

# Request for Proposal (RFP) to select the Indiana Qualifications Framework (IQF) “Consistency Check” Entity

December 2, 2025

## Section 1: Description & Background

### INTRODUCTION & FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

[CEMETS iLab Indiana](#) - a coalition of over 300 Indiana leaders representing industry, K-12 education, higher education, government, non-profits and philanthropy - is seeking an organization that can serve as an independent, third-party validator of competencies and learning levels as part of a two-year pilot of the Indiana Qualifications Framework (IQF) implementation process for the [Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway \(INCAP\)](#).

Organizations may apply for a grant from the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation of up to \$500,000 over two years (up to \$250,000 in 2026 and up to \$250,000 in 2027). Ultimately, it is iLab’s goal that this entity will demonstrate success and will be selected by and receive ongoing funding from the State of Indiana to sustain this function for the Indiana Qualifications Framework beyond the two-year pilot period.

***Note on use of AI:*** Please note that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in any part of the “consistency check” process is strictly prohibited.

### CONTEXT

By 2031, 72% of U.S. jobs will require education or training beyond high school, but Indiana is not on track to meet that demand. Only 39% of Indiana adults age 25 or older have an associate degree or higher. To create new career preparation opportunities for Hoosiers and strengthen our economy, our state needs a new education and training pathway that complements the high school-to-college pathway.

Since December 2023, more than 300 Indiana leaders have joined a coalition launched by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation and referred to as CEMETS iLab Indiana, and are working to build a new professional education and training pathway called the Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway (INCAP). To design INCAP, iLab has drawn inspiration from Switzerland’s globally renowned Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) system.

At its core, INCAP is an employer-led, competency-based education and training pathway where learning takes place in two primary locations: the workplace and the classroom. This dual approach to education and training ensures INCAP graduates are well-prepared for either a career or additional education and training. It is relevant to note that the bulk of the education and training for INCAP students takes place in the workplace, and much of the classroom learning is aligned with the applicable occupation.

INCAP includes two types of programs: 1) INCAP Apprenticeship Program (INCAP AP), which consists of a multi-year paid apprenticeship program that starts in high school and combines classroom learning with on-the-job education and training, and 2) INCAP Career Program

(INCAP CP), which provides opportunities for adults to learn through industry-led training, whether they're advancing in their current career or training for a new one. Students participating in an INCAP AP program graduate with a high school diploma and an Employment Honors Plus Seal, along with an industry-recognized credential, while adult students in an INCAP CP program earn a professional degree. Both are recognized by employers, colleges, and our state.

In September 2024, CEMETS iLab Indiana released a strategic plan that identified four priorities for the creation of what we now call the Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway. iLab's goal is that INCAP will serve a cumulative total of 50,000 Indiana students by 2034. These four priorities are:

1. Establish "Industry Talent Associations" (ITAs) to convene employers statewide, select priority occupations, identify the required knowledge, skills, and competencies for each occupation, develop workplace training materials, and partner with educators to develop related classroom materials.
2. Create structured mechanisms for progression, enabling learners to move up and/or across the academic and professional pathways.
3. Design a labor market-aligned career advising system starting in middle school that has the capacity to serve all students in Indiana.
4. Define clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, including employers, educators, nonprofit, and government representatives.

To date, iLab Indiana has launched six industry talent associations in key Indiana industries facing increased workforce shortages: Advanced Manufacturing & Logistics, Banking, Construction, Healthcare, Information Technology (IT), and Life Sciences. Employers in additional industries are identifying the next steps for their own potential ITAs.

The first cohort of students will begin INCAP programs in the fall of 2026.

## **THE INDIANA QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK**

Indiana currently has a fragmented system of formal and non-formal education degree, credential, and certificate programs, with no standard mechanism for recognizing learning that occurs outside of the formal education system. While hundreds of credential and certificate programs exist, they are not formally recognized by the education system or by employers. The current system leads to confusion on the part of both students and employers, who lack clear guidance on the value of individual programs in ensuring Hoosiers have the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to advance into higher levels of education or enter the workforce prepared for sector-specific occupations.

