

ADVANCING THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROFESSION:

A National Youth Development Credentialing Project

Findings and Recommendations from Phases 1 & 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The youth development workforce is essential to the learning, safety, and well-being of millions of young people across the United States. Yet the profession has long operated without the unifying structures that characterize other fields, structures such as a Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code and nationally-recognized, portable credentials. These missing pieces have contributed to chronic instability, inequitable career pathways, and a persistent undervaluing of the people whose work directly shapes program quality and youth outcomes.

In response, the National AfterSchool Association (NAA) launched a multi-phase exploration of what it would take to establish a national credentialing system grounded in

real youth development practice. The first two phases of this work — research and landscape analysis (Phase 1) and the initial design and development process (Phase 2) — revealed both the need and the opportunity to create a credential that is equitable, scalable, and aligned with existing systems.

This white paper provides a narrative synthesis of those first two phases. It describes the field's current credentialing landscape, key insights learned from practitioners and system leaders, the rationale for a national demonstration-based credential, and the resulting proposal for a Foundational Youth Development Practices Credential housed within NAA's existing Professional Credentialing System. The paper concludes by outlining the path forward, including pilot testing, system integration, and the broader vision for elevating youth development as a recognized profession.



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I. Introduction

The [National AfterSchool Association \(NAA\)](#) exists to support, develop, and advocate for the professionals who work with and for youth during out-of-school time. These practitioners serve as mentors, educators, caregivers, and guides in environments that foster exploration, belonging, growth, and connection. They are central to young people's experiences, but the systems around them have not always reflected the significance of their roles.

Over the past decade, NAA has increasingly focused on the conditions that enable a strong and stable OST workforce. This work includes the [Thriving OST Workforce Initiative](#), which aims to improve job quality by reshaping public narratives, influencing policies, and elevating practices that promote equitable hiring and retention. A key barrier to professional stability is the “paper ceiling,” which is the widespread use of degree requirements that do not accurately predict effectiveness in youth development roles. These barriers disproportionately exclude individuals who have deep practical expertise and strong cultural alignment with the communities they serve.

As NAA examined the broader professional landscape, it became clear that the OST field is missing two critical elements that many other professions take for granted: a recognized [Standard Occupational Classification \(SOC\) code](#) and a universally recognized credentialing structure. While NAA, its affiliates, and numerous state systems have made significant strides in defining competencies, improving quality, and strengthening training, there is still no national, portable way to validate a youth development practitioner's foundational skills.

This realization sparked the Youth Development Credentialing Project. Its purpose is straightforward but ambitious: to create an equitable, accessible, and credible credential that recognizes real practice, aligns with existing systems, and supports practitioners in building meaningful careers.

II. Why Credentialing Matters Now

The need for a national credential is rooted in the realities of the youth development workforce. Across the country, turnover rates remain alarmingly high, averaging around 40 percent annually. These conditions make it difficult for programs to maintain consistency, build trust with families, and deliver high-quality learning experiences. Without structured

pathways for growth and recognition, practitioners frequently leave the field or see youth work only as a short-term job rather than a viable career.

Many state leaders, system intermediaries, and program directors have called attention to the limitations of existing qualification structures. Traditional credentials and pathways tend to emphasize formal education, training hours, or written assessments. For many youth development practitioners, particularly those who are part-time, early in their careers, or balancing multiple jobs, these approaches can be prohibitively expensive, time-consuming, or inaccessible. Moreover, these structures often fall short of measuring the most important aspect of youth development work: what practitioners do with young people in real time.

Throughout NAA's research process, the field communicated a strong and consistent message. Practitioners want recognition that is meaningful and attainable. Employers want clearer and more reliable ways to identify staff who possess essential skills. Systems want alignment that supports a mobile workforce without creating new silos. The demand for a national credential is not theoretical; it reflects a pressing workforce need and a widely shared aspiration for professional coherence.

As one OST leader put it during a listening session, "A resume with a youth development credential on it would definitely get my attention." Practitioners echoed this sentiment, noting that a national credential could help them advance, negotiate better pay, or simply feel seen for the expertise they bring. In short, the field is ready, perhaps more than ever, to embrace a competency-based, nationally recognized approach to credentialing.

III. Phase 1: Understanding the National Landscape

The first phase of NAA's work focused on gaining a comprehensive understanding of state credentialing systems, competency frameworks, and professional development infrastructures across the country. This process included analyzing state documents, conducting interviews with system leaders, convening focus groups with practitioners and employers, and reviewing national research and assessment tools.

[A 2020 study from the American Institutes for Research](#) illuminated the breadth of existing state-level supports for program quality. Dozens of states have implemented quality standards, developed aligned training systems, established core knowledge and competencies, or created youth development and school-age credentials. This work reflects decades of commitment from state networks, intermediaries, and policymakers who believe deeply in elevating the quality and consistency of youth programs.

