

# **GUIDELINES ON TRADE BENCHMARKING CERTIFICATION**



**2025**

**Certified by COER the developers of TRADE**

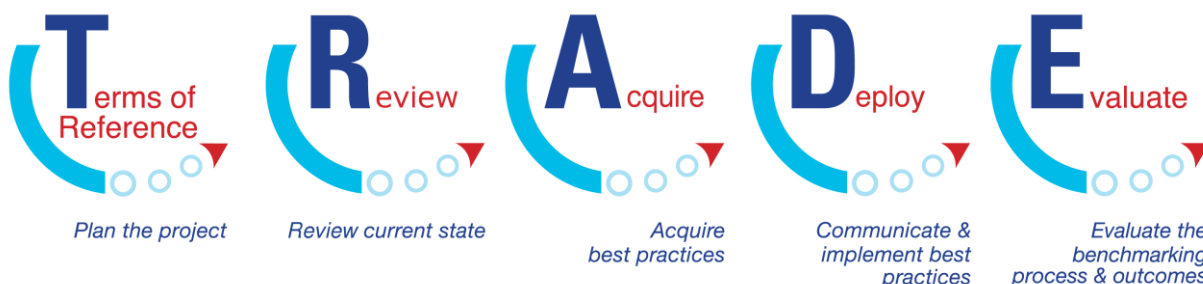
# TRADE Benchmarking Certification

**TRADE Benchmarking Certification assures that individuals have a comprehensive understanding of the TRADE Benchmarking Methodology and can apply it effectively to achieve significant operational and financial benefits.**



Individuals trained in TRADE can progress through three certification levels: "Trained," "Proficiency," and "Mastery."

- **Trained** status is awarded upon completing an approved training course led by a certified instructor.
- **Proficiency** status is achieved by submitting a completed benchmarking project that meets at least a 3-Star standard. Projects assessed at a 5- to 7-Star standard receive a **Commendation**.
- **Mastery** status is awarded upon submitting two completed benchmarking projects, with at least one assessed at the **Commendation** level. Those who reach Mastery status possess the skills and experience to lead benchmarking projects that are likely to yield significant operational and financial improvements.



## TRADE Benchmarking Trained Certificate (BRONZE)

This certificate is awarded to individuals who complete an approved TRADE Benchmarking Course.

- **Documentation required:** List of attendees and date of the course.
- **Certificate Validity:** 5 years from the date of issue.



## TRADE Benchmarking Proficiency Certificate (SILVER)

Awarded to TRADE-trained individuals who demonstrate benchmarking proficiency by completing a TRADE benchmarking project. Submissions are graded using a star-based system, as detailed below in Table 1:

**Table 1** – Assessment Grades and Certificates Awarded

| Assessment grades | Certificate awarded                              | Explanation                                                         |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 7 Stars ★★★★★★    | Proficiency Certificate <i>with Commendation</i> | Role Model, World-Class, Wow!<br>(Across 3 or more TRADE stages)    |
| 6 Stars ★★★★★★    | Proficiency Certificate <i>with Commendation</i> | Outstanding (Across 3 or more TRADE stages)                         |
| 5 Stars ★★★★★     | Proficiency Certificate <i>with Commendation</i> | Excellence, Exceeds Expectations<br>(Across 3 or more TRADE stages) |
| 4 Stars ★★★★★     | Proficiency Certificate                          | Professional/Competence Applied<br>(Across 3 or more TRADE stages)  |
| 3 Stars ★★★★★     | Proficiency Certificate                          | Professional/Competence Foundations (Across 3 or more TRADE stages) |
| 1 to 2 Stars ★★   | Incomplete                                       | Deficient, Incomplete<br>(Across 3 or more TRADE stages)            |

### Requirements for Certification:

- **Proficiency Certificate:** Complete the first 3 stages of TRADE ("T," "R," and "A") with each achieving a Proficiency grade (3 Stars or higher).
- **Proficiency Certificate with Commendation (5-6-7 Stars):** Complete all stages ("T," "R," "A," "D," "E") with a minimum of 4 Stars in each, and at least 3 stages achieving a Commendation grade of 5-6-7 Stars.

