



Core Competencies for Certification Professionals

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These competencies are general descriptions of the behavior or actions needed to successfully perform the certification function. This document represents the broad certification landscape, not any one particular role. There are many roles within the certification function and the particular mix of competencies needed by role will vary.

In addition, these competencies focus primarily on competencies that are unique to the certification function. Association professionals should also refer to the Certified Association Executive Content Outline for broad association management competencies which are also important for success.

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I. PLANNING CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

A. Research and Analysis

1. Identify the need to conduct research to inform certification business decisions or standards development, including but not limited to:
 - a. considering all the credentialing options before determining if certification is the appropriate strategy
 - b. identifying the market potential for and viability of a certification program or related products or services
 - c. identifying regulatory bodies and regulations that may impact the program
 - d. identifying characteristics of prospective certificants or other stakeholders
 - e. assuring a valid, reliable and legally defensible certification program
 - f. assuring the ongoing viability of existing certification programs or related products or services
2. Define the research question / intent (needs assessment, environmental scan, awareness, image, satisfaction, feasibility, competitive analysis, segmentation, job analysis, outcomes evaluation, etc.)
3. Select and implement appropriate research design, methods and instruments
4. Ensure cross-functional team involvement, as appropriate
5. Develop a system to track research data
6. Analyze the data in an unbiased manner
7. Report data in a way that supports decision-making
8. Use the information gained to set priorities, change existing and create new programs, products, and services to accomplish association and certification-specific strategic priorities and business plan

Knowledge Needed:

- Research questions related to certification planning
- Research types
- Research methods and instruments available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Data tracking systems available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Data analysis
- Data reporting

B. Strategy Development

1. Identify department/program strategic priorities that support the certification program's purpose and goals, based on market research, internal data and experience and input from the certification target audience, members, staff, and other stakeholders
2. Develop clear and measurable performance indicators for each strategic priority

3. Develop an implementation plan (tasks required to accomplish the strategic priorities and responsible parties and deadlines)
4. Establish and implement mechanisms to monitor plan progress and outcomes

Knowledge needed:

- Organization's mission/purpose and strategy (if the certifying body is part of a parent organization)
- Available relevant research and internal data
- Program stakeholders
- Elements of a strategy / strategic plan
- Mechanisms to monitor progress in accomplishing plan

C. Business Planning

1. Evaluate data from a variety of sources (market research, needs assessment, trend monitoring, benchmarking, evaluations) to inform certification business planning
2. Determine expectations for business profitability and sustainability (examples: support and funding, resources, expected break-even, return on investments, return on assets)
3. Develop a business plan for new and existing certification programs, including:
 - a. Identifying certification body's business goals and objectives, and strategies and tactics for achieving these
 - b. Developing clear and measurable performance indicators for each business plan objective
 - c. Developing an implementation plan, including tasks required to accomplish plan and responsible parties and deadlines
 - d. Establishing and implementing mechanisms to monitor plan progress and outcomes

Knowledge needed:

- Organization's (and/or certification unit's) strategic priorities
- Available market research and internal data
- Relevant stakeholders
- Elements of a business plan (financial projections, breakeven points and total costs, etc.)
- Mechanisms to monitor plan progress

D. Certification Program Design

1. Identify program target audience
 - a. Based on the purpose of and goals for certification
 - b. Utilizing data from a variety of sources
2. Identify and validate the content of the assessment through job/practice analysis research
 - a. Involving key stakeholders
 - b. Using subject matter experts appropriately guided by testing experts
 - c. Using industry-accepted practices/methodologies

3. Identify the certification eligibility requirements, maintenance requirements (if applicable) and recertification requirements
 - a. Consistent with the program purpose and goals and with the certification target audience characteristics
 - b. Involving key stakeholders
 - c. Based on data and a sound rationale
4. Identify the certification's test specifications
5. Design the certification program's disciplinary system
6. Publish relevant program and assessment design information and components

Knowledge Needed

- Certification industry standards*
- Data available (such as job or practice analysis, market research, needs assessment, trend monitoring, benchmarking industry competencies, etc.) to inform certification program design
- Key stakeholders of the certification program
- Principles integral to certification design, including transparency, consensus, and balance
- Job/practice analysis methods available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Components of test specifications
- Eligibility requirements available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Recertification methods available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Options related to domestic versus international markets and the strengths and limitations of each

