

## **Appendix 1**

### **Standards for Recognized Veterinary Specialty Organizations (RVSOs) and Recognized Veterinary Specialties (RVSS)**

#### **A. Definitions**

An RVSO is an AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty organization that meets the standards used by the ABVS to recognize independent organizations that certify veterinarians in a specialized field of veterinary medicine.

An RVS is an AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty that certifies a clearly defined unique subset of an RVSO based upon a species, discipline, or system related to that of the parent RVSO.

#### **B. Standards for recognition of veterinary specialty organizations or veterinary specialties by the AVMA**

For a veterinary specialty organization, veterinary specialty, or their independent certification board to be recognized by the AVMA, they must:

1. Demonstrate that improved veterinary medical services and knowledge will be provided to the public that advance the health and well-being of animals and/or people.
2. Serve a clearly defined need within the profession. This includes both a demonstration that there are a sufficient number of veterinarians who are interested in pursuing certification in the specialty, if established, as well as a demonstration that members of the public would value and utilize such service.
3. Have an adequate number of members to fulfill the functions and expenses required of a certification body, including verification of candidate credentials, examination development and administration, and provision of an appeal process independent from the credentialing and examination processes. ABVS recommends a minimum of 30 members for an RVSO and 18 for an RVS within a supporting RVSO to fulfill those functions. If diplomate numbers fall below these recommended amounts, the triennial report must provide a detailed description of how the needs of the college are being met and how the college is ensuring a sound and defensible examination process.
4. Represent a distinct and identifiable specialty of veterinary medicine, one that is supported by a base of scientific knowledge and practice that follows the tenets of evidence-based medicine. Strong consideration will be given to literature that provides evidence for efficacy or application. Randomized, controlled trials provide the best evidence, followed by other prospective studies and retrospective studies and, to a lesser degree, case reports.
5. Establish and abide by clearly stated standards for certification of diplomates.
6. The RVSO/RVS (or their independent certification board) must examine only veterinarians who:
  1. Have a degree necessary for the practice of veterinary medicine in some state, province, territory, or possession of the United States, Canada, or other country.
  2. Meet the education, training, and experience requirements established by the RVSO/RVS (or their independent certification board).
  3. Demonstrate unquestionable moral character and ethical professional behavior.

7. The RVSO/RVS (or their independent certification board) must certify only veterinarians who have fulfilled established training and/or experience requirements and who have attained acceptable scores on comprehensive examinations administered by the RVSO/RVS. Founding members of the RVSO/RVS may not be subject to the training requirements but will be required to pass the certification exam before being certified as a Diplomate.
8. Ensure that all training or experience requirements and all prerequisites for examination serve the purpose of assessing the competency of the candidate.
9. Establish routes through education, training, and experience to qualify candidates for examination. Information about these routes must be available to any potential candidate.
10. Not require any period that involves merely a passage of time (waiting period) between successful completion of formal training and eligibility to sit for examination. Experience requirements must be clearly defined, relevant to the objectives of the specialty, and amenable to evaluation. Knowledge of those requirements must be readily attainable by potential candidates.
11. Notify candidates promptly of any deficiencies in credentials that prevent their examination or certification by the RVSO/RVS (or their independent certification board). Applicants whose credentials are not approved must be notified of the Appeal procedure and deadline.
12. Adhere to the following examination procedures:
  - a. Examinations must reflect the professional competence expected of the diplomate based on a job task analysis. Job task analyses should focus on content regarding knowledge, skills, and/or abilities that is required for competent performance related to practice within the specialty. Job task analyses shall be performed at intervals determined by considerations including the rate at which knowledge in the field is evolving; the rate at which elements of the field are becoming obsolete; and/or the rate at which individuals in the field lose expertise in elements of the field. In any case, job task analyses shall be performed at least once every 10 years.
  - b. Examinations shall reflect the breadth and depth of the field for which certification is being awarded.
  - c. Time between final credentials decisions and the examination date must be sufficient (not less than 120 days) to permit adequate examination preparation or appeal of an adverse decision.
  - d. If a candidate's credentials are denied and an appeal is filed, the RVSO or RVS must review this appeal and inform the candidate of their decision at least 45 days prior to the examination date.
  - e. Candidates must receive a content outline (blueprint) of the exam and exam format prior to the exam. The exam blueprint must be an outcome of the job task analysis and should describe exam content categories and the percentage placed on each.
  - f. Passing points, or cut scores, shall not be set arbitrarily but rather shall be determined by psychometrically sound practices. The passing point may be adjusted lower than a previously published passing point, but not higher, after administering the exam.
  - g. Candidates must be informed prior to the examination of the passing point, or, if this is not determined in advance, the method of setting the passing point.
  - h. Avoid personal conflict, or the appearance of conflict, that could affect results of examinations.
  - i. All Candidates must be notified of their examination results simultaneously. Regardless of notification method, each candidate who took the examination must be notified of his/her result prior to notifying the general membership or the parent RVSO if certification is performed by an independent certification board. A

reasonable time limit must be established (not to exceed 45 days) for notifying candidates of the results of the examination.

- j. Candidates who do not successfully complete the examination (including any oral examination), must, upon request, be provided with an explanation of the deficiencies that prevented their passing the examination. The procedure for obtaining this review must be published by the veterinary specialty organization (or their independent certification board) prior to the examination.
- k. All candidates must be informed of their remaining eligibility and reapplication procedures.
- l. Accommodate reasonable requests from applicants with documented disabilities for special test considerations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Model language for ADA requests is provided in Appendix 13.
- m. Establish a formal appeal procedure for candidates in case of an adverse decision by the RVSO/RVS (or the independent certification board). The appeal procedure must appear in the constitution, bylaws, and/or policies and procedures documents (e.g., policy and procedure manuals, standard operating procedures) of the organization, and must accompany each application form and notification of an adverse decision. For those RVSOs with an independent certification board, the appeals process must be defined the same in the operation documents of both entities.

