

## PROFICIENCY TESTING REVIEW PROGRAM

### 1. Scope

Proficiency testing is utilized as a practical component of obtaining and maintaining Fellow status within the ABC Certification Program. This document outlines the operating procedures of the American Board of Criminalistics with respect to proficiency testing.

### 2. General Requirements for Proficiency Testing Programs

2.1 Whenever practicable, proficiency tests shall be prepared by an approved proficiency test provider.

2.2 An approved proficiency test provider is one that is:

- accredited to ISO/IEC 17043;
- accredited to ISO/IEC 17025;
- used by a laboratory section or unit accredited to ISO/IEC 17025; OR
- approved by an accrediting body.

2.3 If a proficiency test from an approved provider is not available or practicable, then a proficiency test from a non-approved provider may be reported. Proficiency tests from a non-approved provider must meet the test design requirements outlined in the supplemental documents for each discipline to be considered. *See 09-0710S through 09-0715S.*

2.4 Proficiency test samples should be handled similar to casework samples. If the laboratory process utilizes technicians or other examiners to perform initial testing or sample preparation, the proficiency test participant is only required to perform the analyses normally conducted in daily casework.

2.5 At any time, a certificant may request a certification conversion by submitting an Application for Conversion of Certification (09-0802F). *See 09-08 Conversion of Certification.*

2.5.1 Certificants that have converted from Fellow to Diplomate may reapply for Fellow status in the next recertification cycle pending documentation that the proficiency testing requirements have been met.

### 3. Initial Proficiency Test Review

3.1 Upon application for conversion to Fellow status, the Proficiency Testing Certification Form (09-0701F) must be submitted documenting successful completion in all proficiency tests that are relevant to the scope of certification. Reported proficiency tests must have been completed within one calendar year of the date of the Application for Conversion (09-0802F). Additional supporting documentation must also be submitted for the most recent proficiency test noted on the Proficiency Testing Certification Form.

3.1.1 Tests from an Approved Provider: the summary of test results submitted to the provider and a copy of the verification or technical review conducted by the Fellow's agency.

- 3.1.2 Tests from a Non-Approved Provider: the technical procedure(s) used along with a complete copy of the Fellow's proficiency documentation, including bench notes, reports and documentation of a satisfactory performance.
- 3.2 Specific laboratory practice or policy which precludes release of results, or manufacturer release, will be honored. Alternate procedures for verifying proficiency compliance and outcomes with specific laboratory officials may be employed at the discretion of the Proficiency Review Chair(s).
- 3.3 The Registrar's Office will submit the proficiency test documentation to the Proficiency Review Committee following the procedures set forth in Section 5 of this document.
- 3.4 The Proficiency Review Committee will review the proficiency test documentation following the procedures set forth in Section 5 of this document.
- 3.4.1 If additional documentation is necessary, the Proficiency Review Chair may request the documentation from the individual. The request will be initiated by the Registrar's Office (09-0706T). If the information is not received within 30 days of the request, no further action will be taken on the review.
- 3.4.2 If a deficiency is identified in the proficiency test documentation, see Section 6 of this document.
- 3.4.3 The Proficiency Review Committee review should be completed and returned to the Registrar's office within 60 days of the date the Application for Conversion (09-0802F) and supporting proficiency testing documentation are received by the Registrar's Office.
- 3.5 Once the Registrar's Office receives the signed Proficiency Review Checklist (09-0702F) and Non-Approved Proficiency Test Review form (090-716F), if applicable, the Registrar's Office will forward the candidate's or certificant's name to the Board of Directors for vote following *Conversion of an ABC Certification (09-08)*.
- 4. Annual Proficiency Test Reporting**
- 4.1 Each year after Fellow status has been granted, certificants must provide annual reporting of proficiency test participation by submitting the Proficiency Testing Certification Form (09-0701F).
- 4.2 Annual proficiency test reporting must be submitted with the annual recertification paperwork.
- 4.2.1 If a Fellow has taken a proficiency test and the results have not been released by the manufacturer in time to submit with the recertification packet, the Fellow must submit the Proficiency Testing Certification Form within 90 days of receipt of results.
- 4.2.2 Each proficiency test submitted for review must be from the same calendar year as the recertification paperwork. Older or former proficiency results will not be accepted.

