PROFESSIONAL-TECHNICAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Workforce Education Department

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

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CONTENTS

UPDATE NOTES

July 2025

- Updated the Certificate Registration Procedure section to include workforce outcome information.

June 2025

- Added definition for fully online programs.

GUIDELINES

All professional-technical degree and certificate programs must be approved by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (State Board) prior to program implementation (see excerpts from the State Board Policy Manual (Chapter 4, 4.40.00). As part of this responsibility, the State Board partners with the college system to create and maintain guidelines and procedures that provide for the approval of all proposed new professional-technical programs, program modifications, and program status changes.

Authority

RCW 28B.50.140(12) states, "May grant to every student, upon graduation or completion of a course of study, a suitable diploma, degree, or certificate under the rules of the state board for community and technical colleges that are appropriate to their mission. The purposes of these diplomas, certificates, and degrees are to lead individuals directly to employment in a specific occupation or prepare individuals for a bachelor's degree or beyond. Technical colleges may only offer transfer degrees that prepare students for bachelor's degrees in professional fields, subject to rules adopted by the college board."

RCW 28B.50.215 states, "Technical colleges may, under the rules of the state board for community and technical colleges offer all specific academic support courses that may be at a transfer level that are required of all students to earn a particular degree or certificate. This shall not be interpreted to mean that their mission may be expanded to include transfer preparation, nor does it preclude technical colleges from voluntarily and cooperatively using available community college courses as components of technical college programs."

Distribution of Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the State Board

Upholds the standards and procedures agreed upon by the councils and commissions.

Maintains alignment with RCW, WAC, and SBCTC policies.

The State Board staff will report to WEC annually a list of programs approved during the preceding

year. Once a program is formally approved and listed on the inventory report, it will continue to be approved if it is not "substantively" changed in such a way as to cause it to lose its original content or context.

SBCTC does not provide interpretation of NWCCU accreditation policies, such consultations should be made with the college's ALO and/or NWCCU.

Responsibilities of the Workforce Education Council and Instruction Commission

Provide guidance and feedback to the Workforce Education program staff and collaborate on system and process improvements for program approval to meet the evolving needs of the CTC system.

Responsibilities of the College

Participate in state councils and commissions to support the creation and maintenance of these guidelines.

Collaboration between colleges contributes to informed program decision-making, which benefits the state as well as the local community. Colleges must work collaboratively before submitting a request for a new program to the State Board office, avoiding overly competitive or adversarial approaches to new program startups. The college proposing the program will provide evidence of collaboration with at least three institutions and prioritize collaboration with colleges in the closest proximity and have programs that are the same or closely related to the program being proposed. If there are no similar programs of study, then collaboration should focus on programs within the same CIP cluster.

Programs proposed that will only be offered at a corrections facility are exempt from the collaboration requirement.

These guidelines provide resources to help colleges identify existing programs, wages, and occupation data. Refer to the Resources section of this document.

An advisory committee must be appointed by the college administration for each professional-technical program or program cluster. When submitting a new plan approval request, colleges need to include the advisory committee membership form (programs that are options are exempt from submitting an advisory committee membership form). Refer to the college advisory committee procedure to learn more about representation and committee processes and duties. After the State Board staff endorses the *Professional-Technical Program Approval Request* for a new primary program, the college will submit any additional documentation required for final approval within six months. The State Board staff will notify the college within two weeks of receipt of the documentation as to any additional documentation that will be required before final approval is granted. Once final approval is granted, the program will be recorded on the college's inventory of approved professional-technical programs.

Following approval by the State Board office, a college may advertise, offer, or conduct professional-technical programs. Courses must be offered, and students enrolled in a program within one year of the date of approval. The State Board staff may grant an extension for cause, e.g., capital construction delays. A degree, certificate, or diploma recognizing successful completion of the program or prescribed course of study covered by this policy shall be awarded to students who satisfy program requirements. Degree, certificate, or diploma programs shall meet all requirements of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Colleges are responsible for ensuring degree and certificate programs meet accreditation guidelines as established by NWCCU.

Colleges are responsible for communicating with NWCCU regarding program guidelines and substantive changes.

Colleges are responsible for ensuring degree and certificate programs meet accreditation guidelines as established by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). Consistent with its mission, the college establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy. SBCTC does not provide interpretation of accreditation policies for colleges, such consultations should be made with the college's ALO and/or NWCCU.

Definitions

- A **professional-technical** program prepares students for employment in a specific industry.

- An **associate degree** is a lower division undergraduate degree that requires a minimum of 90 quarter hours. Some highly technical programs may require more than this to ensure that students have the necessary preparation to succeed.

- An **associate in applied science–transfer (AAS-T)** degree is built upon the technical courses required for job preparation but also includes a college-level general education component, common in structure for all such degrees. Further, the general education courses for the degree are drawn from the same list as those taken by students completing the Direct Transfer Agreement (DTA) associate degree or the Associate in Science-Transfer (AS-T) degree. These degrees are consistent with the dual purpose of transfer and preparation for direct employment.

- A **certificate** is an award which may be made for completion of the competencies and requirements for an occupational program.

- A **short-term certificate** is an award that has fewer than 20 credits and results in a specific skill set and does not qualify as a program option.

- A **primary program** is any prescribed program of study 20 credits or greater of instruction leading to initial employment or improvement of occupational skills. A primary program may have options.

- A **program option** is a variant of a primary program. At least 50 percent of the option must be drawn from the technical core of the primary program curriculum. (If less than 50 percent of the curriculum is from the technical core of the primary program, the college must apply for a new primary program.) Options are inventoried as separate programs and approved under the umbrella of the primary program. Removing a primary program from inventory does not eliminate its option(s), which will remain in the inventory. If, after removing the primary program, a college wants to make the option a primary program, the college will need to submit wage and occupation data before this change can be made.

- **Corrections Education** is a program that is only offered at a Department of Corrections facility and has a DOC designator in the plan description.

