



Badging: Considerations and Potential Ahead for the Early Childhood Workforce

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The National Workforce Registry Alliance seeks to promote a framework that improves training, education, and ultimately the competency of early childhood professionals. Together with the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Council for Professional Recognition, and a work group of expert advisors, the Alliance is exploring the role of digital badging and its potential to contribute to career development.



Early childhood teachers and caregivers participate in training and education from a patchwork of different entities, to comply with requirements of different agencies and funding streams. Practitioners navigate this patchwork to varying degrees of success and varying degrees of meaningful influence on their practice.

Badging has the potential to weave together the disparate threads of education and training that currently texture professional preparation in the field. The Alliance intends to add value to states and their systems, to employers, and to practitioners, which ultimately benefits children and families.

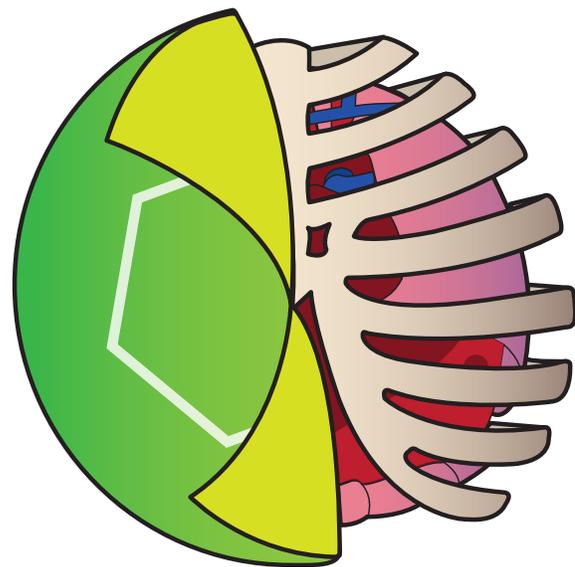
Throughout the process of exploring badges for the early childhood workforce, the work group discussions focused on questions such as:

- Who would issue badges? What standards/criteria would issuers and badges need to meet?
- How would badges be validated? In the absence of an authoritative body, which “best practice” standards should be met?
- What would motivate a practitioner to participate in this? What would bring in the employers and the state agencies?
- How could badging advance compensation?
- What would it take to link to existing state systems?

Overarching Principles

As the questions and ideas were explored, the Alliance and the work group identified basic principles as a framework for making badging meaningful for the early childhood workforce:

- There is value in three types of badges: competency-based, competency-demonstrated, and participation/experience badges.
- A badge should have currency to practitioners and to employers.
- A badge should be a building block: It can be scaled, stacked, and include encouragement for the practitioner to earn the next level.
- A badge can refer (electronically) a practitioner to related badges based on topic, professional development plan, or regulatory compliance of practitioner, or highlighting a professional pathway.
- ECE badges would need shared data points.
- ECE badges would have criteria for quality that has to be met, that would be inclusive of large and small/individual providers of training.



Work Group Explorations

• Training and trainer approval, and criteria for a badge issuer

In “open badging” any person or entity can issue a badge. But, not every badge would be meaningful to the ECE field. The group identified “currency” as a principle that must be present in order for badging to advance the early childhood workforce.

The Alliance proposes that the badges in early childhood be issued by a valid, quality source in order to convey achievement in quality training and competency in the work. Some states already have systems for tracking and maintaining training and trainers, as well as systems for applying core knowledge areas for this field. There are organizations with experience in vetting the pieces. Though the processes and procedures are not uniform across states, there are commonalities. If a badge is going to be useful, it has to convey to the state’s systems those base commonalities.

The work group grappled with how to define or set criteria that would show it was credible, quality content from a qualified trainer. Is it self-policed? Is there a higher level of responsibility to know that the badge issuer has met certain quality criteria? Having quality assurance on the training and the trainer has proven important for this field.

The work group also noted that badging needed to be inclusive of many types of qualified trainers. In one state the work group examined, there are four levels of competence in their trainers: Apprentice, Practitioner, Specialist, and

Content Expert. Trainers move through the levels. This also allows opportunities for many types of trainers – individuals operating locally or nationally; training agencies/ organizations large and small, regional or national.

The work group explored existing Training Registries for lessons learned and practical application to badging. This included discussion of trainer and training approval. In states with a structure or system for trainer approval, the same trainers would be the credible trainers issuing badges. They appear on the Registry as vetted and approved; this could be a data point on a badge.

