



January 2026 Tuesday Topic:

**Key Organizations Shaping the Higher
Education Landscape**

January 13, 2026



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

Webinar Logistics

- Please use the chat and/or raise hand feature to submit questions
- The Closed Caption option is available
- The webinar will be recorded
- The webinar recording and slides will be posted on the SPE Website



Our Time Together

- Welcome
- Key Organizations Shaping the Higher Education Landscape
- Q & A for Guest Presenters
- Updates from NC-SARA
- Q & A for NC-SARA



Welcome!

Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.
President
NC-SARA



Introduction of Guest Speakers

Dr. Deb Adair	Mr. Scott Cheney	Dr. Nasser Paydar
Chief Executive Officer	Chief Executive Officer	President
Quality Matters (QM)	Credential Engine	Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)





Credential Engine

Mr. Scott Cheney

Chief Executive Officer



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

Clarity Through Credential Transparency:

NC-SARA Tuesday Topics

January 2026





Who We Are & What We Do

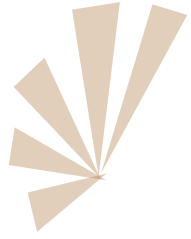
Our Mission: Credential Engine is a non-profit whose mission is to map the credential landscape with clear and consistent information, fueling the creation of resources that empower people to find the pathways that are best for them.

Our Vision: We envision a future where millions of people worldwide have access to information about credentials that opens their eyes to the full range of opportunities for learning, advancement, and meaningful careers.

How we accomplish our Mission and Vision:

- Building common infrastructure and language
- Collaboration
- Empowerment





About Credential Engine

Who We Are

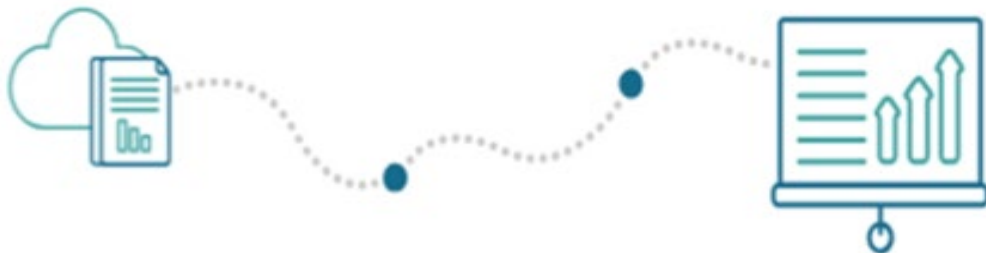
- Non-Profit
- Community built
- Vendor agnostic
- Data driven
- Mission oriented around credential, competency, and pathways transparency

What We Do

- Advocate for credential transparency
- Develop and support linked open data schemas
- Provide open, interoperable infrastructure
- Build and mobilize partnerships
- Provide expertise and services for organizations implementing credential transparency

What We Do NOT Do

- Collect or verify personally identifiable information
- Issue credentials
- Verify issued credentials





Why It Matters

- 1.8m Unique Credentials in the U.S. alone
- Before Credential Engine, no common language to describe or compare credentials and competencies. But now, our Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) is recognized as the standard language to make credentials understandable, comparable, and discoverable.
- Without widespread adoption of this standard common language, people get lost and lose out on opportunities

Counting Credentials 2025 Report Findings:

The Counting Credentials 2025 report provides the most comprehensive national count of all unique credentials offered in the United States.

- ➔ A total of **1,850,034** credentials in the United States, including diplomas, badges, certificates, certifications, occupational licenses, and degrees of all types and levels.
- ➔ A total of **\$2.34 trillion** is expended annually in the United States on the delivery and attainment of these credentials
- ➔ Offered by **134,491** providers across the United States.

The credential ecosystem is vast, complex, and economically significant larger than most people realize.



Counting Credentials 2025 Numbers:

The report identifies seven major categories of credentials, each serving distinct purposes in documenting learning and skills:

- **Badges**(1,022,028) represent the largest category, driven by increased digitization of learning recognition
- **Certificates** (486,352) encompass everything from bootcamp completions to academic certificates and apprenticeships
- **Micro-credentials** (3,384) represent focused learning achievements
- **Certifications** (6,892) are industry-driven credentials validating specific competencies
- **Degrees**(264,099) include associate's through doctoral programs from higher education institutions
- **Licenses**(14,331) are government-issued authorizations to legally practice a particular occupation or trade
- **Secondary School Credentials**(52,948) cover secondary school seals and endorsements, public and private school diplomas, and alternative diplomas and equivalencies



Counting Credentials 2025: From Credential Complexity to Navigable Pathways

- The number of credentials continues to increase across education, training, and work
- Volume alone does not create clarity for learners, employers, or policymakers
- Fragmented descriptions make credentials difficult to compare, trust, and use

What enables navigation:

- **Structured credential data** creates shared understanding across systems
- The **Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL)** provides a common language to describe credentials, skills, and outcomes
- **Linked open data** connects credentials to skills, occupations, jobs, and pathways

