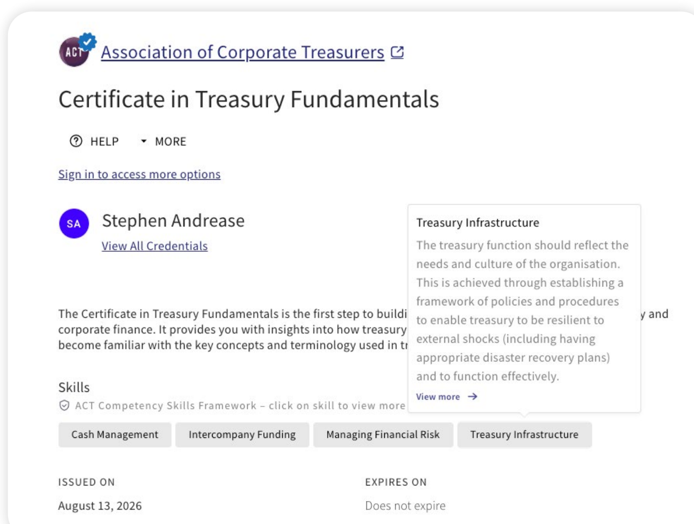


Richer skill descriptions and metadata are relatively straightforward improvements that can make credentials easier for both learners and employers to understand.

Wendy Palmer puts the stakes plainly: "I've seen trusted, verifiable badges that are completely useless, because the information written in them doesn't help anyone."

The fix is specificity. [Noah Geisel](), Micro-Credentials Program Manager at the [University of Colorado Boulder](), argues that trust with learners and employers is built through "radical transparency into what credentials are credentialing (descriptions, alignments to standards, clear earning criteria that is measurable and assessed) and evidence to demonstrate how earning criteria was met."

This critical metadata turns a digital badge from a static graphic into a trusted, verifiable signal of capability. The [Association of Corporate Treasurers (ACT)]() puts this into practice by [tying every skill on a credential to its own competency framework](), so a hiring manager or evaluator who hovers over "Treasury Infrastructure" doesn't just see a tag. They see exactly what it means and why it matters, without needing to already know ACT's programs.

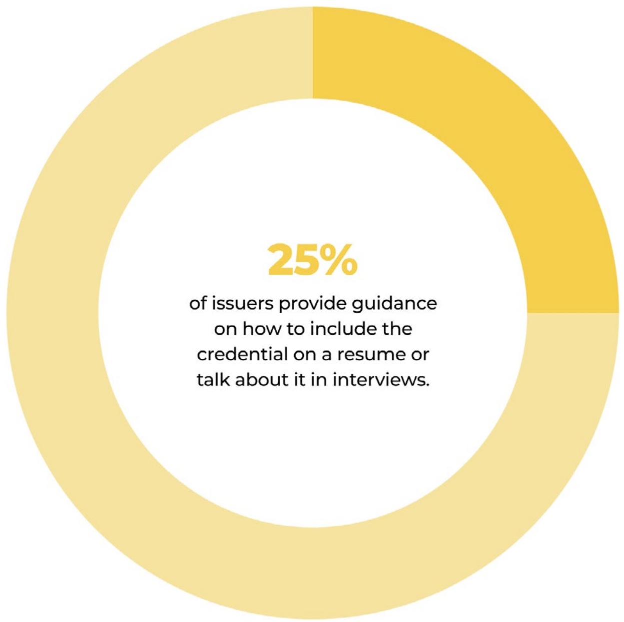


[Example of a digital credential]() with skill tags linked to a recognized competency framework, including built-in definitions

Opportunity #2: Help learners talk about their credentials

A third of learners are looking for practical guidance on incorporating credentials into their resumes, yet relatively few issuers currently provide it.

For many organizations, this is a relatively low-effort improvement to better support learners. Consider offering simple resources such as resume examples, interview talking points, and guidance on where credentials fit into a job application. These tools can help learners communicate the value of what they've earned more effectively.



Some educators build this into their teaching. Frank Sorokach, Associate Teaching Professor of Business and Economics at Penn State University, encourages his students to put every credential they earn on LinkedIn — offering extra credit to those who do — because, as he puts it, "if they don't signal that they have this skill, they essentially don't have the skill. A person who has a bachelor's degree and doesn't tell anybody they have the degree might as well not have the degree."

The payoff can be immediate: one of his students, with zero work experience to point to, added a rigorous supply-chain credential to his profile and within two weeks heard from three Amazon recruiters — and ultimately landed the role. The credential didn't do the work alone, but it was the signal that got him noticed.

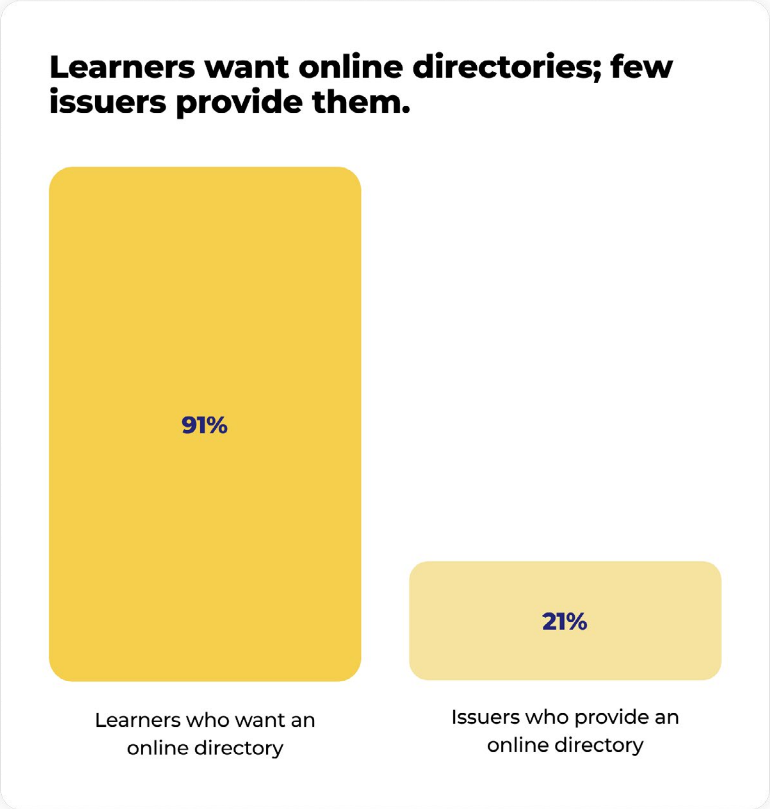
Build Your Learner-Facing Digital Credential Page

Give learners everything they need to understand, share, and maximize the value of their credentials. This guide includes ready-to-use page templates, LinkedIn posting examples, credential delivery email copy, and tips to increase visibility and engagement.

