



Standard Practice for Certificate Programs¹

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1. Scope

1.1 This practice provides guidance to certificate issuers for developing and administering quality certificate programs and to stakeholders for determining the quality of certificate programs.

1.2 This practice includes requirements for both the entity issuing the certificate and requirements for the specific certificate programs for which it issues certificates.

1.3 This practice provides the foundation for the recognition or accreditation, or both, of a specific entity to issue a specific certificate or certificates to individuals after successful completion of a certificate program.

1.4 This practice does not address guidance pertaining to certification of individuals nor does it address guidance pertaining to education or training programs in general, including those that issue certificates of participation or certificates of attendance.

1.5 *This international standard was developed in accordance with internationally recognized principles on standardization established in the Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations issued by the World Trade Organization Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee.*

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ANSI/IACET Standard:*
ANSI/IACET 1-2013 Standard for Continuing Education and Training^{2,3}

¹ This practice is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E36 on Accreditation & Certification and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E36.30 on Personnel Certificate Programs.

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² Available from the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET), 1760 Old Meadow Rd., Suite 500, McLean, VA 22102, <http://www.iacet.org>.

³ ANSI/IACET 1-2013 is a valuable document with detailed guidance for all providers of continuing education and training. It provides a descriptive framework to assist organizations in adhering to quality practices for all types of continuing education and training programs. In contrast, this practice outlines a framework of quality for one specific type of program, the certificate program.

2.2 *ANSI/ISO/IEC Standard:*

ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024:2012 Conformity Assessment—General Requirements for Bodies Operating Certification of Persons^{4,5}

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions:*

3.1.1 For the purposes of this practice, the following apply.

3.1.2 *advisory group, n*—group responsible for advising certificate program management on creating and maintaining a certificate program that is current, relevant, and valued.

3.1.3 *appeal, n*—written request made to the certificate issuer for reconsideration of an adverse decision made by the certificate issuer related to the certificate program

3.1.4 *assessment, n*—instrument or method used to measure learner attainment of intended learning outcomes (including but not limited to oral or written tests, skill demonstrations, portfolios, or work products).

3.1.5 *certificate, n*—document (letter, card, or other medium) awarded to certificate holders that designates the successful completion of a certificate program's requisites.

3.1.6 *certificate holder, n*—individual who has been issued a certificate after successfully meeting a certificate program's requisites.

3.1.7 *certificate issuer, n*—legal business entity or government agency, or operating unit thereof, that has ultimate responsibility for administering a certificate program and issuing certificates to individuals successfully meeting certificate program requisites.

3.1.8 *certificate program, n*—nondegree-granting education or training program consisting of (1) a learning event or series of events designed to educate or train individuals to achieve specified learning outcomes within a defined scope, and (2) a system designed to ensure individuals receive a certificate only after verification of successful completion of all program requisites including but not limited to an assessment of learner attainment of intended learning outcomes.

⁴ Available from American National Standards Institute (ANSI), 25 W. 43rd St., 4th Floor, New York, NY 10036, <http://www.ansi.org>.

⁵ ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024:2012 serves as a valuable standard document providing a framework of quality for personnel certification programs. In contrast, this practice serves as a framework of quality for certificate programs.

3.1.9 *certificate program instructional design plan*, *n*—document that outlines the certificate issuer’s instructional design model, processes and implementation plan.

3.1.10 *certificate program management*, *n*—the individual(s) who establish and review the management system for the certificate program activities.

3.1.11 *certificate program process*, *n*—all activities by which the certificate issuer establishes that a person fulfills specified requisites to earn the certificate, including but not limited to prerequisites (if applicable), completion of a learning event or events, the learner assessment(s), and the certificate decision.

3.1.12 *certificate program requisites*, *n*—specific requirements of the certificate program that certificate holders shall meet before being issued the certificate including but not limited to the essential element of the assessment of learner attainment of intended learning outcomes.

3.1.13 *certificate program scope*, *n*—specific range of competencies, procedures, actions, or processes covered by a certificate program.

3.1.14 *certificate term*, *n*—length of time for which the issued certificate program’s content is considered current and relevant.

