



Quality Framework and Beyond: A CBE User's Guide

START HERE

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)

Welcome!

The C-BEN Quality Framework for CBE Programs was developed in response to a growing need for definitions of quality relating to competency-based education. Our aim with this work is to provide guidance to the field, allowing institutions to draw on these principles and standards to inform the design, implementation, or scaling of high-quality programs. The principles and standards can also provide guideposts and assurances to policymakers and accreditors tasked with regulating this vibrant, and still emerging, field of practice.

In this e-book, you will be able to explore each of the eight elements of quality, the corresponding standards and performance indicators, additional guidance for using the Quality Framework, as well as model examples from institutions across the country that are launching or have launched CBE programs. You will also come across other supplementary resources to guide your next steps in developing or enhancing your CBE programs.



**I'm new to competency-
based education.**



**I'm looking to enhance
my CBE program.**



I'm new to competency-based education.

What is Competency-Based Education?

Competency-based education combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills by engaging in learning exercises, activities, and experiences that align with clearly defined programmatic outcomes. Faculty and staff provide proactive guidance and support to students, who earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace.

A Growing Interest

Competency-based education programs are generating increased interest and awareness in higher education. Many colleges and universities see the potential to better plan, organize, and deliver educational opportunities and experiences at the program level using CBE. This is in contrast to those opportunities and experiences available through traditional academic instruction, in which paths to completion and what students will learn are often less transparent and progress is measured primarily by the accumulation of credit hours, the achievement of minimum grade-point averages, and the passage of time.

Designed with the Individual in Mind

Competency-based education is rapidly changing, and new models are constantly emerging. In most competency-based education programs, learning can occur in a wide variety of forms and settings. Students are assessed using objective, performance-based tools that reinforce the rigor of programs. Many of these programs are designed as flexible, affordable options for students who are not served well by existing postsecondary programs. Students receive more intensive guidance and support from faculty and mentors and also have the option of accelerating their studies to save additional time and money.

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



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**Learn about the The
Eight Elements of
Quality CBE Design**



**Check out this
video to learn
more about CBE**



Additional Resources
[CBE-related terminology](#)
[The history of CBE](#)

[Articles, news, and publications
related to CBE](#)

I'm looking to enhance my CBE program.

Whether you have launched one, two, or ten CBE programs, this e-book can provide you with a starting point to evaluate your existing programs, learn how other institutions are handling various challenges, and share your own unique stories about CBE.

To start, **review the performance indicators** for each of the eight quality elements. For each standard, determine where your institution is on a scale from Initial to Highly Developed. You can evaluate a specific program or several programs more broadly; you may also find you need other individuals from your institution to provide their insights. Evaluating your institution's progress will help you identify gaps or areas for improvement and allow room for conversation and collaboration around continuous improvement.

From there, you may decide to hone in on one or several quality elements. Consider the resources you have, and read the institutional examples, questions to consider, and steps for getting started. Are there strategies that you have learned that you would like to share with others?

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



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for Competency-Based
Education Programs at
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**Learn about the The Eight Elements
of Quality CBE Design**



