
BLACKTECHSTARTUP EDUCATION

Cloud Certifications: Choose the Path That Matches the Job

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Start with 30 jobs, not a certification logo

Collect 30 postings for one target role—cloud support, cloud engineer, platform/DevOps, security, solutions architect or data/cloud role—in the geography you can actually work. Count provider mentions, required services, Linux, networking, scripting, infrastructure-as-code, containers, identity/security and experience. Do not choose AWS, Azure or Google Cloud because a social-media creator said it pays the most. Choose the ecosystem repeatedly attached to jobs you can pursue.

Cloud work sits on top of fundamentals. Before an associate-level credential, be comfortable with IP addressing/subnets at a practical level, DNS, HTTP/TLS, operating systems, command line, identity/permissions, storage, databases and basic scripting. A certificate can validate knowledge; it cannot hide a weak troubleshooting foundation in an interview.

Know the current cost before you commit

As of this guide's review, AWS lists Cloud Practitioner at \$100, Associate exams at \$150, and Professional/Specialty exams at \$300. Microsoft says Associate and Expert exams typically cost US\$165, with regional pricing. Google Cloud lists Associate Cloud Engineer at \$125 plus applicable

tax and Professional Cloud Architect at \$200 plus tax. Prices and exam catalogs change, so verify immediately before registration.

Budget for retakes, labs and time—not only the exam. Use free official learning paths, sandboxes and low-cost lab environments before buying expensive bootcamps. If an employer, workforce program, school or partner offers vouchers, use them. Never take on consumer debt for a stack of certifications without job evidence.

Choose the provider using market evidence

AWS is a strong default when your target postings repeatedly use AWS services. Azure can be particularly relevant in Microsoft-heavy enterprise environments. Google Cloud can be compelling in organizations centered on GCP, data/analytics and specific cloud-native stacks. There is no universal “best cloud.” There is a best fit for the work you are pursuing.

Also look at the direction of the role, not only the provider. BLS projects computer network architects to grow 12% from 2024–2034 and information security analysts 29%, while network and computer systems administrator employment is projected to decline 4% even though replacement openings remain. That does not predict your individual outcome, but it argues for building toward architecture, automation, cloud engineering and security capability rather than treating legacy administration alone as the destination.

Pair every credential with an evidence project

For a foundational credential, build a small cloud-hosted site with domain, TLS, logging and budget alerts. For an associate cloud-engineer path, deploy an application with network segmentation, identity roles, database/storage, monitoring and infrastructure-as-code. For security, add least privilege, secret handling, audit logs and incident-response steps. For architecture, write a diagram and a one-page tradeoff memo covering cost, availability, recovery and security.

Put the project in a repository with sanitized configuration, README, architecture diagram, cost estimate and screenshots of monitoring. Employers can see that you know more than multiple-choice answers. Keep cloud spend capped with budgets/alerts and delete resources you no longer need.

Use a 10-week study system

Week 1: download the official exam guide and mark every domain red/yellow/green. Weeks 2–6: study one domain, then build or break something related to it. Weeks 7–8: complete the evidence project and revisit weak domains. Week 9: timed practice and error log. Week 10: final review and

exam. Every missed practice question should become a note explaining why the wrong choices are wrong—not just the correct letter.

After passing, apply immediately while the knowledge is fresh. Add the credential to the resume only with the proof project next to it. Search for roles that list the exact credential as preferred/required and roles that list the underlying services even when the certificate is not named.

Stack certifications only when the next role requires it

Do not automatically go Foundational → Associate → Professional → another provider. After each credential, ask whether the next bottleneck is another exam or real experience. Often the better move is Linux, Python/PowerShell, Terraform, Kubernetes, security, CI/CD or a production support role. Certifications are strongest when they confirm a growing body of work.

For Black technologists trying to convert training into income, the discipline is especially important: buy credentials that open a verified door, not status symbols. Guide 09 helps choose the career ladder, Guide 31 covers cybersecurity-role mapping, and Guide 10 helps package proof of work. Use this guide to decide which cloud credential—if any—belongs between them.

Research behind this guide

Use the primary and authoritative sources below to verify current rules, prices, eligibility and program details before acting. Terms can change.

AWS — Certification FAQs and exam pricing



AWS — Certification



Microsoft Learn — Certification Exam FAQs



Google Cloud — Associate Cloud Engineer



Google Cloud — Professional Cloud Architect



BLS — Computer Network Architects



BLS — Information Security Analysts



Important: This guide is educational information, not individualized legal, tax, investment, employment, security or compliance advice. For decisions with material legal or financial consequences, use a qualified professional who can review your facts.

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