

Information Technology Architect Certification Program: Frequently Asked Questions

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Positioning

What is the Open Group IT Architect Certification Program?

The Open Group IT Architect Certification program certifies Enterprise and IT Architects that meet an open standard for skills and experience. The program includes direct certification of applicants as well as a process and a set of criteria for accrediting an organization's internal certification program. By defining criteria for recognizing certified professionals it also sets the foundation for establishing a recognized Enterprise and IT Architect profession. Certification requires the submission of a written package and a board interview.

Who is the target audience of the Open Group IT Architect Certification Program?

The program will be of interest to organizations with large Enterprise and/or IT Architecture practices and to individual Enterprise or IT Architects working in consulting firms, user organizations and or as individual consultants.

The certification criteria for skills and experience may also be useful to educational institutions intending to create IT Architect development programs.

The program defines many of the requirements for establishing and managing an Enterprise and/or an IT Architect profession and the program material may be used as the foundation for establishing an effective IT Architect practice within a company or organization.

What type of Enterprise Architect does the ITAC program certify?

The ITAC Program provides for Enterprise IT Architect certification at Level 3 (Distinguished Certified IT Architect) within one of the three Level 3 Career Path Categories (CPCs). The ITAC program assumes that an Enterprise IT Architect must

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have experience producing IT architectures before they can be effective Enterprise IT Architects. Simply put - an Enterprise IT Architect must understand the implications of the Enterprise Architecture on the IT systems for which they are responsible.

Can a single individual become certified through the program?

Yes, the direct certification route has been developed specifically to make certification available to individual practitioners, as well as to architects working in practices for which an accredited program is not established.

What benefit will individuals gain from becoming certified?

Individuals across the industry will be assessed and measured against the same baseline criteria across the industry, thereby establishing a standard for the use of the title of IT Architect.

Certification credentials are granted to the individual and remain with the individual as long as they maintain good standing as a practicing IT Architect.

Today, organizations need experienced and business-aware IT professionals, who can plan, design and implement IT solutions in relation to recognized quality standards. Professionals who can prove they have the necessary skills and experience to meet these requirements can immediately differentiate themselves from the competition – a crucial factor in the current economic climate.

What benefits will organizations get from participation in the program?

Companies that have not yet established their own certification program or formalized their architecture profession will benefit from the adoption of the IT Architect Certification program framework by leveraging the best practices of the contributing members. They will essentially get a head start in developing their own IT Architect profession model and certification program. Additional certification conformance criteria may be added to the base ITAC certification requirements by ITAC accredited organizations. These additional certification requirements are called extended certification requirements.

The flexible framework of the ITAC standard and the accreditation program allows companies to add additional industry, cultural and organizational extensions to the base certification framework. This allows organizations to require additional certification conformance criteria that are aligned to their business strategy. Such company methods and added value remain confidential. However, extended certification requirements may not change the base certification requirements.

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Credibility will be improved for companies or organizations that accredit their certification program or certify their IT Architects.

Open Group recognition of an organization's architecture method against the ITAC method conformance criteria is also a valuable statement to their customers.

Governments, companies and organizations that develop safety- or mission-critical IT systems may require Certified IT Architects to lead the design of important systems to help mitigate risk of project failure or shortfall.

How is the IT Architect certification different from the TOGAF certification? Is one a higher-level certification than the other?

The two programs are separate but complementary.

The IT Architect Certification (ITAC) program is the foundation for the IT Architecture Profession. ITAC is agnostic about methods and is concerned instead with an architect's skills and experience - their ability to deliver business value to their clients.

TOGAF is one of the methods used in the IT Architecture domain. TOGAF certification confirms an individual's knowledge of the TOGAF Architecture Development Method (ADM) and the TOGAF body of knowledge.

The Open Group's Architecture Forum will continue to evolve and develop TOGAF, the ADM and associated tools. TOGAF certification will operate in parallel with the IT Architect Certification program.