**Share your own story
about CBE here**

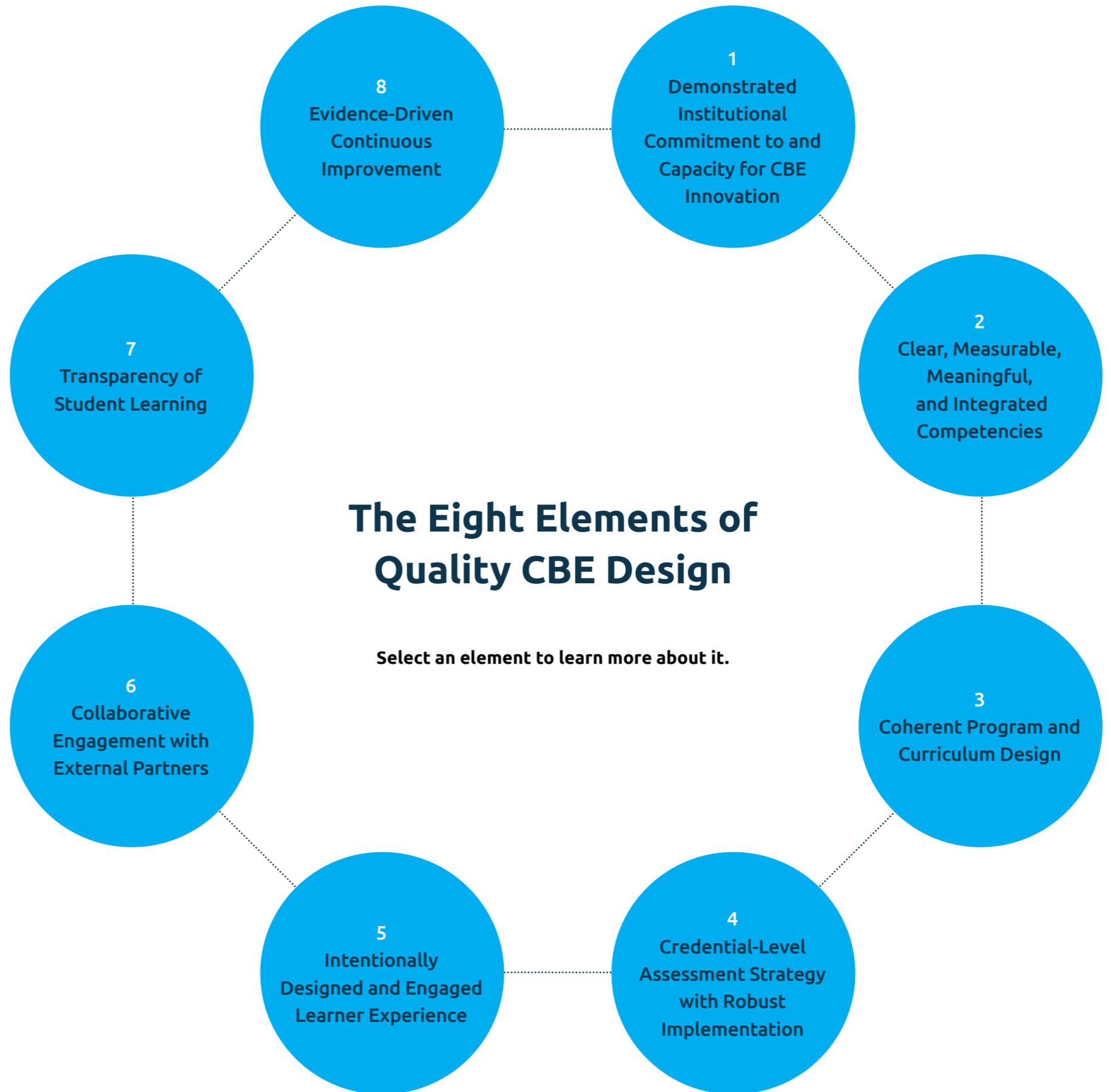
[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)





ELEMENT 1

Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation

Overview

In order to produce a high-quality CBE program, the institution must build a foundational infrastructure in support of competency-based education. This includes the development of a CBE philosophy and commitment as it relates to the institution's mission, the design of the program structure, and the definition of appropriate supports for the program and its learners (including people, policy, and process supports). The institution must also make appropriate financial investments in the program, understanding that the return on investment (ROI) for CBE programs is generally a long-term one. Such investments are often necessary to achieve regulatory and accreditor compliance and to provide learners with an adequate and appropriate support structure.



[View Institutional Illustrations](#)

[View User's Guide](#)

[View Performance Indicators](#)



[Additional Resources](#)

[Accreditation Resources](#)

[CBE Institutions](#)

[Costs, Finance, and Affordability](#)

[Financial Aid](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

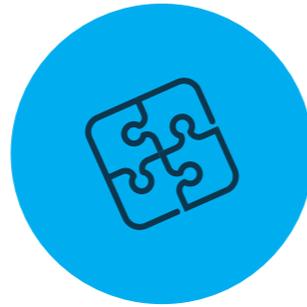
[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



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ELEMENT 2

Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies

Overview

Each competency is explicitly stated and provides unambiguous descriptions of what a learner must master to complete a program of study. Each competency includes the theory and the application of theory required for mastery at the appropriate level for the credential being earned. Each competency connects to content and learning activities designed to support learners in developing the proficiencies required by the program to award a credential. Each competency is measurable and can be reliably and validly assessed.