- A **Washington State Registered Apprenticeship program** provides both on-the-job training that is employer sponsored and supervised by a journey-level craft or trade professional for a minimum of 2,000 hours/year, and related supplemental instruction (RSI) provided by the training agent for a minimum of 144 hours/year that develop highly trained, knowledgeable, and skilled professionals. WA Labor & Industry registers qualified apprenticeship sponsors/employers who partner with a variety of training agents, including employer-sponsored schools, union-sponsored schools and Washington state's community and technical colleges (more information at RCW 49.04 and https://secure.lni.wa.gov/arts-public/#/program-search). State Registered Apprenticeship programs are inventoried as separate programs in the college's official inventory.

- **A Federally Registered Apprenticeship** is an industry-driven career pathway where employers develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, receive progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable credential. Programs are approved and validated by the U.S. Department of Labor (https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/apprenticeship).

- **Collaborative agreements** are a partnership between two colleges to share instructional programs. The agreement requires a signed collaborative agreement between both colleges sharing the instruction. The collaboration allows the host college (institution with an approved plan/credential) to share access with the partner college. The partner college adopts the host college's existing curriculum and plan/credential, allowing the partner college to manage all admission, registration, financial aid, and credential awarding for their students enrolled in the collaborative plan.

- An **individualized education program** is a program that offers unique opportunities for a few students and is designed to meet the career goals of the individual student. The education is to be accomplished on an individual basis with the technical portion of the program occurring in a work environment as contracted instruction or a cooperative arrangement. Degrees or certificates are issued for these programs. The total state completions in one occupation should not exceed probable job opportunities, but no more than four students should be enrolled at any point in time.

- **Program Description** (from WEC/IC) must include information pertaining to program title, program credits, program goals, student outcomes, awards, and instructional delivery modes.

- **Program Pathway** (from WEC/IC) colleges must publish on their website a schematic or flow chart diagram representing the structure of the program and entire pathway for students including options beyond a 2-year degree, as appropriate and in alignment with Guided Pathways.

PAR Form Key Terms

- **Plan description:** visible to staff throughout the CS pillar, in Self-Service (advisor, faculty, and student), and the Online Admissions Application Portal (OAAP). This field is limited to 25 characters for college naming. The remaining five characters are for SBCTC use.

- **Transcript/Diploma description:** refers to what is posted on a transcript/diploma and must correspond with inventory.

- **CIP Code:** is the Classification of Instructional Programs that supports accurate tracking and reporting of fields of study and program completions activity. When identifying a CIP Code for your program, it must be a vocational CIP and must align with the career outcome.

- **SOC Code:** is the Standard Occupational Classification code used to classify and categorize various occupations in the workforce. It is used for statistical analysis, labor market research, and other purposes related to employment. Collected for the purpose of cross walking SBCTC (CIP) inventory to state labor market (SOC) information.

- **Program Type:** please refer to the definition section to read about the different program types (primary, option, etc.)

- **Effective Date:** Rows on the Academic Plan Table are effective dated: Settings on each row are "effective" as of the date of that row and remain in effect until the date of the next row. In most cases, effective dates should be between academic terms. In most cases, the current dating scheme is as follows:

  - A new plan is dated no later than the day after the term preceding the first term that the plan will admit students.

  - A change to an existing plan is dated the day after the term preceding the term that the change takes effect.

  - The inactivation of a plan is dated two days after the last term the plan can be completed.

- **First Term Valid:** the term a student can be admitted into a plan.

- **OAAP (Online Admissions Application Portal):** students can apply to any of the community and technical colleges in Washington state using this portal. This is also where students can view the program plans at their institution. Colleges can locally manage within ctcLink which plans are visible/available for selection in OAAP.

- **SULA (Subsidized Usage Limit Restriction):** the SULA Special Program field is used by Financial Aid to flag programs that have special treatment under the 150% limit regulations. This includes selective admission plans in a financial aid context. The college's financial aid office should provide regulation interpretation and guidance for their campus.

  - **SULA Special Program Options:**

    - Not Applicable: no special treatment under 150% limit regulations.

    - Preparatory Coursework for entrance into an undergrad program: enrollment in preparatory coursework necessary for enrollment in an undergraduate or professional program.

    - Selective Admissions Associate Degree: 1. Requires an associate degree or the successful completion of at least two years of postsecondary coursework as a prerequisite for admission and 2. Admits only a selected number of applicants based on additional competitive criteria, and 3. Provides the academic qualifications necessary for a profession that requires licensure or certification by the State.

    - 2-Year Bachelor's Degree: Only admit students who have completed an associate degree or at least two years of post-secondary coursework.

- **PRQ:** a parallel plan to support financial aid funding of plan prerequisites.

- **NSC (National Student Clearinghouse):** colleges report student enrollment and completion information to NSC. NSC then provides this information to the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS). Colleges are responsible for knowing about, understanding, and adhering

to federal reporting requirements. Colleges can reach out to their contacts at NSC or NSLDS if they have questions about reporting or reporting requirements.

- **Show in Advisement:** what-If reports are like the degree audit tool from the previous system. It is a simulated advisement report based on alternate programs of study. The What-If Advisor, What-If Pre-Matriculated Student, and What-If Student options represent an audience and if you want all or select which audience can run a what-if.

- **LAT (Last Admit Term):** a last admit term is applied to a plan and signals that the plan is no longer admitting, or is not currently admitting, new students. A last admit term could be applied for many reasons (i.e., budgetary, faculty vacancy, review/update of curriculum, limited program demand, etc.) and indicates the commencement of the teach-out.

- **Inactive status:** a plan that has reached the maximum three years allowed for teach-out and/or is determined by the college that it will be permanently removed from the respective college's inventory. Once a plan is inactive, a return to active status requires a new PAR (Program Approval Request) process.

- **Fully Online Program:** The following clarifications help define what is meant by a fully online program:
  - *The fully online designation indicates all required courses within a program are available online and do not require in-person attendance.*
  - *Fully online does not apply to all elements of the college experience. Elements that may require in-person attendance include:*
    - *Non-instructional in-person requirements (such as orientation and testing).*
    - *Prerequisite courses, such as pre-college level math and English, that may be required to successfully complete a program.*
- **When determining whether a program qualifies as fully online, please consider the following:**
  - The availability of fully online delivery may vary depending on program enrollment, faculty availability, and required student placement. Programs should only be designated as fully online if these elements can be consistently supported.
  - Program-specific requirements should be clearly communicated on the college website, including any prerequisites or non-instructional in-person requirements that may affect online access.