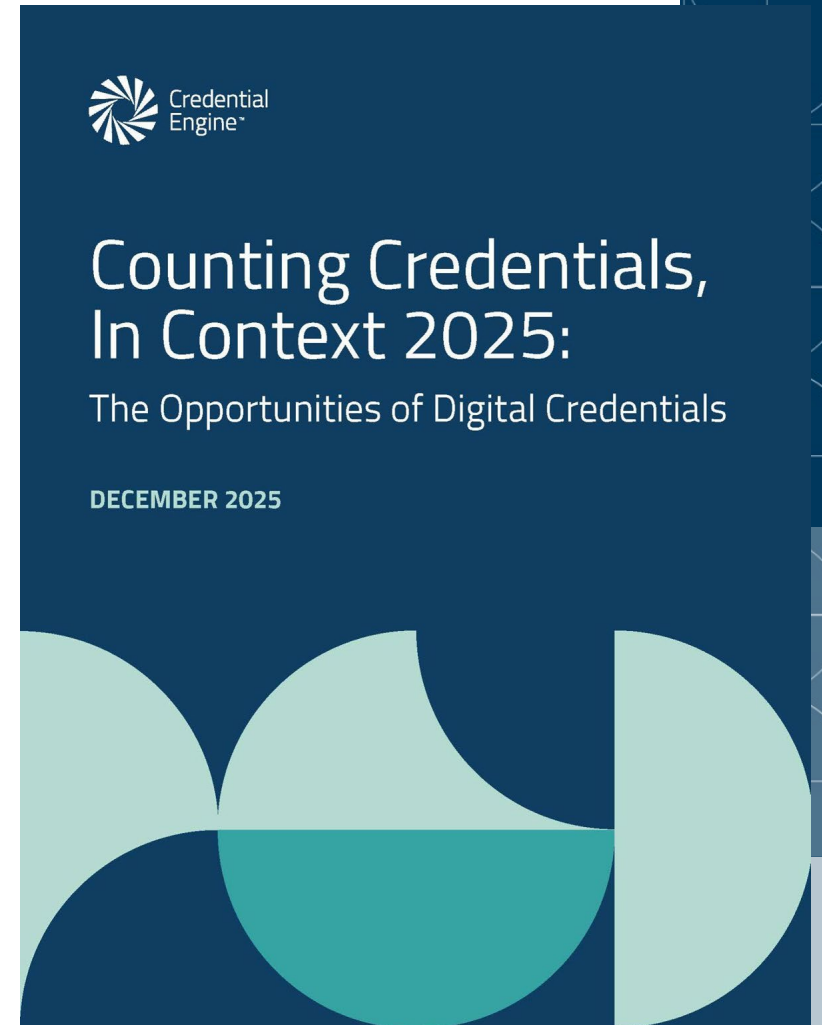
As credential options expand, structured, open, linked, data is essential to turn complexity into transparency and navigation.



Counting Credentials, in Context 2025

The companion report adds meaning to the numbers highlighted in *Counting Credentials 2025* examining:

- How credentials function within education and workforce systems
- The role of digitization and data in credential transparency
- Opportunities to better connect learning, skills, and jobs



How We Do It



Credential Transparency Description Language (CTDL) – Common language that describes key features of credentials, credentialing organizations, competency frameworks, and quality assurance bodies

Common descriptors allow for better apples to-apples comparison between credentials.

Publishing – After creating a user account, organizations use the API, Credential Registry Publisher, or bulk upload to convert organization, credential, competency framework, and quality assurance information to CTDL and publish to the Registry

Organizations have a suite of options to add information to the Credential Registry.

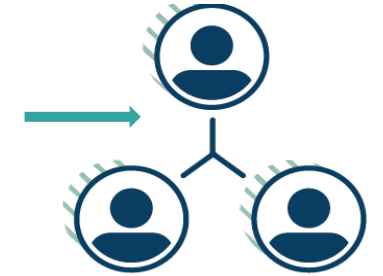
Credential Registry – More than a database, the Registry collects and connects credential data described with CTDL and supports an open applications marketplace

Developers can create specialized applications to utilize Registry data for different types of audiences, such as employers, veterans, and learners.

CRECENTIAL FINDER

Credential Finder – A basic app to view and explore the information stored in the Registry.

The public can use the Finder to see all information published to the Credential Registry.



Community – A wide range of stakeholders provide and receive technical assistance and other services to both publish to the Registry and consume the data it houses

Credentialing bodies, developers, and other users have access to resources such as do-it-yourself guides, best practices, and technical support.

What's in the Registry?