Yet beneath this progress lies a complicated and uneven landscape. State credentials vary widely in structure, purpose, and rigor. Some are embedded in childcare licensing or higher education systems; others are voluntary and lightly supported. Leaders consistently reported challenges in maintaining registries, conducting observations, reviewing portfolios, and tracking outcomes in ways that demonstrate impact. Others find it difficult to incentivize participation, especially when employers do not consistently recognize or reward credentials. Many credentials, while valuable, mirror early childhood models that do not fully reflect the staffing patterns, learning environments, or practice culture of programs serving school-age youth and teens. In many places, the lack of portability makes credentials useful only within state borders, leaving practitioners unable to carry their qualifications with them if they move or change employers.

At the same time, the field advanced a unified ask. Practitioners, supervisors, and state leaders described the need for a credential that better addresses recruitment and retention challenges, provides equitable access for staff who may not pursue traditional degrees, and reflects the practices that matter most in real youth development settings. They emphasized the importance of a national approach that could work across disparate systems, reduce duplication, and create portability for a highly mobile workforce.

Across these diverse perspectives, one theme emerged repeatedly: a national credential would be valuable only if it *builds on*, rather than replaces, the investments states have already made. The field wants a connector, not another silo. The Phase 1 findings affirmed that a national, competency-based, demonstration-focused credential could meet this need and offer a unifying framework that complements existing systems while elevating youth development practice across the country.

The central conclusion of Phase 1 was that a national credential could bring coherence, consistency, and equity to youth development practice, but only if it aligns with existing state systems and elevates what practitioners actually do in OST environments.

IV. Phase 2: Designing a National Credential

Building on the findings from Phase 1, NAA began the design phase with a clear set of goals: to create a credential that is rigorous and credible yet accessible; grounded in research yet flexible enough to work across diverse systems; and aligned with the field's values of equity, belonging, and recognition.

NAA is uniquely positioned to lead this work. As the professional association for the OST field, NAA brings together a national membership, strong partnerships with and through

state affiliates, trusted relationships with practitioners and system leaders, and a long-standing commitment to workforce development. Importantly, NAA also has an established credentialing platform — the National AfterSchool Association Professional Credentialing System (NAAPCS) — to support competency-based assessment.

The NAAPCS platform provides a strong foundation for the new credential. It is designed to recognize demonstrated skill rather than seat time; to support multiple preparation pathways; and to function independently of any single training provider. It uses technology to remove barriers often found in traditional credentialing systems and is already home to NAA's STEM credential. Housing the youth development credential within this existing platform ensures both credibility and sustainability.

During Phase 2, NAA worked closely with an advisory group representing state leaders, intermediaries, employers, practitioners, and training organizations. This group helped shape the design principles and informed the development of four foundational micro-credentials that together comprise the proposed **National Youth Development Foundational Practices Credential**.

These micro-credentials reflect essential, observable practices drawn from widely respected national frameworks, including [NAA's Core Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies](#), the [NAA Code of Ethics](#), the Forum for Youth Investment's [Program Quality Assessment \(PQA\)](#), PEAR's Dimensions of Learning, based on the popular [Dimensions of Success](#), and research from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Each micro-credential includes a competency statement, a description of the method and its components, guidance for evidence submission, and evaluation criteria.

An important part of the design process involved clarifying what this credential is not. It is not a reproduction of early childhood or childcare credentials, nor does it attempt to cover the full breadth of core knowledge and competencies required for all OST roles. It does not require formal education, training hours, or years of experience. Instead, it is focused on the observable practices that are essential for anyone working directly with youth ages 5-18. This credential is not intended to become a mandatory requirement imposed by systems. Rather, it is envisioned as an alternate pathway, one that supports existing systems by offering a nationally portable, demonstration-based option that complements state credentials, reduces duplication, and broadens access.

Together, the micro-credentials represent a coherent set of foundational practices that define high-quality youth development work. They are designed to be achievable for

practitioners at various stages of their careers and adaptable to different program contexts.

V. A Closer Look at the Credential

The **Foundational Practices Credential** is built around four micro-credentials, each reflecting a core pillar of effective youth development practice:

1. **Creating an Inclusive, Supportive Learning Climate**, in which practitioners establish environments where all young people feel valued, respected, and safe to express themselves.
2. **Establishing Effective Learning Environments**, which highlights how practitioners organize space, manage materials, and structure time to support engaging, flexible learning experiences.
3. **Facilitating Purposeful Learning**, where practitioners design and deliver activities that are goal-aligned, culturally responsive, and meaningful to youth.
4. **Centering Youth Voice and Choice**, ensuring that young people have genuine opportunities to contribute ideas, make decisions, and shape their learning experience.

