

## Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why are we launching a new certification program?

A: The old certification program was developed almost 25 years ago and had not had a major update in all of that time. In order to keep pace with the changes in the Procurement Technical Assistance career field, it is necessary to update our professional certification program.

Q: What are the differences between the old certification program and the new one?

A: There are several differences between the programs, including but not limited to the following

- The old program had two separate sets of requirements: one for those with a college degree and one for those without a college degree. The new program does not make that distinction.
- The old program had three 'levels' of certification. The new program has one basic certification, the Certified Procurement Counselor (CPC). Additional recognitions for specializations will be made available in the future, but they will not constitute 'levels' as such.
- The old program included requirements for time spent in training, but did not specifically identify the topics that the training should cover. The new program is based on and tied to the APTAC Body of Knowledge (BOK).
- The old program required a cumulative examination for the final level of certification. The new program provides for verification of knowledge and abilities on specific areas related to the APTAC BOK, eliminating the need for a final comprehensive test.
- The old program recognized experience documented by resumes and letters from employers. The new program requires a third party verification of described knowledge, skills, and abilities from the APTAC Body of Knowledge.
- The old certification program did not provide specific guidance concerning topics for training at the national APTAC Conferences. The new certification program is based on our Body of Knowledge and provides specific recommendations for conference planning activities.

Q: If I already have an APTAC Certification, what happens to it when the new Certified Procurement Counselor (CPC) is offered?

A: You can maintain your current APTAC Certification by obtaining 10 APTAC Training Credits (ATCs) each year. Additionally, you may continue to pursue CA, ACAS, and CCAS certifications. New applications for old certifications will be processed through the APTAC Spring Conference in 2013.

Q: So, I could have one of the current levels of certification and earn the new Certified Procurement Counselor) CPC as well?

A: Absolutely. We hope that you will.

Q: If I am a CCAS (I currently have a Level III Certification) and I earn the CPC certificate, do I have to earn twice as many APTAC Training Credits each year to keep both?

A: No. The same 10 ATCs can be used for both re-certifications.

Q: Once I use my DAU class credits for the Federal Contractor Certification (FCC), are they used up? What can I use for the CPC certification?

A: Credits are never “used up.”

The Federal Contractor Certification Trainer designations earned through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs are APTAC Recognized Credentials, but they are a separate professional recognition.

When reviewers are verifying your qualifications for APTAC Certifications, your DAU classes will all count. This is similar to having a Bachelor’s Degree and still getting credit for 6 hours of English Composition. You always have both the degree, and the courses completed to obtain it.

Q: What about my Federal Contractor Certification (FCC) from the US Department of Veterans Affairs? Does it count for anything in the new system?

A: At this time the CORE Knowledge Requirement includes all of the DAU classes required for FCC Level I and Level II, so you can be earning both at the same time. The FCC Trainer Designations do not require an annual review of any sort; however, the Department of Veteran Affairs assumes that the counselor will keep up to date on relevant issues.

Q: I understand that the Specialized Core Knowledge Requirement has two separate lists of requirements. Why is that?

A: Effective counseling requires skills that develop through the practice as our knowledge is applied to real client companies and real acquisition scenarios. So, it is beneficial to review both the training completed and the application of that training in real world applications. The ‘Observable Behaviors Checklist’ includes those behaviors that demonstrate an understanding and ability to apply the Specialized Core Knowledge for Procurement Counselors.

The Class Checklist assures that APTAC Counselors have a core of common knowledge and that they speak the language of government acquisition.

Q: How do I complete the Observable Behaviors Checklist?

A: You will work with your program manager on this. Each program manager will decide how to verify the knowledge, skills, and abilities of their own staff. They may customize training to fit your service area. Some methods program managers may use include:

- a. Program Manager conducts one-on-one reviews for each counselor
- b. Establishing a local peer review process
- c. Requiring submission of white papers
- d. Sending counselors to APTAC Conferences, NCMA Training Sessions, etc.

Q: Where do I find the Observable Behaviors Checklist?

A: It is on the APTAC Web Site at <hyperlink>.

Q: I am a Program Manager. How can I complete the Observable Behaviors Checklist?

A: You need to obtain third party verification for all of the elements listed.

It is up to you to determine a method that works well for your program. A forum to discuss methods of verification may be available at the Spring Conference or through web-based meetings sponsored by APTAC.

Program Managers may elect to complete a written examination in lieu of obtaining a third party verification.

The exam will consist of approximately 10 essay type questions requiring you to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities being tested. This will be an open-book test, allowing you to use any resources that you would use in real world counseling. Answers will be submitted to the PRB for scoring.

Q: What will this certification do for me?

A: Provide verification of your expertise as a procurement counselor.

Demonstrate that staff members, including program managers, understand federal procurement basics.

Contribute to a common vocabulary across PTAC programs.

Define core knowledge relevant to all PTAC counselors, providing a point of reference for discussions with internal and external partners.

Q: How much time will it take?

A: That will vary with the individual's background, the needs of your center, and your internal policies and procedures. For new hires with no experience in contracting or counseling, it may take 18 – 24 months. For seasoned counselors, it may be closer to 6 months.

Q: How many hours of training are required?

A: While this will vary from person to person, the required courses will, on the average, require 103.5 hours of training (about 13 days).

Q: Where does it say I need contracts training?

A: The SCAA has several sections that specify the requirement for Program Managers and personnel to have knowledge of government contracting laws, regulations, policies and procedures. The PRB has developed a training program that satisfies the references in the SCAA for qualified personnel. Section III A. Resources b. PTAC Staff: "Appropriate professional development and training program must be in place to address this requirement."

Q: Does DLA require APTAC training and certification?

A: Under Evaluations Factors, in the SCAA, DLA does credit APTAC certification as one method of qualifying personnel to perform PTAC duties. "An evaluation of the overall qualifications of the personnel staff as it relates to performing the PTAP requirements, noting any Federal procurement experience, APTAC certifications, NCMA memberships, completion of Defense Acquisition University courses, continued education, will be conducted."