

**Task Force for Micro-Credentials
Strategy and Leadership:
Report of Recommendations for
Campus Leadership**

University of Colorado Boulder

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Contents

Executive Summary and Task Force Recommendations	3
Introduction: Why Micro-Credentials	4
Task Force Representation	5
Purpose	7
Task Force Briefing Document	7
Objectives	9
Learners, University, Consumers: Framing our “Why”	10
Micro-credentials Task Force Recommendations	12
1. Vision and Strategic Alignment	12
2. Centralized Governance and Leadership Accountability	13
3. Sustainability and Resource Allocation	14
4. Strategic Partnerships and Industry and Community Alignment	15
5. Technology Infrastructure and Digital Transformation	16
6. Culture of Innovation and Continuous Improvement	17
7. Access and Success for All	18
8. Measurement and Accountability	19
Concluding Narrative	20
The Task Force’s Call to Action	21
Appendix	22
Risk Factors	22
Strategies for local leaders beyond “Hurry up and wait”	23

Executive Summary and Task Force Recommendations for a Campus-wide Micro-credentials Strategy

The Task Force for Micro-Credential Strategy and Leadership recommends a campus-wide strategy for implementing micro-credentials. The task force was formed under the sponsorship of the Office of the Provost and received BUS (Buff Undergraduate Success) endorsement to define and prioritize the university's position on credential innovation and micro-credentials. The task force held a kickoff event and four meetings during the Fall 2024 semester.

As a campus-wide initiative with touch points potentially reaching every single unit, the task force identified many recommendations for campus leadership to adopt for strategic planning. The recommendations are organized into eight categories. Throughout the work, it became clear that many recommendations were interconnected, interdependent, and overlapping.

The eight categories of recommendations share commonalities and notably avoid silos:

1. Vision and Strategic Alignment
2. Centralized Governance and Leadership Accountability
3. Sustainability and Resource Allocation
4. Strategic Partnerships and Industry Alignment
5. Technology Infrastructure and Digital Transformation
6. Culture of Innovation and Continuous Improvement
7. Access and Belonging
8. Measurement and Accountability

The process also revealed that task force members believe **Senior Executive Leadership and Communication are vital to success**. Three high-level patterns were persistently raised:

- Align micro-credential strategy with university goals in order to establish campus-wide standards and success metrics that are clearly and commonly communicated with shared vision and meaning. While the practitioner-level contributions are valuable, they don't fully address the critical questions of leadership, governance, and long-term vision.
- While the university has a value of empowering departments, schools and colleges with trusted autonomy, it's important to avoid redundancy and division of leadership/territory in our offerings. Shared governance, consistent communications, and predictable and transparent learner experiences require executive sponsorship and leadership.
- What we measure is a sign of our values and priorities. The lack of measurement is a signal indicating that micro-credentials are not a strategic priority. The creation and standardization of periodic review and assessment processes are necessary in order to understand the effectiveness and relevance of micro-credentials over time.

These three sentiments echo a leading takeaway from the Actionable Findings section of [UPCEA's Alternative Credentials Business and Program Models report \(2024\)](#):

"Institutions should consider several things as they seek to develop or expand their alternative credentials portfolio. First is the strategic priority within their institution. If alternative credentials have been embraced by senior leadership and included in the strategic plan, they are more likely to have the necessary resources allocated to them."

Introduction: Why Micro-Credentials

It is clear throughout the higher education landscape that [nearly every institution is offering or planning to offer micro-credentials](#). Potential revenue from the growing market is one clear driver: The global alternative credentials [market size was valued](#) at \$16.33 billion in 2023, \$18.83 billion in 2024, and is projected to more than triple to \$69.87 billion by 2032.

The [external proliferation of innovative credentials and learning and employment records in Colorado and beyond](#) may be validation that the University of Colorado Boulder is correct to be pursuing micro-credential strategy and implementation. “Everyone else is doing it,” is not, however, a valid justification for why micro-credentials are a learner-centered, mission-aligned university pursuit.

Ours is a moment in which the value of postsecondary attainment is facing public scrutiny, yet there remains clear sentiment that in addition to the virtuous pursuit of empowered learning to broaden perspectives and develop capacities for civic engagement, learners look to higher education in preparing for and gaining competitive advantages to getting hired. And, they hold programs such as micro-credentials in increasingly high esteem. According to [a 2024 survey](#) that asked students about such non-degree credentials, 86% agreed that earning one “will help them stand out to employers and land a job upon graduation.” Meanwhile, employers validate this sentiment, as they are 74% more likely to hire such candidates because a credential “helps hiring teams solve two top challenges: [identifying and validating applicants’ skills](#).”

This suggests that CU Boulder (and all post-secondary institutions) is confronted with an urgent need of our learning communities, as well as a decision point of whether to proactively assume responsibility to meet the need. Indeed, the LER Accelerator Initiative (a consortium of 12 higher education membership organizations, including several to which CU Boulder belongs) recently published a [white paper](#) declaring that there is an “imperative for higher education institutions to translate learning into skills and competencies that learners can demonstrate and that employers value.” There is a nexus between an opportunity for institutions of higher education to demonstrate the value of post-secondary learning, and the ability to formally recognize our learners’ assets through trusted, verifiable credentials that function as currency to open doors of opportunity.

