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NSSB *Partnerships*

SUMMARY OF THE NSSB GUIDELINES FOR A VOLUNTARY NATIONAL SKILL STANDARDS SYSTEM

The NSSB's guidelines -- which the Board will use to determine its approval of the Voluntary Partnerships and the skill standards systems they develop -- are designed to assure the public that the system represents both quality and fairness.

The National Skill Standards Act declares that the Board itself will *not* set skill standards, but rather establish the guidelines used to endorse standards created by coalitions called "Voluntary Partnerships" in the 1994 law. These Voluntary Partnerships include employer, union, worker, community, government, and education and training representatives.

NSSB's guidelines comprise key components designed to ensure quality and fairness in the national skill standards system, some required by the National Skill Standards Act and others established by the Board itself. The guidelines cover:

- the broad clusters of jobs by industry, for which skill standards are developed;
- the composition and operating procedures of the Voluntary Partnerships;
- the development of the skill standards;
- the assessments and certifications to determine whether individuals meet the standards;
- promoting the goals of civil rights, opportunity and access; and
- continuous improvement through updating, research, evaluation and other means.

Overview of the NSSB Skill Standards Framework

Description of work: The setting of standards will include the describing of three tiers of critical work functions (core, concentration, and specialty) and their corresponding skills. Core refers to the level of description applicable to an entire cluster, such as "transportation"; concentration refers to the level of description applicable to broad industry or occupational areas or job families within a cluster, such as "trucking"; and specialty refers to the level of description applicable to particular or specialized jobs or occupations within a concentration, such as "tractor-trailer driver."

Identification of skills and knowledge: There will be three broad classes of skills and knowledge: academic skills and knowledge (for example, language arts, mathematics, and science), employability skills and knowledge (for example, teamwork, problem solving, and negotiation skills), and occupational skills and knowledge (for example, small engine repair and double-entry bookkeeping).

Certification: Within the system, there will be two types of certificates issued:

1. **"Core + 1" certificates** (initially targeting workers up to and including what is traditionally referred to as the first level of supervision) will encompass skill

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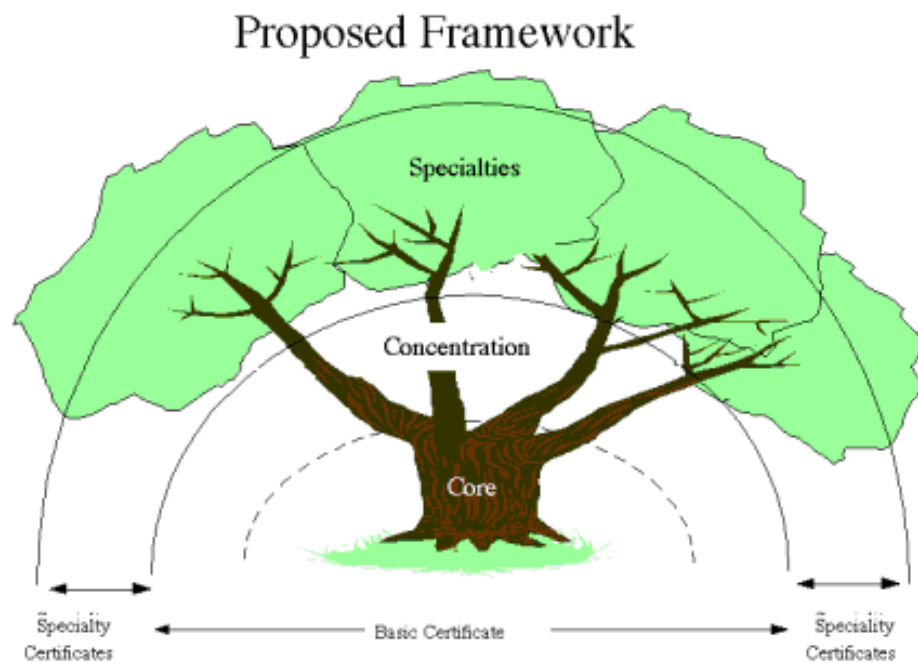
standards applicable either to the core alone (if there are no concentrations) or the core plus one concentration. They will be established by Voluntary Partnerships and endorsed by the Board.

2. **Specialty certificates** will encompass skill standards applicable to particular jobs or occupations, and which will be established by outside groups (for example, trade associations, educational/training institutions, and so forth). Skill standards for specialty certificates must build directly upon the standards for the core certificate(s).

Endorsement of certificates: Specialty certificates will be submitted to the Voluntary Partnership for NSSB endorsement. Voluntary Partnerships will bring Core + 1 certificates to the NSSB for endorsement prior to accepting specialty certificates for endorsement.

NSSB endorsement process: NSSB endorsement of the skill standards systems of Voluntary Partnerships will occur in three stages: NSSB endorsement of the 1) skill standards; 2) assessment system; and 3) implementation of the entire system (including development and implementation of Core+1 and specialty certifications, continuous improvement, data collection, and use by various stakeholders). For each stage, there are two required endorsement sub-steps: 1) submission of a development plan prior to beginning the work, subject to approval by the NSSB staff; and 2) submission of the completed product to the Board.

Analogy: A visual description of the NSSB Skill Standards Framework would include a forest of 15 trees with corresponding Voluntary Partnerships depicting the 15 industry clusters. Each tree would demonstrate the standards system as shown.