Each micro-credential requires the practitioner to demonstrate these practices in observable ways. The process begins with self-reflection and identification of strengths and growth areas. Practitioners can then pursue professional development, receive coaching, or draw on prior experience to prepare for submission.

In order to pursue each micro-credential, practitioners may demonstrate their competency in one of three ways: by (1) Submitting a qualifying PQA observation, (2) Sharing a DoL observer rating, or (3) Providing a 20-minute video showing the practice in action. This structure ensures that the credential centers real-world practice and provides multiple, equitable pathways for practitioners to showcase their skills. Once evidence is submitted, it is assessed using standardized rubrics. Practitioners receive feedback and, upon meeting the criteria, earn the micro-credential. Completing all four results in the full Foundational Practices Credential. More information is provided in Appendix I of this document.

VI. The Value of a National Credential

A national credential grounded in practice holds unique promise for the OST field. For practitioners, it offers a way to gain recognition for skills that often go unnoticed or

undocumented. Many youth development professionals enter the field without formal education in teaching or child development but bring rich cultural knowledge, strong relationships, and deep understanding of youth needs. A practice-based credential validates this expertise and provides a pathway for advancement that does not require navigating barriers of cost, time, or traditional academics.

For employers, the credential creates a clear and trustworthy measure of foundational skills. Hiring and promoting staff becomes more consistent and transparent, and organizations gain tools to support talent development and retention. A national credential also signals to families, partners, and funders that practitioners have met rigorous standards rooted in research and best practice.

At the system level, the credential helps bring coherence to a fragmented landscape. Because it is designed to integrate with existing state credentials, training systems, and quality improvement efforts, it can create bridges rather than silos. States can adopt the credential as part of registered apprenticeship programs, align it with workforce pipelines, or use it to support equitable hiring practices. Many states have already expressed interest in reciprocity models that would allow their credentials to be validated within the national framework.

Most importantly, the credential moves the field closer to something it has lacked for decades: a cohesive professional identity. By establishing a common currency of demonstrated youth development practice, the field takes another step toward being recognized as a true profession, one with common standards, credentials, and clear pathways for growth. The credential provides a shared language for foundational practice, a consistent marker of quality, and a scalable mechanism for elevating youth development work. It also strengthens NAA's role as the national professional association for OST, positioning the organization to steward standards, support members, and amplify the value of youth development practitioners nationwide.

VII. Theory of Action: How Credentialing Drives System Change

The design of the **Foundational Practices Credential** is grounded in a sound logic model (see Appendix II) that translates to simple but powerful theory of action. When the field aligns around shared standards and brings together strong partners to steward them, it creates a foundation for developing a portable, demonstration-based credential that is meaningful across settings. When that credential becomes connected to hiring,

compensation, and professional development investments, it begins to carry incentives that drive adoption by both practitioners and employers.

Over time, as more practitioners earn the credential and more organizations recognize its value, the field experiences network effects. The credential becomes a common currency that supports consistent expectations for practice and creates clearer pathways for advancement. This process strengthens job quality, enhances program access and retention, and generates measurable returns on workforce investments.

While a credential alone cannot transform the field overnight, it fills a critical missing piece in the six elements of a profession: the existence of a portable, recognized credential that reflects real practice. In combination with NAA's continued efforts to secure an SOC code and improve job quality, the **Foundational Practices Credential** contributes meaningfully to the long-term professionalization of youth development.

VIII. Next Steps: Piloting, Evaluation, and Scaling

As NAA moves into Phase 3, the focus shifts from design to testing. Pilot projects will take place with state systems, city intermediaries, and organizational partners to examine feasibility and impact. These pilots will allow NAA to explore reciprocity with existing credentials, refine evidence requirements, and understand how the credential functions in diverse contexts. Evaluation will provide insights into practitioners' experiences, employer recognition, system readiness, and necessary adjustments.

At the same time, NAA is cultivating partnerships with funders and policymakers to ensure the sustainability and scalability of the credential. Many states have expressed interest in integrating the credential into registered apprenticeships, career pathways, or statewide training registries. National organizations, training providers, and existing credentialing bodies are also in discussions about how their programs might align with or support the new structure.

Phase 4 will move from planning and piloting to broader implementation. This stage will include expansion of partnerships, deeper integration with systems, and a focus on long-term sustainability. It will also involve continued research, data collection, and refinement to ensure that the credential remains relevant, accessible, and effective.

