

## The Subspecialty Application Process (Revised 10/2011)

### C. Maguth Nezu, Chair, Standards

Definitions (previously adopted, June 2009, with feedback and suggestions for revision from BOT meeting 2010)

- Subspecialty: An identifiable area of practice that requires special educational, training, and/or professional experiences. A subspecialty may involve specific (1) problems, (2) populations, and/or (3) methods. A subspecialty is a concentrated area of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that is a focus within at least one existing specialty area.
- Specialist in a Subspecialty: The specialist in a subspecialty demonstrates competence through focused knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the subspecialty. To qualify as a subspecialist, the psychologist must be certified by a specialty board of the American Board of Professional Psychology and devote a significant portion of time to the subspecialty.
- Special Interest Groups (SIGs): Special interest groups may be self-defined by board certified psychologists who share mutual interest in problems, populations, or methods within an existing specialty or across several existing specialties. Membership in a special interest group shall not imply special competency, merely interest. Any formal mechanisms for meeting or communication should be proposed to at least one specialty board, and receive the board's support. SIG's may be formed within an existing SB to discern the need for development of a subspecialty.

### General Guidelines

- Before proposing an SIG or Subspecialty, the individuals involved in the process must first be board certified by an existing Specialty Board (SB). If such a group is formed and wishes to seek recognition, the ABPP Central Office (CO) and Affiliations Committee will send out an announcement to all Specialty Boards (SBs), making them aware of these actions. If any existing SIG believes that they meet the definition of a subspecialty they may approach their respective board(s) to consider this path if there is support to do so.
- Any existing SB may propose a subspecialty by submitting a subspecialty application that follows the format of a specialty application. The completed application would be reviewed by the Affiliations Committee which would consider the application using the method outlined below. The Affiliations Committee would provide an announcement to the BOT to solicit input and participation of any interested specialty boards. In any cases of potential overlap with other existing ABPP specialties, it is important for the relevant specialty boards to be represented in the affiliation deliberation.
- No member will be awarded subspecialty designation by virtue of membership in a specialty board alone; all subspecialists shall be required to meet the education, training, and competency requirements of the subspecialty as determined by the SB(s) involved in its creation.

- All proposed subspecialties will necessarily involve a plan regarding how best to “retrofit” existing specialists from the relevant SB’s who practice this subspecialty.

## The Subspecialty Application Process

To be accepted as an applicant for subspecialty affiliation with the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), the applicant subspecialty panel (the specialists comprising the leadership of the subspecialty that is making an application for recognition) must meet the following requirements:

- a) The subspecialty must apply for subspecialty recognition with the endorsement of at least one of the existing ABPP Specialty Board (SB’s).
- b) The initial application is submitted to ABPP along with an application fee to be determined by the ABPP Board of Trustees (BOT).
- c) The application is reviewed by ABPP’s Specialty Board Affiliation Committee, who may request participation of representatives from other relevant SB’s that are likely to be impacted by the development of the subspecialty.
- d) The committee may request clarification and recommend revisions to SB that is submitting a Subspecialty Application
- e) The committee will make a recommendation to ABPP’s Board of Trustees (BOT).
- f) The BOT studies all materials and votes on the application. The application may be
  - 1) Approved,
  - 2) Approved contingent on specific changes and resubmission to the BOT, or
  - 3) Not approved.

## Guidelines for Completing an Initial Application

These guidelines are intended to provide guidance to a Subspecialty Panel and the SB(s) sponsoring the application. A designated consultant, typically the chair of the Specialty Board Affiliation Committee can answer additional questions as they arise. As the application is prepared, please remember to (1) document conclusions and cite sources whenever possible (using APA style) (2) respond to all questions posed but (3) do so concisely and succinctly. The document you produce will be widely reviewed and should present an enduring rationale for the subspecialty in professional psychology.

### Section I: Basic Information

- A. The SB that is sponsoring the proposal for subspecialty recognition. The ABPP only accepts applications for subspecialty recognition representing a subspecialty s that is recognized by at least one existing ABPP SB.
- B. Proposed Name of Subspecialty

- C. Brief Definition of the Subspecialty: Please limit this to a one-paragraph statement that sufficiently describes the subspecialty area.
- D. Organization of Credentialing Subspecialty Board
  - 1. Provide a brief description of the history of the subspecialty in chronological fashion.
  - 2. List names and relevant affiliations of the specialists who will serve as the initial members of Subspecialty Panel.
- E. Fiscal and Long-term Stability
  - 1. Provide evidence that your specialty board possesses the financial resources necessary to complete the application and affiliation process including (a) application fees, and (b) Sustainability of the examination process for subspecialty.
  - 2. Provide evidence supporting the necessary long-term stability of the professional subspecialty you are proposing. This may include (a) a description of the historical development of the subspecialty, (b) summaries of needs assessments and related surveys of consumer demand for services your subspecialty practitioners provide, (c) brief description of any related national organizations, (d) a brief review of the history of your board and its relationship to the existing sponsoring ABPP Specialty Board(s)

## Section II: Demographic Estimates

- A. Approximate Number of Current Subspecialty Practitioners  
Estimate the number of practitioners in North America who primarily (i.e., spend 25% or more of their work time) provide the services characteristic of your subspecialty. Indicate how you're arrived at this number by citing published survey data, summarizing results of surveys conducted by your organization, reporting numbers of members of related organizations, or describing other sources unique to your specialty area.
- B. Description of "Typical" Subspecialty Practitioner  
Describe a typical or modal practitioner of your subspecialty, citing any sources that support your conclusions. The description should include a clear picture of the pattern of practice for those engaged in the subspecialty incorporating the essential and distinctive practice activities described in Section IV Phase I.
- C. Potential Number of Applicants.  
Estimate the number of potential candidates for credentialing in your subspecialty area during the first three (3) years of approval, including a description of how you arrived at this conclusion.

