

ACCREDITATION SERVICES

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Certificate vs. Certification: What's the Difference?

Certificate programs and certification programs are designed to meet very different needs. For instance, the organization that aims to recognize professionals who meet established knowledge, skills, or competencies (as in certification) may be missing an opportunity to build capacity and recognition of a specialty area of practice or set of skills (as in many certificate programs).

One program type is not more or less rigorous than another. They simply serve different purposes and may require different business approaches, governance structures, development processes, etc.

Assessment-based Certificate Program	Professional or Personnel Certification Program
Provides instruction and training (non-degree granting)	Assesses knowledge, skills, and/or competencies previously acquired
Goal is for participants to acquire specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies	Goal is to validate the participant's competency through a conformity assessment system
Assessment is used to evaluate mastery of the intended learning outcomes; linked directly to the learning event	Assessment is best used to assure baseline competencies and to differentiate professionals; independent of a specific learning event
Assessment content may be narrower in scope	Assessment content is usually broad in scope
Awards a certificate to recognize mastery of the specific learning outcomes; it is NOT a certificate of attendance or participation, which is awarded to individuals who have attended or participated in a course or training program but did not have to demonstrate mastery of the intended learning outcomes	Awards designations to recognize achievement
To earn accreditation, complies with the <i>ICE 1100 Standard</i> and follows the ACAP application procedures	To earn accreditation, complies with the <i>NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs</i> and follows the NCCA application procedures



Download the [Defining Features](#) document , or purchase the [Assessment-Based Certificate Programs: Why They May Be Preferable](#) on-demand webcast to learn additional features and details about each program type.