Indiana's goal is to implement a "permeable" education system comprised of an academic pathway and a professional pathway that allows students to move up and across both pathways starting in high school and extending into adulthood. In practical terms, this means students at both the high school and adult workforce level do not have to worry about enrolling in dead-end programs that do not result in either a formally recognized degree or credential, or an in-demand, well-paying career. What makes this permeability possible in countries outside of the U.S., including Switzerland, is a tool called a Qualifications Framework, which defines the knowledge, skills, and competencies required at each level of education that allow a learner to

either 1) advance up to higher levels of education and training, or 2) enter the labor market with relevant and in-demand competencies identified by industry for sector-specific occupations.

On May 1, 2025, Indiana Governor Mike Braun signed into law SEA 448, directing the Indiana Secretary of Education to prepare a plan to develop a statewide qualifications framework aligned with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) by no later than November 1, 2025. ISCED is considered the global gold standard for defining levels of education spanning pre-kindergarten to the doctorate level. Informed by a recommendation from CEMETS iLab Indiana, the Indiana Secretary of Education submitted a plan to establish and implement the Indiana Qualifications Framework, [which can be found in its entirety here](#).

The proposed Indiana Qualifications Framework (IQF) is a grid comprised of eight levels, aligned to the ISCED levels, to which all formal education and training programs and degrees will be systematically assigned. This will be done on the basis of competence-oriented descriptors that describe the required learning outcomes for each level. Learning outcomes are defined through the **knowledge**, **skills**, and **competencies** that must be acquired at each level. This level of detail is needed in order to differentiate between each occupation within each industry, to provide a common framework that enables comparison across industries, and to compare degrees earned within the academic and professional pathways. It is structured as follows:

- **Knowledge** is described as theoretical and/or factual learning (e.g., all of the facts, principles, and theories acquired) and is subdivided into the categories of “knowledge” and “understanding.” The “knowledge” section of each framework level is intended to answer the question: What has an individual learned at the culmination of a formal education and training program and/or degree program?
- **Skills** are described as the ability to apply knowledge in order to perform tasks and solve problems, and are subdivided into the categories of “cognitive” (use of logical, intuitive, and creative thinking) and “practical” (manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, and tools). The “skills” section of each framework level is intended to answer the question: What can an individual do at the culmination of a formal education and training program and/or degree program?
- **Competencies** are described as the ability of the learner to apply knowledge and skills autonomously and with defined levels of responsibility. Competencies relate to the regular and routine practices of knowledge and skills in a work context and are subdivided into the categories of “professional” and “personal.” The “competencies” section of each framework level is intended to answer the question: How is an individual prepared to accomplish and lead work tasks at the culmination of a formal education and training program and/or degree program?

An example of the framework for Level 4 qualifications (degrees and/or credentials) can be found in Figure 1 below. The entire Indiana Qualifications Framework can be [found in the full recommendation](#).

**Figure 1: Indiana Qualifications Framework: Level 4**

LEVEL 4	Post-secondary or non-tertiary education		
Description:	Programs providing learning experiences that build on secondary education and prepare for labor market entry or tertiary education. The content is broader than secondary but not as complex as tertiary education. Could include a portion of an associate's or bachelor's degree through credits earned.		
	Knowledge	Skills	Competencies
Overview	Factual & theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive & practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation & improvement of work or study activities
Detail	<b>Knowledge:</b>  Possess more in-depth knowledge specific to the working or learning context and general education. Also able to acquire on one's own specific technical knowledge.	<b>Cognitive skills:</b>  Able to recognize tasks in a specific field. Able to carry out tasks based on operational guidelines or through the use of known problem-solving strategies.	<b>Professional competencies:</b>  Drawing from work experience, able to use the requisite knowledge and skills at this level to ensure smooth operation of one's own working processes within a business. Work can be performed on one's own. Able to supervise routine tasks of other persons.
	<b>Understanding:</b>  Understand the correlations within the specific working or learning context or branch, as well as from thematically related fields, and be able to explain these in one's own words.	<b>Practical skills:</b>  Able to use specific technical aids and instruments to solve particularly difficult tasks in familiar situations in a specific field based on operational guidelines or with the help of known methods or tools. Able to use basic means of communication.	<b>Personal competencies:</b>  <u>Autonomy:</u> able to apply the requisite knowledge and skills in a specific field mostly on one's own. Within the specific field, able to take responsibility for clearly defined tasks and handle changing requirements.  <u>Communication competencies:</u> able to adapt one's behavior to the situation at hand and the needs of others, work within a team and convey information from the specific field both verbally and in writing in a suitable form.  <u>Leadership competencies:</u> able to show other workers how to perform a specific set of tasks within a given working context.

