



Building Incremental Credentials

Incremental credentials capture learning as it is acquired, formally recognize that learning, and connect it to a larger context of education and work.

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www.credentialasyougo.org



CREDENTIAL AS YOU GO

INCREMENTAL CREDENTIALING

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About Credential As You Go

Credential As You Go is catalyzing redesign and integration of credentialing systems across states, higher education, and third-party providers, including employers, to recognize all learners for what they know and can do.

Credential As You Go focuses on building an incremental credentialing system, recognizing that many types of quality credentials (degrees, certificates, industry certifications, licenses, badges, microcredentials) document an individual's learning, and credentials are awarded by many types of providers including community and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities, third-party organizations, employers, military, and state licensing boards.

For too many learners, the only postsecondary credentials that count for employment are degrees. This focus limits access to further education and employment. Yet, many have acquired valuable skills and knowledge through life and work experience. The U.S. needs a credentialing system that captures and validates all learning.

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Learning Objectives

Purpose

Incremental credentials capture learning as it is acquired, formally recognize that learning, and connect it to a larger context of education and work.

The purpose of incremental credentials is to officially recognize learners for what they know and can do as they acquire their learning, thus ensuring that they obtain formal documentation of that learning.

This playbook:

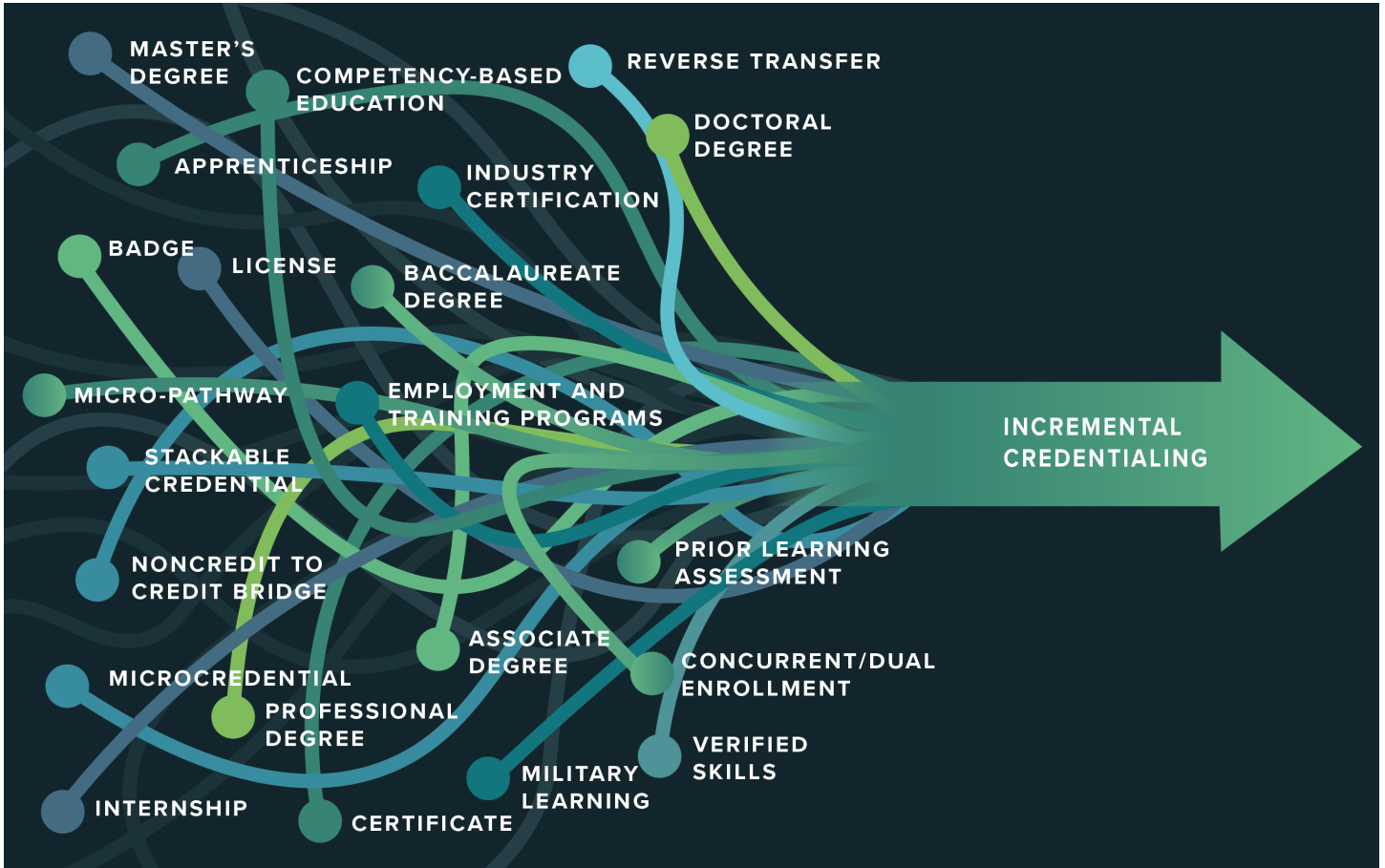
- 1 Provides an overview of incremental credentials
- 2 Provides key considerations when designing and implementing different credentials
- 3 Links to case studies that illustrate different incremental credentials

