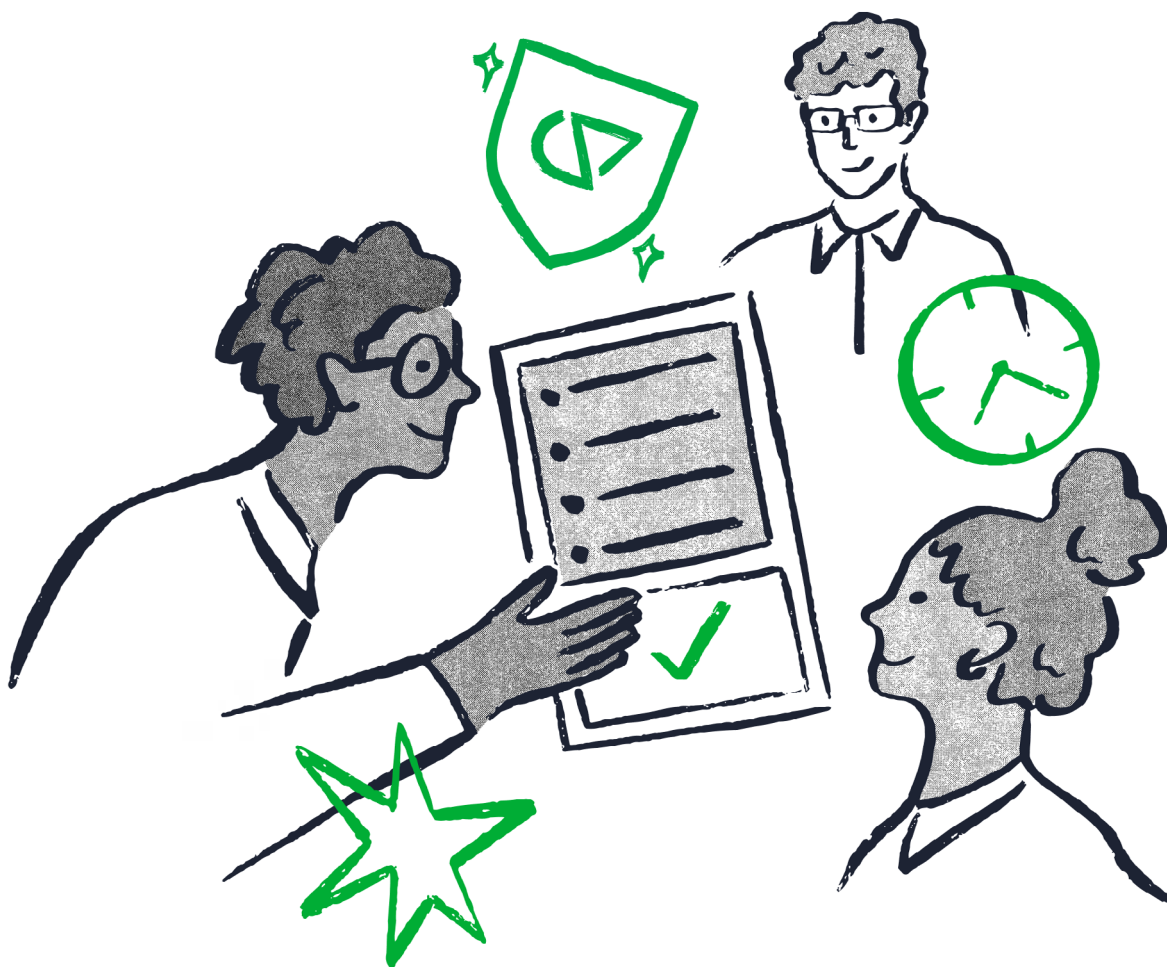




2026 Edition

The Buyer's Guide to Starting a Certification Program

An essential guide for learning leaders to create a future-forward certification strategy that builds trust and powers growth.

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Introduction

Why Certification Matters in 2026

The pace of workforce change has never been faster, and both organizations and individuals are racing to keep up. The need to validate skills, build trust, and ensure adoption of complex solutions spans industries and employers. With decreasing enrollment in traditional post-secondary education and technology evolving faster than textbooks, learning has gone beyond the classroom and become a lifelong element of career advancement.

When assurance matters, certification is the solution.

In 2026, certifications are more than credentials; they're strategic assets that drive revenue, customer loyalty, and workforce readiness. With AI reshaping roles and automation redefining processes, verified skills are the markers of credibility.

