

FAQ's About the ACCT Practitioner Certification Standards

Why did ACCT decide to create Certification Standards - What are the Benefits to the Industry? To me as a Program Manager? To me as a Program Facilitator?

There is a lot of variation in what is currently called certification in the challenge course industry. If someone tells you that they are certified, the next question is what does that mean? After the implementation of these standards, if someone is certified in accordance with the standards, there will be meaning to the word for both program managers in hiring and staffing, and for program facilitators, when stating their qualifications.

Who was involved in creating the Certification Standards?

A committee of 10 people was formed – 5 vendors and 5 program representatives to actually write the standards. At several points during the 2+ years of writing the standards, they were sent out for comments to readers, some who were specifically asked to read them, and some who responded to an open call for readers. Reader comments were incorporated as appropriate, and input was given as well by the ACCT Universal Access and Design Committee so that the standards would be appropriate for individuals with disabilities. Final approval came from the Professional Vendor Members of ACCT and the Board of Directors. No one viewpoint or person had influence in creating the standards, they were truly created across the industry.

Will the certification be issued from ACCT? Who can certify?

No, it will not be an ACCT Certification. Certification will come directly from the certifying bodies. ACCT Professional Vendor Members who choose to offer certification will have their certification programs reviewed as a piece of their PVM accreditation. Other entities may also choose to follow these standards.

Does everyone need to be certified? If not, then who should?

No, not everyone needs to be certified as a challenge course practitioner. As is always the case the need or demand for challenge course certification will depend on the program, setting, and circumstances. All staff should be properly trained, with or without certification. Programs with large staffs, multiple elements, high and low courses, who serve large numbers of clients will most likely decide to have multiple staff certified. Small programs which operate seasonally may only have one staff member certified. Over time it is hoped that programs have more than one staff member certified, though the numbers will vary depending on the size and capacity of the program.

An unknown variable is to what extent government regulation(s), other association standards and insurance companies will dictate the minimum standard for challenge course practitioners' certification.

Can I hire someone who is not a certified challenge course practitioner for my program?

Yes. The certification standards are going to take some time to be implemented and the system populated with certified practitioners. In some cases, a practitioner may not need to be certified. In all cases, care should be given to hiring individuals who can show documented evidence of relevant training and experience. It is always recommended that skills be verified as a part of the hiring/internal training path. Certification should not replace good hiring practices (including but not limited to interview, skills verification, resume review, facilitation presentation, training log, and reference check). A site specific orientation is required regardless of certification.

Does every program need a Challenge Course Manager that is certified?

No, not every program needs a certified Challenge Course Manager. When the activity within the program requires multiple practitioners, larger numbers of elements, coordination with outside agencies, and multiple levels of staff management it is recommended to have a Certified Challenge Course Manager.

Will a certified practitioner be allowed to move from one challenge course to another?

Yes. That is one of the benefits for the individual and the program site. The only exception is for the site specific level of certification. This would be no different than it is now, except that the individual has an opportunity to be certified by a certifying body in one or more operating systems and at a variety of levels, depending on skills and experience. Specifics about transferability will be up to the site and/or the certifying body.

Why should a “portfolio” accompany a certification card/certificate?

A portfolio, like a resume, provides more information for both the individual and the program. It greatly broadens the picture of one’s experience and skills and will serve as ongoing documentation of an individual’s learning path.

Are we defining what components should be part of quality training?

Yes and No.

Yes, the operations standards dictate the skills needed to operate a challenge course. The certification standards then sub-divide these skill sets based on what level of certification an individual is seeking.

No, in that any certifying body and/or training organization will still have discretion in what their training looks like and how they choose to meet the operations standards.

Will certification assess facilitation skills as well as technical skills? How will they be addressed?

Yes. Facilitation skills are covered in the operations standards and therefore connect at different levels of understanding and competency for each level of certification. It will be up to the training organizations and certifying bodies to determine how they are addressing these standards (both in training and testing).

Operating Systems vary widely from course to course. How do the ACCT standards address these differences?

The certification standards have been written to parallel the current operations standards. An individual’s certification card/certificate would indicate the system in which he/she had been certified. This would be up to the certifying body to determine. An individual’s portfolio would also track the systems for which they have received training and in which they have experience. The portfolio would also help in illustrating what skills exist for which operating systems. A system specific certification level is available.

Will the written tests be standardized?

No. Individual certifying bodies will design their own tests. For ACCT PVMs, there will be guidelines on how to design the test, and what specific areas need to be covered. In the interests of best practices in testing, certification tests will also have to be able to be modified to accommodate ADA requirements, learning disabilities, and the like.

Will training and testing happen at the same time?

No. Training and testing will be separate activities, and may even be conducted by different organizations, at different sites or by different people in the same organization. Each certifying body will set up their own system.

Is there a “grandfather-in” process? What is it?

Yes. A person may “challenge in” at any level they desire if they meet the qualifications. Challenging in is the process by which an experienced practitioner may become certified without having to take the training, which may be repetitive of their experience, knowledge, and skill level.

When will the standards actually be published?

The standards were published in June 2007. Copies were mailed to current members. They are now for sale through the ACCT website.

When will the ACCT Professional Vendor Members be able to offer certification under the new standards?

ACCT PVMs who choose to do so will have their certification programs reviewed in August 2007, and will be able to offer certification which meets ACCT standards in the fall, providing their program is accredited. Check with your individual vendor to see what their plans are.

What process are the PVMs going through to get reviewed/approved for offering Certification?

PVMs will be reviewed for certification by their peers, just as they are for installation, inspection and training. ACCT is setting up a system to do this in August 2007 and January 2008, and it will be part of the application process for any new PVMs. All paperwork and manuals relating to certification will be submitted, and reviewed by a review team. Certification will then be rolled in to the Re-Review that PVMs undergo every 3 years to maintain their accreditation.

If I currently hold a piece of paper saying I am certified by a PVM, is that still valid after August 2007? Yes, it is still valid, but it may not be accepted as a certification that meets ACCT standards. That would be up to the outside organization which might require certification, or an employer. If you are already certified by an ACCT PVM, that company may have information for you about how you can then challenge in to the system. Contact them directly for that information.

What will the insurance companies do about certification requirements? When will these insurance requirements go in to effect?

That is up to the individual insurance company, and it will vary, just as inspection requirements vary. Companies which are well informed about challenge courses will also understand that certification will take some time to become widespread among practitioners, and will not require it immediately. If a company approaches ACCT for help in understanding the new certification standards, this time frame is emphasized.

How can I get approved to train and/or certify my own staff?

ACCT does not offer this kind of approval with the exception of companies eligible for and undergoing the PVM accreditation process. Acceptance of these practices is often up to an outside organization, such as an insurance company or an accrediting organization. Each certifying body will determine whether or not they will accept internal training for the required training hours.