



Connecting
Data and Insights
to Advance
Equitable Futures

Cradle-to-Career Data and Tools Advisory Board Proposal Form

Instructions:

Per the [Governance Manual](#) proposal forms submitted will address significant gaps regarding whether the data system is providing access to actionable information. Please note there should only be one proposal per form.

Name:

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Proposal Title: *no more than 50 characters*

Community College Certificate Requirements (Length)

- ☒ By checking this box, I understand that I will be presenting my recommendation at the Fall Advisory Board meeting.

Type of Proposal¹:

- ☐ Changes to tools such as dashboards or practical tools (*Complete section one*)
- ☒ Adding data points not available through the P20W data set or adjusting (including the removal of) the existing P20W data points (*Complete section two*)
- Please note a proposal form(s) can recommend adding one data point or several clearly related data points to the data system.

¹ The C2C Governance Manual notes that DTAB members can also submit recommendations related to the data request process. As this is not yet live, it has been removed from the version of this form.

Section One: Changes to Practical Tools

1. What is the nature of the gap regarding access to actionable information?

2. What type of tool should be developed?

3. How would a tool address the gap?

4. Who would be the likely user(s) of the tool?

5. How does the tool relate to the [mission and vision](#) of C2C?

Section Two: Adding Data Points Not Available Through the P20W Data Set or Adjusting the Existing P20W Data Points

1. Please state the research question of interest that cannot be fully addressed with the [existing data elements](#) in the P20W Data System.

- Which Californians complete undergraduate certificates of various lengths?
- How is certificate length associated with subsequent educational experiences, workforce outcomes, health outcomes, and use of means-tested services?

2. How does this research question relate to the [mission and vision](#) of C2C?

The research questions pointed out above sit squarely within C2C's mission and vision. The mission commits the data system to producing actionable data and research on education, economic, and health outcomes for individuals,

families, and communities. The two questions map directly onto that mandate: the first asks which Californians complete certificates of different lengths, and the second traces how certificate length relates to subsequent educational experiences, workforce outcomes, health outcomes, and use of means-tested services — the same three outcome domains the mission names. By linking a single, currently uncaptured credential characteristic to outcomes across all three domains, the research puts C2C's cross-sector data to exactly the use the mission envisions.

C2C's vision includes providing insights into critical milestones in the pipeline spanning early care, K–12, higher education, skills training, and employment. Undergraduate certificates are a defining skills-training milestone, and length is a characteristic that materially shapes how students experience it, affecting time to completion and the earnings premium potentially associated with completion.

At present, C2C ingests undergraduate certificate completions from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) but does not distinguish them by length, even though CCCCCO records each certificate's length category in its SP02 data element. Certificates of every length are therefore pooled together in C2C, leaving a measurable blind spot in the very milestone the vision describes. Carrying the existing length category through makes the milestone legible.

The vision also charges C2C with fostering evidence-based decision-making to help California build a more equitable future. Disaggregating certificates by length supports precisely the decisions colleges and policymakers face: which certificates to offer? How to estimate their value in the workplace? How much financial aid do different types of certificate programs warrant? These decisions are unusually timely. Congress recently expanded Pell Grant eligibility to very-short-term workforce programs (those running at least 8 but fewer than 15 weeks), despite scant evidence of their effects on employability or earnings, long-standing concerns about provider integrity, and the prospect

of wider racial stratification (for example, see: [Understanding the full cost of short-term credentials](#) and [The bad policy that won't die and has gotten worse: Short-term Pell](#)). California will need its own evidence to steer this expansion well, and the equity stakes (who enrolls in the shortest programs and what becomes of them) go to the heart of C2C's vision commitment to a more equitable future.

Certificate length is worth capturing precisely because it varies by orders of magnitude in a way degrees do not. With few exceptions, bachelor's degrees require 120 semester credit hours and associate's degrees require 60, equivalent to four and two years of full-time enrollment. Certificate requirements, by contrast, span an enormous range. The most recent college transcript study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), analyzing transcripts of more than 16,000 first-time beginning postsecondary students, found that completed certificates ranged from 0.21 to 120 semester credit hours

(<https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/codebooks/by-variable-name/53-beginning-postsecondary-students-2004-2009#QCRTREQ>). Completion times track that range: among community college students who completed certificates, the median time to completion was 16 months for the shortest quartile (less than 19 credits) versus 28 months for the longest quartile (45 or more credits) (Radwin, D., & Matthews, M. (2013). [Characteristics of certificate completers with their time to certificate and labor market outcomes \(NCES 2013-157\)](#), table 4. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education). Without length in the data system, none of this variation, or the outcome differences it likely drives, is visible to the Californians and institutions C2C serves.

