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NEA MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FACILITATION GUIDE

CONTENTS

This guide is designed to provide facilitators of micro-credential professional learning communities (PLCs) with the information, tools, and strategies needed to effectively support educators interested in earning a micro-credential. The guide is organized in four parts: Background Information, Expectations of a PLC Facilitator, Support Content, and Facilitation Strategies. Each part provides a facilitator of the micro-credential PLC with the basic information, resources, and tools needed to support a group of educators as they prepare and submit a micro-credential.

Background Information
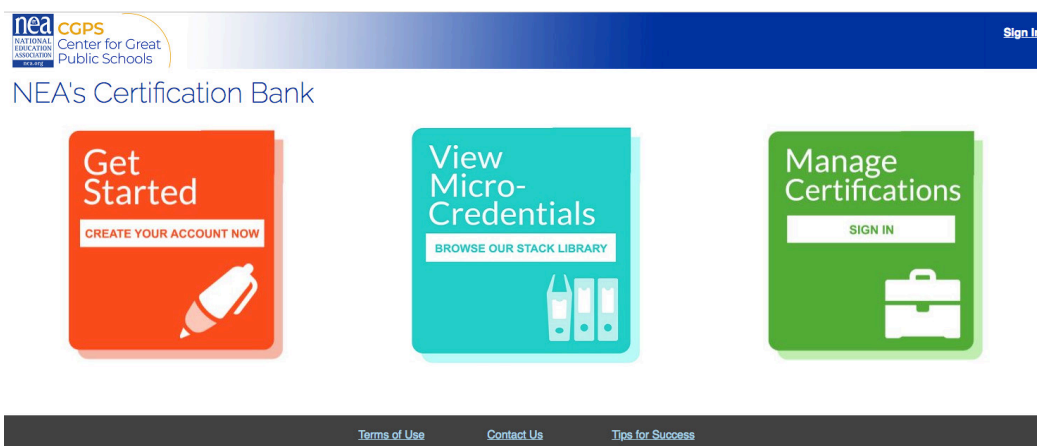
What is a Micro-credential?

A micro-credential recognizes a discrete skill of educators, related to their practice, based on evidence that demonstrates competency of that specific skill.

Micro-credentials are:	Micro-credentials are NOT:
• Competency based • Personalized, self-directed • On demand, responsive to teachers' schedules • Shareable portable currency • Job embedded, practical	• Seat-time based • One-size fits all professional learning • Limited by their availability • Minimal in their public value • Limited in contextualized learning

Micro-credentials are designed to recognize mastery of a skill.

Gathering evidence of a skill already mastered is less time consuming than developing a new skill and practicing it until it is mastered. Thus, educators who begin the process with micro-credentials they've already mastered will need less support than educators who begin the process with micro-credentials requiring skills they have yet to develop.

NEA's Micro-credentials

All of NEA's micro-credentials can be found here: nea.certificationbank.com

The following stacks are examples of the micro-credentials currently available:

- Arts Integration
- Assessment Literacy
- Bully Free Schools
- Classroom Management
- Classroom Practice (InTasc): Learner and Learning
- Classroom Practice (InTasc): Understanding Content
- Classroom Practice (InTasc): Instructional Practice
- Classroom Practice (InTasc): Professional Responsibility
- Community Schools Improvement Science
- Cooperating Teacher
- English Language Learners
- Every Student Succeeds Act
- Five Core Propositions
- Leadership in Organizing
- Supporting LGBTQ Students
- Teacher Leadership: Overarching Competencies
- Teacher Leadership: Diversity, Equity, and Cultural Competence Pathway
- Teacher Leadership: Association Pathway
- Teacher Leadership: Instructional Pathway
- Teacher Leadership: Policy Pathway
- Technology Integration

Check back on NEA's micro-credential platform frequently. New micro-credentials are added to the platform periodically.

