

Advancing Immigrant Inclusion: A Practical Guide to Obtaining Federal and State Funding to Pay for Credential Evaluations



A credential evaluation report

is an important tool that can open doors for internationally educated individuals and help them to make full use of their skills and training

in the United States. For example, a credential evaluation report can help licensing boards or employers to compare international academic credentials to U.S. degrees and standards, thereby facilitating an individual's entry into the workforce via roles that require higher levels of education.



This guide provides information on successful funding models that institutions and agencies can adapt in additional states and locales.

For more detailed information on advancing these models in your own community, [contact WES Global Talent Bridge](#).

States and local communities across the U.S. have begun to direct existing federal and state funding to finance credential evaluations for their internationally educated immigrant and refugee residents.

World Education Services (WES) has identified three replicable models:



Statutory Model:

The Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), authorized as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Practitioners in Texas have used this model to pay for credential evaluations for internationally educated students.



Partnership and Multi-sector Network Model:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment & Training (E&T). This model has worked in Nevada.



Grant Model:

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Refugee Career Pathways (RCP) grant has been used in Idaho to pay for credential evaluations for refugees.

Statutory Model: Family Literacy Act Funding

In [Texas, adult education practitioners at Integrated Education and Training \(IET\) programs are applying Family Literacy Act \(AEFLA\) funding](#), authorized as Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), to pay for the credential evaluations of their internationally educated students—including internationally educated immigrants and refugees. To qualify for coverage, a credential evaluation must be relevant for the IET program in which the student is enrolled.

[Program Memorandum OCTAE 19-2](#) from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) states:

States and eligible providers may use AEFLA funds to pay for occupational certificates and/or credentials within an AEFLA-funded IET program, consistent with the requirements of the AEFLA program regulations at [34 C.F.R. §463.36](#).

The program memo also describes the types of credentials that meet the criteria of being “necessary to achieve the purposes of the IET program,” making them eligible to use AEFLA funding. These include:

- [A recognized post-secondary credential](#), defined as “a credential consisting of an industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of an apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or Federal Government, or an associate or baccalaureate degree.”
- “Other types of credentials or certificates [... demonstrating] attainment of general skills that are required to qualify for entry-level employment or advancement in employment and are a part of a career pathway.”

For example, an individual enrolled in an IET health care program who completed nursing education in another country would qualify to have a credential evaluation of their coursework and degree paid for using AEFLA funding, as their prior education is relevant to the IET health care program.

Organizations interested in pursuing this funding pathway should confirm that their state does not disallow the use of AEFLA funds to support credential evaluations.

Institutions interested in financing credential evaluations through AEFLA funds should:

- ① Find out if their organization receives AEFLA funding, or if it partners with an adult education organization that does.
- ② Check if their state has specific language disallowing the use of AEFLA funds to support credential evaluations.
- ③ During the intake process, ask immigrant and refugee clients if they completed any education in another country.
- ④ Identify whether their clients’ prior education is relevant to the IET program in which they are enrolled.
- ⑤ Support clients in obtaining a credential evaluation from a provider with membership in the [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services \(NACES\)](#) or the [Association of International Credential Evaluators \(AICE\)](#) or, when required, the appropriate industry-specific provider. Pay for the evaluation with available AEFLA funds.

Partnership and Multi-sector Network Model: TANF and SNAP E&T

In Nevada, internationally educated immigrants and refugees can now access credential evaluations as part of the intake process when seeking [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#) and [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Employment & Training \(E&T\)](#) welfare assistance. Both programs are federally funded and state-administered: TANF provides cash assistance to low-income families with children, while SNAP E&T helps low-income individuals receiving SNAP food benefits obtain the skills and training that will allow them to become gainfully employed. Using what had been an annual surplus of TANF and SNAP funding, the Governor's Office for New Americans (ONA) and the Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Welfare and Supportive Services (DWSS) report that they have integrated credential evaluations as a standard supportive service for program recipients with international degrees.

After implementing this change internally, Nevada's DWSS and ONA sought to raise wider support for the practice. DWSS began regularly convening an Immigrant Workforce Development Group (IDWG) in concert with ONA, which now coordinates the group entirely. Organizations participated from throughout the state, including refugee resettlement agencies, community colleges, workforce boards, workforce development providers, and other state agencies. At each of these meetings, DWSS and ONA raised the issue of credential evaluations, discussing success stories of immigrants and refugees who had received evaluations paid for by TANF and SNAP E&T, including a representative from ONA who shared her own experience as an internationally educated immigrant. By demonstrating leadership with paying for credential evaluations with federal funding and raising awareness among other statewide workforce stakeholders and immigrant and refugee service providers, Nevada's DWSS and ONA provided a model of how to best serve the state's newcomers.