3. Please propose additional data element(s) needed in order to successfully address the research question of interest.

To address the research questions mentioned above, two related data elements are needed for each community college certificate: (1) its length

category (the band of units required, as already recorded by CCCCCO) and (2) the basis of that band, that is, whether it is expressed in semester units (for credit certificates) or contact hours (for noncredit certificates).

CCCCCO assigns every certificate to one of these bands in its SP02 data element, so the request is to carry that existing categorization through to the P20W data system rather than to derive a new measure.

4. Please verify that the proposed data element(s) do not already exist in the P20W Data System.

Verified in communication from C2C staff dated October 29, 2024.

5. If the P20W Data System does not currently include the proposed data element(s), can the proposed data element(s) be derived from the existing data element(s) in the P20W Data System?

No

6. If the P20W Data System does not currently include the proposed data element(s), are there existing data element(s) closely related to the proposed data element(s)? If so, please list them and why they are not sufficient to answer the proposed research question.

As noted above, the P20W data system does not currently distinguish certificates by length. CCCCCO records each certificate's length category in its SP02 data element, but that categorization is not carried into P20W, so no existing P20W element can substitute for it.

7. C2C keeps a [repository](#) of previous data elements that were either a) considered during the planning process or b) proposed through the mechanisms as outlined in the Governance Manual, but were ultimately not included in the P20W, along with related feasibility studies. Do any of the data element(s) being proposed overlap with the data elements in this repository?

(New proposals can build on or duplicate prior proposals. It is helpful for proposers to share that context, including prior related feasibility studies.)

No

8. Are the proposed data element(s) already collected by a state-level entity? For data element(s) already collected, please answer question nine. For data element(s) not collected, please answer question ten.

Yes, by the CCCCCO. Ideally this proposal would also include certificates awarded by the California State University(CSU) Professional and Continuing Education programs and the University of California (UC) Extension programs (their non-state-supported operations), but these systems do not appear to collect these data.

9. [For proposed data element(s) already collected] To the extent possible, please share details pertaining to the proposed data element(s). Relevant details may include but are not limited to: a) corresponding entity that collects and houses the data element(s); b) specific variable name(s) used in the originating data system; and c) timeframe available.

The CCCCCO Management Information System records certificate length categorically in its SP02 data element (<https://webdata.cccco.edu/ded/sp/sp02.pdf>), and these categories have been stable since 2019-20.

For credit certificates, SP02 captures the band of semester units required:

- O = under 6
- E = 6 to fewer than 18 (not approved by the CCCCCO)
- M = 8 to fewer than 16 (approved by the CCCCCO)
- N = 16 to fewer than 30
- T = 30 to fewer than 60
- F = 60 or more

For noncredit certificates, SP02 captures the band of contact (direct

instruction or directly supervised activity) hours required:

- G = under 48
- H = 48 to fewer than 96
- I = 96 to fewer than 144
- J = 144 to fewer than 192
- K = 192 to fewer than 288
- P = 288 to fewer than 480
- Q = 480 to fewer than 960
- R = 960 or more

The credit categories E and M overlap because E applies to certificates not approved by the Chancellor's Office and M to those that are approved. The codes are alphabetic in SP02 but could be stored numerically if that better matches how other P20W elements are kept.

10. [For proposed data element(s) not collected] Please propose institution(s) that would be most suited for the new data collection effort.

Although not part of this proposal, we encourage the CSU and UC systems to collect certificate completion, disaggregated by requirements or length, for future addition to C2C.

11. Please explain the desired level(s) of grain size for each data element proposed. (i.e., individual-level, institution-level, or other aggregated levels)? Multiple grain sizes may be requested for each proposed data element.

These elements are needed at the individual level: each person's record should carry the length of every certificate they earned. The length of a certificate is the same for everyone who completes it. For example, everyone who finishes a given medical billing certificate completes the same number of units, so C2C can record that length once for each certificate and attach it to each person who earned it. Someone who earned three certificates would then have three length values, one for each certificate, rather than a single length recorded for the person.