Credential Approval Criteria

Colleges are responsible for ensuring degree and certificate programs meet accreditation guidelines as established by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). Please see the NWCCU Accreditation [Handbook](#) for details, including those regarding institutional learning outcomes/competences and general education coursework.

SBCTC does not provide interpretation of accreditation policies for colleges, such consultations should be made with the college's ALO and/or NWCCU.

All professional-technical credentials are reviewed for alignment with an occupational outcome. This includes a review of the curriculum. SBCTC program approval staff consult with submitting colleges when a submitted professional-technical credential is not comprised of a majority (50% or more) of credits earned through courses designated as vocational.

Refer to the [procedures section](#) of this document to view the requirements for each type of plan.

Non-Credit Certificates (C00)

To be included as a professional-technical credential. A C00 is any non-credit bearing certificate that is aligned with a professional-technical pathway. C00 coding is also used in continuing education to document non-credit experiences, which is distinctly different than the use under professional-technical, For the purposes of professional-technical Program Approval, this is a short-term certificate providing skills and training and must have a workforce outcome.

Short certificates (C00 and C01) must be registered with the State Board office using the New Plan approval form and following the Certificate Registration Procedure referenced in this document.

Certificates of 1-19 Credits (C01)

A **C01** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that total 1-19 credits. For the purposes of Program Approval, this is a short-term certificate.

Short certificates (C00 and C01) must be registered with the State Board office using the New Plan approval form and following the Certificate Registration Procedure referenced in this document.

Certificates of 20-44 Credits (C20)

A **C20** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that total 20-44 credits. For the purposes of Program Approval, this is a mid-length certificate.

Credit Threshold

When developing certificates of 40-44 credits, colleges are encouraged to weigh the potential benefit of creating a C45 credential.

Option C20 Certificates

Option certificates (a variant of an existing credential) must be registered with the State Board office.

Documentation of need may include, but is not limited to, advisory committee meeting minutes, notes of conversations or emails from local employers, labor/market data, or notes from meetings with economic and/or workforce development organizations.

To register a C20 option certificate, use the Certificate Registration Procedure as described in the procedures section.

Primary C20 Certificates

Primary certificates (standalone) must be approved by the State Board office, which acts to affirm programs are in line with the requirements put forth by the Workforce Education Council and Instruction Commission.

To seek approval for a new primary C20 certificate, use the Program Approval Request Procedure as described in the procedures section.

Certificates of 45-89 Credits (C45)

A **C45** is any professional-technical certificate comprised of lower-division courses that total 45-89 credits.

Credit Threshold

When developing certificates of 80-89 credits, colleges are encouraged to weigh the potential benefit of developing a two-year degree.

Primary C45 certificates (new programs) must be approved by the State Board office, which acts to affirm programs are in line with the requirements put forth by the Workforce Education Council and Instruction Commission.

Option C45 Certificates –do not require a two-week comment period prior to approval and are considered expedited approvals.

To seek approval for a new 45-89 credit certificate, use the Program Approval Request Procedure as described in the procedures section.

Certificates of 90+ Credits (C90)

A **C90** is any professional-technical certificate comprised of lower-division courses that total 90+ credits.

Credit Threshold

When developing certificates of 90+ credits, colleges are encouraged to weigh the potential benefit of developing a two-year degree.

Primary C90 certificates (new programs) must be approved by the State Board office, which acts to affirm programs are in line with the requirements put forth by the Workforce Education Council and Instruction Commission.

Option C90 Certificates –do not require a two-week comment period prior to approval and are considered expedited approvals.

To seek approval for a new 90+ credit certificate, use the Program Approval Request Procedure as described in the procedures section.

Associate in Professional-Technical Degrees (APT) An **APT** is any professional-technical degree comprised of lower-division courses that total 90 credits or greater. This includes the following: Associate in Applied Science (AAS), Associate in Technical Arts (ATA), Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), etc.

Associate in Applied Science - Transfer Degrees (AAS-T)

The college must submit appropriate documentation to support the addition of a primary or option AAS-T as outlined in the procedures section of this document.

Per the ICRC Handbook:

The general education component of the transferable technical degree is to be comprised of not less than 20 credits of courses generally accepted in transfer. These 20 credits must include as **a minimum** the following:

Credits by subject	Possible courses
5 credits in Communication	English Composition
5 credits in Quantitative Skills	Any course from the generally accepted transfer list with Intermediate Algebra as a prerequisite
10 credits in Science, Social Science, or Humanities	Courses selected from the generally accepted transfer list including a course meeting the human relations requirement.

The 20-credit **minimum** is in recognition of the difficulty that some technical programs would have in adding even more general education credits to their degree. Yet other technical degrees would go beyond the 20 credits minimum because the technical program may already include transferable courses including the introductory course in the technical field.

Credit Threshold

When developing degrees over 90 credits, colleges are encouraged to weigh the extra time/costs to students.

New AAS-T degrees must use the program approval request procedure as described in the *Professional-Technical Program Approval & Revision Guidelines*.

Credentials Earned via Apprenticeship

Multi-Occupational Trades Associate Degree

The MOT degree is designed for students who have completed a state recognized or federally registered JATC program or to journey-level workers who have completed an approved apprenticeship training program. Colleges recognize credit equivalency for the journey card and the student must complete the general education requirements to earn the associate degree.

Other Credentials Earned through an Apprenticeship

If a college provides evidence that an established apprenticeship results in a credential, without any additional coursework, and the student meets all the course and learning outcomes of a credential through participation in the apprenticeship, the State Board will approve the apprenticeship as a certificate or degree (C20, C45, C90, or APT).

Colleges using the C20, C45, C90, or APT for the apprenticeship programs will need to provide updated program/curriculum information when submitting the apprenticeship registration form.