Micro-credential Example: Creating a Classroom Community (Classroom Management stack)

To better understand the structure and components of a typical micro-credential, it is important for a facilitator to study its content. Facilitators should be very familiar with the micro-credentials the members of his or her community are pursuing. The "Creating a Classroom Community" micro-credential example (shown below) will provide the general information on the structure and the components for all of NEA's micro-credentials. To access the full four-page PDF of this micro-credential, click on the following link below. http://nea.certificationbank.com/images/NEAdocuments/CM/Creating%20a%20 Classroom%20Community.pdf

Great Public Schools for Every Student

Creating a Classroom Community

Educator understands the importance of building key relationships for a positive classroom community.

Key Method

The educator creates a classroom culture that cultivates relationships among all learners, which ensures a sense of belonging and value for each learner.

Method Components

Cultivating relationships among all learners

Educators should first demonstrate knowledge that the learners in the room include both the students and teacher. Therefore, positive relationships must be established between all of the learners in the classroom. Below, you will find some examples of how this can be done:

- Create and display a space in your classroom where all the learners can post pictures of themselves, their hobbies, and their likes and dislikes
- Activities that encourage learners to learn each other's names and learn more about each other
- Team-building activities
- Encouraging the sharing of ideas
- Invite parents into the classroom and include them in the learning

Creating a sense of belonging and value for each learner

Educators should demonstrate and model appropriate social skills, including communication, conflict resolution, tolerance, and acceptance.

- Teach learners how to participate in class meetings
- Teach learners how to work collaboratively
- Model and allow learners to resolve conflicts peacefully
- Develop a space where diversity is accepted and encouraged
- Assess the individual needs of learners
- Incorporate tasks that make connections with the lives and cultures of all learners
- Allow a space for the learners' choices and voice

## Models for Supporting Educators Pursing Micro-credentials

The chart below outlines examples of support, which might be made available to educators pursuing micro-credentials. A basic description of the role of the facilitator for each model is provided in the last column.

Support Model	Description	Role of Facilitator
Independent	Educators participate independently with little or no support provided. Participants study guidelines, prepare evidence, and submit portfolios on their own.	The facilitator's role is very limited in this model. One suggestion is for the facilitator to maintain a list of educators who are choosing to work through micro-credentials on their own.
Basic Support	Educators participate with light touch support. Basic support generally includes **ONE** of the following categories: • Face-to-face (F2F) meeting • Weekly/Bi-monthly email reminders with tips & strategies for micro-credential submission success • One or two sessions of open office hours (virtual or F2F) to answer questions and provide support • Release time for participants to prepare submissions (independent work time or group work time)	Facilitators will implement ONE support described in this option list. • Face-to-face meeting: plan, publicize, and conduct meeting • Email reminders: customize content for emails using resources provided; compile email list; send emails; respond to questions • Open office hours: schedule and publicize open office hour schedule providing virtual links, if needed; conduct sessions and answer questions • Release time: coordinate all necessary permissions and paperwork; schedule, if necessary; be available for questions
Standard Support	Educators participate with light touch support. Standard support generally includes **TWO** of the following categories: • Face-to-face meeting • Weekly/Bi-monthly email reminders with tips & strategies for micro-credential submission success • One or two sessions of open office hours (virtual or F2F) to answer questions and provide support • Individual coaching sessions (phone, email, video conference, F2F) • Release time for participants to prepare submissions	See the description for facilitator role for each support service above

Support Model	Description	Role of Facilitator
Ultimate Support	Educators participate with light touch support. Ultimate support generally includes **ALL or MOST** of the following categories: • Face-to-face meeting • Weekly/Bi-monthly email reminders with tips & strategies for micro-credential submission success • One or two sessions of open office hours (virtual or F2F) to answer questions and provide support • Individual coaching sessions (phone, email, video conference, F2F) • Release time for participants to prepare submissions	See the description for facilitator role for each support service above
Online Learning/ Professional Learning Community	Educators participate in an online learning lab and/or professional learning community available 24/7 to participants. The lab or community is facilitated by experienced edCommunities facilitators who consistently provide a high level of support and encouragement throughout the pilot process. (Some of the bullets above may be used in virtual space in additional to the threaded discussions in the online space.)	• Create edCommunity for the PLC. • Load the edCommunity with resources and information and useful prompts for educators pursuing micro-credentials • Publicize the space • Provide ongoing support throughout the micro-credential process
Support Reallocation	Professional learning time reallocated for the pilot (e.g., PLC time during school day, embedded professional development (PD) days or time, common planning time, etc.)	Coordinate with district or school personnel, as needed
Support Allocated	Professional learning time created for the pilot (e.g., PLC time during school day, embedded PD days or time, common planning time, etc.)	Coordinate with district or school personnel, as needed

