The Open Group Certified IT Specialist (Open CITS) Program

Board Member Handbook

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The Open Group Certified IT Specialist (Open CITS) Program – Board Member Handbook

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Contents

1. Program Overview

1.1 The Open CITS Program

The Open Group Certified IT Specialist (Open CITS) Program (the Program) is designed to validate the existence of those qualities and skills in a professional that enable the effective development, implementation, and operation of IT solutions. The Open CITS Program is skills and experience-based and goes beyond validating the mastery of any specific knowledge base.

The Program includes a framework for accreditation of third parties to establish IT Specialist certification programs affiliated to The Open Group. The framework of accreditation and certification is specifically intended to standardize the process and criteria for IT Specialist professional certification and establish a foundation for the required skills and experience necessary to achieve such a distinction. The Program has been designed to be flexible and extensible so that the framework may be adopted by any industry, country, or organization.

The Open Group supports two different routes to IT Specialist certification:

- The first route is *direct* certification by The Open Group.
- The second route is *indirect*, through third-party programs accredited by The Open Group.

The Conformance Requirements for IT Specialist certification apply equally to the direct and indirect routes to certification.

Beyond the Conformance Requirements for a Certified IT Specialist, third parties operating Accredited Certification Programs (ACPs) may levy additional requirements on their candidates in order to satisfy their internal skills requirements. Such additional requirements are called “extended certification requirements”, or simply “extended requirements”. For example, extended certification requirements might include experience with proprietary corporate tools or products, or appropriate industry or cultural requirements.

The Program requires ACPs’ extended certification requirements to be effectively documented and communicated within the accredited program. In addition, extended certification requirements must not relax the skills, experience, or process requirements set forth by the framework established by the ITSC Program.

The Program is based upon a set of key documents:

- The *Certification Policy*, which sets out the policies and processes by which an IT Specialist may achieve certification
- The *Conformance Requirements*, which documents the skills and experience that a Certified IT Specialist must possess
- The *Accreditation Policy*, which sets out the policies and processes by which an organization may achieve accreditation
- The *Accreditation Requirements*, which documents the criteria that must be met by an ACP

1.2 Levels of Certification

The Program recognizes three levels of certification – “Certified”, “Master”, and “Distinguished” – in increasing order of skill and experience.

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

Level 2: Master IT Specialist (able to perform independently and take responsibility for delivery of systems and solutions as a lead IT Specialist)

Level 3: Distinguished IT Specialist (delivering leadership, scope, depth, and breadth of impact)

It is recommended that all professionals seeking Open CITS certification at Level 1 or Level 2 have the following:

- Three (3) years’ experience in the Stream in the last five (5) years
- Five (5) years’ work experience in IT in the last eight (8) years

For guidance, it would normally take three to five years of additional IT experience to grow from Level 1 certification to Level 2 certification, and a further two to five years to grow to Level 3 certification.

Certification Level	Experience Requirements
Level 1: Certified	Level 1 Certified IT Specialists are required to have led technical aspects of projects or engagements within their chosen Stream. Level 1 Certified IT Specialists must have acted in the role of IT Specialist within their Stream in at least two (2) successful engagements. The deliverables produced by the Candidate must have contributed to the engagement meeting its acceptance criteria.
Level 2: Master	Level 2 Certified IT Specialists are recognized experts who have mastered the state-of-the-art in their field. Level 2 Certified IT Specialists: • Lead teams involving multiple streams on projects or engagements • Make significant contributions to project definition and management • Are involved in the growth and development of others Level 2 Certified IT Specialists must have acted in a leadership role in at least three (3) successful engagements.
Level 3: Distinguished	Level 3 Certified IT Specialists are experts in the application of information and communications technology to system design and implementation, taking into account security, extensibility, interoperability, manageability, and organizational considerations. They are leaders of the profession, constantly learning and applying new techniques and technologies and seeking to design new and innovative solutions. What distinguishes IT Specialists at Level 3 from those at Level 2 are leadership, scope, depth, and breadth of impact.

2. Open CITS Board

2.1 Objectives

The certification objectives are simple: to objectively assess and validate each candidate against the applicable Conformance Requirements (Level 1 or Level 2), and to arrive at a majority or unanimous decision regarding certification.

