

## **National Commission for Certifying Agencies**

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### **Standards for Accreditation of National Certification Organizations**

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A certification organization that conducts a certification program or programs that evaluate the competence of practitioners has a responsibility to individuals seeking and holding certification, employers of those individuals, agencies and customers that pay for or require the services of the practitioners, and the public. The competent practitioner performs work accurately and in the best interest of the consumer, makes correct judgements, and interacts with other professionals and customers effectively. Competence must be demonstrated and maintained throughout the individual's practicing life.

The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) is an independent organization which has identified the essential components of a national certification program and determines if certification organizations meet established standards based on those essential components. The NCCA Standards for Accreditation are standards for voluntary certification organizations. The standards have been developed after years of research into, discussion about, and implementation into the operation of certification organizations. They are nationally recognized principles utilized by a variety of certification organizations for certification programs in diverse professions and occupations. Accreditation by the Commission indicates that the certification organization has been evaluated by the Commission and found to meet or exceed all of its established standards.

All certification organizations are expected to review the "Uniform Guidelines On Employee Selection Procedures" (1978) developed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Joint Technical Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests" (1985) developed jointly by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education, and "Principles of Fairness: An Examining Guide for Credentialing Boards" (1993) developed by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement, and Regulation and the National Organization for Competency Assurance. These publications will assist certification organizations to assure that certification examinations comply with principles which may be referred to in legal challenges of examinations.

To earn accreditation by the Commission, the certification organization and its program(s) must meet the following standards and provide evidence of compliance through the documentation requested in the application. The Commission monitors continuing compliance with the standards through the entire accreditation period. To be eligible for accreditation, a certification program must have completed at least two national examination administrations.

## NCCA Standards

### 1. Purpose of Certification Organization

a. shall be to evaluate individuals who wish to enter, continue and/or advance in their discipline through a certification process, and to issue a credential to individuals who demonstrate the required level of competence.

### 2. Structure of Certification Organization

a. shall conduct certification activities which are national in scope.

b. shall be incorporated as a legal entity (applies to the parent organization if the certification organization is a subsidiary of another organization).

c. shall be independent in decision-making for all matters pertaining to certification. A certification organization, whether or not it is a legal entity in and of itself, shall have control over all matters related to the certification and recertification programs, without being subject to approval by any other body, including but not limited to:

policies and procedures;  
eligibility requirements and application processing;  
standards for certification and recertification;  
examination content, development and administration;  
examination cut score(s);  
grievance and disciplinary processes;  
governing body and committee(s) meeting rules including agenda, frequency, and related procedures;  
committee appointments and work assignments;  
publications about certification and recertification;  
setting fees for application, certification, recertification, and all other services provided as a part of certification and recertification activities;  
funding, spending and budget authority; financial matters related to the operation of the certification organization are segregated.  
ability to enter into contract and grant arrangements for certification and recertification activities; and  
ability to demonstrate adequate staffing and management resources to conduct the program(s) including the authority to approve selection of, evaluate, and initiate dismissal of the chief certification staff member.

d. shall have a governing body which includes individuals from the discipline being certified and whose composition addresses the needs of the users of the certification programs(s) (e.g., consumers, public, employers, regulators). A certification organization which certifies more than one specialty or level within a discipline shall have appropriate representation for each on the governing body.

e. shall require that members of the certification organization governing body who represent the certified discipline be selected by the certificants or by the members of an organization(s) of the certified discipline. Such selection shall not be subject to approval by any other individual or organization. The process of appointment, election and/or termination of members of the governing body shall not result in undue influence on governance of the certification organization.

f. shall utilize formal procedures for the selection of members of the governing body which prohibit the governing body from selecting a majority of its successors.

g. shall have at least one voting public member with full board privileges and responsibilities on the governing body to represent the interests of consumers and protect the interests of the public at large. The public member shall not be a member of the discipline or derive significant income from the discipline, its related organizations or the certification organization.

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h. shall be separate from the accreditation and education function(s) of the discipline.

### 3. Resources of Certification Organization

a. shall demonstrate the availability of financial resources to effectively and thoroughly conduct regular and ongoing certification and recertification activities.

b. shall demonstrate that staff possesses the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct the certification and recertification programs or has available and makes use of non-staff consultants and professionals to sufficiently supplement staff knowledge and skill.

