



**ACCREDITATION PROCEDURES
INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION**

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Introduction

The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC), defines certification as the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes. The ultimate goal of professional certification is to assist consumers in making informed choices regarding their health-care practitioners. To that end, ABSNC provides an accreditation process for specialty nursing certification programs. ABSNC accreditation signifies compliance with rigorous standards for certification programs and is a further testament to the public of the high quality and credibility of an individual nurse's certification credential.

ABSNC History

Following three years of dialogue within the nursing community to create uniformity in nursing certification and to increase public awareness of the value of quality certification to health care, the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) was incorporated in 1991. The development effort was generously supported by the Macy Foundation. Soon afterward, the ABSN created the Accreditation Council, an autonomous accrediting body within the organization. In 2007, ABNS began a process for creating a separate, autonomous body to perform the accreditation function. By 2009, the ABNS Accreditation Council was renamed the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) and a separate corporation was established.

The ABSNC is governed by an elected Board of Directors. Each board member represents an organization with at least one accredited certification program.

The ABSNC maintains a website, www.absnc.org. The website details all information regarding the governance and accreditation of the organization.

Accreditation Standards

Each organization applying for certification must demonstrate that the nursing certification program meets all standards of ABSNC. A standard is defined as "an authoritative principle or rule that provides a model or pattern of guidance." Each standard includes a rationale providing an explanation of the meaning of the standard and its importance. The criteria for each standard can be considered the basis for making judgments about the certification program's ability to meet the standard. Additionally, required documentation for each standard is outlined.

Compliance with all standards must be demonstrated for initial accreditation and reaccreditation to be granted. Reviewers will determine if an application meets the criteria based on the documentation provided. To be approved for accreditation, certifying organizations must provide the requested evidence (e.g., policy and procedure, description/narrative) that each criterion is met.

Initial accreditation applications must demonstrate compliance with the most current Accreditation Standards as posted at www.absnc.org. Because the time required to prepare an accreditation application can be lengthy, organizations are advised to check the website regularly to ensure they are using the most current version of the Accreditation Standards.

When is an Organization Ready to Submit an Initial Accreditation Application?

In addition to being able to submit documentation of compliance with each standard, a certifying organization must have certification statistics data to report for at least 1 year of certification or for a minimum of 100 candidates, whichever occurs first.

Submission of a Letter of Intent

An organization seeking initial accreditation from ABSNC must submit an electronic Letter of Intent to the ABSNC office at info@absnc.org at least 90 calendar days before application submission.

Application Process

The application process is designed to allow the applicant organization to demonstrate a certification program meets each ABSNC Standard by assessing the certification program and providing evidence of compliance with the ABSNC Standards. Additional information or clarification may be requested of the organization submitting an application. Whenever additional information is requested more than three times, the applicant organization must resubmit the application and associated fees.

Applications for initial accreditation may be submitted at any time during the year. Each application will be evaluated individually by an ABSNC Review Team. Every effort is made to complete the application review and determination of accreditation status within 60 business days after receipt of an application. All application materials will be treated confidentially.

Upon completion of the review process, individual Review Teams makes a final accreditation recommendation to the ABSNC Board of Directors. Approval from two-thirds of ABSNC Board of Directors is required for accreditation approval.

In order to submit an accreditation application for a certification program for non-RN members of the nursing team, the certifying organization must have an RN and/or APRN certification program currently accredited by ABSNC.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Please note: Paper applications are not accepted. Accreditation applications must be submitted electronically.

Download the standards document from the website, www.absnc.org as a Word document so that it may be used as described below.

All information and documents must be submitted in a single, bookmarked PDF file. Additionally, hyperlinks must be added to assist reviewers in locating specific referenced information in the application. These features allow ABSNC reviewers to find the submitted evidence easily and evaluate compliance with each standard. Of note, a potential problem with using only hyperlinks is that the

reviewer is not able to return easily to the narrative document. Specific exhibits and page numbers should be referenced, even when hyperlinks are added. When bookmarking and/or hyperlinking, use a different color of font to denote the bookmark link and/or hyperlink.

Instructions for creating a single, bookmarked PDF file and adding hyperlinks are included in the "Instructions for Bookmarking & Hyperlinking an Accreditation Application" section of this document.

The following instructions are provided to assist nursing certifying boards in developing and organizing the electronic application.

Procedure

1. Be familiar with the "Instructions for Submitting an Accreditation Application" to determine the type and scope of information that must be provided to demonstrate compliance with each of the standards.
2. Organize information according to the instructions. Each section of the application must be bookmarked within the final, combined PDF and labeled as follows.
 - a. **Narrative Section**
 - 1) Overview of certification organization and its certification program(s)
 - 2) Standard 1 (For each standard, in the Narrative column, cite the Tab or
 - 3) Appendix for specific supportive documentation [evidence] and hyperlink directly to the relevant document.)
 - 4) Standard 2, etc.
 - b. **Appendices Section** – includes publications/documents referenced often throughout the application:
 - 1) Appendix A – Standards of Practice for Specialty
 - 2) Appendix B – Certification Handbook
 - 3) Appendix C – Recertification Handbook
 - 4) Appendix D – Bylaws
 - 5) Appendix E – Policy and Procedure Manual
 - 6) Appendix F – Testing Vendor’s Policies & Procedures specific to the applicant organization
 - 7) Appendix G – Item Writers' Training Manual
 - 8) Appendix H – Certification Organization’s Annual Report from Testing Vendor
 - 9) Appendix I – Testing Vendor’s Chief Examiner’s Training Manual
 - 10) Appendix J – Testing Vendor’s Manual for the Administration of Applicant Organization’s Examination(s)
 - c. **Tabs Section** – includes documentation to demonstrate compliance with a specific aspect of a standard; for example:
 - 1) Tab 1 - Table of Contents from Core Curriculum
 - 2) Tab 2 - Examples of information describing educational programs focused on
 - 3) specialty
 - 4) Tab 3 – Job description

3. Include a Table of Contents in each of the three sections, listing the exhibit title and document name. For example, Appendix A – Name of document; Tab 20 – Name of document.
4. Any information available in hard copy only must be scanned and saved as a PDF document. Place this PDF document in the appropriate location within the final PDF file.
5. The final bookmarked PDF that contains all the combined PDF files (Narrative section with the organizational Overview, and each Standard and narrative; Appendices; and Tabs) included in the electronic file is submitted to the ABSNC.

