First Credential Needs Assessment Response Guide

This guide helps LEAs prepare clear, complete answers to every section of the First Credential Needs Assessment. It explains what each question is asking, what information to include, what documentation to attach, and common mistakes to avoid.

General expectations for every response

The Needs Assessment is intended to help LEAs identify needs associated with any of the five First Credential routes. The process is designed so that the needs assessment informs the implementation plan, as LEAs analyze how funds can best be utilized to increase student attainment of First Credentials.

With this perspective, the needs assessment should be approached from a holistic perspective, and should include the following considerations:

1. **Current condition:** What is currently available?
2. **Evidence:** How do I know this? What evidence validates the information?
3. **Identified need or gap:** What prevents full implementation or student access?
4. **Proposed response:** What must change, be purchased, or be developed?

Five First Credential routes

Organize responses around the route or routes being assessed:

- **Concurrent Enrollment:** 12-18 concurrent enrollment credits, including Written Communications and Quantitative Literacy courses.
- **Technical College Certificate:** An approved certificate or at least 300 hours of an approved certificate at a Utah public technical college.
- **CTE Pathway Completion:** A state-approved sequence of high school CTE courses.
- **Industry-Recognized Credential:** A credential included on the First Credential Master List.
- **Youth Apprenticeship:** At least 300 hours through an approved youth apprenticeship pathway with related training instruction through a public secondary or postsecondary institution.

Section 1: LEA Profile

What this section is asking

Provide the identifying information needed to establish the exact scope of the assessment. Only include schools whose programs, students, facilities, staffing, and partnerships are represented in the remaining sections.

Include:

- Official LEA name
- Names of all participating schools
- Total enrollment represented by the assessment
- Number of participating schools
- Primary contact
- Secondary contact
- Official titles, telephone numbers, and email addresses

Quality check

Make sure the enrollment total used here matches the denominator used in Section 5.

Section 2: Program Alignment

A. Targeted Pathways and Programs

What the question is asking

Identify the specific programs or pathways the LEA intends to launch, expand, or strengthen through First Credential implementation funding.

May include:

- First Credential route
- Program or pathway name
- Participating school or schools
- Credential students will earn
- Whether the program is new, expanding, or being improved
- Intended student population

- Reason the program was selected

Strong example

The LEA will target the Health Science pathway through CTE Pathway Completion, the Certified Nursing Assistant credential through the Industry-Recognized Credential route, and a technical college certificate option. The program will serve students at two high schools and will expand access for students who currently cannot participate because of limited lab capacity, transportation, and instructor availability.

Avoid

- Listing broad fields such as “healthcare” without naming the pathway or credential
- Naming a credential that is not on the approved First Credential Master List
- Listing several unrelated programs without explaining the priority need

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B. Program and Course Inventory

What the table is asking

Document what is currently available for targeted pathways or programs. Assess each route individually and include summary statements of programs and courses offered for each route that is not targeted.

Identify gaps in current routes, such as missing Written Communications and Quantitative Literacy courses for the concurrent enrollment route.

C. Stackability and Postsecondary Alignment

What the question is asking

Explain how the identified credential becomes a building block toward an advanced credential, postsecondary certificate, degree, or career without requiring students to repeat training they have already completed.

May include:

- Credential students earn first
- Next credential, certificate, or degree in the sequence
- Institution recognizing the credential or credit

- Number or type of credits or competencies that transfer
- Career or occupation connected to the sequence
- Any articulation agreement supporting the transition

Strong response framework

Students who complete [initial credential] may continue into [advanced certificate or degree] at [institution]. Through [articulation agreement, CE credit, advanced placement, or prior-learning process], students receive [specific credit or advanced standing]. This reduces duplication by allowing students to begin at [next course, level, or program milestone].

Answering the checkboxes

Only mark **Yes** when the LEA can verify that:

- The credential connects to a larger credential or degree;
- Applicable CE courses are included in a USHE General Education Certificate; and
- The CE sequence includes the required Written Communications and Quantitative Literacy courses.

Do not mark "Yes" based solely on the possibility that a college might accept the credit.

Section 3: Capacity and Readiness

A. Staffing

For each role, identify:

- Whether the current instructor or proctor is qualified
- School or institution
- Courses or assessments the person is authorized to teach or proctor
- Additional personnel still needed

The assessment specifically asks about CE instructors, CTE instructors, technical college/shared instructors, and qualified proctors for IRC assessments.