12. Please explain the intended use case(s) for the proposed data elements (i.e., dashboards, query builder, or the research request tool)? Multiple use cases may be requested for each proposed data element.

Certificate length is a basic descriptor of postsecondary completion, so once it is added to the linked dataset it would enrich the two public tools built on that dataset: the dashboard and the query builder. Both present aggregated information, so the element delivers value at the state scale right away: broad measures for the general public through a dashboard, and more specific cuts for particular audiences through the query builder, which is already in operation.

Dashboard: broad, public, state- and local-level measures

A dashboard view would extend what the Student Pathways dashboard already does, adding certificate length (and credit versus noncredit status) as a lens, with the customary breakdowns by student characteristics and region.

- **Who completes certificates of each length:** completions by length category, disaggregated by demographics and geography.
 - *Usefulness:* Reveals whether short, medium, and long certificates reach different student populations and regions equitably, and where access gaps exist. Useful for state policymakers and equity advocates tracking who is served, and for college leaders and the public comparing their region against the state.
- **How long completion takes:** average and median time to completion by certificate length.
 - *Usefulness:* Replaces guesswork with realistic timelines for each type of certificate, supporting program design and honest advising. Useful for prospective students and families weighing the time commitment, for advisors guiding them, and for colleges structuring programs.
- **Median wages by certificate length:** the Student Pathways dashboard already reports median wages after graduation by credential type, with community college certificates shown as a single line alongside

associate and bachelor's degrees over one to five years. Adding certificate length would let that existing earnings view be split by length.

- *Usefulness:* Lets users see how median post-completion wages differ across short, medium, and long certificates, impossible today, since all certificates are pooled into one line that, in the current statewide view, already sits above the associate-degree line. It signals whether wages rise with length, without treating length as the cause, since field of study, student background, and local labor markets also shape wages. Useful for students comparing options, policymakers gauging the value of public investment, and colleges deciding where to focus resources.

In a dashboard, length would be shown as a few meaningful bands rather than a raw count, aligned to the categories CCCCCO already records in SP02 so they can be built directly from the source data.

Credit certificates would fall into five bands:

- Under 16 semester units
- 16 to fewer than 30
- 30 to fewer than 60
- 60 or more

A separate band for certificates not approved by the Chancellor's Office (6 to fewer than 18 semester units).

Noncredit certificates would fall into five bands:

- Under 96 contact hours
- 96 to fewer than 192
- 192 to fewer than 480
- 480 to fewer than 960
- 960 or more

Query builder: specific cuts for specific audiences

For narrower questions that particular users want to explore on their own, the

query builder would let them build aggregated tables that incorporate certificate length.

- **Dual enrollment:** how many dual-enrolled high school students earn short- and long-term certificates.
 - *Usefulness:* Shows how well early-college pathways move high schoolers into and through certificate programs, and at what lengths. Useful for K–12 districts, dual-enrollment coordinators, and early-college partners assessing whether these pathways are working as an on-ramp.
- **Field-of-study comparisons:** how outcomes vary by certificate length within a field, including how they compare with associate's degrees in the same field.
 - *Usefulness:* Lets a program judge whether its shorter certificate delivers outcomes competitive with longer credentials in the same field, informing whether to keep, redesign, or consolidate offerings. Useful for deans, program faculty, and regional workforce boards making program-level decisions.
- **Program format:** how time to completion and outcomes differ across in-person, online, and hybrid programs.
 - *Usefulness:* Surfaces whether delivery mode is associated with faster completion or better outcomes, informing how and where programs are offered. Useful for institutional planners and program designers weighing modality and resource allocation.

More specialized analyses

A few high-stakes policy questions (the return on investment of certificates of different lengths relative to associate's degrees, and whether a minimum certificate length should count toward state and regional attainment goals) call for modeling rather than a standard tool view.

- *Usefulness:* These speak directly to money and policy thresholds: how much financial aid a program type warrants, whether its net cost is justified by its payoff, and which credentials should count toward

attainment goals, a particularly timely question as Workforce (short-term) Pell takes effect. Useful for state policymakers, financial-aid administrators, and accountability bodies.