

Guidelines

for Developing the Quality and Competence of Advisors in European Rural Areas

CECRA

(Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas)

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1. What does CECRA mean?

The availability of competency development programmes for advisors and consultants in rural areas varies between and within countries. Those that are available often focus on knowledge rather than skills development.

Under the umbrella of the IALB (International Academy of Rural Advisors), standards were compiled over a four-year project phase (2009 – 2012) for a qualification and competence development program for consultants in rural areas, concluding with the CECRA (= Certificate for European Consultants in Rural Areas) Certificate.

CECRA combines a seminar series consisting of various modules with familiarization with rural advisory work in other regions and structures, and offers cross-border networking opportunities for the Certificate holder.

2. Focus and Target Groups

Because this training program is geared to developing methodological, social and personal advisory skills, it is suitable for all advisors working in rural areas, regardless of their advisory priorities. Hence, in addition to its focus on advisors for agricultural and household extension services, the CECRA competence development program is relevant for additional actors in the rural area, such as e.g. regional managers or leader-managers.

3. Requirements for Advisors

3.1. The Advisory Process

The advisory process is a target- and solution-oriented communicative relationship between client and advisor, actively shaped by both parties. In this process, the advisory service is bound to neutrality, and geared exclusively to the client's success. The advisor must possess sound social, personal and communication competencies, as well as expert knowledge and ongoing training, to successfully guide advisory processes. In addition to advising individual enterprises, this involves supporting cooperative ventures and cross-sector advisory projects, as well as organizing adult-education provision.

3.2. Advisor/Client Relationship

To successfully cultivate a relationship, the advisor must be able to properly assess the personalities and situations of clients, in order to deal with them respectfully and support them empathetically throughout the advisory process.

In addition, the advisor will need to have mastered the communicative and methodological tools to understand the needs of clients and to support them to develop and implement effective strategies to achieve their goals.

3.3. Professional and Skills Profile of Advisors in Rural Areas

The professional requirements profile for advisors in rural areas varies greatly. However there are some common components such as:

Advisors in rural areas

- have specialized in agricultural, domestic and forestry disciplines, and/or rural development
- assist clients in problem-solving-processes
- are active in adult education, support projects, and promote the networking of actors in rural areas
- are self-employed, or are employed in the private or public sector
- work professionally on a technical, methodological and personal level
- are capable of reflecting on their professional activity, their various advisory roles, and their personality profile, and of continuing their personal development
- treat advisory partners with esteem (conception of humanity)

To enable rural advisors to fulfil this requirements profile, two groups of skills are essential which can be divided into the following categories:

- **Professional skills**

- **Methodological**

- Organisation of advisory processes in their different stages (relationship building, clarification of tasks, etc.)
- Understanding of one's role and advisory models (client-centred advice, etc.)
- Project management
- Moderation skills, media technology, visualization
- Process guidance, monitoring of processes of change
- Problem- and conflict-solving skills
- Adult and education management

- **Communication and social skills**

- Ability to cooperate, work in a team, and network
- Conversational skills (basics of communication, esteem, questioning techniques, active listening, etc.)
- Ability to form relationships
- Information literacy, high-profile knowledge transfer
- Ability to accept criticism; capable to handle conflicts

- **Personal** (interpersonal and intrapersonal skills)

- Analytical faculties
- Personal appearance
- Self-organization
- Work organisation, working techniques, goal-oriented working
- Willingness to learn and change (change management)
- Intercultural competence
- Innovative thinking and acting
- Recognition of abilities and limits, reference to other specialists; Selfcare
- Self-reflection and reflection of work

- **Professional competence / specialization**

Developing core professional knowledge or specialisation is not a CECRA function

4. The Benefit of CECRA for Advisors in the Rural Areas of Europe

For Certificate holders:

- They acquire methodological, communicative, social and personal development knowledge and skills corresponding to the requirements of their position in the rural advisory sector
- They gain experience with a strong practical orientation through participant-centred seminar work, and with extensive documentation of and reflection on advisory, educational and project work
- They learn how to independently plan, execute, document, reflect on and evaluate individual and group advisory sessions, educational events, and projects;

- They reflect on their professional activity in their various advisory roles as well as on their personal profile, and continue to evolve in both
- They get to know like-minded colleagues as well as different advisory and educational bodies in other countries, and forge links with a functional cross-border network
- They earn a certificate providing cross-border confirmation of the relevant advisory skills according to IALB standards (modules attended, associated requirements, capacity for reflection, 'thinking outside of the box').

