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TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS
ALL YOUTHBUILD GRANTEES

FROM: PORTIA WU 
Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Guidance for Implementing the “Construction Plus” Component of the YouthBuild Program

1. **Purpose.** To provide guidance for YouthBuild grantees implementing the “Construction Plus” component of the YouthBuild program, including a synopsis of what it entails and to inform workforce partners of the expansion of the YouthBuild program to include Construction Plus training in addition to construction training.

2. **References.**

- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (PL 113-128 July 2014), www.doleta.gov/wioa
- YouthBuild Final Rule, 20 CFR Part 672, <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2012/02/15/2012-2373/youthbuild-program>
- Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 15-10, “*Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the Public Workforce System,*” http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=2967
- Notice of Availability of Funds and Solicitation for Grant Applications (SGA) for YouthBuild Grants, SGA-DFA-PY-13-04, http://www.doleta.gov/grants/pdf/YouthBuild_SGA-DFA-PY-13-04.pdf
- CareerOneStop Labor Market Information Center, <http://www.careeronestop.org/lmi/lmihome.asp>
- CareerOneStop Credentials Center, <http://www.careeronestop.org/EducationTraining/KeepLearning/GetCredentials.aspx>
- Labor Market Information Win-Win Network Community of Practice, <https://winwin.workforce3one.org/>

3. **Background.** YouthBuild is a workforce development program that provides employment, education, pre-apprenticeship and registered apprenticeship opportunities, and leadership development training to disconnected youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are high school dropouts. Those eligible may be a member of a low-income family, a foster care

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youth, an offender, a youth with a disability, a child of an incarcerated parent, or a migrant youth. The YouthBuild Transfer Act of 2006 (Transfer Act) established the YouthBuild program in the U.S. Department of Labor (Department) under subtitle D of Title I of WIA, as amended. The Transfer Act authorizes grants for job training and educational activities for YouthBuild participants who, as part of their training, help build or rehabilitate housing for low-income or homeless individuals and families in their respective communities.

In the YouthBuild Final Rule, published February 15, 2012 at 77 FR 9129, the Department expanded the occupational skills training component of the YouthBuild program from solely construction skills training to include skills training in other high-demand jobs toward the goal of economic self-sufficiency. This guidance refers to these additional training industries as “Construction Plus” industries.

- 4. What is Construction Plus?** Construction Plus refers to the inclusion of occupational skills training opportunities for YouthBuild participants in in-demand occupations other than construction. All Department-funded YouthBuild programs are required to offer construction skills training to program participants. Whether Construction Plus training is provided consecutively or in tandem, the required training time of educational skills (50% of the time) and occupational skills (40% of the time) - also known as eligible workforce activities - for each participant must be maintained, as identified in the YouthBuild Final Rule. Further, the participation timeframe must not exceed 24 months, regardless of the participant’s occupational skills training track, and must allow for a follow-up period of not less than 9 months and no more than 12 months, as identified in the YouthBuild Final Rule.

As defined in the SGA issued on February 18, 2014 (SGA-DFA-PY-13-04), only grantees that have been awarded a YouthBuild grant by the Department’s YouthBuild program in a previous grant year are eligible to apply as Construction Plus grantees; first-time DOL YouthBuild grantees are not eligible for Construction Plus as they must first demonstrate their ability to provide construction training, as the core YouthBuild industry, prior to being able to add additional industries for training. Only those previously-funded grantees that were approved through their grant statements of work at the time of grant award are eligible to use grant funds to offer training in Construction Plus occupations. Construction Plus grantees must have demonstrated in their statements of work, through the use of local labor market data, that the proposed additional occupational skills trainings will lead to or prepare participants for employment in high-demand or locally in-demand jobs and that the selected industries will benefit the target communities.

- 5. Labor Market Information Resources.** The Department has many labor market information resources available to grantees for assistance in identifying appropriate Construction Plus industries within their local communities; the CareerOneStop Labor Market Information Center Web page (<http://www.careeronestop.org/lmi/lmihome.asp>) provides information on local labor markets across the country. Additionally, grantees must use comprehensive curricula that, upon completion, lead to the attainment of industry-recognized credentials for program participants. The Labor Market Information Win-Win Network Community of Practice (<https://winwin.workforce3one.org/>) provides valuable information on additional data sources useful for determining in-demand occupations and

skills. Information on related credentials such as industry-recognized certifications and required state occupational licenses are available through the CareerOneStop Credentials Center

(<http://www.careeronestop.org/EducationTraining/KeepLearning/GetCredentials.aspx>). This information can be helpful in developing the required curricula and credentialing pathways.

- 6. Implementing Construction Plus in Your YouthBuild Program.** YouthBuild grantees offering approved Construction Plus training must provide the same level of opportunity and benefit to Construction Plus participants that are available to participants in the core construction training. As with the core construction training, Construction Plus programs must offer participants eligible education activities during at least 50 percent of the time and eligible workforce investment activities during at least 40 percent of the time during which they participate in the program. Up to 10 percent of the time of participation may be used for leadership development and community service activities.