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



**View Institutional
Illustrations**

View User's Guide

View Performance Indicators



Additional Resources

[Degree Qualifications Profile](#)

[Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

[Competency Frameworks](#)

[Credentials](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated
Institutional
Commitment to
and Capacity for
CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear,
Measurable,
Meaningful,
and Integrated
Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program
and Curriculum
Design](#)

[Credential-Level
Assessment
Strategy
with Robust
Implementation](#)

[Intentionally
Designed and
Engaged Learner
Experience](#)

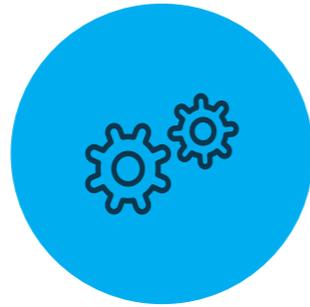
[Collaborative
Engagement with
External Partners](#)

[Transparency of
Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-
driven Continuous
Improvement](#)



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ELEMENT 3

Coherent Program and Curriculum Design

Overview

Competency-based education programs use an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design that provides a learner with the full range of competencies necessary to meet post-graduation demands. These programs intentionally seek to reduce racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, and other potential bias in their design, delivery, and implementation. This academic model, which provides clear pathways to completion, builds a unified body of knowledge that leverages frameworks, disciplines, standards, national norms, workforce demands, and societal needs. Learners are at the core of the program's design, and the logic of the program (as well as its associated assessment strategy) supports flexibility in pacing. The curricular design ensures that each competency's level of difficulty aligns with the level of the program it's used in (undergraduate, graduate, professional, etc.).



View Institutional Illustrations

View User's Guide

View Performance Indicators



Additional Resources

[CBE Design Models/Effective Practices](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



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ELEMENT 4

Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation

Overview

Authentic assessments and their corresponding rubrics are key components of CBE, which is anchored by the belief that progress toward a credential should be determined by what learners know and are able to do. The overarching assessment strategy is comprised of assessments designed both to inform the learning journey (i.e., “assessment for learning” or “formative assessment”) and to validate mastery (i.e., “assessment for learning” or “summative assessment”). In CBE models, assessments are intentionally aligned to competencies and cognitive levels and use a range of assessment types and modalities to measure the transfer of learning and mastery to varied contexts. Authentic assessment design and use follow best practices for assessment professionals.

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



[View Institutional Illustrations](#)

[View User's Guide](#)

[View Performance Indicators](#)



[Additional Resources](#)

[Measuring Mastery: Best Practices for Assessment in Competency-Based Education](#)

[Assessment and Quality](#)

[Prior Learning Assessment](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)



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ELEMENT 5

Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience

Overview

CBE professionals (faculty and staff) comprehensively understand the strengths and needs of their target learner population and put those needs at the core of all decisions, processes, and systems. CBE programs offer proactive and personalized support for learners, from determining program fit through alumni relations. Faculty and staff are invested in and involved with understanding and improving the entire learner lifecycle by designing, guiding, and supporting the learning journey, including processes that facilitate and encourage meaningful interaction with individual learners. A full array of wraparound learner services and social supports, appropriate to the learners being served, is offered by CBE professionals through a wide range of roles and responsibilities.



[View Institutional Illustrations](#)

[View User's Guide](#)

[View Performance Indicators](#)



[Additional Resources](#)

[Competency-Based Education Model Benefits Faculty As Well As Students](#)

[The Journal of Competency-Based Education: Ensuring faculty success in online competency-based education programs](#)

[Faculty and Staff Roles](#)

[Prior Learning Assessment](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



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ELEMENT 6

Collaborative Engagement with External Partners

Overview

Institutions strategically identify and secure the commitment of multiple external partners to inform and support the achievement of their CBE programs' purpose and their institutional equity goals. External partners are meaningfully engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of institutions' CBE programs. They work collaboratively to inform and validate CBE program competencies and curriculum and to ensure the authenticity of assessments. The result is a relevant, transparent credential and authentic learning experience that is endorsed and trusted by external partners as well as learners.



View Institutional Illustrations

View User's Guide

View Performance Indicators



Additional Resources

[The DQP Executive Summary](#)

[Integrating CBE into Workforce Development Efforts](#)

[K-12](#)

[Military](#)

[Organizations](#)

[Workforce/Employer Perspectives](#)

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)



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for Competency-Based
Education Programs at
cbenetwork.org



ELEMENT 7

Transparency of Student Learning

Overview

One of the central differentiators of CBE programs is their transparency regarding the learning required to earn a credential. This means that the competencies and their alignment, the pathway to mastering those competencies, the assessment methodologies, and the performance requirements for successful demonstration of competency are clearly articulated to learners and all other stakeholders. Transcription practices make demonstrated competencies transparent to learners, faculty, staff, employers, transfer institutions, accreditors, and regulators, often in digital form. Transcripts are designed to support portability and transferability to non-CBE environments and include an “extended or comprehensive record” with details about the learner’s complete accomplishments.