Additional Program Types

Collaboration Agreements

When a college, without approval for a professional-technical program, wishes to enter a collaboration with another college that does have approval, the requesting college sends a signed memorandum of understanding, with details of the collaboration, to the State Board office. The plan/credential will be added to the requesting college's inventory under a separate category titled Collaboration Agreements. The host and partner colleges will use identical plan codes for collaboration agreements.

Colleges are required to manage and maintain their collaboration agreements. If a collaborative agreement is discontinued, colleges must notify SBCTC to inform program inventory changes.

Refer to the Resources section of this document to view a template of a collaboration agreement.

State Funded Contract Programs

There are four types of contracts under which a college may offer courses — regular, supplemental, shared funding, and international student (see Chapter 4, Appendix J and Chapter 5, Section 5.90.40 of the State Board Policy Manual). Contracted programs with the Department of Corrections, Job Skills Program, military, private industry, or others 20 credits or greater shall be submitted to the State Board office using normal approval procedures described in section D.3 above.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Specialty Approval

Each college shall submit to the State Board office a form IEP (Individualized Educational Plan) for each individual enrolled in an individualized education program **prior** to beginning of instruction. The approval will expire at the conclusion of that individual's training or separation from the program.

Each community and technical college using work-based learning processes shall have on file contracts as outlined in the Policy Manual (Chapter 4) and a detailed program for each student. If an employer/employee relationship exists, each student enrolled must be paid by the employer at or above minimum wage. Internships and related programs are treated on an individual basis by each campus, but in no case will these situations result in displacement of employed workers.

Nursing Programs

In the case of new Nursing program, the documentation required for approval is the same for either a new primary or option program (see 2-D and 3). The process differs in that prior to approval and implementation of the program the college must submit to the State Board office the following documentation:

- The submitted Program Approval Request (PAR) must include assurances of clinical sites.

- Before final approval of the program, the college must receive approval from the Nursing Commission. A copy of the Nursing Commission approval letter must be submitted to the State Board.

Subplans

Subplans are currently "documented" in ctcLink and not formally "approved" by SBCTC. SBCTC program approval staff review information for alignment with existing policy and procedures, ensuring ctcLink inventory consistency across all 34 colleges. To create a subplan, colleges must submit a SolarWinds ticket and attach the curriculum of the subplan and the curriculum of the academic plan to that ticket. Reminders related to subplans:

- Only one subplan can be earned by a student under each plan code. SBCTC staff will review offer suggestions if colleges are unsure if a subplan is the correct approach.
- Subplans may only include coursework already approved in the primary plan. Introduction of new/modified curriculum, not already included in the approved plan code, may require program approval.
- Subplans used for the purposes of Guided Pathways coding or other forms of inventory management are reviewed against these criteria to ensure consistency.

Procedures

These procedures cover professional-technical lower division credentials. For information on BAS (Bachelor of Applied Science) degrees, BS degrees, or upper division certificates please see the Applied Baccalaureate instructions on the SBCTC website. For procedures regarding academic transfer degrees including DTAs (Direct Transfer Agreement), please refer to the Transfer Degree Approval & Inventory on the SBCTC website.

To provide the most flexibility and expedited service to colleges, allowing them to be responsive to the needs of industry, the program approval process varies based on the type of credential (certificate, AAS, AAS-T), the length of the program (total credits), and the programs relationship to other programs already offered by the college. The chart below details which procedure to follow.

Procedures to follow for Primary

Program Relationship	Primary				
Award	Certificate				Degree
Credits	1-19	20-44	45-89	90+	APT/AAS
Procedure	Cert. Reg.	Program Approval Request (Inter-College Communication Not Required)	Program Approval Request (Full)*		

Programs proposed that will only be offered at a corrections facility are exempt from providing evidence of collaboration and the two-week comment period.

Procedures to follow for Option

Program Relationship	Option			
Award	Certificate			AAS, AAS-T, etc.
Credits	1-19	20-44	45-89	90+
Procedure	Certificate Registration	Program Approval Request (Expedited)		

Certificate Registration Procedure

The certificate registration procedure is used for all short certificates (C00 and C01) and mid-length **option** certificates (C20).

A **C00 certificate** is any non-credit bearing certificate that is typically in a college's Continuing Education program.

A **C01 certificate** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that total 1-19 credits.

A **C20 option certificate** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that total 20-44 credits. The certificate registration procedure is used for C20 **option** certificates-- an offshoot of an existing credential.

New C20 primary certificates must use the program approval request procedure as described in these *guidelines*. Evidence of collaboration with colleges that have similar programs is not required for new certificates that are 20-44 credits.

The following details are requirements, information for registration, and the registration procedure.

Registration Information

- ❑ Program title and abbreviated title
- ❑ Total credits
- ❑ Primary program title and plan code (The credential which was the source of this offshoot.)
- ❑ Learning outcomes
- ❑ Curriculum guide listing required courses
- ❑ Course descriptions for all required courses
- ❑ Curriculum guide of the primary program if option (The credential which was the source of this option.)
- ❑ Advisory committee minutes/members
- ❑ Statement of need
- ❑ Include workforce outcomes such as relevant job titles, employment prospects, and wage information.
- ❑ Coding information including:

  - CIP code
  - Financial aid eligibility
  - Effective date
  - Visibility in the student facing online application
  - SULA program length (in weeks, months, or years)
  - Anticipated first term of enrollment

Registration Procedure

1. Under the supervision of the Chief Instructional Officer, college staff will submit the above

information using the online New Plan form in the Plan Approval database. Any attachments will be condensed into a single PDF file prior to attaching.

2. An automated confirmation message will be sent to the submitting college staff.

3. State Board staff will review the program information and attachments for completion and alignment with the stated requirements. If additional information is required, State Board staff will return the plan for revisions through the New Plan form database.

4. State Board staff will approve the plan through the New Plan form database and submit a ticket on behalf of the college to ctcLink support for the creation of a plan code for the new program.

5. ctcLink support will create the plan code and request the college's confirmation of accuracy via the ticketing system.

6. College staff will review the plan code for accuracy and send confirmation via the ticketing system.

7. Once confirmed by the college, the plan will be set to active status, and the ticket will be resolved. This will serve as the formal approval of the new plan.

