



University of Colorado **Denver**

# Badging Working Group Report

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## BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

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Digital badges are growing in acceptance as verification of learners' skills, competency, and knowledge among the nation's employers. Standardization in this area through technical requirements<sup>1</sup>, the increase in institutions of higher education entering this space, and the availability of trustworthy platforms to host digital badges to give nearly universal access to learners, are among the contributing factors to this increase in use.

CU Denver's Badging Working Group was an essential step in developing a robust badging initiative at CU Denver through the inclusive engagement of a wide range of campus community members. Multiple perspectives are needed to begin this initiative and to inform decisions regarding badging proposal, administration, sustainability, and scaling. The members of this working group included participants from the following campus groups and representative bodies (a complete list of members appears in Appendix A):

Representatives from five colleges/schools	Continuing and Professional Education
Office of the Registrar	Office of the Bursar
Office of Academic Achievement	Office of Information Technology
Strategic Planning (TIPS)	Instructional Design (TIPS)
Graduate Education	University Communications Office
Members of various governance groups	College/School and University Administration

There are many benefits to including digital badges among our institutional credentials. First, badges align with both our institutional goal to become a "University for Life" as well as our larger digital strategy, which requires CU Denver to find new ways to provide value to our learners across their lives and careers.

Badges also offer a range of benefits to diverse learner populations, including:

- Allowing transparency of skills. Universities can clarify the connection from learning outcomes and objectives to skills, competencies, and knowledge familiar to employers. Digital Badges, through the meta-data that they contain, provide the tool for making these connections, to the benefit of both our learners and our industry partners. Also, the descriptions in the metadata provide the language that our learners need to explain what they have acquired in a way that is valuable to employers.
- Serving as validation of skills verified by an institution of higher education, which require no further validation beyond the badge.
- Empowering the learner because badges, once awarded, are owned by the learner and can therefore be shared freely.
- Offering the flexibility to serve as the evidence of the skills acquired for activities that are not traditionally provided, such as not-for-credit programs and smaller modules that are embedded within larger programs.
- Serving as extra motivation for learners to "earn as they learn" when they are placed along learning pathways to serve as milestones.

To support and improve CU Denver's infrastructure for Digital Badges, a working group was formed in March 2023. Leveraging the expertise across our colleges, schools, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Open Badges 3.0 standard as an example

administrative units, and building on our 2030 strategic plan that positions CU Denver to be a University for Life for all learners, the working group came together to define and create a roadmap for the infrastructure needed to design and launch badges that meet the needs of Coloradans. This working group reviewed the current state of badge utilization by institutions of higher education; identified opportunities for potential badging at CU Denver; created a flexible taxonomy to allow the variety of activities at CU Denver to be reflected; and provided recommendations for next steps so that all members of our campus can contribute to developing and maintaining the CU Denver badging initiative.

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## WHERE WE ARE NOW

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### CU Denver Strengths

While it may take some time to work out the details of our badging efforts, the foundation for creating a badging ecosystem within our larger microcredential landscape is strong.

#### **Support from Credly, an established vendor**

CU Denver has invested in the badging platform, Credly, which is an established vendor in the microcredential space. As part of our relationship with Credly, we will have access to support resources that will be available to the larger CU Denver community.

#### **Geographic proximity to employers**

Located in a large metropolitan area, CU Denver has the potential to develop new partnerships and strengthen existing relational opportunities from which to build and badge new programs that will help our learners to be workforce ready.

### CU Denver Challenges and Opportunities

Even with our strengths, it is important to recognize possible barriers that could impede our efforts to build out a robust badging infrastructure:

#### **Digital badges are unfamiliar to CU Denver**

CU Denver has not previously engaged in a formalized digital badging initiative, so there will be a need for education and training to ensure that the community understands the benefits of badges and best practices for creating and administering them as a form of microcredentialing.

#### **Organizational infrastructure needed for an effective badging initiative**

CU Denver currently has little infrastructure for creating or administering badges since this is not an area of microcredentialing in which the campus has previously engaged. It will be important to quickly create comprehensive and consistent guidelines and processes to ensure an effective launch of the initiative.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The Badging Working Group offers the following recommendations for shoring up and strengthening our current badging infrastructure:

**Recommendation 1:** Adopt a common definition for badges and badge-related terminology.

**Recommendation 2:** Implement a badge taxonomy that aligns with the current and future state of CU Denver activities and digital strategy.