Read the guide

Opportunity #3: Help learners get in front of employers

Searchable online directories give learners another opportunity to showcase their qualifications to prospective employers while making credential verification straightforward. Learner interest is exceptionally strong. 91% say they would opt into a directory if one were available, up from 84% in 2024. Yet only 21% of issuers are currently offering this.



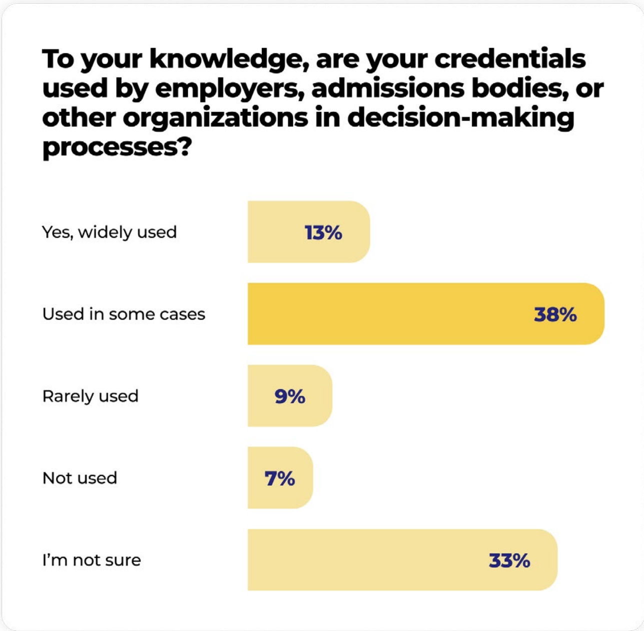
That demand isn't hypothetical. Where directories already exist, both sides of the market are showing up: Learner opt-ins into Spotlight directories grew 167% year over year in 2025, and directory searches from employers and talent sourcers rose more than 5x over the same period.

The North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) saw this demand firsthand. Despite expecting low uptake — many of its learners have been reluctant to publicize their achievements — the opposite happened. "As we rolled out our directory, we expected low opt-in — yet 97% of learners chose to participate. Learners want visibility when it's easy and trusted," says Chanelle Huff, Senior Manager, Certifications & Large Programs. NAVC's directory now includes more than 4,700 members.

Opportunity #4: Close the loop with employers

Expanding recognition of their credentials' value isn't solely the learner's responsibility. Issuers also have a role to play by ensuring credentials reflect the skills and outcomes employers value.

More than a third of learners (38%) say they would like their credential to be better recognized by employers. Many issuers are already taking steps to align credentials with workforce needs, most commonly by mapping them to job roles or industry skills frameworks (47%). But fewer involve employers directly in the design and evolution of their credential programs (21%).



Engaging employers earlier can help issuers understand the skills employers are looking for and design credentials that more clearly signal those skills. It can also create a foundation for an ongoing relationship with employers after credentials are issued.

The highest-leverage move is also the least common: involving employers before the credential exists. As Curtiss Barnes, CEO of the 1EdTech Consortium, advises: "Talk to employers. Make sure you understand what information they actually need and how they describe the skills and competencies they're looking for. Then build that into a digital credential ... so it can be understood by both people and systems."

Early engagement also sets up something issuers need after credentials are issued: visibility into whether employers are actually using them. Right now, many issuers don't have that visibility at all. While 51% say their credentials are widely used or used in some cases by employers, admissions bodies, or other organizations in decision-making processes, 33% aren't sure whether their credentials are used at all.

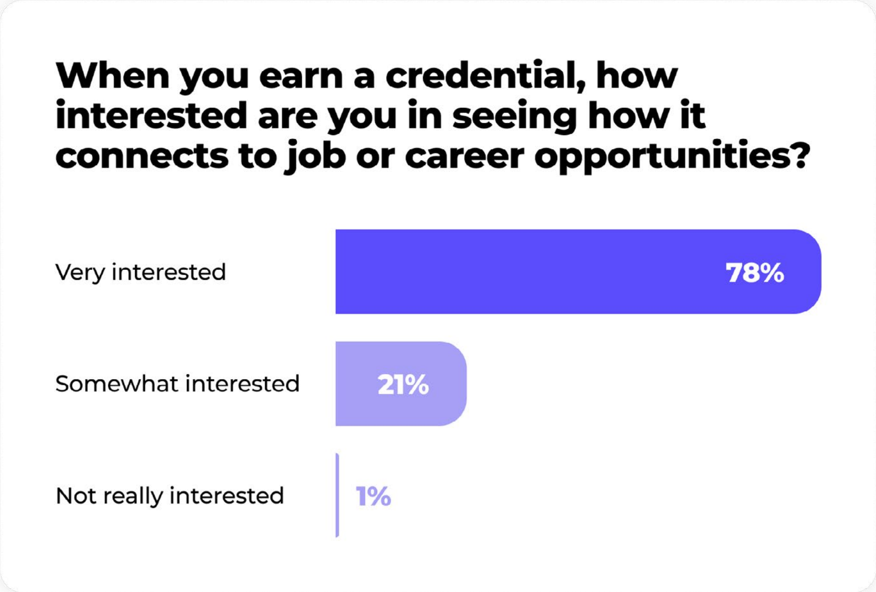
Without that visibility, issuers have a harder time understanding how their credentials translate into real-world opportunities, and where they may need to strengthen employer recognition.

The career connection learners want, and the data issuers don't have

The previous section focused on helping learners communicate the value of a credential to employers. The next opportunity is helping learners understand what that credential means for their career over time and collecting the evidence to prove it's working.

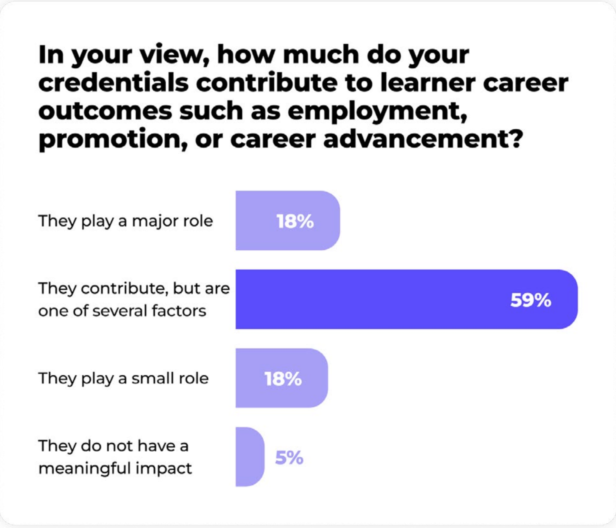
Learners want to see the career connection

Learners aren't simply looking for career advice. Almost all (99%) want to see how the credential connects to job or career opportunities.