16793

Organizations

117224

Credentials

49993

Learning/Training
Opportunities

1016

Assessments

12488

Competency Frameworks

231707

Competencies

5997

Outcomes

7458

Quality Assurance Action

20472

Transfer Values

3106

Occupations

6920

Job Profiles

50044

Task Profiles

79

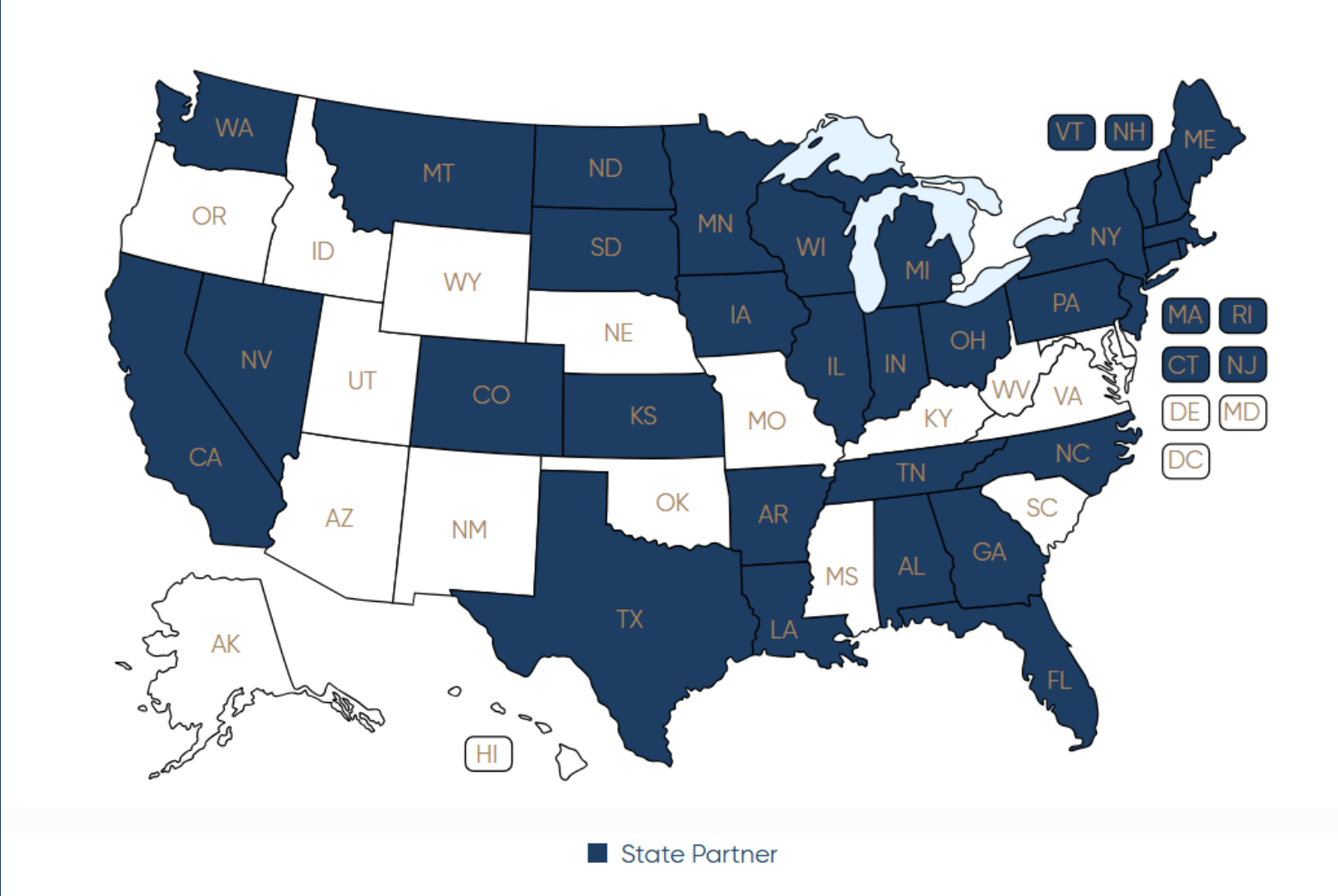
Pathways

76

Collections

50

Support Services



The work is already underway in 35 states and regions, and across 2 regional consortia of states.

www.credentialengine.org/state-partnerships



State Roadmap & Action Guide to Transparency

State leaders are in unique positions to prioritize credential transparency and align it with efforts to identify credentials of value.

Create systems where credentials are:

- Accessible
- Understood
- Comparable
- Connected to other critical education and workforce data
- Communicated so that they serve everyone.

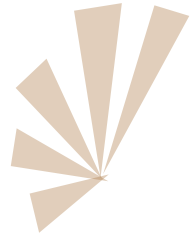


www.credentialengine.org

Making Sense of Credentials: A State Roadmap and Action Guide for Transparency

November 2020





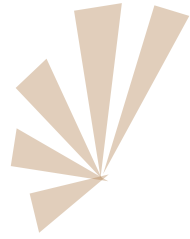
Policy and Field Developments

State Partnerships, Policy & Practice

- 30+ state partners and more regional partners
- Expect to grow to nearly 40 in 2026
- Policy enacted in half a dozen plus states – legislation, E.O., regulations, guidelines, practices
- Workforce Pell changes
- More tools, services, platforms being built, such as finders, pathway navigation tools, accountability resources, etc.