**Recommendation 3:** Provide guiding principles for determining whether programs and activities are badge-eligible.

**Recommendation 4:** Establish clear and consistent processes for badge proposal, administration, and maintenance that ensure high-quality and valuable badges.

**Recommendation 5:** Develop a shared governance infrastructure for faculty, staff, and students to provide administrative review and guidance for emerging questions and concerns arising from microcredential and badging advancements.

**Recommendation 6:** Create a comprehensive suite of resources for faculty, staff, and administrators who wish to utilize badges for programs and activities.

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## SUPPORTING STRATEGIES AND INITIATIVES

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Recommendation 1: Adopt a common definition for badges and badge-related terminology.

The following definitions are recommended for adoption by CU Denver in support of our badging initiative (and a more detail taxonomy is outlined below):

**Skill Badge (digital):** A kind of microcredential. It is a validated digital record of the demonstrated competency, skill, or knowledge achieved through the learning activity. The badge contains detailed metadata about the learner and their achievements, including such information as who earned it, who issued it, criteria required to earn it, associated learning outcomes, and the means by which competency in the relevant skills was assessed. In the case of CU Denver, our digital badges will be hosted by Credly. To earn a Skill Badge, the skill, competency, or knowledge must be corroborated through some form of assessment.

**Recognition Badge (digital):** A digital artifact available to recognize unassessed learning activities or to be used for awards or other recognitions of achievement or service. These badges will also be hosted by Credly.

## Recommendation 2: Implement a badge taxonomy that aligns with the current and future state of CU Denver activities and digital strategy.

The recommended taxonomy presented below is to provide structure to our badging effort while adhering to principles of clarity, simplicity, and flexibility. The working group sought to devise a taxonomy that would encompass the wide variety of potentially badge-worthy activities available at CU Denver within as few categories as possible. Additionally, consideration of what would be of value to external audiences, namely employers of our learner, were of primary importance.

The working group also paid specific attention to:

- avoiding the introduction of a great deal of new terminology;
- focusing on methods to distinguish activities where skills are verified, and therefore CU Denver could stand behind them, versus those that were not verified;
- providing structure that would help subject matter experts differentiate different levels of understanding of a topic through the badges while at the same time providing flexibility;
- and to offering a framework that could evolve to address future needs.

### Skill Badges

Skill Badge: General	Skill Badge: Industry Partner
 <p>This badge is earned for completion of microcredential programs that are open to all qualified learners.</p>	 <p>This badge is earned for completion of microcredential programs that are designed for specific industry partners.</p>

**CU Denver Employee Badges:** Further discussion is needed to determine if a separate design would be of value for programs limited to CU Denver employees. Because badge-worthy programs must meet the same requirements regardless of the cohort, the need to distinguish employee badges from general skill badges is unnecessary; however, if CU Denver Employee Badges are of greater value for merit/promotion, this could be a reason to have them visually distinguished.

### Recognition Badge

In order to recognize participation in learning activities that do not include validation of skills, competency, or knowledge, as well as for recognizing accomplishments related to achievement and service, an additional badge is recommended: A Recognition Badge.

## Participation, Achievement, and Service Recognition



These digital recognitions would be available for awarding to learners who participated in a learning activity in which the skill was not assessed. Examples are attending a workshop or conference. They would also be available to recognize accomplishments or service. Examples include recognitions of academic achievement or of service in support of the institution or community.

### Skill Badges: Recognizing Depth and Breadth of Learning

Each of these skill badges can reflect additional attributes of the microcredential program through which it is earned. These additional attributes fall into two categories: (a) depth of understanding and (b) breadth of skills. For the Foundational, Intermediate, and Advanced, specific definitions are not provided for what depth of understanding should be acquired by the learner in order to earn each badge because of the great variability across different subjects. Issuing departments (or other) will clearly define the different skills encompassed in each level, for example “advanced” level badges might reflect the ability of learners to complete a task or apply a skill *independently or with minimal supervision*.