* *Key Certification Industry Standards*

- *ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024: General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons* (2003) American National Standards Institute (ANSI), Washington, DC.
- *Development, Administration, Scoring and Reporting of Credentialing Examinations* (2004), Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR), Lexington, KY.
- *Principles of Fairness: An Examining Guide for Credentialing Bodies* (2002), National Organization for Competency Assurance and Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation, Lexington KY.
- *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs* (2002) National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the National Organization for Competency Assurance, Washington, DC.
- *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1999) of the American Educational Research Organization, American Psychological Organization and the National Council on Measurement in Education.
- *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (1978), Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Civil Service Commission, U.S. Department of Labor, and U.S. Department of Justice.

E. International Expansion Considerations

1. Assess the need for, purpose of, viability of and risk of international expansion of your certification program
2. Assess the availability of and access to the necessary infrastructure and resources in the countries / regions you target
3. Assess the implications of international expansion to test delivery options
4. Assess the language / translation options and impact to the integrity of the certification program
5. Assess cultural considerations and impact to your certification program
6. Consider the impact of international expansion to your existing program
7. Determine if you need and/or desire recognition from the accrediting body (of certification systems) in the country or countries you are exploring.

Knowledge Needed:

- Global practices, cultural approaches and customs as they relate to certification
- Global certification standards, such as *ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024: General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons (2003)*
- Global accreditation system for certifying bodies (i.e., International Accreditation Forum)
- International laws as they apply to certification
- International credentialing options, including delivering a domestic program internationally, customizing an existing program for a particular region, or creating a truly global program

II. DEVELOPMENT, DELIVERY AND MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

A. Development of Certification Policies, Procedures and Collateral Materials

1. Develop fair and equitable policies and procedures to support the critical areas of certification programs (governance, program administration and management, test development and administration, eligibility, recertification, complaints and discipline, suspension and revocation, rights of candidates, records and document control, information about candidates, compliance with applicable laws and regulations, scope expansion or reduction)
2. Develop collateral materials needed to support the certification program (information available to public, information available to applicants and candidates, general promotional and marketing materials/ website)

Knowledge Needed

- Stakeholder needs
- Certification industry standards
- Usual certification policies and procedures
- Usual certification collateral materials
- Legal implications and risk management strategies

B. Assessment Tool Development and Maintenance

1. Develop the certification assessment(s) that are valid, reliable and legally defensible
 - a. Using subject matter experts appropriately guided by testing experts
 - b. According to the assessment specifications
2. Establish the passing score
 - a. Using subject matter experts appropriately guided by testing experts
 - b. Using industry-accepted practices/methodologies
3. Establish and implement test question and overall test performance monitoring / quality assurance measures
 - a. Using subject matter experts appropriately guided by testing experts
 - b. Using industry-accepted practices/methodologies

Knowledge Needed

- Certification industry standards
- Selection of qualified testing experts appropriate to the type of assessment administered
- Passing score methodologies and the strengths and limitations of each
- Equating methodologies and the strengths and limitations of each
- Test performance monitoring techniques and the strengths and limitations of each
- Legal implications and risk management strategies

C. Delivery of Certification

1. Identify and implement appropriate delivery methods for specific program elements (such as assessments, recertification requirements)
 - a. Considering the cost, customer service and accessibility for the candidates
2. Identify appropriate security measures for delivery of assessments
3. Develop and implement orientation, training, and continuous improvement guidance for proctors and examiners, as applicable
4. Establish and manage site coordination and logistics
5. Establish and manage proctor and examiner coordination and logistics, as applicable
6. Consider environmental sustainability and implications in program delivery

Knowledge Needed

- Certification industry standards
- Delivery methods available and the strengths and limitations of each (paper and pencil-based, computer-based, web-based, performance-based, etc.)
- Extent to which your target audience has reasonable access to the delivery vehicles being considered
- Sustainability options and the strengths and limitations of each

D. Assessment Scoring and Score Reporting

1. Conduct examination performance analysis and key/rubric verification
 - a. Using subject matter experts appropriately guided by testing experts
 - b. Using industry-accepted practices/methodologies
2. Score examinations
 - a. Using industry-accepted practices/methodologies
3. Report scores, pass/fail results and appropriate information to candidates
4. Implement equating methodologies, if appropriate, to ensure comparability of exam form difficulty
5. Generate a technical report of exam development and administration activities and data

