First Credential Needs Assessment Guide

This document is organized as follows:

Part 1: Needs Assessment Checklist (optional for LEAs)
Part 2: Evaluation Framework
Part 3: Domain Scoring Criteria
Part 4: Need Placement Bands & Band-Specific Operational Requirements

Part 1: Needs Assessment Checklist

This optional checklist helps LEAs confirm alignment with the Utah First Credential Program, as established in statute, and the statewide Master Plan. Completion supports readiness for implementation and grant consideration.

A. Program Alignment & Gap Analysis

- ☐ The LEA has identified a program or pathway that allows for growth in First Credentials earned by students.
- ☐ Credentials and coursework are designed to build toward college degrees or advanced training.
- ☐ Concurrent Enrollment offerings include required Writing and Quantitative Literacy courses.
- ☐ Articulation agreements exist or are planned for any pathway identified as stackable.
- ☐ Gaps in current offerings have been identified.

B. Capacity & Readiness

- ☐ Qualified instructors and administrative support are identified or recruitment plans are in place.
- ☐ Facilities and equipment needs are identified as start-up or expansion costs.
- ☐ Equipment maintenance and replacement costs are accounted for.
- ☐ Any needed adjustments to the master schedule have been identified.
- ☐ Transportation needs for off-campus access are documented.
- ☐ Any additional barriers have been identified.

C. Industry & Postsecondary Alignment

- ☐ Proposed credentials align with documented labor market demand.
- ☐ Industry-Recognized Credentials appear on the approved Master Credential List.
- ☐ Active or planned industry partnerships support work-based learning where required.
- ☐ Opportunities to expand partnerships with USHE institutions are articulated.
- ☐ The proposed program or pathway does not duplicate existing efforts.

D. Student Demographics & Participation

- ☐ The LEA has a clear picture of current student participation and demographics.
- ☐ The program supports students graduating with a high school diploma and a credential.
- ☐ Advising barriers are identified and addressed.
- ☐ Planning considers access for students who may face participation barriers.

Part 2: Domain Scoring Criteria

The First Credential Oversight Committee evaluates Local Education Agency (LEA) Needs Assessments to determine their readiness for program implementation and grant consideration. The placement is based on a 33-point framework that evaluates the four domains—Demand & Alignment, Capacity & Readiness, Industry & Postsecondary Partnership, and Student Participation.

Reviewers will use the following criteria to assign scores across core evaluation areas.

PROGRAM ALIGNMENT & GAP ANALYSIS

Program Alignment - Focus: Overall integration with the First Credential Program objectives

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Weak or informal alignment	Targeted pathways are vague. Course inventory lacks required writing and quantitative literacy courses for CE routes. IRCs are not on the First Credential Master List.
2	Adequate alignment	Pathways map directly to the First Credential Master List. Course inventory is complete.
3	Exemplary alignment	Multiple stackable routes are established leading to postsecondary certificates or degrees. Complete course alignment across options.

Gap Analysis - Focus: Overall assessment of gaps

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Weak or informal analysis	Gap analysis is weak and informal without much detail.
2	Adequate analysis	Gap analysis is general but covers most areas.
3	Exemplary analysis	Detailed, thorough gap analysis covering all areas.

CAPACITY & READINESS

Capacity - Focus: Staffing

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Minimal capacity	Staffing or proctor qualifications and plans are unaddressed.
2	Sufficient capacity	Most staff are qualified and needed staff are assigned or the LEA has recruitment plans.
3	Exemplary capacity	All staff are highly qualified and staffing needs are met.

Capacity - Focus: Facilities and equipment

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Minimal capacity	Facility and high-cost equipment needs are listed without start-up details or lifecycle replacement plans.
2	Sufficient capacity	Physical space and equipment inventories are detailed with start-up costs identified. facilities/equipment identified, and administrative support demonstrated.
3	Exemplary capacity	Physical space is appropriate with plans for growth as needed. Multi-year equipment maintenance and replacement lifecycle plan.

Capacity - Focus: Transportation and Other Barriers

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Minimal capacity	Transportation barriers are unaddressed. Multiple barriers that the LEA has not addressed.
2	Sufficient capacity	Transportation gaps are addressed and fuel and maintenance funding sources are clear. Minimal barriers listed with additional support required.
3	Exemplary capacity	The LEA's transportation capacity currently meets the needs of the students.

