THE COMPLETE **HOW-TO-GUIDE** FOR CREATING ASSOCIATION CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Whether you're part of a trade, professional, or consumer-based association, you likely offer your members some type of educational experience. Maybe it's continuing education courses, seminars, or conferences.

But, many associations are in the dark when it comes to creating a certification program. If done well, certification programs can be a renewable source of income that doesn't rely on membership dues.

So, we're here to help you get started with our extensive how-to guide on building engaging certificate programs for your association.

STEP #1:

DISCOVER THE CHALLENGES YOUR MEMBERS ARE FACING.

Before you undertake the work of creating a certification program, you want to make sure that your offerings are grounded in your members' needs. Though you are deeply connected to your members, what's top of mind for them may change quickly.

These techniques will help you remain on the pulse of your constituents and keep your training relevant:

- ☑ Create online surveys and update them regularly.
- ☑ Hold brainstorming sessions with instructors in your industry and other trusted thought leaders in your space to delve deeper into your members' interests and challenges.
- ☑ Collect detailed feedback from your current initiatives -- such as conferences, email outreach, and news articles -- so you can better understand what resonates with your members and what falls flat.

STEP #2:

EXPLORE THE FEDERAL AND STATE REGULATIONS THAT IMPACT CONTINUING EDUCATION IN YOUR INDUSTRY.

If you would like your certificate program to be recognized outside of your association, it's crucial that you meet any regulations or laws associated with continuing education in your industry.

- ☑ Check with your state's education department. Many states have adult education programs that can help you better understand regulations.
- ☑ Determine if any aspect of your training will include sensitive information, trade secrets, or copyrighted information. Students may need to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).
- ☑ Explore whether you need to address or exempt yourself from any liability associated with the training process.

As an added benefit, when you understand the regulations surrounding your members' education, you can be a resource for them. Rather than relying on hearsay or other members' experiences, they can turn to you for insight into industry requirements.

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STEP #3:

NARROW DOWN YOUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES.

The foundation of any strong training is well-designed learning objectives. A learning objective is what you want your students to know, feel, or do when the learning is complete.
Here are our tips on creating strong, actionable learning objectives.

Ready, set, action!

Start each learning objective with a precise action word that reflects the outcome you wish to achieve. For some great examples of motivating action words, check out Bloom's Taxonomy:
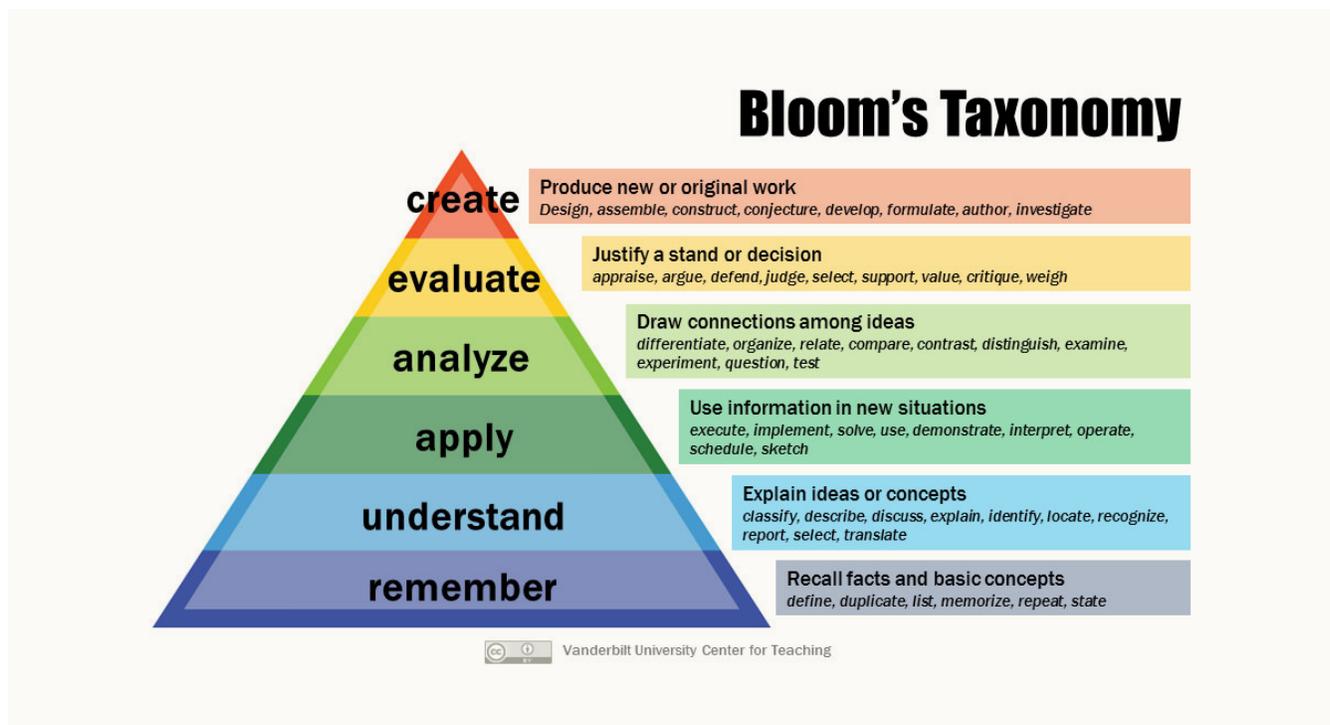
In most cases, you will want to spend very little time in remembering. Instead, you want to allow your learner to focus on higher-level actions: analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Tie each action to an outcome.