This e-book will guide you through creating a certification program that delivers measurable impact for you and your learners.

01

The Business Case for Certification

Why invest in certification? Most simply, because it pays off. Certified communities adopt products faster, renew subscriptions more often, and advocate on your behalf.

Studies show certification programs can increase product adoption by 30% and reduce support costs by 20%. For internal teams, certifications boost productivity and retention. For partners, they strengthen ecosystem trust. Certification is not just a learning initiative; it's a revenue engine and a competitive differentiator.



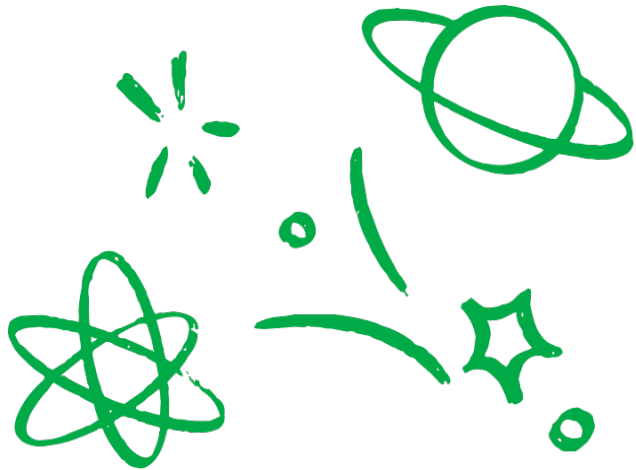
02

Understanding Your Audience

Before designing your program, you need to know who you're certifying. Are your learners professionals seeking career advancement? Partners needing product expertise? Internal teams requiring compliance?

The first step in certification design is to build learner personas.

- ✓ Conduct interviews, surveys, or focus groups with target participants
- ✓ Analyze skill gaps they face in their roles and preferred technology platforms
- ✓ Determine any barriers they face in accessing or completing certification



A deep understanding of your learners ensures the program resonates, delivers value, and drives adoption.

03

Setting Strategic Goals

When you've narrowed down the target of your certification, clarify your why.

Define both the purpose of your program and what measurable success looks like. Goals should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound. For example:

"Increase certified partner count by 15% in 12 months"

"Reduce onboarding time by 20% by Q4"



Regularly track progress against these goals using key performance indicators to ensure your program stays on course. Adjust strategies as needed based on data and feedback to maximize impact and long-term value.

04

Choosing the Right Certification Model

Three common certification models dominate the industry:

- **Role-based:** Validates skills for specific job roles
- **Product-based:** Focuses on proficiency with your solution
- **Competency-based:** Measures broader skills and behaviors

Role-based
Product-based
Competency-based

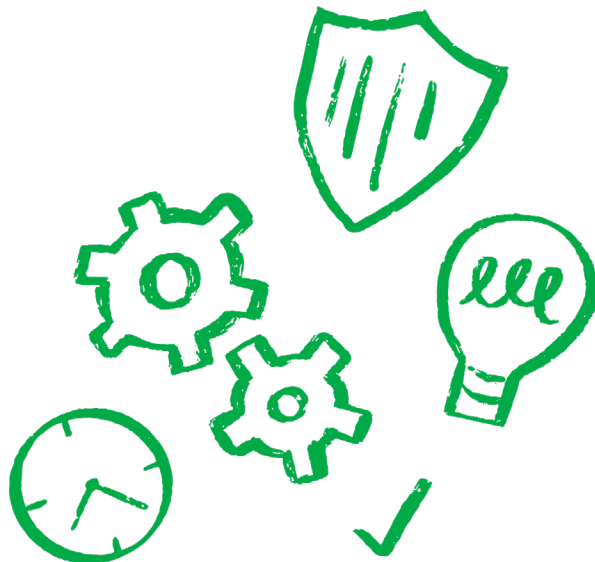


Choose a model based on your audience and objectives. The model you select may also impact the type of testing being used, such as multiple-choice exams or performance-based testing, as we'll discuss next.

05

Building the Framework

Your framework is the core of your certification program, serving as the guiding structure for everything that follows. Now that you have clearly defined your learning objectives and assessment strategy, you can consider the delivery method.



When determining how you'll measure competency, think about practical ways to assess understanding. Certifications often include a variety of item types, such as hands-on tasks, multiple-choice questions, or scenario-based items.