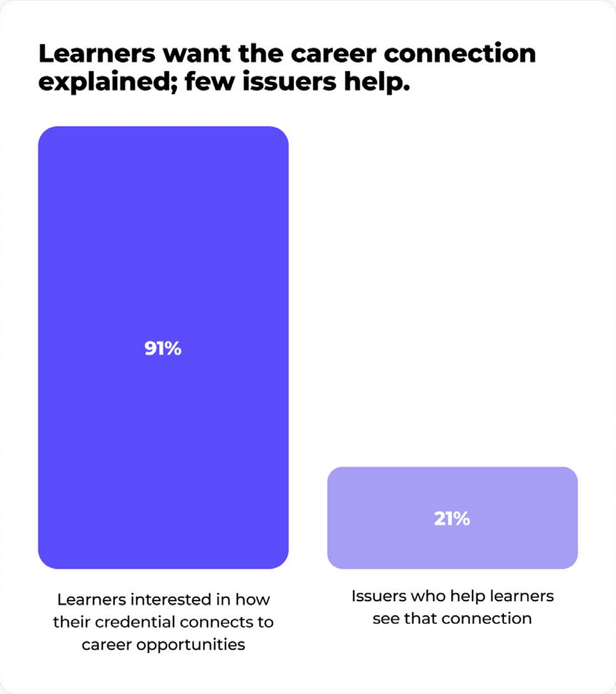


And the majority of issuers recognize the role their credentials play in this. Most issuers (77%) recognize credentials contribute to career outcomes. But, importantly, most also recognize they're rarely the whole story.

Credentials are only one of several factors that influence employment, promotion, and career advancement, so issuers need to think beyond credential issuance if they want their credentials to be as valuable as possible for learners.

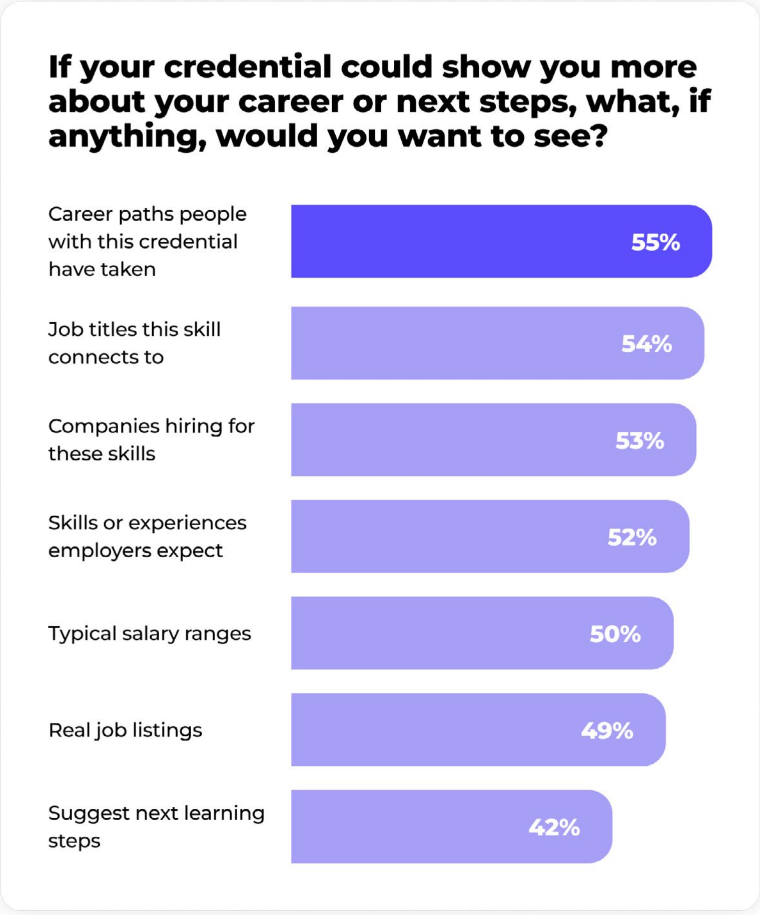


Even though issuers understand the role credentials play in career outcomes, there is a significant gap. Only 21% report that they help learners understand how the credential connects to career opportunities.



Learners want more than a record — they want direction

Learners are looking for more than a digital record of achievement. They want credentials that help them understand where they can go next, what opportunities they qualify for, and how their skills translate into the job market.



Introducing Career Journey: What Comes After the Credential

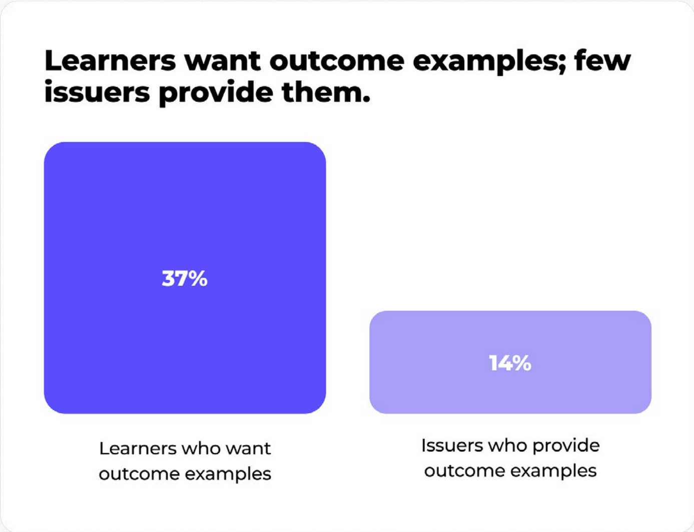
See how Career Journey gives every credential earner free, automatic career guidance — skill translation, role recommendations, and a concrete next step — the moment they view their credential. No setup required.

Learn more

Show learners what's possible

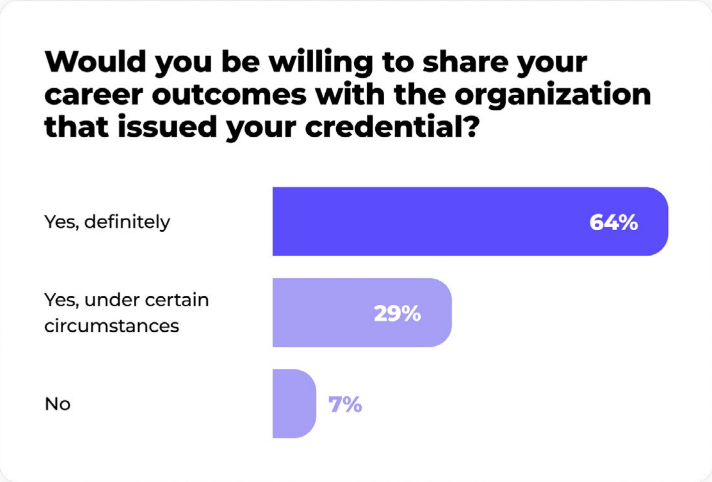
Beyond career information, many learners want evidence of what others have achieved after earning the same credential. Sharing examples of employment, promotions, or other career outcomes helps learners understand the potential value of their credential while reinforcing program impact, and this is something that 37% of learners would like to see.