Hiring, recruitment, retention, and support

May address:

- Availability of qualified candidates
- Salary or stipend competitiveness
- Hard-to-fill endorsements or industry qualifications
- Shared-instructor options
- Partnerships with technical colleges
- Professional learning and certification costs
- Mentoring and onboarding
- Retention strategies
- Succession or contingency planning

Strong example

The LEA has one qualified instructor who can teach the introductory sequence but does not have sufficient staff to offer the advanced course at both high schools. The LEA will pursue a shared-instructor agreement with the technical college and support one existing CTE teacher in obtaining the required industry certification.

Training for diverse student populations

If "Yes" is selected, identify:

- Training provider
- Training topic
- Frequency
- Participating staff

Examples include special education accommodations, Universal Design for Learning, English learner supports, trauma-responsive practices, accessible laboratory instruction, and nondiscrimination in nontraditional career fields.

B. Facilities and Equipment

Current physical space

Describe:

- Whether the space supports the targeted program
- Specific modifications required

Future physical space

Identify the space needed to operate the proposed program at its intended enrollment. Describe needed renovations or facility modifications, which may include:

- Type and approximate size of space
- Utility, ventilation, electrical, plumbing, or technology requirements
- Safety equipment
- Any other modifications needed

Accessibility

Assess whether students with disabilities can:

- Enter and move through the space
- Use workstations and equipment
- Access safety devices
- Participate in laboratory or shop activities
- Reach off-campus partner sites

If modifications are needed, identify them specifically.

Equipment inventory

For high-cost items needed, include:

- Item name
- Quantity
- Purpose
- Approximate cost

Equipment lifecycle

Explain:

- Who maintains the equipment

- Annual maintenance costs
- Inspection or calibration schedule
- Software or licensing requirements
- Replacement schedule
- Funding source after the grant
- Responsibility for repairs

Additional needs

Include resources not captured elsewhere, such as:

- Curriculum
- Assessment fees
- Credential exam vouchers
- Instructor certification fees
- Personal protective equipment
- Software licenses
- Student uniforms
- Marketing materials
- Data tracking systems

C. Schedule and Enrollment

Schedule flexibility

Describe whether students can complete the full sequence without conflicts involving:

- Graduation requirements
- Required academic courses
- Single-section courses
- Transportation windows
- Technical college schedules

- Work-based learning hours
- Athletics or extracurricular participation
- Block versus traditional schedules

If changes are required, identify the specific change, such as offering a double-period lab, adjusting the bus departure time, adding a zero-hour course, or aligning bell schedules between schools.

Program discontinuation

If a new program would replace or reduce another one:

- Name the affected program
- Explain the reason
- Provide enrollment and completion data
- Describe the effect on students and staff
- Explain how current students will complete their sequence

Do not characterize replacement as a positive outcome without acknowledging the students who may lose access.

Student demand

Refer to documented evidence such as:

- Student interest survey results
- Current enrollment
- Course request data
- Waitlists
- Counseling records
- Career interest inventory results
- Focus groups
- Historical pathway completion
- Student requests for off-campus programs

Include the survey date, number of respondents, grade levels, participating schools, and number or percentage expressing interest.

Marketing and outreach

Describe concrete activities, responsible staff, target audiences, and timing. Examples include:

- Middle school pathway nights
- Parent information sessions
- Counselor presentations
- Classroom demonstrations
- Employer showcases
- Multilingual family materials
- Student ambassadors
- Social media campaigns
- Direct outreach to underrepresented students

Program sustainability

Provide projected enrollment for years 1, 2, and 3. Explain the assumptions supporting the estimates, such as feeder-school enrollment, survey results, course requests, and historical conversion rates.

D. Transportation

Complete the detailed transportation questions only when current capacity does not meet student needs.

Off-campus access

Identify:

- Student origin and destination
- Distance and travel time
- Current route and frequency

- Technical college or partner schedule
- Number of students needing transportation
- Missed instructional time
- Vehicle or route gap
- Estimated recurring cost

Personnel needs

Specify:

- Driver positions
- Required endorsements or training
- Substitute-driver needs
- Supervision or aide requirements
- Coordinator or dispatcher responsibilities

Budget sustainability

Identify the long-term funding source for:

- Fuel
- Maintenance
- Insurance
- Driver compensation
- Vehicle replacement
- Accessibility equipment

First Credential funding should not be described as the permanent funding source for recurring transportation costs.

