

From Platform Orientation to Professional Readiness: Design of the S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. Microcredential for Independent Contractors and Service Professionals

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ABSTRACT

For independent contractors and residential service professionals, as well as prospective tradespeople, the future of work requires making high-stakes technical, safety, ethical, financial, and customer-service decisions as a matter of daily course with increasing autonomy and digital integration. Yet many onboarding initiatives are at best limited to company operational procedures or trade trade practices, with less coverage of the broader professional-readiness skills. This conceptual study and program-design article introduces S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H., a private professional-readiness microcredential developed by Earth Care Rent A Tech to train contractors, service professionals, and wannabe tradespeople for the 21st-century workplace. The curriculum combines technical platform-specific orientation with transferable learning in safety and risk management, professionalism and ethics, customer communication skills, financial and business literacy, sustainability and green business practices, ethical artificial intelligence use, and career planning. The research describes curriculum architecture, modularity with organization-specific content and transferable-learning modules, and a blueprinted oral interview that sampling core content areas randomized order. Drawing on research related to workforce development, safety, online learning, authentic assessment, employability, financial literacy, and microcredentials, the paper theorizes the competencies and reasoning that propelled the program design while clarifying the credential's scope and purpose. Certified through the completion of safety and professionalism training and knowing demonstrated in course assessments, program completers do not possess any specific occupational licence, regulatory authority, or technical mastery. The article concludes with quality assurance tools, credential validation and administration issues, and guiding objectives for future inquiry into assessment consistency, skill transference, credential acceptance, and positive workforce impacts.

1. Introduction

Independent contractors and home-service workers often work in situations where technical execution is just one aspect of the job. They may have to go inside private residences, try to understand vague or incomplete instructions, notice risks, announce scope changes, document work, secure proprietary data, quote prices, handle fluctuating income, and determine when they are outside their expertise. They could have to work through third-party online job sites, computer software, artificial intelligence, learn on the job, and or tap into local labor pools. Such tasks and considerations evoke a professional-readiness challenge that is more significant than the trade know-how itself.

Traditional new employee procedures for contractors seem to focus on compliance with administrative expectations or operational procedures. While those areas are important, these topics do not cover the interpersonal, moral, financial, ecological, and decision-making dimensions required by service systems of today. Employability has been theorized as comprised of a set of technical knowledge, skills, and competencies (Knight and York, 2003; Jackson et al., 2013) or multiple personal characteristics or a dynamic integrative stream of competencies (Fugate et al., 2004). Similarly, research on soft skills has identified that employers

want integrity, communication, responsibility, professionalism, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and work ethic in addition to technical knowledge (Robles, 2012).²¹ Heckman and Kautz (2012) also identified that traditional measures of achievement failed to account for the noncognitive features that contribute to success in work and life.

S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. was initiated by Earth Care Rent A Tech as a private training & assessment system for independent contractors, service professionals, and helpers applying for employment or business opportunities in the trades. Originally part of Earth Care's onboarding process, the program grew into a more developed curriculum of professional behaviors and work-readiness basics. Earth Care program materials note lessons and questions on safety, communication, ethics, financial literacy and estimating, sustainability and use of AI, interviewing and career planning, workforce resources, and business development, as well as Earth Care procedures (Earth Care Rent A Tech, 2026a, 2026b).

This article has two objectives. The first is to outline the design logic, content areas, and assessment architecture of the S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. microcredential. The second is to note the quality-assurance process necessary for the credential to have significance outside of the licensing body. This is a conceptual/descriptive program paper that does not describe an experimental evaluation, make unsubstantiated causal assertions, or establish that certificate-holders are technically proficient to perform the regulated occupation. Rather, the article offers a model of a professional-readiness educational intervention that can be empirically evaluated and, if necessary, refined and adapted by workforce coalitions and service-sector employers.

2. Evidence Base for a Multi-Domain Professional-Readiness Program

The design of S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. reflects the premise that workplace performance depends on interacting domains rather than a single body of knowledge. Training science emphasizes systematic needs analysis, clear learning objectives, active participation, practice, feedback, and transfer conditions before, during, and after instruction (Salas et al., 2012). These principles are especially relevant to independent contractors because they often work without close supervision and must apply judgment under variable conditions.