## Section III: Parameters of Practice

A. Populations

Describe characteristics of recipients of subspecialty services provided by practitioners of your subspecialty, citing sources that support your conclusions.

B. Client Problems/Issues

Describe typical problems or issues experienced by recipients of services from practitioners of your subspecialty, citing sources that support your conclusions.

C. Practice Settings

describe the primary settings where psychologists practice this subspecialty, citing any sources that support your conclusions.

#### Section IV: Comprehensive Rational for the Sub Specialty

The material you present in this section operationally defines the competencies which characterize your subspecialty and represents the primary rationale for its definition. It should include: a) the procedures for reviewing applicants' training /educational requirements, credentials, evaluating practice samples (if relevant), and conducting examinations (written or oral) that relate directly to the professional competencies and activities that are defined in this section. Finally, the content validity of the subspecialty credentialing examination should relate directly to the precision with which the competencies are defined.

A competency in professional psychology is defined as those key foundational and functional practice activities that are characteristic of practicing psychologists and that are related to the application of relevant knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the discipline and profession involved in the day-to-day pattern of practice in the subspecialty. Therefore, the information in this section includes specific descriptions of the functional or foundational competencies (see ABPP Competency Model) that are unique to the subspecialty (those competencies that are required over and above the competencies of the existing ABPP Specialty Board(s) that are sponsoring the subspecialty application).

#### Section V: Education and Training Standards or Guidelines

Describe the education and training requirements required for the subspecialty

Your statement should describe the various components of subspecialty training, and their sequencing, including didactic course work and supervised practice experiences. Because many subspecialty competences may be completed at the postdoctoral training level, it is important to emphasize the post-doctoral training and experience requirements which most distinctively characterize specialty training. If the subspecialty has developed written education and training standards or guidelines, please attach a copy to your application. Emerging subspecialties may be in the early developmental stages of formal training programs and requirements. Please describe the subspecialty's aspirational plans to develop further the education and training in the subspecialty.

If relevant, include a representative number of training or continuing education program descriptions which are representative of the subspecialty (brochures may be included).

#### Section VI: Practice Standards or Guidelines

If the proposed subspecialty has developed practice guidelines or standards, please attach a copy and include in the application any additional necessary commentary that explains how the practice guidelines reflect the distinctive professional competencies defined in Section IV. If your subspecialty has not yet published formal practice guidelines, you may outline an initial draft of guidelines for appropriate practice in your subspecialty.

#### Section VII: Outcome Research

Write a brief literature review that summarizes published research of the past decade on the efficacy of services provided by practitioners of your subspecialty. Please attach any recently published outcome reviews that are relevant to your subspecialty area.

#### Subspecialty Structure and Examination Process:

- A. Provide a detailed structural description of the subspecialty within the sponsoring SB. Describe the SB in which the subspecialty would be administratively housed and how the current SB would be restructured to accommodate the subspecialty.
- B. If candidates will be accepted from additional SB's who may be jointly sponsoring the subspecialty, describe their involvement in the process, and include approval of the application from these relevant SB's.
- C. Describe the make-up and number of individuals serving on the Subspecialty Panel
- D. Describe the process by which the candidate's credentials will be reviewed.
- E. Describe how the subspecialty exam will be developed and administered, and a description of the exam. It is important to specify whether or not the subspecialty exam would be available to potential candidates at the time of their board examination for the relevant specialty or whether the examination would be separately administered.
- F. Describe how current specialists who have practiced the new subspecialty may be eligible or "retrofitted" to the subspecialty.

#### SUBMISSION OF INITIAL APPLICATION

Send six (6) copies of your completed application document and the initial application fee to

American Board of Professional Psychology  
600 Market Street  
Suite 300  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

The application will be forwarded to ABPP's Specialty Board Affiliation Committee for review. The Committee may contact you for clarification or with suggested modifications. After an initial review by the committee, the application will be disseminated to all current ABPP specialty boards for review and comments. Consideration of the subspecialty will be added to the agenda of the next scheduled BOT meeting for further discussion and a vote. The BOT will then act on the subspecialty application by either

- 1) Approval
- 2) Approval contingent upon specific changes, or
- 3) Non-Approval

A BOT approval will be considered a conditional approval for three (3) years, in order to assess the stability of the newly approved subspecialty. The newly approved subspecialty panel and its sponsoring SB(s) will develop a plan for implementation and evaluation of the credentialing process for the new subspecialty that will occur over the next three (3) years. This three (3) year period will serve as a realistic appraisal that may occur concerning the sustainability of the subspecialty including a review of the number of newly certified subspecialists. The subspecialty panel will prepare a summary of this evaluation to the ABPP BOT for consideration of final approval of the specialty.