- 4.3 To be accepted for review, proficiency test results must have been submitted to the manufacturer on or before the manufacturer's due date.
- 4.3.1 If a certificant or laboratory has been granted an extension by the proficiency manufacturer and meets the adjusted due date, the results are considered to have been submitted by the due date.
- 4.4 Extenuating circumstances due to life changing events such as military deployment, long term illness, family care leave, maternity leave, or a leave of absence from the profession may preclude a certificant from submitting proficiency testing documentation during any given year. In this situation the certificant may request a reprieve from proficiency testing in writing to the Registrar.
- 4.4.1 The letter must outline the reason for the request.
- 4.4.2 The Registrar's Office will forward the reprieve requests to the Proficiency Review Chair(s).
- 4.4.3 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will approve or deny the requests.
- 4.4.4 The certificant will only be granted one reprieve per proficiency over the course of five years.
- 4.4.5 If a request for reprieve is denied and the certificant has not completed the required proficiency tests, the certificant may be subject to probation.
- 4.4.6 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will notify the certificant of the results of the reprieve request. In the event of a denial, the Proficiency Review Chair(s) will notify the certificant of the reason for the denial.
- 4.5 Successful completion of proficiency tests is defined in separate documents with specific requirements for each discipline. *See 09-0710S through 09-0715S.*
- 4.6 Fellow certificants must provide documentation of proficiency testing for each subspecialty in which the Fellow holds certification. All proficiency tests taken within the scope of certification must be reported. For example, if an individual is certified in Hairs and Fibers and the certificant takes a hair proficiency test and a fiber proficiency test, then both must be reported. Similarly, DNA analysts who take two proficiency tests within a year must report both proficiency tests.
- 4.7 In the event that a certificant does not attain the expected answer in any proficiency test the certificant is expected to report the unexpected result to the Registrar's Office within 60 days of receipt of the manufacturer's summary results. Failure to do so may result in disciplinary action. To report results, the certificant should complete the Proficiency Testing Certification Form (09-0701F) for the test(s) in question.

- 4.7.1 An unexpected result is one in which the proficiency manufacturer has identified as unexpected or a result that is incongruent with the majority of test-taker responses. See specific proficiency testing requirements for additional information on unexpected results (09-0710S through 09-0715S).
- 4.7.2 Upon notification of an unexpected result, the Registrar's Office will notify the Proficiency Review Chair(s).
- 4.7.3 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will review the Proficiency Testing Certification Form and any explanations. If necessary, the Proficiency Review Chair(s) will contact the certificant to determine if remediation is being pursued by the laboratory.
- 4.7.3.1 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will determine if the laboratory remediation addresses the unexpected result of the affected certificant. The remediation will be taken into consideration when determining if probation is warranted.
- 4.7.4 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will determine if probation is warranted and will provide a recommendation to the President. The President will make the final decision on probationary status.
- 4.8 The certificant or the certificant's laboratory will maintain all records, including bench notes and analytical data, used to formulate conclusions in proficiency tests. These records must be retained and available for ABC review for five years after the submission of the proficiency test to the test provider.
- 5. Review of Proficiency Results**
- 5.1 The Registrar's Office will perform an initial review of all Proficiency Test Certification Forms (09-0701F) submitted. The forms will be reviewed for completeness and to identify any certificants denoting an unexpected result on a proficiency test.
- 5.1.1 The review will ensure that Fellows submit a Proficiency Testing Certification Form (09-0701F) each year denoting all required proficiency tests.
- 5.1.2 In the event that a certificant reports an unexpected result on a proficiency test, the Registrar's Office will forward a copy of the Proficiency Testing Certification Form to the Proficiency Review Chair(s) as soon as practicable for review.
- 5.1.3 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will review the forms and determine if further action is warranted.
- 5.2 The Registrar's Office will submit copies of all Proficiency Testing Certification Forms to the Proficiency Review Chair(s).
- 5.3 Certificants will have at least one proficiency test, per certification, reviewed in each 5-year certification cycle.

