

The National Career Readiness Certificate

Employer Handbook

December 14, 2007



NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
CERTIFICATE

© 2007 by ACT, Inc. All rights reserved.

Acknowledgements

The National Career Readiness Certificate holds great promise to serve the interests of the U.S. workforce, as well as employers, trade and labor organizations, economic and workforce development organizations, and educational systems and institutions. Since the Certificate was launched just over a year ago, several employers, educational institutions, state workforce development agencies, and economic development organizations have assisted ACT in developing and refining this key workforce initiative. We greatly appreciate the efforts of these organizations in helping ACT develop the National Career Readiness Certificate program.

ACT would like to give a special note of thanks to the West Michigan WIRED Program and the Skills Advantage program in the Cedar Rapids – Iowa City Corridor for their contributions to this Employer Handbook.



Table of Contents

1. Purpose Statement
2. Introduction
3. What is the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)?
4. Application of the NCRC
5. NCRC Use Models
6. Implementation
7. Stakeholders
8. Value of Participating in the NCRC Movement
9. Supporting Products
10. Appendix
 - A. Frequently Asked Questions
 - B. Testing Sites
 - C. Sample Certificates
 - D. Success Stories
 - E. NCRC Brochure

1. Purpose Statement for the Employer Handbook

The purpose of this Handbook is to assist the staff, who are responsible for implementing the National Career Readiness System, maximize the benefits of this program to your organization. The Handbook provides both background information necessary to your organization's understanding of the National Career Readiness System and implementation suggestions for your consideration and use.

A strength of the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) and other System components is the customization capabilities that can be used to meet the needs of your particular organization. You will note throughout the Handbook specific statements directed to connecting the content of the Handbook to your specific needs and interests. In addition, you will find information in the Employer Handbook as to who to call at ACT regarding issues and questions. In addition, there are references to ACT resources that provide additional information on ACT's products and services.

The advice and guidance contained in this Employer Handbook is specific to the NCRC or other WorkKeys powered certificate programs that exactly adhere to NCRC principles such as not printing WorkKeys scores on the certificate credential.

The Employer Handbook is, and always will be, a work in progress. Your experience will help shape future editions of the Handbook. The format of the Handbook (delivered in a 3-ring binder) permits easy update as additional applications for the Certificate are identified and services are added to the System. We wish you well as you begin your National Career Readiness Certificate use journey.

2. Introduction

The U.S. economy is challenged by:

- The presence of larger number of individuals who lack sufficient knowledge and skills to meet the higher expectations about performance in today's workforce.
- Questions about the value, meaning, and relevance of traditional educational credentials give rise to the need for objective assessment measures that confirm worker competence and help predict future performance. Employers want new forms of evidence that their workers possess the means to excel in highly specialized work areas.
- Doubts about the adequacy of workers' foundational skills throughout the workforce serve to inspire growing interest in general work-ready certifications that document applied skills that can be shown to be essential to virtually every job, occupation, profession, and career.
- The value and utility of these credentials is greatly enhanced by the capability to connect the needs of private employers seeking highly skilled workers with the methods that are used by institutions and individuals who prepare individuals to enter the workforce.



The certificate is a meaningful credential based on objective measures of skills directly linked to the workplace

Businesses and communities create competitive advantages when they can measure, document, analyze, and increase the skills of the local workforce. Your company's decision to adopt the National Career Readiness Certificate represents an assertive step towards defining skills that are essential in today's competitive business environment. At the same time, your commitment provides important opportunities for individuals seeking meaningful careers and educators who are preparing them.

3. What is the National Career Readiness Certificate?



Using common language gives you the power to precisely describe the workforce skills you need your applicants to demonstrate

The National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) verifies that an individual has the foundational skills necessary to be successful entering employment, advancing to a new position, or entering a training program. It serves as an employability skill credential that demonstrates that an individual has certain essential and technical skills that are important across a range of jobs. The NCRC confirms an individual's specific skill set by assessing skill levels in relationship to workplace requirements. Three certificate levels signify different skill levels with higher levels indicating readiness for a greater range of jobs. Certificates are issued to individuals who successfully complete a series of three assessments developed by ACT, Inc. as part of its nationally recognized WorkKeys program.

3.1. Meaningful for individuals, businesses, educators, and workforce strategies

WorkKeys assessments can be used by virtually any entity that is engaged in ensuring the employability skills of current and future employees. Test results provide valuable information for individuals, employers, high schools, colleges, one-stop centers, job services, welfare-to-work programs, correctional institutions, and occupational training programs. The WorkKeys system is designed to give individuals, educators, and employers a common language that can be used to target, develop, and measure applied skills in terms of workplace performance.

3.2 Based on objective, standardized, and certifiable assessment results


WorkKeys offers objective, standardized tests administered in secure, monitored testing environments to ensure the validity of test results. The system has been in use since 1992 and its components are fully researched, validated and available for immediate implementation. The system offers Internet-based and paper-and-pencil tests with alternate forms—a must for any certificate program. More than 12 million WorkKeys tests have been administered since the system was launched nearly 15 years ago.

3.3 Widely available via an established network

An established network of partner organizations is strategically positioned to support the administration of the National Career Readiness Certificate with services that include both assessment delivery and targeted training programs. The network includes facilities at 235 community colleges, relationships with more than 400 institutional and individual resellers, training organizations offering electronic training content, secondary schools, Workforce Investment Boards, economic developers and a wide range of government agencies and organizations.



You can use the national system to replicate successful HR initiatives and unify worker training and development across the United States



Instituting a national system helps future workers get ready to meet the same skill requirements across multiple company sites

3.4 Nationally portable

As a national program recognized by employers, education, government, and individuals, the WorkKeys system and the National Career Readiness Certificate provide comprehensive solutions that are applicable to workforce challenges across the United States. This enables you to help your company develop, maintain, and evaluate preparation strategies at multiple educational institutions. This process ensures that all workers pursue a common employability standard at all your company's locations.