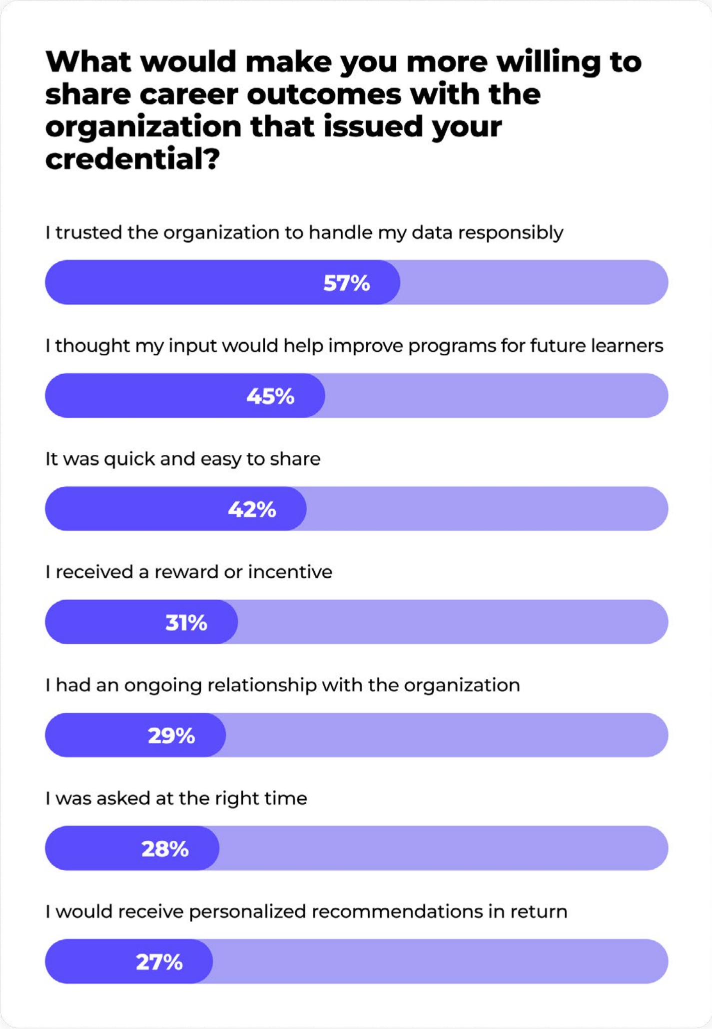
However, only 14% of issuers currently provide this type of evidence.



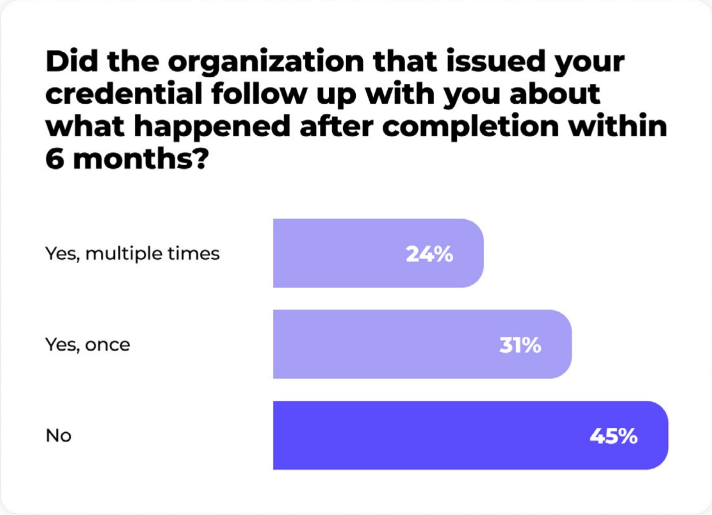
Learners are willing to share career outcomes, but issuers aren't asking

Organizations often struggle to demonstrate long-term impact because they lack career outcome data. The encouraging news is that this may be easier to solve than many assume. Nearly all learners (93%) say they would be willing to share their career outcomes with the organization that issued their credential, provided basic expectations around privacy and transparency are met.





Even though learners are willing to share this information, issuers aren't asking. Almost half of learners report they have never been asked for this information, and an additional third say they have only been contacted once.



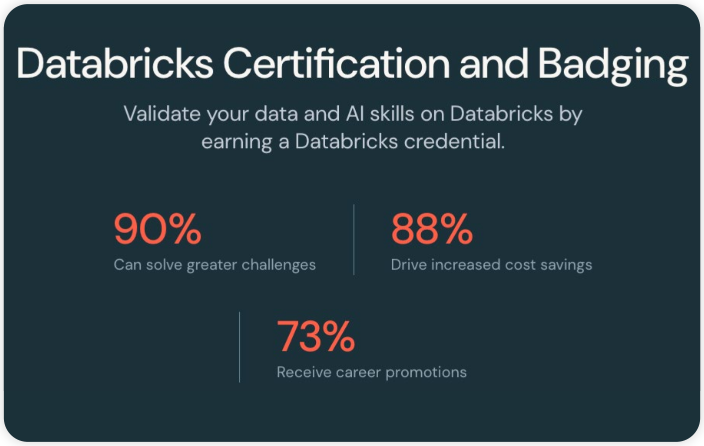
The gap is structural. As Holly Zanville, Founder and Executive Director of the Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, puts it: “We have spent a great deal of time building systems for awarding credentials and much less time building relationships with credential earners that tell us what happened next.”

A caveat: closing it may not be as easy as the willingness numbers suggest. Jennifer Fong, Senior Director of Continuing Education and Workforce Development at IEEE, urges realism about that willingness: “I was surprised at the high percentage of learners who were open to the follow-up, and based on our experience with response rates, I’m a bit skeptical that it is as easy as asking.”

But the difficulty is not an alibi. Michelle Van Noy, Director of the Education & Employment Research Center at Rutgers University, on issuers who don’t track outcomes, is blunt: “That doesn’t justify not doing it.”

Some issuers are already doing it well. Programs like Maven Analytics, Snowflake, and Databricks share learner testimonials, outcomes, and proof points directly on their program pages. Not buried in a case study, but visible to anyone considering their credentials. Databricks, for example, publishes aggregate outcome data on its certification page: the share of certified professionals who report solving greater challenges (90%), driving cost savings (88%), and receiving career promotions (73%). Data like that only exists because someone followed up.

Helping learners connect credentials to career outcomes creates value on both sides. Learners clearly have a desire for this type of support, and those who receive it will have a better experience. But doing so helps issuers as well. By helping learners navigate what comes next — and by continuing the conversation after completion — issuers can create a stronger learner experience while collecting the outcome data that has become increasingly important to demonstrating program success.



