

## INTRODUCTION

*The responsibilities of a regulatory Board encompass the entire credentialing program, from setting the entrance requirements, through developing the exam, to ensuring the practitioners' continued competence. A critical component of these responsibilities involves the development, administration, and maintenance of the credentialing exam. The Board maintains the responsibility of ensuring the quality of the exam, whether the members elect to purchase an existing exam or to have an exam developed. A credentialing exam should address the content and competencies of the profession, and it should meet established standards for test quality. Thus, a well designed credentialing exam will cover the knowledge and skills necessary for competence in the field, and it will satisfy test quality criteria such as validity, reliability, fairness, and legal defensibility. In addition to their responsibilities for the credentialing exam, regulatory Boards also have other responsibilities for the credentialing program. These additional management responsibilities include setting entrance requirements, rulemaking, disciplining, and assuring continued competence.*

### Board Responsibilities for the Exam Program

A credentialing exam is intended to help protect public safety, by ensuring competent practitioners within the occupation or profession. In addition to measuring the appropriate knowledge and skills, the exam must also discriminate clearly between competent and incompetent examinees. A regulatory Board must manage the test development process in such a way that a high quality exam, which satisfies these goals, is produced. One critical component of this process is the job analysis. A job analysis should be conducted in order to determine the essential components of the occupation or profession. Once a job analysis has been conducted, it should be used in developing a set of test specifications. The test specifications provide the essential link between the determination of occupational tasks, and the actual assessments which will be developed. The test specifications are used to guide all item writing, test assembly, and related test development activities. Once a test form has been developed, Boards must address the critical process of setting the passing score for the exam. To ensure the legal defensibility of the exam, appropriate procedures for establishing the passing score must be both followed and documented.



After the test has been developed, Boards have the further responsibility of ensuring that it is administered under appropriate conditions. Thus, professional standards for test administration must also be applied. The tests should be administered under standardized conditions so that all examinees have a comparable, and comparably fair, opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The decisions that the Board must make about test administration encompass characteristics of the physical site, schedules for exam administration, training of proctors, accommodations for candidates with disabilities, and more.

The additional responsibilities that regulatory Boards have for their credentialing exam programs span a diverse set of tasks. Boards should ensure that informational materials, such as candidate bulletins and test administration manuals are accurate, complete, and fully available. Boards must also establish appropriate policies and procedures for the statistical analyses and research to be conducted on the exam program. In addition, Board decisions need to be made about scoring and reporting, including the types of scores to be reported to examinees, as well as the summary data to be made available to other stakeholders. Boards are responsible for ensuring the confidentiality of the examinee records that are retained. The candidate application and registration policies must be set by the Board. The Board must also establish procedures to ensure the security of the exam, before, during, and after the test administration. Finally, Boards are responsible for encouraging appropriate use of their tests and test scores, and discouraging misuse.

### **Board Responsibilities for Entrance Requirements**

Regulatory Boards are responsible for setting the pre-licensure, entrance requirements for candidates. These eligibility requirements often include specific levels of education, training, or experience that an individual must acquire prior to being allowed to register for an exam. It is important that these requirements be relevant and appropriate; that is, they should be clearly related to public protection and they should be based on competency. It is inappropriate for eligibility requirements to include non-competency based components, such as restrictions on an applicant's age, residency, or citizenship. The education requirements should typically include some flexibility, allowing those who may have acquired competency through other means to demonstrate their competence. Excessive requirements may be problematic, both because they are likely to reduce the number of available practitioners, and because they are likely to increase the cost of the credential, to the candidate as well as to the public.



### **Board Responsibilities for Rulemaking**

While legislatures have retained the primary responsibility of establishing policies and guidelines related to credentialing programs, they have also granted Boards specific powers by law. These powers include certain responsibilities for promulgating rules and regulations. It is important for Boards to use this rulemaking power only as legally mandated, and with restraint. In the past, regulatory Boards have been criticized by both federal agencies and consumer groups for abuses of their rulemaking authority.

### **Board Responsibilities for Disciplining**

An additional responsibility that Boards often have is related to discipline within the occupation. The authority to discipline can be seen as another aspect of the Board's mandate to protect the public from incompetent or unethical practitioners. Many Boards are authorized to receive complaints against credentialed individuals, from members of the public or others. Furthermore, Boards may have the authority to conduct appropriate investigations into the complaints, to hold hearings, and to take disciplinary actions against those licensees who have violated the law or the rules and regulations of the Board. These disciplinary actions may range from imposing fines to revoking licenses. It is important that the Board utilize procedural due process in undertaking the responsibility for disciplining.

### **Board Responsibilities for Ensuring Continued Competence**

While in many credentialing programs an individual is able to renew a license simply by paying a fee, in other cases Boards have the responsibility of ensuring the regulated individuals' continued competence. That is, regulatory Boards may have the responsibility of putting a system in place in order to monitor the competence of regulated individuals over time. For those credentialing programs that include an expiration date on licenses, one approach to ensuring continued competence involves re-examination as a requirement for re-licensure. Another approach that Boards have used involves peer review. In general, the primary approach that Boards use to assure continued competence is mandatory continuing education.

### **Summary**

A regulatory Board is responsible for managing a credentialing program, in order to provide public protection. The Board has a clear set of responsibilities, along with a wide set of powers, which it must use to ensure competent practice within the occupation or profession. A substantial element of the Board's responsibilities concerns the



development, administration, and maintenance of the credentialing exam. However, the Board's additional responsibilities, for setting entrance requirements, rulemaking, disciplining, and ensuring continued competence, are also highly important. In order to provide a fair, sound, and legally defensible credentialing program, it is critical that the Board members know and understand their responsibilities, and manage the program according to professional standards.