In addition, make sure to outline any prerequisites learners need before starting, establish progression paths so participants know how to advance, and set up recertification timelines to keep skills current.

06

Assessment Design

Building an exam that fairly and consistently represents the requirements of a job or task is a complex process. The difference between a course-ending quiz and a formal, verified certification is the use of robust principles to guarantee validity and reliability in every evaluation.



The most common method to apply these principles is to pay for services from a psychometrician, either as an independent consultant or as a staff member of a test development vendor.

But increasingly, modern certification development platforms provide structured pathways and integrated toolsets that enable organizations to design rigorous, defensible certification exams, even without in-house psychometric experts.

07

Technology Infrastructure

When selecting the right technology for your certification program, start by considering the needs of your learners and the long-term goals of your organization.

Many organizations may benefit from a dedicated certification platform, which is often designed with advanced features like exam proctoring, detailed reporting, and secure credential management.

Above all, keep the user experience front and center: choose platforms that make navigation, enrollment, and exam-taking easy and intuitive. The right tech stack doesn't just support your program; it helps it thrive.



08

Security and Compliance

The value of your certification is tied to its integrity. Anti-cheating measures like secure proctoring and identity verification increase the protection of your exam content, but security starts with development. Building a robust item bank and having the ability to rapidly change and update content also reduces risk of content exposure.

With ever-evolving technologies, regularly audit your systems to identify potential vulnerabilities and ensure your security protocols remain up to date.

It's also important to establish clear policies for handling breaches or suspicious activities and communicate these procedures transparently to maintain test-taker and client confidence.



09

Marketing Your Program

Your certification is an extension of your organization, and its branding communicates the value of both. The visual and messaging elements should resonate with your learning audience and reflect credibility while also being appealing and aspirational.

When it comes to marketing your certification, leverage social proof. While building a credentialed base, run targeted campaigns highlighting the benefits of attainment and partner with influencers and industry groups to amplify reach.

As exam completion counts increase, encourage certified users to share their badges and testing experiences on LinkedIn.

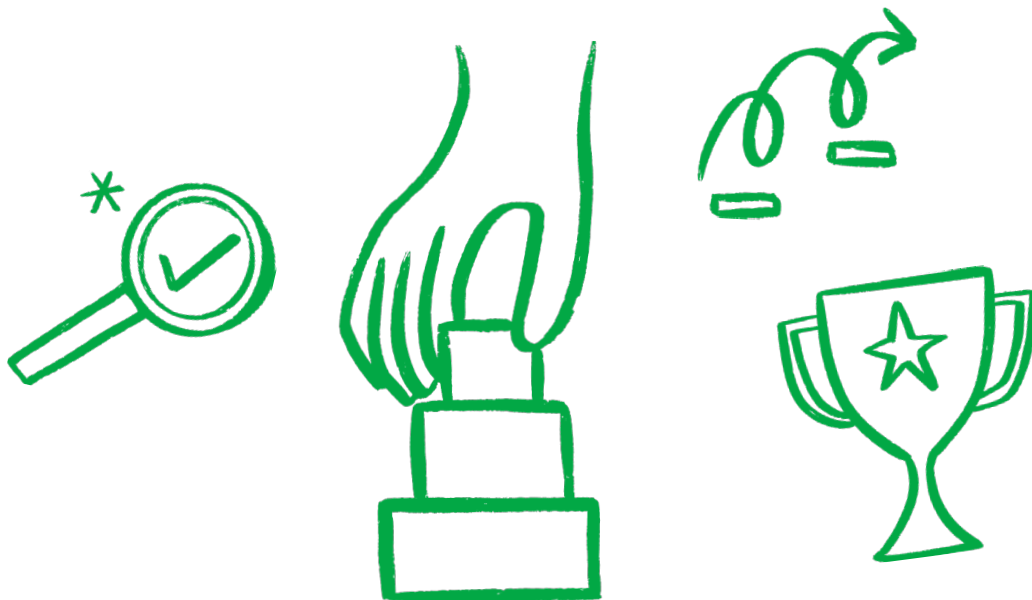


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Measuring Success

To gauge your rollout and ongoing progress, track KPIs such as:

- Number of exam registrations
- Product adoption rates
- New revenue



Your testing vendor should provide reporting mechanisms so you can easily visualize trends and identify areas of growth or concern over time.

