

New Cisco Partner Designations

January 2026

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is designed to help answer common customer questions regarding the evolution of Cisco's partner ecosystem and partner designations.

Why is Cisco changing its partner program?

Cisco is evolving its world-class partner program to meet customer needs in the AI era. Today's technology solutions span multiple architectures, which is why customers need to build a team of partners working together to achieve transformative business outcomes. The Cisco 360 Partner Program makes it easier to find and build those teams, tapping into the best technology ecosystem on the planet.

What exactly is changing?

We're excited to announce new partner designations that will help customers more easily identify Cisco partners with the right expertise to match their opportunities. New partner designations, competencies, specializations, and Cisco Powered Services will give customers the confidence and clarity to unlock the power of our entire partner ecosystem to deliver the outcomes that matter most: AI-ready data centers, future-proofed workplaces, and digital resilience.

When do these changes take effect?

These new designations will take effect on January 25, 2026, and you will see these changes reflected in the [Cisco Partner Locator](#) tool then.

Will the "Gold, Premier, and Select" partner levels go away with the new Cisco 360 Partner Program?

Yes, all current partner levels will retire on January 24, 2026, coinciding with the new designations taking effect on January 25, 2026.

What will the new partner designations be after Gold, Premier, and Select retire?

To simplify and improve the customer experience we are moving away from the current roles and levels framework to a new structure that enables partners to clearly showcase their Cisco expertise and capabilities to customers. Cisco is introducing new designations, specializations, competencies, and Cisco Powered Services to help partners differentiate their expertise and communicate their value in specific Cisco portfolios. Every partner company enrolled

New Cisco Partner Designations

in the program is recognized as a registered Cisco Partner. As partners build their expertise in the program, they can unlock additional designations, specializations, competencies, and Cisco Powered Services that further showcase the depth and breadth of their expertise.

- **Cisco Portfolio Partner:** Partners who have demonstrated investment in customer engagement, specific sales and technical capabilities, as well as foundational practice maturity, to effectively implement Cisco solutions in a specific portfolio.

Cisco Networking Partner, Cisco Cloud and AI Infrastructure Partner, Cisco Security Partner, Cisco Splunk Partner, Cisco Collaboration Partner, Cisco Services Partner

- **Cisco Preferred Partner:** Partners who have achieved advanced technical expertise, invested deeply in customer engagement, and built foundational practices. Recognized for deep sales & technical skills, lifecycle practices, and ability to deliver specialized solutions tailored to customer needs. Cisco Preferred Partners can further differentiate their deep expertise and technical capabilities with specializations aligned to Cisco's flagship offers and solutions.

Cisco Preferred Networking Partner, Cisco Preferred Cloud and AI Infrastructure Partner, Cisco Preferred Security Partner, Cisco Preferred Splunk Partner, Cisco Preferred Collaboration Partner, Cisco Preferred Services Partner

Can partners achieve more than just these portfolio designations?

Yes, to further showcase the depth and breadth of their expertise, partners can achieve additional specializations, competencies, and Cisco Powered Services.

- Competencies identify partners with a unique skill.
- Specializations reflect deep expertise and technical capabilities across Cisco's entire portfolio and are reserved for Cisco Preferred Partners.
- Cisco Powered Services showcase a partner's ability to design, provision, manage, and deliver outcomes built on Cisco technologies.

Is a Cisco Preferred Partner a partner that Cisco has shown preference to?

No, the Cisco Preferred Partner designation is simply the label associated with a tier of partners who have achieved objective, transparent criteria as part of the Cisco 360 Partner Program's structure. All Cisco partners have opportunities to achieve recognition and participate in tenders and bids. A Cisco Preferred Partner is a partner that has achieved advanced technical expertise, invested deeply in customer engagement and built foundational practices.

New Cisco Partner Designations

Recognized for deep sales and technical skills, lifecycle practices, and ability to deliver specialized solutions tailored to customer needs.

Is a Cisco Preferred Partner the same as a Cisco Gold Partner?

No, a Cisco Preferred Partner is not a direct replacement for Gold. Preferred Partners must demonstrate deeper and broader capabilities, backed by advanced technical certifications, proven customer engagement, and robust lifecycle practices, within a specific portfolio or cross-portfolio.

How will these changes benefit me as a customer?

The new designations will make it easier for you to identify Cisco partners with the precise expertise to match your opportunities and business needs. You can build your lineup of experts by selecting partners that have achieved the appropriate capabilities. Whether that's a partner with deep security expertise, a partner with a breadth of cross-portfolio expertise in networking, collaboration, and more, or selecting multiple partners to deliver an outcome, you will have the confidence and clarity to know you've chosen the right partners for your outcomes.

What do public sector customers need to know or do regarding these changes?

Public sector customers should be aware that the new partner designations may necessitate updates to their typical solicitation language (RFIs, RFQs, RFPs, IFBs, etc.). If your solicitations currently require only Gold Partners to respond, you will want to update them to ensure they remain relevant and inclusive and attract the most qualified partners under Cisco's new program framework. We recommend emphasizing partners' validated skills and proven capabilities that align with your specific business objectives, rather than exclusively requiring the Gold Partner status. For more information about updating your solicitations, read the [Cisco Partner Solicitations FAQ](#).

Can only Cisco Preferred Partners bid on solicitations that previously required only Gold Partners to bid?

No, the most capable partners for that specific customer's needs should bid on the solicitation. The new designations in the Cisco 360 Partner Program will more accurately reflect a partner's depth and breadth of capabilities across Cisco portfolios to help customers achieve their business outcomes.

How do I find a Cisco partner's status and capabilities?

Visit the [Cisco Partner Locator tool](#) to further explore partners' validated Cisco capabilities and expertise.

New Cisco Partner Designations

What is Cisco Partner Locator?

Cisco Partner Locator is an online tool designed to help customers identify and connect with Cisco partners with validated expertise and capabilities tailored to specific business outcomes.

What are the key improvements for customers in the new version?

The updated tool features a redesigned user experience and several new capabilities, including:

- **Outcome-Based Search:** A new search capability that allows you to find partners based on the specific business outcomes you are looking to achieve.
- **Cisco 360 Partner Designations:** Partner listings will now reflect new designations from the Cisco 360 Partner Program, making it easier to identify a partner's specific level of expertise.
- **Managed Services Visibility:** You will be able to see Managed Services offers directly within partner listings.
- **Search Result Downloads:** Logged-in users can compare up to four partners and download the Partner Comparison result or download one partner profile at a time.

How can I find a partner with specific technical expertise?

You can use updated filters within the tool to connect with a partner who has been validated by Cisco to deliver the specific technology solutions you need. New filters include options like Global Status, Portfolios, Competencies, Cisco Powered Services, Partner Type, and Industries served.

Can I find partners in specific locations?

Yes. Cisco Partner Locator allows you to search for partners by address or site location. Many partners list multiple locations to show their global or regional reach.

Where can I get more information?

Visit the [Partner Ecosystem web page](#), and sign up for exclusive email updates [HERE](#).