



NATIONAL NONPROFIT • TRUSTED DATA INFRASTRUCTURE • INDEPENDENT STRADA AFFILIATE

AN OUTCOMES DATA READINESS DIAGNOSTIC FOR CREDENTIAL ISSUERS

The CredLens Data Readiness Diagnostic

Are you ready to report on outcomes?

A self-scored guide to your data readiness — and what it takes to get further.

THE READINESS LEVELS

Set by your lowest subtotal across Records, Access, and Resources (0–18)

Building	Developing	Established	Leading
0 or 3	6	9 or 12	15 or 18

Why data readiness matters

Outcomes are the labor-market results your credential holders experience: employment, earnings, and further educational attainment. Credential issuers use this data to improve credential performance and to show results to funders, boards, and prospective learners and candidates. The challenge is that most of this data lives outside your systems—with states, federal agencies, and other sources—and getting reliable access usually requires outside help.

Understanding your data readiness—your organization’s current ability to produce and use outcomes data—is the essential first step. *The Data Readiness Diagnostic* shows where you stand and where to focus first. This self-scored assessment takes about 15 minutes—nine questions across three areas that place you on one of four readiness levels.

ABOUT CREDLENS

CredLens is a national nonprofit and neutral source of quality outcomes data for degree and non-degree credentials. We connect issuer-verified credential records to real-world employment, earnings, and education outcomes — giving you longitudinal evidence to understand what happens after completion and demonstrate value.

If your organization runs both non-credit (including Career and Technical Education, or CTE) and for-credit programs, you should score each separately.

What it measures

Three areas, three questions each — referenced throughout as (A), (B), and (C).

(A)

Records

The credential data already in your systems.

(B)

Access

Whether you can obtain employment and earnings data.

(C)

Resources

The people and capacity to act on what you find.

Why do this

Funders, boards, policymakers, prospective credential holders, and employers are asking for evidence that your credentials deliver. Many issuers don’t yet have the data infrastructure to produce this evidence. The diagnostic will help you:

See where you stand across Records, Access, and Resources.

Surface where different teams agree and disagree on data readiness.

Decide where to focus and what to do next — from internal changes to bringing in a data partner.

Who should take part — and how

This diagnostic is for all credential issuers expected to report on outcomes.

One person can complete it for a baseline. It works better with a team.

Bring in the people who own outcomes data operationally or who take part in outcomes conversations. When their answers differ, that disagreement is the finding — use it to build a shared view before moving forward.

Who to involve

Two perspectives, and you want both in the room.

WHO KNOWS THE DATA

- Institutional research and effectiveness staff
- IT and data analytics staff

WHO OWNS THE PROGRAM

- Workforce, continuing education, or extension program leaders
- Program managers or directors
- Credentialing or program operations leaders

How to use it

Six steps, start to finish — about fifteen minutes.

- | | | |
|----|--|-----------|
| 1. | Read what outcomes data is, where it comes from, and why it is hard to get | pp. 4–6 |
| 2. | Set your scope — program type, outcomes, audience, and where your credential holders work | p. 7 |
| 3. | Score each of the nine questions | pp. 8–10 |
| 4. | Add the three scores within each area —
Ⓐ Records, Ⓑ Access, Ⓒ Resources — for its subtotal | p. 11 |
| 5. | Find your lowest subtotal — it sets your readiness level | p. 12 |
| 6. | Read your strengths and gaps, and decide what to do next | pp. 13–14 |

The outcomes data you need now

Funders, boards, and prospective credential holders ask three questions about your credential. These five outcomes are how you answer them.

QUESTION ONE

Did it lead to work — and the right work?

Employment

Whether credential holders found work, and where they're employed.

Occupation alignment

Whether they work in the roles the credential is designed for.

QUESTION TWO

Did it improve what they earn?

Earnings

What they make, and how wages grow over time.

Career mobility

How their careers advance after earning the credential.

QUESTION THREE

Did it open further learning?

Educational attainment

Whether they stack into further credentials, complete a degree, or earn another.

Whether you can report on these depends on the records you hold and the data you can obtain — scored in **Section (A) Records** and **Section (B) Access**.

