

Coach Certification Program

Following requests from our CCNet community, in 2017 we launched a second party certification program, where CCNet is the entity certifying Conservation Coaches. The first cohort of Certified Coaches was presented at the 2018 Coaches Rally in Australia.

The CCNet Certification Program provides an opportunity for conservation practitioners who coach projects with the Open Standards for the Practice of Conservation (Conservation Standards or CS), to be recognized through certification – indicating that they have achieved an “officially” acknowledged level of proficiency.

All Conservation Coaches, whether they seek certification or not, should periodically reflect on their skills and experience, and seek to improve. The self-assessment was developed for this purpose.

Because the certification process requires a significant effort and a documented high level of proficiency, only a certain percentage of coaches are expected to seek certification. And to be clear: you don't have to be certified to call yourself, and act as, a conservation coach. Certification is only for those coaches who feel the need (e.g., as a consultant) to have those credentials. Time will tell how important and widespread certification becomes as coaching becomes more professional.

Constituencies for certification include:

- Consulting Conservation Coaches who can use certification to assure potential clients;
- Members of medium to large conservation organizations whose organization will support or even eventually require their certification.

We believe that once 40-50 coaches are certified, the program will be recognized as a clear and desirable standard and should become sustainable.

Program Description

Reviewers

The most experienced coaches in CCNet are asked to help review coaches for certification. Membership of the group rotates in a staggered sequence so as to reduce the burden but maintain consistency among reviewers. For coaches from non-English-speaking countries we consider a reviewer from their regional Network who can vouch for the ability to communicate effectively in the language a coach indicates.

Review Process

We believe it will take 10-15 person-hours (total) per candidate to review. This is based on:

- 2-3 hours to receive, review, organize, and distribute for review the initial application materials from each candidate to the lead reviewer for each candidate;
- 3 hours each for 1 reviewer to review the application independently, interview the candidate & present findings to larger review committee;
- 1 hour each for 6 persons on the review committee to discuss the candidate and come to a decision;
- Extra few hours for candidates where additional interview, reference checks or direct observation is required.

The process itself is envisioned as follows:

1. Certification Program Lead receives application and scans.
2. Certification Program Lead forwards to a designated Review Subcommittee Lead who assembles a Review Subcommittee – a group of 6 Reviewers from a pool of pre-designated Reviewers across the CCNet Network. Each unique Review Subcommittee can review up to 5 applicants. Review Subcommittees can overlap in terms of their participants.
3. The Review Subcommittee Lead assigns applicants to members of the Review Subcommittee.
4. Lead Reviewer reviews the application individually, interviews the candidate as necessary. One possible outcome (see below) is that further on-site review of the candidate is necessary – this is likely to delay the process until a mutually convenient opportunity is found for on-site review.
5. Lead Reviewer presents his/her findings to the Review Subcommittee for a decision.
6. Review Subcommittee decisions should be unanimous.
7. Review Subcommittee Lead reports back to Certification Program Lead.
8. Certification Program Lead reports back to applicant.
9. Applicant pays for Review and is issued certificate if successful.

Rating

Everyone will have some deficiencies – it is to be expected.

The rating criteria is aligned, more or less, with the coach self-assessment – a living document that will continue to evolve over time as new and different skill areas become important. Applicants for renewal would be expected to stay current with evolving practice as included in the self-assessment.

As a reminder, the categories in the current version of the coach self-assessment are:

1. Facilitation
2. Conservation Knowledge
3. Open Standards
4. Theory of Change
5. Monitoring and adaptive Management
6. Operational Planning
7. Meeting Organization
8. Reports/Reporting

9. Digital Sharing & Collaboration
10. Human Well-Being Targets & Ecosystem Services
11. Thematic Projects/Programs
12. Climate Change & Climate Adaptation
13. Environmental & Social Safeguards

Some areas of the self-assessment are probably more critical than others. Initial attempts to come to a consensus on the priorities have been unsuccessful to date. We hope that initial review committees can assist in establishing a prioritization.

The reviewing team will have great latitude to use their own judgement in certifying coaches.

The Lead Reviewer for each candidate would coordinate the group to come to a conclusion about the certification. The following outcomes seem possible:

- The committee knows the candidate and all agree that they should be certified based on their knowledge and the materials in front of them.
- The committee knows (or might not know) the candidate but there is some disagreement, or uncertainty – in which case a (remote) interview would be organized to inform the decision. No promises are made.
- The committee knows the candidate but there is disagreement or even doubt – in which case a live work session is in order. This is based on a suggested principle that at least one experienced coach needs to actually see (or have seen) a coach working, and feel confident about the candidate, for that coach to become certified – i.e., that looking at work products is helpful but not sufficient. If an experienced coach that we trust (one or more of the references) can vouchsafe for the candidate – that will probably be enough. If no one the review team knows and trusts has seen the coach in action, then we need to make arrangements for 1 reviewer to watch them in action. This is a high bar, as we will probably require the candidate to fund the coach's time and expenses. An alternative is to hold regional certification reviews where a number of coaches would get the chance to work on case studies with a group of other candidates – that would save costs significantly. We are actually hoping and thinking that this would be relatively rare and won't come up too often (because it's a big hassle all the way around!)?
- Another situation is where no one on the committee has seen the candidate in action – the committee can decide, based on the materials or consultations, that either an interview or live observation is required.
- The decision about how to proceed would be left up to the consensus of the review committee.
- No matter what the outcome of the review (e.g., whether the candidate gets certified or not), the committee will make suggestions for improvement and work with Franchise leads and local mentors to identify opportunities for further development.

Coach Certification Levels

1. Coach in Training – this basically means the coach is not yet fully competent or appropriately experienced in all required areas in order to be certified.
2. Certified Coach – a competent coach.
3. “Master” Coach – an exceptional coach who can handle virtually any situation. This would be a relatively rare designation.

Coaches in Training could sometimes be caught at the application stage and most of their application fee would be refunded.

Cost Structure (USD) – “Promotional Rate” for first 1-2 years

- Developed Countries: Application fee \$300 (total) for three years, \$150 (total) for three-year renewal
- Developing Countries/Areas: Application fee \$150 (total) for three years, \$100 (total) for three-year renewal

At renewal, applicants would need to show that they had made an effort to stay current with accepted practice (as identified in the self-assessment), and been active as a coach.

Application Process

Applications will be reviewed once a year. You may want to inquire with [John Morrison](#) or [Stuart Cowell](#) before filling out the extensive application form.

The application form includes fields for:

- Name
- Current, past orgs
- List any OS training in a table (including webinars, etc., including date(s), location, trainers’ names)
- List all OS experience in a table (including date(s), title, realm (fw, terr, mar), country(ies), training vs. planning vs. monitoring vs. implementation of CS, # days involved, contact person & email)
- List conservation experience in general
- List any relevant special expertise (monitoring, facilitation, ecological knowledge, etc.)
- List of 3 CS references in a table (with emphasis on experienced coaches who have seen you at work as a coach). Project leaders/managers & team members can be sent a template to fill out.
- Attach work product examples, if relevant and possible
- Fill out self-assessment