

# Professional Enhancement: Understanding the Benefits of Industry Certification

**M**ost professions boast an industry certification as a way for working professionals to demonstrate measured skill sets in specialty areas. In architecture, it's the Architect Registration Exam (ARE); in retail electronics, it's the Mobile Electronics Certified Professional (MECP); in accounting, it's the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam. Why are these credentials relevant? Earned designations provide assurance of a member's ability to perform a job or task, making him or her more valuable to, and coveted by, employers and the public. In the case of architecture, for example, achieving registration demonstrates a candidate's ability to provide the various services required in the design and construction of buildings.

There are some state associations that require candidates to hold a certification as a prerequisite to practice in a given field. Some fields, including law, medicine, and accounting, demand professional certification or licensure as a job requirement. Real estate agents, insurance agents, and construction workers are also required to hold certain credentials before they are licensed to practice. For example, to obtain and maintain licensure, members of all state CPA societies across the country are required by the National Association of State Boards of Accountancy to pass the Uniform CPA Exam. In other industries, requirements are legislative. The Association of State and

Provincial Psychology Boards reports that "the legal basis for licensure lies in the right of a jurisdiction to enact legislation to protect its citizens." Credentials ensure the competence of practitioners as well as compliance to industry standards, and regulating bodies often require association members to hold trade certifications to uphold the integrity of a given profession.

In other cases, certification programs are voluntary and optional, but nonetheless advantageous. State and regional associations may want to consider offering a certification program to benefit members and further the integrity of their profession. Such programs have several tangible benefits for association members.

## Validation of Knowledge

Organization affiliates recognize that evidence of continual learning is desirable and demonstrates the knowledge and skill set necessary to fulfilling professional responsibilities. Third-party validation of skills from a certification is far more powerful than self-promotion of knowledge. In the case of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, passing all divisions of the ARE makes a candidate eligible for licensure by a state board of architecture, assuming other qualifications for licensure have also been met. When mid-level professionals seek third-party certifications, they validate their knowledge, making employers and

consumers more likely to recognize and reward professionals holding official certifications. A voluntary certification is also often seen as evidence of an individual's personal drive and motivation, giving them a leg up for raises and promotions.

## Increased Marketability

Increasing one's marketability is a primary driver and a powerful incentive to obtaining professional certification. Credentials provide amplified visibility of a professional's skill set in the workplace, throughout professional communities and within organizations. In any line of business, the desire to land the perfect job is a significant certification incentive. Industry studies back up these claims. According to a survey by HR.com, 100 percent of respondents agreed that industry certifications are preferred during the hiring process, in both new hire and internal employee placement scenarios.

## Reputation, Credibility, and Confidence

Many of the stated benefits of getting certified are intertwined but are best summarized as providing superior reputation, credibility, and confidence. According to the American





Society of Association Executives, 70 percent of its Certified Association Executive (CAE) program test takers report “enhancing knowledge,” “improving advancement opportunities,” and “evaluating their status in their current position” as motivation for taking the exam. Clients, patients, and partners quickly assume confidence in the competency and proficiency of professionals who are both participants in their trade organization and recipients of industry certifications.

### Earning Respect

Bearing in mind these motivations, once an association decides to implement an optional certification program, there are some big-picture items that should be established from the get-go. These items will communicate to potential test takers what they can expect from the

testing process and inform them of the program’s potential value.

- **Positive reputation:** Professionals will seek out certification exams recommended by industry colleagues or valued by consumers and/or “watchdog” groups.
- **Accuracy and ethics:** Certification candidates will seek out, through the above recommendations of colleagues, exams that maintain legitimacy by keeping exam items up-to-date and relevant to current industry standards.
- **Prerequisites:** Many certification exams require a prerequisite of some sort, be it education (either association or institution based), years of experience, or a fee. Rigorous prerequisites are often

telling of whether a certification is prestigious or well regarded.

Certification exams are an excellent way for state and local associations to maintain relevancy on a national level and a reliable, respected way to open new doors for the professionals obtaining them. If implemented properly, certifications give state and local organizations, as well as professionals and consumers, a new layer of competency in the constantly changing world of business. **AB**

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