

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Issued by: Non-degree Credentials Research Network (NCRN)
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Due Date: **September 27, 2021 - 11:59pm EDT** - (Preliminary Applications)

To support research in non-degree credentialing through two funding opportunities: Microgrants and Research Contracts

NON-DEGREE CREDENTIALS RESEARCH NETWORK (NCRN)

The NCRN's mission is to advance non-degree credentialing research by fostering communication and collaboration among scholars and stakeholders. It brings together researchers and practitioners concerned with policy and practice issues related to the world of non-degree credentials - which include industry-awarded certifications, certificates, occupational licenses, badges, apprenticeships, and other microcredentials. The NCRN hosts monthly webinars and other meetings for members of the research community to share their findings and receive feedback from peers.

The NCRN is a project of the [Program on Skills, Credentials & Workforce Policy](#) (PSCWP) at George Washington University. The PSCWP supports the publication of [Workforce Monitor](#) (weekly newsletter) and disseminates information about public policies and practices that affect data collection and research opportunities related to the learn-and-work-ecosystem.

Since 2018, the NCRN has been supported by grants from [Lumina Foundation](#).

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY: MICROGRANTS

The NCRN invites applications to assist researchers conducting research on non-degree credentials. Microgrants will support direct expenses associated with NCRN-relevant research for which funding from another source is unlikely. Microgrants are efforts with budgets not to exceed \$5,000. Examples of expenses that can be covered in a microgrant include:

- Access to data
- Research-related software and technology
- Travel to collect data or disseminate findings
- Specific professional development opportunities
- Compensation for research assistants

Early career researchers and researchers from regionally accredited higher education institutions in the United States unable to cover direct costs associated with research will be prioritized for these microgrants.

Award recipients may be asked to present their research findings to the NCRN at a webinar or in-person meeting within two years following their award.

There is a two-stage application process for Microgrants:

1. Preliminary Applications. Applicants are invited to complete a [preliminary application](#) summarizing their research project and requested support by September 20, 2021. Within two weeks, the NCRN will reach out to semi-finalist applicants (estimated up to 10) to invite a final application.
2. Final Applications. Invited applicants are required to complete a 1-2-page detailed description of their proposed research activities and submit by the due date specified by the NCRN (estimated within 30-45 days of invitation).

The NCRN will review preliminary and final applications in consultation with our advisory council and notify successful applicants by December 1, 2021. Up to five awards are anticipated.

Evaluation criteria include the extent to which a proposed research project advances the field of non-degree credentialing research, the likelihood that a project will be successful, and the relevance of the proposed research project to the themes of credential quality and labor market equity. Applications from early-career researchers and individuals from underrepresented demographic groups are strongly encouraged.

A second round of applications will be solicited in fall 2022.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY: RESEARCH CONTRACTS

The NCRN invites bids for research contracts on critical topics of relevance to the Network. We are particularly interested in topics that align with the themes of upcoming meetings in 2022-2023; i.e., credential quality and labor market equity. We are also open to other suggestions.

Examples of topics for research contracts include:

- How should we define quality for non-degree credentials? Are there fields of study and credential types that tend to be characterized by low quality and if so, which ones? How can adult learners, especially adult students of color, best avoid low-quality credentials?
- What are the motivations of credential issuers launching new non-degree credentials?
- How do states vary in their efforts to connect job and training seekers to data on quality non-degree credentials?
- How portable are employment-aligned credentials (employer/education aligned credentialing) beyond local or regional labor markets?
- How does the regulation of non-degree credentials differ between the U.S. and other countries? What can we learn from other nations with respect to quality assurance and/or the integration of non-degree credentials (often called microcredentials in other nations) into the broader system of workforce education and credentialing?

Research contracts are expected to result in a publishable working paper, typically between 15- 30 pages in length, containing an Executive Summary. The format/style will be selected by the author.

All papers developed through this fund will be disseminated on the NCRN website, and authors will be expected to disseminate their papers (and other products resulting from their research) through other communications after presentation to the NCRN (e.g., journals, social media, conference panels, poster sessions). Authors will be asked to present their findings through either a NCRN webinar or in-meeting

presentation, and strongly encouraged to draft short blog-style articles for the NCRN's website and/or Workforce Monitor. Authors will be free to submit their work to external publications after disseminating to the NCRN.

Depending on the strength of the applicant pool, the NCRN anticipates awarding 2-3 contracts of \$10,000 each in 2021. An additional 2-3 contracts will be awarded through a separate RFP to be issued in fall 2022.

Contracts can be made with individual authors and/or their institutions.

There is a two-stage application process for contracts:

1. Applicants are invited to complete a [preliminary application](#) summarizing a research topic of interest by September 20, 2021. Applicants are permitted to propose multiple topics, but each topic must be requested through a separate application. Within two weeks, the NCRN will reach out to semi-finalist applicants (estimated up to 5) to invite a final application.
2. Invited semi-finalist applicants are required to complete an outline of the proposed research paper and a detailed summary of the research questions to be answered.

The NCRN will review preliminary and final applications in consultation with our advisory council and notify successful applicants by December 1, 2021. Up to 5 awards are anticipated.

We will review full applications in consultation with our advisory council and notify successful applicants no later than December 1, 2021.

QUESTIONS

For questions contact:

Kyle W. Albert, Ph.D.
Assistant Research Professor
George Washington Institute of Public Policy (GWIPP)
The George Washington University
805 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC 20052
Email: kalbert@gwu.edu
Voicemail: 202-994-5365