Foundational	Intermediate	Advanced

Meta-Badge
<p data-bbox="613 1388 1408 1581">The working group also recommends a badge to signify multiple skills or competencies. These Competency/Meta-badges can be earned through compiling multiple single-skill badges or through other evidence of acquiring a larger set of skills. Again, the number of skills required to earn a meta-badge is not prescribed here, but it is expected to be a number worthy of distinction from a badge earned for a single skill or small number of related skills.</p>

### Skill Badge for Sequenced Programs

## Sequenced Skill Badge



In order to indicate sequenced learning activities, such as a multi-program sequence that moves a learner from a foundational understanding to an advanced understanding, a badge option is provided where levels are included as part of the badge name and can be described further in the meta-data.

Recommendation 3: Provide guiding principles for determining whether programs and activities are badge-eligible.

### Principles for Skill Badges

Skill Badges are meant to be awarded for a demonstrated competency, skill, or knowledge acquired through the learning activity. In order for CU Denver to stand behind a badge, the skill it recognizes does need to be corroborated through evidence of learning.

Although badges are motivational to learners, motivation alone is not a sufficient reason to award a Skill Badge. Skill Badges are a tool for highlighting and verifying skills that have value for the earner's career and/or professional growth. The Skill Badge, therefore, should be both a motivator and of career value. The following examples of evidence are provided to help make this decision about badge-worthiness:

- a) linking it to professional standards,
- b) basing it on skills that are known to be needed in the market, such as through market data or employer surveys,
- c) addressing skills needed to advance along a specified professional pathway,
- d) basing it on student and/or industry-partner feedback.

A process will need to be established for (a) preventing badge duplication and (b) to determine if skills are being taught through other programs at CU Denver that may be awarding a different credential.

### Principles for Recognition Badges

Recognition Badges should be reserved for deserving activities worthy of calling out by CU Denver. Three categories are designated: Achievement, Service, and Participation.

Across all three categories, the following activities are needed:

- Establish naming conventions for different kinds of recognitions
- Create example templates including language for meta-data

**Achievement:** Recognition Badges are meant to provide an additional artifact that could be shared by an awardee in a digital format, beyond more traditional physical recognitions like printed certificates and trophies. To be established, these achievement recognitions should follow guidelines of traditional recognitions of achievement. A process needs to be established for creating these recognitions considering the following:

- Review traditional university achievement recognitions and how they are established build from these processes for establish guidelines for creating new Recognition Badges.
- Identify existing awards that may have added value with a digital recognition badge.

**Service:** Service to CU Denver or to a partnering agency are often recognized through official letters or other documents that can serve as evidence of that service. The appreciation of the institution for these activities can also be further emphasized through recognition badges.

**Participation:** Participation badges are meant to provide evidence of attendance/participation in an activity for which the learner’s skills are not corroborated. Examples of such activities include workshops, conferences, and professional development activities.

- Build from Skill Badge processes to inform guidance and principles to follow for establishing participation Recognition Badges.

### Examples of Activities that can award Badges

To provide further clarity about programs that may award these different badges, consider the following examples:

Skills Embedded in a Course: A for-credit course includes a module on Business Communication Skills based on the NACE Career Readiness Competencies. The skills are assessed using a rubric. Learners are awarded a **Foundational Skill Badge** upon the successful completion of the module.

Bundled Courses: Two for-credit courses are focused on a variety of aspects of computer programming. These courses are marketed as a Microcredential Program that is part of a degree pathway. At the successful completion of these two courses, the learners earn an **Advanced Skill Badge**. The courses also apply toward their degree program.

CU Denver Employee Professional Learning Program: A series of trainings is offered by the TIPS Division on course development. The final product of the experience is a redesigned course that meets the principles of a provided rubric. At the completion of this redesign that meets the rubric criteria, an **Intermediate Skill Badge** is awarded.

Co-curricular Learning Program: A research-skills workshop is offered by the Auraria Library to degree-seeking students. At the conclusion of this workshop, the learners can choose to complete a project that demonstrates the acquisition of the skill and earn a **Foundational Skill Badge**. Learners may also choose not to complete a project and receive a **Recognition Badge** for their participation.

