

## Credentialing: The Association's Perspective

### **What is a "Certification"?**

- Three forms of credentialing
  - Licensure: mandatory governmental requirement to practice particular profession or occupation
  - Certification: voluntary process by which a nongovernmental organization grants recognition to an individual who has met certain qualifications
  - Registration: individuals are required to apply for a title through the appropriate governmental or private agency
- Essential elements of measurement (psychometrics)
  - Validity: Are we measuring what we intend to measure?
  - Reliability: Is the measurement process accurate?
- National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA): 300 members representing approximately 6 million certificants holding several thousand certifications offered in the U.S.
- National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the arm of NOCA that sets the accreditation standards against which certification programs are measured
- Certification standards also offered by other agencies/organizations; e.g., ISO/ANSI
- Perceived value of the credential
  - High-stake: significantly affect employability opportunities for promotion or compensation
  - Mid- or low-stake: seen as desirable or prestigious, may enhance professional development, but have little or no effect on one's career or employability

### **Why Professionals Are Interested in Achieving Certification**

- Enhanced opportunities for employment/advancement—credibility
- Professional development—learning about your field
- It's a challenge—"How do I stack up against my peers?"

### **Why Associations Are Interested in Achieving Certification**

- Financial benefits through educational resource sales and examination revenue
  - Workbooks, books, on-site courses/seminars, online courses/seminars, tapes, etc.
  - Examination revenue is the smaller portion of the revenue stream
- Examples of reasons to have a certification program
  - Provide for health, safety & welfare of the public
  - Attract new members
  - Enhance association's credibility and prestige
  - Elevate the stature of a profession in the eyes of the public
  - Establish standards for the profession or enhance the quality of products and services provided by certified individuals
  - Enable employers to identify qualified workers
  - Meet the public's demand for standards
  - Avoid regulation or obtain recognition from regulatory bodies

- Questions to ask in determining if certification program is right for your association
  - Is it the best use of the association's resources?
  - Do the benefits justify the costs?
  - Will the program generate a positive financial return on investment?
  - Is it the right time to develop a certification program?
  - **Is certification consonant with the association's mission and strategic goals?**

### **Legal Issues**

- Criteria for obtaining a credential must be fair and reasonable. Do the criteria identify fundamental competencies?
- Relevant content
  - Appropriate: related to competencies required by profession
  - Fair: provides ample opportunity for success; lack of success must be associated with a demonstration of meaningful deficit in competency
  - Accurate: results can be expected to be reproduced by reassessment (assessment must measure what it is supposed to measure, and it must do so consistently)
- Grandfathering the people currently practicing in the industry when the credentialing program is initiated?
- Organizations that attempt to use standards to eliminate or harm competitors may be challenged on the grounds of illegal tying arrangements

### **Analyzing Costs**

- Development
  - Marketing program to determine if a credentialing program is needed/wanted. Does it have support of membership and shareholders/industry? \$30,000 to \$100,000
  - Job/practice task analysis, role delineation, or body of knowledge study. \$50,000 to \$125,000 (\$500,000 possible)
  - Exam development including item/question assessment and marketing costs. \$150,000 to \$350,000
- Maintenance: paid staff, volunteers, and consultants

### Sources:

- (1) *Certification: A NOCA Handbook*; 1996
- (2) "Certification Appeal"; Knapp & Gallery; *Association Management*; November 2003