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# **NIST-MEP FOCUS GROUP ORIENTATION DOCUMENT AND PROTOCOL**

## Welcome and Introduction

This focus group is an important part of a research study sponsored by the National Institute of Standards Technology (NIST) Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) to examine the quality, market value, and effectiveness of manufacturing credentials. Conducted in partnership with WorkCred, an affiliate of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the initiative will contribute to the body of knowledge for manufacturing-related skills credentials and identify skill gaps that could be filled by new credentials.

We are going to be talking about why some of you may think credentials are considered important in your facility, and why and how they are used. Equally important, we will also talk about why some of you might feel that credentials aren't used or important and what might make credentials more useful.

In this context, credentials include industry certifications and certificates, licenses, badges, and apprenticeships.

## Meeting Information

**Date:**

**Location:**

Focus Group	Date	Time	Location

## Agenda

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Time	Activity
	Welcome, Introductions, and Ground Rules
	Questions (Focus Group Protocol)
	Anything We Missed, Wrap-Up
	Adjournment

## Focus Group Protocol - Introduction

### Introduction

Good morning and welcome! First, we would like to thank you for participating, making yourself available, and lending your expertise to this very important research task.

At this time, we would like to introduce ourselves. My name is <facilitator's name>, I will be the lead facilitator for this focus group. In addition, we will be digitally recording our conversations. You should have agreed to the recording at your registration. If you are not comfortable with being recorded, please sign off now.

Before we begin to address the questions in this focus group, we would like to review some ground rules:

1. **CONFIDENTIAL.** Everything said will remain private and confidential. In any future reports, we will not identify you or your organization.
2. **YOUR OPINION COUNTS.** There are no wrong answers. We are interested in your expertise, experiences, and above all, your opinion.
3. **SUCCINCT.** Please keep your responses succinct and relevant to the questions.
4. **GIVE OTHERS A CHANCE.** Please be aware of your level of participation. We want everybody to have a chance to respond to the questions. So, if you are talking a lot, I may intervene and ask others to respond. And if you are not talking a lot, I may ask you to respond.
5. **INTERACT.** If you feel like you need to respond to others to understand or expand on the conversations, please use the raise hands tool on the right bar of your screen
6. **SPEAK UP.** We are digitally audio recording this session to ensure we capture everything appropriately, so please speak up.
7. **DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY.** Please turn off cell phones and other technologies that can distract the group and mute your phone when not talking.

Now that we have introduced ourselves and laid out the ground rules, let's take roll call.

[Call out the names of registrants; as they respond, ask if anyone else has joined them.]

## Question Block A: Uses and Reasons for Credentials

1. Can you provide some examples of any credential(s) that are relevant to your facility?
  - a. What jobs do they align with?
2. When you think about the credentials that are most important in your facilities, what skills or attributes do they address, for example, safety, quality, or technical skills?
3. What credentials do you **require** to be held in your facility and why?
  - a. *Do you require them for hiring?*
  - b. *Do you require them for promotion?*
  - c. *Does a pay differential result?*

*Prompt: Consider the type of credential, such as whether it's a certificate or a certification; whether its required by law; the skills the credential is supposed to represent.*

4. What credentials do you **prefer** to be held by employees in your facility, and why?

*Prompt: Consider the type of credential, such as whether it's a certificate or a certification; whether its required by law; the skills the credential is supposed to represent; if you have had good luck with other employees holding the credential; if you have heard good things about the credential; if someone else in your facility is requiring it.*

5. What is it about any credential, or the skills it represents, that would make it required or preferred for employment, promotion, or salary differential?
6. Are there certain types of credentials, such as certifications, certificates, or licenses that are more important than others?
  - a. Can you provide me some reasons and/or examples?
7. Are there credentials that are specific to your industry?
  - a. What are they? Can you provide some reasons and/or examples?
  - b. Do you think they are more important than more generic credentials? Why or why not?
8. What other factors, such as experience and/or education, do you think are as important as -- or even more important -- than holding a credential?

- a. Can you provide me some reasons and/or examples?
- 9.** What difference do credentials make in your facility?
- 10.** 95% of the responses from a recent survey that was conducted as part of this research study indicated that credentials make a difference, the top two reasons being (1) “credentials allow us to more easily identify qualified people” and (2) “individuals with credentials require less on the job training.”
- a. Do you agree with either or both of these statements? Why or why not?
- 11.** Do you think there is more or less turnover (the rate at which employees leave a workforce and are replaced) with people holding credentials?
- 12.** What else would you add in thinking about the value of credentials?  
*Prompt: Some examples of value include earnings, promotions, obtaining jobs more easily, recognition from peers, pursuing life-long learning, and so forth.*

## Question Block B: Uses and Reasons for No Credentials

- 1.** What do you think might be the reasons that you or others do not use credentials? For example, the survey that was recently completed indicates that:
- a. Nearly 20% of survey respondents said that facilities can't find individuals who hold relevant credentials. Why do you think that is?
  - b. One third of respondents said credentials are not relevant to the jobs in their facility. Why do you think that is?
  - c. 28% of respondents said credentials don't make any difference in an individuals' performance. Why do you think that is?
  - d. 38% of respondents said credentials don't make any difference in an individual's performance because they have to be retrained anyway.
    - I. When you say someone has to be retrained, what do you mean?
    - II. Are you retraining people for a specific need or for something more general?
  - e. 36% of respondents said it is more cost-effective to create their own credential or training program? Why would that be the case?
  - f. 56% of respondents say they conduct training (such as machining, blue-print reading, inspection, etc.) to fill unique training skills for individuals who ALREADY hold credentials. What are some of the unique technical skills that you train on for individuals who already hold credentials?

- g. 61% of respondents say they conduct training (such as machining, blue-print reading, inspection, etc.) to fill unique training skills for individuals who DO NOT hold credentials. What are some of the unique technical skills that you train on for individuals who do not hold credentials?

### Question Block C: Improving Credentials

1. How could the usefulness of credentials be improved?  
*Prompt: You can talk about credentials in general or discuss specific credentials. We will not release the specific name of any specific credentials you want to comment on.*
2. What new credentials do you feel are needed to address the skills you find lacking?
3. If a new credential was created to address those skills you find lacking, how would you know the credential was successful at doing so?  
*Prompt: What improvements would you see in your current workers?*

### Question Block D: Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

1. What is the most common and significant reason that an individual is **NOT** successful in a manufacturing facility?
2. What seems to be the appropriate balance between soft skills and technical skills?  
*Prompt: In other words, if someone asked you what percentage should be soft skills and technical skills, what would you say?*
  - a. What is the reason for your response? Can you provide any examples?
3. 43% of survey respondents reported that credentials are needed to produce individuals with problem solving and critical thinking skills.
  - a. What does critical thinking mean to you?
  - b. What does problem solving mean to you?

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