Safety training provides one of the strongest rationales for active, scenario-oriented learning. Burke et al. (2006) synthesized 95 studies involving 20,991 participants and found that more engaging safety-training methods were associated with greater knowledge acquisition and improved safety outcomes. A more recent meta-analysis of 157 independent studies found positive effects of safety training on reactions, learning, transfer, and safety indicators, while also distinguishing technical and nontechnical safety content (Bisbey et al., 2026). These findings support a curriculum that asks learners not merely to recall rules but to explain what they would do when they smell gas, encounter a damaged ladder, are asked to work on a live circuit, observe a structural hazard, or face a task outside their qualifications.

The program's communication and professionalism domains are also supported by service-quality and workforce research. Zeithaml et al. (1988) identified communication and control processes, role clarity, and role conflict as central influences on service delivery. For home-service professionals, communication failures can produce scope disputes, pricing disagreements, scheduling problems, and customer anxiety even when the physical work is competent. S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. therefore includes instruction on confirming scope, setting expectations, communicating delays, documenting changes, using understandable language, and de-escalating conflict. These topics align with employer preferences for integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, professionalism, and work ethic (Robles, 2012).

Financial literacy is another essential but frequently neglected component of contractor readiness. Independent workers may confuse gross receipts with profit, fail to reserve funds for taxes, underprice labor, overlook travel and equipment costs, or lack funds to replace broken tools. Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) described financial knowledge as an investment in human capital that influences economic decision-making. A systematic review of entrepreneurial financial literacy found that financial knowledge is connected to access to finance and enterprise performance, although measurement approaches remain inconsistent (Anshika & Singla, 2022). S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. addresses this gap through basic instruction on net income, expenses, tax reserves, estimating, invoices, job costing, material markups, and tool-replacement planning.

The sustainability domain recognizes that construction and building services have environmental, social, and economic effects. Green-building scholarship has documented the need to integrate environmental performance with broader social and economic considerations (Zuo & Zhao, 2014). For small service providers, sustainability can be translated into practical behaviors: reducing unnecessary travel, purchasing appropriate material quantities, repairing rather than prematurely replacing durable items, recycling or donating usable materials, choosing energy-saving improvements, and explaining affordable options to customers. This approach avoids presenting sustainability as an abstract or luxury concept and instead connects it to waste reduction, customer value, and operational efficiency.

Digital and AI literacy have become increasingly relevant to service work. AI tools can assist with templates, checklists, scheduling, marketing drafts, and information organization, but they can also produce inaccurate estimates, unsafe instructions, privacy risks, and overconfident recommendations. Abioye et al. (2021) identified opportunities for AI in construction while emphasizing adoption challenges and the need to address risk, data, and implementation concerns. S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. teaches that AI-generated content must be reviewed, that sensitive customer information should not be entered unnecessarily into public systems, and that AI should not independently determine technical safety, legal compliance, pricing, or scope commitments.

Finally, the credential is situated within the growing microcredential landscape. Microcredentials can support rapid upskilling and more flexible learning pathways, but employer recognition is uneven and depends on issuer credibility, assessment rigor, transparency, and alignment with meaningful competencies (Varadarajan et al., 2023). Quality-assurance scholarship recommends clear governance, learning outcomes, evidence, assessment criteria, and verification mechanisms rather than relying on the appearance of a digital badge alone (Sullivan, 2025). These considerations are central to the distinction between a marketable completion certificate and a credential that other organizations can confidently interpret.

3. Program Development and Curriculum Architecture

The S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. curriculum was developed as an applied professional-readiness program rather than a trade-school substitute. Earth Care's internal master reference catalog organizes learning resources across sustainable contracting, AI and technology, customer service, conflict resolution, punctuality, time management, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, safety, communication, professionalism, soft skills, corporate social responsibility, client psychology, stress management, ethics, and transparency (Earth Care Rent A Tech, 2026a). A document audit of the catalog identified 104 linked resources. The list includes public agencies, professional organizations, business-development organizations, educational providers, industry publications, and scholarly sources. This breadth supports continued learning, but the program's academic development should increasingly prioritize primary, peer-reviewed, and official sources when revising core lessons.