- For Level 2 initial certification, the interviews take place face-to-face.
- For Level 1 initial certification, and for all re-certifications, the interviews take place by telephone (or other remote means).

Direct Certification Boards are usually held at The Open Group quarterly member conferences, normally during the weekend before the meeting. These conferences typically alternate between Europe and the US. Boards may be held at other times and places according to need.

Board members for Level 2 must all be Master Certified IT Specialists, either from those who have been certified directly by The Open Group, or from those certified through Accredited Certification Programs (ACPs).

2.2 Certification Package Review

It is absolutely essential that the candidate’s Certification Package is reviewed as soon as it is received. Waiting to do so will not leave enough time to properly prepare or seek assistance prior to the interview deadline.

When reviewing the Certification Package, take into consideration the candidate’s background. The descriptions they provide may be from an unfamiliar perspective. Board reviewers need to think about how the candidate’s experience may meet the spirit of the requirement. Remember, IT Specialists perform many varied roles; not all experiences are customer-related and not all knowledge is acquired through courses. Having a better understanding of what an IT Specialist does in their business will help put the candidate’s responses into a context the Board member can understand.

2.3 Preparation

Each certification level has a documented set of Conformance Requirements that must be met by candidates in order to attain certification at that level. The Board member must be familiar with those requirements and must assess candidates against them. This is accomplished by reading the Certification Package and determining what questions to ask to validate the candidate’s claim. The Board member also needs to ask questions that will cover any perceived gaps in the written package. So, identify areas of concern and prepare ample (10-15) open-ended questions for the interview.

You should check for any Interpretations that have been granted against the Conformance Requirements to ensure that you are evaluating the candidate against the current requirements.

Philosophically, the job of the Board member is to try to cover gaps in the Certification Package rather than find reasons to fail the candidate. If the applicant has misunderstood a requirement or a question in the Certification Package template, the Board member should try to determine during the interview whether the requirement is actually met. The purpose of the interview is also to confirm that the candidate can speak authoritatively about the work cited as evidence in the Certification Package, to ensure that it was indeed the candidates' own work.

If certification is to be declined, it is most important to ensure that there is a clear explanation of which of the Conformance Requirements are not met and how/why – and what the candidate can do about it to succeed in future.

Board members should also provide candidates with guidance on their growth and development as IT Specialists, and (if applicable) how they should approach certification at the next level. Board members are also responsible for identifying people who should be approached about serving on Boards in future.

Board members must be objective and avoid any conflict of interest. Board members should excuse themselves from interviewing a candidate if they have a conflict of interest, such as having a close working relationship with the candidate, working for the candidate, the candidate working for the Board member, or any other situation which may impact objectivity. Each Board member must use their own discretion in choosing to expand their list of ineligibles beyond the guidelines.

If you have previously declined a candidate, you should not interview them again.

ACPs are allowed to impose more stringent and/or additional requirements on their internal candidates. Board members should ensure that they don't evaluate direct certification candidates against these additional criteria – there is no substitute for reading the Conformance Requirements!

The Chair of the Board has the responsibility of ensuring that the Board members have downloaded the candidates' Certification Packages, and of ensuring that the Consensus Meeting takes place. The Chair is also responsible for providing the final summary text that will be passed to candidates when they are notified of their results.

2.4 The Interview

There are many things to consider when evaluating a candidate. Candidate interviews are one hour in length. Familiarity with the Conformance Requirements enables the Board member to identify areas of concern or where the candidate may not meet the requirements.

Even though Board members are expected to participate in evaluating candidates regularly, some members don't get the opportunity to do so often enough to remain familiar with the criteria or to develop an interviewing style – and the Program does evolve. This makes it difficult for candidates to be interviewed and evaluated in a consistent manner. Board members should download and read the current Conformance Requirements, and have a look at any recent Interpretations in the Problem Reporting system. Anything that is unclear about the Conformance Requirements should be discussed with other members of the Board.

The interviews should be conducted in a professional and courteous manner. The questions the Board member poses to the candidate should be specific and criteria-based – although open and general questions may help candidates relax. Only careful preparation will enable the Board member to do justice to candidates through a fair and accurate evaluation.

The Board member should take notes on each candidate to assist in supporting the vote to accept or decline certification. These notes will help during the Consensus Meeting. Should the interviewing peers vote to decline a candidate, the notes will become input to the candidate's decline letter. Decline letters are based on peer assessment and observations.