Special populations

Explain accommodations such as:

- Wheelchair-accessible vehicles
- Rural pickup points

- Flexible routes
- Individualized transportation plans
- Aides or additional supervision
- Adjusted schedules
- Communication with families
- Transportation for students without reliable personal vehicles

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E. Barriers

What the question is asking

Identify the specific local obstacles preventing implementation. The assessment gives examples such as funding, geography, and policy.

Responses may include:

- What the barrier is
- Which students or schools it affects
- Its effect on enrollment, completion, or access
- Proposed action
- Whether the barrier is a one-time start-up issue or an ongoing issue

Strong example

Students at the district's rural high school travel 42 minutes each way to the technical college. The current bus schedule allows students to attend only one of the college's two daily laboratory blocks, limiting participation to 18 students. The LEA proposes adding a scheduled afternoon route and aligning the high school's fourth-period dismissal with the technical college start time.

Avoid:

- "Funding is a barrier" without naming the unfunded cost
- "Students lack interest" without survey or enrollment evidence
- Describing the grant itself as the only solution

F. Leadership Support

May include:

- Leadership roles supporting the plan
- Strategic plan or board priority connected to First Credential
- Staff time or local funds committed
- Decisions leadership has already made
- Governance or oversight structure
- Progress-monitoring process
- Sustainability commitment

Strong response framework

The superintendent and secondary leadership team have incorporated First Credential participation into the LEA's college and career readiness strategy. The LEA has designated [role] to coordinate implementation, committed [resource], and established quarterly reviews of enrollment, completion, access, and credential attainment. The initiative aligns with the LEA's strategic objective to [specific objective].

Section 4: Industry and Postsecondary Partnerships

A. Industry Partnerships and Labor Market Demand

What the table is asking

Connect each targeted program to active employers and regional workforce demand.

Program or pathway

Use the same official name used in Section 2.

Industry partner

List only organizations that have an active or developing role. Describe their contribution, such as:

- Worksite experiences

- Apprenticeship positions
- Equipment donations
- Curriculum validation
- Guest instruction
- Employee mentors
- Mock interviews
- Credential review
- Hiring consideration

Regional labor market demand

Use current regional information such as:

- Employment projections
- Annual openings
- Median wages
- Job posting trends
- Employer vacancy data
- Regional economic development priorities

Strong table entry

Program: Medical Assistant
Partner: [Employer name]
Demand: [Number] projected annual regional openings, with a median wage of [amount], according to [source and date].

B. Postsecondary Partnerships

USHE partnerships and support

Name each institution and explain its specific contribution, including:

- Advising
- Faculty

- Concurrent Enrollment courses
- Technical instruction
- Grant collaboration
- Equipment or laboratory access
- Curriculum alignment
- Student transition support
- Credit recognition

Partnership communication

Describe the actual communication process, which may include:

- Meeting frequency
- Participants
- Responsible LEA and institution contacts
- Method for reviewing course alignment
- Process for updating agreements
- How credit-transfer concerns are resolved
- How changes are communicated to students and counselors

Program expansion

Distinguish among:

- Current formal partnerships
- Current informal partnerships
- Partnerships under development
- Future opportunities

Address opportunities involving technical college instruction, CE, shared instructors, specialized laboratories, Early College, and articulation agreements, as applicable.

C. Duplication of Effort

Current landscape

Inventory related programs already provided by:

- The contracted technical college
- Degree-granting institutions
- Neighboring LEAs
- Regional or magnet programs
- The LEA-based technical high school, if applicable

For each program, consider:

- Location
- Eligibility
- Available seats
- Schedule
- Travel requirements
- Cost
- Student participation
- Completion outcomes
- Whether students can reasonably access it

A program's existence does not automatically mean it is accessible to the LEA's students.