The National Career Readiness Certificate is a valuable component in the evaluation of individuals that have relocated to your community. This credential will enable you to compare the foundational skills of applicants from anywhere in the country.

3.5 Developed and maintained by ACT, Inc.

A not-for-profit organization founded in 1959, ACT is an international leader in assessment and workforce development services and actively practices an ongoing commitment to helping people achieve academic and career success. ACT is best known for the ACT college assessment instrument used by millions of students each year as part of the college admissions process. ACT developed the WorkKeys system and the National Career Readiness Certificate as tools for helping individuals gain admission to the workforce and advance in their careers.

3.6 Benefits for employers

For employers participating in the NCRC, the primary benefits are:

- **Matches employee skills with job requirements**
- **Identifies key skill requirements of job**
- **Targets training needs**
- **Improves employee retention and performance**
- **Increases employee productivity**

The certificates can be considered along with other education and background information when making employment and training decisions. They might be considered as a “plus” when presented to an employer during the hiring or advancement process. They also may help identify who can benefit from specific training programs. An employer may accept the certificate results to reduce hiring time and costs. If an employer is already using one or more of the WorkKeys assessments, applicants with a national certificate also may be able to skip those tests, resulting in cost savings for the employer. The National Career Readiness Certificate benefits from established credibility among employers. More than 2,500



New employees with certificate levels that align with your job requirements will help your company cut training time and expense

companies use the WorkKeys system and ACT has documented its benefits by collecting data from hundreds of organizations over the last 10 years. This positions the National Career Readiness Certificate to serve as the entry point to a larger human capital development system and provides substantial additional benefits to employers. Integrating it into the selection process helps small businesses overcome the absence of an established human resources department. Linking certificate level to occupation-specific information is an important benefit for small- and medium-sized businesses.

4.0 Application of the NCRC

4.1 National Career Readiness Certificate levels

There are three levels of Certificates:

Bronze signifies that an individual has scored at least a Level 3 in each of the three core areas addressed by the certificate. This indicates that the individual possesses the foundational skills needed to perform in 35 percent of the jobs identified in the ACT Occupational Profiles database.

Silver signifies that an individual has scored at least a Level 4 in each of the three core areas. It indicates that the individual possesses the foundational skills needed to perform in 65 percent of the jobs addressed by occupational profiles.

Gold identifies individuals who have scored at least a Level 5 in each of the three core areas. They possess the foundational skills needed for 90 percent of the jobs in the database.

4.2 Foundational skill areas measured by National Career Readiness Certificates

Three core WorkKeys assessments are used for the Certificate. ACT research shows that these skills are essential to 85 percent of over 14,000 jobs in the WorkKeys database of job profiles. The NCRC is a measure of critical thinking and problem-solving skills across a range of essential work-related competencies.

4.2.1 Reading for Information

Measures the skills people use when they read and use written text in order to do a job. The written texts include memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations. It is often the case that workplace communications are not necessarily well written or targeted to the appropriate audience. Reading for Information materials do not include information that is presented graphically, such as charts, forms, or blueprints.

4.2.2 Applied Mathematics

Measures the skills people use when they apply mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, and problem-solving techniques to work-related problems. The test questions require the individual to set up and solve problems and do the types of calculations that actually occur in the workplace.

4.2.3 Locating Information

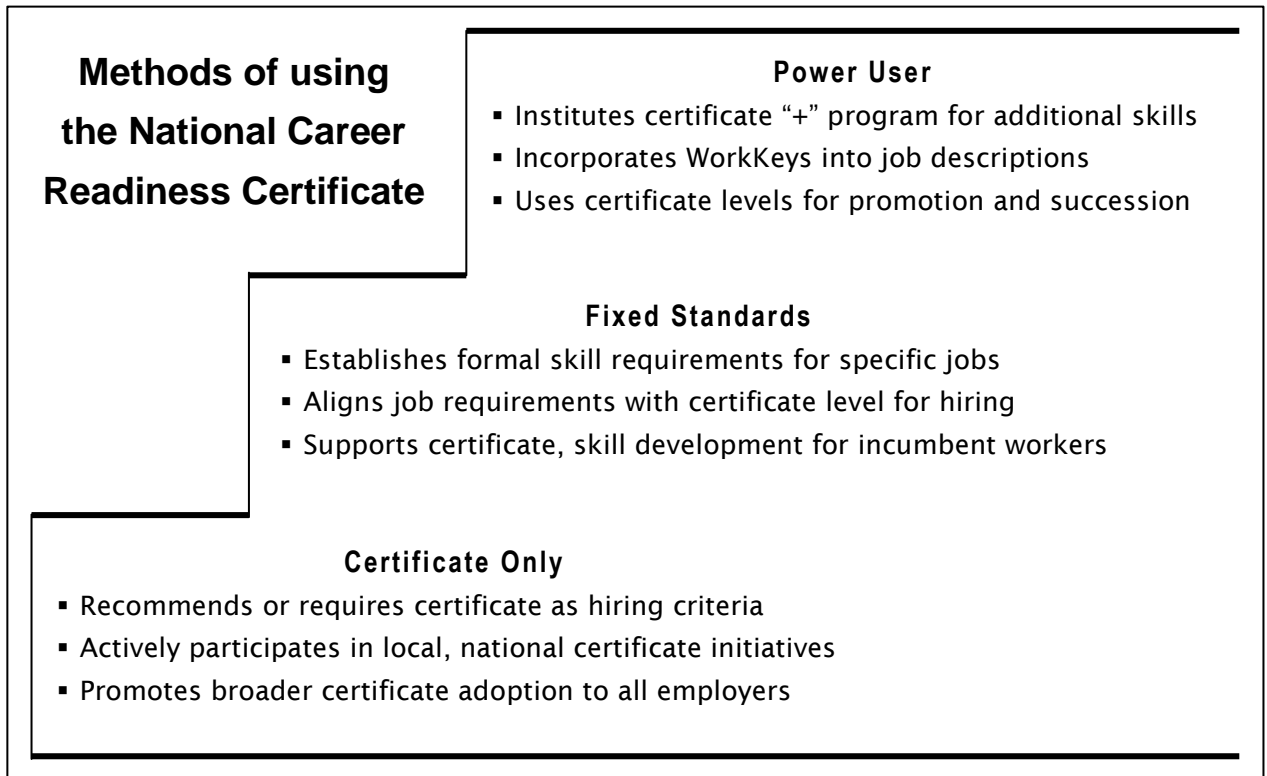
Measures the skills people use when they work with workplace graphics such as charts, graphs, tables, forms, flowcharts, diagrams, floor plans, maps, and instrument gauges.

