

How to Select a Black Belt e-Learning & Certification Program

The Lean Six Sigma Black Belt

To remain competitive in today's markets, businesses must strike a delicate balance between lowering operating costs and maintaining a high-quality product or service. This critical need for efficiency has fueled the demand for professionals with the skills of process improvement. If your goal is to master this skill set and improve your value as an employee, you should consider earning your **Lean Six Sigma Black Belt**.

The Black Belt, the most advanced level of practice, is the heart of the Lean Six Sigma operation. He or she has expert knowledge and skills of the Six Sigma methodology, Lean methods, and team leadership. Black Belts should be able to lead any team across the organization in executing process improvement projects. They may also conduct Lean Six Sigma training and act as coaches and mentors to other Belts-in-training.

Black Belt training typically runs between 140 and 160 hours and includes instruction in the use of statistical data analysis and designed experiments. Most Black Belt students complete their training within a half year and certify after completing two projects within 18 months of the start of the training program.

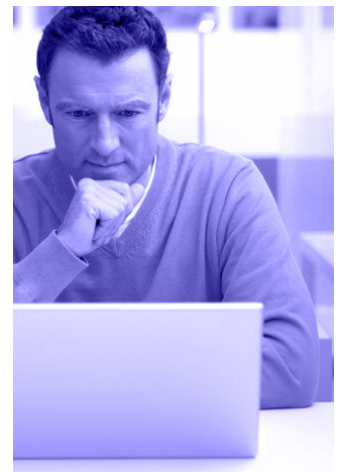
By earning a Black Belt, you will have the opportunity for increased responsibility and recognition, improved earnings, and positively impacting the health and efficiency of your organization. Are you ready to start?

e-Learning: The Popular New Training Option

You can obtain Black Belt training from a variety of sources. In the past few years, online training, or "e-Learning", has become a popular and cost-effective way to balance to earn your Black Belt without negatively impacting your existing commitments (i.e., work, family, community). With the recent growth in the number of commercial and academic e-Learning programs, you now have the luxury of choice – an often complicated choice.

What defines good e-Learning? What are the features of high-quality online Black Belt training? Does the training program cover all the material you need to know as a Black Belt? What is the difference between training and certification, and which is right for you?

As you explore your options, you'll quickly learn that no two programs are alike. You will see substantial variation in content, pricing and the requirements for certification. *So how do you determine which program is right for you?*



There's a Difference between Training and Certification

What does it really mean to become a Black Belt? Does that mean a 'trained' Black Belt or a 'certified' Black Belt? **Training and certification are distinctly different objectives.** Because training providers have often used the terms interchangeably, many professionals are confused as to exactly what they'll earn from an e-Learning Black Belt program.



“Training” means exactly what you think: one or more courses designed to give you the knowledge you need for the job. If you just want to learn the basics of process improvement, you can enroll in a training course and earn a “Certificate of Completion.” That certificate states that you have studied X number of hours of material and implies you know what you’re talking about. This is no different than taking any other technical or academic coursework.



If your goal is “Certification,” as in a “Hello, I am a certified Black Belt,” then you will need to complete a more rigorous and lengthy program. Certification commonly (but not always) means completing one or more training courses, passing a comprehensive test, and submitting one or more completed projects for assessment.

It can take over a year to earn your Black Belt, but when you do, you’ll receive a certificate that recognizes your demonstrated knowledge as a certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt. As you’ll see in the next section, there is no exact definition for Lean Six Sigma Black Belt Certification, so it is important to understand how an e-learning provider defines it.

Why a Project-Based Black Belt Certification Standard?

Certification is the recognition that you have not only learned the theory but have also successfully applied it to improve the performance of your organization. Many third-party training programs require very little for certification - fewer hours of study and no real-world project requirements. These programs are designed for speed rather than depth.



In an effort to reform the inconsistencies found in commercial Black Belt programs, a few institutions have recognized the need for a Black Belt certification standard and worked with industry and academic partners to develop one.

Universities like The Ohio State University Center for Operational Excellence (OSU COE) (<http://fisher.osu.edu/centers/coe/lean-six-sigma-black-belt-certification-standards/>) and organizations like the American Society for Quality (<http://www.asq.org/certification/six-sigma/index.html>) have established rigorous standards that rely on a combination of knowledge and experience. Each has published their Body of Knowledge (BOK) online for the general public.