Like the core construction training, Construction Plus training must balance project-based learning and occupational skills training that prepare disconnected youth to gain placement into career pathways and/or further education or training. Construction Plus training must not be limited to classroom learning and must incorporate hands-on training similar to that offered in the core construction training. Additionally, Construction Plus must incorporate community service, youth leadership development, and work experience opportunities like those required in the core construction training.

Grantees have flexibility in determining how the program model includes Construction Plus industries. However, they are required to enroll a sufficient number of participants in the construction skills training component to build or renovate at least one unit of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families or transitional housing for homeless individuals during the grant period of performance. Youth may be divided between construction training and Construction Plus industry(ies) training, based on assessments of interest and skills match or all youth may first be placed in construction training for development of broadly-applicable professional skills, including soft skills (teamwork, leadership, communication) and hard skills (math, reading comprehension) before being further trained in the chosen Construction Plus industry. The grant period of performance and budget should be considered in designing the program model for the addition of Construction Plus.

All program performance measures are the same for the Construction Plus training(s). In particular, grantees should take into consideration the eligibility of YouthBuild participants for industry-recognized credentials and placement opportunities in selected Construction Plus field(s) (see Attachment A, “*Considerations Guide for Credential Attainment for US Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild Grantees,*” for additional information).

- 7. What is an Industry-Recognized Credential?** Within the workforce system, the term credential refers to the attestation of qualification or competence issued to an individual by a third party with the relevant authority or competence to issue such a credential. There are many different types of industry-recognized credentials offered or awarded by various types

of third-party organizations, such as an educational institution or an industry- or occupational-certifying organization. You can find more information on credentials in TEGL No. 15-10 (http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?docn=2967).

An industry-recognized credential provides recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an occupation. An industry-recognized credential is either one that is developed or endorsed by a nationally-recognized industry, professional, or occupational association or organization or one that is sought or accepted by companies within the industry sector for purposes of hiring or recruitment.

Generally, employers develop or endorse these technical or occupational skills standards. A variety of different public and private entities issue credentials, including:

- State agencies, including workforce or education agencies;
- Professional, industry, or employer organizations;
- The Department's Employment and Training Administration/Office of Apprenticeship or state apprenticeship agencies;
- Public regulatory agencies, including state and local licensing boards;
- Programs approved by Job Corps centers or the Department of Veterans Affairs;
- Institutions of higher education governed by an Indian or Native American tribe or tribes; and
- Community colleges.

8. Qualifying Credentials for the YouthBuild Program. A qualifying credential is one that provides a participant with the documentation of education and/or technical or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation. These skills are measurable, based on industry standards, and developed or endorsed by employers. Qualifying credentials for YouthBuild must meet the definition of industry-recognized credentials provided above. Only qualifying credentials are appropriate to be recorded into the YouthBuild Management Information System (MIS) for the "Attainment of Degree/Certificate" performance measure, which measures the number of participants who attain a diploma, a state-recognized high school equivalency credential, or a certificate within 9 months of program exit.

A non-qualifying credential is any diploma or certificate that does not meet the above definition and does not document "measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation." The Department will not count non-qualifying credentials toward the "Attainment of Degree/Certificate" performance measure in the YouthBuild MIS. However, such credentials can be of value to participants as building blocks for educational and/or occupational success. Examples of non-qualifying credentials include: certificates awarded by Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs); single skill certificates, such as CPR, First Aid, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Safety Training, and ServSafe; and work readiness certificates, such as the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) Certificate of Mastery and the WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).

At the state level, the workforce system can recognize specific programs of study and determine if they meet the WIA definition of a credential, as defined in TEGL 15-10. Local WIA youth service providers may be of assistance to YouthBuild grantees in determining if a certificate offered for a particular completed program of study qualifies as a credential within their state. YouthBuild grantees should consult their assigned Federal Project Officers with any questions regarding qualifying credentials.

In addition to identifying qualifying credentials, the stackability and portability of credentials are also important factors in determining whether to pursue a particular course of credentialing in the Construction Plus component. A credential is considered “stackable” when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build an individual’s qualifications and help the individual to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs within the same industry. A credential is considered “portable” when it is recognized and accepted as verifying the qualifications of an individual in other settings such as, in other geographic areas, at other educational institutions, or by other industries or employers. To the extent possible, YouthBuild grantees that incorporate Construction Plus into their programs should strive to identify occupational skills training fields that will lead to both stackable and portable credentials within the chosen Construction Plus industries.

The Department developed a tool to help you determine potential Construction Plus industries and the related credentials, particularly as they relate to the guidance in TEGL 15-10 on qualifying, stackable, and portable credentials. Attachment A, “*Considerations Guide for Credential Attainment for US Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild Grantees,*” provides a series of framing questions that can help programs determine whether a Construction Plus credential pathway is the right fit for their YouthBuild program participants.

Please find additional information on what constitutes an industry-recognized credential in TEGL No. 15-10 at: http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?docn=2967.