Overview

The incremental credentialing process formally credentials all types learning that individuals acquire – in education institutions, in the workplace, or other life experiences.

Incremental credentials can be of any size or level (credit or noncredit, undergraduate or graduate), and from any source. They can be a first credential, act as a bridge between credentials, and build into larger credentials.

These increments can originate from education or industry and be integrated together. In addition, learning acquired outside formal education and training structures – often called “prior” or “experiential” learning – can be integrated within incremental credentials. The [Incremental Credentialing Framework](#) captures these different approaches to developing incremental credentials.



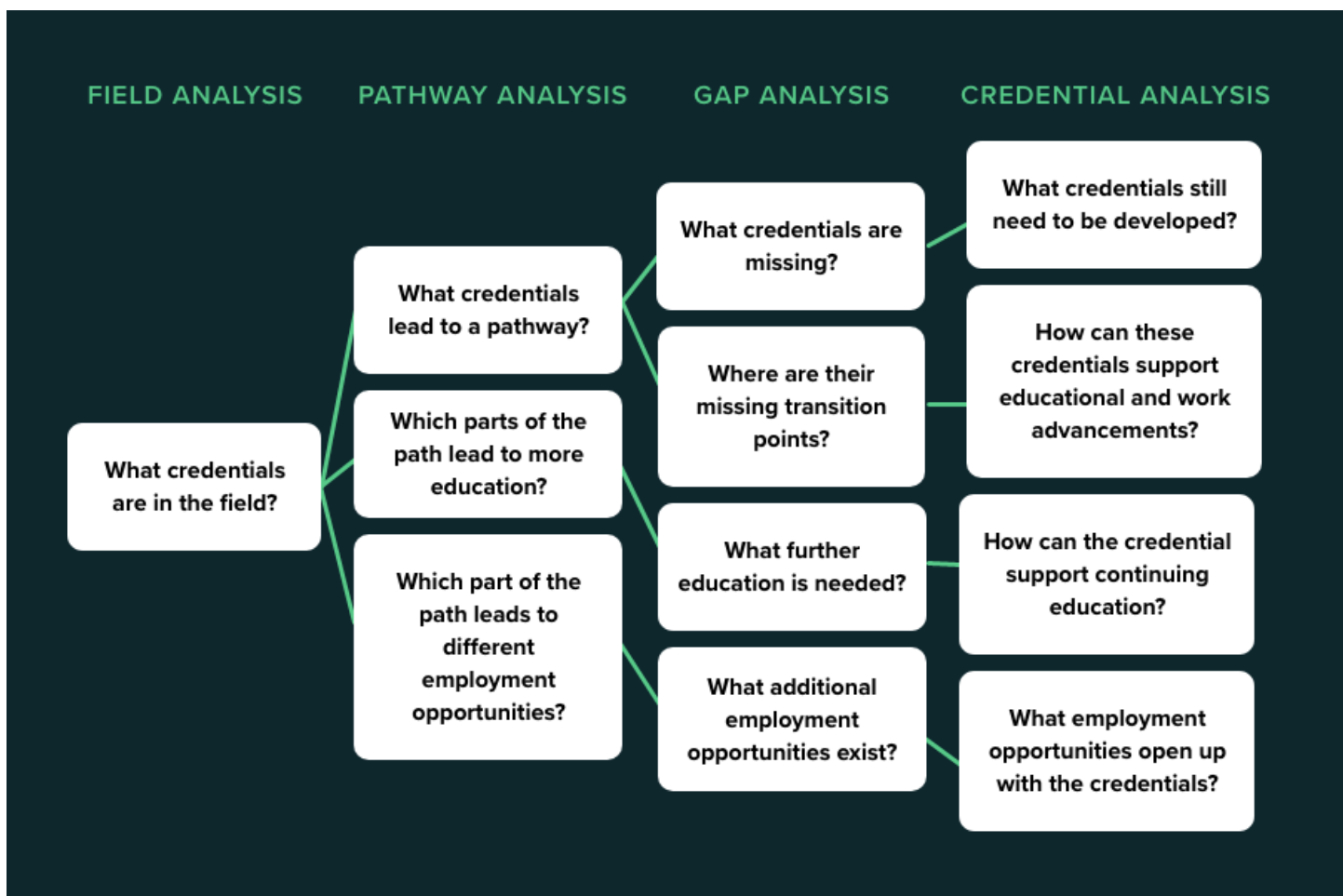
[Watch: Incremental Credentialing Framework Video](#)