In the press release announcing the IT Architect Certification program, representatives from IBM and HP are quoted. How are they related to the Open Group? Are they sponsoring accredited IT Architect or TOGAF certification programs at their companies?

IBM and HP are Platinum members of The Open Group and have representatives on our governing board.

They jointly submitted the initial outline of the program to The Open Group and, in concert with other members, have been developing the formal program documentation, processes and systems. The Open Group membership including the members of AOGEA have provided input and feedback into the development of ITAC.

What is the reason The Open Group's members embarked on the program?

The membership realized that IT Architecture was becoming a critical discipline for large organizations to achieve their IT goals in support of their business objectives. It was clear

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that the industry needed a formal definition of the skills and experience necessary to be recognized as a certified IT Architect.

Members of The Open Group realized that their companies or organizations had established similar internal programs to support their consulting organizations or IT programs.

What is the importance of this certification? How is different than other architect certifications?

This is the first independent program to deal with demonstrated skills and experience of IT architects as opposed to a particular body of knowledge, and as such represents a most important step in the development of IT Architecture as a profession. While examination based programs are of value, repeated and recognized success (i.e. experience) is a best indicator of professional stature and, ultimately, the ability to succeed.

Microsoft supports a board level certification program for IT Architects. How does your program compare with Microsoft's?

The skill and experience requirements of the two programs are broadly similar, as they have both been developed to respond to the needs of the market. A key similarity is the use of a board of IT Architects to evaluate candidates for certification. In the Microsoft program, about 25% of the requirements are related to Microsoft-related technologies. In contrast, The Open Group's program is agnostic in terms of technology, frameworks, methods, and products. One difference that seems to have been highlighted in the press is the number of years of experience required. Microsoft states that 10 years of experience would be expected, whereas ITAC requires 3 years as a lead architect and conformance to the required skills – essentially both programs require about the same level of experience to become certified.

Microsoft's announcement is a validation of our view that the market needs an independent and respected certification program for IT Architects.

What is the difference between accreditation and certification?

Accreditation is attained by organizations whose internal profession certification or staff development programs have been assessed as meeting the accreditation requirements of The Open Group's certification program.

Certification is attained by those individual IT Architects who have successfully been assessed as meeting the requirements of the program either directly by The Open Group or by an accredited certification program.

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What does it mean to be accredited?

Before an organization or company can offer IT Architect certifications through the program, their company's own program must be accredited. Accreditation is the process of verifying that the company or organization is managing their certification program according to the established standard policies and criteria.

Obtaining accreditation requires that the organization submits an application for accreditation to The Open Group. An on-site accreditation assessment will be scheduled once the application is completed and accepted. The process of accreditation was established to ensure uniformity of the process and requirements for managing an IT Architect certification program – and therefore in the certified IT Architects qualifying through the program. The program framework is intended to be flexible and provides for additional industry, cultural and organizational extensions to the base certification framework. As a result confidential company methods remain secret.

What is direct vs. indirect certification?

IT Architects may achieve certification by applying directly to The Open Group, or indirectly by certifying through third party programs accredited by The Open Group for this purpose.

It is an essential feature of The Open Group's IT Architect Certification program that the Conformance Requirements that Candidates must meet are the same for both the direct and indirect routes, and the process by which applications and candidates are assessed meet the same high standard of objectivity and fairness.

Certification Process

When did the IT Architect Certification Program commence?

Development of the ITAC program started in 2003. During this time the members developed the initial program process and conformance criteria. The program officially launched on July 18th 2005 at the Open Group Architect Practitioners Conference in New York City.

Are there tests required to obtain the IT Architect certification?

ITAC requires that the candidate possess a set of skills required at each level of certification. ITAC is not prescriptive as to how a candidate obtains those skills. However, course training will most likely be one way a candidate obtains these skills. The ITAC certification process does not include an exam as part of the certification process. Instead

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ITAC assess candidates' experience and skills against the requirements of the program by evaluating their written applications validated by a Certification Board review.

Your white paper talked about "Certification Board reviews" evaluating a candidate's skills. How is that administered? Who is on that board?