Affiliate Resources

NEA has tools and resources available to organize and support implementation of a micro-credential initiative. These tools and resources can be found here:

Affiliate Resources
Use these tools and resources to organize a micro-credential study group and support members in their learning journey
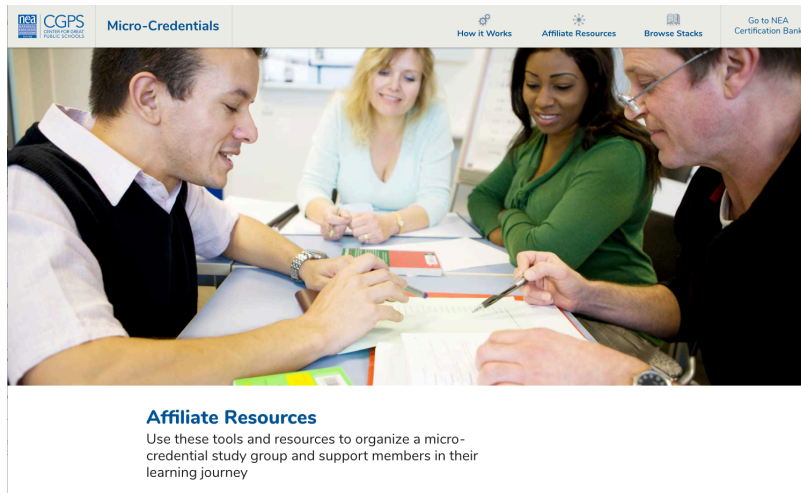
Expectations of a PLC Facilitator

The teacher leader is responsible for guiding and supporting a small group of at least 15 educators through the process of successfully completing and submitting an NEA micro-credential. A PLC leader should expect to put in approximately one-to-two hours per week over the course of a 6-to-8-week cycle.

Commitments may include:
- leading face-to-face or online video conference meetings with educators
- leading asynchronous, online conversations in edCommunities or other platform
- sending follow up and reminder emails
- building an agenda for meetings
- checking in on the progress of the participants and sharing the information with the local affiliate point person
- collaborating and communicating with the local point person, Center for Teaching Quality consultant, and NEA staff
- responding within 24 hours to any digital communication from the participants or NEA
- troubleshooting issues that arise and seek out support from NEA or the local coordinator as the need arises

Facilitator Tasks

The types of tasks a facilitator may be responsible for completing include:

- leading face-to-face or online video conference meetings with educators
- leading asynchronous, online conversations in NEA edCommunities (**mynea360.org**)
- sending follow up and reminder emails
- building agendas for meetings
- checking in on the progress of the participants and sharing the information with the local affiliate point person
- collaborating and communicating with the local and/or state point person, outside consultants (if necessary), and designated NEA staff person
- responding within 24 hours to any digital communication from the participants or NEA
- troubleshooting issues that arise and seek out support from NEA or the local or state point person/representative coordinator as needed
- provide feedback and encouragement to members if there is a need to resubmit their micro-credential
- provide NEA/SEA with a bullet-formatted debrief document, sharing the learnings, challenges, and successes gained from the micro-credentials facilitation experience

Support Content

Tips for Choosing a Micro-credential

Here are some tips you can share with the educators as they begin to determine which micro-credential(s) they would like to pursue:

- **Create your criteria for your choice.** Before you even begin searching the database of micro-credentials, decide what you want from this experience. Do you hope to grow in a new skill? Look for micro-credentials that might inspire you to learn about something new and master that skill. Do you want to demonstrate expertise you have already developed? This narrows things down. These are the micro-credentials that cause you to nod in agreement as you read them. Other criteria: Are you looking for a particular topic? Do you need to combine this effort with other professional growth plans? Are you part of a team working on this project? Write down your criteria. Once you start searching the database, you'll be glad you did!
- **Gather enough choices, but no more.** There are many, many micro-credentials available. Decide how many you'd like to consider. Limit your choices to a manageable size; too many choices can be overwhelming.
- **Once you narrow your choices to a reasonable list, let it sit a bit.** Sometimes quick decisions are good. Sometimes, upon reflection, it would have been better to let your decision marinade. Take a week or two and reflect. What has been on your mind? Where has your professional focus been? Which micro-credential(s) match up? Which don't?
- **Seek another perspective.** There are many who know you and your work well. Ask for their thoughts and input. A trusted colleague, instructional leader, or mentor might have just the perspective to help you make your final decision.

- **Share your choice.** Sharing a decision with someone always makes it feel more "official." That accountability can be very helpful in getting us in motion. Shout your decision from the mountaintop! (Well, at least tell the teacher next door.)
- **It's not final until it's final.** Remember, you can always change your mind!
- **Begin with the end in mind.** Relate this to backward planning.

Tips for Studying the Submission Guidelines for Micro-credentials

- **Read carefully.** Ignore the fact that you "read" this document when you were making your decision. It's a new ballgame. Now, you have to do this thing! So, make a conscious effort to read it. Repeat after me: I WILL NOT BROWSE THIS DOCUMENT. Read every word carefully.
- **Print the submission guidelines.** Sometimes reading the guidelines on a computer screen doesn't allow the tactical interaction some need to process information.
- **Use active reading strategies.** For example, circle the parts on which you need more clarification. Underline the parts you understand. Highlight the parts you already have evidence to support or know exactly how you'd like to answer.
- **Study the rubric.** Use active reading strategies on the rubric. Remember, your submission hinges on your ability to provide evidence according to the standards outlined in the rubric. Seek help if you are unclear about any part of it.

Tips for Preparing your Submission

- **Schedule benchmarks for yourself.** Each component of the micro-credential will require time and effort. Map out your tasks (e.g., research, practice of the skill, drafting the context, gathering evidence, writing the reflection, revising, peer input, etc.). Schedule your deadlines for each portion of your submission. One more thing: Stick to your timeline.
- **Draft your context (part one of your submission) before you begin gathering your evidence.** This strategy will help you focus on the exact skill you must demonstrate to earn the micro-credential. Rather than writing this after you gather evidence, draft it first. You can always revise. (A must, of course!)
- **Gather more evidence than you need.** If you're required to submit video or audio evidence, gather numerous samples. If you put all your eggs in one recording, you may end up disappointed.
- **Answer ONLY what you are asked.** You have a lot to say. We know. You are brilliant. Truly amazing things are going on in your classroom and school. We agree. You must resist the urge to share all of that. Answer ONLY what you are asked. You have a tight word limit. Don't waste any words on anything outside the requirement.
- **Seek a critique partner.** One of the best ways to find a critique partner is to offer to critique someone else's submission. Another eye is always helpful. Be sure to ask specific questions for feedback. Think about what you need from the critique. Feedback on particular sections? Language/grammar edits? Evaluation of evidence compared to the rubric? Be as specific as possible. And don't forget to find a special way to thank them for their effort.
- **Give it a rest.** Put the work down for a few days and then revisit with fresh eyes.

Tips for Preparing a Resubmission

- **Process your feedback.** Carefully read the feedback provided. Reread your submission and make notes using the feedback received. Brainstorm what you need to do to improve the submission.

- **Review the tips.** Go back and study the tips provided throughout the submission process. Did you take shortcuts on any of these steps? Did you skip steps? Take the time to walk your submission through the process with full attention to each piece of advice.

- **Read a successful submission.** If you have a colleague or friend who submitted a successful micro-credential portfolio, ask to read his or her entry. Ask them to take a look at your submission, and gather feedback before resubmitting.

Facilitation Strategies

Using NEA's edCommunities to Provide Support

edCommunities is a virtual space available to all NEA members (mynea360.org/login). This is a perfect spot for a micro-credential professional learning community. In fact, a number of communities already exist around micro-credentials. Create one for your PLC, or access an active community using the directions below.