1. Each AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty organization must have a published procedure to ensure due process for appeal of adverse decisions.
2. The specific language of an acceptable appeal procedure is determined by the recognized veterinary specialty organization or specialty (RVSO or RVS, see Appendix 14 for suggested language).
3. Changes in appeal procedures must be reported to the ABVS in the RVSO/RVS's annual report.
4. The appeal procedure must be a part of the constitution or bylaws of the RVSO or RVS. In addition, it must be included on forms used by candidates who apply for certifying examinations.
5. The appeals process must be autonomous, that is, the committee considering and making a final decision for an appeal must not be comprised of individuals involved in the entity that made the adverse decision (e.g., credentials committee, examination committee, appeals committee, maintenance of certification committee, etc.), and must be distinct from that RVSO/RVS's current executive committee or board.
6. Upon acceptance of the report of the appeals committee, the executive committee board must act in a manner that is consistent with the decision of the appeals committee. The executive committee may only reverse a decision of the appeals committee if the decision is adverse to the appellant and not in accordance with fair procedure, contrary to applicable requirements, or otherwise arbitrary. The decision of the executive committee will be final.
7. Recognized veterinary specialty organizations are responsible for full implementation of their appeal procedures to ensure due process. The criteria for veterinary specialty organizations recognized by the AVMA should guide procedures and influence decisions in disputes between specialty organizations and dissatisfied candidates. These procedures and decisions must be fair and reasonable for all parties, in keeping with the objectives of RVSOs /RVSs and the goals of the AVMA.

13. Provide certification attesting to diplomate status:
  - a. There shall be one certification for each RVSO and/or recognized veterinary specialty (RVS), indicating the individual is certified in the AVMA-recognized specialty.
  - b. Certification of diplomate status will be issued by the certifying entity of the RVSO.
  - c. Certification is an assurance to the public that individuals have the knowledge and skills for the certification awarded.
  - d. Diplomate status should not be contingent upon membership dues in the organization issuing the certification. All Diplomates may be required to pay fees to maintain the processes related to the certification program.
  
14. Have a mandatory program for maintenance of certification (MOC). All awarded diplomate certification must be time dated. A MOC program requires actions by newly-certified diplomates to maintain their certification that includes an evaluation process by their RVSO/RVS to ensure compliance. For those RVSOs/RVSs with an independent certification board, the process for implementing MOC may be relegated to that board.

Each RVSO/RVS develops their own standards and protocols for their MOC program based on the following characteristics:

- a. Examinations may be used but are not required.
  - b. A point system may be used, and points may be accrued in a variety of ways (e.g., continuing education attendance or presentations, publications, serving on exam committees, etc.) as determined by the RVSO/RVS.
  - c. Evaluation of diplomates for MOC will occur a minimum of every 10 years from the date of their initial certification (or renewal of certification), but an RVSO may choose a shorter period of time if desired.
  - d. An honor system for compliance, with diplomates self-declaring completion of requirements, is acceptable. However, if an honor system is used, random audits of diplomate compliance must be performed at a frequency that can be justified by the RVSO/RVS.
  - e. MOC will not be retroactive to previously certified diplomates. That is, certificates awarded prior to the initiation of an MOC program (i.e., certificates that are not time dated) cannot be withdrawn for noncompliance with the MOC program.
  - f. RVSOs/RVSs are encouraged to initiate a system of voluntary replacement of original certificates that are not time dated with certificates requiring maintenance. Procedures for certification maintenance will be the same as those required for diplomates attaining certification after the program has been initiated.
  - g. For those diplomates for which it is applicable, MOC must be required to maintain diplomate status in an RVSO/RVS.
15. Encourage and implement special training beyond the professional veterinary degree to enhance the ability of candidates to meet certification requirements and to maintain the competence of diplomates. The RVSO/RVS may provide educational or training programs to enhance the preparation of candidates; however, the RVSO/RVS must not require candidates to complete educational or training programs provided by the RVSO/RVS for eligibility for certification.
  16. Avoid contracts or agreements leading to activities outside the scope of the stated objectives of the RVSO.

17. The constitution and/or bylaws and/or policies and procedures documents (e.g., policy and procedure manuals, standard operating procedures) of RVSOs and RVSs and any independent certification board created by an RVSO or an RVS must contain elements as specified in the Standards for Recognition in the Policies and Procedures of the ABVS. Organizations must notify the ABVS of all changes in the RVSOs, the RVSs, and the independent certification board's constitution, bylaws, and/or other policies and procedures documents at the time of the next annual report. Annual reports must include previous and newly accepted wording.

An RVSO with one or more RVSs may have:

1. One constitution delineating the operations of the RVSO and separate bylaws delineating the functions and operations of each RVS, or
  2. A single constitution and bylaws clearly delineating the operations of the RVSO and the functions and operations of each RVS, or
  3. A single bylaws clearly delineating the operations of the RVSO and the functions and operations of each RVS.
18. Be legally incorporated as a not-for-profit educational organization within a state or district of the United States, and have a determination made as to the federal tax status of the organization. Groups are encouraged to incorporate and secure tax exemption under section 501(C)(3) or 501 (C) (6) of the Internal Revenue Service code. An RVS need not be incorporated separately from the parent RVSO.