For employers:

- Strengthening of the personal and methodological skills of the advisor enhances the efficacy/effectiveness of rural extension
- Employers have staff with broader horizons
- Employers are able inter alia to provide evidence to clients, supervisory authorities or funders that they are using qualified staff
- An internationally impartial certificate issued by a public authority makes a stronger impression on the client
- Additional skills have the potential to reduce stress for consultants
- Positive image for the advisory organization

For educational institutions:

- The cooperation of the participating educational institutions enables complementary course provision and standardization of the modules
- The strengths and specializations of different institutions can be leveraged
- The cross-border, networked qualification of advisors leads to a comprehensive course provision that far exceeds the capabilities of a single training provider.

5. About CECRA: The Organisation

CECRA's owner

CECRA's owner is the IALB, which decides on organizational and development issues (committee).

Cooperation partners

The IALB concludes contracts with the cooperation partners (see www.cecra.net) for the professional and organizational implementation. Generally speaking, the cooperation partners are Regional Certification bodies, and may also be Module Providers. They delegate experts to the CECRA working group as required.

For European countries, EUFRAS (European Forum for Agricultural and Rural Advisory Services) organises and coordinates the CECRA program.

The collaboration on contents and structure of CECRA program between IALB and EUFRAS as well as the user agreement for the product „CECRA“ is governed by its own cooperation agreement.

Regional certification bodies

The Regional Certification bodies advise potential Certificate holders and consider Certificate applications. As a rule, they are also Module Providers. Accredited institutions/ enterprises are further providers of modules.

In the event of disputes, the IALB committee has the final say.

Tasks of the Regional Certification bodies:

- The Regional Certification Bodies are in principle responsible for the certification process (for regional allocation, see Annex 7).
- They hold the responsibility and the costs for translation and adjustment of the content on the ongoing updating of all CECRA documents, respectively to the national language.
- They publish and advertise the CECRA annual program (link to www.cecra.net) and the CECRA modules offered in their respective country programs.
- They play a significant role in participant recruitment.
- They receive the candidates' applications (verification of compliance with the associated requirements, confirmations of equivalence, assessment of thesis, etc.), charge certification fees, process applications (together with a second certification body, in keeping with the 'four-eyes' principle), decide on certification, and forward applications with their decision to the IALB offices or EUFRAS CECRA Office.
- They provide general advice on CECRA further training.
- They provide bodies for the cross-border research visit to a body, as required.
- They carry out a preliminary assessment / benchmarking for the participants, as required (subject to a fee).
- They task the IALB office or EUFRAS CECRA Office with the issuing of the CECRA Certificate and the charging of the fee for the certificate.

CECRA Working Group

The IALB appoints a CECRA Working Group (CECRA-WG) for the operational implementation. CECRA-WG is composed of (i) representatives of the Regional Certification Bodies in the German-speaking countries, (ii) of the head of EUFRAS CECRA-WG and (iii) of a chairperson from a Regional Certification Body of other European countries. The implementation and development of CECRA is monitored by the appointed CECRA-WG. The Members of the Working Group are nominated by the IALB Committee for a four-year term, and elect a Chairperson in each case. This regulation applies also to EUFRAS.

Tasks of the CECRA Working Group:

- The Working Group is responsible for the monitoring, implementation and development of CECRA, especially of the Guidelines with the IALB standards.
- It has formal oversight of CECRA.
- It decides by unanimous agreement on the accreditation of potential Module Providers according to the criteria for CECRA accreditation.
- It cooperates intensively with Module Providers and the EUFRAS CECRA-WG or the EUFRAS CECRA Office.
- It draws up a joint CECRA annual program.
- It supports in advertising the CECRA training series.
- It handles further technical and content-related tasks for the IALB office.
- It carries out evaluations on a continuous basis.
- It reviews the financial transactions of CECRA.
- The Chairperson reports to the IALB Management.