These two standards represent the knowledge and skills that employers expect in their Black Belts. If you’re seeking Black Belt Certification to become more marketable, consider that managers and hiring agents will prefer to see evidence of successful project experience and real-life tool application.

Certification that includes real project work separates you from the inexperienced.



What about Cost?

A quick pricing comparison from different programs will show you that online courses can cost anywhere from \$99 to several thousands of dollars. If cost is the over-riding factor in your decision to select a training provider, then the answer would seem obvious: take the lowest price course. Problem solved.

But Black Belt training and certification is not like an ice cream maker. You can't just dump in ingredients and churn out a top-of-the-line Black Belt; neither should you rush the process. It's a professional commitment of a year or more of your life (usually outside of work and family) in study, reflection and practice. The point of this paper is that other, less tangible factors - the depth of content, quality of the training materials, and level of interactivity – should be just as important in your decision as the cost.

This is not to say that cost is insignificant. Times are tough, and budgets are tight. As you research a training program, we suggest you run a cost/benefits analysis. First, make note of the cost, write it down, and put it aside. Then answer as many of the questions listed below as you can.

When you've finished, revisit the program cost and compare it to what you've learned about the program. *Is it still worth it? Does the value equal the price?* Then run this cost/benefit analysis on each of the Black Belt training programs you like. You may be surprised at what you see.



Ask the Right Questions

We've designed the remainder of this white paper to help you to **ask the right questions** before you commit your wallet and time to a specific training Provider. The next few sections contain comprehensive checklists of questions that you should answer for each program that you are considering.

Keep in mind that **Black Belt certification is comprised of three areas of concentration:**

- The Training Course (Gain the Knowledge)
- The Examination (Confirm the Knowledge)
- The Project (Apply the Knowledge)

You should understand the requirements around each of these areas. We assume that your goal is Black Belt *certification*, but if you are only interested in training, then just work through the Training Course section below. Try to answer all or as many of the questions below as possible so you can directly compare programs and establish your own ranking criteria.



To make this easier for you, we've included a printable table at the end of this paper that you can use to compare several courses. We've included the MoreSteam Black Belt information to save you time as you get started.

The Training Course (Gain the Knowledge)

First, you need to acquire the knowledge. You may be starting from scratch, or you may already have partial or full exposure to Lean Six Sigma. Thus, we've divided this portion into two subsections: (1) I need training (new or additional) and (2) I have already completed Black Belt training. Start at the section appropriate for you.

I Need Training (New or Additional)

- Is the Provider affiliated with a University or quality organization?
- Is the training widely used by people/organizations who know what they are doing?
- Is the training / certification Six Sigma or Lean Six Sigma?
- How many hours of training does the course include? (For Black Belts, 140 hours of online training is considered appropriate to cover the standard Body of Knowledge (BOK). Anything less than that will indicate something is missing.)
- Does the Provider list the BOK required to earn certification? (You should compare what they list to the OSU COE and ASQ standards mentioned above to ascertain what is different.)
- Are there any pre-requisites for the course?
- If I already have my Green Belt (or equivalent), does the provider offer an upgrade course?
- Is the course entirely self-directed, or are there scheduled live components?
- How interactive is the course? (The spectrum runs from passive, pre-recorded videos to practice exercise with interactive components. When evaluating the interactivity, notice what the student DOES.)
- Is the course modular - meaning can I move around at will and view any material at any time?
- Is there instructor support for the course? What form does that support take?
- What statistical software – if any – is required?
- Does the course include statistical software or do I have to purchase it as a separate cost? How much is the additional statistical software?
- Does the Provider offer a video tour or example lesson to help me examine the structure and quality of the course?
- How much does the course cost?
- Is the cost of the course separate form the cost of the certification process?
- Are there travel and material costs excluded from the base price of the certification?



- Can I earn professional credits (CEUs or PDUs) for completing the course?

I Have Already Completed Black Belt Training

- Will the Provider accept the training I have already completed? If no, what do I need to do to satisfy the training requirements?
- Does my former training align with the Providers' certification BOK?
 - o If yes, then I can continue with what I know.
 - o If not, then I may need to learn more techniques and tools on my own or through the Provider.

NOTE: If you're seeking certification, then complete the next two sections. If you are only interested in training, then skip down to the Summary section.