Efficiency and logistics

Look for:

- Students retaking content
- Similar courses with no articulated credit
- Overlapping equipment purchases
- Competing schedules
- Multiple programs serving the same students
- Underused partner capacity

- Transportation barriers that make an existing option inaccessible

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D. Duplication Analysis

If duplication exists, explain why the proposed program is still needed. Appropriate justification may include:

- Geographic distance
- Insufficient seats
- Schedule incompatibility
- Lack of accessibility
- Different credential outcome
- Program waitlist
- Underserved student population
- Partner program not available to high school students
- Inability of the existing program to meet documented regional demand

Avoid justifying duplication solely by stating that students prefer an in-district option.

E. Industry Alignment

May include:

- Occupations students are preparing for
- Credentials associated with each occupation
- Employer partners
- Work-based learning or apprenticeship opportunities
- Postsecondary continuation options
- Evidence that employers helped shape the program
- Evidence that the credential supports employment or advancement

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Section 5: Student Demographics and Participation

A. Current Student Participation by Route

Entering student counts

Report the number of students currently (2025-2026) participating in each route.

Calculating percentage of enrollment

Route student count ÷ total enrollment represented in Section 1 × 100

Example:

- Total enrollment: 2,000
- Students participating in the CTE route: 260
- Calculation: 260 ÷ 2,000 × 100
- Reported percentage: 13.0%

Counting duplications

A student may be counted in more than one route if the student participates in multiple routes. Therefore, the total across the five routes may be greater than the number of unique students. Label the total clearly as including duplications.

B. Student Demographics

What the table is asking

Report participation among demographic groups so the LEA can determine whether students have equitable access to high-wage, high-demand pathways. The categories include gender, race and ethnicity, disability status, economic disadvantage, English learner status, foster youth, and McKinney-Vento status.

Calculating percentage of First Credential route enrollment

Before calculating percentages, establish one consistent denominator. The recommended denominator is the number of **unique students** participating in at least one First Credential route.

Number of participating students in the demographic group ÷ total unique First Credential participants × 100

Example:

- Unique First Credential participants: 400
- Participants identified as economically disadvantaged: 140
- Calculation: 140 ÷ 400 × 100
- Reported percentage: 35.0%

Data-quality rules

- Use the same reporting period (2025-2026) for all categories.
- Define whether counts represent participants, completers, or credential earners.
- Do not add race categories together if students may be represented in multiple categories.

C. Targeted Support

What the question is asking

Describe specific marketing and accessibility strategies for special populations, rather than offering a general statement that the program is open to all students.

Examples of targeted strategies

- Multilingual family information sessions for English learner families
- Accessible program materials and laboratory accommodations for students with disabilities
- Exam-fee support for economically disadvantaged students
- Transportation assistance for rural students
- Direct counselor outreach to students entering nontraditional career fields
- Flexible scheduling for students experiencing homelessness
- Coordination with foster care and McKinney-Vento liaisons
- Accessible work-based learning placements
- Mentoring by industry professionals

Strong response pattern

Students with disabilities represent 14% of LEA enrollment but 6% of current pathway participation. To address this difference, the LEA will conduct individual accessibility reviews before enrollment, provide adapted laboratory workstations, train instructors in accessible instruction, and include special education staff in pathway advising. The LEA will review enrollment, persistence, and credential completion each semester.

D. Advisory Support

May include:

- Current scheduling and advising barriers
- Students affected
- Cause of each barrier
- Action to address it

Possible barriers

- Counselors lack current credential information
- Students begin sequences too late
- Graduation requirements conflict with technical college blocks
- Families do not understand the five routes
- Students cannot see how courses stack
- Advising materials are not available in family home languages
- Some students are advised away from non-traditional fields
- Credit-transfer expectations are unclear

Practical responses

- Develop four-year pathway maps
- Train counselors annually
- Incorporate First Credential planning into student education and occupation plans
- Flag missing pathway courses before senior year
- Develop multilingual advising materials

- Establish a technical college referral process
- Conduct individual schedule audits
- Track students from interest through credential completion

LEA Certification

The authorized representative must be the superintendent or another LEA representative with authority to commit the LEA's resources. The certification confirms that the LEA's planning aligns with Utah statute and the statewide First Credential Master Plan.

The completed assessment must be submitted by **November 16, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. to firstcredential@schools.utah.gov.** The First Credential Oversight Committee will provide feedback that the LEA will use when developing its Implementation Plan.