The question bank contains 240 potential questions associated with lessons in the course (Earth Care Rent A Tech, 2026b). The bank evolved from a company-procedure test into a broader set of factual, applied, and scenario-based prompts. Questions address Earth Care work-order procedures, hazard recognition, customer communication, ethics, confidentiality, financial calculations, project documentation, estimating, AI use, sustainability, interviewing, workforce resources, goal setting, and professional business tools. Many prompts require the learner to explain an action and its rationale rather than recite a definition.

For conceptual clarity, the curriculum can be organized into seven domains. Table 1 summarizes each domain, its intended learning outcomes, and examples of assessment content. The domains are not intended to establish technical trade competence. Instead, they define professional behaviors and knowledge that can support safer and more reliable participation in service work, employment, entrepreneurship, and further training.

The program-design review used curriculum mapping rather than treating the existing question bank as the curriculum itself. Each question was considered in relation to the lesson concept it was intended to sample, the behavior or judgment represented by a successful response, and the intended use of the resulting score. This distinction is important because a large item bank can create an appearance of rigor while still producing uneven assessments if questions are duplicated, overly dependent on company trivia, or disconnected from stated learning outcomes. Mapping items to domains allows the organization to identify content gaps, eliminate redundancy, and separate transferable professional-readiness knowledge from company-specific operating procedures.

The resulting architecture is modular. The transferable core addresses safety awareness, ethics, communication, financial and business reasoning, sustainability, and modern work readiness. Earth Care operating procedures form an organization-specific application module. This structure preserves the practical needs of platform onboarding while making it possible to develop a future employer edition in which another organization could substitute its own operating procedures without changing the common professional-readiness core. Modularization also clarifies what evidence a certificate represents: completion of the common curriculum, successful performance on the associated assessment, and when applicable completion of a separately identified organizational module.

Table 1: S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. Curriculum Domains and Intended Outcomes

Domain	Intended outcomes	Illustrative content
Earth Care procedures	Understand work-order workflows, documentation, check-in/check-out, support escalation, approval, and opportunity distinctions.	Scope changes, sign-off records, tool approval, third-party listings, platform support.
Safety and risk prevention	Recognize hazards, stop unsafe work, prioritize life safety, document incidents, and respect qualification limits.	Gas odor, damaged ladder, live electrical work, broken tools, structural concerns.
Professionalism and ethics	Demonstrate honesty, confidentiality, fair treatment, accountability, and professional boundaries.	Property damage, client privacy, consistent pricing, admitting limitations, avoiding unnecessary upselling.
Customer communication	Clarify scope, set expectations, communicate delays, obtain approval, and de-escalate disputes.	Unclear requests, additional work, scheduling updates, customer anxiety, written communication.
Business and financial literacy	Distinguish revenue from profit, track expenses, price responsibly, reserve funds, and use professional documents.	Net-income calculations, estimates, invoices, revisions, travel costs, tool-replacement funds.
Sustainability	Apply practical waste-reduction, efficiency, reuse, disposal, and customer-education principles.	Material planning, recycling, durable repairs, energy-saving upgrades, reduced travel.
Modern work and career readiness	Use AI responsibly, present experience honestly, plan measurable goals, and locate workforce resources.	AI privacy, interviews, apprenticeships, action plans, professional profiles, workforce centers.

The domains describe professional-readiness knowledge and behaviors; they do not verify occupational licensure or hands-on technical competence.

4. Assessment Architecture

The original study guide placed disproportionate emphasis on Earth Care procedures. That approach risked communicating that S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. was only an internal platform test even though most of the updated curriculum addressed transferable competencies. The redesigned assessment uses structured randomization: applicants are asked 10 oral questions selected from a 240-item bank, but the questions are drawn according to a fixed content blueprint rather than unrestricted randomness.