- 5.3.1 The proficiency review completed as part of the initial conversion to Fellow will be counted towards this requirement.
- 5.4 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will select approximately 20% of the certificants within each specialty group to be reviewed.
- 5.4.1 The certificants are randomly selected, however if a certificant was reviewed the previous year in the selected specialty group, the certificant will be removed from the review list and another selected.
- 5.5 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will form a committee to perform the reviews. Committee members chosen must be ABC Fellows and must cover the specific disciplines under review. The committee will be formed annually.
- 5.5.1 A Fellow may not review their own proficiency test.
- 5.6 The Registrar's Office will notify the certificants for review via 09-0703T. Certificants will be asked to provide two copies of the following information.
- 5.6.1 Tests from an Approved Provider: the summary of test results submitted to the provider and a copy of the verification or technical review conducted by the Fellow's agency.
- 5.6.2 Tests from a Non-Approved Provider: the technical procedure(s) used along with a complete copy of the Fellow's proficiency documentation, including bench notes, reports and documentation of a satisfactory performance.
- 5.7 The documentation for review must be submitted to the Registrar's Office within 30 days of the postmark date on the letter requesting information for review.
- 5.7.1 If the information is not received within 30 days, the Registrar's Office will contact the certificant.
- 5.7.2 The certificant will have an additional 30 days after the second notification to provide the information requested.
- 5.7.3 If the certificant does not provide the information requested, the certificant may be placed on probation.
- 5.7.4 The initial notification (09-0703T) will constitute a 60-day notice prior to probation. The date of the letter will be the date of notification.
- 5.8 Specific laboratory practice or policy which precludes release of results, or manufacturer release, will be honored. Alternate procedures for verifying proficiency compliance and outcomes with specific laboratory officials may be employed at the discretion of the Proficiency Review Chair(s).
- 5.9 Upon receipt of the proficiency test information for review, the Proficiency Review Chair will determine which committee member will review the proficiency results. Reviewers will not

review the work of an individual with whom the reviewer has a close personal relationship or a co-worker.

- 5.9.1 In the event a reviewer identifies a conflict of interest, the reviewer will notify the relevant Proficiency Review Chair who will reassign the proficiency review.
- 5.10 The Registrar's Office will submit copies of the review documentation to the Proficiency Review Chair(s) and to the selected reviewer. Documentation may be sent via common carrier, e-mail or stored in the organization's shared electronic folder. The Registrar's office and Proficiency Review Chair(s) will determine the means by which the documentation will be disseminated.
  - 5.10.1 If upon initial review further information is necessary, the Chair may request additional information from the certificant.
  - 5.10.2 If a participant's documentation is incomplete, the Chair will advise the participant of any deficiencies (09-0706T). The certificant will have 30 days to respond or to provide the additional documentation.
  - 5.10.3 If the additional documentation is not received within 30 days of the postmark date on the notification, the certificant may be placed on probation.
  - 5.10.4 The initial notification (09-0706T) will constitute a 60-day notice prior to probation. The date of the letter will be the date of notification.
- 5.11 The Chair(s) or other member of the Proficiency Review Committee will review the information submitted. The review will be documented on the Proficiency Review Checklist (09-0702F).
  - 5.11.1 Proficiency tests submitted from a non-approved provider will be reviewed following the Non-Approved Proficiency Provider Review Guidelines (09-0716F), in addition to the Proficiency Review Checklist (09-0702F).
- 5.12 Upon completion of the review, the reviewer will submit the completed checklist to the Proficiency Review Chair(s) for an additional review.
  - 5.12.1 The reviewer will securely destroy any personal copies of the information submitted by the certificant.
- 5.13 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will review and sign the checklist (09-0702F). The signed checklist and the information submitted by the certificant will be returned to the Registrar's Office for inclusion in the certificant's file.
- 5.14 The Registrar's Office will track the proficiency test review for each specialty for each certificant in the Registrar's Database. The tracking will minimally include the proficiency test year that was reviewed.
- 5.15 The Chair(s) and the Registrar will each maintain sufficient records to document the certificant's performance.