Federal Policy and Action

- DOL Discretionary Grants calling for open data about credentials and skills (*Strengthening Community Colleges, Apprenticeships, etc.*)
- Workforce Pell and short-term credentials
- Dept of ED FIPSE Grants, which for the first time explicitly calls out Credential Registries as part of Talent Marketplaces
- Congressional Hearing on Learning & Employment Records (LERs) and the recognition of the necessity of Registries and Interoperable Data
- CREATES Act calling for appropriations for state Credential Registries



For More Information

Scott Cheney
CEO

scheney@credentialengine.org



Website: credentialengine.org

Email us: info@credentialengine.org

Technical Information: credreg.net

Credential Finder: credentialfinder.org



Find @CredEngine on Social

Media



This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) International License.



Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

**Dr. Nasser Paydar
President**



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) & the Future of Accreditation

NC-SARA

January 13, 2026

Nasser H. Paydar, Ph.D.
President

CHEA Council for
Higher Education
Accreditation

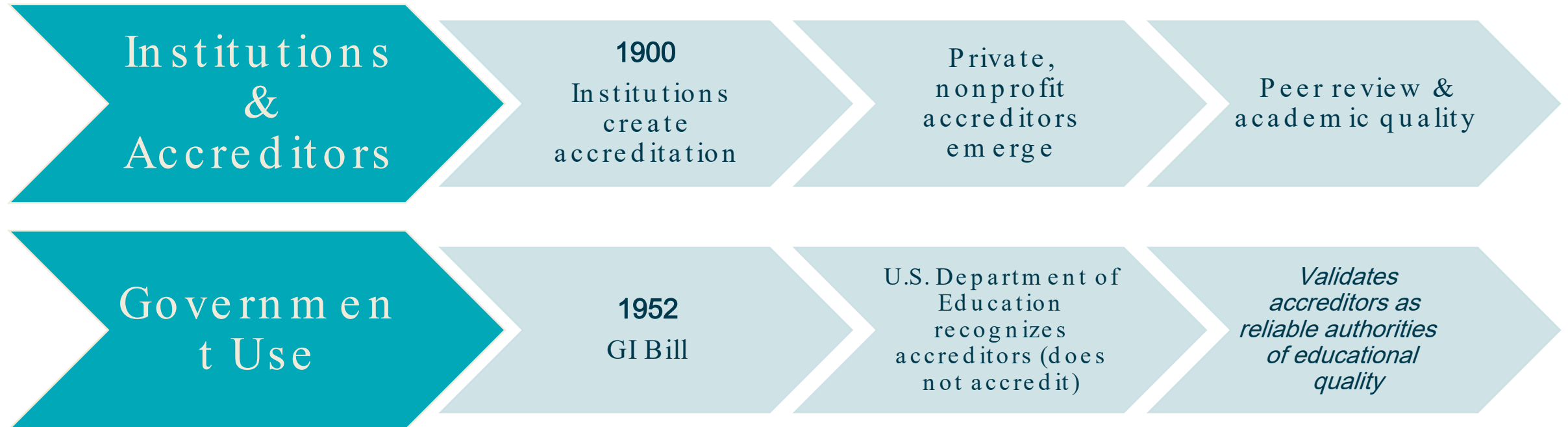
CHEA International Quality Group

CIQG[®]

What We'll Cover Today

1. Higher Education Accreditation
 - The U.S. system and how it works
2. Why Accreditation Matters
3. Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
4. What's Changing in Accreditation

Accreditation: Origins and Federal Role



Importance of Accreditation

- Access to federal student aid programs
- Public sector confidence in the institution
- Facilitates transfer of credit for students
- Reliable evaluation of education credentials and qualifications of job applicants
- In some cases, accreditation is a requirement to sit for licensing exams

