



Starting a Voluntary Certification Program



This guide shows you steps to launch your program, including: providing guidance as you establish a certification board, offering model standards for your program, and making nationally validated exams available through our Testing Services.

The Association of Boards of Certification

Established in 1972, our Association includes almost 100 certifying authorities, representing more than 40 states, nine Canadian provinces and several international programs. These programs certify over 150,000 water and wastewater operators, laboratory analysts, plant maintenance technologists, biosolids land applicators and backflow prevention assembly testers.

ABC exists for its membership, giving them a voice on national issues and serving as a conduit for information in an ever-changing industry. Our members and dedicated volunteers, along with our professional staff, work each day to advance water quality and integrity and promote certification as a means of protecting public health and the environment.

Certification Program Benefits

Awareness of certification importance in the water and wastewater industry has led several groups to develop their own voluntary certification programs for multiple disciplines.

Voluntary certification programs offer individuals a mechanism to demonstrate their expertise in the

With almost 40 years of experience providing support to both mandatory and voluntary certification programs, ABC is positioned to partner with groups in developing and administering a voluntary certification program in their state or region.

field, just as their colleagues in water and wastewater treatment have done for many years through state regulatory boards. A certification program not only protects public health, but builds strong careers and provides numerous benefits to employees and employers.

Establishing a Program

There are a number of features characterizing a quality voluntary certification program. These indicators include a legally defensible exam validation process, standards for education, experience and renewal requirements, and well defined operating procedures.

Setting up a Certification Board

To build a program's foundation and develop the administrative framework, a single appointed board responsible for the adoption of procedures, policies and general program direction should be appointed. One of the most important indicators of a quality program is the structure and performance of its board.

Boards are responsible for technical expertise as well as oversight and direction of the organization and should include well-respected subject matter experts to help ensure the ongoing integrity.

Potential stakeholder involvement in certification boards can include

representation from:

- Practitioners
- Employers
- Academia
- Government agencies with regulatory authority over the field/discipline
- Associations or organizations with related interests
- Consumers/public

Certification Program Standards

Operating standards must be developed by the board. ABC's Certification Program was established in 1985 and has served as the model program for many developing and established certification programs across the globe.

ABC's Certification Program has almost 25 years of experience handling the day-to-day administration activities including: database design and maintenance, plant classification, application processing and evaluation, data tracking and issuing of certificates.

The ABC Certification Program Standards, which include certification requirements for education and experience, examination requirements and renewal, are available as a certification program development guide. In addition, the standards contain administrative policies such as certification appeals and request for accommodations.

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Advancing Water Quality and Integrity

Certification Examinations

The validity of the process used to develop the certification exams is critical. ABC offers nationally validated standardized exams for use by ABC member certification programs. ABC has almost 30 years of experience in providing examination related services through our Testing Service, and has established a Validation & Examination (V&E) committee for each of our exam disciplines.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility requirements are the education and experience necessary to become certified and should be logically related and appropriate to the job responsibilities as well as non-discriminatory, objective and reasonable. Organizations must make decisions about eligibility requirements only after the issue has been studied in detail and input has been sought from all affected stakeholders.



Certification Renewal

The validity of a certification program is compromised if the credential does not attempt to ensure a continual level of current knowledge,

skill or ability. The renewal process requires certificants to obtain continuing education in order to maintain their knowledge and skills in their profession.

Public perception of certification programs can improve through renewal. In the water industry, a two-year renewal cycle is typical.

Program Administration

The certification board must provide an adequate staff to administer the program. Administrative duties involved with implementing a certification program include fee, application, scheduling and certificate management. For certification duties alone, there should be at least one staff member per 1,000 active certificates.

As your program changes, so will staff requirements. ABC has the expertise to assist you with these program developments. Through a service agreement, our team of experienced staff is available to process your program applications and administer computerized exams through our partnership with Applied Measurement Professionals (AMP).

Establishing Fees

The board should establish fees at level necessary for the program to be self-supporting, to the extent of direct costs. Fees may be charged for application, exam, re-examination, and renewal. All fees received should be available for use by the certification program only.



Voluntary Certification Employee Benefits

- career advancement opportunities
- higher wage earning opportunities
- mechanism to demonstrate competency and professionalism
- competitive advantage over non-certified individuals
- enhances professional reputation and prestige
- demonstrates commitment to the field

Voluntary Certification Employer Benefits

- screen potential new hires and select contractors
- motivate employees to expand their knowledge and skills
- increase competence level of employees
- ensure ongoing continuing education for employees

For more information on establishing a certification program, ABC program administration, assistance or membership, please contact ABC at (515) 233-3623 or abc@abccert.org or visit our website at www.abccert.org.



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