Designing Incremental Credentials

Key Questions to Consider

Increasingly, incremental credentials are being developed in many sectors and fields. Knowing what already has been developed shows you what credentials are available to learners, helps you understand how these credentials form pathways within and across fields, and allows you to identify gaps where more credentials may be needed.



Identify Existing Incremental Credentials

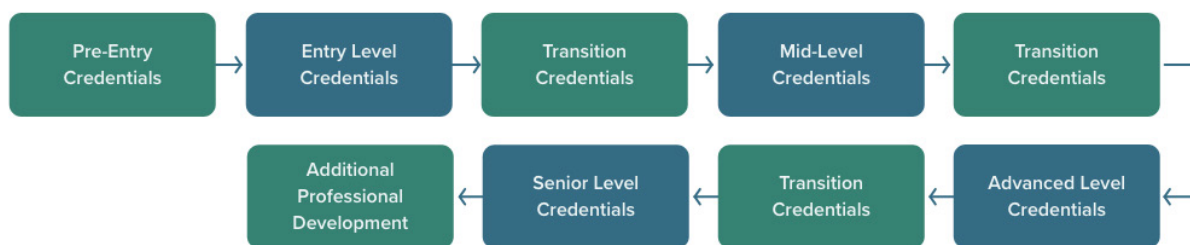
FIELD ANALYSIS



GAP ANALYSIS



CREDENTIAL ANALYSIS



The following strategies can help you determine which incremental credentials to develop.

- Take an inventory of the existing credentials in your field. For examples, see those showcased on this website or search credentials at Credential Engine's Credential Registry. As you review credentials, ask these questions:
 - Are they being offered within higher education, industry, or other organizations?
 - What types of credentials are they? What learning are they documenting?
 - How do learners progress along a pathway with these credentials?
 - How are non-college credentials and college credentials being aligned and integrated?
 - If in higher education, how do the noncredit and credentials align and stack?
- Map out a credentialing pathway for a field.
 - What are some credentialing pathways for this field?
 - Which credentials make up this pathway?
 - How do existing credentials help learners along that pathway?
 - For what jobs do learners qualify at each level of the pathway?
 - How does this pathway connect to other pathways?

■ Identify gaps in the pathways you have identified.

- Is there a credential in the pathway that lacks an obvious predecessor or next step?
- What types of prerequisite knowledge and skills are missing from one credential to the next?
- What other types of credentials would support learners on this pathway?
- What are some related credentials that would augment these credentials?
- What could be some next steps that expand on existing credentials?
- In what ways could your organization develop and/or support these newer credentials?