3.1.15 *complaint*, *n*—written request, other than an appeal, made to a certificate issuer for corrective action relating to the activities of that issuer.

3.1.16 *confidentiality*, *n*—ability to ensure that information is accessible only to those authorized to have access.

3.1.17 *contractor*, *n*—an individual or entity external to the certificate issuer that assists in carrying out one or more certificate program activities.

3.1.18 *criterion-referenced assessment*, *n*—an assessment intended to measure a learner’s performance through items linked to intended learning outcomes, with the goal of identifying those who do and do not meet a defined performance standard.

3.1.19 *designation*, *n*—title or label that a certificate holder is granted to use.

3.1.20 *designation acronym*, *n*—abbreviated title, usually the acronym form of the designation, which a certificate holder is granted to use.

3.1.21 *digital badge*, *n*—visual representation of a credential that can be displayed online, according to the rules of the issuing organization.

3.1.22 *document control*, *n*—process addressing how documents are created, approved, revised and reapproved, and distributed and how obsolete document use is prevented.

3.1.23 *formative assessment*, *n*—assessment of a learner’s progress towards attainment of the certificate program’s intended learning outcomes that occurs during the learning event(s).

3.1.24 *intended learning outcomes*, *n*—statement of what learners are expected to know or be able to do as a result of the

certificate program’s learning event or program (recognizing that actual learning outcomes may or may not be those intended).

3.1.25 *internal audit*, *n*—first-party review of the certificate issuer’s policies and procedures to ensure adherence to this practice’s requirements.

3.1.26 *learning event*, *n*—combination of learning experiences designed to assess a learner’s understanding of content or his/her ability to perform a skill or set of skills that satisfies a set of learning objectives/outcomes. This event can be accomplished by any media sufficient to achieve the learning outcomes, including but not limited to, classroom instruction, distance-learning course, blended-learning activities, conferences, and satellite transmissions. **ANSI/IACET 1-2013**

3.1.27 *learning experience*, *n*—single instance of learning obtained during a learning event that demonstrates a specific learning objective or learning outcome. This could include solving a problem, completing a case study, completing a quiz, or applying a skill. **ANSI/IACET 1-2013**

3.1.28 *primary stakeholders*, *n*—persons, groups, or organizations, or combination thereof, for which the certificate program is targeted or for which intended outcomes are directed or both.

3.1.29 *privacy*, *n*—ability of individuals to control access to themselves or information about themselves and thereby reveal themselves selectively.

3.1.30 *records control*, *n*—process addressing which and how records are kept, by whom, for how long, and how they are disposed.

3.1.31 *stakeholder*, *n*—any person, group, or organization with an interest in, or who may be affected by, the certificate program.

3.1.32 *summative assessment*, *n*—assessment of a learner’s attainment of the certificate program’s intended learning outcomes that occurs at the conclusion of the learning event(s).

3.1.33 *training and education industry generally accepted practices*, *n*—those practices that can be referenced to existing training and education industry published professional literature or standards, or both.

3.1.33.1 *Discussion*—This standard does not prescribe any specific practices. Certificate issuers can be assured their practices are generally accepted if they are referenced in training and education industry published professional literature or standards, or both.

4. Significance and Use

4.1 Certificate programs are typically offered by community colleges and universities, government agencies, employers, independent for-profit training organizations, and professional and trade associations. While quality guidelines do exist for continuing education and training providers in general (for example, ANSI/IACET 1-2013) and for entities offering personnel certification programs (for example, ANSI/ISO/IEC 17024:2012), currently, no quality guidelines exist specifically to aid entities offering certificate programs. This practice aims to change that and has been developed to:

4.1.1 Provide certificate program developers and certificate issuers guidelines for quality program development and administration;

4.1.2 Form the foundation for a recognition or accreditation system, or both, that enable consumers, employers, government agencies, and others who rely upon a skilled workforce to distinguish between qualified workers and those with fraudulent or less-than-quality credentials;

4.1.3 Assist stakeholders in differentiating between certificate programs from personnel certification; and

4.1.4 Assist stakeholders in differentiating certificate programs from other programs that confer certificates, including but not limited to certificates of attendance or certificates of participation.

