

# INSTALLER AND CONTRACTOR QUALIFICATIONS GUIDE

## General

A home or any building today is one of the few things still made entirely “by hand” and every aspect of a tile installation relies on the tile contracting company and its installers. How good the finished installation looks, how well it performs, and how long it lasts are in their hands. It is for this reason that the Handbook Committee and the Tile Council of North America strongly recommend hiring tile installation professionals who have demonstrated their commitment to their craft and taken the time to stay current with the latest materials and methods. Because tile is a permanent finish, the lowest bid should not be the driving factor, but rather who is the most qualified to perform the scope of the work specified.

Requiring a portfolio and references reflecting the installer's/contractor's experience, along with a bid or estimate, is a good way to ensure work of similar size, scope, and complexity has been completed. Pools, exterior facades, mortar beds, shower pans, steam showers, and other potentially complex installations, require different skills. Matching installer ability to the project at hand requires close evaluation of their experience, training, state licensing (where applicable), and certifications/credentials (where applicable). The Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) provides a Contractor Questionnaire that can be used to aid in evaluating and comparing contractors ([www.ceramictilefoundation.org](http://www.ceramictilefoundation.org)).

Various programs administered by associations, nonprofit educational organizations, unions, and private companies serve the tile industry by providing education, hands-on training, and evaluation of the skills and competency of installers and contractors. It is important to distinguish between the many programs available:

- Classroom and/or online knowledge training
- Hands-on installation skills training
- Evaluation/certification of contractor qualifications
- Evaluation/certification of knowledge
- Evaluation/certification of hands-on skills

As with all programs, the rigor and credibility of the program must also be considered.

The following nonprofit programs are well-established and recognized by the Handbook Committee (listed alphabetically):

**Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT):** ACT is an evaluation and certification program for tile

installers in advanced, specific skills areas: large format tile installation and substrate preparation, mortar (mud) beds for walls, mortar (mud) beds for floors, shower receptor (waterproof shower pan membrane, mortar bed and mortar curb) installation, membrane (both sheet and liquid) applications, grouting, and installation of gauged porcelain tiles (GPT) and gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs. To pass an ACT test module, an installer must demonstrate hands-on proficiency and specific knowledge. Only installers who have already passed the Certified Tile Installer (CTI) test or those who are recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as Journeyman Tile Layers may register for ACT testing. ACT tests were developed collaboratively by product manufacturers and industry associations including the Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF), Tile Contractors Association of America (TCAA), International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (IUBAC), International Masonry Institute (IMI), National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA), and Tile Council of North America (TCNA). Certification testing is administered by CTEF and IMI. For more information see [www.tilecertifications.com](http://www.tilecertifications.com). See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) Certified Tile Installer Program:** CTEF tests hands-on installation skills and knowledge. Installers must achieve the minimum required score on both tests to earn the “CTEF Certified Tile Installer” (CTI) designation. Contractors that employ CTEF Certified Tile Installers are listed on the CTEF website. See [www.ceramictilefoundation.org](http://www.ceramictilefoundation.org) for more information. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**International Masonry Institute (IMI) Contractor College Program:** IMI conducts professional and technical courses for union masonry and tile contractors, which lead to certification in installation and project supervision. See [www.imiweb.org](http://www.imiweb.org) for more information. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**Journeyman Tile Layer Apprenticeship Programs:** Installers recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) as Journeyman Tile Layers are required to fulfill and document several years of training and on-the-job experience as apprentices to become Journeymen. The majority of these setters earn their Journeyman status through registered apprenticeship programs that are jointly-trusted by union and management trustees, although

some non-union tile contractors administer their own DOL-recognized apprenticeship programs and employ journeyman tile layers. Contractors that employ union Journeyman Tile Setters can be found through the union locals that list their signatory contractors, primarily the Bricklayer and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC). See [www.bacweb.org](http://www.bacweb.org) and [www.carpenters.org](http://www.carpenters.org) for more information. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**Natural Stone Institute (NSI) Accreditation for Natural Stone Tile Installation Contractors:** The Natural Stone Institute is an internationally recognized trade association that operates an industry accreditation program for natural stone tile installation contractors. NSI Accredited companies are required to: have been in business for at least three years and have completed at least 200 projects in that timeframe, agree to a code of ethics, and have passed the NSI Accreditation exam. NSI Accredited companies are evaluated and tested with regard to best practices in installation and safety. Visit [www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/gettheseal](http://www.naturalstoneinstitute.org/gettheseal) for more information.