Types of Accreditation

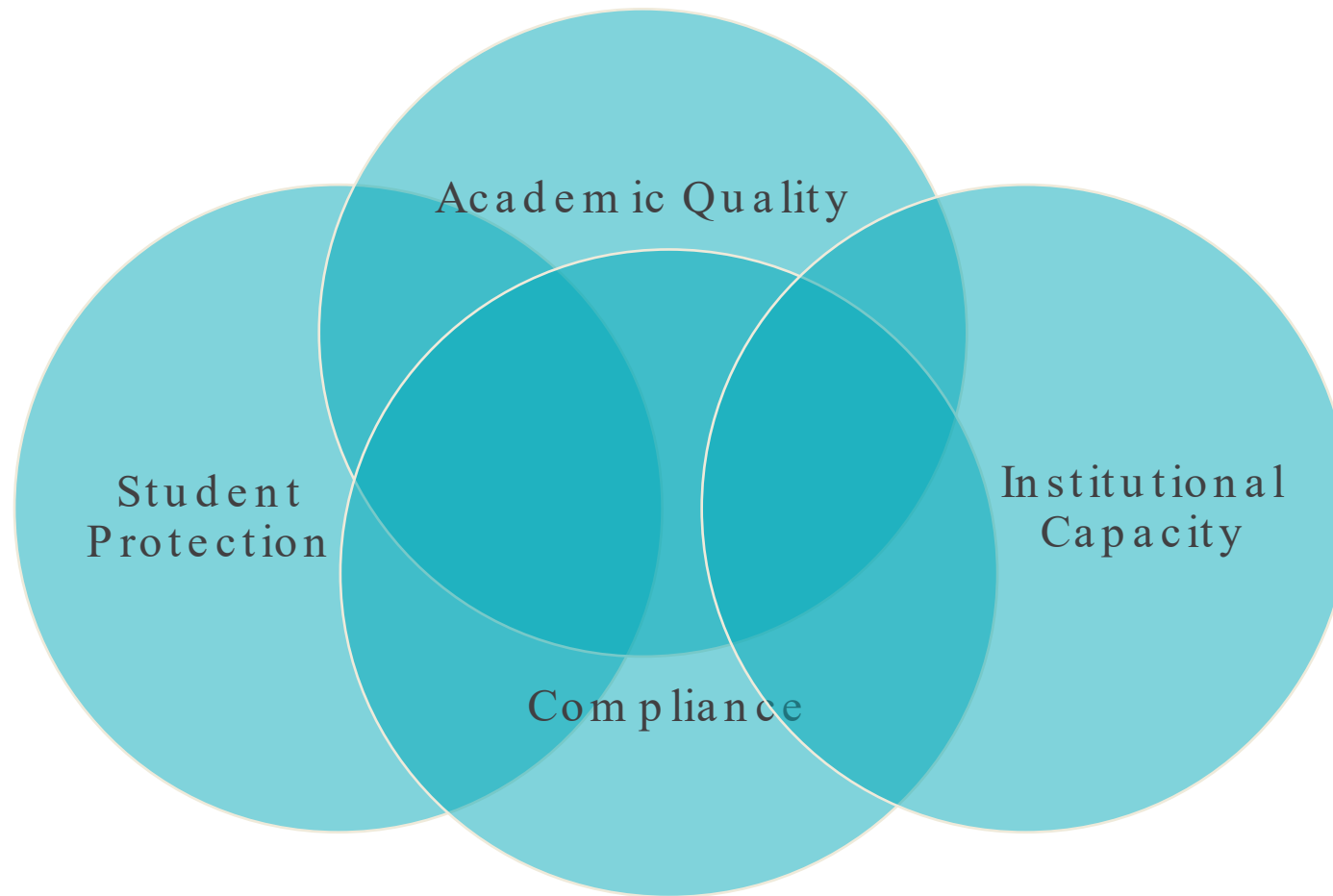
➤ Institutional Accreditation

- Applies to an entire institution
- Required for access to Title IV federal student aid
- Provided by institutional accreditors (formerly regional, faith-related, and career-related accreditors)

➤ Program Accreditation

- Applies to specific academic programs
- Conducted by specialized accreditors
- Common in fields such as business, engineering, education, and health professions

USDE Recognition Standards



CHEA Council for
Higher Education
Accreditation

CHEA International Quality Group **CIQG**[®]



A Brief Overview

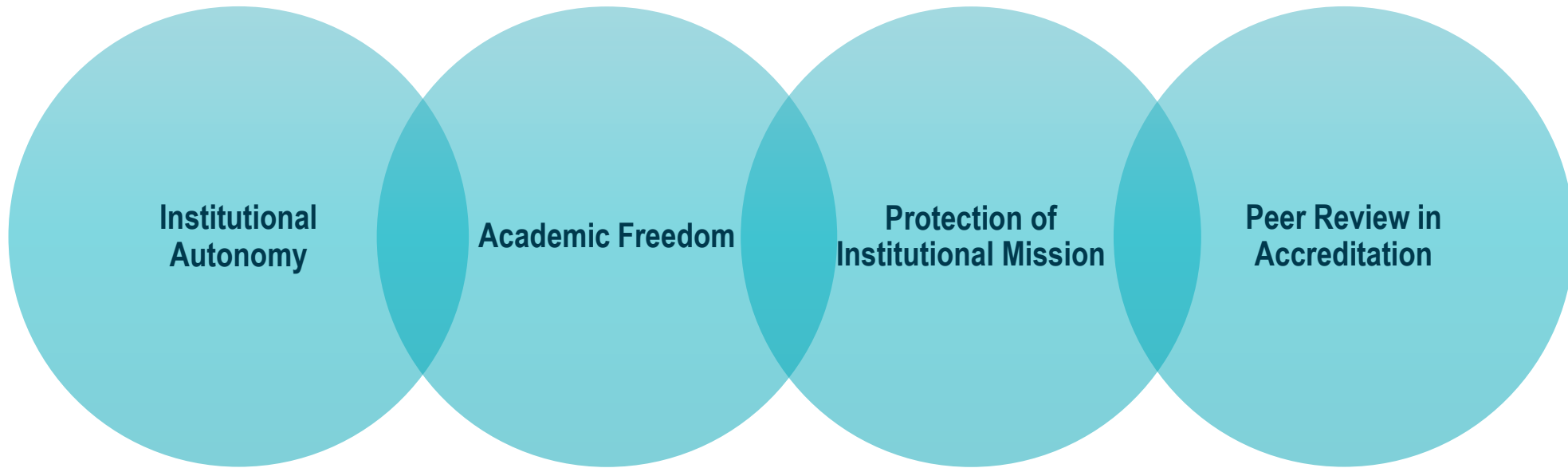
CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation) is an institutional membership organization that recognizes higher education accreditors