■ Identify market demand for the existing and potentially new credentials.

- What are projected growth areas for this field?
- Which areas have employment gaps?
- How can entry-level or transition credentials boost the availability of qualified employees in areas of need or projected growth?
- How can you work with industry partners to pinpoint gap areas and identify new credentialing needs and opportunities?
- How can these new credentials be aligned to existing job areas?

Align Credentials to the Incremental Credentialing Framework

Based on research that explored different ways credentials are being developed across the United States, the Incremental Credentialing Framework uses six approaches to develop and implement incremental credentials. The Framework's approaches are not mutually exclusive – in fact many incremental credentials implement multiple approaches. For example, skills development that follows the “Learn As You Go” approach may also build into credentials using “Stack As You Go” approaches.

■ Identify which Framework approach(es) best fit your credential design. Check out the links provided to learn more about each approach.

- Is the credential focused on skills development? Learn As You Go - Incremental credentials are gained on their own for skilling, upskilling, or reskilling, and may or may not be part of a larger credential or credentialing pathway.
- Does the credential provide for specialization? Specialize As You Go – Incremental credentials are gained for specializations, which may be part of or add to a larger credential or credentialing pathway.

- Does the credential lead to additional credentials? Stack As You Go – Incremental credentials purposefully stack into other credentials, forming a credentialing pathway. These credentials can be noncredit, microcredentials, certificates, skills badges, licenses, certifications, degrees, and other types of credentials.
- Will the credential be transferable? Transfer As You Go – Incremental credentials are part of academic transfer pathways. These credentials may be designed to transfer to a higher level within or across institutions (e.g., noncredit to credit, associate to bachelor’s) or across the same level. This latter transfer type often is across institutions, thus increasing opportunities for learners while saving money to institutions. Through an agreement, each institution can offer to its learners opportunities at the other institution without investing resources to offer the same opportunity at the home institution.
- Does the credential align with workplace learning and/or industry certifications? Partner As You Go – Incremental credentials are part of an employer-education partnership. Credentials gained in the workplace are determined to be part of a pathway, and/or workplace credentials are embedded within the educational curriculum.
- Does the credential incorporate learning that has already occurred? Retro Award As You Go – Incremental credentials are awarded retroactively for learning already acquired but not yet recognized in other credentials.

■ Determine how you will use the Framework approach(es).

- What is the purpose of the credential(s)?
- What type of credential(s) will you be developing?
- How do these new credential(s) align with the credentialing pathways?
- How do the credential(s) align with the six Framework approaches? Remember, approaches can be combined.
 - ▶ Which skills or competencies are involved in the credential?
 - ▶ Will there be specializations?
 - ▶ Where do they fit within a pathway?
 - ▶ How are they connected to other programs or credentials?
 - ▶ How is prior learning recognized in the credential?
- Which skills or competencies do you want to expand?
- What are the outcomes you expect from the credential(s)?
 - ▶ How do the credential(s) support further education?
 - ▶ How do the credential(s) support further employment?
- Which other related credentials could also be developed?

Define Incremental Credentials

Many higher education institutions have found that components of existing curriculum can be unbundled and re-bundled into new credentials that meet the needs of learners and employers. In other cases, new curricula must be developed to address gaps in credentialing. Similarly, industry credentials can be divided to create smaller increments that lead to a larger credential. Also, prerequisite credentials or other additional credentials can be developed to meet identified gaps.

- Redefine credentials by recombining unbundled components to create credentials more manageable in size for learners.
 - Which introductory parts of existing credentials can be recombined to provide learners with entry points?
 - Which prerequisite skills or competencies, addressed across multiple fields, can be combined to create entry points for learners who then can choose to go different directions?
 - How can a credential be divided into multiple, smaller credentials to provide more completion points for learners?
 - How can more advanced components of a credential be recombined to create specialties for learners?
 - What other skills or competencies can be added to existing credentials to provide specialties or more advancement?