Individuals are asked to find information in a graph or insert information into a graphic. They also must compare, summarize, and analyze information found in related graphics.

5. NATIONAL CAREER READINESS USE MODELS

The ultimate value of the National Career Readiness Certificate to your business will largely be determined by the way in which you choose to use it.

Employers can apply the NCRC at several levels of engagement that range from the hiring decision to a comprehensive range of human resources management functions that encompass recruitment, hiring, promotion, training, succession planning, mentoring, and performance evaluation. In general, these models are associated with three use levels:



Certificate Only: Recommends or requires that job applicants possess a national certificate in order to apply for a job.

Fixed Standards: Identifies certificate level associated with a specific job and uses them as a primary factor in hiring decision.

Power User: Incorporates the National Career Readiness Certificate, WorkKeys assessments, and other NCRC System components as the basis for a strategic talent management system.

5.1 Certificate Only Model

Employers who recommend or require that job applicants possess the NCRC are positioning the system as one of several criteria that will be used to identify job candidates. The final selection decision will be based on an effective comparison of all of these criteria. This model's primary benefit is the reliable comparison of foundational skill levels demonstrated by multiple candidates that is established through standardized and objective measures of assessment. Other information collected as part of a multiple-step hiring process – applications, resumes, school transcripts, interviews, and reference checks – are to be collected and considered within the process. Under this method, all applicants are asked to provide the same credential as part of the selection process as a common standard.

5.1.1 Estimating skill levels

Employers can make hiring decisions more precise by better understanding the skill requirements associated with their jobs. ACT's Occupational Profiles database can provide insight into the skills and skill levels required for jobs that are similar to those they are attempting to fill. By estimating skill levels required for a specific job requirement, employers are using the certificate to supplement and corroborate information gathered at multiple points in the hiring process. It does not alleviate the need to collect and evaluate other types of information in reaching a decision to hire.

5.1.2 Training requirements after hiring

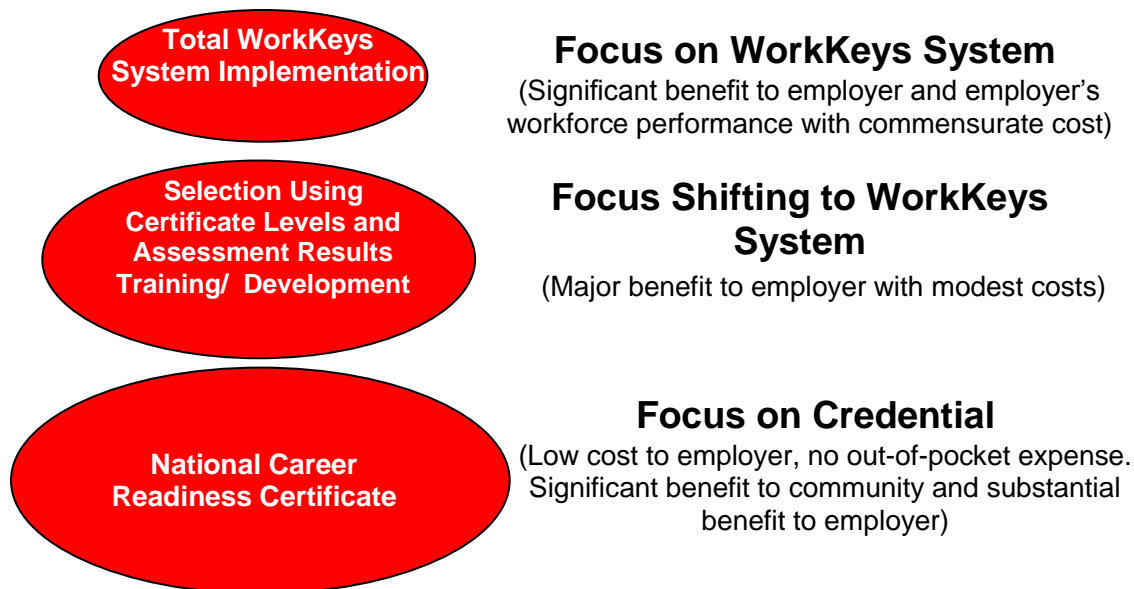
Estimating skill levels can also inform the type of training processes that need to occur after a candidate is hired. A limited applicant pool may lead an employer to hire individuals whose skills do not conform to skill estimates. In this case, a job candidate's certificate level can assist in identifying the training regime needed to raise their skill levels to a targeted standard.

5.1.3 ACT Occupational Profiles

An important resource that can assist employers in this process is ACT's Occupational Profile database. Information distilled from job analysis studies on several thousand jobs is the basis for more than 400 Occupational Profiles contained in the database. The profiles were developed by combining job analysis information from Profiles that were conducted on more

than 4,800 jobs into groups of jobs, or occupations, that share the same identification numbers in the O*NET system, the nation's primary source of occupational information. O*Net Online (<http://online.onetcenter.org/>) was developed for the U.S. Department of Labor to provide information on attributes and characteristics of workers and occupations. Profiles enable a review of skill levels associated with a wide range of jobs that will likely resemble those for which an employer is hiring.