Tasks of the Module Providers:

- The Module Providers indicate the CECRA course provision in their annual country programs and in the single course advertisements, and forward a list of the offered modules to the CECRA WG Chairperson for the creation of a joint CECRA annual program.

- They publish and advertise the joint CECRA annual program in their own individual programs.
- They conduct participant recruitment. They create the specific module program of their institution and the necessary course documents of the modules offered in each case, bearing in mind the jointly developed IALB standards.
- They accept registration for CECRA modules, and run the advertised modules when the stipulated minimum number of participants is reached.
- Up until 6 weeks before the start of the seminar, they reserve at least 4 places in the CECRA modules for participants aspiring to the certificate; beyond this point, authorisations are only granted according to the places available (the registration deadlines of the respective providers apply).
- They issue confirmations of participation for the CECRA modules that have been run.
- They evaluate the individual modules according to the respective systems of the Module Providers; upon request, the evaluation results are to be submitted to the IALB office as proof.

Tasks of the IALB office in connection with CECRA:

- The IALB office supports the IALB Management, the CECRA-WG and the Regional Certification Bodies in the advertising of the CECRA qualification and skills development series in the countries of Europe (homepage, folder, print, fairs, exhibitions, conferences for further education and training).
- They support the Working Group in the preparation and dispatch of the CECRA annual program.
- They document all applications for the CECRA Certificate.
- They forward the requests of external participants for preliminary assessments of attendance requirements and confirmations of equivalence to individual Regional Certification Bodies.
- They accept applications from external participants for the CECRA Certificate and forward them to a Regional Certification Body.
- They issue invoices for administration fees.
- They issue the CECRA Certificate upon the approval of a Regional Certification Body.
- They collect and document the Module Providers' evaluations of the entire CECRA further-education series.
- They send links to online evaluations to all certificate holders.
- They collect and document applications for accreditation, forward them to the CECRA-WG Members, issue invoices for accreditation fees, and issue the accreditation notification.

CECRA Organizational Structure see annex 12

Visit of Advisory Body

6. Requirements for the CECRA Certificate

To earn the certificate, attendance at the necessary modules (module confirmation, see Chap. 6.1) as well as compliance with the associated requirements is required (see Chap. 6.2).

As an alternative to attending a module, events attended by 31/12/2013 which meet IALB standards can be counted subject to confirmation of equivalence being provided. Special forms for this purpose are made available to the applicant by the Regional Certification Body as necessary.

In addition to the associated self-study during the advisory activity, there is also the issue of the candidates' capacity for reflection, which must be proven in the thesis in particular.

All individual components earned towards the certificate generally have a validity period of 5 years.

6.1. Overview of the Modules

Owing to their importance for the advisory process, two of a total of 15 modules are deemed essential, making their attendance compulsory.

A further three elective modules from the overall program are to be selected and completed (see following summary as well as Annex 1).

Compul- sory Modules	1. Personal Development / My Profile as a Consultant
	2. Communication and Building Relationships in Advisory Work
Elective Modules (min. of 3 modules ac- cording to individual choice)	3. Teamwork and Team Leadership
	4. Rhetoric / Presentation
	5. Self-Management and Time Management
	6. Project Management
	7. Shaping Advisory Processes
	8. Handling Difficult Advisory Situations / Change Management
	9. Moderation Management
	10. Marketing of advisory services
	11. Event Management
	12. Advising and Supporting Groups
	13. Essentials of Mediation
	14. Advising and Supporting Enterprises in Strategic Issues
	15. Introduction to Coaching

Each module consists of at least 12 hours of physical presence (approx. 2 days) as well as additional self-study (literature review, own in-depth studies) and the application of the relevant topic in day-to-day advisory work with a minimum time investment of 18 hours.

