

Establishing a National Certification Program

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National Certification – What does it mean and what is required to establish one for your organization?

Certification

Certification is the process by which an organization of subject matter experts (SMEs) establishes a standardized process for validating the qualifications of an individual (a practitioner in our case), and awarding them a credential, a certification. The certification signifies that the individual has demonstrated the level of proficiency required by the organization to earn their certification.

In the world of biofield therapies certification is normally granted by a non-profit organization, often the organization representing practitioners of a particular discipline. For example, the American Polarity Therapy Association, through its Certification Governing Council (CGC), has developed the standards and practices for the award of, and awards, the certification: Board Certified Polarity Practitioner (BCPP).

National Certification

The organization establishing a certification is responsible for designating the scope or applicability of its certification. Whether the certification is a “national certification” or not, therefore, depends on the intent of the organization establishing and awarding the certification. This should be documented in the certification program’s governing documents.

To date, there is no United States federal law that governs certification or certification programs.¹ Currently, there are no state laws governing the award of certifications either. Therefore, the requirements for the award of a certification and the applicability of that certification are the provinces of the establishing organization.

Best Practice Frameworks

While there may be no federal or state laws governing certification programs, there are best practice frameworks that stipulate how a certification program should be structured and governed.

Two of the most prominent are published by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence’s (ICE’s) National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and the International Organization for Standardization/International Electrotechnical Commission (ISO/IEC, or ISO for short).

¹ There are, however, considerations related to taxation through the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Organizations should consult their tax professional for the implications of creating a certification program if they are organized as a non-profit. For further information see this article:

<https://pdf.venable.com/pdfrenderer.svc/v1/ABCpdf11/GetRenderedPdfByUrl/New%20IRS%20Ruling%20Could%20Have%20Taxing%20Impact%20on%20501c3%20A.pdf?url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.venable.com%2finsights%2fpublications%2f2004%2f10%2fnew-irs-ruling-could-have-taxing-impact-on-501c3-a%3fformat%3dpdf%26attachment%3dfalse>

The NCCA was established in 1977 in cooperation with the federal government. It was established as the National Commission for Health Certifying Agencies (NCHCA) and changed its name to NCCA in 1989 when it broadened its scope to all professions and industries, not just those associated with health.

The NCCA publishes its *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*, a document that provides best practices and guidelines for the establishment of any certification program.²

The ISO is an international standards body established in 1946. It operates out of Geneva, Switzerland, to establish international standards. It also works with national standards bodies like the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

The ISO publishes its *ISO/IEC 17024, Conformity assessment — General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons*.³ This standard provides guidelines for international certification programs.

Accreditation

As in virtually all fields, the gold standard for a certification program is accreditation. Several organizations accredit certification programs, among them are the NCCA and the ISO/IEC.

Accreditation is awarded by an outside organization, like the NCCA, after a thorough review of the certification program, its operation, and its governance – to ensure it meets the standards and guidelines it is being reviewed against (e.g., NCCA, ISO/IEC). It is a long and challenging process and one that demonstrates that the certification program meets the highest standards.

The American Polarity Therapy Association chose to accredit its BCPP program through the NCCA and earned the distinction of being the first energy therapy to receive NCCA's national accreditation.

Certification vs. Licensing

It is important to recognize that there are crucial differences between certification and licensing.

- Certification is accomplished through a certifying organization, often a non-profit, and is an indicator of practitioner competence in the field in which they are certified.
- Licensing is accomplished through a state or commonwealth within the U.S. Licensing confers a right to practice within licensing state or commonwealth and within the stipulated scope of practice.

Currently, there are no states that directly license biofield practitioners. However, multiple states restrict the right of practitioners to physically touch clients to specific licensed practices (e.g., massage therapy, physical therapy, medicine (medical doctor, nurse), etc.).

It is important to know the state and local laws in your area to ensure you are in compliance when practicing any biofield therapy.

The Bottom Line

² Available from: <https://my.credentialingexcellence.org/ice-product-details?id=7118d7c6-999b-eb11-89ee-dc98408f7164&reload=timezone>

³ Available from: <https://www.iso.org/standard/52993.html>

There is much to consider when creating a national or international certification program. While certification programs are relatively easy to construct and operate, how this is accomplished will directly affect the status and credibility of the certification. Following established guidelines and best practices will help to ensure that your certification will be well respected. Then it is up to your organization to ensure it is well recognized.