

# Determine what the best HR certification for you is.

If you're looking to earn an HR certification - you must first determine what the best HR certification is for you. Earning an HR certification demonstrates a level of competence and commitment that employers find attractive. The designation adds credibility to your reputation in the industry and can open doors to higher titles and responsibilities. During times of high competition in the HR field, desirable certifications can prove the tipping factor between candidates. In fact, job descriptions may even include certifications as a prerequisite rather than as a preference.

With a variety of certification choices available to the modern HR professional, deciding which to pursue poses a dilemma. No one-size-fits-all answer exists. The following food-for-thought, however, can assist in figuring out which certification might be right for you.

## ✖ General considerations

Each HR certification requires a certain educational level and amount of experience. A good starting point is evaluating your background to determine the offerings for which you are eligible. If you have a specific certification in mind but lack the qualifications, you'll need to rectify the situation. This may require obtaining a degree, gaining a more substantial work history, or something else.

When looking over possible HR certifications, it also helps to have an idea of what you want to concentrate on in your career. Do you focus on operational functions like recruitment and employee relations? Do your interests tend to lean toward technical functions such as labor laws and policy implementation?

If currently employed and looking to advance, take a look at what your organization values. What certifications do people already in the roles you aspire to possess? You also may consider bringing up the issue when talking about career objectives during your annual review.

Similarly, do some research through your network or by examining job postings for companies and/or roles of interest. You may find patterns emerging that can guide your decision.

Likely, you'll discover quickly that employers value certifications issued by the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) (SHRM) or the [HR Certification Institute](#) (HRCI). Though HRCI has been administering exams since 1976 and SHRM only since 2015, both are highly respected in the industry. (For many decades, the two organizations were one.)

## SHRM certifications

SHRM offers two certification possibilities: [SHRM Certified Professional \(SHRM-CP\)](#) or [SHRM Senior Certified Professional \(SHRM-SCP\)](#). The organization recommends the former for "HR professionals who implement policies and strategies, serve as point of contact for staff and stakeholders, deliver HR services, and perform operational HR functions." The latter is designed for "HR professionals who develop strategies, lead the HR

function, foster influence in the community, analyze performance metrics, and align HR strategies to organizational goals.”

Individuals wishing to take either of these exams must meet eligibility requirements in terms of education and work experience. Check this [SHRM exam eligibility](#) outline for specifics.

## HRCI certifications

Similar to the SHRM-CP is HRCI’s [Professional in Human Resources \(PHR\)](#), which for decades was the only certification option in existence in the HR industry. According to HRCI, “The PHR demonstrates your mastery of the technical and operational aspects of HR management, including U.S. laws and regulations. The PHR is for the HR professional who has experience with program implementation, has a tactical/logistical orientation, is accountable to another HR professional within the organization, and has responsibilities that focus on the HR department rather than the whole organization.”

HRCI’s [Senior Professional in Human Resources \(SPHR\)](#) resembles the SHRM-SCP. HRCI calls it a credential that “demonstrates your mastery of the strategic and policy-making aspects of HR management as practiced in the U.S.” and is “designed for big-picture thinkers responsible for planning rather than implementing HR policy.”

(Again, check [eligibility requirements for HRCI exams](#) when exploring your options.)

HRCI also offers six other certifications for HR professionals at various points in their careers:

- Associate Professional in Human Resources (aPHR): Designed for individuals just beginning their HR career
- Associate Professional in Human Resources – International (aPHRi): A knowledge-based credential to prove your understanding of foundational human resources in any locale
- Professional in Human Resources -- California (PHRca): Beneficial to those working in the state to show mastery of California’s unique laws, regulations, and HR management practices
- Global Professional in Human Resources (GPHR): Demonstrates expertise in multinational HR responsibilities and development of HR initiatives that support organizational global growth
- Professional in Human Resources -- International (PHRi): Shows mastery of generally accepted technical and operational HR principles independent of geographic region
- Senior Professional in Human Resources -- International (SPHRi): Signifies strategic international HR leadership

## Do employers prefer SHRM or HRCI certifications?

Some in the industry lean one way or the other to varying degrees. Overall, however, both SHRM and HRCI are seen as reputable. Many share the sentiment of HR leader and certified mediator Michael Trust of [Michael Trust Consulting](#), “I don’t think anyone can go wrong with either organization’s certifications.”

In some circumstances, a certain certification may be especially desirable to a given company. As Trust explains, “I’m in California, and I like to additionally see the California-specific certifications, particularly for entry through mid-level professionals, because California is so unique and the issues that people deal with at these levels daily in California are well represented in the California-specific certifications.”

## Recertification

HR professionals should view passing the exam to earn their desired credential as a good initial step. Keeping the distinction involves a continued commitment to expanding one’s knowledge base to maintain HR excellence.

Both [SHRM](#) and [HRCI](#) operate on three-year renewal cycles from the date of passing the exam. During this time, the certification holder must meet specific recertification requirements established by the issuing organization. Options may include professional development courses or activities, professional achievements, HR research, or retaking the exam before expiration.

## Graduate degrees

People exploring HR certification options also sometimes ponder going back to school to further their education. A master's degree leaves little doubt about a job seeker's commitment to the field.

"HR is very competitive, so if you really want to stand out from other applicants, I think a master's degree would definitely do that as it shows that you are not only very skilled but are passionate enough to go that one step further," says Lucas Robinson, CMO of [Crediful](#).

HR professionals aspiring to executive-level positions may find the road to such advancement harder or impossible without a graduate degree. Possessing a master's degree also can speed along the process of qualifying to take desirable senior-level certification exams such as the SPHR or the SHRM-SCP.

While an "alphabet soup" of credentials following your name looks impressive, acquiring them takes time, effort, and money. Explore potential options carefully to find what holds most promise for your individual career path.