End each learning objective with a specific statement about what you want the learners to know, feel, or do.

Here are some examples.

> **Learning objectives for a course for mortgage loan officers:**
> ☑ Remember the record retention rule as stated in Regulation Z.
> ☑ Analyze the historical impact of interest rates on mortgage loan production from 1950 to the present.
> ☑ Create a timeline about The Truth in Lending Act based on at least two additional resources.

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Learning objectives for a course on the use of virtual reality in the classroom:

- ☑ Understand how to access virtual reality tools at little or no expense.
- ☑ Evaluate a current lesson plan and determine how virtual reality could enhance the plan.
- ☑ Create a plan to work with colleagues, administrators, and your school district to provide VR-related professional development for other classroom teachers.

Organize learning objectives into a certificate plan.

Once you've written your learning objectives, you'll begin to notice patterns that will help you organize a cohesive learning plan. Combine similar objectives together to form individual lessons. Arrange those lessons into module topics and titles.

STEP #4:

DESIGN ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS TO MATCH THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES.

Now that you understand your learning outcomes and have an idea of your modules, you're ready to determine the best way to assess whether a student has achieved your learning outcomes.

There are many, many ways to assess learning. Here are just a few examples:

- ☑ Multiple Choice
- ☑ True/False
- ☑ Matching
- ☑ Ordering (such as placing dates in the correct order)
- ☑ Fill-in-the-Blank
- ☑ Short Answer
- ☑ Essay

Here's an example of how you may want to organize your thinking and link learning objectives to appropriate assessment.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR MORTGAGE LOAN OFFICERS	MULTIPLE CHOICE	SHORT ANSWER	SHORT ANSWER OR ESSAY
Remember the record retention rule as stated in Regulation Z.	☑	☑	
Analyze the historical impact of interest rates on mortgage loan production from 1950 to the present.	☑	☑	
Create a timeline about The Truth in Lending Act based on at least two additional resources.	☑		☑

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR VIRTUAL REALITY IN THE CLASSROOM	MATCHING EXERCISE	SHORT ANSWER	SHORT ANSWER OR ESSAY
Understand how to access virtual reality tools at little or no expense.	☑	☑	
Evaluate a current lesson plan and determine how virtual reality could enhance the plan.	☑	☑	
Create a plan to work with colleagues, administrators, and your school district to provide VR-related professional development for other classroom teachers.			☑

We strongly suggest writing your assessment questions at this stage in the learning creation

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STEP #5:

DISCOVER UNKNOWN TREASURE
AND THE GAPS

Now it's time to take a look at the content you have on hand. Most of the time, you will find that you have a great deal of the content already ready either through video or written content.

Match the content with the learning that you have planned.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR VIRTUAL REALITY IN THE CLASSROOM	MATCHING EXERCISE	SHORT ANSWER	SHORT ANSWER OR ESSAY	CONTENT ON-HAND	CONTENT TO BE CREATED
Understand how to access virtual reality tools at little or no expense.	☑	☑		VR Partner graphics & websites	
Evaluate a current lesson plan and determine how virtual reality could enhance the plan.	☑	☑			Lesson plan samples
Create a plan to work with colleagues, administrators, and your school district to provide VR-related professional development for other classroom teachers.			☑	How to create a master PD plan with your principal [video]	

Your plan is taking shape! You can see the learning objectives, how you can best assess a students progress, and the content you have on hand to deliver the information.

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STEP #6:

DECIDE ON THE BEST WAY TO DELIVER AND ASSESS THE COURSE.

This is one of the more difficult questions to answer. What is the best way to deliver the learning? Which format will learning occur best in?

- ☑ Instructor-Led Training (ILT), which is primarily delivered in-person, such as a traditional seminar.
- ☑ Webinar, which provides a live teacher but in an online forum.
- ☑ eLearning, which combines tradition learning techniques but is accessed primarily from a mobile device or computer.
- ☑ Blended Learning, which might include elements of all three of the above.

Choosing a format can be tricky to determine, so we put together this chart which provides just a few of the essential factors that drive the decision.

FACTORS	OPTIONS			
	LIT	**WEBINAR**	**eLEARNING**	**BLENDED LEARNING**
Learners need 24/7/365 access to the content		☑ (via recording)	☑	☑
Learners live close to me or are willing to travel, or facilitators that can travel to multiple locations to meet with learners	☑			☑
Content focus requires demonstration of a specific skill	☑	☑	☑	☑
Learner must access specific equipment to demonstrate learning	☑			☑
Content needs to be updated often or at irregular intervals		☑	☑	☑
Learner needs access to subject matter experts	☑			☑

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STEP #7:
BUILD YOUR COURSE.