Employer Adoption Use Model

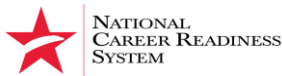


5.2 Fixed Standards Model

This model assumes that an individual must meet a specific standard of performance on one or more of the WorkKeys assessments included in the National Career Readiness Certificate in order to be hired or promoted by the employer. Elevating the use of certificate data to this level creates a corresponding need for a higher level of documentation. To enhance the legal defensibility of its employment practices, the employer needs to gather information that documents the linkage between the skills demonstrated by candidates and the specific performance requirements of the jobs for which they are applying.

Employers who implement the National Career Readiness Certificate at this level can draw on documentation from a variety of sources to substantiate this connection. Documentation can be based on basic research results, computerized documentation systems, or onsite consultant engagements that deliver precise information about a specific job in a specific organization. Each

level of engagement produces a higher degree of documentation that, in turn, will provide further information and documentation in your human resource management system.



Power users conduct job studies to help guide programs for selecting, promoting, and developing individuals with skill levels that result in high performance

5.3 Power User Model

Employers who move to the highest levels of the fixed standards model become power users of the National Career Readiness Certificate and the WorkKeys system. This transition achieves maximum benefits and return on investment as the system is established as the basis for a full-fledged talent management system capable of addressing the full range of human resource needs. Linkages between the national certificate, the WorkKeys assessments, and other system components create the potential to put a robust workforce credential at the center of a comprehensive development strategy.

Companies that wish to move their hiring and promotion practices to the power user level can implement job analysis studies that yield extensive information and documentation that describes an employer's jobs, processes, environments, and objectives for growth. Professional researchers from ACT frequently conduct these studies as consulting engagements. They are also performed by outside consultants authorized by ACT and by authorized staff at a wide range of institutional providers that include workforce development centers, community colleges, and state agencies.

From the job analysis studies, it may be determined that additional WorkKeys skills besides Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information may be very important in a specific job. For example, Observation is a very important skill for a Security Guard, Applied Technology is important for Automotive Mechanics, and Teamwork is important for Nurses. Therefore, a power user may require additional foundational skills to meet the requirements of a specific position. Employers may find Personal Skills to be very important in assessing the full potential of applicants and employees. The following describes how the power user can utilize the WorkKeys system in their organization.



Power users raise the bar by identifying and assessing skills that meet their specific needs, establishing a "certificate +" to single out key objectives for the workforce

- **Screening** – finding dependable, trustworthy employees while saving time and money in the process. WorkKeys enables you to match the work requirements that are important on the job to the skill levels in the candidate pool. For example, the WorkKeys Performance assessment can be used to screen for negative work attitudes and risky work behavior. The WorkKeys foundational skills can be used to screen for communication, problem solving, and interpersonal skills.
- **Selection** – taking the guesswork out of hiring by comparing potential employees' WorkKeys assessment scores with benchmarks based on occupational needs. The WorkKeys system provides several options to benchmark requirements

needed for specific jobs and to make accurate, well-informed hiring decisions.

You can also reduce the time you spend on costly interviews and unqualified candidates. For example, the Talent assessment allows you to compare applicants' attitudes and behaviors to top performers in a specific job to determine the best candidates. Add that information to the foundational WorkKeys skills assessment results to identify individuals who have the skills to succeed on the job.

- **Training and Development** – speeding up the time it takes for an employee to be fully productive using WorkKeys to identify and close skill gaps. By pinpointing the specific areas for employee improvement, the targeted training that has been developed specifically to the skills levels in the WorkKeys Foundational Skills can be used very cost effectively. You will be able to make concrete recommendations for advancement based on employee strengths and development needs.


By benchmarking key attributes of a position, the Talent and Fit assessments can be used as powerful tools for career laddering and latticing.

- **Succession Planning** – replacing the retiring baby boomers with younger workers will be a challenging task. With younger – and often less qualified – people stepping in to replace retiring workers, succession planning is more critical than ever. WorkKeys can help ensure your future workforce will be equipped with the skills to succeed. Use workforce gap analysis from WorkKeys Foundational Skills to define current competencies and harness training data to align your workforce with your company's near- and long-term strategic plans.

The WorkKeys Talent assessment allows you to groom candidates for advancement by comparing them to top performers.

5.4 The WorkKeys assessment system


WorkKeys assessments measure “real world” foundational skills that are critical to job success. These skills are valuable for any occupation — unskilled, skilled or professional — and at any level of education. In addition to assessments, the WorkKeys system offers a comprehensive approach that includes job analysis methodologies that identify skills required for jobs and training to correct skill gaps. WorkKeys assessments can be used by any entity concerned about the employability skills of current and future employees. Test results provide valuable information for individuals, employers, high schools, colleges, one-stop centers, job services, welfare-to-work programs, correctional institutions,



NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
SYSTEM

Employers that use WorkKeys and engage in a certificate initiative save money when job applicants use external funds to take assessments

and occupational training programs. Educators use WorkKeys to tailor development plans, certify workforce readiness, and guarantee diplomas. Employers use the system to determine hiring qualifications and training needs. And economic and workforce developers match employers with communities to ensure the best possible workforce.



Input from individuals who perform work tasks serves as the basis for calculating and reporting the skill levels each job requires

5.4.1 Foundational skills assessed by WorkKeys

The system measures skills in nine foundational areas using these assessment tools:

Reading for Information	Observation
Applied Mathematics	Listening
Locating Information	Teamwork
Applied Technology	Business Writing
Writing	


In addition, there are three Personal Skills assessment tools:

Talent	Performance	Fit
--------	-------------	-----

5.4.2 Job Analysis tools

Employers may use a range of job analysis tools to assist with personnel selection, performance management, and training decisions. These tools include:

- Job Profiling - The WorkKeys profiling process uses an ACT-trained and authorized facilitator who works collaboratively with groups of your employees to complete each job analysis. Your job incumbents serve as the subject matter experts who define the tasks and skills needed to perform a specific job successfully. Job Profiling consists of a task analysis to select the tasks most critical to a job and skills analysis to identify the skills and skill levels required to enter the job and perform effectively. Job Profiles are performed by authorized ACT staff and outside consultants, who have been trained and authorized by ACT. These outside consultants are employed at a wide range of institutional providers that include workforce development centers, community colleges, and state agencies.
- SkillMap - This is a web-based service designed with flexibility and ease of use in mind. SkillMap takes advantage of current computer technology to provide a detailed, easy-to-follow process for reviewing jobs. The SkillMap process involves an administrator and job experts at your organization. The administrator (who does not need to be a trained/authorized job profiler)



Profiling tools offer different measures of reliability, so you can weigh flexibility and defensibility to develop the hiring method that's best for your company

can be a member of your staff or a third-party consultant.