- 5.16 The Chair(s) will advise the Registrar of any changes in a Fellow's proficiency status resulting from the review.
- 5.17 The Registrar's Office will make entries in the Registrar's Database and the Recertification Database to reflect the Fellow's proficiency status.

**6. Deficiencies Noted During Proficiency Review**

- 6.1 In the event the Proficiency Reviewer identifies deficiencies in a proficiency test, the reviewer will contact the relevant Proficiency Review Chair.
- 6.2 The Proficiency Review Chair will review the proficiency documentation.
- 6.3 For an existing Fellow, if the Proficiency Review Chair agrees that a deficiency has been identified, the Chair will contact the President to determine if probation is warranted for an existing Fellow.
- 6.4 For an applicant for conversion, if the Proficiency Review Chair agrees that a deficiency has been identified, the Registrar's Office will note the deficiency on the Certification Conversion Approval Form (09-0803F). Additionally, the Registrar's Office will provide a copy of the Proficiency Review Checklist (09-0702F) and the Non-Approved Proficiency Provider Review Guidelines (09-0716F), if applicable, to the Board of Directors. The Board will determine if the deficiency will preclude conversion to a Fellow status.

**7. Probation**

- 7.1 A Fellow may be placed on probation for the following reasons:
- Unexpected result in a proficiency test
  - Not providing information requested by the Registrar or Proficiency Review Chair(s)
  - Failure to participate in annual proficiency testing
  - Anything is identified as a "No" on an Non-Approved Proficiency Test review
- 7.2 The Proficiency Review Chair(s), with the approval of the President, will determine if a certificant will be placed on probation.
- 7.3 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will maintain a tracking mechanism to ensure that all certificants are treated fairly. The tracking mechanism will minimally include any Fellow that meets the criteria for probation, the certificant number, whether the Fellow was placed on probation or not, date of probation if applicable, the reason probation was considered, the reasoning behind the decision and the date of the decision.
- 7.4 If a Fellow does not participate in annual proficiency testing the Fellow may be placed on probation for a period of one year. During this time, the Fellow must successfully complete a proficiency test and submit the required documentation.

- 7.5 Fellows who have been placed on probation due to deficiencies identified during the proficiency review will automatically be reviewed by the Committee during their probation period.
- 7.6 Fellows who have been placed on probation due to deficiencies identified during the proficiency review will be notified of their probationary status by the Registrar using the Notification of Probationary Status of Fellow (09-0707T).
- 7.7 Probation may be lifted if a Fellow resolves Proficiency Test Program deficiencies and provides documentation to support corrective actions and preventative actions and successfully completes a proficiency test within one year of being placed on probation.
- 7.7.1 Certificants will be notified of lifted probation by the Registrar's Office via e-mail or mail (09-1201T).
- 8. Suspension**
- 8.1 The Proficiency Review Chair(s) will notify the Registrar of any certificant than needs to be placed on suspension and will indicate the reason(s) for the suspension. Certificants will be suspended upon a vote from the Board.
- 8.1.1 Certificants will be given a minimum of 60-day notice prior to the Board vote for suspension (09-1202T)
- 8.2 A Fellow who has been placed on probation due to deficiencies identified during the proficiency review, who does not successfully complete a proficiency test and submit the required documentation within one year of being placed on probation, will be suspended. During this time, the suspended Fellow must continue to satisfy all requirements of the Proficiency Testing Review Program.
- 8.3 Fellow status will remain suspended until the participant successfully completes and submits the required documentation. Fellows who have been placed in a suspended status due to unsuccessful performance on proficiency tests will automatically be reviewed by the Committee throughout their suspension.
- 8.4 Fellows who have been suspended due to deficiencies identified during the proficiency review will be notified of their suspension by the Registrar using the Notification of Suspension of Fellow (09-0708T). Notification should be given within 30 days of the Board vote to suspend certification.
- 8.5 Suspension may be lifted if a Fellow resolves Proficiency Test Program deficiencies and provides documentation to support successful corrective actions and preventative actions taken and successfully completes a proficiency test within one year of being place on suspension.
- 8.5.1 Certificants will be notified of lifted suspension by the Registrar's Office via e-mail or mail (09-1201T).

