



Coach Training and Certification FAQs

The Philadelphia Area Coaches Alliance is thrilled that new and prospective members express interest in the coaching profession, in general, and in coach training and certification, specifically.

All of this interest in coaching invariably leads to numerous questions and this FAQ is designed to get you started on your new journey. Of course, it's expected that you'll have additional questions, so please bring them to one of the new member sessions scheduled prior to our monthly meetings!

Q. I already have years of experience in a related profession (i.e., social work, nursing, psychology, education or training). Why is it necessary to obtain coach-specific training and certification?

A. Excellent question – so many coaches come from backgrounds with rich education and experience! Coach-specific training is essential for both your personal credibility and that of the profession. All recognized professions have basic standards for entry into practice and none can call themselves a “professional” without it. For example, a social worker who wants to be a licensed psychologist needs to be credentialed in psychology, and a registered nurse with a baccalaureate degree who wants to be a nurse practitioner needs specific training and certification to be able to use the title “nurse practitioner.” The same is true for coaches.

The International Coach Federation (ICF) has completed comprehensive research on coach competencies using the standards of the International Organization for Standardization and has articulated the unique knowledge base that supports these competencies.

Q. Then why are there so many people, such as consultants and trainers, who do business as coaches who do not have this training?

A. Coaching, unlike most professions, is not licensed or regulated by a government body, such as an individual state. Thus, the title is not protected under law. The ICF sees coaching as a self-regulating profession. ICF offers the credibility of accredited coach training programs, certification and a Code of Ethics to which each member must agree. The Code outlines acceptable standards of coach behavior and offers security to clients that the coach meets the ICF standards of practice. Potential clients are encouraged to ask if a prospective coach has coach-specific training and is certified to ensure they are getting a qualified coach with education and experience in the coaching core competencies.

Q. There are so many coach training programs, how does one sort them all out?

A. First, the most important factor is that the coach training program is accredited by the ICF. This ensures that the program meets professional standards and will include coaching competencies in its curriculum. There is a searchable data base of ICF accredited programs at www.coachfederation.org. Look under the section entitled Research & Education.

Q. Okay, I've checked out the ICF site and am still confused. How do I choose among those offered?

A. There are a number of related factors. First, let's start with the types of programs. These are the current requirements as of August 25, 2009. (Note that the ICF is in the process of making significant credentialing enhancements using standards developed by the International Organization for Standardization):

1. Accredited Coach Training program (ACTP) – The most comprehensive type of program that includes a minimum of 125 hours of coach-specific training on all ICF Core Competencies and the Code of Ethics, coach supervision, and a comprehensive final exam. Graduates who complete the certification program and have the required number of coaching hours and reference letters, are eligible for ICF certification at the ACC or PCC level. They also receive certification from their program.
2. Approved Coach-Specific Training Hours (ACSTH) – Offers a minimum of 30 hours of coach-specific training on all the ICF Core Competencies and the Code of Ethics. Students may use these hours to apply for portfolio review, which requires 60 hours of training, ten hours of work with a mentor coach, documentation of coaching hours, reference letters and the ICF competency exam.
3. Continuing Coach Education (CCE) – These are advanced or niche-specific courses that may be used for continuing education or renewing a credential at the ACC, PCC, or MCC level. These programs generally do not satisfy the requirements for a coaching credential. Continuing education is an essential component of continued professional development.

Q. What do ACC, PCC and MCC mean?

A. These are the current levels of coaching competency: Associate Certified Coach, Professional Certified Coach and Master Certified Coach. Each level has its own required number of coach-specific training and client coaching hours as well as defined levels of competency. This information is also found on the ICF website <link to: www.coachfederation.org>.

The ICF is in the process of rolling out a new single credential with new requirements that are proposed for coaches in 2011. PACA will be monitoring developments in this area and will keep members informed. All current credentials remain in place and will be renewable and supported by ICF for a number of years.

Q. Beyond the type of program, what other factors should I consider in choosing a program?

A. This is where your needs and preferences come in. What type of coaching do you see yourself doing? What is your prior level of education and experience? How best do you learn? For example, some learners prefer face-to-face and experiential learning; many of these programs are offered on weekends. Others prefer an online or teleconference learning environment. How you learn is a major factor as is the type of niche you see yourself working in. There are life coaching programs, executive coaching programs, generic programs that apply to all areas and many others to consider. Also, if you think you might want a graduate degree or graduate level certificate, there are many programs now offered by universities, some even in an online format so distance is not an issue.

Compare program descriptions. Just like a college catalog, different programs will describe their vision and purpose and you can see where you best fit. You'll also want to see who is teaching in the program. They should be ICF credentialed coaches at the PCC or MCC level and have significant experience.

Q. Should I have a coach myself?

A. Absolutely! There are a number of reasons. First, what better way to explore coaching than to be coached yourself? It's essentially walking your talk. And a credentialed coach can support you in your decision making process, mentor you, provide supervision, and be a thought partner in your learning process. Also, ICF requires that you work with a mentor coach. The ACTP programs include this as part of the program. Make sure you ask if the coach you are considering has coach-specific training and is certified by the ICF.

Q. How do I find a qualified coach for myself?

A. There are two sources. First, check the PACA website <link to: www.philadelphiacoaches.org>. There is a "Find a Coach" searchable data base of PACA members, by specialty and experience. Second, the ICF website noted above also allows you to search for qualified coaches. It is generally a good idea to interview 2-3 certified coaches to determine the best fit for your style and needs. Many coaches offer a complimentary session and reduced fees for coaches in training.

Q. What will a coach training program cost?

A. There are a number of factors to consider and it is a good idea to research a few programs that meet your area of interest and then add up the costs, both direct and indirect. Costs will include tuition, travel and perhaps lodging for face-to-face programs, internet and phone line fees, recording fees for coach supervision, fees for your mentor coach, application and exam fees, and ICF credentialing fees, which are less for an ACTP program than for portfolio review. Some programs are segmented into different levels so you can plan your budget outlay accordingly.

Q. Where else can I obtain information?

A. Come to a PACA monthly meeting and talk to members. Coaches are generally passionate about the program they attended and PACA members represent a broad sampling. See which described programs resonate with you. While no one can advise you what is best for you, many coaches will have stories that will grab your attention. Then go explore more information about what you hear. And take advantage of advisors who represent the programs you are considering. Remember, this is an investment in your professional development so paying due diligence on your options will serve you well.

PACA now has a Board position to serve as a resource to aspiring coaches and new members. The interim Vice President for Professional Development is currently Dr. Cheryl Vermey, CPCC, ACC, CTC. Please contact her at: professionaldevelopment@philadelphiacoaches.org or 610-793-6503.

We're looking forward to serving you on your journey!

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