Where this data comes from

Outcomes data comes from three types of sources: surveys, government data, and private sector data. The table below lists sources within each type and the related coverage and access limits. Section B of the diagnostic scores your access to this data.

SOURCE	WHAT IT IS	WHAT IT CANNOT TELL YOU
SURVEYS		
Your surveys of credential holders	Self-reported employment and earnings from surveys sent to credential holders.	Response rates are typically low, so results may not reflect all credential holders.
GOVERNMENT DATA		
State UI wage records	Quarterly wage and employment data employers report to the state unemployment insurance system.	Covers a single state only. Doesn't capture federal or military workers, anyone working out of state, or most self-employed and 1099 workers.
State longitudinal data systems (SLDS)	State-built systems that link education and workforce records.	Stays within state lines. Access and matching rules vary, with no visibility into anyone who leaves the state.
Federal new-hire and wage data	A federal database (the National Directory of New Hires) combining state and federal employment records, with near-universal coverage.	Can't be obtained directly — restricted by law to permitted purposes.
Federal tax data (IRS)	Earnings data reported to the IRS through employer and individual tax filings, with national coverage.	Highly restricted; available only through authorized data-matching programs.
Census PSEO	A U.S. Census Bureau program (Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes) publishing aggregate earnings and employment for graduates of participating institutions, by credential and field.	Publishes aggregate statistics for participating institutions, not individual outcomes for your credential holders. Covers only institutions with a Census data-sharing agreement, with variable coverage by state and cohort.
PRIVATE SECTOR DATA		
Commercial payroll data	Administrative earnings data derived from payroll records, with national coverage.	Obtained only through a data provider. Methodology and coverage vary by vendor.

Why outcomes data is hard to get

Three barriers make outcomes data difficult and expensive to collect. Two of them are scored later in this diagnostic.

THE BARRIER	WHERE IT'S SCORED	CAN YOU CLOSE IT ALONE?
1 Capacity and skill limitations Outcomes data development and reporting calls for dedicated time and expertise. Matching, cleaning, and producing a defensible report is specialist work that rarely sits spare in an existing team.	© Resources Questions 7–9	Often yes — through staffing, training, or contract help.
2 Traditional research methods fall short Surveys and RCTs (Randomized Controlled Trials) are expensive and draw low response rates, so results rarely reflect all of your credential holders.	Not scored Context for the sections that follow	Not a gap to close — it's why administrative data is the route.
3 Administrative data is hard to obtain Access is restricted, and state data covers only in-state, non-federal workers. Anyone who moves away, works for the federal government, or is self-employed falls out of view.	Ⓑ Access Questions 4–6	Rarely — federal and out-of-state coverage needs outside help.

The diagnostic shows you which of these you can address on your own, and where a data partner can help. **Sections Ⓑ and © are where these barriers turn into scores.**

Assess your readiness

One scope question, not scored, then nine questions across three areas.
About fifteen minutes.

FILL THIS IN

Set your scope

YOUR PROGRAM TYPE

☐ Non-Credit (incl.CTE) ☐ For-Credit ☐ Both

THE OUTCOMES YOU'RE EXPECTED TO REPORT

WHO IS ASKING FOR THEM

WHERE YOUR CREDENTIAL HOLDERS WORK

☐ In-state ☐ National ☐ Both

Not scored. This sets the context for everything that follows.

KNOW THIS

How scoring works

0

NO

Not in place.

3

PARTIAL

In progress, or incomplete.

6

YES

In place and working today.

Write your score in the column that applies to your programs. Add the three scores within each area — **(A) Records**, **(B) Access**, **(C) Resources** — for its subtotal.

Each subtotal runs **0 to 18**. Carry all three to the worksheet on **page 11**, where your lowest subtotal sets your readiness level.

If you run both non-credit and for-credit programs, score both columns throughout — you will finish with two separate readiness levels.

Records: The data you hold

Records are the people who earned your credential and the details you hold on them. These questions check whether that data is complete enough to match against employment and earnings data.