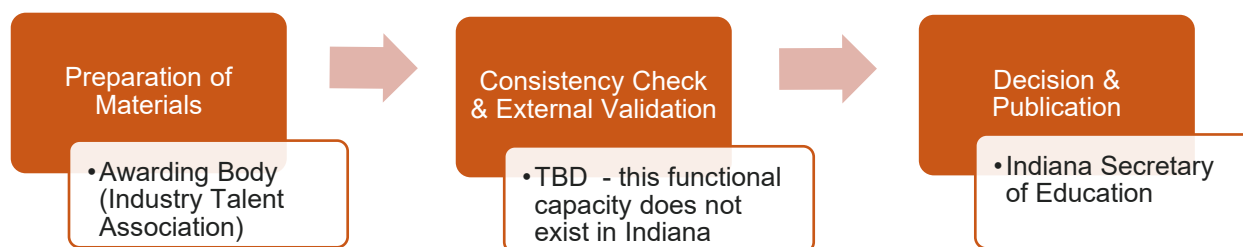
The implementation of the Indiana Qualifications Framework plays two important roles in the success of launching INCAP: it ensures that INCAP graduates at all levels earn formally recognized degrees and credentials, and it allows for students of all ages to transition seamlessly up and across both the academic and professional pathways as their career goals evolve.

## THE NEED FOR AN INDEPENDENT, THIRD-PARTY “CONSISTENCY CHECK” ORGANIZATION

It is highly recommended that any organization considering responding to this RFP read the [Indiana Qualifications Framework and recommended process for implementation in full](#); however, a brief overview of the process for INCAP qualifications and a discussion of the need for the “consistency check” function can be found in this section.

Figure 2 provides a visual description of the three-part process for assigning an appropriate level for INCAP qualifications. iLab Indiana recommends that the same process be used for other non-degree credentials. Further detail about each of these steps is provided below.

**Figure 2: Proposed Qualification Assignment Process**



1. **Preparation of Materials by Awarding Body (Industry Talent Associations):** Through the iLab Indiana collaborative, employers are organized by sector to speak as one voice about their talent needs through an organization referred to as an Industry Talent Association (ITA). ITAs function as the awarding body within the Indiana Qualifications Framework level assignment process.

The first step in the qualifications framework level assignment process is that the ITA prepares a “training plan” for the proposed INCAP occupation’s qualification. The training plan will include detailed *competency sets*, which identify the knowledge, skills, and competencies that must be achieved by the learner to complete the INCAP program. Figure 3 below is an example of a partial competency set for the Healthcare Assistant INCAP Apprenticeship Program.

**Figure 3: Example of a Partial Competency Set for an INCAP Healthcare Assistant**

Competency Theme E: Patient Care in Specialized and Challenging Situations	
<p>Core Concepts: Patient-Specific Emergency Response, Behavioral Health, and Specialized Care</p> <p>Equips individuals to identify when additional or specialized care is necessary. Emphasizes the importance of involving additional professionals to meet escalating needs. Equips individuals to respond appropriately in patient emergencies. Provides foundational knowledge regarding the unique needs of patients in various specialized situations or settings.</p>	E.1 Demonstrates Appropriate Patient-Specific Emergency Response
	E.2 Adapts Care in Specialized Situations

Using the training plan, the ITA will compare the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through the INCAP program to the levels of learning outlined in the Indiana Qualifications Framework (IQF) and make a recommendation to the Indiana Secretary of Education as to what IQF level the program should be considered. This is done by assigning each identified competency to a level based on the IQF. The level value of all identified competencies is then averaged and rounded to the nearest whole number. Figure 4 below shows an example of this process for a Level 3 occupation in Switzerland's VPET system, which has a similar, three-part process for assigning qualifications.