- [View Institutional Illustrations](#)
- [View User’s Guide](#)
- [View Performance Indicators](#)



Additional Resources

- [What’s Happening with Competency-Based Transcripts and Rethinking College Admissions in the United States](#)
- [Lumina Foundation Credentials Transcripts](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

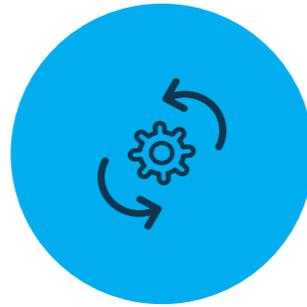
[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)





ELEMENT 8

Evidence-Driven Continuous Improvement

Overview

An evidence-driven continuous improvement methodology is an essential dimension of competency-based education. To ensure program effectiveness, data are collected and analyzed at regular intervals during the program and post-completion. These data are reported and used to inform learners and faculty, identify and prioritize improvements, evaluate and refine assessment strategy and implementation, monitor equitable learner achievement across diverse groups, optimize learner supports to impact program persistence and completion, and enable external validation of learning. Where performance gaps are identified, the institution actively implements and monitors solutions.

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



View Institutional Illustrations

View User's Guide

View Performance Indicators



Additional Resources

[Conferences and Webinars](#)

[Data and Analytics](#)

Jump to another element:

[Demonstrated Institutional Commitment to and Capacity for CBE Innovation](#)

[Clear, Measurable, Meaningful, and Integrated Competencies](#)

[Coherent Program and Curriculum Design](#)

[Credential-Level Assessment Strategy with Robust Implementation](#)

[Intentionally Designed and Engaged Learner Experience](#)

[Collaborative Engagement with External Partners](#)

[Transparency of Student Learning](#)

[Evidence-driven Continuous Improvement](#)



Download Quality Framework for Competency-Based Education Programs at cbenetwork.org



Resources

[Accreditation Resources](#)

Information from regional accrediting agencies about approval to offer CBE and direct assessment

[CBE Institutions](#)

Institutions with CBE programs that are early adopters and incorporate effective practices

[Costs, Finance, and Affordability](#)

Studies and models related to CBE costs, finances, and affordability

[Financial Aid](#)

Financial aid for CBE (see also U.S. Department of Education for Title IV aid for direct assessment and CBE)

[Competency Frameworks](#)

Nationally recognized competency frameworks

[Credentials](#)

Connecting credentials and competencies

[CBE Design Models/Effective Practices](#)

Program design models and documentation of effective practices for creating CBE

[Assessment and Quality](#)

Efforts to ensure quality and academic integrity in CBE program design and assessment

[Prior Learning Assessment](#)

How CBE relates to prior learning assessment initiatives

[Faculty and Staff Roles](#)

New and unbundled roles for faculty in CBE

[Student Services](#)

Student affairs topics for CBE, including career coaches and program services

[K-12](#)

CBE resources specific to K-12

[Military](#)

Military job and training crosswalks to competencies and credit

[Organizations](#)

Associations, networks, and other groups interested in CBE

[Workforce/Employer Perspectives](#)

Studies and policy work related to employer needs and perspectives about CBE

[Credentials](#)

Connecting credentials and competencies

[Transcripts](#)

Research and initiatives to document competency-based, extended transcripts

[Conferences and Webinars](#)

Conferences with significant CBE-related sessions (includes specific webinars with materials available)

[Data and Analytics](#)

Performance measures, metrics, analytics, and data structures for understanding CBE

[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)



[Welcome](#)

[The Eight Elements
of Quality](#)

[Resources](#)

[Contributors](#)

[How We Can Help](#)

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Special thanks to **John Milam**, Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, Lord Fairfax Community College, for maintaining and sharing the extensive list of CBE resources found at <http://highered.org/cbe>



Welcome

The Eight Elements
of Quality

Resources

Contributors

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C-BEN offers consulting services and technical assistance to help institutions, state systems, and other organizations build new and enhance existing CBE programs. If you would like to learn more about how you can best leverage this resource and C-BEN's services, please contact:



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