Capacity - Focus: Enrollment

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Minimal capacity	The master schedule will not accommodate the addition of a program or pathway. Student interest has not been assessed or is weak.
2	Sufficient capacity	Master schedule adjustments are identified. Some evidence of student interest in the program or pathway.
3	Exemplary capacity	Highly flexible master schedule. Strong student interest.

Readiness - Focus: Leadership commitment

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Minimal readiness	No administrative support.
2	Sufficient readiness	Administrative support demonstrated.
3	Exemplary readiness	Strong alignment with LEA priorities with strong administrative support.

INDUSTRY & POSTSECONDARY PARTNERSHIPS

Industry & Postsecondary Partnership - Focus: Depth and quality of industry and postsecondary partnerships.

Score	Descriptor	Characteristics
1-3	Informal partnerships	Workforce demand is asserted without partner verification. Postsecondary communication channels are informal. Potential duplication of effort with USHE institutions is unaddressed.
4-6	Functional partnerships	Active industry partners with verified regional labor demand data. Established communication channels with USHE partners. Justification provided confirming proposed programs do not replicate existing local offerings.
7-9	Exemplary partnerships	Strong employer commitments providing clear connections for students. Formal USHE plans for expansion of shared resources. Thorough duplication analysis demonstrating maximum regional efficiency and clear career pathways.

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS & PARTICIPATION

Student Demographics & Participation - Focus: Participation data and scheduling barriers.

Score	Descriptors	Evidence Characteristics
1	Incomplete access plan	Baseline route participation counts are missing or incomplete. Demographic tracking lacks focus on special populations. Outreach or advising plans are unclear.
2	Complete access plan	Complete baseline participation data across all five routes. Clear demographic tracking. Actionable marketing and accessibility plans tailored for special populations. Strategies provided to overcome advising and scheduling barriers.

3	Exemplary access plan	Complete baseline data with anticipated increase in enrollment. Proactive marketing campaigns. Comprehensive counseling and advisory framework designed to eliminate scheduling barriers for all underrepresented groups.

Part 4: Need Placement Continuum & Operational Requirements

The total rubric score (out of 27 points) determines the LEA's ultimate placement within the Need Placement Continuum.
REMINDER: Need placement informs support and planning requirements; it is not a funding award or program approval.

Points	Category	Readiness Level	What to Expect
0-9 pts	**Targeted Support**	**Substantial Guidance:** Multiple gaps identified; technical assistance required; goals are set with assistance.	Extensive technical assistance and a long checklist of requirements.
10-18 pts	**Standard Assurance**	**Routine Checks:** Some gaps identified; some routine checks required, with some conditions.	Routine checks on progress addressing identified gaps.
19-27 pts	**Minimal Assurance**	**High Autonomy:** Few gaps identified across all domains; minimal confirmations required, and conditions are rare.	Very few requirements; mostly just statutory basics.

Need Placement Continuum

Targeted Support Operational Requirements

- **Implementation Application Focus:** The Oversight Committee will collaborate with the LEA in creating clear, measurable goals targeting each area below a "2" in the needs assessment.
- **Implementation Directives**: The LEA will map an actionable timeline to systematically address specific gaps identified during evaluation.
- **Oversight/Assurances**: LEA leadership must participate in targeted technical assistance sessions.
- **Guiding Philosophy**: Placement is strictly descriptive of current readiness, not an indication of final approval; technical assistance is focused on increasing readiness and directly tied to student outcomes.

Standard Assurance Operational Requirements

- **Implementation Application Focus**: The Oversight Committee will collaborate with the LEA in creating clear, measurable goals targeting each area below a "2" in the needs assessment.
- **Oversight/Assurances**: Agree to a brief, focused list of time-bound requirements designed to close minor infrastructure or planning gaps.

Minimal Assurance Operational Requirements

- **Implementation Application Focus**: The LEA will have autonomy in creating clear, measurable goals.
- **Oversight/Assurances**: Provide critical, high-level updates only. Program intervention or state-level conditions are rare.
- **Peer Exemplar Program** (Encouraged): Band 4 LEAs are encouraged to share best-practice documentation (e.g., pathway maps, procurement blueprints) and participate in state-level mentorship or advisory sessions to support other LEAs.