It is imperative that the Board members not disclose their potential vote to the candidate or each other before the Consensus Meeting. Even if the Board member feels the candidate is a definite yes, the other Board members may not feel the same way and the candidate could be declined. Even a hint to the candidate of what the vote will be could be cause for much frustration on the candidate’s part and possibly initiate an escalation, if they are declined.

Remember, the interview time should be used solely to determine whether the candidate meets the Conformance Requirements. Wasting time on personal or frivolous discussion will again provide the candidate with a reason to escalate if the interview discussion did not pertain to the criteria and they were declined. Be sure to use up the complete hour, for the same reason mentioned above. If you determine early in the interview that the candidate should be certified and stop the interview short, but the candidate is declined, they may feel that they were not provided with a complete and professional interview and initiate an escalation.

When starting the interview, use some “ice breaking” techniques to help put the candidate at ease. Let the candidate know what to expect, and what is expected. The first Board member should make sure the candidate understands the process and should advise the candidate of the following:

1. Notes will be taken during the interview. This also applies for phone interviews. The Board member may need time to complete notes between questions and the candidate should expect some silence while you do so.
2. Candidates should listen to the question and think before answering. Their answer should be as direct and concise as possible and respond to the question asked.
3. Because time is short, the Board member may stop the candidate’s response if the Board member feels that the response has been sufficient.

The Board member is in control of the interview. If the candidate starts rambling, wait for an appropriate break and remind them that time is short, and then ask the next question.

It is to the candidate’s advantage to make sure that all the Board member questions are answered. The Board member must help the candidate to be concise and to the point with answers. This is also an indication of how good a communicator they are, or are not.

Remember that the candidate’s experience may be quite different to yours. If needed, ask for explanation if you do not understand a response. They may be responding to the question but in a different context than you are expecting. For example, if your questions are about a client experience, they may only have internal experience and not understand your question the same way you meant it.

You may need to help them relate their internal experience to the question and then determine whether the experience they describe satisfies the spirit of the requirement.

This is key for some candidates, so you should be familiar with their background as described in their Certification Package to know when you need to apply this technique.

Make sure your questions pertain to their skills and not to them personally.

Personal points of view – such as politics, cultural or religious beliefs, likes and dislikes, etc. – are not part of the certification criteria and should not be discussed during the interview. Doing so will likely make the candidate feel that some form of prejudice may be present and affect the balance of the interview. In the case of a decline, it will most likely be the cause of an escalation.

Make sure you get specific answers to your questions and that your questions relate to the certification criteria. If you feel that you are getting a one-sided view of the candidate, ask them to describe a contrary situation that did not go so well or where they made a mistake and what they learned from it.

You should strive to have a well rounded view of the candidate at the end of the interview.

Candidates are not allowed to bring additional material to the interviews – they may bring their Certification Package of course, and you may wish to ask them to draw diagrams when explaining some of their experiences to you.

The project profiles are one of the focus areas of the package and the interviews. The profiles should provide descriptive evidence of the candidate’s earlier claims of skill and experience.

Decide whether the candidate meets or exceeds each of the Conformance Requirements. A decision to decline a candidate *must* be based on their failure to meet one or more criteria. On completion of the interview, the Board member should make a preliminary decision for each candidate. The preliminary decision is either Accept, Discuss, or Decline.

Once you have completed the interview and made your preliminary decision, complete the Board Report Form on the Certification Authority web site.

Use the form to record your comments about apparent non-conformances that were resolved during the interview.

Use it also to record your decision about any criteria that were not met.

If the Consensus Meeting is being held on the same day as the interviews, there may not be time to fill in the form before the Consensus Meeting, but it must be done soon, while the interview is still fresh in your mind.

The Board Report Forms are a critical part of the process as they provide the link between the Board process and the Certification Authority – they are the formal record of why a candidate is accepted or declined. The forms must be completed before a candidate can be informed of the result.

2.5 The Consensus Meeting

The discussions and results of Consensus Meetings are "Board Confidential". Board member discussions of candidates should be limited to each candidate's designated discussion period in the Board Consensus Meeting.