Partner Program: A need in the marketplace is identified by CU Denver employer partners. One particular partner wants a cohort of its own employees to go through the program together, with some specific content to their organization included in the program. This cohort-limited group can receive a **Skill Badge with the industry logo** included on the badge icon. If CU Denver offers this program more widely, a **General Skill Badge** can be awarded, without the logo.

CEU Program/ PDU Program: A half-day unassessed workshop is offered to meet the requirements of licensure. Participation in the workshop appears on a non-credit transcript provided by the CU Denver Registrar’s Office, which serves as documentation of their participation. However, the topic of the training was on Educational Leadership Skills and aligned with professional standards. To expand the value of this program beyond the school system, a **Recognition Badge** is awarded for participation.

Certificate Program: Upon completion of a 9-credit-hour graduate certificate program, the coursework and completed certificate appears on a transcript provided by CU Denver’s Registrar’s Office. However, some skills associated with this certificate have been identified as valuable in the marketplace but are not specifically identified on the transcript, so the developers would like to also include a Skill Badge. Two options are available to them: (1) The number of skills covered by the certificate are broad and difficult to describe in a single badge; however, specific skills covered within the certificate are known to be of value, so two separate **Skill Badges** are awarded upon completion of the relevant coursework. (2) A **Meta-Skills Badge** is awarded upon completion of the certificate program, which describes the skills in greater detail.

Recommendation 4: Establish clear and consistent processes for badge proposal, administration, and maintenance that ensure high-quality and valuable badges.

The working group recommends the following strategies and initiatives to ensure efficiency and quality in badge creation and administration:

### **Badge Proposal Process**

- Develop processes for creating Skill Badges for new and for existing programs:
  - (1) Develop a process that is embedded within the microcredential program proposal process that can subsequently take advantage of the information provided about the microcredential program to create the badge and related meta-data.
  - (2) Develop a process for creating badges for programs that are already in existence that can ensure the rigor and quality of those learning activities.
- Establish supports for efficient identification of skills for tagging Skill Badges using language that facilitates understanding among employers and industry.
- Create a proposal process that allows flexible completion, such as allowing collaborative completion, that allows forms to be exported and completed externally, and/or that can be saved and completed in multiple sittings.
- Develop a process for creating Recognition Badges, taking into account the needs identified in Recommendation 2.

### **Administration and Maintenance**

- Explore different administrative models and determine responsible parties for administering badges, including setting up badges in Credly, awarding to earners, and gathering and reporting metrics. The model chosen should also take into account the administrative burden.

**Recommendation 5: Develop a shared governance infrastructure for faculty, staff, and students to provide administrative review and guidance for emerging questions and concerns arising from microcredential and badging advancements.**

As the recommendations from this report are addressed, and new developments arise, a process for review and advising will be necessary. A representative group should therefore be established for this purpose. This group should consist of faculty, staff, and student representatives with representation from the following bodies:

- Faculty Assembly
- Staff Council
- Student Government
- College/School Curriculum Committees
- Graduate Council
- The Office of the Registrar
- Transfer Office
- Career Center
- Teaching Innovation and Program Strategy (TIPS) Division

Other representatives may also be needed as our badging infrastructure continues to evolve.

**Recommendation 6: Create a comprehensive suite of resources for faculty, staff, and administrators who wish to utilize badges for programs and activities.**

The working group recommends the following strategies and initiatives to ensure appropriate professional development resources for those wishing to engage in microcredential development:

- Create clear and easy processes and related guidance for identifying appropriate badges for a program and for proposing badges, including examples and illustrations where possible.
- Create self-paced courses and offer short trainings to those interested in learning about badges and their creation. Distribute materials through a variety of avenues, including newsletters, shared governance, and with colleges/schools/units.
- Establish metrics of badge earning and claiming among learners to inform future badge creation decisions. Share this information with faculty/staff who are offering badges.
- Provide guidance specifically for creating stackable/meta-badges that are aligned with current and in-development degree programs.
- Create resources for learners to facilitate badge claiming and sharing. Included in these resources are educational materials about badge availability, characteristics, and value.