The Examination (Confirm the Knowledge)

In the next step of certification, you have to prove you understand the tools and framework of Lean Six Sigma. Most Providers offer an exam – online or live – to test your experience. Here are some questions you should ask about the examination:

- Is there an examination required for certification? (If no, then ask how I can prove I've learned the material)?
- Is the exam provided online or live?
- How extensive is the exam (number of questions)?
- How long am I given to complete the exam (hours)?
- Am I expected to complete the exam in a single sitting, or has it been partitioned into several smaller exams?
- Are the questions laid out in the DMAIC format or random?
- What topics does the exam cover?
- When can I take the exam (at any time or at pre-determined dates)?
- Is the exam "open book" (i.e., I can use materials like books, software, and notes to help me during the test) or "closed book" (i.e., no support materials allowed)?
- What statistical software – if any – is required, or am I expected to make calculations by hand?
- Does the Provider offer a practice exam or practice materials? If yes, are they included or an extra cost?



- What is the passing score for the exam?
- Who grades the exam?
- Is there a separate cost to the exam from the overall certification and training?
- If I fail, can I retake the exam? And if I can retake the exam, how many times can I do this? Is there an additional cost for re-taking the exam?
- Once complete, can I see which answers I had correct and incorrect (in other words, can I use the exam as a learning tool)?

The Project (Apply the Knowledge)

Finally, for certification you need to show you can successfully apply the knowledge. Here is where Providers show the most variation in their offerings. Once again, we subdivide this section based on your experience:

- (1) I Need to Complete New Project(s), and
- (2) I Have Already Completed Project(s).

I Need to Complete New Project(s)

- Is a project required for certification?
 - If yes, how many projects are required?
 - If yes, is the project “real world” or simulated (or do I have a choice)?
 - If no, how do I prove I can successfully apply the LSS BOK?
- How much time am I given to complete each project?
- Who selects each project?
- What are the minimum types and amounts of tools and techniques I must complete in each project to show my mastery of the LSS BOK?
- Will I have coaching support during my project, and how much support can I expect?
- Am I told what the final project documentation should look like?
- Does the provider expect me to submit a full report, summary and/or an affidavit for each project?
- Does the Provider provide a project template?
- Does the Provider supply me with software for project tracking and management?
- What is the definition of a successful project?
- Are there any extra costs (e.g., shipping of materials) related to these projects?



I Have Already Completed a Project(s)

- Is a project required for certification?
 - If yes, how many projects are required?
 - If yes, is the project “real world” or simulated?
 - If no, how do I prove I can successfully apply the LSS BOK?
- Does the provider expect me to submit a full report, summary report or an affidavit for each project?
- Do I need my manager / Master Black Belt to sign off on each project?
- Do I need to provide information on the financial success of each project?
- What are the minimum types and amounts of tools and techniques I must complete in each project to show my mastery of the LSS BOK?
- How is each project evaluated?
- Who does the evaluation, and will I have direct contact with that evaluator?
- What is the definition of a successful project?
- Are there any extra costs (e.g., shipping of materials) related to these projects?

Summary: Understanding the Value of Your Certification

Once you’ve worked through the lists above, you can be more confident you know what you’re getting when you put down your credit card or write your check. Here are a few final questions to consider now that your research is complete:

- Is the Provider’s training program broadly recognized?
- Does the provider give me information as to who they are and where they are located?
- Will it be easy to contact the provider on an ongoing basis? What is their preferred means of contact?
- What will be the total cost of the entire certification (include whatever optional components I feel are necessary) or training program?
- How long will this entire process take?
- Are the order and deliverables of the entire process clear to me?
- Does the certification adhere to the highest standards in the field? (See the OSU COE standard mentioned above.)



- Will the value of the certification satisfy my current or future employers?
- How confident will I be that I can apply my certification to solve real-world problems?

A provider's Web site and datasheets should contain the answers to all the above questions. If you still have a few open questions, rather than make assumptions as to the answers, you should directly contact the provider.

Good luck with your analysis! If you have any questions or feedback, please send them to marketing@moresteam.com.

About MoreSteam.com

MoreSteam.com is the leading global provider of online Lean Six Sigma training and Blended Learning technology, serving over 2,100 corporate clients and over 50% of the Fortune 500 with a full suite of Lean Six Sigma e-Learning courses, [EngineRoom](#)[®] data analysis software, [TRACTION](#)[®] online project tracking software, [Crucible](#)[®] online testing, and [SigmaSim](#)[®] online DMAIC simulations and games.



