Deep Dives: Reimagine Credentialing

Transformative Issues Symposium Report
Deep Dives Event Summary

August 9, 2019 | 8:30am - 12:00pm | Washington, D.C.

The American Water Works Association, the Association of Boards of Certification, and the Water Environment Federation are working together to reimagine credentialing in the water industry.

All states and provinces recognize the importance of certification for water environment professionals, but every program approaches certification differently. This diversity among programs is largely responsible for the lack of “reciprocity,” or recognition of a certification awarded by a different program. Now is the time for certification authorities, regulators, and operators to combine ideas into an action plan focused on solving this industry-wide issue.

Attendees were asked to help identify the benefits and pathways to credential portability, as well as any drawbacks or barriers.
Credential Portability Benefits

- Streamlining and reducing complication
- Push for higher standards
- Allows regional specification modules on rules and regulations
- Mobility makes more attractive career
- Larger pool of candidates provides more competition so people need to raise the bar to be better
- One national exam is easier and less difficult to maintain
- Greater flexibility
- Growing professionalism
- Ability for operators to respond to disaster relief
- Standardization with a known baseline for operator knowledge
- Higher standards
Credential Portability Drawbacks

- Perception of lost control among regulators
- Some states already do have reciprocity, but it’s in different levels of strictness
- We do not have quantitative data to know if this is really a problem
- Testing knowledge of state regulations becomes more challenging
- Certification boards sit in different locations around states and it’s not easy to get everyone at one table to discuss these issues
- Push for higher standards could be a drawback because people might not want to put in the effort
- If highly mobile, there could be a lack of familiarity with who to contact for issues
- Weaker connections with regulators
- If highly mobile, operator dedication could be an issue—especially with smaller utilities
- Could be complex to update or maintain
- Some states may require additional credentials such as a civil service exam
- State differences might be too great such as water rights, chlorine residual, etc.
- With regional differences, we risk diluting the subject matter covered too much
- State certification is seen as a revenue source so states may need to seek alternative revenue sources
Credential Portability and Standardization Barriers

- Make it easier, faster, and cheaper for the states and it will be more accepted
- Put the boards and counsels in a place where the right decision is also the economical decision. This will keep them off the defensive
- State regulation laws can address certification—it would be difficult to get these changed
- Regulations driven by classes and levels are not necessarily consistent across the same areas
- Different levels of classification add complexity that isn’t present in other industries with portable credentials
- Multiple visions from various groups
Credential Portability and Standardization Pathways

- Contract operations and rationalization are likely trends
- State buy-in is the challenge, so we could focus on one segment of certification (e.g., wastewater) first to show success and build from there
- Coming together in a sustained effort to develop a clear picture of what we want the industry to look like
- National vision beyond reciprocity, that includes small utilities and how technology is going to impact the industry
- Extended effort like with an OpCert collaboration
- Data driven decisions
- Get RCAP, rural water, etc. on board to ensure we’re all moving in the same direction
- Involving lawyers and lobbyists to help us on this path
- Find champions
- Develop a plan/roadmap coming out of these types of meetings (5-10 year plan)
- Develop model legislation
- Pack state cert boards with people who share the interest—like AWWA and WEF members
- National baseline for exam certification like with physical therapy
Top Three Priorities for Moving Forward

1. Collect data to justify the need for standardization

2. Develop a 5-10 year plan or roadmap

3. Form a coalition including certifiers, rural water, RCAP, and regulators with a defined, shared vision
Next Steps

Aligned with the top priority from this session, a series of additional workshops will be conducted in two upcoming conferences to gather more data around this important topic:

**ASDWA Annual Conference**
Hilton Downtown Tampa—Tampa, FL
October 28-31, 2019

**ABC’s Innovation in Certification Conference**
Battle House Renaissance Hotel & Spa—Mobile, AL
January 13-17, 2020

*Keep an eye out in Basecamp for more details to come about these sessions. We hope to see you there!*