- WorkKeys Estimator – This method provides quick estimates of the WorkKeys skills and skill levels required for jobs at your organization. This paper-and-pencil-based system provides information you can use to develop recruiting, training, and personal development plans, with the goal of up-skilling your workforce.

6. Implementation

This section provides an overview of the implementation of the National Career Readiness Certificate – from the selection of the Use Model to the actual execution of the Certificate program within your company. In addition, in this section is a listing of ACT toll free telephone numbers for operations support and website addresses for additional information on ACT's products and services.

6.1 Selection of the Use Model

In the previous section, three use models were presented:

- Certificate Only
- Fixed Standards
- Power User

Your initial step is to select that model that best fits your organization's current needs. It is important to note that the NCRC system is flexible and you have the ability to change your use model at any time.

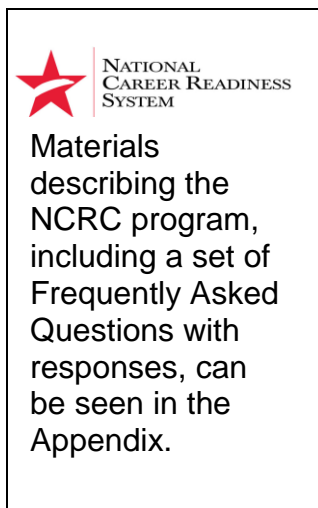
6.2 Internal communications

A critical step in your implementation of the NCRC in your organization is to inform all internal parties about the NCRC and your organization's participation in the Certificate program. Identify all of the staff that have a "need-to-know" about the NCRC and establish a mailing and/or e-mail list of these individuals.

Depending on the size and complexity of your organization perhaps scheduling a training session for key individuals in the implementation of the NCRC might be a desired approach. Materials describing the NCRC program, including a set of Frequently Asked Questions with responses, can be seen in the Appendix of this Employer Handbook.

6.3 Employee recruitment

For those positions that you will recommend or require a National Career Readiness Certificate, a review and modification of their classification and job description material is a next step. In the appropriate skills and requirements sections language addressing the Certificate and the core skills should be included.



Internal job postings and external advertising of these job opportunities should also refer to the NCRC alerting possible job candidates to the importance of attaining this credential.

Some examples of references to the NCRC that could be included in the copy of Help Wanted advertisements are:

“Preference will be given to candidates that have received a National Career Readiness Certificate.”

“All applicants are required to have received a National Career Readiness Certificate.”

“Name of Company is a participant in the Name of the Region’s Workforce Initiative that is dedicated to improving the skills of the workforce in our community. As part of this program, we give preference to candidates that have received a National Career Readiness Certificate.”

6.4 Testing procedures

The WorkKeys assessments can be delivered at an established WorkKeys testing site or at your company, if you have appropriate facilities, equipment, and staff. You can establish your own test center by following the guidelines set by ACT. The following describes the testing methods and procedures that an approved WorkKeys test center follows.

6.4.1 Test delivery methods

The WorkKeys assessments are available for delivery in two formats: Internet-based and Paper-and-Pencil. The requirements of the specific program for which the examinee is being tested will determine the format under which the tests will be delivered.

6.4.2 Internet-based testing

Personal computers with broadband Internet connections are used by examinees for Internet-based testing. Examinees are not allowed to bring a pen and scratch paper into the testing room, but the test center may provide these materials to examinees. In order to maintain the security of the tests, the test center will collect the pens and scratch paper from the examinees upon completion of the testing. The test center will shred the scratch paper. Cellular phones or pagers cannot be brought into the testing room.

6.4.3 Paper-and-Pencil testing

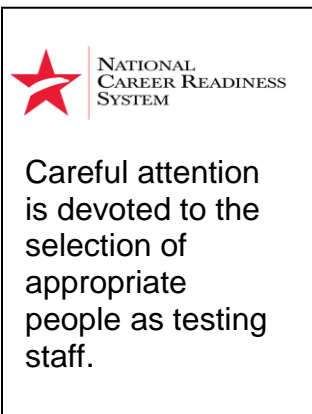
Testing sites provide examinees with a testing area that offers adequate writing surfaces and seating space, good lighting, comfortable temperatures, a quiet atmosphere, and freedom from distraction. The use of scratch paper, notes, or dictionaries is not permitted. Examinees are able to do any scratch work in the assessment booklets. Examinees are not allowed to have pagers or cellular phones in the testing room.

6.4.4 Supervising examinee activities

Careful attention is devoted to the selection of appropriate people as testing staff. They are responsible individuals, familiar with testing practices, and able to handle prohibited behaviors and emergency situations. Persons that may eventually take any of the WorkKeys assessments are not to be part of the testing staff. All testing staff, room supervisors, and proctors are to remain attentive to their testing responsibilities throughout the entire administration. Examinees must feel that the staff are doing all they can to provide an irregularity-free administration. To protect the validity of the individual test scores and maintain the security of test materials, the testing staff must:

- Walk around the room during testing to be sure that examinees are working on the correct test and to help prevent prohibited behaviors.
- Not read, correct papers, or engage in any tasks not related to the administration of the test.
- Not engage in conversation during the testing or allow unauthorized personnel in the testing room.
- Not leave the testing room unattended at any time.
- Complete detailed documentation of any irregularities of which you are aware.

A verbal announcement of time remaining is read five minutes and one minute before the end of each assessment.