### Submission Requirements:

1. **TRADE Benchmarking Certificate Application Form**
2. **TRADE Benchmarking Report Form** (use the provided template to compile your Benchmarking Report)
3. **TRADE Spreadsheet.** Additional documentation (e.g., surveys, slides, reports) may also be submitted as supplementary evidence.

An assessor will evaluate your project using the **TRADE Benchmarking Certification Criteria** (refer to Table 2). Further details on the grading system are available in Table 3.

### Additional Information:

1. **Project Selection:** Choose a project for certification that demonstrates your benchmarking knowledge at each stage of TRADE.
2. **Application Form:** Specify whether certification is for individuals or the project team. A certification fee applies per project, with an additional fee for each individual certification.
3. **Confidentiality:** COER staff will review your application confidentially. Information will not be shared externally without consent. Sensitive information can be redacted or anonymized (e.g., "Organization X").
4. **Certificate Validity:** 3 years from the date of issue.



### TRADE Benchmarking Mastery Certificate (GOLD)

This certificate is awarded to individuals who have completed and/or facilitated two benchmarking projects that meet the TRADE Benchmarking Proficiency level or higher, with at least one project receiving a Commendation grade. The certificate will display the star ratings achieved for both projects.

**Certificate Validity:** 3 years from the date of issue



For a TRADE Benchmarking Certificate Application Form or for more information contact Dr Robin Mann, [r.s.mann@coer.org.nz](mailto:r.s.mann@coer.org.nz), [www.coer.org.nz](http://www.coer.org.nz).