Last year, the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District followed suit and began using surplus internal funding to pay for the credential evaluations of its internationally educated clients upon completion of the Library District's ESL programs. Making this a formal intake practice statewide and across all departments is pending approval, with the value proposition that it will allow internationally educated individuals to obtain better, higher-paying jobs more quickly, thereby supporting the mission of the welfare program to help people achieve economic self-sufficiency

Unlike the AEFLA funding model, there is no statute or mandate instructing TANF and SNAP to pay for credential evaluations. Instead, the programs allow the administering agency to decide what expenses meet the program criteria; and Nevada has embraced a holistic approach, defining supportive services as any functional tool or resource that improves client program engagement and skilled employment candidacy, within the bounds of federal policy. Thus, in Nevada, credential evaluations have been integrated as a wraparound service alongside other social benefits and employment supports; and multi-sector coordination between government agencies, workforce development organizations, adult education practitioners, employers, and immigrant and refugee service providers is helping the practice gain wider traction throughout the state.

Partnership and Multi-sector Network Model: TANF and SNAP E&T *(Continued)*

Institutions interested in financing credential evaluations through TANF and SNAP E&T funding should:

- ① Find out if their organization or agency receives TANF or SNAP E&T funding.
- ② Examine their TANF and SNAP E&T budget and identify any surplus funds that could be directed towards covering the costs of credential evaluations for immigrant and refugee clients. If there is no surplus, explore the possibility of redistributing allocations to free up funds for this purpose.
- ③ Follow their organization's protocol for getting such a change approved. Share credential evaluation success stories with organization leadership to demonstrate the positive impact it would have on the lives of immigrant and refugee clients.
- ④ Support clients in obtaining a credential evaluation from a provider with membership in the [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services \(NACES\)](#) or the [Association of International Credential Evaluators \(AICE\)](#) or, when required, the appropriate industry-specific provider. Pay for the evaluation with available TANF and SNAP E&T funds.

Grant Model: ORR RCP Grant

In Idaho, an Employment Services Associate at Global Talent Idaho reports that the organization is using [funding from an Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\) Refugee Career Pathways \(RCP\) grant to pay for credential evaluations for its refugee clients](#), a clearly delineated service provided under the program.

The RCP grant is dedicated to “support[ing] refugees in attaining the knowledge and resources needed to begin a professional career in their new community.” To this end, program grant recipients receive funding to provide financial assistance of up to \$3,500 per participant per year to support refugee clients’ career development plans, according to an ORR RCP representative. These plans are tailored to each individual and can cover a wide variety of allowable expenses, including: “assistance in creating personalized career development plans, classroom and work-based learning opportunities, career coaching and mentoring, connections with educational opportunities, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training, re-credentialing and credential recognition, [and] vocational English language training.” ORR RCP reports that credential evaluations are one of the most frequent expenses. Grant recipients are required to partner with an educational institution to implement services; or, if the grant recipient is an educational institution, it must partner with an organization that explicitly serves refugees.

Institutions interested in exploring how to pay for credential evaluations through the ORR RCP grant should:

- ① Apply to become one of [ORR’s Refugee Career Pathways grant recipients](#). Note that before opening a grant to [applications](#), government agencies first publish a “forecast” for several months with basic information about the opportunity, allowing interested institutions to check their eligibility and begin preparing an application.
- ② If selected by ORR, or if already an RCP grant recipient, identify which refugee clients have been educated in another country and could benefit from a credential evaluation as part of their professional development plan.
- ③ Support eligible clients in obtaining a credential evaluation from a provider with membership in the [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services \(NACES\)](#) or the [Association of International Credential Evaluators \(AICE\)](#) or, when required, the appropriate industry-specific provider. Pay for the evaluation with available RCP funds.

Go Further

All of these funding opportunities can be accessed by individual institutions, but will have greater impact if adopted on a wider basis by states and agencies.

Institutions interested in raising awareness about using existing federal and state funding to finance credential evaluations for internationally educated immigrants and refugees—and in advocating more widespread adoption of the practice—should:

- ① Develop partnerships and a multi-sector network with government agencies, workforce development organizations, adult education practitioners, employers, and immigrant and refugee service providers in their area.
- ② Share stories of internationally educated immigrants and refugees with the organizations and agencies in their network to (a) emphasize the specific barriers these individuals often face, and (b) address how credential evaluations can provide access to further education and careers commensurate with their existing education and experience.

For more detailed information on advancing effective models in your own community, [contact WES Global Talent Bridge.](#)