**National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) Five Star Contractor Program:** NTCA is a tile contractors association, with membership open to all tile contractors. Their Five Star program is a peer review program to recognize NTCA members who have demonstrated a track record of providing successful installations. Earning the Five Star designation requires recommendations from customers, suppliers, and peers as well as participation in continuing education, training, and safety programs. See [www.tile-assn.com](http://www.tile-assn.com) for more information. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**Tile Contractors' Association of America (TCAA) Trowel of Excellence Program:** TCAA is a contractors association for BAC signatory contractors. Its Trowel of Excellence program is a peer review program to recognize TCAA members who have demonstrated a track record of providing successful installations. Earning the Trowel of Excellence designation requires letters of reference, submittal of a detailed project description and photos, employee participation in educational programming, and proof of financial responsibility. See [www.tcaainc.org](http://www.tcaainc.org) for more information. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

**Other Programs:** The *Handbook* Committee recognizes many qualified tile installers and contractors can be found

that have not participated in the programs listed above. They are encouraged to do so, in order that consumers may more easily identify them. Similarly, the *Handbook* Committee recognizes there are useful training and evaluation programs for contractors and installers not listed in this guide, such as consumer-review-based rating systems, programs offered by for-profit educational firms, and government-based programs. See also: Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications.

### Sample Language for Including Installer and Contractor Qualifications in Specifications

Where inclusion of installer and contractor qualifications in project specifications is desired, include the qualifications under a quality assurance section and require proof of qualifications under a submittals section. The language below may be used for the purpose of including such requirements.

#### Qualifications/Quality Assurance

Installing contractor is [a five-star member of the National Tile Contractors Association] [and] [or] [a Trowel of Excellence member of the Tile Contractors' Association of America].

Installing contractor's foreman or superintendent for the Project holds the International Masonry Institute's Foreman Certification<sup>1</sup>.

Installing contractor employs [Ceramic Tile Education Foundation Certified Installers] [and] [or] [installers recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as Journeyman Tile Layers].

Individual installer(s) working for installing contractor are certified through Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of <Insert one or more ACT certification requirements>: [Large Format Tile and Substrate Preparation] [and] [or] [Membranes] [and] [or] [Mud (Mortar Bed) Floors] [and] [or] [Mud (Mortar) Walls] [and] [or] [Shower Receptors] [and] [or] [Grouts] [and] [or] gauged porcelain tiles (GPT) and gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs.

Installer meets the requirements of a program identified and approved by the architect with the criteria for such

<sup>1</sup> The International Masonry Institute's Foreman Certification is available only to members of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers; accordingly, only IUBAC signatory contractors can meet this requirement.

program similar to or exceeding [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Large Format Tile and Substrate Preparation] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Membranes] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Mud (Mortar Bed) Floors] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Mud (Mortar) Walls] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Shower Receptors] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of Grout] [and] [or] [Advanced Certifications for Tile Installers (ACT) for installation of gauged porcelain tiles (GPT) and gauged porcelain tile panels/slabs]; [and] [or] [Ceramic Tile Education Foundation (CTEF) Certified Tile Installer Program] [and] [or] [International Masonry Institute (IMI) Contractor College Program] [and] [or] [Department of Labor recognized Journeyman Tile Layer Apprenticeship Programs].

Installing contractor meets the requirements of a program identified and approved by the architect with the criteria for such program similar to or exceeding [National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA) Five Star Contractor Program] [and] [or] [Tile Contractors' Association of America (TCAA) Trowel of Excellence Program].

### **Submittals**

Submit certificates and other qualification data for Installer(s).

Submit certificates and other qualification data for Installing Contractor(s).