Under the proposed blueprint, three questions assess Earth Care procedures, two assess safety and risk prevention, and one question is drawn from each of five additional categories: professionalism and ethics, customer communication, business and financial literacy, sustainability, and professional growth or modern work readiness. Table 2 shows the distribution. This structure allows test forms to vary while preserving comparable domain coverage. It also gives applicants a transparent description of what to study without disclosing the full operational answer key.

The use of oral and scenario-based questions is consistent with authentic-assessment principles. Authentic assessments should resemble the decisions and performance conditions learners are likely to encounter in practice (Gulikers et al., 2004). Scenario-based assessment can develop professional communication and situated judgment because learners respond to realistic tasks rather than isolated facts (Nickerson & Davidson, 2024). Oral assessment can also require learners to articulate understanding in their own words, although careful planning is necessary to support validity, reliability, and fairness (Akimov & Malin, 2020). Research on oral assessment highlights the value of practice opportunities, feedback, and clear expectations (Stephenson et al., 2025).

The phone assessment is closed-note and is intended to confirm course understanding, not technical mastery. Learners may answer in their own words, but the response must include the required principle and action. For example, a safe answer to a damaged-ladder scenario should communicate refusal to use unsafe equipment and selection of a safe alternative; exact memorization should not be required. By contrast, an answer that accepts the customer's assurance that the ladder is safe should not pass because it contradicts the safety objective.

A 10-question test is defensible as a focused course knowledge check when it is one component of a larger onboarding process and when structured sampling guarantees coverage of core domains. It should not be described as a comprehensive measurement of technical competence. The American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education (2014) emphasize that score interpretations must be supported for their intended uses and that fairness and workplace credentialing require explicit attention. The intended interpretation of a S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. pass is therefore limited: the participant completed the assigned training and demonstrated acceptable understanding of selected professional-readiness concepts.

To strengthen reliability, the program should maintain an examiner rubric for every question. Each rubric should identify required concepts, acceptable alternative wording, critical errors, permitted clarifying prompts, and the conditions for passing or retesting. Examiners should record the questions administered, the participant's result, the assessment version, and any clarification used. Safety-critical questions should contain nonnegotiable elements. For instance, an applicant should not pass a gas-leak question if the answer involves continuing work or operating switches in the affected area.

Fairness also requires attention to language, disability, anxiety, and examiner effects. Oral testing can disadvantage individuals who understand the content but require additional processing time or communication accommodations. The program should publish reasonable accommodation procedures, train examiners not to reward accent or rhetorical confidence over content, and use neutral prompts consistently. The study guide should explain the category distribution, provide sample scenarios, and encourage practice without revealing the actual answer key. These safeguards support the ethical use of the assessment while preserving its purpose.

Transparency should be balanced with assessment security. Applicants can be told the number of potential questions, the fixed category distribution, the learning outcomes, the closed-note rule, the retesting process, and examples of the level of reasoning expected. They do not need public access to the complete operational bank or scoring key. This approach reduces the likelihood that success reflects memorization of a leaked answer list while giving learners a reasonable opportunity to prepare. It also supports a more defensible interpretation of a pass because every candidate knows what competencies will be sampled and every test form follows the same blueprint.

Table 2: Structured Random Assessment Blueprint

Assessment category	Questions	Primary focus
Earth Care procedures	3	Platform workflow and internal operating knowledge
Safety and risk prevention	2	Hazard recognition, emergency response, and safe judgment
Professionalism and ethics	1	Honesty, confidentiality, accountability, and boundaries
Customer communication	1	Scope clarity, expectations, updates, and de-escalation
Business and financial literacy	1	Profit awareness, estimating, documentation, and planning
Sustainability	1	Waste reduction, efficient practices, and responsible options
Professional growth or modern work readiness	1	AI literacy, employability, resources, and career planning
Total	10	Structured random form from the 240-item bank

Questions are selected at random within categories from the 240-item bank. The blueprint is intended to preserve consistent content coverage across test forms.