It is important to note that despite increasing indicators pointing to the ubiquity of such a future, there are not yet signs of prevailing, monolithic systems for how this future will operate. This absence of standardized expectations for our practices, processes, and policies affords space for strategy and leadership that engages in proactive design to shape how implementation should look for the CU Boulder learning community. Such opportunity will be short-lived; as the space experiences acceleration and maturation, consolidation and standardization will limit flexibility and creativity. It is possible that the design teams that paved the way for the campuses choosing to lead in innovation today will be replaced by adoption teams at the campuses choosing to wait.

For CU Boulder, this is a consequential window of opportunity. Unlike many other post-secondary institutions transparently racing to develop and implement micro-credentials in pure pursuit of new revenue streams, the University of Colorado Boulder has enjoyed the privilege of preparing for this future from a place of sincere commitment to learner-centered, mission-aligned practices and processes.

Sustaining this approach requires senior leaders to provide strategy and leadership. And their communication will be essential to identify values and audiences so that our learners, educators, staff, institutional and industry partners, and broad learning community recognize how we are guided by our core values, vision, and mission. It must be clear that CU Boulder's micro-credentials strategy seeks to synthesize with, supplement and broaden our capacities to advance lives, contribute to society, and serve as a leading model of what a modern university is and can be.

The creation of the Task Force for Micro-Credential Strategy and Leadership and its resulting recommendations offer strategy and leadership guidance to apply the campus-wide intentionality that is vital to meeting this moment for CU Boulder learners, faculty, staff and our broad learning community at large.

Task Force Representation

Invitations to represent their academic units (or to delegate to a direct report) on the task force were sent to every dean. Likewise, directors of many nonacademic units were also invited, as were campus leaders with existing roles and involvement that have been influential and integral to CU Boulder's micro-credentials initiative to date (established in 2020).

Taskforce Co-Chairs

- Robert McDonald, Senior Vice Provost of Online & Extended Education and Dean (University Libraries)
- Kristi Wold-McCormick, Assistant Vice Provost & University Registrar (Office of the Registrar)

BUS Executive Sponsor

- Katherine Eggert, Vice Chancellor and Senior Vice Provost for Academic Planning and Assessment (Academic Affairs)

Taskforce Administrative Leads

- Noah Geisel, Micro-Credentials Program Manager (Office of the Registrar)
- Gabriela Christen-Munoz, Project Manager (Academic and Learning Innovation)

Taskforce Members (or their designees):

Representatives from colleges/schools (Deans or appointed by Deans) and other unit leaders.

- Alaina Nickerson, Interim Director (Career Services)
- Amy Bauer, Associate Dean for Instructional Development and Teaching Professor (School of Law)
- Chase Cromwell, Student Body President and External Affairs Tri-Executive, Executive Branch (Student Government)
- Chris Gustavson, Workforce Innovation Director (Research & Innovation Office Administration)
- Dan Zhang, Associate Dean for Research and Academics (Leeds School of Business)
- Daryl Maeda, Interim Dean (College of Arts & Sciences)
- Elizabeth McVeigh, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Enrollment Business Solutions (Enrollment Management)
- Elizabeth Romero Fuerte, Assistant Vice Provost and Assistant Vice Chancellor for Digital Experience and Technology for Learner Success (Office of Information Technology)
- Erin Frazier, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Constituent Engagement (Strategic Relations and Communications)
- Fernando Rosario-Ortiz, Interim Dean (School of Education)
- Garrett Zantow Bredeson, Associate Chair for Philosophy and Director of Undergraduate Studies (College of Arts & Sciences)
- Ginny McNellis, Assistant Dean (Graduate School)
- Geoffrey Rubinstein, Director of Online Learning (Contemplative Resource Center)
- Jennifer Bone, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs (Leeds School of Business)
- John-Michael Rivera, Dean of Division, Arts and Humanities (College of Arts & Sciences)
- Joseph Thomas, Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs (Division of Student Affairs)
- Julann Andresen, Senior Director, Forever Buffs Engagement & Outreach (Alumni Association)
- Kate Cimino, Assistant Dean for Strategic Initiatives (College of Music)
- Katy Herbert Kotlarczyk, Vice Chancellor for Advancement (Office of Advancement)
- Kelsey Draper, Infrastructure and Resilience Learning & Development Program Manager (Facilities Management)
- Kirk Ambrose, Founding Director (Center for Teaching and Learning)
- Kristen Marie Wanderlich, Senior Training and Development Specialist (Human Resources)
- Lory-Ann Varela, Assistant Vice Provost Academic Support and Enrichment (Office of Undergraduate Education)
- Matthew Murray, Data Librarian and Assistant Teaching Professor (Center for Research Data & Digital Scholarship, University Libraries)
- Merna Jacobsen, Associate Vice Chancellor (Human Resources)
- Noah Finkelstein, Vice Chair, Department of Physics (College of Arts & Sciences)

- Patrick Tally, Assistant Dean of Academic and Curricular Affairs (College of Arts & Sciences)
- Robert Stubbs, Director of Institutional Research (Boulder Faculty Assembly)
- Ryan Nalty, Managing Senior Director for Industry Relations (Office of Advancement)
- Ryan Chreist, Assistant Vice Chancellor of Alumni and Constituent Engagement and Executive Director of CU Alumni Association (Office of Advancement)
- Scott Battle, Dean of Continuing Education and Vice Provost for Outreach & Engagement (Academic Affairs)
- Sriram Sankaranarayanan, Associate Dean for Digital Education (College of Engineering and Applied Science)
- Susan Nasher, Director of Budget, Finance and Academic Resource Analysis (Academic Affairs)
- Others (Flexibility to include additional members or guests as needed)

Purpose

The Task Force for Micro-Credential Strategy and Leadership brings together senior level stakeholders to establish executive sponsorship of micro-credentials at the University of Colorado Boulder, and recommends a university-wide strategy for implementing micro-credentials.