WRITE IN **No = 0** not in place **Partial = 3** in progress or incomplete **Yes = 6** in place and working today

	NON-CREDIT (INCL. CTE)			FOR-CREDIT		
	NO	PARTIAL	YES	NO	PARTIAL	YES
	0	3	6	0	3	6
1 One complete list of everyone who earned your credential. A single, current file that lists every credential holder in one place, rather than across separate systems or spreadsheets. <i>Can you produce one file of every person who earned your credential, with the credential name, and the date earned?</i>						
2 Records with the details needed to match. Matching connects your records to employment and earnings data. It requires a baseline set of personal identifiers such as name, date of birth, and current address. Specific matching approaches may require additional identifiers. <i>Do your records include baseline identifiers — name, date of birth, and current address — for every credential holder?</i>						
3 A file you can refresh. Reporting happens on a schedule, so the file needs to be one you can refresh rather than rebuild each reporting cycle. <i>Can you refresh this file each reporting cycle without rebuilding?</i>						
Section A subtotal — Records (0–18)						

Access: Getting the data

Employment and earnings data lives outside your systems. These questions check whether you can obtain the data in-state, out-of-state, and on a recurring basis.

	NON-CREDIT (INCL. CTE)			FOR-CREDIT		
	NO	PARTIAL	YES	NO	PARTIAL	YES
	0	3	6	0	3	6
4 In-state data access. Obtaining this data usually requires a formal agreement with your state agency or its longitudinal data system. <i>Do you obtain and use in-state employment and earnings data for your credential holders?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5 Data on people who work outside your state. State wage records only cover people employed in that state, and the federal data that would fill the gap is not directly accessible. <i>Do you obtain and use employment and earnings data for credential holders who work outside your state?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6 A repeatable process for obtaining data. Getting administrative data once is different from having a routine process to obtain it on the schedule your reporting needs. <i>Can you obtain administrative data on a recurring basis?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Section B subtotal — Access (0–18)						

Resources: The capacity to act

Producing outcomes data takes skills, ownership, and funding. These questions check where you stand on each.

		NON-CREDIT (INCL. CTE)			FOR-CREDIT		
		NO	PARTIAL	YES	NO	PARTIAL	YES
		0	3	6	0	3	6
7	The right skills. Matching, cleaning, and turning data into a defensible report takes specific analytical skills, whether on staff, on contract, or from a data partner. <i>Do you have reliable access to the analytical skills required for matching, cleaning, and reporting?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Clear ownership. Outcomes data work often falls between data, technology, and program teams, with no single owner. <i>Is a specific person or team accountable for outcomes data, with the time to own it?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	Sustained funding. Data access, matching, and analysis are ongoing operational costs, not one-time expenses. <i>Do you have ongoing funding for outcomes data work?</i>	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Section © subtotal — Resources (0–18)							

Your readiness level

Your readiness level shows how prepared your organization is to report on outcomes. Records, Access, and Resources are critical for data readiness:

- Complete records make outcomes matchable.
- Data access makes outcomes visible.
- Resources make reporting sustainable.

Because each area is essential, the three work in concert — a low subtotal in one area limits what your organization can do with outcomes data overall.

To find your readiness level, look at your three subtotals for Records, Access, and Resources. The lowest subtotal places you at one of four progressive readiness levels, from Building to Leading per the table below.

Example: with subtotals of 12, 6, and 9, your lowest is 6, so your level is Developing.

RECORD YOUR SUBTOTALS

Complete one row per column you scored.

PROGRAM TYPE	(A) RECORDS	(B) ACCESS	(C) RESOURCES	LOWEST SUBTOTAL
NON-CREDIT (INCL. CTE)				→
FOR-CREDIT				→

YOUR READINESS SCORE

Lowest of (A) Records / (B) Access / (C) Resources (0–18)

Building	Developing	Established	Leading
0 or 3	6	9 or 12	15 or 18
☐ NC ☐ FC	☐ NC ☐ FC	☐ NC ☐ FC	☐ NC ☐ FC

Tick the band containing your lowest subtotal — NC for non-credit, FC for for-credit.

What your level means

You ticked one of four levels on the previous page. Find yours below.