**Figure 4: Example of Competency Assignment in Switzerland**

Areas of professional competence ↓		Professional competencies →		
A	Area of professional competence 1 Manufacturing goods	1.1 Purchasing, inspecting, laying and properly storing pipes in accordance with instructions <b>2</b>	1.2 Installing, configuring and starting devices, machines and equipment <b>3</b>	1.3 Monitoring ongoing production <b>2</b>
	Area of professional competence 2 Ensuring sustainability	2.1 Ensuring occupational health and safety as well as operational safety <b>3</b>	2.2 Ensuring environmental protection <b>3</b>	

The ITA submits all of this information, as [detailed more extensively in the full recommendation](#), to the Indiana Department of Education for approval.

2. **Consistency Check and External Validation (this functional capacity will be piloted by the entity selected through the RFP process):** Upon receipt of draft occupation materials from the awarding body, the Indiana Department of Education provides the materials to an independent, third-party validation entity. This ensures the proposed qualification is evaluated by a neutral entity through a process that can be trusted by all partners in the education and training system, including employers, schools, colleges, and students. At a high level, the third-party consistency check process consists of the following activities:



1. Conduct a detailed industry expert review of the proposed occupation's competency set as compared to the Indiana Qualifications Framework to develop an independent qualification level. Additionally, the review will include a comparison to qualifications across different occupations at the same level to ensure consistency in levels horizontally across industries.
2. Hold at least one, and up to three, meeting(s) with the awarding body to identify differences, gather further information about the occupation, and come to consensus.
3. Make a recommendation of either approval or declination to the Indiana Department of Education.

From a practical standpoint, no consistency check organization will have the requisite expertise in every industry. The organization will engage with employer representatives from the relevant industry with the appropriate skill and experience levels who were not directly involved in the development of the submission materials. The ITA will provide a list of recommended independent industry experts as part of its submission process.

3. **Decision and Publication (Indiana Department of Education):** Once the consistency check organization submits its recommendation, the Indiana Department of Education will consult with the INCAP Governing Body. Once at scale, this review process will take place twice annually to ensure a timely response during the submission and review process. In the two-year pilot period, this review process will occur on a rolling basis.

Ultimately, the Indiana Secretary of Education makes the final decision on the approval of a proposed occupation and its appropriate qualifications framework level. The office will communicate the final decision to the awarding body and, assuming approval, publish the occupation and its corresponding level. For transparency, the Indiana Department of Education will maintain a public list of all approved occupations and qualifications.

## Section 2: Scope of Proposal

When responding to the scope of the proposal, applicants should provide a clear, detailed explanation of how they will fulfill the outlined requirements. Responses should be structured to directly address each component listed in the questions and highlight their relevant expertise to achieve the envisioned outcomes, while adhering to page limits.

### Organization Overview

1. Briefly describe your organization's history, including the number of years in operation, core services provided, geographic area(s) of focus, and target audience(s) served.
2. Explain how your organization's vision, mission, and objectives align with this funding opportunity.
3. Provide the name, title, email address, and phone number for the key contact(s) for the proposal.
4. As an attachment, please provide a copy of your organization's most recent IRS Determination Letter outlining its tax-exempt status.