| Table 2 – TRADE Benchmarking Proficiency Certification Criteria                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
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| TRADE stage                                                                         | For certification purposes submitted projects (Benchmarking Report Form and supporting documents) will be reviewed on approach and deployment with respect to the criteria listed below.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Clarity of the project</b> (<i>Review clarity of the project aim, scope, objectives</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Value/importance of the project</b> (<i>Review if expected benefits (non-financial and financial) and expected costs were provided. Were these benefits specific and measurable showing performance at the start of the project and expected performance at the end? Were expected benefits greater than expected costs?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Purpose of the project fits the need</b> (<i>Review relationship between background and aim, scope, objectives</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Project plan and management system in place</b> (<i>Review TOR form, task worksheets, communication plan, minutes of meetings, planning documents and risk assessment and monitoring forms</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Selection of team members and a team approach</b> (<i>Review if team members' job roles are related to the project topic, are team members all contributing to the project with responsibilities and tasks allocated? Have all team members been attending project meetings?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Training of team members in benchmarking and other skills as required</b> (<i>Review TOR form to see if all team members have attended a TRADE training course or if other benchmarking training was provided, were other training needs for the project identified and training given as appropriate?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Involvement of key stakeholders.</b> (<i>Review if key stakeholders were identified and involved in the TOR stage via meetings or through other activities, is there evidence of two way communication with stakeholders rather than one-way?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Review and refinement of project</b> (<i>Review if TOR form, task worksheets, project plan has been reviewed and refined based on stakeholder involvement and gaining project knowledge</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Project support from sponsor</b> (<i>Review if sponsor holds a senior position and whether the sponsor has supported the team's requests and recommendations, review if there has been regular involvement of the sponsor in meetings or other activities</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Adherence to Benchmarking Code of Conduct (BCoC)</b> (<i>Review if training on BCoC has been provided, has a benchmarking agreement form been signed with all team members indicating adherence to the BCoC?</i>)</li> </ul> |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Understanding of area of focus</b> (<i>Review how the current process and systems were analysed, were process flow charts, fishbone diagram, swot analysis, process analysis, root cause analysis, self-assessment, focus groups, stakeholder meetings, surveys or expert opinion used to aid understanding? Were improvement ideas acquired through this activity and recorded on the Improvement Ideas and Best Practice Form (II&amp;BP) or other forms?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Understanding of current performance</b> (<i>Review if metrics have been selected that measure performance related to the project aim and objectives, and was performance continually monitored and analysed throughout the project to track the progress of the project and give a deeper understanding of performance</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Prioritisation of areas to research for best practices.</b> (<i>Review how the area(s) to focus on for the project were selected, what prioritisation methods were used (if any) and were prioritisation ratings given, were prioritisation meetings held? Review if the TOR form was refined based on prioritisation information</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Involvement of key stakeholders.</b> (<i>Review if key stakeholders were involved in the Review stage via meetings or through other activities to obtain their opinion, is there evidence of two-way communication with stakeholders rather than one-way?</i>)</li> <li>• <b>Project support from sponsor</b> (<i>Review if the sponsor has supported the team's requests and recommendations, review if there has been regular involvement of the sponsor in meetings or other activities</i>)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|  <p>Acquire<br/>best practices</p>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Development of a Best Practice Research Plan</b> (Review if there is an appropriate research plan that has considered project timelines, available resources and the type of information sought. Were suitable research methods—such as surveys, desk-top research, expert opinions, virtual meetings, and site visits—employed to gather benchmarking information?)</li> <li>• <b>Development of Best Practice Search Criteria</b> (Review if search criteria were developed based on the priorities and gaps identified during the Review Stage of TRADE? Were these criteria specifically aligned with the challenges and opportunities faced and did they support the discovery of innovative practices and foster opportunities for cross-sector learning?)</li> <li>• <b>Best Practice Search</b> (Review if the search for best practices was comprehensive and suited to the project's needs? Were potential best practices and benchmarking partners identified for further investigation? Were tools such as the Best Practice Search Form or Partner Selection Table used effectively?)</li> <li>• <b>Inviting and Acquiring Benchmarking Partners</b> (Review the invitation emails/social media approaches, letters, and phone call records to assess how benchmarking partners were approached. Were they informed of the benchmarking code of conduct? If only desk research was used for learning from other organizations, was there a valid reason for not engaging directly with partners?)</li> <li>• <b>Preparation for Learning from Benchmarking Partners</b> (Review the planning for learning from benchmarking partners, especially for site visits. Was there a clear outline of questions to ask and methods for recording responses? Were template forms or questionnaires developed? Was there a detailed plan for the information and documents the team aimed to review? Was a site visit agenda developed and agreed upon in advance? How were data collection responsibilities distributed among the project team members?)</li> <li>• <b>Adherence to Benchmarking Code of Conduct (BCoC)</b> (Review if benchmarking partners were informed of the BCoC? Review if two-way sharing occurred. For example, did the project team leave a copy of how its own organisation performed with respect to the questions asked or was the benchmarking partner invited to the project team's own organisation to learn from them?)</li> <li>• <b>Collect and store data</b> (Review documentation and records of learning from site visits, surveys and desk-top research).</li> <li>• <b>Analysis of learning</b> (Review how the learning was shared, discussed and analysed by team members. Did this learning involve holding meetings, using prioritisation criteria and/or involving stakeholders?).</li> <li>• <b>Formulate recommendations</b> (Review how recommendations were developed and agreed upon by the project team? Was the Improvement Ideas and Best Practices Form (II&amp;BP) or other form/approach used?)</li> <li>• <b>Involvement of key stakeholders</b> (Review if key stakeholders were involved in the Acquire stage via meetings or through activities such as an invitation to a site visit, is there evidence of two-way communication with the stakeholders rather than one-way?)</li> <li>• <b>Project support from sponsor</b> (Review if the sponsor has supported the team's requests and recommendations, review if there has been regular involvement of the sponsor in meetings or other activities)</li> </ul> |
|  <p>Communicate &amp;<br/>implement best<br/>practices</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communication of project findings/recommendations</b> (Review how the project findings/recommendations were communicated and to which stakeholders. Were the costs/benefits of each recommendation provided? Were reports or presentations used and were the recommendations received favourably?)</li> <li>• <b>Development of action plans for implementation</b> (Review how action plans for implementation were created, were they created by the project team or handed over to another project team? Were other stakeholders involved? What detail did the action plans contain, for example, were resources, roles, responsibilities and a timeline specified?)</li> <li>• <b>Approval of action plan</b> (Review how the action plans were communicated and to which stakeholders. Were the costs/benefits of each action calculated? Were reports or presentations used to communicate the proposed actions and were the actions signed off?)</li> <li>• <b>Implementation of action plans</b> (Review if the actions were implemented, and if so, how the implementation and impact of the actions were monitored and how frequently. What mechanisms were in place if actions were not producing the desired results? Did the benchmarking project team have oversight of the actions?)</li> <li>• <b>Involvement of key stakeholders</b> (Review if key stakeholders were identified and involved in the Deploy stage via meetings, is there evidence of two-way communication with the stakeholders rather than one-way?)</li> <li>• <b>Project support from sponsor</b> (Review if the sponsor has supported the team's requests and recommendations, review if there has been regular involvement of the sponsor in meetings or other activities)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |



- **Evaluation of project outcomes** *(Review if a thorough evaluation of project outcomes has been undertaken consisting of a cost/benefit analysis and stakeholder feedback, when was the project closed or is it still ongoing? Have the objectives/benefits in the TOR been met or surpassed? If not, why not and have lessons been learnt? Has a final project report been written, or presentation delivered?)*
- **Evaluation of the benchmarking project as a whole** *(Review if an evaluation of the whole benchmarking project was undertaken to identify what went well and what did not go well. Was this learning captured through a report or presentation and will the learning be applied to future projects?)*
- **Sharing of project success** *(Review if the findings from the project were shared with internal and external stakeholder groups via reports, presentations, conferences or promotional articles. Is information on the project readily available to all staff members? How has this sharing impacted on gaining support for future projects?)*
- **Involvement of key stakeholders** *(Review if key stakeholders were involved in the Evaluate stage via meetings, is there evidence of two-way communication with the stakeholders rather than one-way?)*
- **Project support from sponsor** *(Review if the sponsor continued to support the project in the Evaluate stage and ensure that the outcomes from the project were measured)*

| Table 3 - Assessment Grades for TRADE Benchmarking Proficiency Certification             |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| Assessment grades for projects applying for TRADE Benchmarking Proficiency Certification | <br>Plan the project                                   | <br>Review current state                                  | <br>Acquire best practices                                | <br>Communicate & implement best practices              | <br>Evaluate the benchmarking process & outcomes          | Additional Tips                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Commendation</b><br><b>7 Stars</b><br>★★★★★★                                          | Role model approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the TOR stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup> | Role model approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Review stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup> | Role model approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Acquire stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup> | Role model approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Deploy stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup> | Role model approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Evaluate stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup> | Requires a detailed analysis of the current situation, with performance tracked weekly or monthly across multiple metrics to monitor changes as Quick Wins and larger interventions are implemented. |
| <b>Commendation</b><br><b>5 to 6 Stars</b><br>★★★★★★                                     | Excellent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the TOR stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Excellent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Review stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Excellent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Acquire stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Excellent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Deploy stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Excellent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Evaluate stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Proficient</b><br><b>3 to 4 Stars</b> ★★★                                             | Competent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the TOR stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Competent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Review stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Competent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Acquire stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Competent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Deploy stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Competent approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Evaluate stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Incomplete</b><br><b>1 to 2 Stars</b> ★★                                              | Deficient approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the TOR stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Deficient approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Review stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Deficient approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Acquire stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Deficient approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Deploy stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  | Deficient approach/deployment of TRADE steps in the Evaluate stage as specified in the certification criteria <sup>(refer to Table 2)</sup>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                      |