### 4. Candidate Testing Mechanism(s) of Certification Program

a. shall utilize a reliable testing mechanism(s) to evaluate individual competence that is objective, fair to all candidates, job-related, and based on the knowledge and skills needed to function in the discipline.

b. shall implement a formal policy of periodic review of the testing mechanism(s) to ensure ongoing relevance of the mechanism(s) to knowledge and skills needed in the discipline.

c. shall utilize policies and procedures to assure that all test administration and development materials are secure and demonstrate that these policies and procedures are consistently implemented.

d. shall establish pass/fail levels that protect the public with a method that is based on competence and generally accepted in the psychometric community as being fair and reasonable.

e. shall conduct ongoing studies to substantiate the reliability and validity of the testing mechanism(s).

f. shall utilize policies and procedures that govern how long examination records are kept in their original format (e.g., answer sheets, video tapes, product fabrications).

g. shall demonstrate that different forms of the testing mechanism(s) assess equivalent content and that candidates are not penalized for taking forms of varying difficulty.

### 5. Public Information about the Certification Program

a. shall publish and make available a document which clearly defines the certification responsibilities of the organization and outlines any other activities of the organization which are not directly related to certification or recertification.

b. shall publish and make available general descriptive materials on the procedures used in examination construction and validation, all eligibility requirements and determination procedures, and the procedures of examination administration including exam dates and locations, fees, reporting of results, recertification requirements, disciplinary and grievance procedures.

c. shall publish and make available a comprehensive summary or outline of the information, knowledge, or functions covered by the examination.

d. shall publish and make available at least annually a summary of certification activities for each program including, at least, number of examination administrations, number examined, number passed, number failed, number certified, and number recertified.

### 6. Responsibilities to Applicants for Certification or Recertification

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- a. shall not discriminate among applicants as to age, sex, race, religion, national origin, disability, or marital status and shall include a statement of non-discrimination in announcements of the certification and recertification programs.
- b. shall comply with all requirements of applicable federal and state laws (e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) with respect to all certification and recertification activities and shall require compliance of all contractors and/or providers of services for the certification and recertification programs.
- c. shall provide all applicants with copies of formalized procedures for application for, and attainment of, certification and recertification and shall uniformly follow and enforce such procedures for all applicants.
- d. shall implement a formal policy for the periodic review of eligibility criteria and application procedures to ensure that they are fair and equitable.
- e. shall provide competently proctored examination sites at least once annually;
- f. shall utilize a means for individuals who have obtained a skill or knowledge outside the formal educational setting to be evaluated and judged eligible to seek certification or, in the absence of such means, provide reasonable justification for exclusion.
- g. shall uniformly report examination results to applicants in a timely manner.
- h. shall give applicants failing the examination information on general content areas of deficiency.
- i. shall implement policies and procedures to assure that each applicant's examination results are held confidential and delineate the circumstances under which the applicant's certification status may be made public.
- j. shall have formal policies and procedures on due process for applicants questioning eligibility determination, examination results, and certification status, and shall publish this information.

### 7. Responsibilities to the Public and to Employers of Certified Practitioners

- a. shall demonstrate that the testing mechanism(s) adequately measures the knowledge and skill required for entry, maintenance and/or advancement in the profession.
- b. shall award certification and recertification only after the skill and knowledge of the individual have been evaluated and determined to be acceptable.
- c. shall periodically publish or maintain in an electronic format, a current list of those persons certified in the program(s) and have policies and procedures that delineate what information about a certificant may be made public and under what circumstances.
- d. shall have formal policy and procedures for discipline of certificants, including the sanction or revocation of the certificate, for conduct deemed harmful to the public or inappropriate to the discipline (e.g., incompetence, unethical behavior, physical or mental impairment affecting performance). These procedures shall incorporate due process.
- e. shall demonstrate that any title or credential awarded for the certification program reflects the practitioners' daily occupational or professional duties and is not confusing to employers, consumers, regulators, related professions and/or other interested parties. The following factors will be considered in determining whether the practitioner title or credential complies with this criterion:
  - educational background required by discipline:

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function of discipline;  
occupational and/or professional duties and breadth of these activities;  
level of supervision by other practitioners, or of any other practitioners; and  
various titles commonly utilized in the discipline or related disciplines.

8. Recertification Program
  - a. shall implement a program for periodic recertification:
  - b. shall demonstrate that the recertification program is designed to measure continued competence and/or to enhance the continued competence of the individual.

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9. Criteria for Maintaining Accreditation
  - a. shall annually complete and submit to the Commission information requested on the current status of the certification organization and its program(s).
  - b. shall advise the Commission of any change in purpose, structure or activities of the certification organization or program.
  - c. shall advise the Commission of any substantive change in examination administration procedures.
  - d. shall advise the Commission of any major changes in examination techniques or in the scope or objectives of the examination.
  - e. shall undergo re-evaluation by the Commission at up to five year intervals. The time period of accreditation will be specified at the time of notification of initial accreditation or renewal.
  - f. shall submit to the Commission any information it may require to investigate allegations of lack of compliance with NCCA standards.
  - g. shall be in ongoing compliance with Commission policies and procedures.