## Relevant Experience

5. Describe your organization's familiarity with CEMETS iLab Indiana, the Indiana Career Apprenticeship Pathway (INCAP), and/or Switzerland's Vocational and Professional Education and Training (VPET) system.
6. Describe your organization's relevant experience with identifying, evaluating, or assessing the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired in work-based learning, education, or other training programs.
  - a. When describing relevant experience, please include discussion of whether your organization utilizes/has utilized a specific methodology to assess knowledge and learning levels (e.g., Bloom's Taxonomy).
7. Describe your organization's relevant experience with identifying, evaluating, or assessing the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for career entry and advancement up career ladders within one or more industries.
8. In your experience with competency-based learning, please describe your organization's partnerships or collaboration with the following:
  - a. Industry;
  - b. K-12 partners; and/or
  - c. Postsecondary education partners.
9. Describe your organization's partnership management experience, including experience with:
  - a. Developing new partner relationships.
  - b. Facilitating collaboration requiring proactive and ongoing communication across multiple partners.
  - c. Resolving conflicts between partners.

## Proposed Process

**Note on use of AI:** Please note that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in any part of the "consistency check" process is strictly prohibited.

10. Describe how your organization will establish a robust, independent consistency check process as described in this RFP document as well as the [full Indiana Qualifications Framework \(IQF\) recommendation](#) that is ready for implementation no later than June 30, 2026. Your description must include the specific steps your organization will undertake to perform the following activities:
  - a. Communicate with the Indiana Department of Education.
  - b. Receive all ITA occupation submissions and ensure all available submission materials have been received.
  - c. Identify and implement the appropriate technology systems or tools to ensure you maintain the quality and security of all related data and documents.
  - d. Engage the relevant industry experts to assist in your review of submitted occupation materials. Note: this may include stipends for participation of relevant industry experts.
    - i. Please provide detail on how your organization will ascertain and confirm that industry representatives are considered experts in their field and are truly independent (e.g., how will your organization assess potential conflicts of interest when selecting participants?)



- e. Conduct a thorough, independent consistency check to develop a recommended level within the IQF.
  - f. Conduct a thorough, independent consistency check to ensure consistency horizontally across occupations and industries for qualifications categorized at the same level.
  - g. Seek feedback and input from the awarding body to resolve any questions and work to gain alignment on the IQF level assignment up to three (3) times during the course of the review process.
  - h. Submit a final recommendation of approval or declination to the Indiana Department of Education.
11. Provide detail on the timeline your organization will require to conduct and complete the consistency check process for each submitted occupation.
  12. Recognizing rapidly changing market needs and demands, describe how this process would differ for submissions from the Industry Talent Associations (or other awarding bodies) for modifications to training plans after initial approval.
  13. Explain how your organization will ensure the consistency check process is conducted independently.
  14. Provide any other additional information that is relevant to this RFP and its questions to ensure the proposal evaluation team can appropriately assess your organization's readiness to undertake the consistency check function.

### **Staffing & Capacity**

15. Share a staffing plan for this work, specifying the annual percent FTE budgeted for each staff person, specified by title, and a description of the scope of the person's role for this work.
16. Provide the name and title of who will lead the proposed work. Describe their education and training background, professional experience, skills, and other characteristics that qualify them to lead this work.
17. Describe the timeline and process your organization will use for hiring required staff in order to ensure implementation readiness by June 30, 2026, if the appropriate staff are not already employed by your organization.

### **Budget & Organization Financials**

18. Provide a two-year project budget that includes a detailed breakdown of project-related expenses (including staffing, anticipated travel, and other related expenses).
  - a. Please note that grant funds may be used to cover administrative costs, but all expenses must be detailed in the project budget. Grant funds may not be used to support indirect costs that are calculated as a percentage of the total proposed budget without further detail on what those costs entail.
19. Provide a budget narrative that explains each proposed expense.
20. A copy of the organization's budget for its current fiscal year, and the organization's budget compared to actuals for the previous fiscal year.
21. A copy of the organization's most recent audited financial statements.

## Section 3: Submission, Evaluation, & Funding

### TIMELINE

The table below provides a timeline for activities related to this procurement process. In the event dates change, the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation will provide notice at [RMFF.org/iqfrfp](https://rmff.org/iqfrfp).