5. Credential Boundaries, Verification, and External Use

A central ethical requirement is clarity about what the credential does and does not represent. S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. should be marketed as a private professional-readiness certification or microcredential. It may indicate completion of training and successful performance on a knowledge assessment. It should not imply state licensure, occupational authorization, trade mastery, background clearance, drug-screen completion, equipment verification, or identity verification unless those elements were separately completed and documented for the individual holder.

This distinction does not reduce the credential's value. Employers and contractor networks frequently need workers who can communicate, document, act ethically, recognize hazards, use digital tools responsibly, and understand basic business practices. A professional-readiness credential can provide a structured introduction to those expectations. However, outside organizations will assign value only when the credential is transparent and verifiable. Microcredential research consistently identifies quality assurance, recognizable evidence, and stakeholder alignment as central challenges (Sullivan, 2025; Varadarajan et al., 2023).

Each issued certificate should therefore include the participant's name, a unique credential number, completion date, curriculum version, assessment version, issuing organization, and a verification link or QR code. A public verification page should display the credential status and competencies covered without disclosing private screening information. The certificate should contain a limitation statement such as: 'This credential verifies completion of S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. professional-readiness training and successful completion of its knowledge assessment. It does not verify occupational licensing, hands-on technical proficiency, or authorization to perform regulated work.'

For external adoption, Earth Care should create a general employer edition that replaces the three company-specific questions with general worksite operations, documentation, authorization, scheduling, and incident-reporting content. A co-branded version could then add an employer's operating procedures as a separate module. This modular structure would preserve the core professional-readiness credential while allowing organizations to customize platform-specific expectations.

Employer recognition should be developed through pilot partnerships rather than promotional claims. Small maintenance companies, staffing organizations, workforce nonprofits, pre-apprenticeship programs, property-management networks, and contractor platforms may be appropriate pilot settings. Participating organizations could review the learning outcomes, recommend revisions, and report whether the credential provides useful information during onboarding or hiring. Such evidence would be more persuasive than asserting broad recognition before external validation occurs.

6. Limitations and Research Agenda

This is a program description at present and does not demonstrate effectiveness. No comparison group, pretest-posttest analysis, longitudinal employment data, customer outcomes, incident reports, or independent employer evaluations are provided. The fact that the author appears to have a direct affiliation with the organization that issued the document is a potential COI that should be revealed for any submission. The limitations outlined in the above paragraph do not support claims in this article that S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. causes "higher earnings, higher quality of workmanship, fewer injuries, more jobs, and greater customer satisfaction".

The broad spread of the curriculum is both a boon and a curse. Covering safety, ethics, communication, finance, sustainability, AI, employability and company procedure ensures the program appeals to a broad range of contractor options, but at the same time, a two hour program is not sufficient time to get a good grasp on any of the subjects. Program could be better described as introductory, sign posting the candidate to further training, licensing, apprenticeships and official safety documents.

The 240-item bank will need to be regularly maintained through systematic review. Items should be aligned with learning objectives, evaluated for appropriate difficulty, proofed for language clarity and redundancy, flagged for company policy changes, checked for risk management issues such as unsafe or absolutes in valid answer choices, and combined if duplicates are found. Basic trivia about the company while is not entirely irrelevant (e.g., 1891, the founding date, not especially important for professional-readiness). Any items about the emergency response, financial calculations, confidentiality, or technical parameters should be submitted for expert review.

A series of further studies should be conducted. First, inter-rater reliability should be established by having trained raters independently score a tape recorder or transcription of responses by using the same scoring guide. Second, internal consistency and domain coverage should be tested with several forms of the test generated at random. Third, pretest-posttest have to measure if skills in safety judgment, fiscal prudence, communication skills and ethics are increased among study participants. Fourth, transfer of skills to work, interviewing and business should be established. Fifth, cross-employer studies should be conducted to determine whether the credential is institutionally recognized and valued in employment and orientation decisions.