Through our governance practices, promotion of consistent micro-credentials frameworks, and hosting of the annual Badge Summit @ CU Boulder conference, the university has established itself as a *leader* in innovation in the space since 2020. As non-degree credentials programs gain popularity nationally and appear on a worldwide trajectory toward ubiquity, scores of colleges and universities are racing to catch up to us. With appropriate support and prioritization, the university will be nonetheless positioned to continue as a leader and model for innovative credentials and learning mobility.

In order to realize this potential and to achieve our mission as a flagship university on behalf of our learning community, now is a moment for urgency, developing a strategic plan for implementation, and demonstrating executive support for micro-credentials that will inspire and empower campus experts and stakeholders.

Task Force Briefing Document

Participants on the Task Force for Micro-Credential Strategy and Leadership brought a range of background knowledge and experiences to the effort, including several with limited previous exposure to the campus or global landscape. The task force was supported with scaffolds to address foundational understandings and answer questions about the credential innovation landscape, including a briefing document at the first meeting:

Briefing Doc: Micro-credential Strategy and Leadership Task Force

Why Micro-credentials Matter Now

This briefing document is designed to provide the Micro-credential Strategy and Leadership Task Force with compelling reasons why prioritizing and championing micro-credentials is essential at this time for the University of Colorado Boulder.

The university is at a critical juncture in its micro-credential journey. While already recognized as a leader in innovative credentials, the university must act decisively to maintain its edge as institutions nationwide rapidly adopt micro-credential programs. The evolving landscape demands a strategic, university-wide approach to ensure micro-credentials effectively drive student success, retention, and the university's continued leadership in this transformative educational moment.

The Case for Urgency

- **National Momentum:** Universities are increasingly investing in dedicated micro-credential leadership roles to coordinate and bolster these programs. This dedicated focus underscores the growing recognition of micro-credentials as a significant force in the future of higher education.
- **Learning Mobility:** Micro-credentials provide learners with flexible, targeted, and cost-effective ways to upskill, reskill, and demonstrate competency in specific areas. This responsiveness to evolving learner demands positions the university to attract and retain a wider range of students.
- **Workforce Alignment:** Employers are increasingly recognizing the value of micro-credentials as indicators of specific competencies, leading some universities to prioritize employer collaboration in their micro-credential program design.
- **Data-Driven, Skills-First Hiring:** New technologies like Learning and Employment Records (LERs) are emerging to address employer needs for verifiable and standardized information about micro-credentials. This shift toward skills-first hiring practices necessitates a strategic approach to ensure university-issued micro-credentials are recognized and valued.

CU Boulder's Opportunity

- **Maintain Leadership:** The university's existing efforts have positioned it as a leader in the field. By developing and implementing a robust Micro-credentials Strategic Plan, CU Boulder can continue to set a national standard for credential innovation and learning mobility.
- **Drive Student Success:** Micro-credentials can be powerful tools to enhance student success and retention. By integrating them into academic programs, the university can offer students a competitive edge in the workforce and improve their career prospects.
- **Strengthen Industry Partnerships:** Collaborating with employers in the design and development of micro-credentials will strengthen the university's ties to industry, enhance the relevance of its programs, and ensure graduates are equipped with in-demand skills.

Call to Action

This is a pivotal moment for micro-credentials in higher education. By embracing this moment with the urgency it demands, the Micro-credential Strategy and Leadership Task Force can provide the vision and guidance to secure the University of Colorado Boulder's continued leadership in this transformative

educational landscape. The recommendations developed by the task force will be instrumental in shaping the university's approach to micro-credentials and ensuring their effective and impactful implementation.

Objectives

The formation of the Task Force for Micro-Credentials Strategy and Leadership included six objectives. At the conclusion of the task force work, these objectives were either:

- met
- addressed though not fulfilled, or
- found to depend on other objectives or external forces to be satisfied before they could be appropriately addressed.

Ultimately, two of the six objectives were met, one was addressed, and three were dependent on factors beyond the task force's scope:

Objectives	Status
Identify strategic priorities and diverse campus needs and opportunities regarding implementation of micro-credentials.	Addressed. The recommendations create a foundation for this objective. Various needs and opportunities surfaced, however meeting this objective with reliable and comprehensive data will require time and staff resourcing that were not available.
Develop recommendations for a Micro-Credentials Strategic Plan for the University of Colorado Boulder.	Met. The task force has compiled recommendations, organized into 8 categories.
Promote and educate the campus on the university policy for micro-credentials.	Dependent. The micro-credential policy remained in proposal stage throughout the task force duration and is, at the time of this report, not yet adopted as policy.
Provide recommendations for how senior leadership may support and champion credential innovation and strategic partnerships.	Met. There are specific recommendations aligned with this objective, as well as suggested considerations to guide next steps.
Develop a strategic roadmap that can be adopted at the college/school/department level for utilizing micro-credentials to drive student success and retention.	Dependent. Task force members were supportive of this objective and no objections were raised to the ambition. These themes are addressed in the recommendations, though stop short of developing a strategic roadmap. as meaningful brokering of that design requires an executive mandate, clear alignment to Strategic Plan priorities, and adequate resources, none of which currently exist.
Work collaboratively with the Office of the Registrar and strategic partners to	Dependent. Throughout the task force's efforts, many participants demonstrated

establish business processes and implement technologies that support the university's capacity to issue, store, and validate micro-credentials while also capturing and reporting on relevant learning records.