- Create new credentials to fill credentialing gaps.
 - Do learners need transition skills to move from one program to another? What are they? How might they be developed into credentials?
 - Which prerequisite skills are needed to progress from one credential to another?
 - What transition skills are needed to move from school to work? From work to school?
 - Which industries or business associations could partner to strengthen learners' skills development or to integrate workplace learning with academic learning?

- Integrate prior learning into credentials.
 - How can workplace and experiential learning be incorporated into the credential?
 - How can prior learning address prerequisites for some credentials?
 - How can the assessment of prior learning integrate workplace and academic learning?

Types of Common Credentialing Pathways

- Full degree is broken into incremental credentials with all or most of the degree represented (credit-based).
- Incremental credentials are developed to fit into a part of the degree, additional requirements are needed to complete the degree (credit-based).
- Incremental credentials focus on a specialization for the degree (credit-based).
- Incremental credentials provide different tracks to degree (either in whole or in part) – usually there are core parts that everyone takes, and different cohorts take track options (credit-based).
- Incremental credentials are awarded based on courses already completed – learners usually have not continued with the institution (credit-based).
- Credit for prior learning is embedded into the credentials and degree (credit-based).
- Specific skill development is aimed for employment (usually noncredit based).
- Specific skill development is aimed for articulating noncredit to credit learning.

Building Incremental Credentials

Begin the Work

To develop incremental credentials, your institution or organization should follow the same policies and processes it uses to develop academic programs, professional development, or training. Typically, there are different phases to credential development: Conceptual Phase, Proposal Phase, Approval Phase, and Implementation Phase.



Conceptual Phase

In the conceptual phase, you build your case for developing and providing the credential(s), offering evidence that demonstrates the need for the credential(s).

- Initial ideas - There are many reasons to create incremental credentials. The Incremental Credentialing Framework provides different approaches that can help formulate ideas. Ideas also can be generated by:
 - ▶ Talking with possible partners and others in the field.
 - ▶ Data analysis on learner attrition – When does this happen? When are typical points of attrition? What patterns seem to be emerging?
 - ▶ Trends in the field.
 - ▶ Learners' requests.

- Connected initiatives – How does this credential connect to other initiatives within and outside your institution or organization? How does it fit the mission? How does it fit strategic planning?
- Targeted audience – How will the credential(s) meet learners’ needs? What benefits will it bring to learners? The institution/organization? The partners?
- Equity considerations – How does the credential(s) address equity imbalances? How does the credential(s) support all learners?
- Needs statement – Why are you developing the credential(s)? What are some of your drivers? How can the credential be used? What would be missed if the credential(s) were not developed? How does it support the targeted audience? Those of institutions/organizations? Employers?

Proposal Phase – Developing the How, What, Where, & When

In the proposal phase, you work through all the many details on how credential(s) are developed and delivered. If clear guidelines for a credential proposal exist within your system, institution, or organization, you should follow them, of course. In general, areas to consider include:

- Type of credential(s) – What is the academic or field area for the credential(s)? What type of credential(s) are you developing? What are the components of the credential(s)? At what level are the credential(s)? Are there prerequisites to the credential(s)?
- Learning expectations – What are the expected outcomes from the credential(s)? Are the outcomes competency-based? Learning outcomes-based? How will the learning be evaluated? What types of assessment will be used to capture the outcomes? What evidence is needed to demonstrate progression and completion of the credential(s)?
- Modality and format – How will the credential(s) be delivered? Virtually, in-person, or hybrid? Is there an experiential (applied) component to the credential(s)? When and how often are the credential(s) delivered? How long does it take to complete the credential(s)? Are there specialized equipment or technology requirements for this credential?
- How do the credential(s) link to other credentials? Is there a competency- or learning outcomes-based crosswalk that demonstrates connections among other credentials? How do the credential(s) fit within academic and workplace pathways?
- What is required of learners to participate in the credential(s)? What prerequisites must be in place?
- What learner supports (learner services) exist? How will learners be informed about and advised throughout the credentials? How are learners supported if they struggle?

