



Lean Six Sigma Certification

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Lean Six Sigma (LSS) certification is a watershed achievement for a quality practitioner, confirming an individual's capabilities with respect to a specific body of knowledge. The certification itself recognizes the significance of the individual's contribution to process improvement for an organization.

An individual may seek to be certified in Lean Six Sigma for any of several reasons, and a person may have one or more of these in mind:

- To prove to others a proficiency in value-added, meaningful subject matter
- To make oneself a more desirable contributor within an organization
- As a job requirement for certain full-time quality professionals
- To become more marketable outside of the organization
- To put oneself in a better position for a salary increase
- To continue a life of learning and improving oneself

ProcessGPS has been involved in Lean Six Sigma certification since its founding, and for several years prior to that in other organizations. The certification requires training in the appropriate subject matter, passing a proficiency exam, and achieving successful results on multiple process improvement projects. The last requirement is a Review Board composed of managers familiar with the processes that have been improved as well as subject matter experts proficient in the LSS improvement methodology. Collectively these individuals evaluate the significance of the results, verify that the improvement project achieved those results, and confirm that the Lean Six Sigma problem-solving approach was used in a disciplined way.

To develop these criteria, the consultants at ProcessGPS benchmarked a number of organizations with established certification programs. The consultants considered what was common about each of the certifications, what significant differences each might include, and any unique aspects of a particular certification. The idea was not to create something entirely different, but to integrate some of the best ideas from each and to enhance the criteria with what concepts our organization considers important for an individual to exemplify.

The career field of Lean Six Sigma differs from other professional fields of study in that there has never been a centralized certifying body for certification. CPAs and Professional Engineers have certifying bodies within each state; no such system exists for LSS certification. Instead, a few dozen manufacturing and service companies have created certification criteria for their own LSS practitioners. This recognizes that the companies have invested a good deal of money in preparing the LSS practitioner to make a significant difference in improving processes within the organization.

A few “centralized” organizations have also created certification criteria. One of the most visible is the American Society for Quality. However, their criteria are not necessarily superior to those of private companies, each of which have a vested interest in the reputation of their certification programs. This becomes even more important as Green Belts, Black Belts, and Master Black Belts transition to jobs in other companies. One organization with which ProcessGPS is familiar has even gone as far as to evaluate the significance of an individual’s LSS certification from other companies.

The lack of a centralized certifying body for professional certification of Lean Six Sigma practitioners has the unfortunate consequence of creating significant variability among certificate holders with regard to knowledge, skill level, and experience. This creates an environment where some “certified” Green Belts, Black Belts, and even Master Black Belts have markedly lower genuine credentials. A specific example is certification from some academic organizations, where candidates are certified based on class attendance and passing tests. ProcessGPS considers this to be a “trained” level, worth a training credential, rather than (and far short of) a true practitioner certification. In other cases, organizations may claim to train Black Belts in as few as ten days (two business weeks). Besides the cursory nature of the curriculum, these programs do not consistently require completion of real projects, where the attainment of value-added goals are attributable to effective root-cause analysis and efficient implementation of innovative solutions.

What may be the worst offense is the self-certified individual. While a person may truly have the skills and expertise to be a competent practitioner, it is intellectually dishonest to practice as a certified expert in Lean Six Sigma without the requisite training, experience, and independent certification. Unfortunately, there are some instances where this has happened and continues to happen.

A justifiable formal certification is one that is documented and defensible. Accordingly, a ProcessGPS certification includes a set of elements verifying that rigorous standards have been met. For example, a ProcessGPS Black Belt Certification package consists of:

- a. A final (Review Board approved) copy of the project storyboard(s)
- b. A certificate issued by ProcessGPS and signed by its principals (certified Master Black Belts) and by an organization’s leadership attesting that

- The candidate is fully trained and has passed the Black Belt Exam.
 - The candidate has successfully completed two (in some cases, one) Lean Six Sigma certification project(s). A successful project is defined as one that follows a disciplined approach (typically DMAIC) and achieves the goal(s) set out in the project charter.
- c. A signed letter from the project sponsor stating that the project was successful and that it yielded significant benefits to the organization.
- d. Additional documentation indicating the recipient's specific expertise.

In summary, LSS certification is a worthwhile and substantial enhancement to a businessperson's career. Whether the certified individual continues to improve processes as a process improvement team leader, or moves on to other operational, technical, or administrative areas of the organization, the skills learned make the individual a more valuable contributor. Lean Six Sigma skills continue to be highly regarded in the marketplace.

Consider the certifying alternatives that are available and continue your improvement journey via LSS certification!



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