strong interest in and willingness to collaborate. The recommendations include concrete direction and additional considerations for such collaboration. Establishing these collaborative processes and implementing necessary technologies relies on conditions not currently in place, and that are included in the recommendations.

Learners, University, Consumers: Framing our “Why”

As an exercise in understanding and addressing the urgency for strategy and leadership, the task force sought to articulate why micro-credentials matter. Rather than a blanket statement, the task force engaged in activities to surface “**Why** micro-credentials?” specific to three constituencies: learners, the university itself, and consumers/audiences.

While they have shared interests, each group has distinct priorities, and the task force's process created space to center each group and determine how micro-credentials may serve *their* urgent priorities. The task force used the following descriptions to define each constituency:

- Learners
 - Inclusive of matriculated students, alumni, faculty, staff, industry professionals and community members who are a part of the CU Boulder learning community.
- University
 - Faculty, staff and administrators of the University of Colorado Boulder and all of its units.
- Consumers/Audiences
 - The people and (likely) systems that will serve as authentic audiences to receive, view, consume, and operationalize CU Boulder micro-credentials.

The task force was able to reach consensus on summary statements articulating our why for each of these three constituencies. These statements may serve to anchor CU Boulder in our why, and could be utilized as accountability tools against which to validate if strategic decisions are aligned with our purpose:

Micro-Credentials Task Force: What is our WHY?

“Why are we doing this?” - Organized through the lens of three constituencies

Learners	University	Consumers/Audiences
<p><i>We are creating a micro-credential ecosystem to provide learners with accessible, affordable, and verifiable pathways for skill development that empower them to pursue personal goals, advance in their careers and engage in lifelong learning. This system supports learners’ academic growth, acknowledges their needs to stand out in competitive job markets, and provides them with opportunities to validate and showcase their skills in a way that is respected by audiences. By offering right-sized, flexible learning options, we help learners create customized learning experiences that encapsulate their learning, fulfill their career goals, and open up new opportunities for growth.</i></p>	<p><i>For the faculty, staff, and administrator of the university and all of its units, micro-credentials offer an opportunity to remain relevant and avoid obsolescence in a rapidly changing educational and workforce landscape. We are already providing much of the learning needed by our community, and micro-credentials give us the tools to recognize and validate that learning formally. This initiative strengthens CU Boulder’s value proposition to current students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the broader community by positioning us as leaders in learning innovation. Micro-credentials also create opportunities for additional revenue generation and strategic partnerships while helping us build and sustain meaningful connections with our learning community, research community, and workforce community.</i></p>	<p><i>Consumers of our micro-credentials, including employers and industry partners, seek trusted, verifiable indicators of skills and competencies that align with the evolving demands of the workforce. By offering micro-credentials, CU Boulder provides organizations with a reliable way to validate candidates’ skills, helping them quickly fill talent gaps and avoid turnover. Micro-credentials also position CU Boulder as a thought leader in education and workforce development, helping to meet industry needs and ensuring that learners can adapt to new requirements.</i></p>

Micro-credentials Task Force Recommendations

Task force recommendations are intended to inform campus leadership of needed actions in establishing a strategic plan for micro-credentials implementation. Some of the action items call for decisions by campus leadership in terms of prioritization and strategy. If adopted, implementation of other action items will continue to be the responsibility of the Micro-credential Task Force, Micro-credential Program Manager or other delegated campus authorities. The recommendations are categorized into eight strategic imperatives. Each category is presented in a graphic organizer with three parts:

1. **Title** of the strategic imperative and a summary statement to provide additional context.
2. High level **Recommendations** to support the imperatives for micro-credential strategy and leadership.
3. **Decision prompts** intended to support university leadership by further contextualizing considerations that will be key to implementing the recommendations that are adopted.

1. Vision and Strategic Alignment

This category acknowledges a gap in big-picture alignment of micro-credentials with CU Boulder’s Strategic Plan, and emphasizes the need for centralized leadership and strategy that can effectively oversee the development, implementation, and scaling of micro-credentials. It’s about ensuring clear accountability and avoiding fragmented efforts across departments.

Recommendations:

- Align Micro-Credentials with Institutional Goals: Develop and articulate a unified vision for micro-credentials that explicitly ties into the university’s broader mission* around educating the next generation of learners and leaders through a comprehensive mix of programs.
- Leadership establishes and delivers unified messaging about credential innovation that aligns with existing transformation and program goals across departments.
- The university demonstrates that it values micro-credentials by prioritizing them in our own hiring and other internal processes.
- CU Boulder prioritizes systems and policies that focus on learning and skill development aligned with post-graduate and employer needs, and pathways to degrees and career advancement.