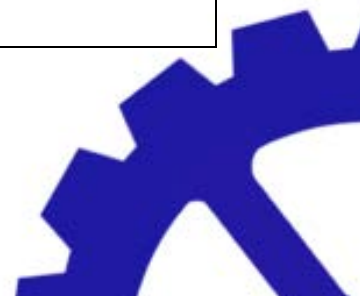
MoreSteam.com was launched in the year 2000 in response to the high cost of traditional Six Sigma training and tools, and has now trained over 380,000 Lean Six Sigma professionals. MoreSteam's mission is to enable people to advance the performance of their organizations by delivering powerful tools for process improvement to the widest possible audience at the lowest price available.

To learn more, please contact MoreSteam.com at 614.602.8190, or send an email to hello@moresteam.com. Our Web site, www.moresteam.com, offers a wide variety of free Lean Six Sigma and Blended Learning resources, including papers, presentations, recorded Webcasts, tool sets and articles. We also offer tips and advice through our online blog and monthly email newsletter.



Black Belt Certification Program Cost / Benefit Worksheet

Provider	MoreSteam.com		
Web site	www.moresteam.com		
Contact Information	9984 Brewster Lane Suite 150 Powell, OH 43065 614-602-8190 hello@moresteam.com		
A. The Training Course (Gain the Knowledge)			
“I Need Training (New or Additional)”			
Is the Provider affiliated with a University or quality organization?	The Ohio State Univ. (OSU) Fisher College of Business; George Washington University; The American Society for Quality (ASQ)		
Is the training widely used by people/organizations who know what they are doing?	Yes - customers listed on company Web site		
Is the training / certification Six Sigma or Lean Six Sigma?	Lean Six Sigma		
How many hours of training does course include?	140 hours (does not include project time)		
Does the Provider list the BOK required to earn certification? (Compare to the OSU COE and ASQ standards)	Adheres to the standard of The Ohio State University Center of Excellence, also aligns with and is ASQ-approved for their standard		
Are there any pre-requisites for the course?	None (BB course includes all material from GB course)		
If I already have my Green Belt (or equivalent), does the provider offer an upgrade course?	Yes – MoreSteam can offer an upgrade from GB to BB		
Is the course entirely self-directed, or are there scheduled live components?	Entirely self-directed		
How interactive is the course? (which elements are interactive?)	Very interactive: includes simulations, Flash exercises, practice questions		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
Is the course modular - meaning can I move around at will and view any material at any time?	Course is completely modular, but framed in a DMAIC format		
Is there instructor support for the course? What form does that support take?	Yes – online forums, email support		
What statistical software – if any – is required?	Only Excel is required, but basic course includes EngineRoom® (Excel Add-in)		
Does the course include statistical software or do I have to purchase it as a separate cost? How much is the additional statistical software?	Basic course includes EngineRoom®, can purchase courses for Minitab® and JMP® but need to buy those programs separately		
Does the Provider offer a video tour or example lesson to help me examine the structure and quality of the course?	Yes- video tour available on site, example course available on request		
How much does the course cost?	\$3,100		
Is the cost of the course separate form the cost of the certification process?	Yes – certification costs an additional \$750		
Are there travel and material costs excluded from the base price of the certification?	No		
Can I earn professional credits (CEUs or PDUs) for completing the course?	Yes – 14.0 CEU's or 140 PDUs		
“I Have Already Completed Black Belt Training”			
Will the Provider accept the training I have already completed? If no, what do I need to do to satisfy the training requirements?	Provider requires MoreSteam.com training, does not offer certification for other training		
Does my training align with the Providers' certification BOK?	NA		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
If yes, I can continue with what I know.	NA		
If not, then I may need to learn more techniques and tools on my own or through the Provider.	NA		
B. The Examination (Confirm the Knowledge)			
Is there an examination required for certification? (If no, then how can I prove I've learned the knowledge?)	Yes		
Is the exam provided online or live?	Online		
How extensive is the exam (number of questions)?	120 questions		
How long am I given to complete the exam (hours)?	5 hours total for all sections		
Am I expected to complete the exam in a single sitting, or has it been partitioned into several smaller exams?	Exam is broken into sub-tests		
Are the questions laid out in the DMAIC format or random?	Presented in random manner, but identified by topic area (DMAIC phase)		
What topics does the exam cover?	Entire Lean Six Sigma Black Belt course (BOK aligns with OSU COE standard)		
When can I take the exam (at any time or at pre-determined dates)?	At any time after completing coursework		
Is the exam "open book" or "closed book"?	Open book		
What statistical software – if any – is required, or am I expected to make calculations by hand?	I can use any statistical software I have		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