6.5 NCRC testing sites

There are a variety of ACT approved testing sites that deliver the three NCRC WorkKeys assessments. Some of these sites may offer testing for anyone, while others may offer testing only for students in their schools or for employees in their company. A complete list of approved sites that can administer WorkKeys tests for the NCRC in your state or region can be seen in NCRC website.

6.6 Promotion of the NCRC

Beyond giving preference to candidates that possess a National Career Readiness Certificate, there are other ways to encourage candidates to have a Certificate. Some of the possibilities include:

- Reimburse candidates, who have a Certificate and are hired by your company, for the cost of the NCRC – this assumes that the candidate paid for the NCRC.
- Pay a hiring bonus, say \$100, to candidates with a Certificate.
- Pay a slightly higher starting wage, say \$.25 per hour, to candidates that have a Certificate – this may not be possible in some companies due to wage and salary policies or labor agreements.

6.7 Execution

You will have to identify an Administrator that will be responsible for the NCRC program in your company. This person will receive all reporting related to the NCRC, and will be responsible for disseminating this information within your organization. In addition, this person may be responsible for determining the effectiveness of the NCRC within your organization.

If your company decides to participate in the Job and Talent Bank (see Section 9.4), this person may also be responsible for this program.

6.8 ACT contacts and resources

The following includes toll free telephone numbers to call if you have questions on the National Career Readiness Certificate and or need Help Desk support for your operation. In addition, there are websites listed that provide additional information on ACT's products and services.

Help Desk: 1-800-WorkKey (1-800-967-5539)

National Career Readiness Certificate: 1-800-WorkKey (1-800-967-5539)

ACT Website: <http://www.act.org/>

National Career Readiness Certificate:
<http://www.NationalCareerReadiness.org>

WorkKeys Website: <http://www.WorkKeys.com>

Occupational Profiles:
<http://www.act.org/workkeys/profiles/occuprof/index.html>

7. Stakeholders

7.1 Benefits of using the National Career Readiness Certificate

Wide acceptance of the WorkKeys system across the United States serves as a driving force for career readiness certificates that are based on the WorkKeys assessments. As a result, the National Career Readiness Certificate provides valuable benefits shared by all workforce development stakeholders, as well as benefits that are specific to each.

The National Career Readiness Certificate benefits from established credibility among employers. More than 2,500 companies have used the WorkKeys system and ACT has documented its benefits by collecting data from hundreds of organizations over the last 10 years. This positions the National Career Readiness Certificate to serve as the entry point to a larger human capital development system and provide substantial additional benefits to employers. Integrating it into the selection process helps small businesses overcome the absence of an established human resources department. Linking certificate level to occupation-specific information is an important benefit for small- and medium-sized businesses.

7.1.1 Benefits for employers

ACT research clearly demonstrates the benefits that the assessments can provide to business as the result of hiring qualified candidates. Information obtained from hundreds of business users substantiates this research. Businesses commonly cite improvements, such as:


- Reduced hiring costs
- Reduced training costs
- Improved product quality
- Lower employee turnover
- Higher productivity

Many companies already accept certificates from statewide or regional certificate programs powered by WorkKeys. For example, Morningstar Foods, a subsidiary of Dean Foods in Virginia, has seen very positive results from the career readiness certificate program at one of its facilities:



**NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
SYSTEM**

New employees with certificate levels that align with your job requirements will help your company cut training time and expense



NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
SYSTEM

Measuring the skills of the local workforce provides data for cost/benefit models that guide company decisions on expansion and relocation

- 64% drop in training time
- 50% decrease in on-the-job training costs
- 35% reduction in turnover

Additional ‘success stories’ can be seen in the Appendix.

7.1.2 Benefits to regional economies

The universal nature of the National Career Readiness Certificate provides value that extends beyond the assessment of individuals. Using assessments and certificate levels to measure quality of a local workforce helps businesses and economic development leaders to:

- Show local companies that the region has the skilled labor for expansion in the region
- Show prospect companies that their region has the skilled labor that meets their needs for a new facility
- Develop a composite of displaced workers to show prospects that the region has a readily available workforce that meets their needs

7.1.3 Benefits to educators


Educators can prepare students with the skills needed to be successful in the workplace by:

- Using the WorkKeys skill levels as benchmarks to help prepare students for the workplace
- Identifying skill gaps for remediation
- Linking academic achievement to career planning and job opportunities
- Using employer standards to measure workplace readiness

7.1.4 Benefits to labor and trade organizations

The NCRC can be utilized by labor and trade organizations to strengthen their membership. These organizations have used WorkKeys in the:

- Selection of individuals for apprenticeship programs by indicating that an individual has the foundational skills necessary to be successful in the program.



NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
SYSTEM

You can use the certificate to as a supplement to academic credentials that signify the development of skills specific to an occupation, career, or job

- Advancement of members by using WorkKeys as an objective measure of an individual's skills when considered for advancement.

7.1.5 Benefits to individuals

WorkKeys assessment results are easy for individuals to understand, helping them determine their current skill levels and how those skill levels match to occupations.

Specifically, individuals can use this information to:

- Identify any skills gaps that may hinder their current job performance and determine training needs
- Undertake career planning by determining if an individual has skills that will enable them to be successful in a position, or if not, what skills training will be needed

The NCRC will serve as proof of foundational skills that the individual can use nationwide in their search for a new position or career.

8. Value of Participating in the NCRC movement

Businesses and communities create competitive advantages when they can measure, document, analyze, and increase the skills of the local workforce. Your company's decision to adopt the National Career Readiness Certificate represents an assertive step toward defining skills that are essential in today's competitive business environment. At the same time, your commitment provides important opportunities for individuals seeking meaningful careers and for educators who are preparing them.

Several regions have expressed a regional commitment to the development of a strong regional workforce through the aggressive implementation of the National Career Readiness Certificate. They have organized their regional initiative under the leadership of either a community or business-oriented organization, such as a community college, workforce investment board, chamber of commerce, or economic development organization, or a combination of two or more of these organizations. ACT generically refers to these regional programs as "Regional Partners for a Skilled Workforce", but regions can brand their regional initiative with a name that they believe best fits their program.