Decision Prompts:

- *How should micro-credentials fit into CU Boulder’s long-term vision for educating the next generation of learners?*
- *What role should micro-credentials play in positioning CU Boulder as a leader in innovation, lifelong learning, and workforce development?*
- *How might each CU Boulder unit lead university efforts in both issuing and consuming badges and micro-credentials?*
- *How might the university’s strategies for consuming credentials synthesize with the HR Blueprint Project and how HR services are delivered across campus?*
- *How can we ensure that micro-credentials are part of CU Boulder’s identity, embedded in academic and non-academic programming and external partnerships?*
- *How might alignment support quality?*

**CU Boulder recognizes the exceptional opportunities associated with its role as a research university, and values the unique strength and character research achievements bring to undergraduate education. It is keenly aware of its responsibility for educating the next generation of citizens and leaders, and for fostering the spirit of discovery through research. Indeed, CU Boulder believes that its students, both graduate and undergraduate, benefit from the comprehensive mix of programs and research excellence that characterize a flagship university. Thus, CU Boulder’s statutory mission is relevant today and will remain relevant tomorrow.*

2. Centralized Governance and Leadership Accountability

This category emphasizes the need for centralized leadership and governance structures that can effectively oversee the development, implementation, and scaling of micro-credentials. Task force members established this as a priority in ensuring clear accountability and avoiding fragmented efforts across departments.

Recommendation:

- Advocate for more intention at the cabinet level for credential innovation to be a strategic priority (or for cabinet level leadership to explicitly declare that it is not a priority and identify why it is not a priority).
- Establish a centralized governance structure for micro-credential development oversight and integration across the university in order to streamline decision-making and ensure alignment with strategic priorities.
- Educate senior leaders at the university (Provost, Deans, VPs) so they understand and can champion for micro-credential development and adoption.
- Leadership prioritizes resources, including budgetary resources, for micro-credential initiatives and staffing so they are managed adequately, effectively and evenly, without overreliance on individual staff.

Decision Prompts:

- *What strategy and leadership structures must be in place for the development, implementation and scaling of micro-credentials?*
- *Who should be accountable for the long-term success of micro-credentials?*
- *How do we identify and avoid redundancies in micro-credentials?*
- *How can we balance autonomy in departments with the need for a coherent, university-wide strategy?*
- *If micro-credentials are not included in the university’s strategic plan, budget, or metrics, who is accountable for making decisions about their future?*
- *How might a communication plan support and reinforce this effort?*
- *What roles and responsibilities do senior leaders have in integrating micro-credentials into core operations?*

3. Sustainability and Resource Allocation

This category deals with creating a financially and operationally sustainable model for micro-credentials by identifying the necessary funding models, resources, and support systems that ensure micro-credentials are scalable without straining other university resources.

Recommendation:

- Leadership develops and/or supports a sustainable model for micro-credentials, including continuing funds and revenue generation, and sharing incentives to support growth.
- Create revenue-generating policies that establish consistent practices in alignment with CU Boulder's values.
- Establish centralized services and resources to assist with micro-credential development, implementation, and administration with a financially sustainable approach.
- Regularly assess micro-credentials to measure learner outcomes and program viability and value. Metrics must reflect university values in terms of education and workforce alignment.

Decision Prompts:

- *What funding models will ensure the long-term sustainability of CU Boulder's micro-credential offerings? (Pricing structures, fees collection and revenue distribution)*
- *What structures are required to ensure micro-credentials are financially accessible, and to meet the financial aid needs not currently provided for by existing structures?*
- *How do we align micro-credential initiatives with revenue generation while maintaining academic and institutional integrity?*
- *What institutional resources need to be allocated (financial, human, technical) to ensure micro-credentials are scalable and sustainable over the next 5-10 years?*
- *How can we ensure that micro-credentials generate value in harmony with other campus initiatives?*
- *What are/aren't appropriate practices for budgeting, pricing, marketing, and partnering?*

4. Strategic Partnerships and Industry and Community Alignment

This category is about having systems and processes in place for building high-value partnerships and aligning credentials with industry, workforce, and community needs.

Recommendation:

- Prioritize building strategic partnerships with industry, academic institutions, and other organizations that align with CU Boulder's mission/goals and the needs of the workforce. Partnerships should be viewed as both practical and as opportunities to enhance the university's reputation, research opportunities, and long-term value proposition in serving our broad learning community.
- Identify the internal role(s) responsible for systems that foster relationships and build/scale partnerships that align with broader industry and learner needs, positioning CU Boulder to meet the demands of key employers.
- Collaborate closely with academic and industry community partners to ensure offerings reflect both academic and research goals, as well as market relevance.
- Create a feedback loop with partners to consistently measure success and improve and expand offerings.