IX. What It Will Take

The creation of a national credential is not a top-down process. It requires collective effort from across the field. State agencies, city intermediaries, OST employers, training organizations, policymakers, researchers, and philanthropic partners all play essential roles in ensuring the credential's success. For the credential to have meaningful impact, it must be integrated with incentives, aligned with system structures, and responsive to the needs of both practitioners and organizations.

NAA is committed to engaging deeply with partners through advisory groups, pilot testing, and ongoing collaboration. The work ahead is complex, but it is also an opportunity to build something transformative that recognizes and elevates the people who make youth programs possible every day.

X. Conclusion and Call to Action

The **National Youth Development Foundational Practices Credential** represents a significant step toward strengthening, stabilizing, and professionalizing the out-of-school time workforce. It reflects the voices and needs of practitioners, the insights of system leaders, and the realities of youth development practice. It brings together research, equity, and innovation into a structure designed to honor both existing systems and the practitioners working within them.

NAA invites practitioners, employers, affiliates, state leaders, funders, and national partners to join us in advancing this work. Whether through pilot participation, offering insight, aligning systems, or advocating for broader adoption, every contribution moves the field closer to a thriving and equitable profession.

Together, we can build the workforce our young people deserve.

To learn more or to get involved, visit **naaweb.org**.

Appendix I: NYD Foundational Practices Credential Framework

Full Credential

To apply for and earn the Foundational Practices Credential, practitioners must submit the following in the NAA National Professional Credentialing System.

- Proof of current NAA membership
- A signed commitment to the Code of Ethics
- One of the items below:
 - Evidence of earning all four NYDFP micro-credentials
 - Proof of current approved NAA state affiliate credential
 - PQA or DoL observation results with scores of 5 and 4, respectively. A trained observer must complete the observation within 4 months of application, evidence of earning all four micro-credentials below,

Micro-Credential 1: Creating Inclusive, Supportive OST Learning Climate

Competency:

Creating an Inclusive, Supportive OST Learning Climate

Key Method:

The practitioner builds safe, welcoming spaces where all youth feel respected, valued, and included. The practitioner connects learning experiences to the youth's personal lives, interests, and community, helping them see themselves as capable learners.

Method Components (Observable Behaviors):

The practitioner:

- Interacts respectfully (no criticism, judgment, sarcasm).
- Uses youth names and makes eye contact.
- Facilitates positive peer interactions; intervenes when exclusion or conflict arises.
- Encourages youth to share materials and ideas.
- Prompts respectful listening and turn-taking.
- Intervenes to prevent or address negative peer interactions.
- Encourages full participation from all youth.
- Models cooperative and supportive behavior.
- Links activities to youths' real-life experiences and interests.
- Uses diverse examples that resonate with all youth.
- Encourages youth to express the relevance of their learning in their own words.
- Connects learning to possible careers or community issues.

Supporting Rationale and Research:

NAA Core Knowledge, Skills, & Competencies Content Areas:

- **1** Child/Youth Growth & Development
- **2** Learning Environments & Curriculum
- **4** Relationships & Interactions with Youth

Program Quality (PQA) Alignment:

- Emotional Safety **1, 2**
- Warm Welcome **1, 2, 3**
- Encouragement **1, 2, 3**
- Belonging **2**
- Reframing Conflict **1**

Dimensions of Learning (DoL) Alignment:

- Relationships
- Participation
- Relevance

Resources:

Aligned resources coming soon to each micro-credential.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Part 1. Overview Questions

Overview questions coming soon to each micro-credential.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

One of the following:

- A copy of an official DoL Observer Rating Sheet completed by a certified DoL observer from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A copy of an official PQA Observation Form completed by a trained PQA assessor from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A link to a 20-minute video showing the practitioner facilitating a lesson that demonstrates the competency. The video will be scored using either DoL or PQA.

Used throughout this appendix, the PQA rubric and DoL rubric were developed by the Forum for Youth Investment and Partnerships in Education and Resilience (PEAR)², respectively.

¹ The Forum for Youth Investment. (2020). *Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA)*. Washington, DC: Forum for Youth Investment.

² Partnerships in Education & Resilience (PEAR). (2024). *Dimensions of Learning: Self-Assessment (DoL-SA)* (pilot version). PEAR.

Scoring Guide

Micro-Credential 1: Creating Inclusive, Supportive OST Learning Climate

Your evidence submission will be assessed based on one of the following rubrics. For the PQA rubric, you must earn a score of 5, and for the DoL rubric, you must earn a score of 4 on each of the items below to earn the micro-credential.