6.2. Associated Requirements

To earn the CECRA Certificate, the following associated requirements must be met and proof of their fulfilment provided:

- Preparatory training: completed degree course or completed vocational training
- Submission of the required module-completion confirmations (two compulsory and at least three elective modules), or proof of confirmations of equivalence (events up to 31/12/2013)
- Attendance at an event (at least one day excluding travel there and back, in another country or another federal state), which serves the professional training (accepted are attendance of modules, events...).
- Visit of Advisory Centre/Advisory Services (at least 2.5 days, excluding travel there and back, in another country or another German federal state, (see 6.2.1)
- Submission of thesis (documentation and self-reflection based on a practical example) (see 6.2.2).

6.2.1. Visit of Advisory Body

Before the planned visit to a body, contact is to be made with the Regional Certification Body, and both the body to be visited and the schedule of events are to be coordinated.

Advisory institutions where attending CECRA candidates come into contact with advisory clients are particularly suitable.

For purposes of preparation, guidelines are available for the visited body/ advisory organization (Annex 4) as well as for the researching of the body by the CECRA candidate (Annex 3).

The form for confirmation of the research visit to the body (Annex 5) can be used as proof of the research visit when submitting the application for certification.

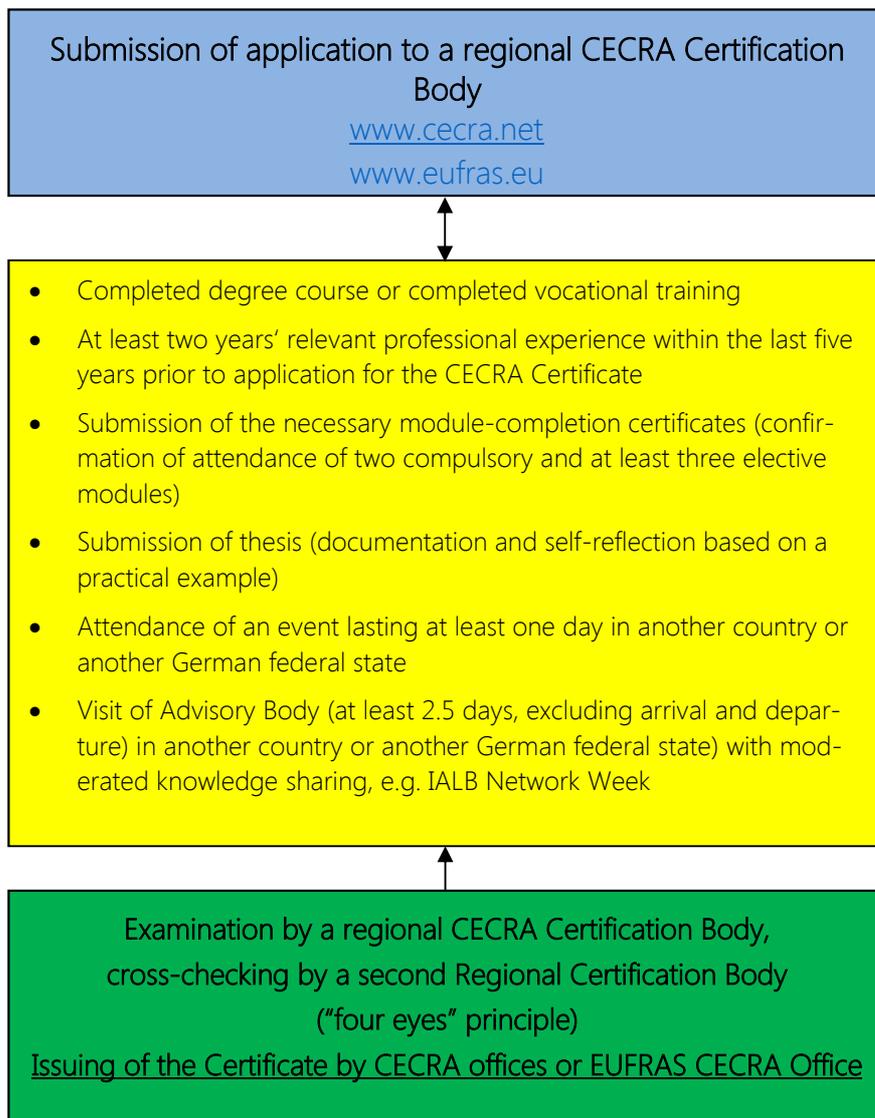
6.2.2. Thesis

The thesis for the CECRA Certificate requires documentation of advisory services provided to an individual, a family, or a business community.