Knowledge Needed

- Certification industry standards
- Score reporting options and the strengths and limitations of each (examples: scaled scores, raw scores, performance by content areas of the exam)
- Equating methodologies and the strengths and limitations of each
- Test performance monitoring techniques and the strengths and limitations of each
- Elements of a technical report

- Confidentiality and privacy issues related to candidate information
- Legal implications and risk management strategies

III. RISK MANAGEMENT IN CERTIFICATION

1. Develop and implement program policies, processes and procedures that minimize the organization's risks of legal liability
2. Consult with legal counsel having expertise in certification to assure that internal and external program processes and procedures are legally defensible
3. Monitor and ensure compliance with applicable codes, laws and regulations
4. Develop and implement contracts and agreements to govern relationships with vendors and others, within your authority
5. Take action to ensure intellectual property (tests, test questions, etc.) is protected
6. If developing a certification mark, consult with patent and trademark attorney
7. Document program development and operational processes and procedures
8. Maintain appropriate insurance coverage
9. Maintain required documents (articles of incorporation, bylaws, contracts, minutes, etc.)

Knowledge Needed:

- Legal issues associated with the development and implementation of certification activities
- Levels of contract/agreement authority within the organization
- Scope of services required and responsibilities for service delivery
- Essential elements of contracts and agreements
- Intellectual property protection
- Risk management strategies
- Insurance options and needs

IV. MARKETING CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

1. Define the scope of the market and identify target segments and key stakeholder groups in building participation in certification programs
2. Identify unique value proposition, preferred positioning and distinctive brand for certification programs products and services
3. Consider data and experience gained from market research, needs assessment, trends monitoring, benchmarking, evaluations and strategic planning
4. Develop and implement a marketing plan(s) to support the identified positioning and branding and promote certification programs, products and services
5. Identify tasks required to accomplish marketing plan and assign responsible parties and deadlines
6. Establish and implement mechanisms to monitor plan progress and outcomes
7. Develop a tracking system of the marketing data
8. Analyze the marketing data in an unbiased manner
9. Report data in a way that supports decision-making
10. Use the information gained to set priorities, improve existing, and create new programs, products and services

Knowledge Needed:

- Components of a marketing plan
- Marketing strategies and vehicles available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Market segmentation
- Unique requirements for positioning
- Diversity of the target audience and perceived barriers to participation
- Branding
- Tracking systems available
- Marketing impact report

V. EVALUATION OF CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

1. Incorporate the objectives identified in the design phase for the evaluation of certification program products or services
2. Develop and implement evaluation plan(s) using an appropriate evaluation methodology and vehicles
3. Identify tasks required to accomplish the evaluation plan and assign responsible parties and deadlines
4. Establish and implement mechanisms to monitor plan progress and outcomes
5. Develop a tracking system of evaluation data
6. Identify and track benchmarks (examples: candidate demographics, revenue, program evaluation)
7. Analyze the evaluation data in an unbiased manner
8. Report data in a way that supports decision-making
9. Use the information gained to set priorities, improve existing, and create new programs, products and services

Knowledge Needed:

- Various evaluation methodologies available and the strengths and limitations of each
- Continuous quality improvement systems and practices (e.g., management systems, internal audits, etc.)
- Tracking systems available
- Benchmarks

VI. TECHNOLOGY IN CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

1. Continually monitor the market for emerging technology options
2. Evaluate the extent to which available technology options meet the requirements of the certifying body and certification program and meet stakeholder needs
3. Include selected technology options in the business plan and budget, as appropriate
4. Decide whether to in-source or out-source selected technology options
5. Implement, as appropriate, technology-based options for the certification program
6. Keep current on and conform to, as appropriate, new and changing technology standards relevant to test development, test administration, and documentation requirements for eligibility and recertification/renewal

Knowledge Needed:

- Technology-enabled options for job analysis, exam development, marketing, application submission, test delivery, candidate and certificant tracking, product sales tracking, and the strengths and limitations of each
- Confidentiality and security requirements for certification data
- Implications and pros and cons of in-sourcing and out-sourcing
- Potential vendors
- Target audience access to and capacity to work with the technologies being considered
- Technology standards as they relate to certification (Americans with Disabilities, SCORM, IMS, QTI as examples)

