



COE Candidate Handbook

“Leaders in Managing the Business of
Ophthalmology”

Updated July 2010

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COE CANDIDATE HANDBOOK

For questions regarding examination application contact:
American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators
4000 Legato Road, # 700
Fairfax, Virginia 22033
(703) 591-2220
Email: asoa@asoa.org

Disclaimer: *The material in this handbook is current at the time of printing but is subject to change without notice.*

COE Program Background

In 1997, the American Society of Ophthalmic Administrators (ASOA) began developing a certification program specifically designed for ophthalmic administrators. Certification consultants and nationally recognized testing experts assisted in the process. A Certification Advisory Board composed of leaders in the field was selected to develop policies and procedures for the certification program and to develop the examination. Consultants assisting ASOA in the development of this examination adhered to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, published by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement and Education. The examination was also prepared in accordance with the Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education, prepared by the Joint Committee on Testing Practices. The final result was the development of the Certified Ophthalmic Executive (COE) credential.

Mission Statement

The National Board for the Certification of Ophthalmic Executives (NBCOE) shall advance the field of Ophthalmic Administration (the Profession) by developing and maintaining criteria and procedures for conducting a valid and reliable national certification examination.

Nondiscrimination Policy

The National Board for the Certification of Ophthalmic Executives does not discriminate against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law.

National Board for the Certification of Ophthalmic Executives

The National Board for the Certification of Ophthalmic Executives is responsible for setting policy, developing procedures, and suggesting guidelines for the certification program in accordance with the NBCOE Bylaws, which also provide for composition, nomination, election, term and other applicable governance requirements.

The board has 9 voting members and 1 non-voting, ex-officio member. The Board consists of the following members: 7 At-Large Members, 2 Standing Members, and the ASOA Executive Director (ex-officio and non-voting). Board officers (President, President-Elect, and Vice-President) are elected by majority vote of the Board during the annual ASOA meeting. The Board elects these officers annually. When appropriate, the Nominating Committee also prepares a slate of nominees to replace At-Large Board Members whose terms are expiring. At-Large members are elected by currently certified COEs. Board terms are three years. At-Large Members may be re-elected for one consecutive term.

Eligibility for Certification

COE applicants must demonstrate that they have at least three years of health care administration experience; they must have one or more years of ophthalmic practice management involvement. Relevant experience includes the following content areas: finance and accounting, marketing, business operations, risk management and regulatory compliance, management information systems, human resources, and basic ophthalmic knowledge. The experience does not need to be completed in three consecutive years;

however, the cumulative total of three years must have occurred within the preceding five calendar years. Eligibility is not limited to ASOA members; however, ASOA members receive a discounted application fee.

Continuing Proficiency Requirements

At the conclusion of each three-year cycle, COEs must be able to provide proof of at least 50 contact clock hours of continuing education acceptable to the NBCOE at its sole discretion. If COEs do not have the required continuing education hours, they may retake and pass the COE examination in the 12 months preceding their certification expiration. Written proof of continuing education is required upon request by the NBCOE.

The recertification process requires that all COEs submit a signed list of their completed continuing education hours. The NBCOE reserves the right to conduct random audits of recertification applicants. Audited COEs will be required to submit copies of documentation verifying their required continuing educational hours.

Those who fail to recertify during the regular cycle are given up to 3 additional years to recertify using alternative criteria. This requires documentation of 68 hours of qualifying continuing education (50 + 18) for the first year; 84 hours during the second year (50 + 34) and 100 hours for the third year. There is an additional fee for re-certifying outside of the regular cycle.

An individual who fails to recertify during the regular cycle may no longer use the COE credential. The credential may be reinstated after the NBCOE receives all required documentation and fees or if the candidate successfully retakes the COE examination. COE recertification candidates who have lapsed more than 3 years may not be renewed and individuals must retake the examination.

Examination Administration

The examination is administered both at the annual ASCRS/ASOA Symposium and Congress and at professional testing centers conveniently located throughout the United States. Test format at the annual meeting is a pencil and paper test. Professional testing centers administer the test electronically.

Acceptance Letter and Confirmation Number – Applicants choosing the paper test receive an acceptance letter containing pertinent details about test administration. Applicants approved to take the examination electronically will receive an acceptance letter providing information on examination scheduling, the 90-day eligibility period, and a toll-free telephone number to schedule the examination. Neither the NBCOE nor ASOA offices schedule computer-based examinations for applicants. To avoid scheduling conflicts, the NBCOE recommends that candidates schedule their examination through the professional testing center indicated, soon after receiving their acceptance letter. Due to the three-month window allowed for scheduling and taking the electronic examination, it is further recommended that candidates not apply until they are ready to sit for the test.

