

**Sole Source  
Written Determination**

**Agency Identification:** SC Department of Education

**Description of the agency need that this procurement fulfills:** *(See instructions on last page for guidance)*

South Carolina is at a pivotal moment in its effort to modernize career pathways and credentialing systems to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving workforce. The Department of Education has already laid foundational work through the Palmetto Pathways credentialing system and the tiered credential model approved by the Education Oversight Committee. However, to fully realize the potential of these systems, the state requires a coordinated, cross-sector strategy that brings together education, industry, and government stakeholders to define high-value credentials, expand dual enrollment access, and ensure alignment with emerging labor market needs. This effort must be both policy-driven and operationally grounded, with clear deliverables that support implementation across diverse regions and populations.

In parallel, SCDE is leading the South Carolina Pathways Project (SCPP), a federally funded initiative focused on transition planning and work-based learning for students with disabilities. While this project has made significant strides in pilot districts, there is a critical need to scale its principles statewide and broaden its scope to include advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and technology sectors. The department requires expert facilitation, policy analysis, and stakeholder engagement to build a comprehensive framework that integrates existing efforts, identifies gaps, and produces actionable recommendations. This work must be completed within a compressed timeline and in close coordination with SCDE's credentialing, accountability, and workforce development teams to ensure continuity, audit-readiness, and long-term sustainability.

**Describe the Market Based on Research Performed:** *(See instructions on last page for guidance)*

SCDE staff conducted a review of organizations engaged in career pathways and workforce development policy. Several national and regional entities provide related services, including policy research centers, education associations, and workforce intermediaries. Many of these groups focus broadly on education reform or workforce training but do not offer targeted expertise in both credentialing frameworks and cross-sector career pathway development.

As part of this review, the agency examined the work of ExcelinEd through publicly available resources and publications. ExcelinEd's "Pathways Matter" initiative is one of the few national efforts that integrates policy analysis, credentialing strategies, and state-specific implementation supports. Their work emphasizes aligning secondary and postsecondary pathways with labor market priorities and incorporates both education and workforce perspectives. This positions them uniquely within the market to support South Carolina's current efforts to modernize career pathways, expand credential portability, and strengthen connections between education and industry.

While other organizations provide valuable general research or technical assistance, none were identified with a track record of directly supporting states in the design and implementation of statewide career pathway systems that include credential validation, dual enrollment expansion, and alignment to accountability frameworks.

**Sole Source Vendor Name:** ExcelinEd

**Sole Source  
Written Determination**

**Based upon the following determination, Agency proposes to acquire the supplies, construction, information technology, and/or services described herein from the vendor named above per SC Code Ann § 11-35-1560 and SC Regulation 19-445.2105, Sole Source Procurement.**

**Description of supplies, construction, information technology, and/or services vendor will provide under the contract:** *(See instructions on last page for guidance.)*

The services being acquired involve the facilitation of a statewide working group focused on strengthening college and career pathways in South Carolina. This includes planning and convening six meetings—five virtual and one in-person—comprised of stakeholders from K–12, postsecondary institutions, workforce development agencies, and industry leaders in sectors such as healthcare and advanced manufacturing. The engagement includes development of meeting materials, coordination with subject-matter experts, and synthesis of evidence-based recommendations tailored to South Carolina’s credentialing and workforce priorities. The working group will produce a formal report outlining short- and long-term policy recommendations, with one concrete legislative proposal prepared for consideration in the 2026 session. The scope also includes project management support, stakeholder outreach, and alignment with existing initiatives such as Palmetto Pathways and the tiered credentialing system.

**Explain why the described solution is the only solution that meets the agency’s need and how no other identified solutions were sufficient.** *(See instructions on last page for guidance)*

The South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) seeks to engage ExcelinEd in support of the South Carolina Pathways Working Group initiative. Through its Pathways Matter framework, ExcelinEd provides an integrated approach to policy analysis, stakeholder facilitation, and credentialing strategy that directly complements SCDE’s existing systems, including the Palmetto Pathways credentialing platform and the tiered credential model approved by the Education Oversight Committee. Market research did not identify any other organization with the demonstrated capacity to deliver this level of alignment to South Carolina’s credentialing architecture or the ability to tailor recommendations to the state’s specific regulatory and workforce context.

In addition, ExcelinEd’s scope of work builds upon SCDE’s ongoing efforts under the federally funded South Carolina Pathways Project (SCPP). While the SCPP has advanced transition planning and work-based learning for students with disabilities in pilot districts, ExcelinEd’s engagement would enable expansion of this work statewide and across critical sectors such as advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and technology. Their ability to convene and facilitate a cross-sector working group and to synthesize actionable, state-specific policy recommendations directly supports SCDE’s strategic goals for dual enrollment expansion, CTE modernization, and credential portability.

ExcelinEd offers a proprietary framework—Pathways Matter—that is uniquely suited to the current needs of SCDE. Their methodology integrates policy analysis, stakeholder facilitation, and credentialing strategy in a manner that directly complements SCDE’s existing infrastructure, including the Palmetto Pathways credentialing system and the tiered credential model approved by the Education Oversight Committee. No alternative vendor was identified with the proprietary tools, engagement model, and policy expertise necessary to achieve these outcomes. ExcelinEd’s involvement ensures continuity with SCDE’s existing procedures—such as credential validation, career pathway mapping, and alignment with Perkins V and ESSA accountability frameworks—while avoiding delays or disruptions that would result from engaging a provider without comparable

**Sole Source  
Written Determination**

experience. For these reasons, ExcelinEd is the only vendor capable of meeting the agency's needs for this initiative.

*Note: Determination is not complete without required signatures and dates*

**Required Signatures:**

**Prepared by:** Kayce Cook

**Date:** 9-26-2025

**Printed Name:** Enter Name of Preparer

**Title:** Enter Title of Preparer

**Approved by:** 

**Approval Date:** 10/13/25

**Printed Name:** Enter Authorized Approver Name

**Title:** Enter Authorized Approver Title

*The last page contains instructions and is not required to be retained.*

Ellen E. Weaver

SC Superintendent of Education