• Competencies

The reality of our workforce is incredibly varied. They are the workforce we have, and their needs should be met for the success of children in early childhood programs today. The work group considered the teacher with more than 30 years’ experience, certified in her state, who moves to a new state and is challenged to get hired; teachers with formal education in something other than early childhood, and the need to bolster the developmentally appropriate practice; and caregivers and teachers achieving hours and hours of training each year without the numbers adding up to advancing their career - but they could and should.

Early childhood educators need to have certain skills and whatever their program regulatory body calls those competencies, there are commonalities. If a badge is going to be useful, it must convey those commonalities to the state’s systems.

Knowledge Area with Equivalency to CDA and NAEYC

Badge Name	CDA Competency Area	NAEYC Professional Preparation Standard
Health & Safety	Planning a safe and healthy learning environment	Promoting Child Development and Learning
Teacher-Child Relationships	Building productive relationships with families	Building Family and Community Relationships
Physical and Intellectual Development	Advancing children’s physical and intellectual development	Promoting Child Development and Learning
Social and Emotional Development	Supporting children’s social and emotional development	Building Family and Community Relationships
Observation & Planning	Observing and recording children’s behavior	Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families
Child Development	Understanding principles of child development and learning	Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum
Program Management and Operation	Managing an effective program operation	Becoming a Professional
Age appropriate curriculum		Using Content Knowledge to Build Meaningful Curriculum
Professional Development		Becoming a Professional

One challenge in this field is how to connect compliance with clock hours and completion of course credits to actual competency. Badging does not solve this but connects the pieces and parts. Part of the competency question is embedded in the class itself. The method of taking information to practice – the demonstration of that competency – would be a data point in the badge.

Additional discussion is needed to identify badges useful to both providers and employees which are not currently within the general core knowledge areas, for example, engagement in activities which support the positive context of a care setting. Badges might include participation in professional organizations, or learning that can be applied to enrichment of the care setting in the arts or STEM which are not reflected in a typical ECE core knowledge area for professional development or licensing.

The work group discussed expiration of badges. Some content areas should have an expiration date. It is important, for instance, to be sure that CPR competency can be demonstrated time and time again. Current procedure is for CPR certification to expire, to be renewed with successful re-training and testing. But for other content areas, it is important to make sure that content shows an advancement, leveraging the “stackability” characteristic of badges, rather than an expiration, the expectation is to earn the next level of badge.

The Alliance and the work group spoke with leaders of the Design Principles Documentation Project, which tracked the work of 29 grantees and their effort to operationalize badges in their particular fields. They found that the most successful badges are role based badges. That is counter to what the work group has been prioritizing, in terms of currency for this field. Some work group members indicated that in order to have currency it would have to be about demonstrated competency, otherwise it is indeed just a badge for show.

• Portability

Portability is important to the success of professional development initiatives in the early childhood workforce. Turnover is high and for those who stay in the field, there needs to be recognition of the professional development of their past employment and/or of a different state.

Portability of professional development and valuable experiences is crucial for this field, but systems are lacking. The work group prioritized portability as a problem potentially eased by digital tools like badges.

One region did a crosswalk among their Registries on trainer and training approval to identify common ground and gaps. Once this was completed and a process was put in place, a trainer from one state doing a training in a neighboring state could get approval. Such procedures are not currently in place across the country. Badging tools could facilitate relief from these barriers.

Portability is not only of value across states but also across settings for this highly mobile workforce. Someone who attended training for state-funded preK or Head Start or child care might find themselves employed in another setting in the future. There is value in the transfer, application of

knowledge, and ability to verify the achievements along the career path.

The work group identified the value of a badge across setting types (such as child care, Head Start/Early Head Start, pre-K). For some content areas, safe sleep is no matter the setting or funding stream; child development is child development no matter where the four year olds are enrolled. Once there is articulated minimum training for safe sleep practices, and an articulation of how it is tested and verified, states could have badge reciprocity. It could even be nationally recognized.

• Career advisement

The field seeks to create and advance career pathways in the current context of disconnected requirements and agencies. The field does not have strong career advisement systems. The Alliance would like to further explore the capability of badging pointing out career pathways. Even in the health and safety case, the data system could point the recipient of the badges to other content areas, assisting with professional development planning and career planning.