Regularly reviewing these analytics will help you make informed decisions to optimize your certification initiatives. Sharing results internally not only demonstrates ROI but also fosters greater organizational support and alignment around program goals.

11

Content Development Best Practices

To ensure your certification content remains current and effective, regularly update the materials on which it's based to reflect the latest industry trends, product updates, and learner feedback. Leverage analytics to monitor engagement and pinpoint areas for improvement, allowing you to refine modules for maximum impact.

Your expert community will remain a valuable resource. Stay in contact with these users to enhance content accuracy and relevance and monitor that you've made learning inclusive for all potential participants.



12

Scaling Globally

Ready to reach a wider group of learners? Global markets provide a tremendous opportunity for growth and also create a new set of program requirements.

When considering scale beyond your original geography, you will

- Content localization
- Multilingual support
- Compliance with regional regulations
- Cultural nuances in content and delivery



It is important when choosing your test development vendor or partners to think in advance about the potential for globalization and determine their ability to support this effort.

13

Leveraging AI and Automation

AI is already a critical component of advanced certification programs. Beyond simple content generation, it can streamline and automate nearly every step of the exam development process, from defining a job role to proctoring an exam.

It is important, however, to use purpose-built AI features to maintain the security and validity of your certification. In a field where accuracy is essential, AI can reduce the repetitive, difficult human labor that introduces errors, but it must be properly applied with enterprise-grade tools and best practices.



14

Future Trends in Certification

One of the most exciting trends we have seen in certification is the increase in exams for job roles that did not exist even two years ago. Technology is empowering the creation of programs that can keep up with the evolution of the workforce, and there is an incredible opportunity to break ground in new fields.

Innovation also lowers the risk of taking a chance on emerging tech. When you're able to build and launch exams quickly and cost-effectively, you don't have to tie your program's well-being to a single test.

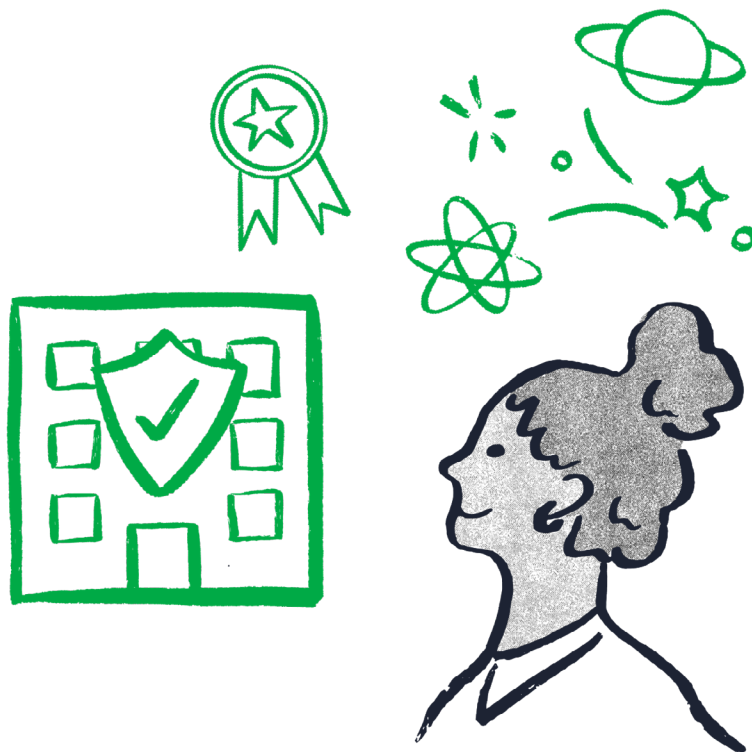


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Keys to Success

The three biggest tips we repeatedly provide to new programs are:

- ✓ Keep it simple. Focus on one job/task at a time to avoid an unclear outcome.
- ✓ Listen to your learners. They're the experts on what they need out of a credential.
- ✓ Marketing is essential. You may get help from your community, but positioning and amplifying your certification is as important as building it.



Conclusion and Next Steps

Certification is a powerful catalyst for growth and credibility, and it's more in reach than you may realize. What was once a long, expensive, vendor-heavy process can now be part of your strategy within weeks.

By clearly defining your objectives, building a strong framework, and embracing cutting-edge technology, you set the stage for lasting success. The outlook is bright for organizations that actively validate skills and empower their learners to reach new heights.

While your competitors wait for the future to arrive, be the one to shape it. Begin your certification journey today.



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