In their applications for certification, candidates are required to describe their work experience in sufficient detail to support their claim to meet the skills and experience requirements defined for the program. Candidates are also asked practical questions regarding the practice of IT Architecture that relate to their experiences and are aligned with the conformance criteria. Certification Boards consist of certified IT Architects and they evaluate applications against the requirements of the program. The evaluation includes the board interview.

What are the different levels of certification?

There are three certification levels for IT Architects within the program:

Level 1: Certified IT Architect (able to perform with assistance/supervision, with a wide range of appropriate skills, as a contributing architect).

Level 2: Master Certified IT Architect (able to perform independently and take responsibility for delivery of systems and solutions as lead architect).

Level 3: Distinguished Certified IT Architect (able to provide enterprise level strategic leadership for multiple initiatives against one of the career path categories: Chief/Lead IT Architect, Enterprise IT Architect and Profession Leader)

What is the difference between Level 1 and Level 2?

The Level 1 certification is designed to provide recognition of practicing IT architects who have proven experience producing IT architectures with mentoring from more experienced members of the IT Architect community.

Why does only Level 3 certification defines career path categories?

The typical career path of IT architects makes senior individuals specialize in IT architecture related domains. To recognize these deviations the program defines three career path categories for the ITAC level 3.

Is there training available and required for the IT Architect certification?

As the program does not prescribe any particular body of knowledge, no training requirements have been defined.

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The program does require IT Architects to be knowledgeable of, and have successfully applied, one or more formal methods but makes no requirements about which, or how such knowledge has been gained.

Will the 24-month validity period of the TOGAF certification apply to this certification as well?

Certification will be valid for three years, at which point certified architects are required to re-certify. Recertification is intended to validate that a candidate continues to practice as an IT Architect and has obtained the expected continuing education. TOGAF and ITAC Profession Certification are separate wholly separate certifications. TOGAF certification validates a candidate's knowledge of how to effectively apply TOGAF. ITAC Profession Certification validates a candidate's practical ability to apply architectural skills through an evaluation of acquired skills and experience as defined by the ITAC conformance criteria.

What is the process to obtain accreditation?

Applicants will request accreditation from The Open Group, who will appoint an assessor. The assessor will conduct a review of the applicant's program documentation against the ITAC accreditation conformance criteria and will conduct an on-site assessment of the program's procedures. The assessor will report the results to the applicant and The Open Group, and if the applicant has been successful accreditation will be granted.

Are there any fees in obtaining the IT Architect certification?

Direct applicants pay certification fees to The Open Group. These fees are \$1250 for the assessment plus \$175 per annum to remain certified.

Will I need to travel to the Certification Board?

It depends on the level of certification. If Level 2 or Level 3 (Master Certified IT Architect or Distinguished Certified IT Architect) then yes, the applicant will be required to attend the Certification Board and to meet any costs involved in travel and accommodation. If Level 1 (Certified IT Architect) then the Certification Board interviews take place by telephone and no travel is required.

How long will it take to become certified?

The application process and documentation systems are on-line and can be completed over a period of time. Thorough documentation of how the applicant meets the criteria is required – this is rather like a detailed resume – and it is anticipated that most applicants will take three to six months to complete the entire process.

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Why would I want to go through the effort and cost of certification?

ITAC certification will increase the trust of clients, increasing demand for the services of the IT architecture practitioner and enabling certified architects to demonstrate independent recognition of their skills and experience.

How do I know that anyone will actually want this certification or that it will make any difference to me?

Both The Open Group and accredited organizations will be working to build awareness of the program which will build demand. There are numerous industry examples where rigorous certification programs have proven to be highly valued and individuals with those certifications are in demand.

Will I receive some sort of logo or title that I can promote once I'm certified? What does it look like?

Yes, there are official marks, one for each certification level, that are awarded for use by certified architects. Details of the use of this mark on business cards, proposals, etc. can be found in the Trademark Usage Guide at the following URL: www.opengroup.org/itac/.