Does the Provider offer a practice exam or practice materials? If yes, are they included or an extra cost?	No, but course lessons have many practice questions and all sessions have a quiz		
What is the passing score for the exam?	80%		
Who grades the exam?	Automatically graded by online tool		
Is there a separate cost to the exam from the overall certification and training?	No		
If I fail, can I retake the exam? And if I can retake the exam, how many times can I do this and is there an additional cost for re-taking the exam?	Yes – if I do not pass on the first attempt, you can re-take the test once and after a one-month waiting period. No extra cost.		
Once complete, can I see which answers I had correct or incorrect (in other words, can I use the exam as a learning tool)?	I will be given an opportunity to review my results by topic area		
C. The Project (Apply the Knowledge)			
“I Need to Complete New Project(s)”			
Is a project required for certification?	Yes		
If yes, how many projects are required?	2 projects		
If yes, is the project “real world” or simulated (or do I have a choice)?	Real-world projects selected by individual		
If no, how do I prove I can successfully apply the LSS BOK?	NA		
How much time am I given to complete each project?	18 months (includes training)		
Who selects each project?	I do		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
What are the minimum types and amounts of tools and techniques I must complete in each project to show my mastery of the LSS BOK?	See MoreSteam Web site for information		
Will I have coaching support during my project, and how much support can I expect?	Yes - Coaching on Charter, Tollgates, and Final Project Review		
Am I told what the final project documentation should look like?	Yes		
Does the provider expect me to submit a full report, summary report or an affidavit for each project?	Full documentation required for 1 st project; Summary for 2 nd . Submitted via TRACtion® online project tracking		
Does the Provider give me a project template?	Yes – I will have access to TRACtion online project tracking		
Does the Provider supply me with software for project tracking and management?	Yes – I will have access to TRACtion online project tracking		
What is the definition of a successful project?	The projects must follow the DMAIC framework and must yield improvement in a performance metric that is important to my organization's mission. More information on specific tools is included on the MoreSteam Web site.		
Are there any extra costs related to these projects?	No		
“I Have Already Completed a Project(s)”			
Is a project required for certification?	Yes. Completed projects must be properly scoped for the Black Belt level and submitted as requested for certification. Many already completed projects are not often at the BB level and have been completed too long ago (e.g., 10 years)		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
If yes, how many projects are required?	2 projects		
If yes, is the project “real world” or simulated (or do I have a choice)?	Real-world projects selected by individual		
If no, how do I prove I can successfully apply the LSS BOK?	NA		
Does the provider expect me to submit a full report, summary report or an affidavit for each project?	Full documentation required for 1 st project; Summary for 2 nd . Submitted via TRACtion® online project tracking		
Do I need my manager / Master Black Belt to sign off on each project?	Yes		
Do I need to provide information on the financial success of each project?	Yes		
What are the minimum types and amounts of tools and techniques I must complete in each project to show my mastery of the LSS BOK?	See MoreSteam Web site for information		
What is the definition of a successful project?	The projects must follow the DMAIC framework and must yield improvement in a performance metric that is important to my organization's mission. More information on specific tools is included on the MoreSteam Web site.		
Are there any extra costs related to these projects?	No		



Provider	MoreSteam.com		
Summary: Understanding the Value of Your Certification			
Is the Provider's training program broadly recognized?	Yes – see Web site and partner organizations (ASQ)		
Does the provider give me information as to who they are and where they are located?	Yes – on Web site Contact page, About us page lists mission and management		
Will it be easy to contact the provider on an ongoing basis? What is their preferred means of contact?	Can reach provider by phone or email, email preferred		
What will be the total cost of the entire certification or training program?	\$3,100 for training alone (EngineRoom software included), \$3,850 for training and certification		
How long will this entire process take?	Self-paced, up to 545 days (18 months)		
Are the order and deliverables of the entire process clear to me?			
Does the certification adhere to the highest standards in the field? (See the OSU COE standard mentioned above)	Adheres to independent LSS Black Belt Standards published by The Center for Operational Excellence (COE) at The Ohio State University. Training is regularly reviewed approved by the American Society for Quality (ASQ)		
Will the value of the certification satisfy my current or future employers?			
How confident will I be that I can apply my certification to solve real-world problems?			

