

Industry-Recognized Credential Application Support

Since summer 2025, in preparation for the 2026 IRC application cycle, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) revised its [IRC webpage](#) to incorporate sample materials from the prior year's application process and a description of [example artifacts](#) for each core criteria, increasing transparency and clarity for applicants.

The application window reopened on August 1, 2025, and remained open through October 31, 2025. During this period, MSDE continued to provide publicly available sample applications and ongoing technical assistance to support high-quality submissions.

MSDE also expanded the IRC Review Committee to include additional representation from key partners, such as the Maryland Department of Commerce and the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). Including these stakeholders provided diverse perspectives on workforce alignment, economic priorities, and post-secondary pathways, ensuring that the IRCs under review meet the broader needs of Maryland's workforce and education system.

This expanded committee strengthened cross-agency alignment and ensured that applications were evaluated for accessibility, representation, functionality, and alignment with [policy criteria](#) established by the Governor's Workforce Development Board CTE Committee.

Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC) Review Committee included:

- Coordinator, Industry Recognized Credentials – Maryland State Department of Education
- Coordinator, Career Connected Learning – Maryland State Department of Education
- Coordinator, Career Counseling – Maryland State Department of Education
- Coordinator, Pathway Implementation and Support – Maryland State Department of Education
- Coordinator, Equity and Civil Rights – Maryland State Department of Education
- Director, Advanced Academics and GT Programs – Maryland State Department of Education
- Director, The Learning Experience – Maryland State Department of Education
- Coordinator, Comprehensive Arts Education – Maryland State Department of Education
- Specialist, Secondary Transition Performance – Maryland State Department of Education
- Program Manager, Apprenticeship and Training – Maryland Department of Labor
- Senior Advisor, CTE Committee - Governor's Workforce Development Board
- Director, Office of Talent and Workforce – Maryland Department of Commerce
- Deputy Secretary – Maryland Higher Education Commission
- Executive Director - Maryland FFA (Special consultation only)

On September 11, 2025, IRC Review Committee members received an orientation, detailed review process training, and ongoing collaboration with MSDE's IRC Coordinator. Each subject matter expert was assigned IRC applications to review alongside an evaluation form and submitted their findings to the IRC Coordinator. Each evaluation form verified that the IRC applications under review met the seven core criteria, were accessible to a high school student, and flagged instances where follow-up or additional support for the applicant was necessary. The seven required criteria include:

1. Aligns with in-demand occupations
2. Provides documented outcomes
3. Validated by industry
4. Assessment-based
5. Standards-driven
6. Attainable and accessible
7. Portable

Two additional criteria, stackable and renewable, are preferred but not required.

The IRC Coordinator monitored the progress of the portfolio of evaluations and provided technical assistance to applicants if their submissions were flagged as incomplete or requiring clarification.

When an application was flagged as incomplete or requires additional information during the review process, MSDE promptly contacted the applicant via email, providing clear instructions for addressing the identified issues. If further clarification was needed, MSDE either scheduled or responded to requests for Google Meet discussions to ensure a thorough understanding of the necessary steps.

Each email acknowledged the submission, thanked the applicant for their effort, and offered detailed guidance on the core criteria, application qualifications, and submission requirements. The emails also included links to the MSDE IRC webpage, recommended artifacts and sample artifacts to assist with revisions. Applicants were encouraged to review the available resources and reach out for further support if needed.

MSDE maintained a comprehensive record of all communication, including emails and virtual meetings, to ensure transparency and accountability. This structured process allowed applicants to address flagged issues effectively, ensuring timely and successful application completion.

Application Data for Cycle Two

This report presents the findings of the Maryland State Department of Education’s Fall 2025 review of applications for the Maryland State Approved Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC) list. The IRC Review Committee established at MSDE reviewed 91 applications submitted by various organizations, including Local Education Agencies (LEAs), government agencies, for-profit organizations, non-profit organizations, and others. Subject matter experts reviewed a total of 75 unique and non-duplicative applications, evaluating them based on the criteria established in policy by the CTE Committee. Recommendations have been made accordingly.

