

Association of



*Professional
Behavior Analysts*

Considerations for
Evaluating Credentials in
the Practice of Applied
Behavior Analysis

ADOPTED AUGUST 2018

REVISED APRIL 2024

The Association of Professional Behavior Analysts (APBA) receives many inquiries about various types of credentials for professional and/or paraprofessional practitioners of applied behavior analysis (ABA). The critical features of credentialing programs and consideration questions (pages 3-4) outlined in this document are offered to help practitioners, consumers, employers, university programs, funders, and regulators evaluate credentials and credentialing programs for themselves by seeking answers to a series of questions. It is APBA's position that individuals and organizations that issue credentials should be transparent about the content, structure, ownership, and operations of the credentialing program as well as about the individuals who develop and manage the program and its components, such as standards and examinations. Full transparency should result in program websites that are easy to navigate and that provide clear answers to the critical consideration questions on the following pages.

It is important to note that there are distinctions among certificates like those that are issued by many colleges, universities, and other entities to signify that one has completed one or more courses; certifications in the implementation of specific assessment instruments or interventions; and professional certifications. Only professional certifications indicate that the holder has completed required coursework, degree, and specified training and has demonstrated some measurable level of competence of that content, typically by passing a professional examination. The consideration questions outlined in this document are relevant to those kinds of professional credentials.

Critical Features of Credentialing Programs

An important feature of credible professional credentialing programs based in the United States is that it be accredited by an appropriate national or international accrediting body. Such accreditation ensures that the credentialing program meets accepted practice standards. Appropriate accrediting bodies for professional certifications in the United States currently include the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) or the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Such accreditation applies to the credentialing

programs, not the organizations that manage them. Also, membership and accreditation are not the same thing; membership in an accrediting organization, such as ICE, should not be taken as an indication that the related member organization or certification program is endorsed, approved, or accredited.

Another feature of credible professional credentialing programs is the use of job (or occupational) analysis studies to identify essential tasks for performing the duties of the occupation or profession and the content of credentialing examinations. Such job studies typically involve having panels of subject matter experts develop a list of knowledge and skills required of a competent practitioner. A test construction expert uses that task list to develop a survey on which a large sample of members of the profession rate the importance of each task. The resulting data are then used to determine which tasks remain on the list. The final task list is used to develop exam items, and often to help guide the development of formal and experiential training requirements. Reports describing the procedures and results of job analysis studies should be publicly available from the credentialing body. Finally, a credible professional credentialing program will publish general information about the SME meetings and findings on their website.

Consideration Questions for ABA Practitioner Credentialing Programs

The following questions can be used to conduct a careful and thoughtful evaluation of credentialing programs.

Credentialing body

- How long has it been in existence?
- Is it owned by, or affiliated with an ABA service-provider organization? If so:
 - Is it clear which organization and the nature of the ownership or affiliation?
 - Is the relationship clearly displayed on the credentialing body's website?
 - What firewalls are in place to ensure the service-provider organization does not have proprietary influence over the credentialing standards?
- Is it autonomous (i.e., independent of other organizations or entities) in making decisions about its credentialing program(s)?
- Is it a nonprofit organization? If so:
 - Are the bylaws or other governance documents publicly available?
 - Does the Board of Directors consist of a representative sample of credentialed behavior analysts (i.e., not just from one agency or service provider) plus one or more consumers of ABA services and/or members of other professions?
 - Are the professional affiliations of the Directors clearly displayed?
 - How are Directors elected or appointed? By whom? What are the terms?
- Are Directors paid? If so, by whom?
- Is there an Executive Director or CEO?
 - If so, do they have a professional background in behavior analysis?

Credentialing program(s)

- Is the program, are the programs, accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) or American National Standards Institute (ANSI)?
- Were job analysis studies conducted to identify the knowledge and competencies required for the credential(s) using transparent processes? Follow-up questions:
 - What were the qualifications of subject matter experts involved?
 - What was the make-up of the subject matter expert group?
 - How were the subject matter experts identified and selected?
 - Did a test construction expert design the job analysis surveys and analyze the data?
 - How was the pool of respondents to whom the job analysis surveys were sent determined?
 - Have the study methods and results been published?
 - Are job analysis studies repeated periodically?
- Is there a comprehensive outline of the knowledge and competencies (task list) resulting from the job analysis study or studies? Does the outline describe the

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practice of behavior analysis generally, **without restriction or reference to particular client or service recipient populations?**

- Does obtaining the credential require passing an objective, valid, and reliable professional exam in the subject matter? If so:
 - Is the exam content clearly derived from and linked to the outline of knowledge and competencies?
 - Who develops exam items and constructs exams and how are their qualifications determined?
 - Is information about procedures for evaluating the exam's validity, reliability, and passing scores available?
 - Are there procedures for assuring the security of exam items?
 - Are there procedures for assuring the security of exam administrations and results? If so, what are they?
 - Are there clear eligibility requirements for taking the exam?
 - How are eligibility requirements determined, and by whom?
 - Is continuing education required to maintain the credential(s)? If so:
 - How are those requirements set, by whom, and how often are they reviewed and updated?
 - Are those standards set by subject matter experts?
 - Is there certificant data available? If so:
 - Are yearly totals of certificants published?
 - Are average pass rates published?
 - Is the public able to search for certificants and access relevant information (e.g., date of initial certification, certification status or standing, general geographic information)?
 - Are there ethical and disciplinary standards for credentialed individuals? If so:
 - Are they publicly available?
 - How were the disciplinary standards created?
 - Are the disciplinary standards informed by subject matter experts and feedback from the profession?
 - Is there an indication that they are reviewed and updated? Is that process clearly described?
 - Do the processes afford due process (e.g., opportunity to: review the documentation of the alleged misconduct, respond, appeal)?
 - Are they enforced? If so, by whom? By what procedures?
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- Are instances of disciplinary actions or sanctions published on the website?
 - Are there procedures in place to allow for collaboration with state regulatory bodies to increase consumer protection?

Adapted from Green, G. (2015). How to evaluate alternative credentials in behavior analysis, Part II. *APBA Reporter*, 55, October 2015.

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Additional Resources

Shook, G. L., Johnston, J. M., & Mellichamp, F. (2004). [Determining essential content for applied behavior analyst practitioners](#). *The Behavior Analyst, 27*, 67-94. doi:10.1007/BF03392093

Shook, G. L., & Neisworth, J. T. (2005). [Ensuring appropriate qualifications for applied behavior analyst professionals: The Behavior Analyst Certification Board](#). *Exceptionality, 13*, 3-10. doi:10.1207/s15327035ex1301_2