



AA Registry Unit Plan

How to Become a Certified HVAC Technician

Required steps to become a certified HVAC technician will vary by state and specialization, and not all technicians will follow precisely the same path. However, the following steps represent one common path to becoming a certified HVAC technician:

Step 1: Receive a high school diploma

Successful HVAC technicians and contractors typically excel in courses such as mathematics, physics, and shop. Some choose to volunteer or seek out employment in mechanics, electronics, or related fields, which can teach them some of the empirical fundamentals of the profession.

Step 2a: Complete an accredited HVAC program (option 1, six months to two years)

While this step can be waived in some states for candidates with extensive experience or an apprenticeship (see option 2 below), many certified technicians choose to complete formal, classroom-based HVAC training at a community college or trade school.

These programs offer training in entry-level service, design, and repair of HVAC-R systems and can be accredited by industry organizations such as HVAC Excellence or Partnership for Air-Conditioning, Heating, Refrigeration Accreditation (PAHRA). Many of the HVAC programs include Section 608 certification and preparation for other industry certifications as part of the training. Also, as part of the curriculum, aspiring HVAC technicians may receive on-the-job instruction working under licensed contractors. This is typically necessary as many certification exams and licenses require at least one to two years of practical experience.

Step 2b: Complete an HVAC apprenticeship (option 2, three to five years)

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS May 2020), HVAC apprenticeship programs typically last from three to five years. These candidates receive at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job training and 144 hours of technical education. Many of these programs are run by joint committees of local organizations such as the Air Conditioning Contractors of America (ACCA) or the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC).

Additional resources are available from the [US Department of Labor Apprenticeship Finder](#).

Step 3: Apply for additional industry competence certifications and pass examinations (timeline varies)

As mentioned above, some job-ready HVAC programs include the certification process as part of their training program, such as the one at the North American Training Center.

That said, there is a wide array of agencies offering HVAC certifications for those looking to enhance their credentials:

- The **North American Technician Excellence (NATE)** hosts the Industry Competency Exam and provides several HVAC-R specialty certifications such as air distribution (AD), HVAC efficiency analyst (senior level), and HVAC performance verifier.
- **HVAC Excellence** not only provides program accreditation, but also has employment-ready certification exams for air conditioning, light commercial air conditioning, and basic refrigeration and charging procedures.
- The **Refrigeration Service Engineers Society (RSES)** has a partnership with NATE and provides additional certification exams including, EPA section 608, commercial air conditioning, commercial refrigeration, heating, and HVAC-R electrical.
- The **Refrigerating Engineers and Technicians Association (RETA)** offers several certifications for technicians in the field of industrial refrigeration. These include CARO – Certified Assistant Refrigeration Operator for entry-level workers and CIRO – Certified Industrial Refrigeration Operator.

Step 4: Pursue national and state certifications or licensure (timeline varies)

As mentioned above, the rules governing HVAC contractors and technicians vary between states. Please reference the table below to check the regional requirements and governing body for HVAC professionals.