**Institutional
Membership
Organization**
(1,752 members)

**Recognizes
Higher
Education
Accreditors**

FUNCTIONS

CHEA serves higher education and its members by advocating for:



CHEA Recognition Differs from USDE Recognition



CHEA focuses on institutional and program academic quality, academic integrity, student success and the preservation of institutional mission, autonomy, accountability and transparency.



The USDE focuses on institutional compliance to manage federal funds allocated to students.

CHEA Supporting Higher Education in a Changing Landscape

- National voice for accreditation
- Advocates for student success
- Supports Higher Education
- Bridge between institutions and policy
- Resource hub



▮ PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

REFORMING ACCREDITATION TO STRENGTHEN HIGHER EDUCATION

Executive Orders | April 23, 2025

U.S. Department of Education

- Shutting Down the Department of Education
- Hollowing out the Department of Education
- Grant Eliminations
- Graduate loans: End of Grad Plus & New Borrowing Caps
- Workforce Pell



U.S. Congress and States

- House of Representatives reviewed two bills focused on accreditation:
 - HR 2516 – Bars DEI/social justice standards in accreditation
 - HR 4054 – Accreditation Choice & Innovation Act
 - Allows states to become accreditors; Limits accreditor governance; Includes strong religious protections
- Florida leads effort to create new accreditor: Commission for Public Higher Education (CPHE)
 - States involved: FL, GA, NC, SC, TN, TX

Accreditation = Integrity + Accountability → Student Success & Public Trust

Thank you!

CHEA: The National Voice of Accreditation





Quality Matters (QM)

Dr. Deb Adair
Chief Executive Officer



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE



Quality Matters Overview

2026 and beyond



About Us

- Quality Matters is the global organization for quality improvement in online and digital teaching and learning environments.
- Began in 2003 by faculty and institutions seeking to determine quality standards for online design.
- Bootstrapped into a non-profit and a community of over 90,000 individual members worldwide.
- Centered around collaboration, collegiality, continuous Improvement, and research



Helping you deliver on your online promise
qualitymatters.org

A Benchmark to Elevate Quality for ALL Learners



- ✓ Non-Profit
- ✓ Research-supported
- ✓ Improvement-focused

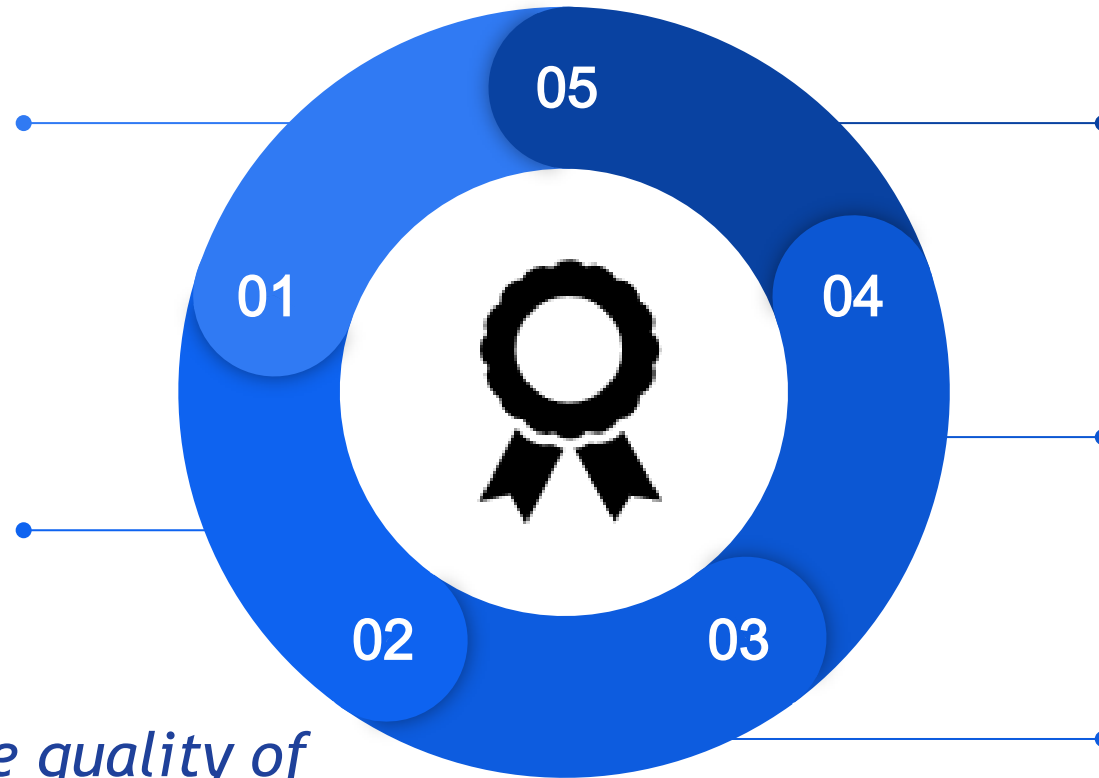
Key Elements of the QM Mission

Quality Standards & Evaluation

Development of current, research-supported, and practice-based quality standards and appropriate evaluation tools and procedures.