How to Join NEA edCommunities

|	
1. Go to mynea360.org 2. Click **Sign up** in bottom right corner	
1. Enter your information 2. Create a password 3. Confirm password 4. Click the Register button 5. Confirm your email (check your junk folder if you don't see the confirmation email)	

1. Customize your experience by choosing areas of interests and joining groups and/or following some people

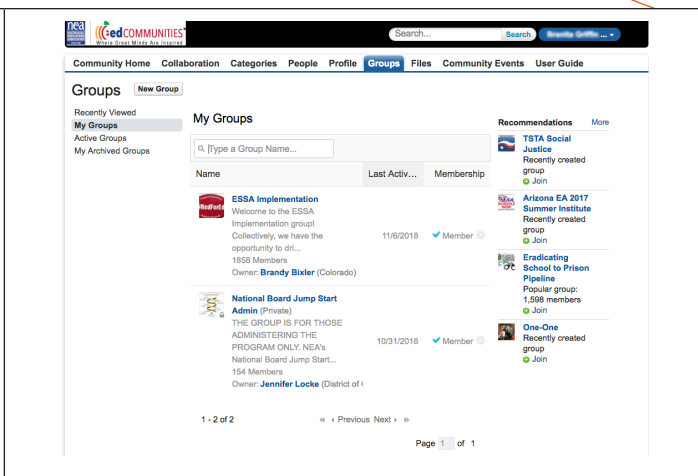2. Click the blue bar **"I'm Done. Take me to my Homepage"** button on the top section
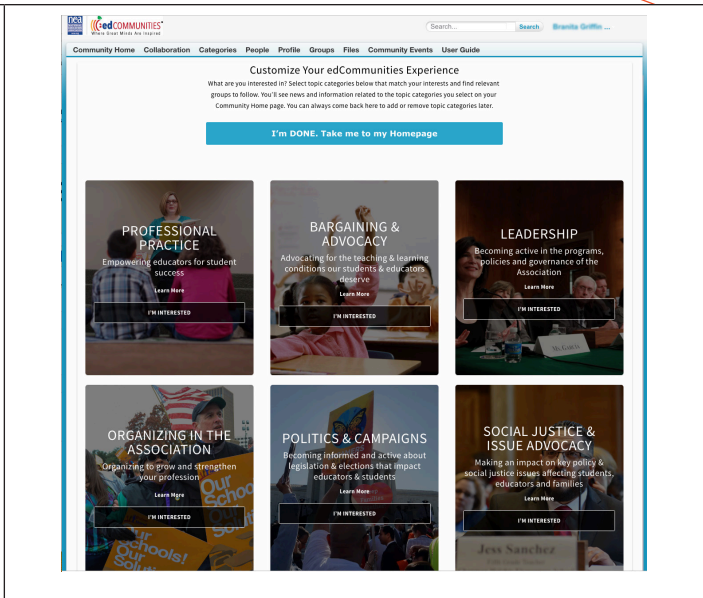
Go to the Collaboration Tab on the top to see your feed *(posts from all the people and groups you follow)*
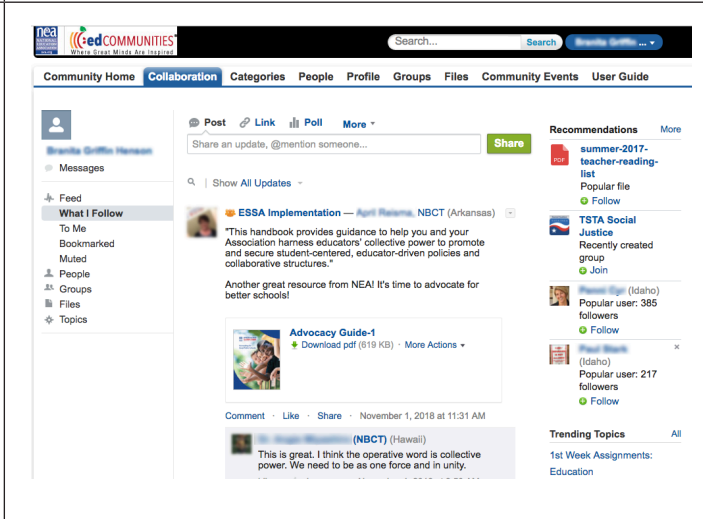
Go to the Profile Tab to add your photo and about me information
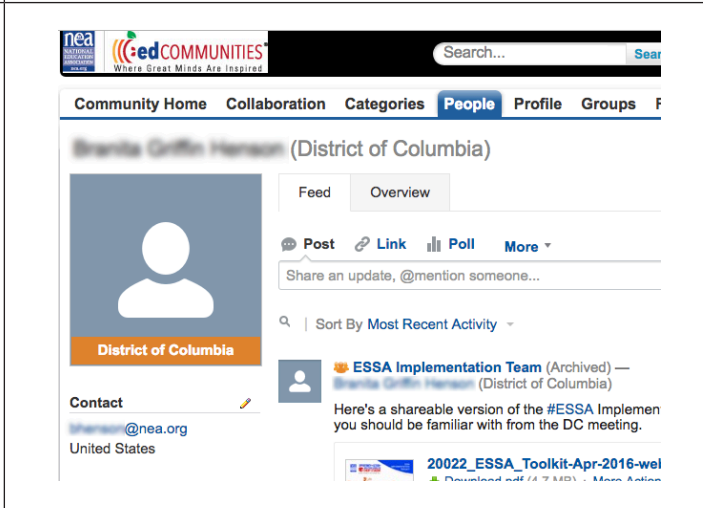
Go to the Groups page to join more groups or to make a new group