The Partners organization is typically responsible for:

- Promoting the workforce initiative to area employers and gaining their commitment to the program
- Communicating information on the initiative to the media and to participating employers
- Sharing "success stories" with participating employers in the region and the local media
- Providing recognition to employers that actively participate in the Partners program

To assist the regional leadership organization, ACT provides a marketing toolkit that includes templates of letters announcing the regional workforce initiative, a PowerPoint presentation, Public Service Announcements, and talking points for interviews with the print, radio, and television media. ACT will also provide a "Guide for Implementing the Strategic Plan for a Skilled Workforce".

If your region has an active workforce initiative based on the Certificate, ACT would recommend that you or a representative from your company become actively involved in the program. If your region does not have a workforce initiative, you should explore the feasibility of forming a workforce initiative with other employers.

9. Supporting Products

ACT has available a number of products that can support the NCRC program. These include additional WorkKeys foundational skills, personal skills, certificate registry, job and talent bank, and training in the WorkKeys skills.

9.1 Additional Foundational Skills

In addition to the three core WorkKeys skills in the NCRC, ACT also offers assessments for the following foundational skills:

Applied Technology	Business Writing
Listening	Observation
Teamwork	Writing

Employers with particular needs may want to include one or more of these foundational skills in their selection process. For example, a manufacturing company may want to use Applied Technology and/or Observation, and a hospital may use Observation and/or Teamwork.

9.2 Personal Skills Assessments

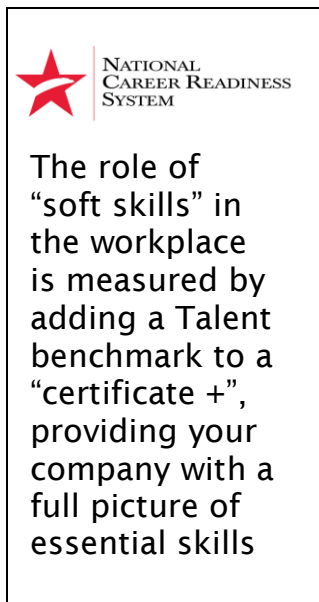
Employers who use the National Career Readiness Certificate to document an individual's foundational skills sometimes turn their attention to the impact of "soft skills" on workplace performance. The WorkKeys system includes a suite of fully validated Personal Skills assessments that can be used to predict workplace behaviors, job-relevant personality attributes, and individual interests and values as they pertain to the type of work being sought. Extensive research initiatives and field test studies well document the validity of WorkKeys Personal Skills assessments.

9.3 Certificate Registry

This Internet-based system allows an individual to view WorkKeys scores, apply for a certificate, and order paper copies, as well as enabling employers to verify that an individual has a certificate.

9.4 Job and Talent Bank

Individuals that qualify for a National Career Readiness Certificate can use the Talent Bank to post credentials for employers and search job postings in the national Job Bank. The Job Bank is available for employers that utilize the National Career Readiness



Certificate. Employers can utilize this site to recruit qualified candidates. This easy-to-use site allows the employer to:

- Post available positions with desired selection criteria
- Search for qualified prospective applicants based on the employer's criteria including desired NCRC level
- Receive electronic applications from qualified applicants
- Communicate with applicants and prospects
- Review performance statistics for each available position and total daily activity
- Identify staff that can administer job postings, prospects, and applicants

A participating employer will be able to set up designated staff that can access their site. These employees will receive user names and passwords to access the Job Bank. The following is a screenshot of a typical login page.

Sample Company Job Bank – Employer Login

The screenshot shows the login interface for the National Career Readiness System. At the top left is the logo, a red star with the text "NATIONAL CAREER READINESS SYSTEM". Below the logo is a "MEMBER LOGIN" section with a "username:" label and a text input field containing "dscudiero". Below that is a "password:" label and a text input field with masked characters "XXXXXXXX". A "LOGIN" button is positioned to the right of the password field. Below the password field is a link for "Forgot password?". To the right of the login form, there is a message: "This is the central page for employers and ACT Administrators. If you are a job candidate, please see [My WorkKeys](#) for access." Below this message is another instruction: "Check back later for updates to this page." At the bottom of the page, there is a copyright notice: "Copyright 2006 National Job Bank. All rights reserved." and two links: "[Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#)".

Once the user has logged in, he/she is taken to the employer's home page. The user is then able to:

- *Review all positions* – Information is available for each of the employer's positions that shows the number of prospective applicants in the system, the number of individuals that have responded to the position, number of prospects that the employer has identified, and the date the position was posted on the system. Summary information, including Certificate level and experience is available for each applicant and prospect for a position. The system allows the user to e-mail information on a position to a prospect that meets the employer's criteria.
- *Create a new position* – In this section, the employer can enter the job title, position description, and salary. In addition, the employer has the option of including criteria for preferred location by state, job experience, minimum education level, and Certificate level.
- *Search for qualified individuals (prospects)* – The user can search for individuals who meet such criteria:
 - Certificate level – Bronze, Silver, Gold
 - Location – State of residence
 - Experience – Job category and industry
 - Education – Minimum level
- *Review statistics* – A summary of the employer's activity, which includes numbers of positions, current applicants, and prospects, is available on a daily basis.
- *Administration* – The employer can add or delete staff that are to have access to the Job Bank.

In summary, the Job Bank has been designed to allow employers to easily recruit qualified candidates for their open positions.