The Certification Authority normally provides a facilitator. The facilitation role is to observe the discussions and to support the Chair in ensuring objectivity and fairness and to ensure due process is followed. The facilitator will not normally be an IT Specialist, may not be familiar with the candidates or their Certification Packages, and has no vote. If a facilitator is not provided, the Chair of the Board assumes these responsibilities.

All Board members *must* attend the Consensus Meeting – once an Board member commits to interviewing a candidate, they are also committing to attend the Consensus Meeting.

Consensus Meetings should take place as soon as possible after the interviews to ensure the interviews are still fresh in the Board members' minds. For face-to-face Boards, the Consensus Meeting will normally take place on the same day. Face-to-face Boards should preferably hold a face-to-face Consensus Meeting, but if this is not practical, a teleconference may be used instead. The Consensus Meeting after telephone interviews will normally take place by teleconference. Consensus Meetings may be spread over more than one teleconference.

All Board members are responsible for fairness. An Board member that feels a candidate has not been treated fairly *must* raise this during the Consensus Meeting. If the issue is not dealt with to the Board member's satisfaction, the issue should be brought to the attention of the Certification Authority.

During the consensus discussions, Board members should limit comments to why they feel the candidate does or does not meet the requirement being discussed. This will help greatly to expedite the meeting. A majority vote will determine whether a candidate is accepted or declined.

The candidate discussions will begin with the candidates with three (3) Accept votes (the easiest) and progress through the list from easiest to those with three (3) Decline votes.

In the case of three Accept votes, the Board members will be asked whether they believe the candidate should be nominated to the Board pool – the Board nomination must be unanimous.

During the Consensus Meeting, the three Board members may be asked to discuss their votes. Three Accept votes indicate a candidate is certified. If there is not unanimous agreement that the candidate should be certified, then Board discussion must occur. During this time the three interviewing Board members will discuss what specific Conformance Requirements were not met.

Candidates with one or more Decline or Discuss votes will always be discussed amongst the three Board members.

The facilitator may interject as needed to keep the discussion focused on the criteria. Once the Board members agree that they are ready for a vote, or once the Chair or facilitator believes that the discussion is no longer being productive, a final vote will be taken. Each Board member will be asked for their final vote to which they must respond with an Accept or Decline. Board Consensus Meetings continue until all three Board members have made a final decision on each candidate.

At that time, if the candidate receives a majority vote (two Accepts), s/he will be certified. If the candidate does not receive a majority vote (two Accepts), s/he will be Declined. It is the Chair's responsibility to document the criteria that were not met.

For candidates that are accepted, Board members will be asked if there are any developmental recommendations that should be passed to the candidate.

For declined candidates, at least two of the Board members must agree on the specific Conformance Requirements the candidate is being declined upon, and this must be reflected in the Board Report Forms submitted to the Certification Authority.

In some cases there may be an appeal and your notes will be instrumental in describing the reasons for your decision. All discussions held during a Consensus Meeting are confidential to the Board and must not be discussed with anyone outside the Board. As well, the final votes must not be communicated to anyone by an Board member.

For declined candidates, the Board Report Form must be used to document the reasons for the decline. When completing the form, include a positive statement and, optionally, any general observations the Board members may have had about this candidate.

For the criteria the candidate met, you may include developmental recommendations to assist the candidate in further developing their professional skills.

For all criteria the candidate did not meet, the interviewing Board members must include specific recommendations that the candidate should complete before re-applying.

General comments or feelings will not be accepted for a decline. If one of the reasons for the decline was based on a project profile, consider whether the candidate might re-use the profile, with rework, in their resubmitted Certification Package or must replace it. Consider the implications of stating that it must be replaced, especially if you are suggesting that they replace more than one. It may take them several years to replace those profiles and significantly delay their ability to certify.

The Chair is responsible for gathering the recommendations for candidates – be they accepted or declined.

Guidance for declined candidates *must* be agreed by a Board majority. Communication of the result and guidance or recommendations to the candidate are *only* performed by the Certification Authority.

When declining a candidate, each reason for the decline must relate to a specific aspect of the Conformance Requirements.

