

The Power of Degrees and Credentials for New Mexico's Graduates

INDUSTRY-RECOGNIZED CREDENTIALS



This fact sheet helps New Mexico students and families understand the value of an Industry-Recognized Credential, how to choose the right credentials, and how to make the journey toward a high-value career quickly and affordably.

When is an Industry-Recognized Credential right for me?

What is an Industry-Recognized Credential?

An **Industry-Recognized Credential (IRC)** is different from a college degree. Credentials can usually be earned in less time and are often exam-based. Passing the exam demonstrates that a person has the knowledge and skills employers are seeking. When a credential is industry-recognized, employers view it as proof that the individual is prepared to work in a specific field.

There are different kinds of credentials, including those geared toward safety on the job. Examples include:

- OSHA 10-Hour (workplace safety)
- Certified Medical Assistant (healthcare occupations)
- CompTIA IT Fundamentals, CompTIA A+, CompTIA Network+, and CompTIA Security+ (information technology)

How should I choose the best skill-based credential to pursue?

The [New Mexico Resource Center for CTE](#) makes this process transparent, so you can begin with the end in mind. A host of credentials that New Mexico's employers are seeking is identified by Career Cluster and Sub-Cluster.

To begin, start with these considerations:

- What careers are of greatest interest to me? Explore the jobs in your community by choosing your school district on the [Career Clusters](#) Page, then select a Career Cluster. Compare wages, number of jobs, and projected growth, as well as education needed.
- How can I see if these careers are a good choice for me? [P2C Career Explorer](#) helps students understand interests, values, and career clusters, and then explore jobs aligned to those answers.
- What skill-based credentials do those careers require and are valued by employers in our region? On the [Career Frameworks](#) page, occupations are connected to skills and credentials needed for those jobs.
- Does my high school or our community college partner offer these credentials, and what are their job placement rates for graduates?
- Where can I earn that/those credentials at the best cost and in the least amount of time?

When deciding, it's also helpful to get real-world experience in a job or industry through work-based learning:



Job shadowing



Internships



Apprenticeships



Part-time or summer jobs

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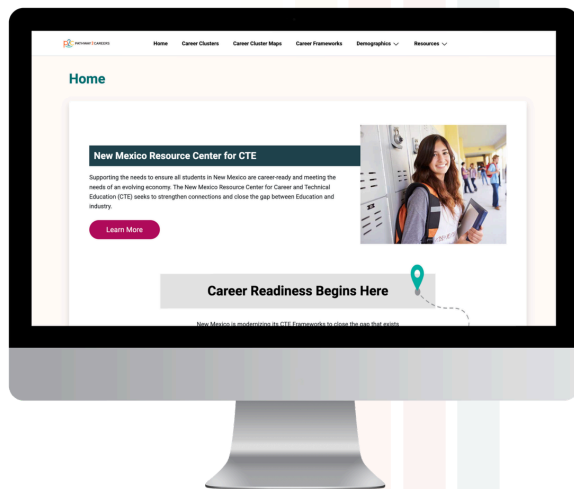


Work-based learning supports career readiness: it builds skills and helps students learn which college majors and training programs connect to careers they may enjoy.

Students can also get hands-on experience and connect with industry professionals by participating in a Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSO). Learn more about [CTSOs](#).

How can I learn more about aligning my education with a future job or career?

In New Mexico, the best way to find out about Career Pathways to industries and occupations is by visiting the [New Mexico Resource Center for CTE](#). These pathways align education with occupations that are in high demand, growing, and pay living wages or higher. The site connects all of the dots to help you navigate your career journey.



Where can I learn an Industry-Recognized Credential?

Some high schools offer Industry-Recognized Credentials through their Career and Technical Education programs and in partnership with their community colleges. Start by exploring the options available in your high school's CTE programs. Then, consider the credentials offered by your school's community college partners.



New Mexico's Industry-Recognized Credential and Associate Degree holders have the second-highest workforce participation rate (74%), the second-lowest unemployment rate (5.1%), and median earnings of \$39,656.

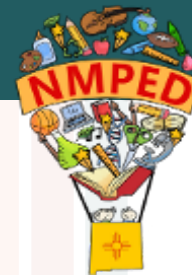
Source U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, <https://data.census.gov>. Data are for the population 25 years old and older.

New Mexico has both independently governed community colleges and branch campuses affiliated with public universities (including the University of New Mexico, New Mexico State University, and Eastern New Mexico University).

- Branch community college campuses aligned to universities offer Industry-Recognized Credentials as educational endpoints, as well as on the way to associate's and bachelor's degrees.
- Students can also earn Industry-Recognized Credentials at independent community colleges. If you want to continue your education, an academic advisor can help you identify which certificate or associate degree might be a good next step toward your career goal.

To find a full list of public colleges and universities (including community colleges) in New Mexico, use the [New Mexico Higher Education Department's statewide map](#). To learn more about how to qualify for each college, check their individual websites for Application Requirements.

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How much does it cost to earn an Industry-Recognized Credential?

The short answer is: it depends. For example, the OSHA 10-General Industry certificate, which provides “comprehensive safety education designed for entry-level workers in general industry roles to prevent workplace accidents and injuries,” is just \$59.99^[1]. Other credentials that are specific to certain kinds of careers, like the CompTIA A+ for computer-related occupations, can be more. CompTIA, for example, is \$265^[2]. Note: Prices are examples only.

In some high schools, credential training and testing fees are covered by the school, district, or grant funding. In other cases, students or families may pay some costs. Eligible students may also be able to access workforce-program funding support (check with your school counselor or local workforce office).

Where can I find help to pay for an Industry-Recognized Credential?

Students can also earn credentials after high school and may be able to use state and federal financial aid programs to help cover eligible education costs, depending on the program and school.

To find out what financial aid you may qualify for, complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)**. The FAFSA helps determine eligibility for grants, scholarships, work-study, and federal student loans. You can complete and submit the FAFSA online at studentaid.gov.

To learn more about New Mexico financial aid programs (including state scholarships), visit the [New Mexico Higher Education Department Financial Aid Division](https://www.nm.gov/education).



Some research shows an industry-recognized credential can grow earnings for IRC holders by **more than \$10,000** over the first two years after enrollment in a training program.^[4]



- ✓ Visit the [New Mexico Resource Center for CTE](https://www.nm.gov/education) to explore programs and pathways.
- ✓ Talk with your school counselor about dual credit and scholarship options. In New Mexico, dual credit tuition and general fees are waived; public-school districts purchase required instructional materials, while students may still be responsible for course-specific fees and transportation.
- ✓ Complete your FAFSA at [FAFSA.gov](https://fafsa.gov) to explore financial aid opportunities.^[3]

References:

[1] [OSHA 10-Hour Training Course](https://www.osha-slc.org/courses/10-hour-general-industry-safety-course)

[2] [CompTIA](https://www.comptia.com/certifications/a-plus)

[3] [Value of A Credential for Disadvantaged Workers: Findings from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study](https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/value-of-a-credential-for-disadvantaged-workers-findings-from-the-sectoral-employment-impact-study)

[4] Grossman, J., Kato, L., Mallon, T., Maguire, S., & Conway, M. (2015). The value of credentials for disadvantaged workers: Findings from the sector employment impact study. Aspen Institute. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.1.2637.4005>