To be admitted to the test, an applicant must present his or her confirmation letter, registration number and two forms of identification. One form of identification must be a government issued ID containing both your picture and signature (driver's license, passport, state identification card) and the second form must contain at least your signature (credit

card, ATM card, voter registration). The name on the acceptance letter (and examination application) must match the name on the two forms of identification. Applicants will be required to check all personal items at the admission desk. The test administration personnel will supply pencils and scratch paper if needed.

Prior to beginning the electronic examination, applicants will be given a tutorial to familiarize themselves with the computer and test format. Answers may be entered using either the mouse or the keyboard.

Applicants taking the electronic version will view only one item (question) at a time on the computer screen and may answer it or mark it for review. Applicants may later return to any item marked for review if they have remaining time.

Applicants are allotted 3 hours to complete the tutorial and COE examination. Applicants taking the electronic test will be informed of the **UN-OFFICIAL** examination result immediately upon completion of the examination and will be provided with a performance report that lists a brief descriptive term for items answered incorrectly. No detail concerning performance on specific examination items or examination result will be provided.

Subsequently, the test result is verified and applicants will receive **OFFICIAL** notification of examination results by mail. Applicants taking the paper test will receive **OFFICIAL** notification of examination results by mail within four to six weeks.

Retesting/Re-scheduling/No Shows/Irregularities and Cheating –To cancel your electronic examination appointment, applicants must notify the test center by calling the telephone number received with the acceptance letter no later than 12:00 noon, 48 hours prior to the scheduled appointment. To cancel your appointment for the paper version, you must notify the ASOA office 48 hours prior to test administration. If an applicant cancels within the allowed time period, he or she may either reschedule with the testing center or ASOA, or request a refund from the NBCOE in writing. Refund requested amounts are net of an application processing fee, which is retained. No refunds will be issued for cancellations that do not conform to the above policy. If the test is cancelled in less than 48 hours, a no show fee applies.

The applicant must reschedule the test within the 90 day eligibility period or use a one-time option to extend the eligibility period for 30 days for an additional fee. Additionally, some exceptions on the length of the extension may be permitted (i.e. due to special circumstances such as serious illness). In case of illness appropriate written documentation will be required.

Candidates who do not successfully pass the COE examination may take the test one more time within a twelve-month period. If a candidate is unsuccessful on the second attempt, he/she must wait one year from the second test date before retesting. The NBCOE will send a Retest Application to those who do not pass. There is a fee for retesting.

The COE examination has been developed to independently assess each applicant based on his or her proficiency in the subject matter at the time of the examination. Any cheating or other examination irregularity that has the potential to affect score results will be considered very seriously by the Board, which reserves the right to cancel or invalidate any scores and/or require/permit a retest whenever the Board in its sole and absolute discretion deems it

necessary or appropriate, whether such irregularity is based on proctor observation, statistical analysis, or other factors.

Accommodation Procedures

The NBCOE supports the intent of, and complies with, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Board will take steps reasonably necessary to make its examination accessible to persons with disabilities covered by the ADA. Appropriate and effective modifications and/or auxiliary aids will be provided to persons with such disabilities unless doing so would impose an undue burden on the Board's programs or fundamentally alter the measurement of skills or knowledge that the examination is intended to test.

An applicant may request a change in certification procedures or process due to a disability, handicap, or other reason. Such notice and documentation must be provided with the application for examination at least 45 days in advance of the examination date. The request must specify the nature of the problem. Medical documentation of specific needs must accompany the request. The Board reserves the right to have requests for accommodation independently reviewed and evaluated by its own experts and the applicant is responsible for demonstrating that the request should be granted. All special arrangements must be made and agreed upon in advance; such arrangements cannot be made at the time an examination is given. The NBCOE will make the final determination as to the necessary accommodations for an individual with a verified disability.

Application Information

Upon receipt of the application, the NBCOE Certification Staff will review the information and assess the applicant's eligibility to sit for the examination. All information must be correct and complete. The NBCOE reserves the right to review, audit, or investigate any matter or information that is related to an application. The provision of false or misleading information constitutes grounds to reject an application and take other disciplinary action. Applicants are accepted and scheduled in order of application remittance. An application and information may be obtained by writing to:

The National Board for the Certification of Ophthalmic Executives
4000 Legato Road, Suite 700
Fairfax, Virginia 22033
Phone: (703) 591-2220
Fax: (703) 591-0614

Applicants may also obtain information regarding the certification program from the ASOA web site at: www.asoa.org, or by calling (703) 591-2220.

Examination Content

The COE examination covers a comprehensive body of knowledge that an ophthalmic administrator with approximately three years of medical practice experience in the ophthalmic field is expected to be familiar with and/or have mastered.

The following outline delineates the seven content areas and the approximate percentage of questions for each area.