VII. RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN THE CERTIFICATION FUNCTION

A. Interpersonal Relationships

1. Establish honest, transparent, respectful and caring relationships with staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders
2. Proactively address conflict and disagreement to productively resolve differences
3. Ensure that diverse perspectives are appreciated and included
4. Protect the confidentiality and privacy of candidates and certificants

Knowledge Needed:

- Conflict resolution
- Effective communication
- Group dynamics
- Confidentiality and privacy

B. Organizational Leadership

1. Provide informed consultation to association staff and volunteer leadership on matters related to certification, within the scope of your authority
2. Communicate certification purpose, goals, products, and services to staff, leaders, and other stakeholders
3. Advocate for new certification or related programs, as needed
4. Recommend and/or take actions based on decisions made in the best interests of the organization and certification program stakeholders

Knowledge Needed:

- Communication strategies
- Organizational skills

C. Strategic Partnerships

1. Identify and target appropriate and potentially effective partnerships in support of the certification program's strategy and business plan
2. Develop and/or implement a system to consider and prioritize possible partnerships, assuring there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest, and protecting the integrity of the certification program and its processes
3. Collaborate with potential partners to establish mutual goals, determine relative strengths and weaknesses,
4. Determine and document the relative responsibilities of each partner, timelines, and financial arrangements

5. Seek legal counsel before finalizing partnership details/agreement/relationship
6. Monitor the effectiveness of partnerships and determine whether to continue, adjust or end the agreement, as necessary

Knowledge Needed:

- Association policies and procedures regarding strategic partnerships
- Mission and vision of association
- Mission and vision of potential partners
- Conflicts of interest

VIII. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE CERTIFICATION FUNCTION

A. Staffing

1. Determine and maintain appropriate staff size and composition to accomplish certification program purposes and goals
2. Ensure separation of education and certification staff functions
3. Develop and keep current staff position descriptions
4. Orient new staff to the field, mission, program purposes and goals, unique requirements of certification personnel and position description
5. Train personnel to specific role/position responsibilities (initial and ongoing)
6. Establish and implement procedures for reviewing the performance of personnel (internal and consultants)
7. Encourage and support staff participation in professional development activities
8. Periodically define and communicate staff goals and expectations
9. Determine need for external consultation/vendor services
10. Manage relationships between staff and consultant/vendor partners
11. Consider and manage the diversity of an evolving work environment and workforce (examples: virtual offices, telecommuting, use of consultants, staff travel, staff of differing generations)

Knowledge Needed:

- Applicable employment laws
- Training and professional development opportunities
- Type of consultative vendor services available and required
- Requests for proposals and selection processes

B. Program and Department Administration

1. Develop the certification program governance system that maintains impartiality and objectivity in all matters related to certification to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all persons involved in certification
2. Develop and/or implement systems, policies, and procedures for administering programs, products, and services, including:
 - Candidate processing
 - Certificant tracking
 - Volunteer management
 - Consultant, vendor and sponsor management
 - Marketing

- Candidate and certificant communications
- 3. Plan, coordinate and manage meetings of volunteer leadership, staff, consultants/vendors, strategic partners to accomplish program purpose and goals
- 4. Review programs, products, and services periodically for appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, cost and return on investment (ROI)
- 5. Conduct ongoing review of governance documents to ensure currency and appropriateness
- 6. Utilize resources efficiently and creatively to meet certificant and other stakeholder needs

Knowledge Needed:

- Certification industry standards
- Appropriate relationship between certification governance and parent association (examples: autonomy, independent decision-making in all matters related to certification)
- Meetings management
- Robert's Rules or other meeting guide
- Data analysis

C. Financial Management

1. Develop, recommend, implement, review and manage budgets for certification activities
2. Implement appropriate financial controls (balance sheets, income/expense statements, audits)
3. Develop and implement metrics and tools to monitor and manage financial performance
4. Develop and implement procedures including:
 - committee and subject matter expert fees and reimbursements
 - soliciting and managing sponsorships for certification activities, if appropriate
 - consultant/vendor selection and contracts, fees and reimbursements
5. Monitor and analyze financial statements periodically and adjust budget and programs accordingly to ensure business sustainability
6. Review programs, products, and services for cost-effectiveness and return on investment/return on assets

Knowledge Needed:

- Organization's policies and procedures regarding financial management and budgets
- Financial management principles
- Tax implications relative to products and services (UBIT) for various organizational structures