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## NEXT STEPS

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These recommendations will serve as the foundation for the road map for CU Denver's Microcredential Initiative. To address these recommendations, many different constituents will be engaged, including schools/colleges and various campus departments (such as the Registrar, CPE colleagues, and the budget office), as well as Faculty Assembly (including EPPC and LETTS committees), UCDALI, and Staff Council representatives.

These constituents will also be engaged as the topics covered in this report continue to evolve over time, and as the processes, guidance, and supports recommended here are developed for CU Denver's digital badging initiative.

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# APPENDICES

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## Appendix A: Badging Working Group Members, Meeting Schedule, and Charge

### Working Group Members

Jeremy Lingle | Director of Microcredentials | TIPS (Facilitator)  
Kenna Aukamp | Graphic Designer & Studio Specialist | University Communications  
Chris Carson | Senior Instructor in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education | School of Education and Human Development  
Jill Giacomini | Senior Instructional Designer | TIPS  
Erin Golden | Director of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities | Office of Academic Achievement  
Dawn Gregg | Associate Dean | Business School  
Nimol Hen | Director of First-Generation and Multicultural Business Program | Business School  
Shane Hoon | Assistant Dean of Student Success | Business School  
Neena Jain | Co-Director Center for Community Safety & Resilience | School of Public Affairs  
Michael Kocet | Assistant Vice Chancellor for Graduate Education  
Dominique Maes | First Generation and Multi-Cultural Program Manager | Business School  
Erica Manuel | Associate Bursar | Office of the Bursar  
Matthew McCarville | Assistant Vice Chancellor | Office of Information Technology  
Lara Medley | Assistant Vice Chancellor and University Registrar | Office of the Registrar  
Chris Puckett | Managing Associate Counsel and Government Relations | Office of General Counsel  
Michael "Bodhi" Rogers | Associate Professor and Chair of Physics | College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Kristen Salisbury | Continuing and Professional Education Program Manager | College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Lia Schraeder | Senior Instructional Designer, TIPS  
Richard Strasser | Associate Professor of Music Business | College of Arts and Media  
Ingrid Summers | Program Manager for Continuing and Professional Education | School of Education and Human Development | Chair of Staff Council  
Lisa VanRaemdonck | Executive Director of Outreach, Partnerships and Professional Learning | School of Public Affairs  
Geeta Verma | Professor of STEM Education | School of Education and Human Development  
Heather Vigeveno | Assistant Director of CRM & Academic Technology | Office of Information Technology

### Meeting Schedule

**March 2:** Introductions, Charge, and Process

**March 10:** Review of badge taxonomies at other institutions

**March 17:** Designing CU Denver's taxonomy

**March 31:** Designing CU Denver's taxonomy

**April 7:** Badge design

**April 14:** Proposal process

**April 20:** Challenges and Resources (Joint meeting with Badging Working Group)

**April 28:** Review of final recommendations

## Charge

The Badging Working Group was created to help the CU Denver community define and implement the steps needed to capitalize on our new badging platform, Credly. Launched in March 2023, the working group is charged with defining CU Denver's badging taxonomy; creating process steps and guidance for proposing and administering badges; and providing recommendations for next steps so that all members of our campus can contribute to developing and maintaining this badging infrastructure. (A second working group on microcredentials was also created to support and improve CU Denver's infrastructure for microcredentials. Learn more about the microcredentials working group and its charge.)

In collaboration with the schools/colleges and various campus departments (such as the Registrar, CPE colleagues, and the budget office), as well as in consultation with Faculty Assembly (including EPPC and LETTS committees), UCDALI, and Staff Council representatives, the working group seeks to provide answers to a series of questions:

### Badging Working Group questions:

- Of the range of badging activities occurring nationally, and considering the potential for current and future badging activities, what categories/taxonomy of badges will CU Denver need, including badges created in partnership with outside entities?
- What characteristics need to be considered when creating digital badges?
- What will be the processes for proposing, creating, administering, and awarding badges?
- Who will be responsible for developing, reviewing, and administering these processes?
- What design will the CU Denver badges have, in order to indicate each badge's place within the established taxonomy?
- What resources will need to be created in order to support the creation of badges and who will be the responsible parties for their development?

The working group will conclude in early May, culminating in a report on the suggested processes, guidance, and additional recommendations to be shared with Chancellor Marks, Provost Nakuma, and our broader community.