9.5 Training

For individuals that desire to achieve a higher level Certificate (e.g. advance from a Silver Certificate to a Gold



NATIONAL
CAREER READINESS
SYSTEM

Raising skills to higher levels can be achieved with electronic learning tools or classroom programs built on guidelines linked directly to assessments

Certificate) or need to remediate any skill gaps, training is available for each of the WorkKeys skills. To ensure the integrity of WorkKeys and to provide employers with helpful information about available courseware, ACT has established the WorkKeys Preferred Content Publishers program. A key feature of the program is a rigorous content review by ACT. Two courseware publishers, KeyTrain and WIN, participate in this program and they have developed courseware that is mapped to the WorkKeys skills and skill levels. These courses are available in Internet, CD-ROM, and print versions, and they are affordably priced. In addition, ACT's *Targets for Instruction* allow an educator to develop curricula for the WorkKeys skills that can be delivered in a classroom environment or they can combine the classroom instruction with the Internet-based courses in a blended approach.

10. Appendix

A. Frequently Asked Questions

B. Sample Certificates

C. Success Stories

D. NCRC Brochure

APPENDIX A:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why do individuals need the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC)?

The NCRC is designed to complement other traditional credentials, such as a high school diploma, community college degree, or college degree. While these educational credentials mark the fulfillment of an individual's classroom learning experiences, the certificate confirms the person's competence in a specific set of workplace skills.

Why is the NCRC based on the Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information skills?

ACT has profiled more than 14,000 individual jobs across the country to determine the skills and skill levels needed to succeed in them. According to our findings, three skills are highly important to most jobs.

- **Reading for Information**—comprehending work-related reading materials, from memos and bulletins to policy manuals and governmental regulations.
- **Applied Mathematics**—applying mathematical reasoning to work-related problems.
- **Locating Information**—using information from such materials as diagrams, floor plans, tables, forms, graphs, and charts.

A solid foundation of these three skills is essential for a well-qualified workforce. A recent American Management Association survey found that 38 percent of job applicants taking employer-administered tests lacked the reading and math skills needed in the jobs for which they applied. Information retrieval and problem-solving skills—what the Locating Information test measures—are highly relevant in our information-based business culture.

How can employers use the National Career Readiness Certificate?

Employers use the Certificate, along with other educational and background information, to make employment and training decisions. The NCRC is often considered a “plus” when presented to an employer during the hiring process because it shows the individual has attained specific workforce competency levels in Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics, and Locating Information. Higher scores indicate an individual's readiness for a greater range of jobs.

What are the benefits to an employer to use the NCRC?

An employer may accept the NCRC results to reduce hiring time and costs. In addition, WorkKeys assessments have been shown to improve the quality of new hires, reduce training time, reduce turnover, and increase productivity.

What makes the National Career Readiness Certificate unique?

The National Career Readiness Certificate is based on well-established WorkKeys tests that are documented as making a difference for employers. WorkKeys has been in use for nearly two decades and is already widely accepted by thousands of companies all over the world.

Career readiness certificates have been used for more than four years at the state- and community-wide level. Also, WorkKeys exams are compliant with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regulations.

Because WorkKeys assesses essential foundational skills, they are applicable to and necessary for virtually every job. "Soft skills" are important, but essential foundational skills such as reading, math, and locating information are the bedrock of training for just about every job.

What is the life cycle of the NCRC?

Generally, Certificates should be renewed after five years. As with any educational or skill credential, the experiences or skills it represents may change.

Who developed WorkKeys and the National Career Readiness Certificate?

WorkKeys and the National Career Readiness Certificate were developed by ACT, an internationally recognized assessment and research company. ACT is best known for the ACT assessment, which helps students transition into college. ACT is equally committed to helping individuals transition into and within the workplace using WorkKeys.

Is training available to improve the WorkKeys skill levels?

WorkKeys is tied to specific training and curriculum for skill improvement, enabling educators and trainers to help individuals improve their skills and enhance job opportunities.

Why should I join the Job and Talent Bank? How is it different from other job boards?

Joining the Job and Talent Bank allows you to focus your recruiting efforts on the most skilled and qualified job applicants. Every job candidate in the bank has earned a National Career Readiness Certificate, meaning they have taken WorkKeys Reading for Information, Locating Information and Applied Mathematics tests and scored at a certain level.

When you require or recommend the National Career Readiness Certificate for jobs in your workplace, you will tap into the most qualified labor pool in your area. Candidates in the Job and Talent Bank have taken WorkKeys tests to demonstrate that they have the skills needed for most jobs. No other job board allows you to connect with candidates that have proven they have the skills to succeed.

Why do positions posted in the Job and Talent Bank need to accept the National Career Readiness Certificate as a qualification?

Requiring or recommending the certificate provides you with a fair and objective "common language" to evaluate candidates' skills.

How will I know applicants have a valid National Career Readiness Certificate at the level they said they have?

All candidates in the Job and Talent Bank must first have a valid Certificate in order to participate, which you can easily verify in the system when you review each person's profile.

How long does it take to post a job to the site?

It only takes a few minutes to post a job. As soon as you finish entering information and save the position, it will be posted, searchable and viewable immediately. You can edit and delete postings at any time as well.

What search criteria can I use to find candidates in the Job and Talent Bank?

You can search on any combination of the following search criteria: state, job experience (by industry type), minimum education level and certificate level. You can also search for a specific candidate by first name, last name and email address.

How long do jobs stay posted?

As long as you are a member, your open positions may stay posted until you fill them. Job postings must be removed as soon as they are filled in order to keep the Job and Talent Bank current and accurate for candidates seeking employment.

How many jobs can I post?

During your membership, you can post an unlimited number of open positions to the Job and Talent Bank.

How do prospective employees find my company's postings?

Prospective employees can search for open positions based on state, employment type, and certificate level required.

How many searches can I do?

During your membership, you can perform an unlimited number of searches within the Job and Talent Bank.

Can I assign other administrators to my Job and Talent Bank employer account?

Yes. When you apply, you will designate one administrator, who can then add or delete additional employer users.

APPENDIX B:
SAMPLE CERTIFICATES

- **Gold**
- **Silver**
- **Bronze**

**APPENDIX C:
SUCCESS STORIES**

- **Reduce Turnover**
- **Increase Productivity**
 - **Increase ROI**

**APPENDIX D:
NATIONAL CAREER READINESS BROCHURE**