Post Registration

Credentials may be revised to update the title, number of credits, courses required, etc. to meet industry needs. The State Board must be notified of any program changes using the Modify an Existing Plan form in the Plan Approval database and follow the program revision procedures as described in the *Professional-Technical Program Approval & Revision Guidelines*.

Colleges must notify the State Board of their intent to cease temporarily or permanently offering any credential using the Modify Plan Status form in the Plan Approval database and follow the program status change procedures as described in the *Professional-Technical Program Approval & Revision Guidelines*.

The State Board does not communicate any new programs or program changes to NWCCU, that is the responsibility of the college.

Program Approval Request Procedure

The *full* Program Approval Request Procedure is for any primary credential, which is 45+ credits.

A **primary credential** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that total 20 or more credits and *is not* an option of an existing program already offered by the college. Primary credentials that are 20-44 credits are required to submit a full PAR but can exclude the evidence of collaboration with colleges that have similar programs.

An **option credential** is any professional-technical credential comprised of lower-division courses that is a variation of an existing program already offered by the college.

The *expedited* Program Approval Request Procedure is used for option credentials of 45 or more credits and corrections specific programs (option/primary) that are 45 or more credits. The documentation required for approval of an option (or corrections specific program) is the same as that for a primary program. The process differs in that the *PAR* is not sent to the colleges for the two-week comment period and does not require evidence of collaboration.

The following details are the credential requirements and the program approval request procedure.

* Items that apply only to option credentials.

Program Approval Request Information

Program Description

- ❑ Program title (e.g., Associate in Applied Science Transfer – Accounting)
- ❑ Abbreviated title, limited to 30 characters (e.g., Accounting AAS-T)
- ❑ Total credits, expressed as a whole number
- ❑ Primary program title and plan code if option. *
- ❑ Coding information including:
    - CIP code
    - Financial aid eligibility
    - Effective date
    - Visibility in the student facing online application
    - SULA program length (in weeks, months, or years)
    - Anticipated first term of enrollment
- ❑ Program description
- ❑ Program Pathway
    - o The structure of the program, including options, certificates, entry and exit points, and award types is provided in a free-flowing narrative.
- ❑ Learning objectives, curriculum guide, and course descriptions. (See attachments)

Program Need

❑ Potential career progression, including job titles, employment opportunities, and wage data. Provide reports or indication of needs from employers to support new and emerging occupations not covered by standard forecasts or data.

❑ Demand Data

- o The BAS supply/demand criteria are well-vetted and stipulate the kinds of evidence required for specific circumstances (established occupations vs. emerging occupations).

- o Define your region- based on service area, reach of program, or type of program.
- o Provide the SOC code(s) you are using for this program.
- o High demand status
  - ▪ Is this program listed on the ESD high demand list?
  - ▪ What information have you used to determine if this program is in high demand?
  - ▪ If this is an emerging field, please demonstrate demand for the program by providing one or more of the following:
    - • Number of job openings
    - • ESD/BLS forecast
    - • EMSI/Burning glass data
    - • Industry research
    - • Local survey or employer letter.

❑ Supply Data
- o The BAS supply/demand criteria are well-vetted and stipulate the kinds of evidence required for specific circumstances (established occupations vs. emerging occupations).
- o Please show the number of similar completions in your defined region.
  If you do not have access to that data, please indicate:
  - ▪ Number of similar programs in the defined region
  - ▪ Number of similar programs in the state
  - ▪ Include the distance of those programs from your service region.

❑ Wage Information

- o Define your region- this could be based on service area, reach of program, or type of program.

- o Provide the SOC code(s) you are using for this program.

- o Is this considered a high wage program? (If so, please provide documentation used to make this determination. if not, please explain)

- o Provide the following wage information for your defined region:
  - ▪ Entry wage
  - ▪ Median wage
  - ▪ High-level wage (if it is relevant to the credential offered)

❑ Evidence of collaboration with colleges that have similar programs and what potential conflicts may exist (only used for primary certificates that are 45 credits and above, as well as primary associate degrees. Corrections specific programs are exempt from this requirement).

- o Which SBCTC colleges (those with similar programs; prioritizing nearby colleges), might be impacted by this program start-up? (You may contact the State Board for a list of similar programs.)
- o What are the potential impacts to the above-identified colleges? Including, but not limited to student base, employment opportunities, clinical space, and work-based learning sites.)
- o Provide names, position, college, contact information, and dates for each college consulted as part of this process. Provide meeting notes/summaries of discussions related to this PAR application.

❑ Does the proposed program prepare completers to obtain living wage employment?

❑ Does the program require approval/accreditation/certification external to the State Board (e.g., Nursing Commission)?

❑ Provide an initial assessment of the need for work-based learning/clinical sites (must be answered if applicable to program)

- o If applicable, the college must state if the clinical or work-based placements are
  - ▪ Required by an accrediting or certifying body.
  - ▪ Required by the college.
  - ▪ Optional for students.
- o If required, the college must provide the number of annual placements needed and provide letters of commitment from all employers/organizations providing placements.

Refer to the Resources section of this document if you need assistance in identifying programs, wage, and occupation data.

Attachments

❑ Attach learning objectives
(Program goals are developed in conjunction with the advisory committee. This joint development is reflected in the minutes of the committee.)

❑ Attach the curriculum guide listing required courses
(Include course number, course title, credit and/or clock hours per course, and total credits.)

❑ Attach the curriculum guide of the primary program if option *(The credential which was the source of this option.)

❑ Attach course descriptions for all required courses as they will appear in the course catalog. (Do not include course syllabi.)

❑ Advisory committee membership
(Located on SBCTC Professional-Technical Programs page)

❑ Minutes of the relevant advisory committee meeting(s)
(Reflecting the joint development of program goals and identifying a commitment in the area to employ credential completers.)

❑ Other supporting documentation (optional)

Program Approval Request Procedure

1. Under the supervision of the Chief Instructional Officer, college staff will submit the above information using the New Plan form in the Plan Approval database.

2. An automated confirmation message will be sent to the submitting college staff.

3. State Board staff will review the program information and attachments to ensure information is complete and aligned with the stated requirements. Staff will also review and assess all submissions for potential conflicts (i.e. clinical and work-based learning placements). If additional information is required, State Board staff will return the plan for revisions through the New Plan form database.