Decision Prompts:

- *Who are the most critical industry partners to align with CU Boulder's vision for micro-credentials?*
- *How can we ensure that partnerships contribute to both academic excellence and workforce development?*
- *Who is accountable for ensuring that industry partnerships and alignment are successful and meaningful?*
- *Is stewardship of partner relationships handled through consistent practices and processes?*
- *Are the internal stewards of CU Boulder's partner relationships adequately resourced and equipped with the skills required to meet the challenges of building partnerships with industry partners?*
- *How do we position CU Boulder as a leader in both academic and workforce credentialing through these partnerships?*
- *How might industry-aligned credentials be strategically embedded into coursework, co-curricular, and extracurricular programming?*
- *What role should external partnerships play in the long-term strategy for micro-credentials, and how do we balance internal academic goals with external workforce needs and pursuit of new revenue?*
- *How might we ensure that micro-credentials have real-world relevance and enhance graduates' employability?*

5. Technology Infrastructure and Digital Transformation

This category focuses on the technological infrastructure needed to support and scale micro-credential offerings, including the need for digital systems that ensure portability, track learner outcomes, and align with CU Boulder's broader technology strategies.

Recommendation:

- Leadership should prioritize the integration of micro-credentials into CU Boulder's overall digital strategy and technological infrastructure, ensuring that the university is prepared to lead in both academic and workforce digital credentialing.
- A robust technology infrastructure capable of supporting integration and management of credentials is essential for advancing CU Boulder's micro-credential strategy. Credential mobility and the expectation that credentials will be operationalized is a worthy tenant for inclusion in the university's micro-credential strategy, and is an opportunity for CU Boulder to be a national leader in establishing that value.
- Develop a technology platform for micro-credential communication, leveraging integrated data systems to ensure consistent, accurate information that is accessible to learners and staff.
- Integrate micro-credential technology into existing systems with robust data infrastructure enabling learner progress monitoring and tracking. This integration will provide actionable insights to support informed decision-making and enhance the learner experience.

Decision Prompts:

- *How can CU Boulder leverage technology to become a leader in credential innovation?*
- *What investments in technology infrastructure are required to support sustainable micro-credential growth over the next decade?*
- *How can we ensure that our digital credentialing technologies intentionally and efficiently integrate with internal platforms, external platforms and industry standards?*
- *What role will technology play in ensuring the long-term scalability and credibility of micro-credentials?*
- *Who are the audiences for our micro-credential information and how do we reach them?*
- *How does our strategy connect with what faculty and departments are already doing (or being asked to do)?*
- *How might LER-related technology such as portable digital badge metadata synthesize with and support student success, career services, transfer student and other key existing efforts?*
- *How do we ensure that credentials and their data persist for a learner's lifetime?*

6. Culture of Innovation and Continuous Improvement

This category encourages a mindset of experimentation and ongoing improvement to foster a culture at CU Boulder that embraces new credentialing methods and adapts to meet emerging trends in education and the workforce.

Recommendation:

- Create a culture of continuous improvement where micro-credentials are not seen as one-off initiatives but as part of CU Boulder's ongoing commitment to innovation, workforce development, student success and academic excellence. Leadership must cultivate a mindset that encourages experimentation, iteration and responsiveness to learner and workforce needs.
- Address fears and misunderstandings about micro-credentials being a threat to existing programs by strategically communicating the value of credential innovation and emphasizing CU Boulder's focus on synthesizing with and enhancing existing programs.
- Create a period of discovery to ideate and refine processes for identifying gaps, learners and markets that micro-credentials can help address.
- Prioritize learners' needs in ways that are concrete, ensuring that credentials provide tangible value and skill-building opportunities.

Decision Prompts:

- *How can CU Boulder cultivate a culture of innovation that supports the continuous development of micro-credentials?*
- *Should micro-credentials intentionally and strategically synthesize with our existing culture of recognition (Dean's List, research awards, etc) in support of academic excellence?*
- *What processes can we put in place to ensure that micro-credentials are high quality and aligned with emerging trends and workforce demands?*
- *How do we create feedback loops that allow for continuous refinement and responsiveness to industry changes?*
- *How do we proactively respond to internal fears, concerns, and misinformation about the purpose and intent of micro-credentialing programs?*
- *How might we collect feedback from students, faculty, industry stakeholders, and alumni to ensure that micro-credentials are meeting current needs and driving positive outcomes.*

7. Access and Success for All

This category acknowledges that access and learner success are broadened through credential affordability and flexibility. However, these principles need to be included in executive level discussions in order to expand impact such that they are embedded in our practices and processes.

Recommendation:

- Ensure that micro-credentials are developed and implemented with a focus on access and learner success, offering opportunities to learners from diverse backgrounds, including CU Boulder staff and faculty, non-traditional learners, working professionals, and underserved communities.
- Prioritize communications strategies to foster potential learners' understanding of opportunities and processes of different tiers and types of micro-credentials and digital badges.
- Recognize systemic and structural difficulties confronting learners, and strategically plan for the scaffolds and supports that will empower their preparation, participation, and success in micro-credentials programs.
- Leverage micro-credentials and innovative learning records to ensure that all learners can articulate the purpose and value of their CU Boulder education.

Decision Prompts:

- *How do we ensure that CU Boulder's micro-credential offerings are accessible to all learners?*
- *What role should micro-credentials play in expanding access to higher education, particularly for staff and other underserved learners?*
- *How can leadership create policies and funding models that support access and learner success in micro-credential programming?*
- *How might the university's micro-credentials strategy support learning and credential earning opportunities that help broader community members see the CU Boulder learning community as a place where they belong?*
- *What role do micro-credentials have in the university's admissions, transfer, and prior learning assessment strategies?*
- *How might digital badge metadata be leveraged to communicate transparently learner-centered practices (such as the availability of advising services, access to mentorship, financial aid, etc) embedded in the university's micro-credential programs?*

8. Measurement and Accountability

This category focuses on establishing meaningful metrics to track the value and success of micro-credentials. What we measure must align with the institution's values and broader educational mission.