9. **Inquiries.** Questions on this TEGL may be addressed to the appropriate ETA regional office.
10. **Attachment.** *Considerations Guide for Credential Attainment for US Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild Grantees*

Considerations Guide for Credential Attainment for US Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild Grantees

DOL YouthBuild grantees should become familiar with TEGL 15-10, “Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the Public Workforce System,” which describes the criteria for ensuring that credentials are career-enhancing and meet the standards for the degree/certificate attainment performance measure (see *Attachment 2*). Some of the important criteria to consider are whether credentials are stackable and portable. A credential is considered “stackable” when it is part of a sequence of credentials that can be accumulated over time to build up an individual’s qualifications and help him/her to move along a career pathway or up a career ladder to different and potentially higher-paying jobs. A credential is considered “portable” when it is recognized and accepted as verifying the qualifications of an individual in other settings, such as a different geographic area, across educational institutions, or by other industries or employers. See TEGL 15-10 for further explanation of the attributes of career-enhancing credentials.

To be consistent with TEGL 15-10, the considerations outlined below should be used to help YouthBuild grantees determine which certifications they should offer to participants. These considerations help grantees to focus on the *value-added* aspects of certifications as they relate to career entry and advancement. Grantees should use these considerations as a guiding tool for designing occupational skills training and certification opportunities for youth, particularly for those programs that were previously funded by DOL and are now considering expansion of training into new labor markets. The considerations outlined below provide a lens through which DOL YouthBuild grantees can ensure that they incorporate key components for successful attainment of credentials into their program design. There is no right or wrong answers to the considerations questions. Rather, these questions frame the intent of providing career-enhancing occupational skills training to youth participants and illustrate what can be gained by selecting stackable and portable credentials, certifications, or degrees that have labor market value; in other words, credentials that are recognized by employers and considered valuable in hiring decisions.

This Considerations Guide provides insight to grantees to consider when selecting occupational skills training curricula that the program will use and the types of credentials to be pursued within each industry. DOL requires each program to offer participants the opportunity to attain an industry-recognized credential in construction. Additionally, with advance approval from DOL, beginning with the 2012 grant awards, those that have been previously-funded may now include additional occupational skills training opportunities in in-demand sectors as part of their DOL YouthBuild program model.

Industry-recognized credentials provide an opportunity for YouthBuild participants to demonstrate and document skills and may lead to advantages in the hiring process, higher earnings, enhanced job security, or advancement along a career pathway. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), between 2012 and 2022, 19 of the 30 fastest growing occupations will require some form of post-secondary education. Moreover, “occupations that

typically require an apprenticeship are projected to grow 22.2 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than any other on-the-job training assignment.” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections - 2012-2022, December 2013)

Definition of Credential

TEGL 15-10 defines “credential” as a broad term that encompasses educational certificates or degrees, occupational licenses, Registered Apprenticeships, and industry-recognized certifications.

Considerations:

1. What is the labor market value of the proposed credential?
 - a. Is the skills training responsive to employer needs and employer-driven (i.e., does the industry drive the curriculum of the credential)?
 - b. Does it meet the skills and competencies as identified by the industry/employer?
 - c. Is the credential recognized by employers and taken into consideration in hiring, promotion, and compensation decisions?
 - d. Are the skills documented through the credential currently in demand in the local labor market?
 - e. Does the training increase the participant’s employment potential in a demand occupation, either nationally or locally?

2. What is the length and intensity of the skills training course of study?
 - a. Are the design, delivery, and duration of the curriculum sufficient to achieve learning outcomes? What is the minimum length of time required to attain the necessary skills for certification?
 - b. Are there opportunities for on-the-job training or internships affiliated with the course of study? Is there a minimum requirement for work-based training?
 - c. Is an apprenticeship required to gain the credential?

3. What are the pre-requisites for the credentialing (educational or otherwise)?
 - a. Is an entrance examination required?
 - b. Is a high school diploma or equivalency required? Can career and technical training be started concurrently with secondary education?
 - c. Are there minimum requirements beyond a high school diploma for each credential offered?

4. What are the affiliated or stackable credentials related to the field(s) under consideration?
 - a. Does it allow students to achieve the skills to get, keep, and progress in a chosen job or to enter further post-secondary or vocational training options?
 - b. Does it incorporate some other educational components beyond the vocational field of study, such as college credit or foundational coursework?
 - c. Are there opportunities for further post-secondary study or training in a related field that lead to additional credentials?

- d. Is the credential embedded in a larger career pathway model (such as the progression from Paramedic or Certified Nursing Assistant to Licensed Practical Nurse to Registered Nurse in which skills demonstrated in each credential provide foundations for the next level) that provides opportunities to continue developing income-enhancing skills and competencies?
 - e. Does the vocational training include apprenticeable fields or lead to apprenticeship opportunities?
 - f. Are other public agencies, including educational institutions, economic development organizations, and human services providers, included in certification development, to ensure the effective leveraging and targeting of public resources aimed at increasing the skills of American workers?
5. Does the credential assist participants with specific barriers to employment to access career pathways?
- a. Does it provide a demonstration of additional training for youth populations that may often be overlooked in hiring (such as justice-involved youth)?
 - b. Are there credentials from which specific populations are excluded— either from attaining the degree or being gainfully employed in the affiliated industry?