Is there any difference in logo for certifications obtained through direct certification or via accredited certification programs?

No, the ITAC certification program maintains the same certification criteria for both. Certification through an accredited certification program provides the same marks awarded for use by certified architects.

How does a 3rd party confirm an individual's certification credentials? How do I obtain a Personal Confirmation Code to verify that a person is a Certified IT Architect and currently holds a current certification?

You should contact the individual concerned. As a Certified IT Architect they have an obligation to provide the Personal Confirmation Code (PCC) on request to customers and prospective customers. Once you have obtained the individual's PCC you should enter this together with the surname into the Search facility within the Directory of Certified IT Architects at <http://www.opengroup.org/itac/directory.html>

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Is there a Register of IT architects that are certified through the ITAC program?

Yes. The Open Group maintains a certification register where of ITAC certified professionals who have chosen to register through a Personal Confirmation Code (PCC). Individuals are obliged to provide the PCC upon request to customers and prospective customers. Once you have obtained the individual's PCC you should enter this together with the surname into the Search facility within the Directory of Certified IT Architects at <http://www.opengroup.org/itac/directory.html>

Where can I get the certification/accreditation logo artwork?

Once you are certified or accredited a link appears within your login account to a Resource Center from where these can be accessed.

Certification Criteria

What are the certification criteria?

There is an extensive set of criteria defined in the IT Architect Certification Conformance Requirements. This document may be found at www.opengroup.org/itac/cert

What is the best method of obtaining the skills and experience necessary to meet the Open Group IT Architect Certification criteria?

There is a set of foundation skills criteria that form the basis for a practicing IT Architect. An individual seeking to become certified should obtain training to satisfy the base skills criteria – for example courses in project management, architecture development methods, etc.

Experience is best obtained and imparted through a combination of formal mentoring and individual performance and empowerment.

Many accredited organizations benefit by promoting a formal IT Architect mentoring program in order to grow a community of certified IT Architects. The authors of the original white paper that launched the program are optimistic that academic institutions will leverage this material in the curriculum of their education offerings.

Is the ITAC certification dependent on certain IT Architecture Methods?

An organization may have a proprietary methodology that believes to provide their architects a competitive edge in the industry. These organizations can obtain accreditation for their IT Architecture Method.

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My organization has a proprietary methodology that we believe provides our architects a competitive edge in the industry. How will my organization obtain accreditation?

The Open Group publishes a set of criteria for the recognition of IT Architecture methods. During accreditation (or subsequently), applicants may submit their proprietary method for evaluation against the criteria. If the criteria are met, the method will be recognized by The Open Group and may be referenced by candidates for certification.

What are the criteria for recognizing a company specific Method as part of the certification process?

The criteria are documented in the Conformance Requirements in the last section (section 7 in version 1.2)

What documentation needs to be submitted for getting a method recognized?

A template for providing an assessment of a method is available at:

<http://www.opengroup.org/itac/cert/methods.tpl>

You should complete and submit the above template to provide your assessment of how the method meets the published criteria, with sufficient references and/or back up material to support your case when evaluated by an expert the field of IT Architecture. This assessment should be a summary of the case for recognition of the method and limited to no more than five pages of text.

If the method is publicly available, then references (URLs, publication titles, course references) will usually suffice.

If the method is proprietary and not publicly accessible, you will need to provide more information.

Can a method be evaluated and recognized in advance of an individual certification request?

Yes. You may at any time submit a request for recognition of a method.

Does EC04 require me to have used three different methods?

In EC04, some candidates have interpreted the request for three experiences to mean experiences using three different methods.

This is incorrect.

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The requirement is to document three experiences using one or more recognized method(s), so three experiences using the same recognized method to do architectural work fully meets the requirement.

How do I know which level of certification to go for?

A new ITAC interactive self assessment tool which will help you determine whether you should apply for Level 1 or Level 2 ITAC is now available. It can be found at <http://www.opengroup.org/bookstore/catalog/x095.htm>.