CONTENT OUTLINE

I. Basic Ophthalmic Knowledge 5%

- A. Knowledge of basic ophthalmic terminology
- B. Familiarity with basic ophthalmic/optical/surgical procedures and protocols
- C. Familiarity with basic ophthalmic instruments
- D. Knowledge about ophthalmic practice triage
- E. Familiarity with customary ophthalmic patient services
- F. Anatomy
- G. Pharmacology

II. Finance and Accounting 20%

- A. Practice generally accepted accounting principles (i.e., GAAP)
 - 1. general ledger
 - 2. cash flow
 - 3. income statement
 - 4. depreciation
 - 5. balance sheets
 - 6. accounts receivable
 - 7. payroll
 - 8. accounts payable
 - 9. audit trails
- B. Study and evaluate operations and financial reports
- C. Prepare and monitor budgets
- D. Demonstrate an understanding of corporate structure and its tax implications
- E. Implement and coordinate accounting procedures
 - 1. internal controls
 - 2. protocols
- F. Develop a cost/benefit analysis
- G. Understand practice valuation
- H. Evaluate and acquire capital assets
- I. Analyze the financial implications of contracts

III. Marketing 5%

- A. Conduct internal and external customer satisfaction surveys
 - 1. focus groups
 - 2. interviews
 - 3. written and telephone surveys
 - 4. demographics
 - 5. patient comments
- B. Develop and implement a marketing plan
- C. Design, implement and monitor advertising and promotional programs
- D. Plan and conduct public relations programs
- E. Lead tracking
- F. Marketing strategy
- G. Marketing terminology
- H. Retail marketing

IV. Business Operations

25%

- A. Develop, prepare, analyze and monitor reports
 - 1. productivity
 - 2. financial
 - 3. utilization
 - 4. inventory
 - 5. human resources
- B. Identify need, create and implement policies and procedures
- C. Identify, analyze and implement processes for practice improvement
 - 1. quality improvement tools
 - a. flowcharting
 - b. brainstorming
 - c. cause-and-effect diagramming
 - d. Pareto diagramming (80/20 rule)
 - e. check sheets
 - f. patient flow
 - g. medical outcomes practice patterns
 - h. efficiency
 - i. effectiveness
 - j. benchmarking
 - 2. methods
 - a. storyboarding
 - b. plan, do, check, act (PDCA)
 - c. situation target plan (STP)
- D. Establish and maintain stakeholder relationships
 - 1. vendors
 - 2. third-party payers
 - 3. referral sources
 - 4. professional services providers
 - 5. patients
 - 6. staff
- E. Develop, implement and monitor a business and/or strategic plan
 - 1. strength, weaknesses, opportunities, & threats (SWOT)
- F. Manage and maintain property, facilities, equipment and supplies
 - 1. disaster recovery plan
 - 2. security systems
- G. Design, implement, and monitor organizational structure
- H. Design, implement, and monitor managed care operations
- I. Establish and maintain fee schedules
- J. Define operational terms
- K. Provide leadership
- L. Manage projects
- M. Develop business
- N. Understand and manage business insurance
- O. Manage legal issues
- P. Manage lines of business (optical, ASC, refractive, etc.)

V. Management Information Systems 5%

- A. Analyze and manage MIS
 - 1. computer and phone systems
 - 2. communications infrastructure
 - 3. telemedicine
 - 4. electronic medical records
 - 5. integration of systems
 - a. local area networks (LANS)
 - b. wide area networks (WANS)
 - 6. electronic billing
- B. Build Technology Information Systems
 - 1. electronic resources
 - a. internet
 - b. networks
 - c. website
- C. Maintain Hardware and Software
 - a. system maintenance
 - b. file maintenance
- D. Administer Databases

VI. Human Resources 20%

- A. Develop and administer personnel policies
 - 1. job descriptions
 - 2. staff & physician recruitment and hiring
 - 3. retention
 - 4. training and development
 - 5. discipline and dismissal
 - 6. evaluation
- B. Formulate and administer compensation and benefit programs
 - 1. salary and benefit surveys
 - 2. physician compensation
 - 3. incentive plans
 - 4. insurance benefits
 - 5. retirement benefits
 - 6. other benefits
- C. Develop and facilitate communication skills and techniques
 - 1. building team spirit
 - 2. resolving conflicts
 - 3. mentoring and facilitating
 - 4. negotiating
- D. Monitor staffing levels

VII. Risk Management & Regulatory Compliance 20%

- A. Understand and comply with federal, state and local laws, regulations and guidelines pertaining to personnel
 - 1. OSHA
 - 2. FMLA
 - 3. HIPAA