Relief is needed for navigating all the pathways and what courses and classes count for compliance to each agency or funder. In one state examined by the work group, the Registry experience facilitated better knowledge of the professional development system by the instructors. This has tremendous potential. In another state, the work group reviewed an online training map and calendar which also makes visual the pathway ahead.

The work group noted that badging also has the potential to drive practitioners to more face to face contact and career advising. The mentor or advisor is still critical in badging. Badging does not take the place of this counsel but helps to craft a plan that the practitioner can see.

• Compensation

The goals of credentials, degrees, and training need to be supported by adequate compensation for a professional workforce. Future discussion is needed to explore if and how badging could influence wages.

• A National Authority

The work group discussed the possibilities for a system “gatekeeper” – a bearer of the quality standards for badges. Some members of the work group identified an ideal: a national set of badging standards, held and managed by a national organization. In the absence of an authoritative body, the work group agreed that identification of “best practice” standards would be valuable as badge-issuing got off the ground for this field.

One local professional development leader noted that badging is moving in a positive direction in her community but not as fast or streamlined as it could have been had there been more common guidance.

The work group also discussed leveraging the functionality of Training Registries to issue badges and be the keepers of the behind-the-scenes data points.

• Connecting to existing state systems

Badging does not make more training or education available or affordable, nor does it improve the content of training and education. But, badging could possibly bridge some of the many disconnects across the patchwork of systems in the states and nationally. There is value to both the practitioner and the employer in bridging gaps in professional development pathways. Badges would need to be acknowledged by licensing agencies, professional development systems, national accrediting bodies, and Quality Rating and Improvement Systems to fully leverage the power and currency of badging.

In one state that the work group examined, the pieces of the system “talk” to one another. Licensing is connected to the professional development system which is also connected to the QRIS. This is possible because the advocates and policy leaders were intentional in building the systems this way. The training registry is a successful function of the systems. Badging could also be a successful function in this state.

More than half the states have Training Registries. There are also workforce management systems; Head Start has a data system; and there are child care resource and referral data systems too. Most practitioners are in more than just one system. Badging could bridge gaps between such data systems.

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**The National
Workforce Registry
Alliance**

Supporting the nation's early childhood and afterschool workforce

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Further Exploration

The Alliance and the work group suggest future work could include unpacking more of the ways badging can bridge gaps in the early childhood field, including gaps in connections to knowledge and education systems; informed career advisement; portability of credentials; consistent, accurate and authentic documentation of experience; and augmenting compensation. The Alliance seeks to bring this work forward and to build support for the badging concept and implementation through pilots convening and working with state leaders, and through advocacy and intensive marketing to practitioners, employers and agencies to build support.

• Pilot Project in Four States

The Alliance suggests a convening of stakeholders from four states to review CCDBG rules and regulations; professional development systems details; QRIS indicators; and other relevant component parts, rules, regulations and competencies. Stakeholders could apply the case study to their own state environment and build a plan to launch a Health and Safety badge, with an eye toward the role of other, future, ECE badges in their state.

• Momentum and buy-in

Achieving buy-in and advancing the support for meaningful badges and badging systems has been a challenge for other industries exploring badging. But it is possible, with resources and an intentional, multi-levelled strategy. To be meaningful, badges and badging systems must clearly demonstrate benefits at the practitioner-, employer-, and systems-level. Building momentum and buy-in will take effort. To be successful, these efforts will need to include advocacy and intensive marketing to practitioners, employers and agencies.

- **Practitioner-Level:** A badge needs to have currency to the practitioner. Practitioners will need to see an immediate value to their professional development in order to participate in earning a badge or a badging system. The field has to be taught how to use these tools and how the systems are a benefit. The work group acknowledged that learning is social and networked. It becomes dynamic.
- **Employer-Level:** A badge also needs to have currency to the employer, who is reviewing applicants for roles and seeking particular skill sets. Employer perspectives are also desired on how badges would add value in the hiring process as well as economic value in terms of wages.
- **Systems-Level:** Currency will not be fulfilled until badging is embedded and recognized in state systems.

The Alliance and work group suggest that this advocacy and marketing take place concurrently with further detail development and launch of pilot badges.

Additionally, there will be a need for technical assistance for getting started. The Alliance proposes also serving as a curator of the industry work underway, lessons learned, and details to translate for the early childhood community.