   When a new primary program is proposed, the college requesting the program must initiate conversations with potentially impacted colleges to mitigate any harm (i.e. enrollment, placement, clinicals, financial, etc.) to system colleges. SBCTC will review all submitted materials to assess impacts prior to posting the notice of intent.

   If a proposed program requires clinical or work-based learning site agreements, evidence of sufficient placement capacity must be submitted as part of the PAR application.

   - Provide signed agreements for the number of clinical or work-based learning sites required for launching or modifying a program.
   - Ensure agreements meet the proposed placement requirements without impacting existing signed agreements with other system colleges.
   - SBCTC retains the right to require additional evidence before sending the request out to the system for input.

4. SBCTC has authority to pause approval processes that are deemed to conflict with the stated requirements, until such time that all concerns have been resolved.

5. State Board staff will distribute a notice of intent to the Workforce Dean and Vice Presidents of Instruction listservs. Any objections must be raised no later than two weeks after the notice is sent by replying to the notice. Please see the Objections section for more information on grounds for objection and the objection procedure.
   Not required for option credentials.

6. If no objections are raised, the State Board will proceed with program approval.

7. State Board staff will approve the plan through the New Plan form database and submit a ticket on behalf of the college to ctcLink support for the creation of a plan code for the new program.

8. ctcLink support will create the plan code and request the college's confirmation of accuracy via the ticketing system.

9. College staff will review the plan code for accuracy and send confirmation via the ticketing system.

10. Once confirmed by the college, the plan will be set to active status, and the ticket will be resolved. This will serve as the formal approval of the new plan.

Post Approval

Credentials may be revised to update the title, number of credits, courses required, CIP code, etc. to meet industry needs. The State Board must be notified of any program changes using the Modify an Existing Plan form in the Plan Approval database and follow the program revision procedures as described in the *Professional-Technical Program Approval & Revision Guidelines*.

Colleges must notify the State Board of their intent to cease temporarily or permanently offering any credential using the Modify Plan Status form in the Plan Approval database and follow the program status change section as described in these guidelines.

The State Board does not communicate any new programs or program changes to NWCCU, that is the responsibility of the college.

OBJECTIONS

These guidelines have been crafted to promote collaboration between colleges and open discussion of concerns before a Program Approval Request is submitted. In the rare case when colleges are not in agreement regarding a new program an objection may be raised.

SBCTC will send a notice of intent to system workforce deans and vice presidents of instruction, giving them the opportunity to raise an objection to the proposed program on behalf of their college. A community or technical college **opposing** a *PAR* must provide written/e-mail notification of such opposition and rationale to the initiating college and the State Board office within two calendar weeks of the initial notification date from the State Board office.

Objections must be discussed between the chief instructional officers of the initiating and objecting colleges before they are forwarded to the State Board office.

Grounds for Objection

PAR opposition must be related to one of the following factors:

- Opposing college offers a program that meets the needs of the proposed new program.
- Demand for the proposed program is not sufficient to add additional instructional capacity.
- Clinical or work-based learning sites are not available to support a new program.

Objection Procedure

1. The objecting college(s) must provide evidence of attempts to collaborate. They must also provide evidence of how the proposed program will negatively impact existing program(s), including, but not limited to, student enrollment, employment opportunities, clinical space, and work-based learning sites. In the case of programs offered via distance education, college(s) opposing the offering must thoroughly explain the negative impacts expected if the program is approved, i.e. unnecessary duplication or unfair competition.

2. The colleges must attempt to resolve concerns prior to the end of the two-week objection period. If an agreement cannot be reached, the college(s) may submit a request for up to three weeks of additional time to continue their discussions and come to a resolution. If additional time is not necessary, the objection process will proceed as documented.

3. Colleges must refrain from actions that could influence the outcome (i.e. requesting or encouraging actions from external partners or stakeholders). All evidence supporting the need for the proposed program must be submitted with the PAR application or through the official process. SBCTC retains the ability to include additional information identified as relevant to the process.

Objection Process

Party	Action
SBCTC	Notice of intent sent
Objecting College	Deadline to provide SBCTC with written objection (2 weeks) • Colleges resolve objection or request extension
Proposing College	Initial college response due (5 business days)
Objecting College	Final response/revision due (3 business days)
SBCTC	Begin to assemble advisory panel (14 business days)
SBCTC	Advisory panel review
SBCTC	Executive Director's Decision (7 working days)

4. Within 14 working days SBCTC will assemble an advisory panel that may include education representatives, other workforce education directors, and other experts in the field, if they are reasonably available.

5. This panel will review documentation required by the Objection process. This documentation includes information submitted with the PAR application; however, no additional solicitation of support will be shared with the panel members. The panel will base their recommendation on the evidence provided as part of the official process.

   The panel will provide a consensus recommendation to the Executive Director of the State Board whether to sustain or overrule the opposition to the *PAR*. The results of the decision of the Executive Director of the State Board will be final; therefore, it is imperative that dissenting rationale be well thought out and documented appropriately.

   Within seven working days after the advisory panel has met, the State Board staff will advise the originating community or technical college whether the proposed program has been endorsed or rejected. If opposed, the reasons for rejection will be explained.

6. After the State Board staff endorses a *PAR*, the initiating community or technical college must submit to the State Board office any additional/final documentation within six months. Once all documentation is received and approved, the program will be entered into the college's inventory of approved vocational programs. If final documentation needed to complete the approval is not received within the six-month period, the request will lapse, and reactivation will require the initiation of a new *PAR*. The six-month limitation may be waived in relation to the capital budget request or other circumstances that are beyond the control of the initiating district.

PROGRAM INVENTORY MAINTENANCE

Program Curriculum or Title change

Any change to program title, CIP code, or curriculum modifications which result in a change to total credits must be approved by the State Board staff **prior** to the college offering the modified program.

In recognition of colleges need to modify curriculum prerequisites and entrance requirements for programs of study, the State Board only provides approval for the courses identified as part of the credential and modifications to prerequisites and entrance requirements are not tracked or approved by the State Board.