The report provides a detailed overview of the distribution of submissions, the career clusters shaping the portfolio of applications, and MSDE’s final endorsement. Additionally, this report outlines key recommendations for the CTE Committee’s consideration during their review, along with feedback for improving the review process and ensuring alignment with industry standards and educational programs of study.

APPLICATION BY SUBMISSION TYPE

Submission Type	Number of Applications
Local Education Agency	21
Government Agency	15
For-Profit Organization	29
Non-Profit Organization	22
Community College	4
Other	1
Total Applications Submitted	92
Total Duplicated Applications	16
Total Already State-Approved Industry-Recognized Credential	1
Total New Non-Duplicative IRC’s Applications	75

APPLICATION OUTCOME BY CAREER CLUSTER

Career Cluster	Number of Applications	Recommended	Not Recommended	Deferred Recommendation
Advanced Manufacturing	5	1	2	2
Agriculture	2		2	
Arts, Entertainment & Design	1			1
Construction	4	2	2	
Digital Technology	14	3	11	
Education	2		2	
Financial Services	3		3	
Healthcare & Human Services	13	2	9	2
Hospitality, Events & Tourism	4		4	
Management & Entrepreneurship	5		5	
Marketing & Sales	2		2	
Public Service & Safety	6	1	4	1
Supply Chain & Transportation	14	13	1	
Total	75	22	47	6
*Excludes 16 duplicates and one already state-approved				

BY OUTCOME

Decision Outcome	Number of Applications
Recommend Applications in this category demonstrated excellence in meeting all seven required core criteria. These submissions included high-quality artifacts supported by strong evidence from a variety of stakeholders and resources. They clearly showed potential for gainful employment and significant value to Maryland's workforce system, as well as alignment with broader economic and workforce needs beyond the state. These programs exemplify the standards necessary for inclusion in the state's approved Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC) list.	22
Do Not Recommend Applications in this category failed to meet the core criteria for approval. Common reasons included not meeting a required criteria, incomplete submissions, duplication of programs already on the approved list, or missing key artifacts necessary for evaluation. These deficiencies prevented MSDE from determining the program's alignment with the state's workforce needs or its value to Maryland's workforce system.	47
Deferred Recommendation Applicants in this category are encouraged to collaborate with MSDE to strengthen their submissions or consider alternative credential pathways for review in the next approval cycle. This category applies to applicants whose proposals demonstrate student-centered best practices aligned with the state's economic development plan and the vision of a high-performing CTE system but require additional refinement to fully meet the seven core criteria.	6
Total New Non-Duplicative IRC's Reviewed	75

Year Two: Application Trends

The second year of the IRC application cycle reflects growing familiarity with Maryland's review process and increased engagement across sectors. Overall, applications demonstrated stronger alignment to submission expectations and broader stakeholder involvement, while also revealing areas where additional clarification, targeted technical assistance, and the establishment of formal business rules will strengthen future submissions.

The portfolio of applications highlighted several areas of strength, including innovative credentials with strong industry alignment, evidence of collaboration among stakeholders, and a clear commitment to expanding high-quality career pathways for Maryland students.

AREAS OF APPLICANT STRENGTH

MSDE primarily recommended applications to the CTE Committee when the following conditions were met:

- **Balanced application representation:** Applications were submitted by balance of for-profit entities, nonprofit organizations, and local education agencies (LEAs). This distribution signals increased statewide awareness of the IRC process and growing confidence across sectors in Maryland's approach to reviewing and approving industry-recognized credentials.
- **Improved application completeness:** Compared to the first cycle, a higher proportion of applicants made a good-faith effort to submit all seven required artifacts. This improvement suggests clearer understanding of submission expectations and timelines, resulting in applications that were more review-ready upon receipt.
- **Stronger evidence of regional and community support:** Many applications included artifacts demonstrating engagement from multiple stakeholders, including education systems, industry partners, national certification bodies, and regional leaders. This trend provides encouraging context for understanding how proposed credentials are embedded within increasingly mature local and regional talent ecosystems, where cross-sector partners are coordinating around workforce demand signals and shared responsibility for talent pipeline development.

