Background:
Professionals are eager to find ways to further differentiate themselves in today's competitive job market. They want to be recognized for their areas of expertise, specializations, and competencies, all of which may not be directly represented by their current and often "general-knowledge" types of certifications. As organizations constantly strive to provide additional value to their stakeholders, while also identifying alternative ways to generate revenue, they have begun to develop specialty certificates, or "microcredentials."

Benefits of microcredentials for organizations:

- Increase revenue by offering an avenue for stakeholders to become recognized for specialty areas, skills and competencies
- Provide a value-add to stakeholders as they can get recognized by an authority in their field for levels of mastery in a specific area- potentially beyond initial certification
- Maintain continued meaningful engagement with stakeholders
- Expand community and reach to potential certificants who many not be eligible or prepared for a certification process
- Gain a competitive advantage within an industry
- Maintain relevancy in the industry (with education providers, individuals, employers, etc.)
- Develop a new product suite
- Opportunity to use, adapt, or repurpose knowledge base and existing content
- Reduce the need to re-work certification assessments when new skill areas emerge or skill gaps need to be addressed

Digital badges:
As organizations are developing microcredentials to grow their program offerings and support the needs of their certificants, they are using what have been readily adopted by a variety of industries and organizations to verify and validate professional certifications - digital badges. Because they can function as a consistent way to represent all aspects of an individual's professional development pathway, digital badges have become the needed "common currency" for industry ecosystems to recognize professional achievements.

Digital badging technology has made it possible to automatically "stack" or "level-up" badges to represent the hierarchy of developing skills and knowledge. This ability enables organizations to be quite creative as they consider how to develop new microcredential programs as standalone credentials, or as complements to certification offerings.

Process of developing micro-credentials:
Microcredentialing is a new paradigm within the professional development community that validates a candidate's specialty area or smaller skills and competencies. Microcredentials may be developed in a variety of ways including the clustering of courses or experiences designed to identify and provide an opportunity for individuals to fill skill or competency gaps, or as a hierarchy/leveling-up of competencies, credentials, or continuing education experiences to a "mastery" level. They can also be designed to recognize a specific areas of expertise within an industry by requiring individuals to complete an assessment, submit evidence of successful mastery in a nuanced field, or submitting an attestation by an employer of years of service in a specialty area. Once the requirements for earning the microcredential have been met, a badge can be awarded to validate and verify the accomplishment.

To begin to develop a program, an organization may consider the following:

- The goals of the program
- Time needed to develop the microcredential or program
- Finances and other resources needed to develop the microcredential or program
- Potential of new revenue
- Need within industry (market research, focus groups, JTA, etc.)
- Requirements needed for individuals to earn the microcredential
- Whether pre-requisites are needed for eligibility to earn the microcredential (membership, certification, years of service, specialty area, etc.)
- How a microcredential will complement a certification/certificate, or whether it may reduce the significance of the certification