The Guide to Measuring Learner Outcomes That Actually Matter

Walk through the exact tactics — credential design, delivery emails, and incentive structures — that programs like ServiceTitan use to turn sharing into a growth channel.

Read the guide

Operational practices behind successful programs

Throughout this report, we've explored opportunities to help learners get more value from their credentials. But delivering those outcomes consistently requires more than learner-facing initiatives. It requires building a credentialing program that is designed to measure, learn, and improve over time.

That's becoming increasingly important. Earlier in this report, we noted that 55% of issuers face growing pressure to demonstrate program value. Yet fewer than half now track learner outcomes after credential completion (a decline from last year), and only 12% can confidently demonstrate professional advancement with data.

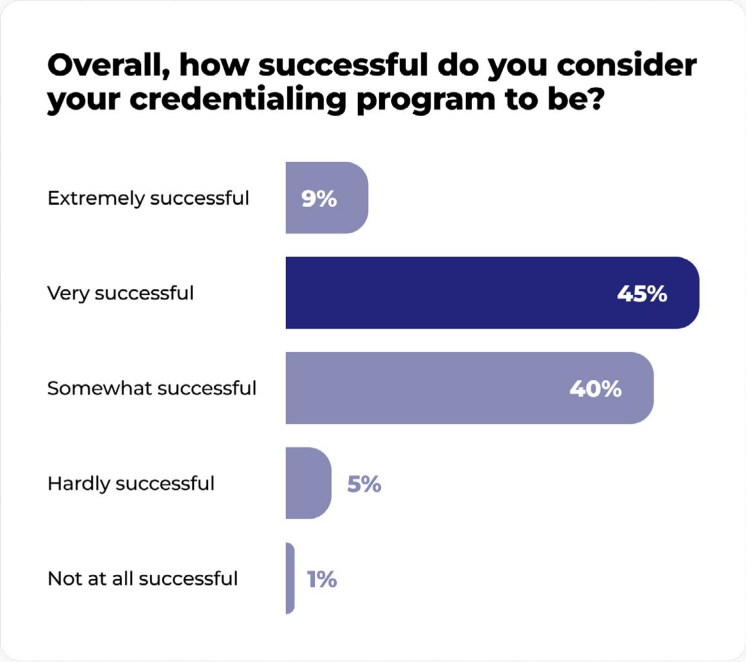
In other words, expectations are rising while many organizations still lack the operational systems needed to prove impact.

Two ways to identify opportunities for improvement

Some opportunities are clear from the data: Issuers broadly aren't doing certain things that could strengthen their programs. Others become clearer when we look at what successful issuers do differently.

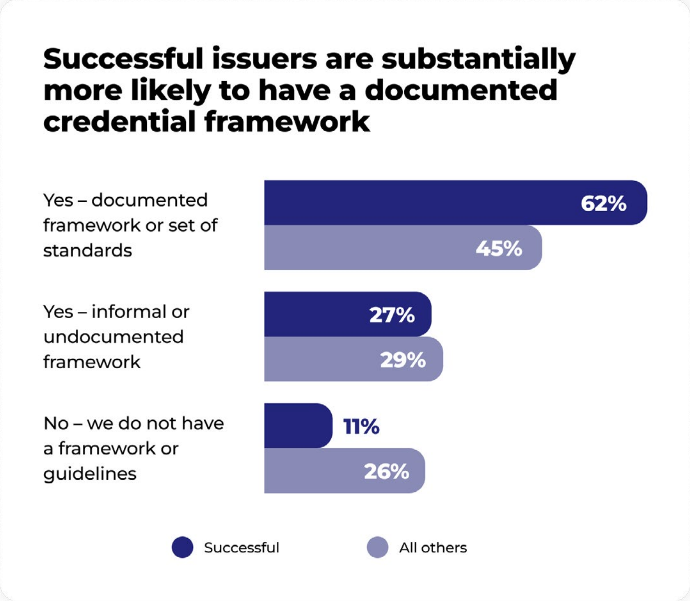
For that second lens, we asked issuers to rate the overall success of their credentialing program. This year, 54% rated their program as very or extremely successful, consistent with last year's findings.

Throughout this section, we'll draw on both perspectives — highlighting widespread gaps as well as practices that distinguish successful issuers from their peers. While program success is self-reported rather than an objective measure, it gives us a useful way to explore how operational practices differ across programs.



Success factor: Define and document your credential framework

A credential program is only as consistent as the rules that govern it. A documented credential framework — covering how credentials are designed, issued, and evaluated — is what keeps that consistency intact as a program scales beyond a handful of badges. More than half of issuers (55%) have formalized one. But that discipline isn't evenly distributed: Successful issuers are far more likely to have a documented framework in place — 62%, compared to 45% of other issuers.



Without that discipline, a credential can mean almost anything. Meghan Turjanica, Senior Director of Credentialing at McGraw Hill, doesn't soften it: "A badge that simply recognizes participation or time spent is very different from one that proves capability... credentials should be proof of skill, not a marketing asset. Employers and HR systems don't just need to know whether someone 'has a skill'; they need to know they 'have a skill at what level.'"

Syracuse University put that consistency into practice by establishing a Digital Badging Council of leaders from across the institution to govern new badge launches. The council's output was a 24-page governance document covering formats, taxonomy, and procedures, still used today to onboard new departments as Syracuse has scaled past 27,000 issued credentials. As Arthur Thomas, former Executive Director of the Office of Microcredentials, explains, "Taking the time to ensure consensus, support executive leadership, and consider how badging aligns with the academic mission has paved the way for Syracuse's success."

By investing in a documented framework with clear governance, issuers create the consistency, scalability, and credibility that learners and employers value most.

Why Your Credentialing Program Needs a Framework (Not Just Badges)

Learn how to design a credential framework and governance model that scales — with practical steps, examples from Syracuse University and Junior Achievement USA, and a proven 8-step process to keep credentials consistent, credible, and aligned to your goals.

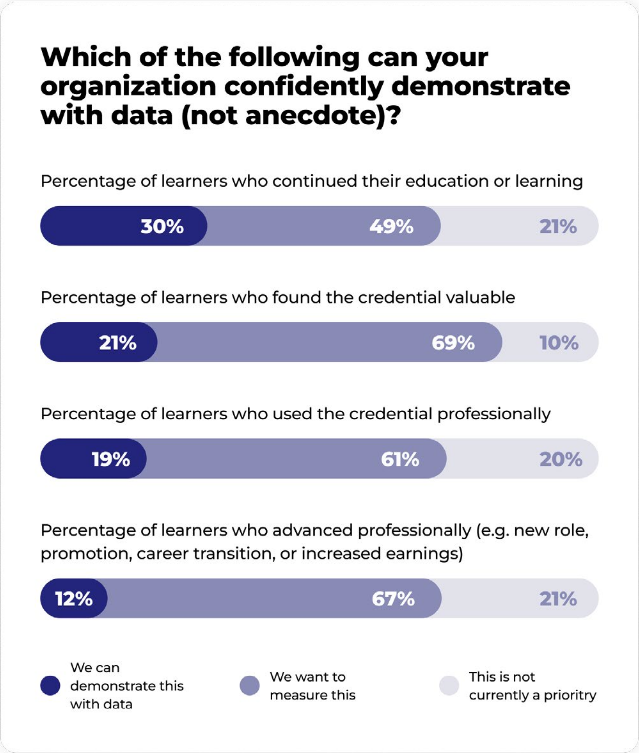
Read the guide

Success factor: Define success beyond credential completion

Organizations can’t measure or improve outcomes without first agreeing on what a successful learner outcome looks like.