Recommendation

- Develop clearly defined metrics and goals that are supported by leadership.
- Create periodic review and assessment processes so that the university can measure and report the effectiveness and relevance of micro-credentials over time.
- Ensure that measurements align with institutional values.
- Augment learner records to formally notice, name and reflect the breadth of learning, research, skills development and scholarly achievement that are realized by students, faculty, staff and the CU Boulder learning community.

Decision Prompts:

- *How do we ensure that the metrics we create for micro-credentials reflect CU Boulder's educational goals and values?*
- *What learner outcomes should we prioritize for tracking and reporting (e.g., career advancement, further education, skills mastery, joy)?*
- *How frequently should we review and assess the success of micro-credentials to ensure their continued relevance and alignment with market needs?*
- *What tools and systems are needed to track learner outcomes and ensure that our micro-credential offerings provide tangible benefits to students and the workforce?*
- *How can we create a feedback loop with learners and industry to continuously improve our measurement criteria?*
- *How do we report micro-credential offerings, enrollments and completions for accountability and visibility?*

Concluding Narrative

The Task Force for Micro-Credential Strategy and Leadership was convened to provide CU Boulder with a roadmap for the strategy and leadership required for implementing micro-credentials in ways that are learner-centered, mission-aligned, and consistent with our university commitment to being a leader in innovation. Over the course of its work, the task force was successful in meeting a primary objective: Develop recommendations for a “Micro-Credentials Strategic Plan” for the University of Colorado Boulder.

These recommendations may now serve as a foundation for executive decision-making.

Through a series of meetings and structured exercises, the task force explored how CU Boulder can leverage micro-credentials to meet the needs of learners, the university, and external audiences such as employers and industry partners. The discussions revealed that while there is enthusiasm and momentum for micro-credentials, their successful implementation requires **intentional strategy, governance, and executive leadership** to ensure coherence and long-term sustainability.

Importantly, various activities surfaced a key cause for caution and concern: As a campus, we do not collectively know what micro-credentials are, and we have minimal awareness or conceptual understanding of the broader LER (Learning and Employment Records) ecosystem to which they belong.

Some of this confusion or lack of understanding may be addressed through the task force recommendations for clear communication of centralized vision and governance. However, most of our institutional knowledge and proficiency rests with and relies on a handful of individuals. The fundamental gaps in our institution’s foundational understanding of the landscape poses costly risks that can only be mitigated through educating ourselves and expanding knowledge, especially at senior leadership levels and in areas without redundant capacity backing up a key individual contributor.

The task force’s recommendations, structured around eight strategic imperatives, offer a blueprint for CU Boulder to move forward. These imperatives call for:

- A clear vision and strategic alignment to ensure micro-credentials reinforce the university’s core mission.
- Centralized governance and leadership accountability to prevent fragmentation and redundancy.
- Sustainable funding models, incentives and resource allocation to support viability.
- Strong industry partnerships to align credentials with workforce needs.
- Robust technology infrastructure to manage digital credentials effectively.
- A culture of innovation and continuous improvement to keep micro-credentials relevant.
- A commitment to access and success for all, ensuring credentials serve and are available to all learners.
- Measurement and accountability frameworks to track impact and success.

Throughout this process, a critical insight emerged: Micro-credentials will happen at CU Boulder—with or without a strategic framework. Faculty, staff, and campus leaders have already started developing and offering micro-credentials in response to learner and industry needs. The question before university leadership is whether CU Boulder will actively shape and lead this space or remain reactive, allowing an uncoordinated patchwork of initiatives to develop in isolation.

Additionally, while university-wide strategy is essential, leaders at all levels do not have to wait for central governance to take action. Task force participants recognize that leaders across campus can take immediate steps to support micro-credential implementation within their spheres of influence. *[See Appendix]* Simple actions—such as publicly recognizing faculty who develop micro-credentials, integrating them into hiring strategies, and advocating for their inclusion in strategic planning—can help create momentum while broader institutional structures are put in place.

The Task Force’s Call to Action

The recommendations in this report are not a mandate but a starting point—an invitation for CU Boulder’s executive leadership to determine their leadership stance, and whether micro-credentials should be pursued in a way that is strategic, coherent, and impactful. The path forward is clear: either CU Boulder leads in this space with intentionality, or it risks falling behind as micro-credentials become an essential component of higher education. The task force has laid the groundwork. Now, it is up to institutional leadership to decide how CU Boulder will move forward.

Appendix

Included in this appendix are two resources created during the task force working meetings:

- Risk Factors and Challenges CU Boulder Faces in Implementing Successful Micro-Credential Strategy & Leadership
- Local Leadership Actions and Easy Wins to Help Spark Creativity for Micro-credential Support

Additional meeting resources and process documentation are available by request:
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Risk Factors

Throughout activities and discussions about possibilities and opportunities to inform the task force recommendations, participants were consistent in noticing and naming risk factors and challenges. Left unaddressed or strategically unplanned for, these risks could be barriers to success.

One observation is that some considerations are independent of micro-credentials. Task force members surfaced such risks as familiar conditions that are common sources of friction in campus change management practices.