Among other things, the justification for the choice of practical example, the content of the advisory process, interventions and their effects, the conclusions for the own development as a rural advisor, and to this end, the reflection on one's own role and relation to client with strengths and weaknesses are evaluated (see Annex 6).

7. The Path to CECRA

An overview of the path to CECRA, from registration and the necessary preconditions up to the achievement of the certificate, is set out below:



The requirements for the thesis and the application for the issuing of the Certificate are provided in Annexes 6 and 8, respectively.

The application for the issuing of the CECRA Certificate is to be submitted to a Regional Certification Body in the country of residence of the applicant (see Annex 7 for regional allocation).

8. Regional Certification Bodies

- AGRIDEA, CH-Lindau
www.agridea.ch, cecra@agridea.ch
- State Management Academy of Food, Agriculture and Forestry (FÜAK), D-Landshut, Germany
www.fueak.bayern.de, martina.rabl@fueak.bayern.de
- University College for Agrarian and Environmental Pedagogy, A-Wien, Austria
www.agrarumweltpaedagogik.ac.at, liane.kaipel@agrarumweltpaedagogik.ac.at
- State Institute for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas (LEL), D-Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany
www.lel-bw.de, cecra@lel.bwl.de

- Hessen State Department of Agriculture – Rauschholzhausen Educational Seminar (LLH), D-Ebsdorfergrund, Germany
www.llh.hessen.de, beate.formowitz@llh.hessen.de
- Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Abt. 22 für Land-, forst- und hauswirtschaftliche Berufsbildung, I-Bozen, Italy
www.provinz.bz.it/land-forstwirtschaft/, philipp.nagel@provinz.bz.it
- LMS Agrarberatung GmbH, D-Rostock, Germany
www.lms-beratung.de, sotten@lms-agrarberatung.de

Regional allocation: See Annex 7.

9. Module Providers

- AGRIDEA, CH-Lindau, Switzerland
- State Management Academy of Food, Agriculture and Forestry (FÜAK), D-Landshut, Germany
- University College for Agrarian and Environmental Pedagogy, A-Vienna, Austria
- State Institute for the Development of Agriculture and Rural Areas (LEL), D-Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany
- Hessen State Department of Agriculture – Rauschholzhausen Educational Seminar (LLH), Ebsdorfergrund, Germany

Further accredited training providers and Regional Certification Bodies are listed online at www.cecra.net or www.eufiras.eu.

10. Accreditation

All training and advisory-service providers may obtain accreditation for the provision of advisory services in accordance with IALB standards. The requirements, costs and steps of the accreditation process are set out in the 'Criteria for CECRA Accreditation' in Annex 9, whilst the application forms can be found in Annex 10 and 11.

11. Schedule of Fees for the CECRA Qualification and Skills Development Series

- The administrative services of the IALB offices as set out above are charged at a flat rate of EUR 100.
- For applications made from 1/1/2015 onwards, the Regional Certification Bodies will charge EUR 100 for direct services, including examination fees.
- If required, a comprehensive individual consultation/benchmarking for interested parties / potential course graduates will be offered by the Regional Certification Bodies at a cost of EUR 75.
- The seminar fee for the individual modules provided by our cooperation partners is usually EUR 160/CHF 180 per day.
- In the event that the specified minimum number of participants is not reached but the event still goes ahead, the fee can be adjusted in agreement with the participants.
- Cancellation policy: The policy of the provider in question applies.
- Country-specific regulations may apply in the case of the aforementioned fees.
- By the year 2018 a user fee of EUR 10 per issued certificate of attendance must be paid to IALB.

As at 2017-01-01