PQA Rubric		DoL Rubric	
5=Consistent evidence, 3=weak evidence, 1=no evidence		4=Consistent Evidence, 3=clear evidence, 2=weak evidence, 1= no evidence	
Emotional Safety	The emotional climate of the session is predominantly positive (e.g., mutually respectful, relaxed, supportive, characterized by teamwork, camaraderie, inclusiveness, and an absence of negative behaviors. Any playful negative behaviors (not considered offensive by parties	Relationships	- The facilitator has positive and equitable relationships with youth and with one another. The facilitator treats youth and other adults with respect and works to create a supportive and encouraging environment. - If negative interactions occur between youth and or between co-facilitators, the

Warm Welcome	involved) are mediated (countered, curtailed, defused by staff or youth. 2. There is no evidence of bias; instead, there is a mutual respect and inclusion of others from different religions, races/ethnicities, classes, genders, abilities, appearances, or sexual orientations. 1. All youth are greeted by staff. 2. Staff mainly use a warm tone of voice and respectful language. 3. Staff generally smile, use friendly gestures, and make eye contact.		facilitator intervenes and works to put a stop to negative exchanges. 3. Youth have positive relationships with one another. They work collaboratively in teams and support rather than shut down each other's ideas.
Encouragement	1. Staff supports at least some contributions/accomplishments of youth by acknowledging what they've said or done with specific non-evaluative language, for example, "yes, the cleanup project you suggested as a way to give back to the community, it looks like you put a lot of time into choosing the colors for your painting." 2. Staff frequently use open-ended questions throughout the activity, and questions related to the contacts, so that most youth have opportunities to answer questions that seek opinions or require thoughtful answers. 3. Staff is almost always actively involved with youth (e.g., they provide directions, answer	Participation	1. As enacted, activities are accessible to youth from all backgrounds (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, ability). For example, the reading level of the materials is appropriate for all youth, and the materials don't inadvertently exclude particular youth from participating. 2. Participation is even amongst youth. Access to meaningful aspects of activities is equitable, and no youth are assigned solely to passive roles, such as notetaker. It is not the case that one student or a group of students dominates activities. 3. When youth do not have access to participate in activities due to group

	questions, work as partners or team members, check in with individuals or small groups).		dynamics, materials, or otherwise, the facilitator provides prompts, such as carving out roles for the youth to help them join in.
Belonging	1. Youth do not exhibit exclusion, and staff successfully intervene when exclusive behavior occurs (e.g., staff introduces excluded youth to other youth, and they then include them; staff suggests a way to include a lone child in others' play).	Relevance	1. The facilitator helps to make connections between activities and broader context, such as community concerns, careers, or other subject matter, as well as the youths' personal lives and cultures. 2. Youth have the opportunity to draw connections and discuss how the activity they are participating in relates to broader contexts, including community concerns, cultural references, other subject matters, and/or their personal lives.
Reframing Conflict	1. Staff always approach conflict or negative behavior calmly (i.e., approaches stop any hurtful actions and acknowledge the youths' feelings).		

Part 3. Reflection

Reflection portion of framework coming soon to each micro-credential.

Micro-Credential 2: Establishing Effective OST Learning Environments

Competency:

Establishing Effective OST Learning Environments

Key Method:

The practitioner organizes space, materials, and time for safe, engaging, and flexible learning and maintains contingency plans to ensure smooth facilitation.

Method Components (Observable Behaviors):

The practitioner:

- Prepares all necessary materials in advance and ensures accessibility.
- Facilitates smooth transitions between activity parts.
- Use time efficiently to maximize engagement.
- Has or implements backup plans that maintain focus on learning goals and youth needs.
- Adapts materials and activities for cultural, developmental, and accessibility needs.

Supporting Rationale and Research:

NAA Core Knowledge, Skills, & Competencies Content Areas:

- **2** Learning Environments & Curriculum
- **3** Observation & Assessment
- **5** Youth Engagement

Program Quality (PQA) Alignment:

- Accommodating Environment **1, 2, 3**
- Session Flow **1, 2, 3, 4, 5**

Dimensions of Learning (DoL) Alignment:

- Organization
- Space Utilization
- Materials

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Part 1. Overview Questions

Overview questions coming soon.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

One of the following:

- A copy of an official DoL Observer Rating Sheet completed by a certified DoL observer from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A copy of an official YPQA Observation Form completed by a trained YPQA assessor from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A link to a 20-minute video showing the practitioner facilitating a lesson that demonstrates the competency. The video will be scored using either DoL or PQA.

Scoring Guide

Micro-Credential 2: Establishing Effective OST Learning Environments

Your evidence submission will be assessed based on one of the following rubrics. For the PQA rubric, you must earn a score of 5, and for the DoL rubric, you must earn a score of 4 on each of the items below to earn the micro-credential.