Most issuers define success around earning a credential or completing a course. Those milestones matter because they represent key moments in the learner journey.

Measurement remains a work in progress across credentialing programs. While the majority of issuers want to measure whether learners continue their education, find their credential valuable, use it professionally, or advance in their careers, far fewer can confidently demonstrate those outcomes with data. The gap is especially pronounced for longer-term career outcomes: Just 12% can demonstrate professional advancement with data, even though 67% want to measure it.



Successful issuers show some signs of progress here too. They're more likely than other issuers to be able to demonstrate that learners continued their learning (37% vs. 21%) and used their credential professionally (23% vs. 14%).

That same pattern holds when we ask a more specific version of the question: What do issuers actually know about a given learner six months after they earn a credential? Visibility is still limited, and skewed toward whatever's easiest to track passively. Issuers are far more likely to know whether a learner viewed or shared their credential (49%) than whether it led to professional use or a job or promotion, outcomes that require actually asking. 32% report they know nothing at all.

One issuer survey respondent described what closing that gap looks like in practice: "Establishing defined touchpoints — 6 months, 12 months, 2 years — to ask the same questions and rate how they attribute their credential to outcomes." That's the difference between hoping a credential mattered and actually asking.

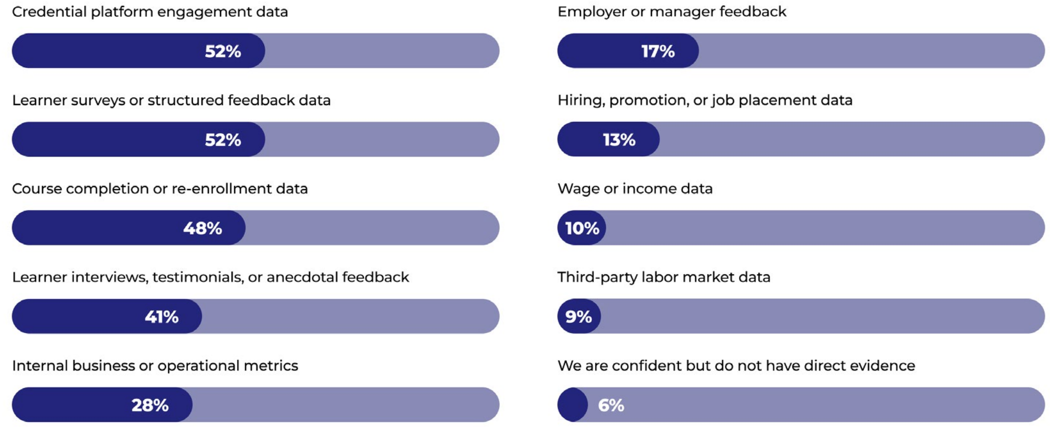
Success factor: Communicate impact, not just activity

Demonstrating program value requires more than a single measure. Different types of data tell different parts of the story, making it important for issuers to build a more diverse evidence base.

Today, issuers most commonly rely on credential platform engagement data (52%), learner surveys or structured feedback (52%), and course completion or re-enrollment data (48%) when asked to demonstrate program value. Far fewer incorporate employer feedback (17%), hiring or job placement data (13%), wage or income data (10%), or third-party labor market data (9%).

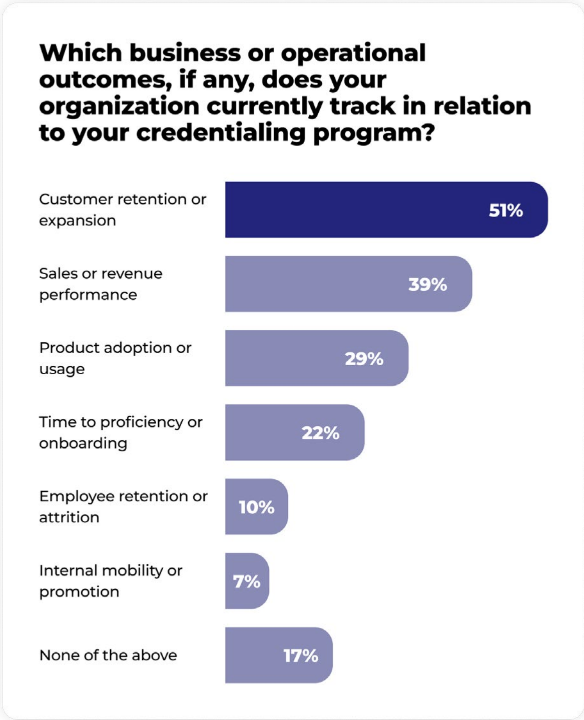
Each of these measures provides a different view of impact. Completion and engagement data can show what learners do, while learner feedback, career outcomes, employer input, and business metrics can provide evidence of what happens as a result. Building a stronger case for credential value means diversifying the evidence rather than relying too heavily on any one source.

What information does your organization rely on when asked to demonstrate the value or outcomes of your credentialing program?



Part of why that evidence is so hard to assemble is that the pieces live in different places — engagement and completion data in the credentialing platform, business results tracked elsewhere in the organization. As Julie Uranis, Senior Vice President of Online and Strategic Initiatives at UPCEA, puts it: “We’re rich with data but lack the ability to truly derive meaning and take action from it because it sits in siloed systems.”

Among the smaller group of issuers who do tie credentialing to internal business metrics, the most common connections are customer retention or expansion (51%) and sales or revenue performance (39%), followed by product adoption (29%) and time to proficiency (22%). Fewer connect it to employee retention (10%) or internal mobility and promotion (7%). These figures point to where the most advanced programs focus already: correlating credential data with the same metrics the rest of the business already tracks.



Organizations with the strongest credentialing programs are also much more likely to report that credentialing is highly visible to senior leadership. Rather than remaining a departmental initiative, credentialing becomes a strategic capability supported by evidence and connected to broader organizational goals.

The strongest credentialing programs aren't defined by a single initiative or technology. They're distinguished by the operational systems they build around their programs.

They define and document a credential framework, define success beyond credential completion, build systems to measure outcomes, and communicate impact — not just activity — across their organization. Together, these practices create a stronger foundation for continuously improving learner outcomes while helping organizations meet the growing expectation to prove program value.

