



Certification Testing: How the CVA Exam is Developed and Scored

WHAT IS CERTIFICATION?

Certification of a profession refers to a generally voluntary process in which the certifying organization formally grants recognition to those who meet certain predetermined standards or qualifications. It usually includes an examination of some kind to assess the candidates' qualifications. Developing a certification is a complex and time-consuming process and requires a strong administrative organization in order to maintain its quality.

Voluntary certification programs accomplish three important goals:

1. They provide a measure of protection to the public by giving them a credential for judging the competency of practitioners;
2. They provide practitioners with a way to distinguish themselves from their competition; and
3. By potentially improving quality, they improve the public perception of the given occupation, helping increase the industry's prominence.

It is important to remember that credentialing exams and other assessments are not specifically designed to evaluate the outcomes of education, but rather to determine whether candidates for the credential have the knowledge and skills deemed minimally necessary to practice the occupation or profession. Education concentrates on career preparation in the broadest sense, while credentialing concentrates on what is important in delivering services to clients, organizations and the public.

The CVA program has been developed and designed to be consistent with established professional credentialing guidelines. Standards are developed by subject matter experts, and the eligibility requirements are reasonable based on the fact that most individuals practice volunteer administration as only a part of their job.

The CVA program is transparent and non-discriminatory, implemented with fair procedures and due process. The Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) and strives to follow the standards set by the National Council for Certification Assurance (NCCA).

HOW THE CVA EXAM IS DEVELOPED

The test development process is quite thorough, probably more so than most people would suspect. It begins with a Job Analysis (or Task Analysis), a study of the tasks that people in the field of volunteer management actually do. From the results of the study of what people do on the job, we develop the blueprint for the certification examination. The Job Analysis is repeated about every 5 years to ensure that the credential is relevant and current.

CVA certificants volunteer their time and expertise to serve on the CVA Test Committee, trained and guided by an expert test consultant/psychometrician. The Test Committee uses the Content

Outline to write questions that will appear on the test. As new questions are written by individual Committee members they are reviewed by the entire Committee to ensure they reflect generally accepted practices across a diversity of organizational settings. The Test Committee then selects questions that meet the required test specifications to comprise a CVA Exam.

HOW THE CVA EXAM IS SCORED

- The CVA examination development process is never static. It is a dynamic and iterative process of item and test development, statistical evaluation, and recommendations for improvement in approaches and techniques.
- The CVA exam is scored using the criterion-referenced standard. This is regarded as current best practice for all certification exams.
- The criterion-referenced standard means that everyone who scores at the passing score or higher will pass, and everyone who scores lower than the passing score will fail. It is the opposite of grading on a curve. In other words, it doesn't matter if you test with the most able group or the least able group – you must meet the criterion to pass (or passing score). The passing score is based on the items of a specific test, and must be re-determined whenever a new test is developed.
- In order to ensure that the test maintains a constant level of difficulty, we statistically equate the passing standard from one year to the next. For example, if next year's test is a little bit easier than this year's test, then candidates will need to answer more questions correctly than was required this year. The criterion to pass (or passing score), set by the Examination Committee and approved by the Board, is upheld through a statistical process of equating.
- CCVA uses a Scaled Score Scale of 0 to 400, with a score of 300 required to pass. This scale has been approved by the CCVA Board.
- No scores are calculated until our expert psychometrician checks the statistical performance of every question. Even after all the previous work by the Test Committee, it may be that a question is interpreted differently by the various examinees – and the statistics will show a problem. After each exam the Test Committee reviews all questions with unexpected statistical performance and decides if there was something vague or flawed in any question. If so, everyone is given credit for the question. We don't have many instances of giving everyone credit – but it is a great way to make sure that we are being fair about every question on every test. The Test Committee also considers the comments that examinees write when taking the examination.
- Next, the number of questions that you answered correctly is calculated. We do not deduct any points for incorrect answers. (There is no penalty for guessing.)
- Finally, these raw scores (number of correct answers) are then converted to "scaled scores." Scaled scores have the same meaning for any CVA exam, no matter when it was taken. The scaling and equating processes yield comparable interpretations from year to year, even though each exam contains different sets of questions.

- As with many certification programs, CVA test results are reported to candidates simply as Pass or Fail. Candidates who Fail are also given their scaled score results so they can have a general idea of how much better prepared they need to be to pass the next exam. For example, a candidate might be told that her score was 289 points out of a possible 400, with 300 required to pass.
- CVA test results are sent to all candidates 4 weeks or less after the exam date. After the verification that each of the 80 questions is statistically error-free and will count towards the examinees' scores, AND the standard to pass is statistically equated to the criterion set by the Examination Committee and approved by the Board, then test results are final and candidates are notified in writing.

RELATED TERMS and DEFINITIONS

Assessment Instruments: Any one of several standardized methods for determining if candidates possess the necessary knowledge and/or skill related to the purpose of the certification.

Certificant: An individual who has earned a credential awarded through a certification program.

Certification : A process, often voluntary, by which individuals who have demonstrated the level of knowledge and skill required in the profession, occupation, role, or skill are identified to the public and other stakeholders.

Cut Score: A specific score on an assessment instrument or instruments at or above which passing decisions are made and below which failing decisions are made. (Also called passing score)

Equating: A statistical procedure used to adjust for any differences in difficulty between various versions of the test. This ensures a high degree of fairness, so that all candidates' scores are comparable regardless of when they take the exam. Equating is a complex topic, even for those trained in measurement.

Job/Practice Analysis/Role Delineation Study: Any of several methods used singly or in combination to identify the performance domains and associated tasks, knowledge, and/or skills relating to the purpose of the credential and providing the basis for validation.

Licensure: Usually refers to a government-sponsored testing program that is legally required before an individual can be employed in the occupation.

Pass/Fail Classifications: For many certification and licensure exams the only score that is reported is a simple pass/fail classification decision. When the purpose of the test is primarily or entirely to make this classification decision, this level of information may be sufficient. Some exam programs offer diagnostic information for those examinees who fail the test so that they will be able to make targeted improvements before retesting.

Recertification: Requirements and procedures established as part of a certification program that certificant must meet in order to ensure continuing competence and renew their certification.

Reliability: The degree to which the scores on an assessment instrument are free of measurement error.

Scaled Scores: Examinees' scores may be reported as scaled scores. Like percentile ranks, scaled scores indicate an examinee's relative performance within some particular group. All of the test forms of an exam program can be converted to the same scale. This allows direct comparison of examinees' reported scores across the different test forms.

Standardization:

IN THE CONTEXT OF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS: ensuring that the process is conducted according to a specified plan in order to provide the same conditions for all candidates.

IN THE CONTEXT OF SCORING: ensuring that candidate responses are judged using predefined criteria in order to provide a consistent basis for evaluating all candidates.

Types of Testing:

CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS (CRTs): the goal is usually to make a decision about whether or not an examinee can demonstrate mastery in an area of content and competencies. Oftentimes, the area of content and competencies being assessed is job-related; most certification and licensure exams are CRTs.

NORM-REFERENCED TESTS (NRTs): the goal is usually to rank the entire set of examinees in order to make comparisons of their performances relative to one another. Many standardized educational tests are NRTs.

The two types of tests differ in several additional important ways, including their comparison targets, the average item difficulty of the exams, the resulting examinee score distributions, and the types of scores typically reported

Validity: The degree to which accumulated evidence supports specific interpretations of all components of a certification program (e.g., education, experience, and assessment instruments).