PQA Rubric		DoL Rubric	
5=Consistent evidence, 3=weak evidence, 1=no evidence		4=Consistent Evidence, 3=clear evidence, 2=weak evidence, 1= no evidence	
Accommodating Environment	1. Program space allows youth and staff to move freely around the room carrying out activities, e.g., the room accommodates all participants without youth blocking doorways, bumping into one another, and crowding. 2. Program spaces suitable for all activities offered, for example, furniture and room support small and large groups. 3. Furniture is comfortable for all youth participating in the program, offering.	Space Utilization	1. Space is used informally, allowing youth to interact with one another, the materials, and the facilitator for most of the time. 2. The space is appropriate for the activities at hand; the space does not inhibit activity from being conducted in a productive manner. 3. There are minimal distractions in the space to take the youth's attention away from the activity.
		Materials	1. The materials used are developmentally appropriate and inclusive, so that youth can engage with and use them. It is not the case that materials isolate youth or prevent them from participating. 2. Materials are appropriate for the learning goals of the activities. The materials could be used to help teach youth about a particular goal.

			3. The materials used are appealing to the youth. Participants do not push materials to the side or engage in unrelated tasks.
Session Flow	1. Staff start and ends the session within 10 minutes of the scheduled time. 2. Staff has all materials and supplies ready to begin all activities, for example, materials are gathered and set up. 3. There are enough materials and supplies prepared for all youth to begin activities. 4. Staff explains all activities clearly. The youth appear to understand directions, the sequence of events, and the purpose is clear. 5. There's an appropriate amount of time for all activities. For example, youth do not appear rushed. Most youth who are generally on task finish activities, and they do not finish significantly early with nothing else planned.	Organization	1. All materials are prepared ahead of time, and the facilitator demonstrates competence in using the materials. 2. Transitions between the various components of an activity (e.g., introduction and group work) are relatively smooth with minimal time loss. There is evidence to suggest that time is used effectively. 3. If changing circumstances arise, an educational backup plan is in place.

Part 3. Reflection

Reflection portion of framework coming soon to each micro-credential.

Micro-Credential 3: Facilitating Purposeful OST Learning

Competency:

Facilitating Purposeful OST Learning

Key Method:

The practitioner designs and delivers activities with clear goals, accurate content, and meaningful application.

Method Components (Observable Behaviors):

The practitioner:

- States and reinforces clear learning goals.
- Presents content accurately, connecting concepts.
- Encourages youth to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.
- Prompts questions and discussions that deepen understanding.
- Creates opportunities for youth to observe, ask questions, investigate, and test ideas.
- Encourages multiple approaches to problem-solving.
- Guides youth to refine and adjust based on results or feedback.

Supporting Rationale and Research:

NAA Core Knowledge, Skills, & Competencies Content Areas:

- **2** Learning Environments & Curriculum
- **3** Observation & Assessment
- **5** Youth Engagement

Program Quality (PQA) Alignment:

- Skill-Building **1, 2, 3, 4, 5**
- Active Engagement **1, 2, 3, 4**

Dimensions of Learning (DoL) Alignment:

- Purposeful Activities
- Engagement
- Inquiry/Professional Practices
- Content Learning

Resources:

Aligned resources coming soon.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Part 1. Overview Questions

Overview questions coming soon.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

One of the following:

- A copy of an official DoL Observer Rating Sheet completed by a certified DoL observer from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A copy of an official YPQA Observation Form completed by a trained YPQA assessor from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A link to a 20-minute video showing the practitioner facilitating a lesson that demonstrates the competency. The video will be scored using either DoL or PQA.

Scoring Guide for Micro-Credential 3: Facilitating Purposeful OST Learning

Your evidence submission will be assessed based on one of the following rubrics. For the PQA rubric, you must earn a score of 5, and for the DoL rubric, you must earn a score of 4 on each of the items below to earn the micro-credential.

PQA Rubric

5=Consistent evidence, 3=weak evidence, 1=no evidence

DoL Rubric

4=Consistent Evidence, 3=clear evidence, 2=weak evidence, 1= no evidence

Skill Building	1. Staff tells youth the specific learning or skill building focus for the session or activity, for example, an objective learning target goal, and the focus is clearly linked to the activity. 2. Staff encourages all youth to try skills or attempt higher levels of performance. 3. Staff model skills for all youth. 4. Staff breaks complex tasks into smaller, simpler sub-tasks for all youth do is Apple steps are sweet and sequence instructions are providing for specific steps examples of completed steps are shared, 5. When youth struggle (with errors, imperfect results, or failure), staff always provides learning support or encouragement (e.g., helping youth problem-solve, encouraging them to try another approach, explaining why an error was made, encouraging them to keep trying, providing guidance or explanation when needed).	Purposeful Activities	1. There are clear (either explicit or implicit) learning goal(s) for the activity. 2. As enacted, each part of the activity is meaningfully related to the learning goal, rather than being peripherally related or spent on other activities/discussions.
Active Engagement	1. The activities involve youth and engaging with creating, combining reforming materials or ideas for example, role-plays projects experiments writing and illustrating stories outside! For at least half of the time.	Engagement	1. Activities present youth with opportunities to engage in prolonged hands-on learning where youth are able to manipulate physical materials, engage with technology and/or use software.