- Credential documentation – How is successful completion documented and recorded? Is there a transcript or official record of successful completion? Is there a digital representation for the credential(s)? Is the credential part of an auditing system? Is it part of a comprehensive learn and work record (LER) or the equivalent? Will the credential(s) be part of Credential Engine’s Credential Registry?
- Funding – How much does it cost to develop the credential(s)? What are the costs to learners? What resources are needed to sustain the credential(s)?

Approval Phase – Developing Quality and Trust

During the approval phase, checks and balances are put in place to ensure the credential(s) are of quality. These build trust in the credential among all constituents, such as learners, employers, faculty, academic advisors, and quality assurance entities.

- How are different groups involved in the development? How are faculty involved? How are industry representatives involved? Who else is involved? How is input collected? How is consensus developed? What are the qualifications of those involved in developing and providing the credential(s)? Who will be delivering the credential(s)? What are their qualifications?
- What standards and metrics were used in developing the credential(s)? What are the standards for the field or industry? What accreditation standards should be followed?
- How are quality and trust ensured in the credential(s)? How is their relevance determined? How do you incorporate different stakeholders’ perspectives of the credential(s)’ value? How do you ensure alignment among various aspects of the credential(s), including needs assessment, what is produced, how it is assessed, its learning outcomes, and the nature of learners’ field experiences?
- What is the approval process? Who reviews the proposal before submission for approval? Where and how is it submitted for approval? Who is involved in the approval process, and who has ultimate approval authority?
- How will information on the credential be made available? Is it easily discoverable and understandable? Transparent and reliable? How will the credential(s) be communicated and marketed to constituents?
- How will the credential(s) be evaluated over time? What are the mechanisms for improvement? How will the credential(s) remain current and relevant? How well does the credential(s) meet its purpose? Is there a follow-up review process, such as a five-year review where outcomes will be examined? What is its retirement process, if needed?

Implementation Phase – Developing Access

Implementation strategies are critical to ensure that learners can gain access to and complete the credential(s). Implementation includes marketing, communication, infrastructure, learner supports, and processes.

- What are the marketing strategies for the credential(s)? Who are the targeted audiences? Who are the targeted learners? How is information on the credential(s) made available, easily discoverable, and transparent to all constituents? How are awareness and value of the credential(s) portrayed to different constituents? How are learners recruited? How do learners understand the credential(s) and the processes necessary to pursue them?
- How does communication play a role in raising awareness of the credential(s)' value? How is this shared with internal and external constituents? How are processes communicated to constituents?
- What infrastructure must be in place to ensure viability and sustainability of the credential(s)? What is the business model for the credential(s)? How are implementation costs covered? What expenses are shifted to the learner? What steps are taken to minimize impact on disadvantaged groups of learners?
- What is the staffing model for the credential(s)? Who delivers the instructional components of the credential(s)? Who supports the learners in the process? Who supports the administrative aspects of the credential(s)?
- What technologies are needed to support the learning acquired in pursuit of the credential(s)? How do these technologies support learners and those who help deliver the credential(s)? How can technology help maintain checks and balances throughout the workflow?
- How are learners' outcomes and engagement tracked and applied to the credential(s)? How are the data collected and stored? How are the data entered within a learner record, transcribed, and made available to the learner?
- How are learners supported throughout the credential(s)? What types of credential pathways and career planning are in place for learners? How are these connected to the credential(s)?

Case Studies

Examples of Success

The following case studies provide examples of the many in which higher education systems, institutions, and other organizations are developing and providing incremental credentials. The two videos – which feature interviews with representatives of several Credential As You Go institutions – were first shown during the Credential As You Go mini-conference series, July - October 2022.

[Automotive Technician Fundamentals](#)



[Certificate & Minor in Design Thinking](#)



[Consumer Services & Collections Management](#)



[Apprenticeship with Indium Corporation](#)



[Estimating & Planning Construction Costs Certificate](#)



[General Management: Accounting & Excel](#)



General Management:
Business Law &
Communication



General Management:
Managerial Skills



Strategic
Decision-Making &
Communications



Veterinary Practice
Management
Certificate



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Additional Resources

Please check our website for updated content, strategies, and examples:
www.credentialasyougo.org