Activity	Date
RFP Launch	December 2, 2025
Virtual Q&A Webinar	December 15, 2025
Deadline for Questions	December 15, 2025
Response to Questions Posted	December 17, 2025
Proposal Deadline	January 16, 2026
Selection Announcement	Week of March 2, 2026

### SUBMITTING QUESTIONS

Interested applicants are encouraged to review this RFP in its entirety and submit any questions to Kami Nielsen ([nielsen@rmff.org](mailto:nielsen@rmff.org)).

CEMETS iLab Indiana will facilitate a virtual Q&A webinar on **December 15, 2025**, which will include an overview of the RFP, proposal instructions, and response to questions received. Please note, questions will be accepted up until the virtual Q&A webinar to accommodate interested applicants who are unable to attend. A recording of the virtual webinar will be available on the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation's [website here](#), along with other information related to the proposal (questions & answers, timeline, contact information, addenda, etc.)

### ELIGIBILITY

Grant funding will be awarded by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation **to tax-exempt organizations**. Organizations do not have to be located in Indianapolis or in Indiana to submit a proposal.

Eligible organizations must provide proof of their tax-exempt status as part of their proposal materials. Federal laws under the Internal Revenue Code require that the Foundation verify an entity's tax-exempt status prior to making a grant payment.

### PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS

To be considered, applicants must submit one (1) proposal in PDF format by **January 16, 2026**, via email to Kami Nielsen, Senior Director of Programs, at [nielsen@rmff.org](mailto:nielsen@rmff.org).

**No proposal submitted after the deadline will be accepted for consideration.**

The proposal must contain the following elements:

- ☐ Scope of Work
  - ☐ Organizational Overview

- Relevant Experience
- Proposed Process
- Staffing & Capacity
- ☐ Project Budget
- ☐ Attachment A: References
- ☐ Attachment B: Organization Financials (current fiscal year budget and previous fiscal year's budget v. actuals)
- ☐ Attachment C: Organization's most recent audited financial statements
- ☐ Attachment D: Organization's most recent tax-exempt status IRS determination letter

Please number all pages for ease of review and reference, and limit the proposal page count to no more than five (5) pages (not including attachments).

## EVALUATION & AWARD

The evaluation of proposals will be overseen by the iLab Indiana Governing Committee, in partnership with an Advisory Committee, led by former Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Chris Lowery and representing members from Indiana's Industry Talent Associations and the State of Indiana. A dedicated proposal team from the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation will carefully review each proposal to ensure alignment with the selection criteria. The Advisory Committee will support and advise the iLab Indiana Governing Committee on the procurement decision, offering insights and recommendations to inform final decision-making. The team, along with the Advisory Committee, will make a final recommendation to the iLab Indiana Governing Committee on which applicant should be selected. The iLab Indiana Governing Committee will vote and make a formal announcement thereafter.

Applicants may be invited to participate in a virtual interview with members of the proposal team, along with members from the Advisory Committee and iLab Governing Committee, to respond to questions and offer clarifications on their response.

## DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS

The disbursement of grant funds to the selected organization will be over two years: \$250,000 in 2026 and \$250,000 in 2027. The two-year grant period will begin in March 2026 and will continue through February 2028.

## NOTICE OF AWARD

The iLab Governing Committee will announce awardees the week of **March 2, 2026**. All applicants will be informed of their award status via email.

## ATTACHMENT A: REFERENCES

Applicants are required to provide contact information for three (3) references who can verify their qualifications, experience, and impact based on direct partnerships. References may be contacted to further discuss with the proposal team the applicant's expertise.

### Reference #1

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Organization</b>	
<b>Email Address</b>	
<b>Phone Number</b>	
<b>Description of Partnership</b>	

### Reference #2

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Organization</b>	
<b>Email Address</b>	
<b>Phone Number</b>	
<b>Description of Partnership</b>	

### Reference #3

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Title</b>	
<b>Organization</b>	
<b>Email Address</b>	
<b>Phone Number</b>	
<b>Description of Partnership</b>	