A Strategic Checklist for Associations:

Certificate vs. Certification

There are no right or wrong answers. This assessment is designed to help you identify which approach best aligns with your organization's goals, audience, and long-term strategy.

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For each question, select the statement that best refelects your association's goals.

What challenge are you trying to solve?

A. Our association needs a recognized way to validate professional competence.

B. Our members need more opportunities to learn and develop skills.

What outcome would create the most value for your members?

A. Industry recognition and professional credibility.

B. Education, skill development, and career growth.

How do employers in your industry currently evaluate talent?

A. Through demonstrated competency and recognized credentials.

B. Through ongoing learning and professional development.

What level of investment is your association prepared to make?

A. Significant investment in standards, governance assessment, and long-term program maintenance.

B. A faster, more flexible learning initiative that can launch relatively quickly.

What role should this program play in your non-dues revenue strategy?

A. A long-term flagship credential program.

B. An educational offering that expands learning opportunities.

Is there already a recognized body of knowledge for the profession?

A. Yes, established competencies and standards already exist.

B. No, we don't have a formally-defined body of knowledge yet.

Which statement sounds more like your organization's mission?

A. Advance and uphold professional standards.

B. Educate and develop professionals.

How important is external recognition?

A. Critical. We want employers and stakeholders to recognize the achievement.

B. Helpful, but learner growth is the primary goal.

What would success look like three years from now?

A. Employers actively seek out holders of our credential.

B. Members regularly engage with our learning programs.

Which statement best describes where you are today?

A. We are prepared to invest in validating professional competence.

B. We want to start by expanding learning and professional development opportunities.

Add up your A's and B's and see your results on the next page.

Your Results

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- **Mostly A's (7-10 A's) Certification May Be the Right Fit**

  Your responses suggest your organization is focused on validating professional competence, establishing industry standards, and creating a credential with long-term recognition. Certification programs are often best suited for associations looking to define excellence within a profession, support career advancement, and create a trusted benchmark for employers and stakeholders.

  While certification programs typically require greater investment in governance, assessment, and ongoing maintence, they can become a cornerstone of an association's value proposition and credentialing strategy.

- **Mostly B's (7-10 B's) A Certificate Program May Be Your Best Starting Point**

  Your responses suggest your organization is focused on education, skill development, and learning engagement. Certificate programs can be an effective way to help members build knowledge, develop new competencies, and stay current in a rapidly changing profession.

  Certificate programs are faster to launch than certification programs and can create meaningful opportunities for member engagement, professional development, and non-dues revenue growth.

- **Mixed Results (4-6 A's and 4-6 B's) Consider a Layered Strategy**

  Your results suggest your organization may benefit from a combination of certificates and certifications rather than choosing one over the other. Many associations use certificate programs to help learners build foundational knowledge and skills, while certifications serve as a way to validate professional competence later in a career journey.

  Together, these offerings can create a clear pathway for member growth while supporting engagement across multiple career stages. The next step may be determining which should come first and how both can work together as part of a broader credentialing system.

Need help determining the right path?

Holmes Corporation partners with associations to design, develop, and scale certificate programs, certifications, assessments, and credentialing pathways. Whether you're exploring a new program or refining an existing strategy, our team can help you identify the best fit for your members, mission, and long-term goals.

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