

Certification vs. Certificate

People are always asking us, “What’s the difference between certification and a certificate?” So, to assist you in communicating with your colleagues and clients and to help avoid confusion in the marketplace, we have provided you the comparison below.

As the premier organization for Event Professionals, ISES *certifies* special event professionals through the Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP) designation . Unlike many certificate programs being offered by colleges and private educational opportunities, the CSEP program is practice-based. It is not intended to teach individuals how to effectively become event professionals. Rather, it is designed to measure an individual’s “knowledge-in-use” – the application of knowledge and skills by those with real-life experience in this role.

Certification	Certificate
Results from an assessment process	Results from an educational process
For individuals	For individuals
Typically requires some amount of professional experience	For both newcomers and experienced professionals alike
Awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organization (ISES)	Awarded by educational programs or institutions
Indicates mastery/competency as measured against a defensible set of standards, usually by application or exam	Indicates completion of a course or series of courses with specific focus; is different than a degree granting program
Standards set through a defensible, industry-wide process (job analysis/role delineation) that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills	Course content set a variety of ways (faculty committee; dean; instructor; occasionally through defensible analysis of topic area)
Typically results in a designation to use after one’s name (CSEP, CERP, CMP, DMCP); may result in a document to hang on the wall or keep in a wallet	Usually listed on a resume detailing education; may issue a document to hang on the wall.
Has on-going requirements in order to maintain; holder must demonstrate he/she continues to meet requirements	Is the end result; demonstrates knowledge of course content at the end of a set period in time

People also confuse *certification* and *credentials* and *designation*.

- *Credentials* attest to someone’s knowledge or authority. Credentials can be a FBI agent badge; a letter of introduction from an ambassador to the President of the United States; a Ph.D. in physics and a list of published papers; or being called a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE)
- *Certification* is a process that results in credentials.
- A *designation* simply refers to the letters someone uses after their name (CSEP, CMP, Ph.D.,M.D., CPA).