Professional Development

Providing professional development in the use of rubrics, tools and practices to improve the quality of online education.



Research

Demonstration of expertise in online education quality assurance and evaluation.

Recognition of Quality

Recognition & certification system, through peer review, of quality in online education.

QA Implementation: Consulting/Capacity Bldg

Fostering culture of continuous improvement, integrating QM standards/processes into org. plans to improve quality of online education.

Promote and improve the quality of online education and student learning



Helping you deliver on your online promise
qualitymatters.org

Certification drives QA processes

INTRODUCE QM & QA

- Assemble a team and appoint a “go to” person to become a QM Expert. Create momentum and buy-in by requesting QM overviews. Brainstorm goals for your implementation of QM to achieve your quality assurance outcome.
- Encourage faculty and staff to take workshops on applying QM Rubrics and/or attend QM Conferences.

STRUCTURE THE PROCESS

- Fit the QM path to the needs of your staff and organization. Customize it based on the maturity of your online/blended learning courses and programs. Determine the breadth and scope of the initiative.
- Evaluate QM review tools or send staff through professional development based on desired expected outcomes.

DEFINE & USE DATA

- QM tools and reports in MyQM are key in showing what can be—and needs to be—measured and adapted in order to achieve your goals. The QM review process allows your team to use what it learns to inform the continuous improvement of learning environments.
- These tools allow you to engage faculty and staff in the process and focus on areas for improvement.

CERTIFY & SHOWCASE

- When courses meet QM criteria, the QM Certification Mark is displayed—a sign of quality to all. Programs can be reviewed and certified using criteria for measuring quality in program design, teaching support, learner support and learner success.
- Your achievements can be shared with the larger education community.

SUSTAIN & GROW

- As you build a culture of quality assurance, you’ll discover opportunities to re -think policy and practices, and implement strategic changes to support quality.
- The use of QM can be broadened throughout the organization – extending engagement to all educators through research and application, presentations and publications, and community recognition.



Implementation Along the CoE

The International Gold Standard for Online Quality

Leading Quality Assurance Globally



**1,200+ Member institutions
in 50 states and over 30
countries**



**18,000+ QM-Certified
Courses and 3,500+ QM-
Certified Reviewers**



**Options for individuals,
schools, publishers, &
organizations/businesses**

QM Community

Primary Constituents

- Instructional Designers
- Online Faculty
- Online Administrators

Collaborators

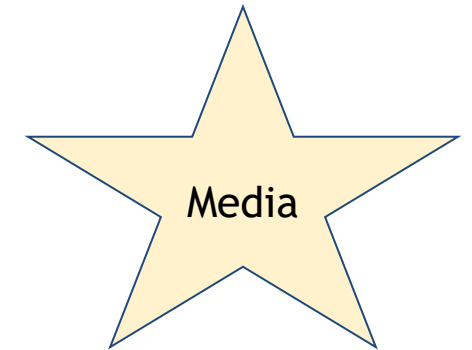
- Ed support and non-profit orgs
- EdTech orgs