Now you're ready to build your course! We've outlined below how to proceed with two common course formats: ILT and eLearning.

Creating an ILT course

If you've chosen to create an Instructor-Led Training course, you are likely half] way through your journey. As you sculpt your certification program, be sure to take into consideration:

- ☑ How will you align the brand and messaging of your organization with this training?
- ☑ Who will teach your course?
- ☑ Will you develop a train-the-trainer program? Is there a market demand for such a training?
- ☑ How will you ensure the longevity of the training if the subject matter expert leaves?
- ☑ How will you organize the training to make the most efficient use of time? Which learning objectives will you teach and when?
- ☑ Will learners need access to certain supplies, tools, or equipment?
- ☑ What is the ideal size for the training?
- ☑ What should the cost of training be?
- ☑ How will you advertise the training?
- ☑ What is the process for signing up?
- ☑ How will you maintain the certificates of those who complete the program? Will you offer refreshers or recertifications after a period of time?

Creating an eLearning course

If you've chosen to create an eLearning course, your previous work will help you to immensely in your next steps.

Before you start using online learning creation tools, get familiar with the large options available in Learning Management Systems (LMS). LMSs vary dramatically in terms of cost and performance.

In your search, you will find that you'll need a handy checklist of items to consider. Click here for an LMS checklist to get you started.

Once you've chosen your LMS, you're ready to create your eLearning course. This is often a tricky part -- if you want help building out your eLearning course, please reach out to us!

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STEP #8:

GET FEEDBACK

Before you go live with your course, you'll want to give it a test run or two.

If you're going with an instructor-led course, have your subject matter expert give a trial-run of the course for you and your colleagues.

If you have built an eLearning certification course, tap some of your most active members to take the beta-version for free or at a discounted price in exchange for their honest feedback on how it could be improved.

The feedback doesn't need to stop just because the course is live. Continually surveying and polling your current and former students can help make sure your courses stay relevant, fresh, and valuable to your members.

Ready to get started? Contact Impart today for a consultation.
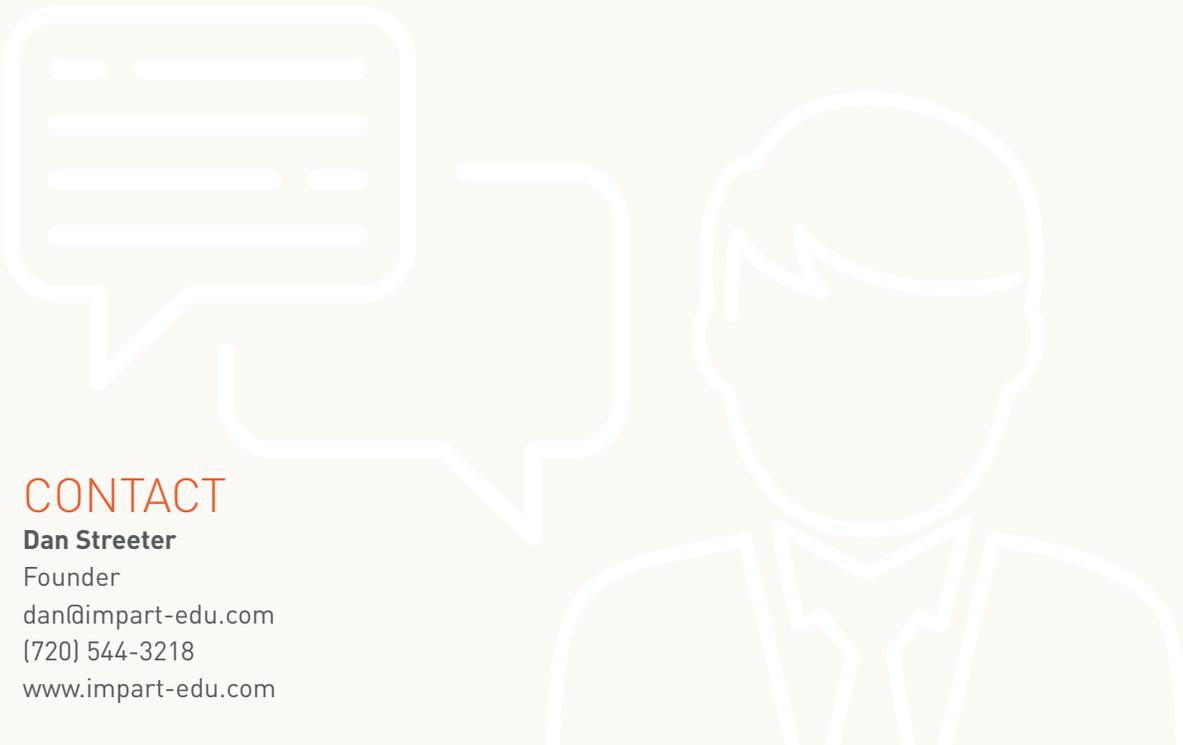
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