Colleges are only required to submit an updated request if the number of credits, degree name, or CIP code is being changed. The college must submit their request using the Modify an Existing Plan form in the Plan Approval database and include a copy of the revised program/curriculum guide along with the current program/curriculum guide. If the change in CIP code is due to the occupational outcome changing, the college is required to provide the advisory minutes. When the CIP code changes, the college must provide to SBCTC the updated SOC code that aligns with the new CIP code.

A credential modification which results in a change in credential categorization (C20, C45, C90, etc.) requires a new program approval process. In addition, when 50% or more of the curriculum is modified, this is no longer considered a credential modification and requires a new program approval process.

Program Status Change

Programs in Teach Out (Last Admit Term Applied)

Approved programs or options that have a last admit term added (teach out) for any reason (i.e., budgetary, job needs fulfilled, housekeeping, start-up delayed, etc.) may be placed in the last admit term category on the program inventory by campus request made in writing to the State Board office. The purpose of this category is to allow a campus ample time to study the continued need or allow some time for program modification and facility, equipment, or instructor acquisition.

The maximum time that a program may remain in a last admit term status is three years. If a program is not reinstated to fully active status during the three-year period, it will be removed from the respective college's inventory and made inactive. The college will need to complete a New Plan request if they want to reinstate the program.

If three years hasn't passed and a campus wants to reinstate a program from last admit term to active status, the campus must make the request on the Modify Plan Status form located on the Plan Approval Site and include all information requested on the form.

Intermittent programs

Approved programs or options that are conducted on an intermittent basis (i.e., every other quarter, once every two years, etc.) are listed on the program inventory in a separate category. This listing alerts the State Board office of possible voids in enrollment information, as well as notification to

prospective students. A program may be placed in this category by written request of the campus to the State Board office.

Process for Termination of Programs

A community or technical college district may, at its own discretion, terminate a program and shall notify the State Board office of such action within six weeks of the time that the program is terminated. Once a program is terminated, the State Board office will maintain as active for a maximum of three years the coding associated with that program.

If a college desires assistance in conducting a program analysis, the State Board staff will assemble an external team of experts to conduct the analysis and will provide recommendations to the requesting college (see Appendix B).

RESOURCES

Accreditation Handbook: https://nwccu.org/tools-resources/institutions/accreditation-handbook/

Resources to help colleges identify existing programs, wage, and occupation data: Employment Security Department

- Access ESD Labor Market Information via the linked website.

- The Data Architecture, Transformation & Analytics (DATA) division delivers quality and accurate data products and analysis that provide a deep understanding of Washington's workforce system, labor market and economy. Including labor market information and economic analysis as outlined in RCW 50.38, the DATA division delivers the following line of products and services:

  o Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reporting.

  o Regional analysis and training about the local labor market and economy.

  o Program evaluation, research and analysis that identifies program improvements.

  o Mandated program performance reporting and technical assistance and service to operational areas in how to leverage data.

  o Standardized and quantitative reporting and projections.

  o Actuarial services regarding solvency of trust funds and long-term affordability and effectiveness of programs.

Chmura Data Analytics

- Access Chmura data by contacting one of our Centers of Excellence, which have active licenses to pull reports.

- Provides current occupation, workforce and demand data and analytics across multiple industry sectors. This platform supports access to current and projected industry demand data, facilitating the work of the Centers to support programming in the community and technical college system. For example, data is used to inform new or expanded

programming to support student success, faculty development, the inclusion of industry standards in curriculum development, demand projections, document foundational workforce demographics, and industry workforce needs.

SBCTC Programs of Study Inventory

- Access [System ctcLink Plan Inventory](#) via the linked website. System inventory is listed under Resource Links and provides information on all active plans across all 34 community and technical colleges. This information can help your college identify existing or similar programs of study. Prior to requesting a new program (45+ credits), colleges are required to document collaboration between colleges to inform program decision-making, which benefits the state as well as the local community. The college proposing the program will provide evidence of collaboration with at least three institutions and prioritize collaboration with colleges in the closest proximity and have programs that are the same or closely related to the program being proposed. If there are no similar programs of study, then collaboration should focus on programs within the same CIP cluster.

Collaboration Agreement

- [Collaboration Agreement Template](#)

[SOC/CIP Code Crosswalk Link](#) - use this link to access the CIP SOC crosswalk and need assistance identifying a SOC code that correlates with the CIP code of your program.

List of professional-technical program approval forms:

- ADV — Professional-Technical Advisory/Planning Committee

- IEP — Professional-Technical Individualized Education Program Approval

- PAR — Program Approval Request

Appendix A — Background

, states, in part, the following:

The college board shall have general supervision and control over the state system of community and technical colleges. In addition to the other powers and duties imposed upon the college board by this chapter, the college board shall be charged with the following:

3. Ensure, through the full use of its authority:

    a. That each college district, in coordination with colleges, within a regional area, shall offer thoroughly comprehensive educational, training, and service programs to meet the needs of both the communities and students served by combining high standards of excellence in academic transfer courses; realistic and practical courses in occupational education, both graded and ungraded; and community services of an educational, cultural, and recreational nature; and adult education, including basic skills and general, family, and workforce literacy programs and services;

1. Establish minimum standards to govern the operation of the community and technical colleges with respect to:

    a. Qualifications and credentials of instructional and key administrative personnel, except as otherwise provided in the state plan for vocational education.

    b. Internal budgeting, accounting, auditing, and financial procedures as necessary to supplement the general requirements prescribed pursuant to chapter 43.88 RCW.

    c. The content of the curriculums and other educational and training programs, and the requirement for degrees and certificates awarded by the colleges.

The State Board Policy Manual, Chapter 4 section 4.40.00, Professional-Technical Programs, states in part:

All professional-technical degree and certificate programs must be approved by the State Board prior to course or program implementation (see RCW 28B.50.090(7)(c)). As part of this responsibility, the State Board:

1. Sets rules/procedures/guidelines, developed in cooperation with the college system, that provide for the approval of all proposed new professional-technical programs, curriculum modifications and program title changes.