Databricks shows what this looks like in practice. Its framework and governance were built before a single new badge launched. "Start the framework and governance before you issue a single badge," says Rachel Canetta, Senior Manager of Certification.

That structure now supports a program that issues more than 50,000 credentials a month and recently crossed one million lifetime credentials issued. It isn't treated as a side project, either: Active, non-expired credentials are a formal OKR for the entire organization, not just its learning and development team, tracked in the same monthly business review deck as every other business metric — credential open rate, share rate, and referral clicks, all pulled straight from platform analytics. "They're not just badges; they're metrics," Canetta says. Databricks is currently 95% of the way to its 602,000-active-badge target, tracked with the same rigor leadership applies to any other growth number.

From Credentials to Consequence: How Leading Programs Tie Learning to Business Impact

Learn how leading programs like Toast, Elastic, and Asana connect credential data to the business metrics your leadership already tracks.

Read the guide

The path ahead

Credentialing programs are entering a new phase. The next chapter for credentialing isn't simply issuing more credentials, but rather helping learners realize more value from their credentials while proving the impact of your program. Whether you're just getting started or looking to mature an established program, the steps follow a natural progression.

Stage 1: Measure what matters

The most successful programs start by aligning on what success means to key stakeholders and systematically collecting this data.

Your mandate:

- Define what success means for your credential program.
- Follow up with learners after they earn a credential.
- Track outcomes beyond issuance, including learner engagement, career impact, and continued learning.
- Regularly review findings to identify opportunities for program improvement.

Stage 2: Help learners translate credentials into opportunity

Learners consistently told us they want more help understanding what their credential represents, how to communicate it, and what opportunities it can unlock.

Your mandate:

- Clearly explain the skills, competencies, and value represented by each credential.
- Equip learners to communicate those skills through resumes, LinkedIn profiles, interviews, and job applications.
- Recommend future learning pathways, additional credentials, or next steps based on learners' goals.
- Showcase what's possible by highlighting career outcomes, job opportunities, and real learner success stories.

Stage 3: Systematize what works

Successful issuers are moving a step further and embedding learner support and measurement into repeatable processes with the goals of continuously improving learner outcomes and proving ROI. The goal is to make learner support and outcome measurement a consistent part of every credential program.

Your mandate:

- Develop a consistent credential framework.
- Create defined learner touchpoints throughout the credential lifecycle.
- Standardize outcome measurement and reporting.
- Share program performance and outcomes with leadership and key stakeholders.

For real examples of programs doing this well, see the [2025 Certified Impact Award winners].

Organizations that close the gaps highlighted in this report will be better positioned to strengthen learner outcomes, demonstrate program impact, and adapt as employer expectations continue to evolve.

Appendix

The 2026 State of Credentialing is based on two original online surveys fielded in spring 2026 by Mantis Research in partnership with Accredible.

- **Credential issuers (n=194):** Education and training leaders at organizations that issue digital certificates and/or badges as part of learning or certification programs. Recruited via Accredible and 1EdTech.
- **Learners (n=1000):** People in the United States who participated in a course, certification program, or continuing education opportunity that awarded a credential within the past two years. The course needed to be taken to learn new skills to launch and/or help them with their career.

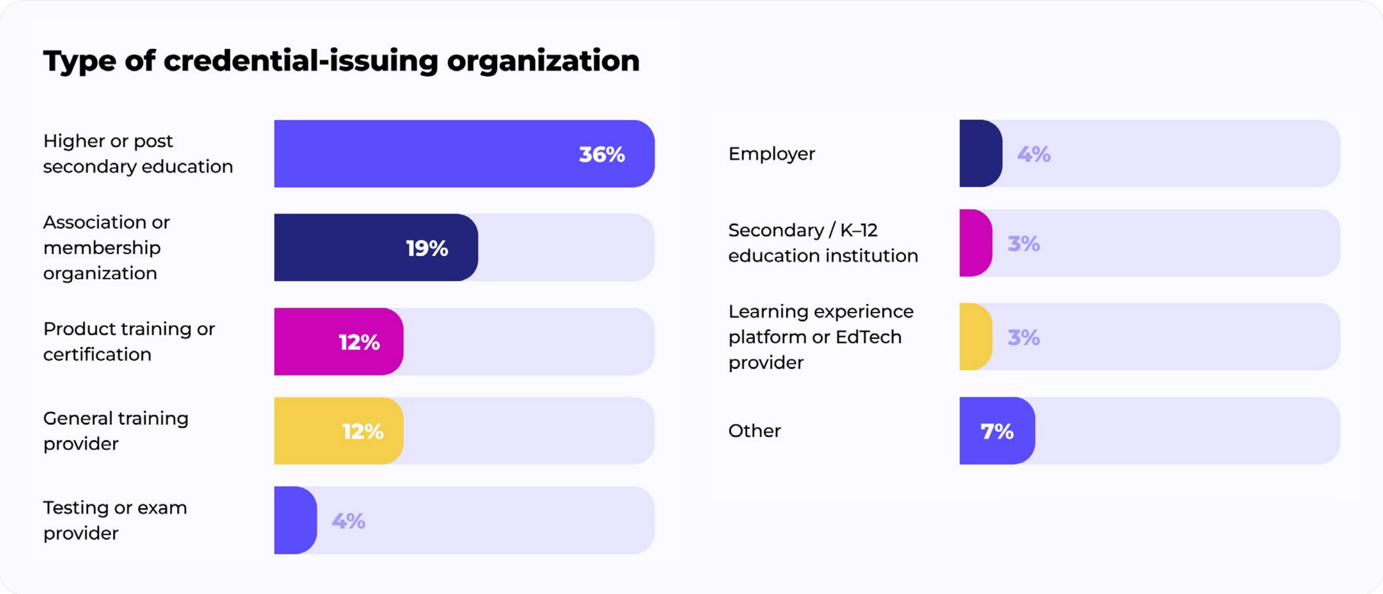
Key definitions

- **Digital credentials:** Verifiable digital certificates and/or badges issued for learning or achieving certification requirements.

Data notes

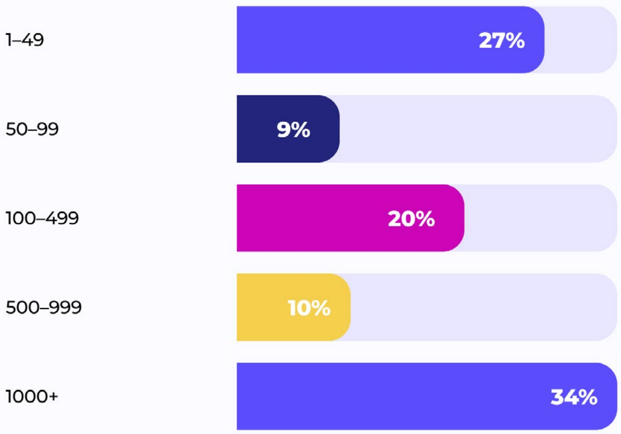
- Some questions included an "I'm not sure" option. Unless otherwise specified, these responses were excluded, and percentages recalculated.
- "Other (please specify)" write-ins were excluded from visuals unless a clearly repeated theme warranted separate categorization or mention.