	2. During activities staff provides all youth a structured opportunity to talk about or otherwise communicate) what they are doing and what they are thinking about (e.g., each youth explains the reasoning behind their design to staff; staff assigns youth to small groups to work on a shared task). 3. The activity balances concrete experiences involving materials, people and projects (e.g., field trips, experiments, interviews practicing dance routines, creative writing) with abstract learning or concepts (e.g. learning/talking about a topic, lectures, staff providing diagrams/formulas. 4. The program activities lead (or will lead in future sessions) to tangible products/performances that reflect youths' ideas/designs (e.g., youth explain their projects to whole group, all create dance routines to perform later, youth create their own sculptures).		2. Youth are prompted to do the cognitive work as opposed to facilitator making all of the connections or and or making sense of activities for youth.
		Content Learning	1. Across activities, facilitator(s) demonstrate a strong understanding of content and/or practices, presenting and demonstrating it accurately, and addressing any misconceptions as they arise. 2. When facilitator(s) are unsure of something, instead of guessing or providing inaccurate information, they use the moment as a learning opportunity (i.e., working with youth to find the answer). 3. Connections between activities, discussions, and concepts are made, so that content ideas and/or practices become more than isolated facts or

			steps, allowing youth to develop a deeper understanding. 4. Youth comments and questions demonstrate a strong understanding of the content and/or practices presented. They move beyond memorization or fact re-call and discuss concepts and/or practices in a meaningful way.
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Part 3. Reflection

Reflection portion of framework coming soon.

Micro-Credential 4: Centering Youth Voice and Choice

Competency:

Centering Youth Voice and Choice

Key Method:

The practitioner ensures all youth have opportunities to share ideas, make decisions, and participate fully in all aspects of all activities.

Method Components (Observable Behaviors):

The practitioner:

- Encourages all youth to express ideas, concerns, and opinions.
- Provides meaningful decision-making opportunities with facilitator-defined limits.
- Monitors and balances participation so no one dominates or is excluded.
- Ensures all youth have equal access to every part of the activity.
- Prompts reflection through the activity, not just at the end.
- Encourages youth to explain learning in their own words.
- Supports youth in organizing ideas and building connections between concepts.

Supporting Rationale and Research:

NAA Core Knowledge, Skills, & Competencies Content Areas:

- **1** Growth & Development
- **4** Relationships & Interactions
- **5** Youth Engagement

Program Quality (PQA) Alignment:

- Adult Partners **1**
- Planning **1**
- Choice **1, 2**

Dimensions of Learning (DoL) Alignment:

- Reflection **1, 2, 3**
- Youth Voice
- Participation
- Reflection

Resources:

Aligned resources coming soon.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

Part 1. Overview Questions

Overview questions coming soon.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

One of the following:

- A copy of an official DoL Observer Rating Sheet completed by a certified DoL observer from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A copy of an official YPQA Observation Form completed by a trained YPQA assessor from an observation completed within four months of this application.
- A link to a 20-minute video showing the practitioner facilitating a lesson that demonstrates the competency. The video will be scored using either DoL or PQA.

Scoring Guide for Micro-Credential 4: Centering Youth Voice and Choice

Your evidence submission will be assessed based on one of the following rubrics. For the PQA rubric, you must earn a score of 5, and for the DoL rubric, you must earn a score of 4 on each of the items below to earn the micro-credential.

PQA Rubric 5=Consistent evidence, 3=weak evidence, 1=no evidence		DoL Rubric 4=Consistent Evidence, 3=clear evidence, 2=weak evidence, 1= no evidence	
Adult Partners	1. Staff shares control with youth, providing guidance and facilitation while retaining overall responsibility (e.g., staff uses youth leaders, semiautonomous small groups, or individually guided activities)	Inquiry & Professional Practices	1. There are ample opportunities for youth to engage in professional practices and inquiry-based discussion. 2. The majority of youth engage in practices in an authentic rather than a prescriptive manner. For example, it's not the case that youth are exclusively following step-by-step directions across.
Planning	1. Staff provide multiple opportunities for youth (individual or group) to plan projects and activities (e.g., how to spend their time, how to complete a task).	Youth Voice	1. The facilitator and activities allow youth to make meaningful decisions that impact their learning experiences 2. Youth are able to share what they've learned and/or created with the broader community, including those outside the program.
Choice	1. Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended content choice within the content framework of the activity (e.g., youth decide topics within a given subject area, subtopics, or aspects of a given topic). 2. Staff provides opportunities for all youth to make at least one open-ended process choice (e.g., youth decide roles, order of activities, tools, or materials, or how to present results).	Participation	1. As enacted, activities are accessible to youth from all backgrounds (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, ability). For example, the reading level of the materials is appropriate for all youth, and the materials don't inadvertently exclude particular youth from participating. 2. Participation is even amongst youth. Access to meaningful aspects of activities