At the same time, the review process revealed areas where improvements can be made.

AREAS OF GROWTH

MSDE did not recommend applications to the CTE Committee under the following conditions:

- Applications were **incomplete**.
- **Overreliance on anecdotal or testimonial evidence:** Several applications relied heavily on personal testimonials or narrative statements.
- Applications that were **already on the approved list** were not recommended by MSDE, as they retain their active status and do not require reapproval.
- Applications **presenting as curriculum or entrance exams**, such as ASVAB, JROTC Employability Skills, WISE Financial Literacy, and CAST Exam, were not recommended as they did not qualify as industry-grade certifications or credentials and were misaligned with the core criteria.
- Endorsements **lacking clear hiring preferences** were considered insufficient external validations.

- Job descriptions that **fail to mention the certification's preference**
- Applications demonstrating **discrepancies between the skills needed for the job and the skills the certification addresses.**

Implementation of Business Rules

Through the completion of two application cycles, MSDE identified a set of implementation-level business rules that support consistent and transparent application review. These clarifications are operational in nature and do not constitute changes to policy and are shared with the CTE Committee to inform future discussions and continuous improvement.

1. **Completeness Review:** MSDE will follow up only when an applicant has made a good-faith effort to submit all required materials by the application close date and limited clarification is needed on already-submitted artifacts. Incomplete or partial applications will not be recommended for approval.
2. **Academic Alignment:** Letters of support must clearly identify the specific course(s) or Program(s) of Study within identified LEAs to which the proposed industry-recognized credential aligns. Broad or generalized statements of alignment may limit MSDE's ability to recommend approval.
3. **Credential Eligibility:** Curricula, exam assessments, instructional programs, programming languages, software platforms, tools, or certificates of course completion do not meet the definition of an industry-recognized credential and will not be recommended for approval.
4. **Credential Modifications and Re-Evaluation:** The CTE Committee and MSDE will apply a consistent distinction between administrative updates and substantive changes to approved industry-recognized credentials.
 - **Administrative Changes:** If an approved IRC undergoes minor adjustments, such as a name update, cleaning up standards, or renaming components, MSDE will notify the CTE Committee. These non-functional refinements are considered administrative updates and do not require re-evaluation, as they do not alter the credential's functionality
 - **Significant Changes Requiring Re-Evaluation:** If a proposed change significantly impacts on the structure or function of an IRC, such as:
 - The elimination or creation of domains not included in the original application standards,
 - Updates to test environments or methodologies,
 - Revisions to core standards or technical requirements,

MSDE will submit the updated IRC for re-evaluation by the committee to ensure alignment with established criteria and standards.

Future Actions

The state-approved list of Industry-Recognized Credentials will be available on the Maryland State Department of Education's Industry-Recognized Credential [webpage](#) and documented in the CTE Committee's approved [meeting minutes](#).

Over the next year, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), in collaboration with the Governor's Workforce Development Board (GWDB) CTE Committee, will undertake the following actions to strengthen implementation, clarity, and the long-term sustainability of the IRC approval process:

1. **Update and streamline the IRC application process:** MSDE will refine and de-fragment the IRC application process by integrating sample artifacts, clarity checks, and indicators of readiness directly into the application itself. This work will reduce reliance on external guidance documents and support more consistent, review-ready submissions.
2. **Establish implementation guidance for IRC lifecycle management:** MSDE and the CTE Committee will develop additional implementation-level business rules, consistent with existing CTE IRC policy, to support the periodic review, maintenance, and potential phase-out of approved IRCs. This guidance will clarify how credentials are reviewed over time in relation to course standards, program design, and changes in industry demand, including considerations for sunseting credentials that no longer align with workforce needs or system requirements. Per the CTE Committee's IRC Policy, a review of currently approved credentials will be conducted bi-annually, with the first timeline for review to take place over August to November 2026.
3. **Clarify expectations for system alignment and data integration:** As part of ongoing system refinement, MSDE and the CTE Committee will examine whether future IRC approvals should be explicitly linked to specific programs of study or course structures within the State's data systems. This review will inform guidance on how IRCs are tracked, reported, and aligned to student pathways, while maintaining flexibility across local implementation models.
4. **Define the role of portfolio-based credentials and performance evidence:** In partnership with representatives from the arts and creative industries, MSDE and the CTE Committee will further examine credentials that rely on portfolio-based or performance-based demonstrations of skill. This work will clarify when and how performance evidence may contribute to credential recognition in specific fields, and where distinctions are necessary between instructional tools, portfolio artifacts, and independently validated industry-recognized credentials.