Credential issuers surveyed

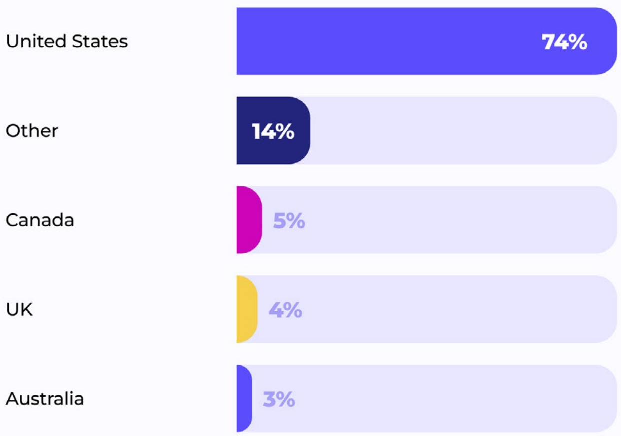


Credential issuers surveyed (continued)

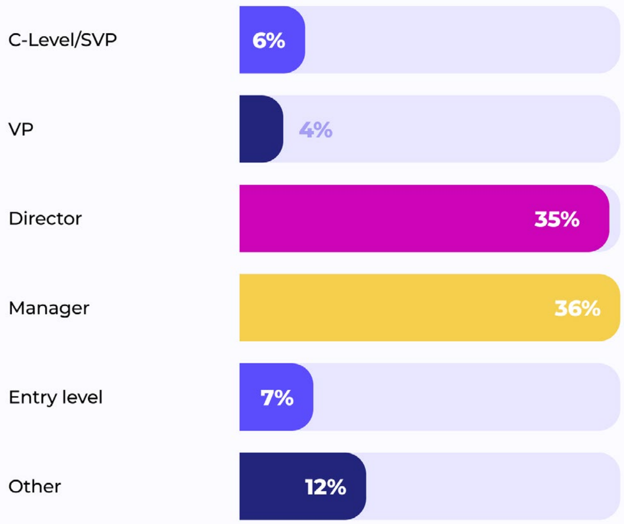
Company size (employee count)



Location

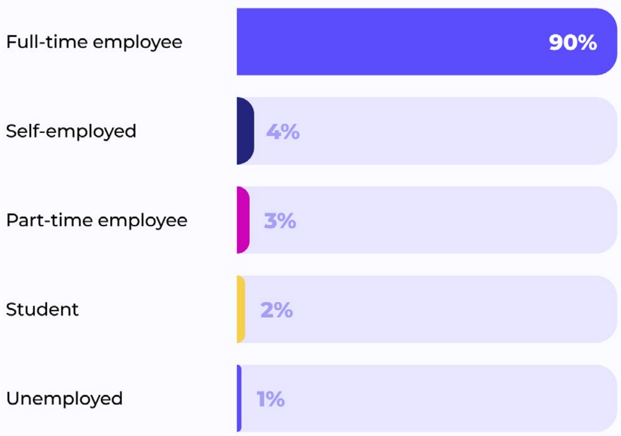


Job Level

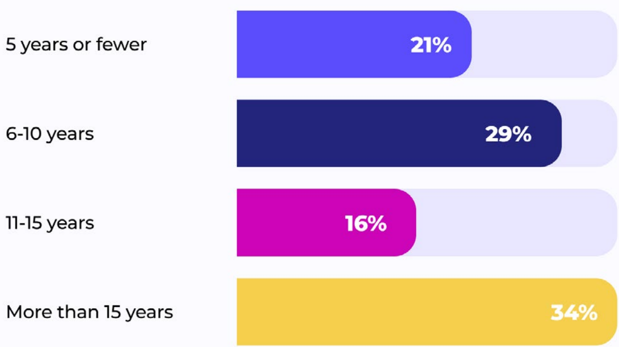


Learners surveyed

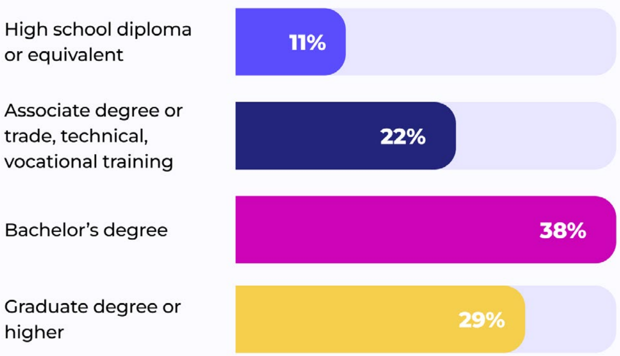
Career status



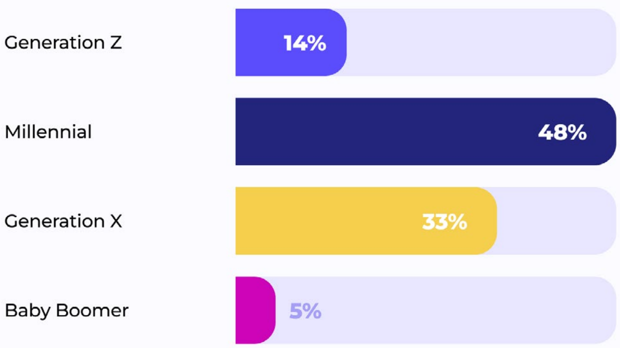
Career experience



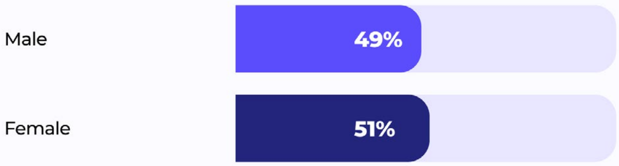
Education level



Generation



Gender



Credits

We extend our sincere thanks to the individuals and organizations whose expertise and perspectives shaped this year's report: Scott Cheney (Credential Engine); Bruce Etter, Julie Uranis, and Stacy Chiaramonte (UPCEA); Stephen Buckley (Digital Credentials Ltd); Wendy Palmer (Lifelong Learning Practice); Noah Geisel (University of Colorado Boulder); Frank Sorokach (Penn State); Curtiss Barnes (1EdTech Consortium); Holly Zanville (Learn & Work Ecosystem Library); Jennifer Fong (IEEE); Michelle Van Noy (Rutgers University); and Meghan Turjanica (McGraw Hill). Special appreciation goes to our research partner, Mantis Research, for their rigor and collaboration throughout this project.