Investigate equity as well. Investigate completion rates and pass rates by category, language, disabilities, previous work experience etc. If oral examination systematically yields different results that are not due to knowledge of the course then the design should be changed. Different assessment channels may be constructed but they should be equal in terms of fairness and have comparable validity.

Finally, the credentialing process should be institutionalized. There should be an approval process for changes, version control, incident review process, and documentation of changes. External advisors who are in the fields of workforce development, occupational safety, small-business education, and contractor operations might add further validity to the program. Different topics should have different renewal frequencies (e.g., renewal every year for dynamic content like AI and digital security, every 3 years for core content).

7. Discussion

The conclusions reported in this article have enabled a broader interpretive lens of professional readiness than what is often evident in contractor onboarding. Independent contractors and residential service professionals are increasingly being called upon to blend technical expertise and judgment in the areas of safety, customer relationships, moral judgment, finances, and computer-mediated communication. However, positive reports have shown that workforce development has difficulty in connecting these skills into logical credentialing instruments. Employability has been argued to be a multidimensional construct that includes one's professional orientation, career identity, fit, and relevant social/human capital instead of the skill set (Fugate et al., 2004). Likewise, employer-centered research findings support the fact that communication, integrity, responsibility, professionalism, flexibility, and work ethic regularly are given the same importance as technical ability in determining workplace success (Robles, 2012). The S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. paradigm was conceptualized on this epistemological point of view, thus placing professional preparedness within a plurality of synergistic fields of knowledge rather than treating technical orientation as the sole goal of onboarding.

The curriculum proposed also aligns with the broader trends occurring in workforce education and micro-credentialing. The evidence steadily demonstrates that micro-credentials are being used as a way to quickly develop skills, support lifelong learning opportunities, and acknowledge workplace proficiency, especially in labor markets demanding specific and expedient training needs (Varadarajan et al., 2023). At the same time, research also consistently identifies variance in quality (e.g., standards, assessment design), misleading competency definitions, lack of employer currency, and a failure to provide evidence of learning when establishing micro-credentials as critical challenges to its credibility (Varadarajan et al., 2023). More recently, Sullivan (2025) argued that the promise of micro-credentials over time hinges upon not only assuring the curriculum but also transparent institutional governance, clearly and publicly displayed learning objectives, documented assessment of competences, institutional oversight, and publicly available evidence of achievement. These highlights emphasize the need to develop professional-readiness credentials which articulate what learners know, how their knowledge was assessed, and the scope of the claims that the credential makes.

In this regard, S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. offers an established framework which clearly separates portable "workforce-ready" skills and knowledge from organization-specific operating procedures. Instead of equating company orientation to workforce readiness, the curriculum differentiates knowledge that can be potentially utilized across various jobs including hazard identification, ethical responsibilities, customer communication, financial reasoning, sustainability, and appropriate digital use from procedures unique to a particular entity. This distinction has implications for credential transparency because it enables employers, learners, and workforce agencies to identify which workforce skills and knowledge are portable vs. organization-specific. This should be helpful to the emerging literature which stipulates that microcredentials should clearly demonstrate how the learner achieved competency while also communicating enough information about the credential to be interpretable by third parties (e.g., employer, other credentialing agencies, etc.), (Varadarajan et al., 2023; Sullivan, 2025).

8. Conclusion

S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. represents an effort to move contractor onboarding beyond platform navigation and toward broader professional readiness. Its curriculum addresses the safety, ethical, communicative, financial, environmental, digital, and career-development demands that independent contractors and service professionals face. The structured 10-question oral assessment, drawn from a 240-item bank according to a fixed domain blueprint, can provide a focused and transparent knowledge check when supported by standardized rubrics and fair administration.

As currently designed, the credential's most defensible claim is that a participant completed professional-readiness training and demonstrated understanding of selected course concepts. That claim can be meaningful to workers and organizations without overstating technical qualification. External market value will depend on continued quality assurance, certificate verification, independent review, employer partnerships, and empirical evaluation. With those safeguards, S.A.F.E.T.E.C.H. could develop from an internal onboarding certificate into a credible, portable microcredential for service-sector and contractor workforce development.

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