## Appendix B: Badge Proposal Form Elements

These elements are taken largely from the proposal process of George Mason University<sup>2</sup> and Credly's recommendations<sup>3</sup>.

- Department or Unit that is authorizing the badge
- Point of contact information
- Attestation that the Dean or Director has approved the issuance of this badge
- Brief description of the process used to approve the badge
- Evidence used to identify the need or demand for the badge
- Attestations of the following:
  - That no other existing badges overlap with this subject area
  - That this lack of overlap has been reviewed by the UCC or other appropriate parties
  - That the instructor who will confirm the badge is an appropriate authorizer.
- Type of Badge: Skill Badge General, Skill Badge Industry Partner, Faculty/Staff Skill Badge
  - If an Industry Partner badge, does the partner want their logo to appear on the Badge. If so, upload the logo or provide a link.
- Badge meta-data.
  - Badge Title (*Must be a name not already in use, 50-character max. Consider naming conventions across your program when naming your badges.*)
  - Badge Description (*500 characters max*): Describe the badge.
    - This is a short and concise description of the achievement. Ideally, this field should answer the question, "What is this individual capable of now that they have this badge?"
    - Try to avoid statements that highlight what it takes to earn the badge, rather focus on what someone is capable of after they earn it
    - Try to avoid canned marketing language, like advertisements enticing people to take a course
    - Articulating the things someone is capable of doing now that they've earned the badge will make the badge more meaningful to someone unfamiliar with the course or learning activity you are badging
    - Focus less on topics covered, and more about what they mean for learners and the employers and others with whom they will share the badge
    - Prerequisites: Is there expected prior knowledge?

**Example:** Earners of the Microsoft Excel Foundational Badge have a fundamental understanding of the Excel environment and the ability to complete tasks independently. They know and demonstrated the correct application of the principal features of Excel 2019. These candidates are

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<sup>2</sup> George Mason University (2020). *Final Report: George Mason Micro-Credentials Work Group*.

<sup>3</sup> Elements of badges described through the Credly Academic ([academy.credly.com](https://academy.credly.com))

able to create and edit a workbook with multiple sheets for a variety of purposes and situations.

- Earning Criteria (*At least 1 required*): Define the criteria by selecting the activities the earner was required to complete to earn this badge. Available criteria for CU Denver Skill Badges:
  - Assessment: Passing a formal assessment or exam.
  - Badge: Referencing another badge that has already been published on the Acclaim platform, such as an entry-level designation that is a criterion for a higher-level designation.
  - Course: Completing relevant coursework in a formal classroom environment or self-study education.
  - Credential: Earning a recognized professional or industrial credential (not academic)
  - Portfolio: Preparing and maintaining a current portfolio of professional submissions.
  - Presenter: Presenting at a conference, webinar, or other key event for a field of organization.
  - Project: Creating or contributing to a significant individual or group project, such as a capstone project.
  - Professional Experience: Representing duration of professional experience or specific types of experiences, such as internships
  - Other: Embodying any criteria type that may not be explicitly represented in the other types.
  
- Skills Tags (*At least 1 required*)
- URL to program information
- What is the name of the college/school/non-academic unit that you want to appear on the badge? (drop down)
  
- Achievement Type:
  - Validation: (Measured and Validated Learning)
  - Certification (Industry recognized or validated achievement)
- Mastery Level
  - None
  - Foundational
  - Intermediate
  - Advanced
- Sequence
  - None
  - Yes, level associated with this badge: \_\_\_\_\_
  - If yes, how many levels are associated with this program?
- Is this a Meta-Badge?
  - Yes
  - No
- Time commitment
  - Hours
  - Days
  - Weeks
  - Months

- Years
- Cost
  - Free
  - Paid
- Industry Standards: *The standards field supports multiple entries that indicate alignment to 3rd party standards related to this achievement. This can be used to indicate adherence to ISO/ANSI standards, educational standards, company policies and standards, institutional commitments or value statements.*
- Recommendation: *Recommendations (optional) – appears as a next step that’s specific to earners of this badge. A recommendation can be either another badge in your program (if they’re sequential or closely related), or a URL to an external website that provides a next step for these earners.*