We strongly encourage all applicants to reach out to the Coordinator of Industry Recognized Credentials at MSDE to discuss their applications and address any questions or concerns. Applicants are welcome and encouraged to resubmit in future cycles.

For further questions, please contact:

Coordinator, Industry Recognized Credentials
Phone: 410-767-0216
Email: IRCSupport.MSDE@maryland.gov

MSDE Recommendations (January 2026)

The [CTE Committee's Policy on Industry-Recognized Credentials \(IRCs\)](#) establishes the criteria, approval process, and review procedures for IRCs in the State of Maryland. Under this policy, MSDE is responsible for preparing annual submission packages for each IRC by December, including a recommendation for the CTE Committee to approve or not approve the credential. As outlined in the policy, the CTE Committee conducts a formal vote each January to approve or reject the IRC packages submitted by MSDE. The IRCs that are approved will be effective starting in the upcoming school year.

MSDE has completed its formal evaluation of application submissions, cross-referenced against the CTE Committee's policy and the required core criteria. Below, the CTE Committee will find MSDE's recommendation list.

- **Recommend:** Applications in this category will be added to the state-approved IRC list, effective July 1, 2026.
- **Do Not Recommend:** Applications in this category will not be added to the state-approved IRC list.
- **Deferred Recommendation:** As defined on page 5 of this report, these applications are not recommended at this time but are identified as priority focus areas aligned with Maryland's sector strategy for the next review cycle. Applicants in this category are encouraged to collaborate with MSDE to strengthen their submissions should they choose to do so.

Pending the outcome of the CTE Committee's vote, each applicant will be notified of their application outcome by January 29, 2026.

[Link to Sample IRC Application](#)

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Advanced Manufacturing	Certified Solidworks Associate	Dassault Systems (Solidworks)	Already Approved
Advanced Manufacturing	Siemens Automation Fundamentals Certification: PLC	Siemens	Recommend
Advanced Manufacturing	Autodesk Tinkercad 3D Design	PearsonVue Certiport	Deferred Recommendation
Advanced Manufacturing	Certified Onshape Associate	Onshape	Do Not Recommend
Advanced Manufacturing	Smart Automation Certification Alliance (SACA) Certification	Smart Automation Certification Alliance (SACA)	Deferred Recommendation

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Advanced Manufacturing	Certified MATLAB Associate	MathWorks	Do Not Recommend
Agriculture	AMSA Food Safety and Science Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Agriculture	Benz School of Floral Design Principles Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Arts, Entertainment & Design	Final Cut Pro Initial Pro	Future Media Concepts	Deferred Recommendation
Construction	Jobsite Leadership Certification (JLC) TM	Blueprint Decoded TM /Blueprint Decoded Academy TM	Do Not Recommend
Construction	Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Technician	National Apartment Association Education	Do Not Recommend
Construction	Pre-Apprenticeship Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3)	North America's Building Trades Union, Tradesfutures	Recommend
Construction	Pre-Apprenticeship Interim Credentials	Electrical Training Alliance	Recommend
Digital Technology	Certified Ethical Hacker (CEH)	International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council)	Do Not Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Digital Technology	Certified Network Defender (CND)	International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council)	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Computer Hacking Forensic Investigator (CHFI)	International Council of E-Commerce Consultants (EC-Council)	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Fundamentals of AI in Cybersecurity (FAIC)	BCR Cyber	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Cybersecurity Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Cybersecurity Level 2 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Java Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	JavaScript Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Python Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Web Design Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Digital Technology	Web Development Level 1 Certification	Code HS	Do Not Recommend
Digital Technology	Microsoft Azure Data Fundamentals	Certiport	Recommend
Digital Technology	CompTIA Data+	Pearson Vue	Recommend
Digital Technology	WISE Certification	CTIA – The Wireless Association	Recommend
Education	Media	Certiport	Do Not Recommend
Education	RefReps Officiating Education Certificate for Completion	RefReps in partnership with the MPSSA	Do Not Recommend
Financial Services	Intuit Personal Finance	Intuit	Do Not Recommend
Financial Services	Microsoft Excel Expert Certification	Certiport	Do Not Recommend
Financial Services	Certified Financially Literate TM	Working In Support of Education (Wise)	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Clinical Medical Assistant Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	EKG Technician Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Healthcare & Human Services	Medical Administrative Assistant	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Medical Coder & Biller Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Mental Health Technician Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Patient Care Technician Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Phlebotomy Technician Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Physical Therapy Technician Certification	American Medical Certification Association	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	DANB Radiation Safety and Health	Dental Assisting National Board (DANB)	Deferred Recommendation
Healthcare & Human Services	Express Employment Professionals Career Preparedness Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Community Health Worker	Johns Hopkins Howard County Medical Center's CHW Training Program	Recommend
Healthcare & Human Services	Community Interpreter	Next Generation Language Access	Deferred Recommendation