**9. Revocation**

- 9.1 If a Fellow in a suspended status fails to satisfy all requirements of the Proficiency Testing Review Program throughout the suspension period, then his or her certification may be revoked via a vote of the Board of Directors.
- 9.1.1 Certificants will be given a minimum of 60-day notice prior to ~~being~~ the Board vote for revocation (09-1202T)
- 9.2 If a Fellow is in a suspended status for unsuccessful performance on a proficiency test and has not successfully completed a proficiency test during his or her probationary and suspended status (total two years) and is unable to successfully provide complete documentation that supports they satisfied all requirements of the Proficiency Test Program and have been reauthorized to conduct independent testing, then his or her certification may be revoked via a vote of the Board of Directors.
- 9.3 Participants who have had their Fellow status revoked due to deficiencies identified during the proficiency review will be notified of revocation by the President of ABC using the Notification of Revocation of Fellow Status (09-0709T). Notification should be given within 30 days of the Board vote to revoke certification.
- 9.4 Revocation may only be lifted upon reapplication to the ABC for Fellow status, successful completion of the appropriate certification examination, fulfillment of the requirements for proficiency testing, and payment of all concomitant fees.
- 9.5 Exceptions to the timelines may be granted on a case by case basis.

**10. Appeals**

- 10.1 In the event a certificant believes that the Proficiency Review Committee has erroneously identified deficiencies in the certificant's proficiency testing documentation, the certificant may file an appeal. *See Appeals and Challenges (09-09)*.

**11. Additional Specialty Areas**

- 11.1 Prior to the administration of any new Certification Specialty Examination, a specialty Proficiency Review Committee will be appointed, and guidance criteria for the evaluation of proficiency tests in that specialty will be formulated.
- 11.2 The Board of Directors may elect to create a Proficiency Review Committee for additional specialty areas without administering a new Certification Specialty Examination.

**12. Records Retention**

- 12.1 The official records are retained by the Registrar's Office according to the following schedule. Records may be either paper or electronic. Paper records will be retained in the Registrar's Office. Electronic records will be retained in a shared electronic storage location accessible to the Registrar's Office. Exceptions will be noted in the retention schedule. All records are confidential and will be securely destroyed on a schedule amenable to the Registrar, but no earlier than the defined schedule.

| <b>Record</b>                                | <b>Retention</b>                                    |
|--|---|
| 09-0701F                                     | 5 years   |
| 09-0702F                                     | 5 years   |
| 09-0703T (copy)                              | 5 years   |
| 09-0704T, if applicable (copy)               | 5 years   |
| 09-0706T, if applicable (copy)               | 5 years   |
| 09-0707T, if applicable (copy)               | 5 years   |
| 09-0708T, if applicable (copy)               | 5 years after a certificant's file becomes inactive |
| 09-0709T, if applicable (copy)               | 5 years after a certificant's file becomes inactive |
| 09-0716F                                     | 5 years   |
| A record of the 20% proficiency test reviews | 5 years   |
| Registrar's Database                         | Retained indefinitely                               |