The task force consolidated concerns into ten risk factors and challenges:

Risk Factors and Challenges CU Boulder Faces in Implementing Successful Micro-credential Strategy & Leadership
Lack of resources and leadership/one place of authority to govern development and maintenance of micro-credentials
Who gets domain ownership over certain topical areas
Building credentials if they aren't revenue generating
Lack of top-level leadership/funding focused on moving this forward quickly
Should CU Boulder be the organization creating industry-based micro-credentials or should we find ways to integrate existing industry credentials with our curricula?
Getting broad faculty buy-in is doable, but a challenge in several respects; micro-credentials are still not well understood on campus, and faculty, especially in the more traditional academic disciplines, are inherently suspicious of initiatives where it looks like industry concerns are driving decision-making within academia.

Not recognizing the disruptive potential of micro-credentials and reinscribing same territorialism
Disaggregated approach yielding results that aren't aligned
Let's not repeat campus patterns of redundant/competing/confusing overlap of offerings
Lack of data from current decentralized structure to communicate non-monetary ROI especially around non-credit credentials

Strategies for local leaders beyond “Hurry up and wait”

In addition to formulating and reaching consensus on strategy and leadership recommendations for cabinet-level leaders, task force participants agreed that local leaders have the opportunity to use their positions meaningfully to promote and accelerate CU Boulder’s micro-credential implementation within their spheres of influence. Some voiced that, given the time it will take before we have a campus-wide strategy, there is perhaps a responsibility to begin leading where they can.

In response to such input, the task force engaged in a brief activity to draft a list of examples of micro and macro actions to help spark creativity for micro-credential support and implementation. This informal list may serve as inspiration for achievable ways that many leaders can engage and impact change:

Ideation: Local Leadership Actions and Easy Wins to Help Spark Creativity for Micro-credential Support

- Earn micro-credentials themselves to model engagement and demonstrate value.
- Add micro-credentials as a standing item to department and leadership team agendas, fostering ongoing discussion.
- Invite the Micro-Credential Program Manager or other experts to give informational sessions to staff, faculty, or student groups.
- Publicly recognize and celebrate colleagues who initiate new micro-credentials or who award badges to successful earners.
- Incorporate micro-credentials in hiring strategies, such as by listing relevant credentials in job postings and prioritizing applicants with these credentials.
- Create internal incentives for faculty and staff to develop new micro-credentials that align with university goals.
- Host micro-credential workshops or "lunch and learns" within your department to educate colleagues on the process and benefits.

Ideation: Local Leadership Actions and Easy Wins to Help Spark Creativity for Micro-credential Support

- Embed micro-credentials into department-level development programs, offering credentials for internal training and professional growth.
- Collaborate with the Alumni Association and Career Services to explore how micro-credentials can help bridge learning and career advancement opportunities.
- Use department newsletters or communications channels to highlight the importance of micro-credentials and share success stories.
- Encourage faculty to offer micro-credentials as part of their course offerings, particularly for skills that are in high demand in the job market.
- Host a live webinar with an executive leader from a potential external partner, where they publicly ideate on what and how partnerships could look. This provides a model for collaboration and is noncommittal but effective.
- Create mentorship opportunities for junior faculty or staff who want to develop or implement micro-credentials.
- Use micro-credentials as a retention tool by offering employees opportunities to upskill and earn credentials for career development.
- Provide resources and training for staff on how to integrate micro-credentials into existing programs and curricula.
- Collaborate across departments (e.g., between colleges, Alumni, HR) to create interdisciplinary micro-credentials that appeal to a broad range of learners.
- Advocate for micro-credentials in strategic planning sessions, ensuring they are part of departmental and university-wide initiatives.
- Develop tracking and reporting mechanisms to monitor the impact of micro-credentials on student and staff development, sharing outcomes with leadership.
- Integrate micro-credential discussions into alumni events, showcasing how the university is preparing students for future workforce needs.
- Organize or participate in cross-campus task forces or working groups focused on advancing micro-credential strategies and sharing best practices.
- Provide a one-page tutorial on how to add badges to email signatures, signaling to others that these credentials are valued.
- Share a template for LinkedIn posts where staff can celebrate earning micro-credentials, making it easy for others to replicate.
- Send out a pre-written email template that faculty can use to notify students about new micro-credential opportunities.
- Create a micro-credential spotlight in your department's newsletter, featuring a success story from a colleague who has developed or earned a micro-credential.
- Host a 10-minute stand-up meeting dedicated to sharing the value of micro-credentials and how they support department goals.

Ideation: Local Leadership Actions and Easy Wins to Help Spark Creativity for Micro-credential Support

- Record a quick video (on your phone or computer) sharing why you personally value micro-credentials and circulate it to your team.
- Create a micro-credential FAQ section on your department's internal web page to answer common questions with minimal effort.
- Nominate a "Micro-Credential Champion" within your team who can answer questions and drive enthusiasm about new credentials.
- Send a quick congratulatory email to staff or faculty who earn micro-credentials, cc'ing relevant leadership, to highlight their achievement.
- Add a micro-credential achievement board (physical or virtual) where individuals can showcase the credentials they've earned and recognize each other's efforts.
- Understand why micro-credentials are strategically important for CU Boulder and the future of education, and be confident in your ability to speak about micro-credentials
- Utilize resources such as the [Change Leadership Toolkit](#).