The facilitator, or Chair in the facilitator's absence, is responsible for the Board Consensus Meeting as follows:

- Calls the Board meeting to order
- Manages the Board meeting to ensure that the integrity of the process is met
- Mediates the discussion, keeping focus on certification criteria
- Clarifies any question concerning the criteria

- Ensures that there is consensus (at least two interviewing Board members) on each specific criterion on which the candidate is being declined
- Documents the outcome of the voting

2.6 Decline Process

The Certification Authority receives the documentation from the Board members about any candidates for which they voted to decline certification. The documentation should include the Board members' assessment and observations of the candidate's Certification Package and interview, and should provide developmental recommendations to assist the candidate in attaining certification in the future. The Certification Authority will prepare a "decline letter" with summary observations and recommendations from the formal Board Report produced by the Chair. The Certification Authority will send this to the declined candidate.

2.7 Certification Review Board Membership

A certification candidate's suitability to serve on a Certification Board is evaluated by the candidate's Certification Board at the time of certification (or re-certification). Certification Boards are responsible for informing the Certification Authority of each accepted candidate that the Board wishes to nominate to be invited to serve on future Certification Boards. To be nominated for membership on the Board, a potential nominee must be:

- Unanimously certified as an IT Specialist
- Unanimously nominated by the Board members

Recommended criteria are:

- Passion for the profession
- Commitment to the ITSC Program
- Ability to evaluate candidates fairly, considering that candidates will come from different companies with different backgrounds, methods, technologies, and project experiences
- Strong interviewing skills, particularly the ability to listen

A unanimously certified candidate may be nominated to be invited to serve as an Board member, recommended to be invited at their next re-certification, or not nominated.

One reason to postpone recommendation until the next re-certification is the view that the candidate would be an effective Board member if they had some more and/or broader experience.

The Board Report Forms allow the Board members to record their views on nomination of candidates for Board service.

2.8 Re-Certification

As for the original certification, candidates for re-certification provide a Re-Certification Package, although the template is considerably smaller and less information is required.

The Certification Authority will audit the submitted documentation and validate that it is complete and well formed.

If complete and well formed, the documentation will be passed to the Board for review against the then applicable Conformance Requirements.

The Board process for re-certification at Level 1 and Level 2 is as follows:

- One Board member will review the Re-Certification Package.
- Normally, the Board member will not interview the IT Specialist, but may do so to resolve questions of clarification.
- If the Board member considers that the Re-Certification Package meets the Conformance Requirements, then the outcome of re-certification is to accept the re-certification.
- If the Board member recommends that the re-certification be declined, a second Board member will review the Re-Certification Package. If the second Board member also recommends that the re-certification be declined, then the re-certification outcome is to decline. If the second Board member recommends accepting the re-certification, then a third Board member will be asked to review the Re-Certification Package and decide the outcome. The second and third Board members may interview the IT Specialist by telephone or video.

Board Report Forms are required as for certification.

After completion of the Board review, notification, etc. will be carried out in the same way as for the initial certification.

3. Board Member Community

As a member of a Board, you will face issues in common with other Board members, and you may find it helpful to share your concerns and benefit from the experience of others.

The Open Group provides email support and will help facilitate the development of the community aspects of the Board member pool.

Boards at The Open Group Conferences will normally be made up of people who will be attending the conference anyway, thus limiting the additional travel and subsistence costs involved. We will attempt to populate Boards at other locations with Board members that are in the vicinity.

In selecting Board members, The Open Group will try to ensure that no two Board members are from the same company, and that there is no more than one first-time Board member.

Boards usually run for a maximum of one day, and interview a maximum of five (5) candidates.

If we have additional candidates, we may ask for more than one day (usually at an Open Group Conference) or we may convene an additional Board or Boards.

Please only use the email alias provided by the Certification Authority when corresponding with other Board members, as it ensures we have a history of all correspondence leading up to a certification decision.

Board membership is a prestigious role and considered an excellent form of giveback by the Open CITS Program. With the title, though, comes responsibility and commitment of participation that the Program absolutely depends on to operate. It is critical that each Board member have their manager's support for their Board activities and the time to participate.

3.1 Serving as an Board Member

Board members are invited by the Certification Authority and must be willing to serve – there is no compulsion. If you agree, the Certification Authority will ask you to sign the Board Member Agreement, which defines the roles and includes requirements upon you for confidentiality concerning candidates and their Certification Packages. The Board Member Agreement is personal between you and the Certification Authority, but you may wish to have your employer review it and advise you whether to sign it.

You may elect for your honorarium to be donated to charity.