4. ADA
5. wage and labor laws (e.g. FLSA)
6. insurance regulations (e.g. ERISA, COBRA)
7. Title VII Civil Rights Act
 - a. age
 - b. religion
 - c. national origin or ethnic-heritage
 - d. race or color
 - e. sexual orientation
 - f. gender
- B. Develop, implement and monitor a compliance/quality assurance program
 1. malpractice
 2. policies and procedures
 3. legal exposure minimization
 4. patient relationships
 5. employee relationships
 6. confidentiality: patients and employees
 7. patient records release
 8. regulatory compliance
 9. coding
 10. documentation
 11. reimbursement
 12. supervision
 13. record retention
 14. standard of care
- C. Implement and manage co-management policies and procedures

Sample Test Items

A small number of sample test items can be found on the COE page of the ASOA website (www.asoa.org)

Principles of Professional Ethics

Those certified under the Certified Ophthalmic Executive (COE™) Program are dedicated to the highest ethical and moral behavior standards for the profession. To this end, the NBCOE has adopted these Principles of Professional Ethics (Principles) and COEs agree to comply with the principles as a condition of certification.

Principles – Certified Ophthalmic Executives should:

- A. act in the public interest by seeking to enhance the quality of the community health care delivery system in their area.
- B. make a commitment to organizational excellence by promoting high-quality, cost-effective care.
- C. act with honesty, integrity, fairness, and professionalism at all times.
- D. promote continuous advancement in the skills, knowledge, development, and competence of their employers and employees, and in their own professional careers.
- E. act in compliance with all laws and regulations applicable to the profession.

- F. remain focused on patient care by being responsive to their needs, by protecting and encouraging meaningful physician/patient relationships, and by maintaining patient confidentiality.
- G. strive to maintain their professional standards.
- H. collaborate with individuals, organizations, and government to create an organizational environment conducive to improving the health standards of the community.
- H. maintain a positive, professional image.
- I. increase public understanding of the profession.
- J. perform all financial matters in a manner consistent with their fiduciary responsibilities and sound financial practices.

Length of COE Certification

COEs are certified for a period of three years and receive a professional certificate. COEs must adhere to the COE Principles of Professional Ethics and the disciplinary Standards included in this Manual. The COE credential is federally registered as a certification mark, which registration includes the design logo. COEs may use the certification mark in accordance with requirements that may be adopted by the Board from time to time. At a minimum, COEs may only use the COE certification mark in a truthful and accurate manner to represent their certified status in connection with professional activities. The COE certification mark may not be used in a false or misleading manner and may only be used by those who are currently certified. The TM symbol should be used in conjunction with the proper use of the COE design logo.

Confidentiality

Examination results are confidential. The NBCOE will not disclose examination results or other information in candidate files to anyone other than the candidate except upon permission or direction from the candidate or COE or where otherwise required by law as determined by the Board. The NBCOE will publish the names of all individuals who have passed the examination and maintain current certification. The NBCOE will verify certification status upon written request. Information about disciplinary actions will be subject to disclosure as provided in this Manual.

Verification and Appeal of Results

Candidates with reason to believe that an error has occurred in reporting examination results may request verification of the test results from the NBCOE Certification Staff, who will have the examination answers and results reviewed and will resend the results as corrected, if necessary, to the candidate. Candidates may also appeal a result determination on the basis that the result is inaccurate. The candidate may appeal by submitting a letter to the NBCOE Certification Staff. This letter should set forth the reasons the results should be changed and should be accompanied by supporting documentation, if any. Candidates are responsible for demonstrating that the appeal should be granted. The request must be received no later than 30 days after the candidate receives his or her examination results. The Certification Staff will forward the appeal and all related documentation to the Board or a committee of the Board delegated with responsibility for score reporting, which will make a determination at its sole discretion. The Certification Staff will notify the candidate of the determination in writing. This determination is final and cannot be appealed.

Disclosure of Examination Material

COE examinations remain the sole and exclusive property of the NBCOE, subject to protection under the copyright laws of the United States and international treaties. These materials are confidential and may not be disclosed or made available for review by any persons or agency for any reason, such as by memorization and repeating, without the prior written approval of the Board. The Board will take all available legal and other steps to protect its valuable copyrighted property.

Passing Point

The passing score reflects the minimum number of questions that must be answered correctly to pass. The passing score is established using a modified Angoff procedure. In this commonly accepted psychometric procedure, content experts estimate the probability for each item based on how many minimally competent individuals will answer each question correctly.

Waiver and Release

The individual releases, discharges, and exonerates the NBCOE, its officers, directors, employees, committee members, agents, and any person furnishing documents, records, and other information relating to eligibility, certification, or recertification from any and all liability of any nature and kind arising out of the furnishing or inspection of documents, records, and other information and any investigation, evaluation, and communications made by the NBCOE in good faith.