2. Requires that colleges certify professional-technical staff and faculty as provided by WAC131-16-070 through WAC 131-16-095.

Section 4.40.20, Advisory Committees for Professional-Technical Programs, describes the requirement for each professional-technical program to have an industry advisory committee. Refer to the College Advisory Committee Procedures, which provides guidance on the membership.

Appendix B — Program Viability Analysis

All programs should be continually reviewed for their effectiveness in meeting the training needs of industry, as well as in fulfilling the mission of the college. Programs failing to meet these needs should be subject to review for viability. The outcome of the review may involve program revision or elimination. Many factors are considered during this process:

1. Is enrollment adequate? Each program has an established average enrollment number that is determined by the college, in collaboration with the faculty, program director, and advisory committee, following analysis of the program curriculum needs: facility and equipment availability, safety factors, and the optimal number of students that the instructor(s) can successfully manage at one time. Is this established average enrollment figure being met?

    Enrollment is determined to be inadequate when the program's average enrollment is 75 percent or less of the established average enrollment figure. A review of the program should be triggered at any point in time that the enrollment dips below the 75 percent standard. During the review, up to three years of enrollment figures may be analyzed.

2. Does the program meet industry standards? Are the industry-validated competencies being successfully met by program graduates? If industry certification/formal recognition exists, has the program achieved said certification/formal recognition?

3. Are there sufficient employment opportunities for program graduates, and are graduates obtaining employment in the field?

4. Do entry-level wages exceed the minimum wage?

5. Are there career advancement opportunities available for those graduates who perform successfully on the job?

6. Is the program advisory committee actively involved and supportive of the program?

7. Is the program cost-effective/economically supportable?

8. Other factors that may be determined during the process may impact program viability.

While enrollment is a key factor considered in the review process, all factors listed above are important considerations and any of them could be a determinant for program viability even though adequate enrollment may exist.

Historic Changes

April 2025

The following revisions have been made to address technical fixes, clarify language, and ensure PAR guidelines align with current statute and policies.

WAC 250-61-060 provides specific exemptions to any public college, public university, public community college, or public technical college or institute operating as part of the public higher education system of this state. Our PAR guidelines were updated to remove the following definition of an associate's degree in WAC Chapter 250-61: Regulations for Degree-Granting Institutions Act. The language removed from these guidelines:

- An **associate degree** program conventionally entails approximately two academic years of study, i.e., 90 credits, or two years of 45 credits each. WAC 250-61-050 defines "associate degree" as a lower division undergraduate degree that requires at least 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours. Some highly technical programs may require more than this to ensure that students have the necessary preparation to succeed. WAC 250-61-100 provides additional guidelines for an associate degree

Other revisions include:

- Added definitions for CIP and SOC codes.
- Added a link to the SOC/CIP code Crosswalk under resources.
- Updated procedures for new program Options, clarifying approval does not require an updated advisory membership form.
- Updated Objection Procedure for plans requiring clinical or work-based learning sites.
- Updated requirements under Program Inventory Maintenance to require documentation of curriculum changes when total program credits are modified.
- Revised language to clarify that removing a primary program from the college inventory does not eliminate program option(s) approved under that primary program.
- Moved historic changes to the end of this document.

October 1, 2024

The revisions provide additional information helpful to colleges when submitting a plan request

Revisions include:

- Information and resource link about college advisory committee procedures.

- Additional language and reference from Washington Administrative Code (WAC) for each degree type.

- Updated the resources section to provide colleges with sources to identify existing programs, wage, and occupation data. Added a collaboration agreement template.

- Added exemption to our guidelines for corrections specific program approval as well as a definition for Corrections Educations.

- Updated Program Type with information about subplans.

- Added additional information about non-credit certificates.

- Removed mentioning of separate Reinstatement Form (REIN). The form is now embedded in the new plan approval site in the Remove Last Admit Term form.

- Provided clarity regarding the character limit on the Plan Description field.

- Additional information about effective dates used for new plans, revisions to an existing plan, and inactivating a plan.

February 23, 2024

The revisions support the enhancement of the Program Approval Request (PAR)

Revisions include:

- Added definitions for terms/acronyms used on the PAR form.

- Added definition for short-term certificates.

- Added definition for collaborations.

- Added information related to changes to existing credentials that modify curriculum, prerequisites, and/or entrance requirements.

- Added COO plans under the credential approval criteria section.

- Created live links in the PAR Guidelines to assist in navigation.

- Updated process for program status changes to match the language and procedures in ctcLink.

- Revised the PAR procedure pertaining to evidence of collaboration with other colleges to include prioritizing collaboration with nearby colleges that have similar programs, and then any college with a similar program.

- Updated credential approval criteria.

- Added definition for apprenticeships.

- Added definition differentiating the MOT (Multi-Occupational Trades) degree from the other credentials awarded through an apprenticeship.

- Revised information related to collaborative agreements.

- Updated PAR procedures to align with the new PAR process.

October 1, 2022

The revisions remove specific references to *related instruction*, replacing this term with institutional learning outcomes/competencies to align with NWCCU 2020 Accreditation Standards (Student Learning 1.C.6).

Additional context related to this change:

- Consistent with its mission, the institution establishes and assesses, across all associate and bachelor level programs or within a General Education curriculum, institutional learning outcomes and/or core competencies. Examples of such learning outcomes and competencies include, but are not limited to, effective communication skills, global awareness, cultural sensitivity, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and logical thinking, problem solving, and/or information literacy.

April 1, 2022

The revisions were approved by IC (Instruction Commission) and WEC (Workforce Education Council) Summer & Fall 2021

Revisions include:

- Taskforce recommendations from 2018-2019 and 2021-2022

- Clarification of roles of SBCTC, Colleges, and Councils

- Expedited approval process for certificates between 20 – 44 credits

- Enhanced inter-college communication requirements

- Required identification of clinical and work-based learning placements as part of approval

- Required clarification when certificates and degrees exceed certain credit thresholds

- The terminology has been updated to remove references to Legacy and better align with ctcLink.

- Reorganized for ease of use.

July 1, 2013

Revised.

February 10, 2012

Date of initial publication.