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Healthcare & Human Services	National Association of Sports Medicine-Certified Personal Trainer	National Association of Sports Medicine	Recommend
Hospitality, Events, & Tourism	Certified Guest Service Professional	American Hotel and Lodging Education Institute	Do Not Recommend
Hospitality, Events, & Tourism	AMSA Food Safety and Science Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Hospitality, Events, & Tourism	AMSA Meat Evaluation Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Hospitality, Events, & Tourism	AMSA Culinary Meat Selection & Cookery Certification	iCEV	Do Not Recommend
Management & Entrepreneurship	Southwest Airlines Professional Communications Certification	Southwest Airlines	Do Not Recommend
Management & Entrepreneurship	Maryland Property and Casualty Insurance	Maryland Insurance Administration (MIA)	Do Not Recommend
Management & Entrepreneurship	Maryland Real Estate Salesperson License	Maryland Real Estate Commission	Do Not Recommend
Management & Entrepreneurship	AI X Design Thinking – Early Career	IDEO U & Dent Education	Do Not Recommend
Management & Entrepreneurship	Lead4Change Leadership Certificate	Lead4Change	Do Not Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Marketing and Sales	AMA Social Media Marketing	American Marketing Association (AMA)	Do Not Recommend
Marketing and Sales	AMA Principles of Marketing	American Marketing Association (AMA)	Do Not Recommend
Public Service & Safety	Emergency Telecommunicator Certificate (ETC)	International Academies of Emergency Dispatch (IAED)	Recommend
Public Service & Safety	JROTC Leadership and Employability Skills Test	NOCTI	Do Not Recommend
Public Service & Safety	Wilderness First Aid	American Red Cross	Deferred Recommendation
Public Service & Safety	Lifeguarding (Including Deep Water) with CPR/AED	American Red Cross	Do Not Recommend
Public Service & Safety	Chesapeake Bay Landscaping Professional Certification	Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council	Do Not Recommend
Public Service & Safety	Certified Legal Support Professional	National Association for Legal Support Professionals (NALS)	Do Not Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck TI – Gasoline Engines	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T2 – Diesel Engines	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T3 – Drive Train	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T4 – Brakes	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T5 – Suspension and Steering	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T6 – Electrical/Electronic Systems	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T7 - HVAC	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	ASE Medium Heavy Truck T8 – Preventive Maintenance	National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	Coordinating Committee for Automotive Repair (CCAR eSafety)	Coordinating Committee for Automotive Repair	Do Not Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	Aluminum & Steel Small Dent Removal	I-CAR	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	Collision Repair Fundamentals	I-CAR	Recommend

Career Cluster	Credentialing Name	Issuing Entity	Recommendation
Supply Chain & Transportation	Disassembly and Reassembly	I-CAR	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	Plastic Repair	I-CAR	Recommend
Supply Chain & Transportation	Preparation for Refinish	I-CAR	Recommend