Asynchronous Facilitation Strategies

Asynchronous facilitation supports educators when communication does not occur at the same time. Facilitators and members of the community can access discussions 24/7 and participate according to their schedule and availability.

- Create thoughtful, stimulating prompts for discussion. Avoid yes/no questions or questions that can be answered without thought and reflection.
- Encourage discussion by sharing personal stories and/or perspective.
- Connect one person's response to another's and ask BOTH a pithy question that encourages them to continue the dialogue without you.
- Decide what you need to know about your community and gather data. Examples include: frequency of interactions, depth of interactions, experience in particular areas, challenges and/or frustrations, potential for leadership, communication style, etc.

Synchronous Facilitation Strategies

Synchronous facilitation supports educators when communication occurs at the same time, in the same virtual place. A meeting time and digital link for the meeting must be provided to the community beforehand.

- Prepare. Do not show up without proper preparation.
- Start and end on time.
- Always set norms and provide opportunity for input on additional norms.
- Know the purpose for the session and share it. Start with why.
- Provide an agenda, overview, or outline of the session.
- Slow down. People need time to think. Go more slowly than feels natural and restate questions.
- Use wait time. (It's much more challenging in virtual space, right?)
- Optimize the chat box. Encourage participants to use the chat box for questions and comments. Skim content and use as springboard for discussion.
- Use powerful visuals. Linking images to ideas makes them stick. Cite your sources or use your own.

General Tips for Virtual Facilitation

1. **Know your community.** Use surveys, bio prompts, and other questionnaires to learn about the members of your community. Be sure to find out all you can about their level of comfort with technology (new websites, making an audio or video recording, and uploading files for submission), as well as their comfort with the micro-credential concept, and the content of the actual micro-credential selected. Learn as much information as possible about your PLC members so you can support them effectively.

2. **Use the support content as discussion prompts.** The support content is organized according to a general timeline an educator might experience with micro-credentials—starting with choosing the best micro-credential to submit, to reflecting on the process once completed. Use the content as a guide or starting point for drafting the most useful discussion posts for your virtual community space.

3. **Make resources easy to find.** Log onto your virtual space and think like a member of your group. Can you find what you need easily? Use the sidebar as a place to put important information and links. Be sure to make the group work for its members.