			is equitable, and no youth are assigned solely to passive roles, such as notetaker. It is not the case that one student or a group of students dominates activities. 3. When youth do not have access to participate in activities due to group dynamics, materials, or otherwise, the facilitator provides prompts, such as carving out roles for the youth to help them join in.
Reflection	1. Staff engages all youth in an intentional process of reflecting on what they have done (e.g., writing in journals; reviewing minutes; sharing progress, accomplishments, or feelings about an experience). 2. Uses two or more strategies to encourage youth to share what they have done and reflect on their experiences (e.g., writing, role-play using media or technology, drawing, using props). 3. Staff initiates structured opportunities for youth to provide feedback on activities (e.g., by asking for feedback and giving session evaluations).	Reflection	1. The facilitator provides ample prompts for reflection during the activity. Prompts may come in the form of questions posed by the facilitator or the facilitator redirecting youth's questions to help them think critically instead of providing answers immediately. 2. Throughout most of the activity, youth engage in a deeper reflection, building connections and moving beyond yes-or-no answers.

Part 3. Reflection

Reflection portion of framework coming soon.

Appendix II: National Youth Development Credential Logic Model

NAA is developing the **National Youth Development Foundational Practices Credential**. This competency-based credential offers meaningful recognition for OST professionals while enhancing alignment and recognition across local, state, and national efforts. The logic model below shows how NAA will use its core knowledge, partnerships, and resources to create and operate a training-neutral, equity-focused, portable, and scalable credentialing system. It highlights the design features, inputs, activities, and outputs that will lead to short-term, intermediate, and long-term results.

Through this credential, NAA aims to establish a nationally recognized standard that elevates OST as a credible, skilled profession, enhances career pathways, and promotes consistent, high-quality experiences for young people everywhere.

Inputs	Ongoing Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-Term Outcomes
NAA's Core Knowledge & Competencies Digital platform for credentialing (e.g., Digital Promise) Aligned training from national and local providers Validated and Reliable Assessments	Administer stackable micro-credentials leading to full credential Provide coaching and technical assistance to candidates and employers Maintain credentialing platform and assessment tools	Youth workers earn micro-credentials and full credential Credential adoption by local and state systems, employers, and intermediaries Training and CQI programs align to credential standards	Increased field awareness and use of credential Youth workers recognized for demonstrated competencies Youth workers have stronger professional network and	Improved staff retention and morale in youth-serving organizations Cross-sector alignment around PYD practices and quality standards Increased job quality	Strengthened, professionalized youth development workforce More equitable and consistent youth experiences across systems Enhanced outcomes for youth

Endorsed assessors and coaches	Offer training alignment resources and crosswalks	Peer learning communities and coaching systems are active	connection to NAA and the field	and clearer career pathways for youth development professionals	furthest from opportunity
Professional development support tools	Integrate credential into partner systems (e.g., CQI, higher ed, HR pipelines, state registries)	Data systems track credential attainment and workforce outcomes	Employers integrate credential into hiring and promotion processes		National recognition of youth development as a credible, skilled profession
Employer, govt, & system partnerships	Support and grow professional learning communities and peer networks		Increased access to incentives (e.g., stipends, bonuses, credits)		
Marketing and incentive infrastructure					
Funding and resources	Collect and analyze data for continuous improvement and field building research				

Design Features

- **Training Neutral:** Compatible with multiple providers and modalities
- **Competency-Based:** Credential based on observable demonstrations, not seat time
- **Portable and Recognized:** Valid across states and systems, aligned with national standards
- **Sustainable and Scalable:** Supported by technology, incentives, and system integration
- **Cross-Sector Applicability:** Grounded in youth development practices that are relevant and usable in diverse settings (e.g., OST, libraries, justice, housing, education, workforce)
- **Non-Duplicative and Complementary:** Designed to align with and enhance, not replace, existing local, state, and national credentials
- **Practice-Centered:** Focused on high-impact, research-based practices proven to support positive youth outcomes across developmental stages and settings
- **Equity-Driven:** Prioritizes cultural responsiveness and access for historically marginalized practitioners
- **Field-Informed:** Developed and continuously refined with input from practitioners, employers, and systems leaders across sectors