

New Research Finds Only 35% of Credential Programs Track Learner Outcomes, Revealing a Value-Evidence Gap

The report identifies the gap between reported employer recognition and systematic evidence of post-credential outcomes.

FRUITA, CO, UNITED STATES, October 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- JANSON Research & Strategy today released a new study of quality, relevance, assessment, artificial intelligence practices, and value across professional credential and certification programs.



Titled The [Currency of Credentials](#), the analysis of provider responses revealed a disparity between confidence in program value and the evidence available to demonstrate what happens after someone earns a credential or certification.

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Dr. Elisa Janson Jones

Among study findings, only 35% of participating programs systematically track outcomes for credential or certification holders, while 91% self-report that employers recognize and value the credentials or certifications their programs award. JANSON Research & Strategy describes the disparity as a value-evidence gap: strong confidence in program value paired with limited systematic evidence of post-completion outcomes.

The finding comes as employers, policymakers, learners, and credential providers face an increasingly complex credential marketplace. [Credential Engine](#) counted 1.85 million unique credentials offered by more than 134,000 U.S. providers in 2025, with approximately \$2.34 trillion in annual expenditures across the credential ecosystem. The

total includes degrees, certificates, professional certifications, occupational licenses, badges, microcredentials, and other forms of documented achievement.

[Workcred](#) has separately documented a persistent shortage of systematic information on outcomes for certifications and other credentials. The organization reports that outcomes data have historically been fragmented and incomplete, even as employers and policymakers increasingly seek evidence concerning employment, wages, career mobility, and education.

“Credential and certification providers, be they nonprofit organizations whose program unlocks a career field or a single SaaS provider offering a product knowledge certificate, may have good reason to believe their programs create value, but belief and evidence are not always equivalent,” said Dr. Elisa Janson Jones, research lead at JANSON Research & Strategy. “When an organization cannot provide evidence for impacts after someone earns its credential or certification, the value claim becomes considerably more challenging to substantiate.”

JANSON researchers observed similar differences between reported quality practices and the infrastructure providers use to maintain or demonstrate them.

Additional findings include:

- Assessment: 71% of programs with a formal assessment rely exclusively on multiple-choice or other selected-response formats.
- Currency: 88% report that their competencies reflect current professional work, while a mere 52% systematically monitor labor-market change.
- AI governance: Among programs using AI, 100% reported human review of final credential

The image shows two pages from a research report. The top page is the cover, titled 'The Currency of Credentials' with the subtitle 'A provider-side study of quality, relevance, assessment, AI practice, and value in credential programs.' It includes the JANSON Research & Strategy logo and the text '2026 · 46 PAGES · 12 EXHIBITS'. The bottom page is titled 'CREDENTIAL VALUE · FINDING 5' and features a comparison between employer beliefs and actual tracking. It shows '91%' for 'THEY BELIEVE' (say employers recognize and value their credential) and '35%' for 'ONLY' (actually track what happens to the people who earn it). A concluding statement reads: 'Credential value is **believed** far more often than it is **demonstrated**.' The JANSON logo is also present at the bottom of this page.

JANSON RESEARCH & STRATEGY · RESEARCH REPORT

The Currency of Credentials

A provider-side study of quality, relevance, assessment, AI practice, and value in credential programs.

JANSON RESEARCH & STRATEGY

2026 · 46 PAGES
12 EXHIBITS

The Currency of Credentials examines how credential and certification programs substantiate quality, relevance, assessment, AI practice, and value.

CREDENTIAL VALUE · FINDING 5

THEY BELIEVE

91%

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ONLY

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JANSON RESEARCH & STRATEGY

THE CURRENCY OF CREDENTIALS
2026 RESEARCH REPORT

The study found a 56-point gap between reported employer recognition and systematic tracking of credential-holder outcomes.

decisions, but only 40% had a formal AI governance framework.

- Equity: 83% report that flexible delivery increases equitable access, while 46% monitor participation and completion by group.

Across the analysis, JANSON researchers identified a recurring structural tension: quality intent is outpacing quality infrastructure. Providers report practices associated with rigor, relevance, and responsible decision-making, yet fewer have established the mechanisms needed to consistently document, maintain, and evaluate those practices.

Analysis of the qualitative responses also identified capacity as a central constraint. Seventy percent of substantive responses regarding barriers cited staffing, time, funding, or related resource limitations. Credential and certification providers appear to understand what a stronger practice entails, but lack the operational capacity to sustain it.

Limited outcome tracking has particular implications for claims about value. Employer recognition can establish whether a credential or certification is visible or respected in the market. Post-completion evidence addresses a different question: what happened to the people who earned it? Depending on the program's purpose, relevant outcomes might include changes in professional opportunities, demonstrated capabilities, scope of work, advancement, earnings, or other intended benefits.

JANSON researchers similarly identified a gap between some competency claims and the assessment evidence available to support them. Selected-response assessment is not inherently weak; well-designed items can assess application, analysis, and judgment. The implication is alignment of assessment methods with the practical evidence. When a single response format encompasses all competencies in a program, some claims may rest on evidence that cannot validly demonstrate the type or level of performance asserted.

Providers expressed high confidence that their competencies reflect their current work, but far fewer reported a systematic process for monitoring labor market change. While 88% of providers report that their competencies reflect their current professional work, only 52% systematically monitor labor market changes. The implication then is that confidence in current content is not equivalent to maintaining a defined process for detecting when occupations, tasks, technologies, or professional expectations change.

Dr. Jones subsequently expanded the research synthesis into a companion Strategic Brief that offers recommendations for certification providers seeking targeted improvements. The brief translates the study's results into a recommendation plan for program leaders, including five value mechanisms, two principal improvement levers, six strategic priorities, eighteen practical moves, four diagnostic tests, and a 90-day sequence for determining where improvement should begin.

The recommendations emphasize proportionality rather than wholesale redesign. Program leaders are encouraged to define precisely what their credential or certification promises, determine whether the available evidence can validly support that promise, identify the point at which value begins to break down, and prioritize improvements according to the program's purpose, sector, accreditation obligations, and available capacity.

JANSON Research & Strategy conducted the study as exploratory research intended to identify patterns, tensions, and areas warranting further investigation rather than produce population-level estimates. Recruitment used purposive outreach and chain-referral sampling. Percentages and qualitative themes, therefore, describe the participating programs and should not be interpreted as estimates for the credentialing or certification field as a whole.

The complete Currency of Credentials PDF report includes the methodology, item-level denominators, limitations, 12 exhibits, and a technical appendix, and is available as a free download from JANSON Research & Strategy.

Later this month, JANSON Research & Strategy will launch a research study exploring AI training methods, titled Ready or Not: A national study of how organizations across sectors are preparing their people to work with artificial intelligence.

About JANSON Research & Strategy

JANSON Research & Strategy is a consulting firm focused on consequential organizational problems, including credential and certification quality, workforce learning, and AI adoption. JANSON combines original research with strategic analysis, diagnostics, and implementation planning to help organizations make evidence-informed decisions. Founded by Dr. Elisa Janson Jones, EdD, MBA, it is based in Fruita, Colorado.

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