Building

LOWEST SUBTOTAL 0 OR 3

Your organization is at the starting point of data readiness. Because the data foundations need to be built, reporting on employment and earnings is not yet possible. Your lowest subtotal points to the area to build first — or if all three are 0, start with records.

Developing

LOWEST SUBTOTAL 6

Foundational elements are beginning to take shape across Records, Access, and Resources. Some outcomes reporting is possible, but your lowest subtotal points to the area with the most room for improvement.

Established

LOWEST SUBTOTAL 9 OR 12

Records, Access, and Resources are each substantially in place. Your organization can produce outcomes reporting, though some elements are still being built. Your lowest subtotal points to the area where strengthening will most expand what you can report.

Leading

LOWEST SUBTOTAL 15 OR 18

Records, Access, and Resources are all strong. Your organization can produce reliable outcomes reporting at the full range and cadence your audiences expect.

Your lowest subtotal also names your **primary gap** — the area where investment will most raise your readiness. Turn the page for what to do about it.

Your strengths and gaps

Your primary gap is the area with your lowest subtotal — where investment will most raise your data readiness.

FIND YOUR SCENARIO:

All three subtotals are 0	At the starting point
Records has your lowest subtotal	Records is your primary gap
Access has your lowest subtotal	Access is your primary gap
Resources has your lowest subtotal	Resources is your primary gap
All three subtotals are 15 or higher	All areas at strength

ALL THREE SUBTOTALS ARE 0

At the starting point

Records, Access, and Resources have yet to be built. Start with Records by building a complete, current, matchable credential-holder file with the identifiers needed to link to employment and earnings data. Enhancing Access and Resources builds on that foundation.

RECORDS IS LOWEST

Records area is your primary gap

Records are the credential-holder data your organization holds and everything downstream depends on them.

Look back at your Section (A) answers to see which elements need the most work. For example, a zero on the refresh process question is where to start.

If two or more areas tie for the lowest, focus on Records first, then Access, then Resources — each area depends on the ones before it. If you scored both columns, read each one separately.

ACCESS IS LOWEST

Access area is your primary gap

Access is your organization's ability to obtain employment and earnings data. This data lives outside your systems — with state agencies, federal databases, and private sources.

Look back at your Section (B) answers to see which elements need the most work. For example, a zero on the out-of-state data question is where to start.

RESOURCES IS LOWEST

Resources is your primary gap

Resources is your organization's capacity to sustain outcomes data work over time.

Look back at your Section (C) answers to see which elements need the most work. For example, a zero on the ownership question is where to start.

ALL THREE ARE 15 OR HIGHER

All areas at strength

Records, Access, and Resources are all in place. With no primary gap to close, the opportunity is to sustain that readiness as programs, data sources, and reporting needs evolve.

Closing the data readiness gap

Once you've completed the diagnostic, you'll know where your organization stands — the strengths to build on and the gaps to close.

CredLens helps issuers close these gaps, including the most challenging — obtaining employment and earnings data for credential holders who work outside your state.

CredLens is a national nonprofit and independent affiliate of Strada Education Foundation, focused on providing high-quality outcomes data for degree and non-degree credentials. The CredLens Insights Platform connects issuer-verified credential records to real-world employment, earnings, and education outcomes. Built on rigorous privacy and security foundations, it turns your records into answers in three steps:

STEP ONE

Scope

A structured walkthrough of your goals, programs, and the questions you most need answered.

STEP TWO

Match

Your records matched to independent outcomes data — including the federal data no issuer can obtain alone — and validated against quality thresholds.

STEP THREE

Deliver

The outcomes you need in interactive dashboards, refreshed after each matching cycle.

GETTING STARTED WITH CREDLENS

A few things help you get the most from working with us:

- At least **100 credential earners per year**, per credential, for reliable matching.
- At least **two years of historical data** per credential.
- A minimum of **name, date of birth, and current address** for every credential holder.

Want to improve your outcomes data readiness?

- Discuss your data readiness
- Explore how CredLens can help close your data readiness gaps
- Schedule a demo of the CredLens Insights Platform

START THE CONVERSATION

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