

# Solar Certification Programs: NABCEP vs ETA International

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## NABCEP and ETA-I

Those who are involved in the solar PV industry have, for the most part, become aware of the certification programs offered through NABCEP. They have done a good job promoting their programs to those who design and install PV systems, however the general public has little awareness of the certifications.

Those who work in technical schools and community colleges have a good awareness of ETA (Electronic Technicians Association) International, who have worked with colleges and industry since the 1970s offering technical certifications in over 80 countries.

## The Programs

NABCEP offers a number of solar- focused certification programs, however its “flagship” program is the PV Installation Professional (PVIP). This program requires that the applicant document experience installing PV systems before qualifying to take the examination.



While this approach demonstrates competence, it is not generally practical for those seeking to enter the industry, nor does it work well in a community college setting where students likely have no installation experience.

To address this issue, NABCEP offers an introductory “Associate” program with no experience requirement, but this program results in a “credential” rather than a “certification”, which is generally not accepted as meeting certification requirements set by AHJs.

ETA's approach has been to create an entry-level certification (PV Level 1) that focuses on the design and installation of residential PV systems. The hands-on tasks are conducted in a classroom setting at an ETA-I approved training center (generally a community college or technical school). They are supervised and documented by an ETA-I approved certification administrator (generally a college employee).



The ETA PV Level 2 credential does require on-the-job experience and is designed for those actively working in the industry. It focuses on commercial design/installation as well as project management.



## Conclusion

The PV industry is fortunate to have two widely accepted and high quality certification programs available. While they offer similar products, their individual approaches are unique enough to provide options to potential candidates.

As more and more jurisdictions begin to require certification in order to perform solar PV design and/or installation services, the industry is well positioned to meet the demand.

Additionally, time and again AHJs have expressed a desire that there be competition and options available in the marketplace when they establish certification requirements.