4.2 Currently, it is challenging to distinguish a certificate earned through the focused learning and assessment offered through a certificate program from one granted through other means. That a certificate is issued is not a distinguishing factor. The word “certificate” is used broadly as a document awarded to designate the attainment or completion of something. An individual might receive a certificate from an education or training provider as verification of attendance at a learning event (often called a certificate of attendance) or receive a certificate as verification of active participation in a learning event’s learning experiences (often called a certificate of participation). The distribution of a certificate, however, does not indicate that the education or training program completed was a certificate program. In a certificate program, an individual participates in a learning event or series of events designed to assist him or her in achieving specified learning outcomes within a defined scope; the individual receives a certificate only after verification of successful completion of all program requisites including but not limited to an assessment of learner attainment of intended learning outcomes.

4.3 It is also important to distinguish certificate programs from the certification of individuals. Certification is a process through which a nongovernmental entity grants a time-limited recognition to an individual after verifying that he or she has met established criteria for proficiency or competency, usually through an eligibility application and assessment. While certification eligibility criteria may specify a certain type or amount of education or training, the learning event(s) are not typically provided by the certifying body. Instead, the certifying body verifies education or training and experience obtained elsewhere through an application process and administers a standardized assessment of current proficiency or competency.

4.4 In contrast, in a certificate program the learning event(s) and the assessment(s) are both developed and administered by the certificate issuer, and there is an essential link between them. That is, the learning event(s) are designed to help participants achieve learning outcomes and the assessment is designed to evaluate the learners’ attainment of those intended learning outcomes.

4.5 Also, certifications have ongoing requirements for maintaining proficiency/competency and can be revoked for not meeting these ongoing requirements. In contrast, certifi-

cates do not have ongoing maintenance or renewal requirements and therefore, cannot be revoked.

5. Requirements for Certificate Issuers

5.1 *Organizational Structure and Administration*—The certificate issuer shall be structured and administered in such a way that confidence is given to stakeholders of its authority and qualifications to issue the certificate.

5.1.1 The certificate issuer shall be, or reside within, a legal business entity or governmental agency.

5.1.2 The certificate issuer shall be an appropriate and qualified issuer of the certificate.

5.1.2.1 The certificate program’s purpose, scope, and intended outcomes shall be consistent with the stated mission and work of the certificate issuer.

5.1.3 The certificate issuer shall have a clearly designated authority charged to administer the certificate program and ensure compliance with the provisions of this practice.

5.1.4 *Advisory Group*—The certificate issuer shall create and sustain an advisory group composed of and representing the interests of the certificate program’s primary stakeholders.

5.1.4.1 The advisory group shall advise certificate program management on issues integral to ensuring the certificate is current, relevant, and valuable to its primary stakeholders.

5.1.4.2 The advisory group shall have input into, at minimum, the certificate program (1) target audience, (2) purpose, (3) scope, (4) requisites, (5) term, (6) intended learning outcomes, and (7) instructional design plan.

5.1.4.3 The advisory group shall convene to advise certificate program management, at minimum, (1) when the elements of 5.1.4.2 are initially created or when changes are proposed, and (2) when a program evaluation is conducted.

5.2 *Management System*—The certificate issuer shall have a management system that is capable of supporting the consistent achievement of the requirements of this standard practice.

5.2.1 *Documentation*:

5.2.1.1 The certificate issuer’s certificate program management shall establish and document objectives and policies for its certificate program activities.

5.2.1.2 Policies (and procedures, where applicable) of the certificate program shall be fair and equitable and comply with all applicable regulatory and statutory requirements and legal obligations.

5.2.1.3 There shall be written policies outlined to address, at a minimum, the following:

- (1) Advisory group composition and responsibilities;
- (2) Certificate program instructional design plan;
- (3) Certificate issuance and use;
- (4) Invalidating a certificate;
- (5) Complaints;
- (6) Appeals;
- (7) Privacy, confidentiality, and security;
- (8) Program commercial support and disclosure;
- (9) Fees, cancellation, and refunds;
- (10) Nondiscrimination;
- (11) Personnel;
- (12) Outsourcing;
- (13) Records control;