Strategic Communities

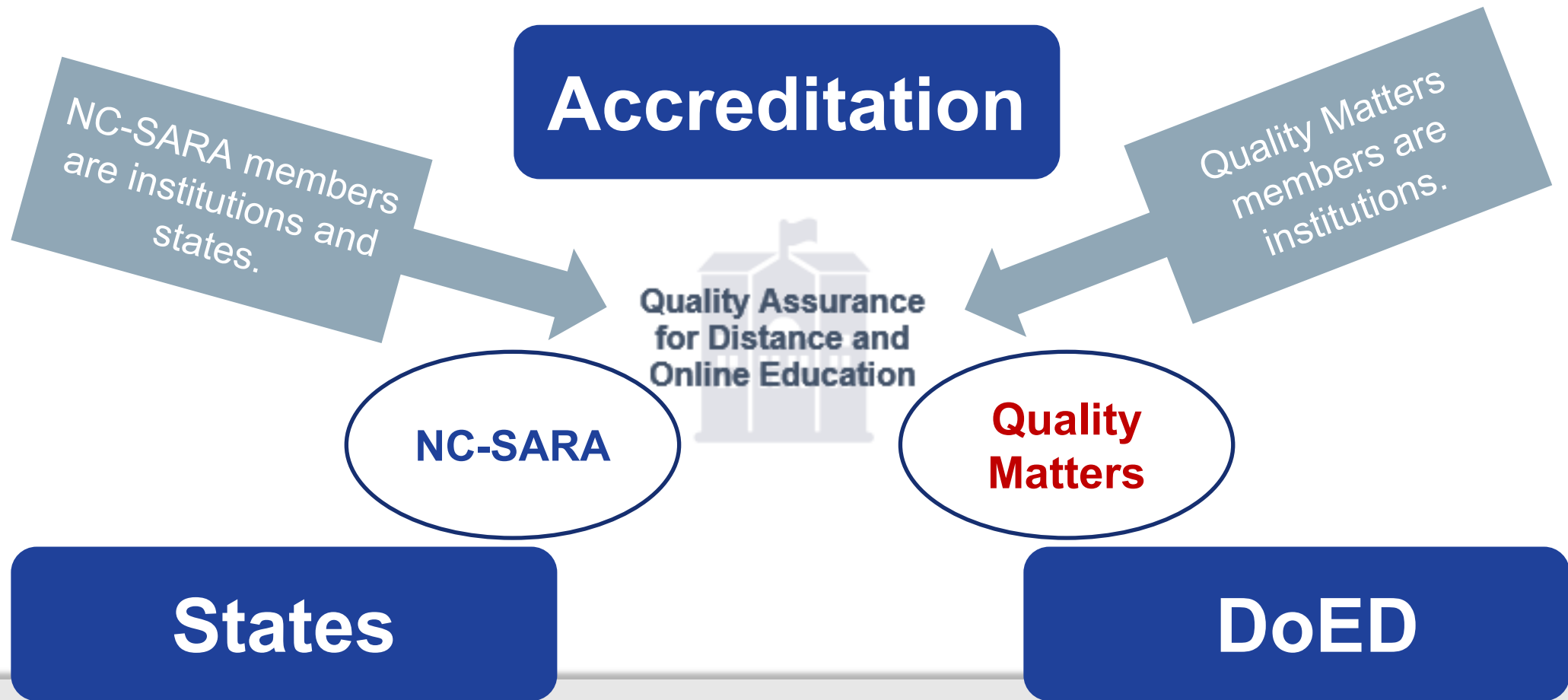
- Accreditors
- Senior Leaders
- NSQ (for K-12)

Funders/Donors

- Event sponsors
- Chloe sponsors



Supporting QA in the U.S.



Future: New Ways to Signal Trust

- AI
 - changes the kinds of guardrails/standards we need
 - increases importance of peer review w/ AI efficiencies
- Alternative credentials & micro learning
 - quality as differentiator - inter-organizational benchmarks
- Trust signals increase in importance as expertise is challenged



Quality Matters (QM) is the global organization leading quality assurance in online and innovative digital teaching and learning environments. It provides a scalable quality assurance system for online and blended learning used within and across organizations. When you see QM Certification Marks on courses or programs, it means they have met QM Course Design Standards or QM Program Review Criteria in a rigorous review process.

qualitymatters.org
1997 Annapolis Exchange Pkway, Suite 300
Annapolis, MD 21401

Helping you deliver on your online promise

Questions?

Please use the chat and/or raise hand feature to submit questions



National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE




Updates from NC-SARA



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Dr. Marianne Boeke, President

Dr. Rachel Christeson, Senior Director,

Research & Planning



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Started working on the strategic plan in 2024 with the NC-SARA Board Strategy Committee

- Reviewed the current higher education trends
- Reviewed the Mission Statement and Core Work of NC-SARA
- Reviewed the blurb of SARA and NC-SARA
- We surveyed 5 constituent groups in June 2025: NC-SARA Board; Regional Education Compact SARA staff; SPEs; SARA participating Institutions; & NC-SARA staff
- Listening Sessions in September & October 2025: NC-SARA staff; Regional Education Compact SARA Staff; and the NC-SARA Board



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Recommendations:

- Modernize Digital Tools and Submission Systems
- Strengthen Compliance Guidance and Oversight
- Expand Training and Onboarding Resources
- Continue and Deepen Federal Policy Engagement
- Enhance Storytelling and Public Communication
- Tailor Stakeholder Engagement Strategies



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Categories of risks / challenges identified:

- Mission, Role, and Governance Clarity
- Operational and Resource Capacity
- Policy Clarity, Consistency, and Compliance
- Strategic Alignment and Organizational Direction
- Federal and External Environment Pressures
- Data, Technology, and Process Infrastructure
- Culture, Communication, and Collaboration



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Next steps:

- February 2026 – review survey and listening session results with Board
- May 2026 – present outline of goals and objectives to Board
- August 2026 – prepare draft with Board Strategy Committee / Board
- October 2026 – review draft with Board
- Early 2027 – Board approves NC-SARA Strategic Plan





The SARA Portal (Demo)

Ray Audett, Director, Information Technology & Salesforce Architectural Strategist



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

Questions?

Please use the chat and/or raise hand feature to submit questions





**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

MHEC • NEBHE • SREB • WICHE

Thank You!

 www.nc-sara.org

 info@nc-sara.org

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/nc-sara>