4. **Encourage members of your group to support others in the group.** You do not need to be the one to answer every question. Encourage others in the community to provide input, share advice, and give examples. Even if you know how to answer a question, it may be better to step back and allow others to get involved by sharing their experiences. This engagement strategy is very similar to how teachers work to engage all students in a classroom.

5. **Communicate with members "offline," too.** Don't feel handcuffed by the virtual space. If you see a member of the PLC in need of more personal support or encouragement, don't hesitate to email them, or give them a call, if you are both comfortable with that. The online space is not the only place for connection. Connect with members of your community in whatever way can be most helpful. They'll appreciate it just as a student really values that extra bit of encouragement outside the regular classroom.

6. **Ask. Ask. Ask.** Make a habit of asking members of your community what they need. It is crucial to gather feedback constantly to be successful as a facilitator. For them to be successful in the micro-credential process, you must know what they need. Don't forget to ask!

7. **Celebrate the process.** Once the submission process concludes, it's time to celebrate with members. Here are some ideas for celebrating:
   a. Recognized at an awards ceremony
   b. Presented with certificates, medals, tokens, or other rewards
   c. Highlighted in a newsletter, website, or other Association publication
   d. Featured in a promotional video about micro-credentials
   e. Asked to serve as a coach, mentor, or PLC facilitator for future cohort
   f. Asked to serve Association in an appropriate role
   g. Asked to share experience at an important meeting, conference, or other session
   h. Recognized in a letter sent to educator's principal and other administrators
   i. Featured on a bulletin board promoting the micro-credential program

Sample 8-week Timeline

Adjust the following weekly tasks to fit your timeline.

Week	Suggested tasks and activities
Pre-launch of the virtual community	☐ Establish virtual space for the community (edCommunities, etc.), and load the space with resources and information ☐ Organize resources and support materials ☐ Sign MOU and/or discuss your role for support with key leaders ☐ Attend the launch of the micro-credential implementation
1	☐ Invite all participants in the micro-credential implementation to the virtual space ☐ Create a welcome thread ☐ Facilitate the initial discussion to learn as much as possible about each member of your community
2	☐ Provide links to Certification Bank ☐ Facilitate discussions around Tips for Choosing a Micro-credential in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Answer questions via virtual community, email, phone, etc. ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas for engaging your community in the early stage of the work
3	☐ Continue facilitating discussions around Tips for Choosing a Micro-credential in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Survey community members (e.g., goals, micro-credential chosen, support needed, etc.) ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas to engage your community in the early stage of the work
4	☐ Facilitate discussions around Tips for Studying the Submission Guidelines in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Schedule and hold virtual office hours, if possible ☐ Make yourself available via text, phone, email, etc. ☐ Share progress with key leaders (How are your community members doing? What questions are they asking? What needs do they have?) ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas to engage your community at the midway point of the work

Week	Suggested tasks and activities
5	☐ Facilitate discussions around Tips for Preparing a Submission in the Support Content section ☐ Schedule and hold virtual office hours, if possible ☐ Share progress with key leaders
6	☐ Continue to facilitate discussions around Tips for Preparing a Submission in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Schedule and hold a feedback party where community members bring a portion of their submission to share with a feedback partner to a virtual meeting to get critical feedback before submission ☐ Schedule and hold virtual office hours, if possible ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas to engage your community at the midway point of the work
7	☐ Continue to facilitate discussions around Tips for Preparing a Submission in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas to engage your community in the final stage of the work
8	☐ Continue to facilitate discussions around Tips for Preparing a Submission in the Support Content section of this guide ☐ Refer to the Facilitation Strategies section of this guide for ideas to engage your community in the final stage of the work ☐ Survey the community and/or hold a panel discussion to gather data on submissions, value of the experience, impact on their practice, etc. ☐ Create a final "report" or summary of the experience and share with key leaders ☐ Plan a way to celebrate (see #7 in General Tips for Virtual Facilitation)

This guide is designed to provide facilitators of micro-credential professional learning communities with the information, tools, and strategies needed to effectively support educators interested in earning a micro-credential. This is a living document, however. Please join our edCommunities group "NEA Micro-credential Education Leaders" at myNEA360.org to provide us with your suggestions and best practices for updated versions of this document.