Grouping Jobs for the Purpose of Creating Skill Standards

The law requires the Board to "identify broad clusters of major occupations" for the purpose of setting standards, for several compelling reasons:

- It would be extraordinarily confusing and inefficient if employers, unions, workers, and educators had to navigate a "system" in which different standards covered the same industry or occupation.
- Second, it is unwise to set standards that are so narrow that workers lack the

versatility to adapt to changes at their workplaces, or cannot perform alternative tasks when the need arises.

Third, one of the goals of skill standards is to facilitate the acquisition of skills not just for a single job or occupation, but for a career. For this purpose it is necessary to group jobs in such a way that individuals clearly understand what skills and knowledge they need to obtain better jobs within a broad field.

The law also requires that the Voluntary Partnerships (described above) establish standards within the occupational categories designated by the Board. To meet these goals, the NSSB has divided the economy into 15 clusters designed to accurately reflect employment patterns, and which make sense to the employers, unions, workers, students, and educators who will use the system. The 15 industry clusters reflect broad industry categories that will be familiar to employers, whose representatives will lead the Voluntary Partnerships.

The 15 industry clusters

- [Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing](#)
- [Business and Administrative Services](#)
- [Construction](#)
- [Education and Training](#)
- [Finance and Insurance](#)
- [Health and Human Services](#)
- [Manufacturing, Installation and Repair](#)
- [Mining](#)
- [Public Administration, Legal and Protective Services](#)
- [Restaurants, Lodging, Hospitality and Tourism, and Amusement and Recreation](#)
- [Retail Trade, Wholesale Trade, Real Estate and Personal Services](#)
- [Scientific and Technical Services](#)
- [Telecommunications, Computers, Arts and Entertainment, and Information](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Utilities and Environmental and Waste Management](#)

Composition and Operating Procedures of the Voluntary Partnerships

The National Skill Standards Act requires that the Voluntary Partnerships reflect the "full and balanced participation" of all major stakeholders, including employer, union, worker, community, government, and education and training representatives. NSSB guidelines fulfill the principle of full and balanced participation through a two-tiered Voluntary Partnership membership structure: 1) all members of the Partnership; and 2) the leadership of the Partnership, which the NSSB calls a Decision Council.

Membership in the Voluntary Partnership must be open to all interested individuals, organizations and coalitions, and all members have a right to participate in the selection of the Decision Council. All members have the right to receive information on Partnership activities, and to comment upon them.

The Decision Councils must be employer-led, and must include representatives from three broadly defined stakeholder groups: 1) employers; 2) workers; and 3) public interest organizations (including educators and community and civil rights organizations). The NSSB also specifies a target range for the share of the Decision Council that each stakeholder constitutes. Within the employer group, the membership must be broadly

representative of the sub-industries within the cluster.

NSSB's guidelines for the operating procedures of the Voluntary Partnerships are based upon the due process criteria of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) -- a venerable institution for quality assurance. These guidelines ensure that the operating procedures of the Partnerships are open, allow adequate notification, include a balance of interested parties, utilize a consensus process, and consider dissenting views.

Development of Skill Standards

The National Skill Standards Act charges the Board with endorsing skill standards that both "meet or exceed the highest applicable standards used in the United States" and "take into account relevant standards used in other countries." The NSSB also stipulates that the standards that it endorses meet the highest professional standards for development -- using rigorous, systematic, valid, reliable, and comprehensive quantitative and qualitative work (or job) analysis methods. Skill standards presented to the NSSB for endorsement must 1) provide clear linkages and paths to training and curriculum development activities; 2) readily lend themselves to the provision of diagnostic and continuous improvement feedback; and 3) provide clear signals regarding the types and levels of skills, knowledge, and performances valued and required in the workplace. They must be structured as a modular, progressive system that enables individuals to build upon blocks of skills and knowledge to (vertically or horizontally) expand their career mobility. This will maximize the transferability and portability of the standards, thus promoting career paths within and among clusters and expanding employment opportunities. Skill standards must also take into account the relevant laws and regulations pertaining to health and safety, the environment, and Federal, state, and local occupational licensing, and are consistent with federal civil rights laws.

Assessment and Certification

Assessments must be developed in a manner consistent with relevant professional and technical standards (such as the American Psychological Association/American Educational Research Association/National Council on Measurement and Education's *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests* and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology's *Principles for the Validation and Use of Employee Selection Procedures*) and government guidelines (such as the federal *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures*). This means that the assessments will meet professional, legal and technical standards for reliability, validity, and fairness. Assessments must be appropriate for and accessible to people who are able to demonstrate their competence by virtue of their experience, self-instruction, or formal programs of instruction. The NSSB encourages -- consistent with other NSSB criteria -- innovative methods of assessment (for example, new types of simulations or performance measures), innovative methods of assessment delivery, and multiple methods of assessment.

Promotion of Civil Rights, Opportunity and Access

These guidelines focus on the importance of *fairness* in the skill standards system, ensuring that it:

- is not discriminatory, and can be used consistent with federal civil rights laws;
- promotes portable credentials;
- facilitates worker mobility;
- disseminates information concerning the system; and
- increases opportunities for minorities and women.

Continuous Improvement

The Voluntary Partnerships must implement a plan for the updating and continuous improvement of standards, assessments, certificates and other elements of the system. Continuous improvement activities must include research and evaluation (including audits of a random sample of assessments), and updating of the system, to assure that the skill standards system keeps pace with the changing workplace. The Core + 1 skill standards must be revised and updated at least every five years; specialty skill standards must be updated as often as necessary, but not less often than every three years. There must also be a documented system in place to gather input from employed workers and their representatives and subject matter experts (such as professional or industry groups) in order to track changes in technology, work organization, industry structure, and customer requirements that affect how work is being performed in the cluster.



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