Assessment-Based Certificate Programs: Design Document

Think of the instructional design document as a blueprint for how you design and develop the certificate program. An instructional design document specifies all of the decisions made about the course. It can be useful in obtaining agreement for all involved parties as to the vision and plans for the course (subject matter experts, instructors, staff members, etc).

The document can be written at a high level, touching upon the certificate program's overall approach to instruction and learning. However, you may find that detailed documentation, such as policies and procedures, dovetails nicely with this document. If this is the case, you may find the design document becoming a handbook of sorts for the certificate program and its operations in their entirety.

The following content could be included:

1) Need
   a) Why is this program needed?
   b) Who is the target audience?
   c) Is there a gap analysis that demonstrates a need for this program?
   d) Learning needs analysis
2) Purpose
   a) What will learners achieve by completing the program?
   b) How does this program address the question of "what's in it for me?"
   c) What do learners need to be able to do that they aren't doing now? What changed behaviors/actions/skills should they exhibit after concluding the program?
3) Audience
   a) Who is the target audience that will take this program?
   b) What demographic factors must the program be mindful of to meet learner needs? E.g., level of education, technology, language, accessibility, pre-requisite programs/courses.
4) Design principles
   a) Describe the overall learning approach
      i) Instructional design theory being applied
   b) High level overview of the course
   c) Learning outcomes
      i) How do these learning outcomes tie back into the learning needs analysis?
   d) Content overview and activities that meet the learning outcomes (content outline)
   e) Identify instructional media choices
   f) How/when/where will learners access the content?
5) Program Support
   a) Roles needed to support the program
      i) Operational, administrative, instructional, exam development
   b) Qualifications of individuals to fill the roles
   c) How staff/volunteers are selected to fill roles

6) How will the program know if learning outcomes have been met and learners have gained the knowledge/skills necessary to demonstrate proficiency?
   a) Assessment
      i) Describe the type of assessment instrument(s) used
      ii) Tie the assessment to the learning outcomes
      iii) Psychometrics
      iv) Cut-score determination
   b) Describe evaluations
      i) Learner satisfaction
      ii) Content/instruction
      iii) Instructors/program
      iv) Post-event
   c) Are there-post training requirements?
   d) How do you ensure the transfer of learning before/during/after the training?
7) Security protocols
   a) How does the program protect its intellectual property regarding the program?
8) Communication
   a) How does the program inform/educate potential and current program participants about its offering(s)?
   b) Where are policies and procedures (learner "bill of rights") made available to participants?
9) Program maintenance/updates
   a) Who/what/when/where/why for determining what updates should be made to the program?
   b) How frequently is the training program reviewed?
   c) How are changes to the program reflected in the content, exams, and evaluations?
   d) How are learner experiences regarding the content, exams, and evaluations reflected in the program?
   e) Describe the process by which changes are incorporated into the program.
   f) When/how are program participants notified of changes to the program?
   g) Describe the system of checks-and-balances to ensure accuracy with content and assessment development/maintenance efforts.

Though design documents may be written as a traditional outline in Word, they may take various formats or layouts. One alternative template may be found here:
http://www.usgs.gov/humancapital/documents/tel_instructionalmodeule.pdf