Upon completion of the application, the organization submitting the application will contact the ABSNC office via email at info@absnc.org. The ABSNC office will provide detail for submitting the application to a collaborative platform.

A non-refundable application fee and application cover sheet (found on the last page of this document) must accompany each application, as described under the Fees section of this document.

ADDITIONAL HELPFUL INFORMATION

Lengthy documents, such as candidate handbooks and policy manuals, should include bookmarks for each section of the document.

When the narrative references a document found in the Appendices or Tabs section, please specify the appropriate page number within the referenced document and bookmark that page. This is critical to the team's expedient, thorough review.

Overview

Before the Narrative portion of the standard is begun, a brief overview of the organization should be provided. The purpose of the overview is to give the reviewer an introduction to the organization that will make reading of the narrative more comprehensible.

The overview should include, but is not limited to a description of the certification program(s) being submitted and the related certification credential, what the certification credential acronym means, the number of certified individuals at the time of the application, the length of the certification period, a summary of options for recertification, a list of the testing and/or management company that provides service (including the name, address, names/credentials of staff assigned, and names/credentials of certification staff, if applicable), brief description of governance structure (e.g., A nine-member Board of Directors comprised of eight RNs and one Public Member, governs XX organization), and a brief summary of the certifying organization's history.

Standards

The ABSNC Standards document should be saved as a Word document; it is designed so the applicant can type into the column called Narrative. This column should indicate where to find supporting documentation that demonstrates compliance with the specific element of a

standard (i.e., reference a specific Tab or Appendix, and bookmark and hyperlink to the specific section number within the exhibit). For example, the list of item writers and corresponding demographics might be found in Tab X while the “Review and Appeal” policy would be found in Appendix X, Section Z, page Y. Unless otherwise noted, the Narrative column should indicate simply, “See Policy xyz, found in Appendix X.” In the final bookmarked PDF, each exhibit will be bookmarked with hyperlinks provided to the specific document location.

The Appendices section contains documents continually referenced throughout the application. For example, this section would include the organization’s complete Policy and Procedure Manual, Bylaws, Candidate Handbook, Recertification Handbook, testing vendor’s Proctor Manual, Item Writer’s Manual, etc. If the Narrative refers to a portion or section of a particular appendix or tab, each relevant portion or section of the appendix or tab should be bookmarked; hyperlinks also must be added from the reference in the application to the appropriate document.

The Tabs section contains all other supporting documents. If the Narrative refers to a specific tab that may have multiple pages, the appropriate page number should be identified within the tab with bookmarking of the corresponding page. Hyperlinking from the reference in the application to the supporting document will ensure reviewers can locate the appropriate evidence.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR REQUIRED BOOKMARKING/HYPERLINKING

ABSNC requires all applications to be submitted in a single bookmarked PDF file with hyperlinks to referenced documents within the application. Details and tutorials for using Adobe Bookmarking and Hyperlinking features can be found at: <https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/user-guide.html>.

When bookmarking and hyperlinking, use a different color font to denote the bookmark link or hyperlink. Adobe Acrobat must be used to bookmark and hyperlink an application.

Step 1: Initial Document Preparation

Adding page numbers should be considered when creating an Appendix or Tab that does not have them. This will make it easier to refer reviewers to a specific location within the document.

Step 2: Creating Bookmarks

The completed application should be converted to an Adobe PDF file. Each Appendix and Tab also must be converted to PDF format. Naming each file with the corresponding exhibit name will save time when combining files later in the process. For example, if Appendix A is the Scope of Practice, the file name should be changed to “Appendix A – Scope of Practice.” Once this process is complete, the files may be bookmarked.

The application form and each Appendix and Tab more than a few pages in length should be bookmarked. Adding bookmarks creates an electronic table of contents that allows reviewers to navigate the application and exhibit materials easily. In bookmarks, utilize a multilevel view, especially for Appendices that are bookmarked within the document.

Shortcut: Instead of typing the name of each bookmark, use your cursor to highlight text on the page that will match the title of the bookmark. For example, if you are creating a bookmark titled “Content Outline” and the heading on the corresponding page is “Content Outline,” you may be able to highlight the words “Content Outline” with your cursor (using the selection tool) and then click the bookmark icon in the bookmark panel. This may save you a lot of typing. However, it will NOT work documents that have been scanned as an image.

Step 3: Hyperlinking

Before converting the accreditation application to PDF format, use a different font color and format for the text that will eventually be hyperlinked in the application. For example, blue underlined text works well to indicate a hyperlink and will make it easy to locate the text for links later in the process.

Ex.

The Candidate Handbook lists the content outline for the ABC Certification Examination developed as a result of the job analysis.

[Appendix B, Candidate Handbook, Content Outline, pages 12-25](#)

Step 4: Combining PDF Files

After all PDF files have been finalized and bookmarked, they must be combined into one PDF file.

Step 5: Adding Hyperlinks

Add hyperlinks to referenced documents.

ACCREDITATION PERIOD

ABSNC accreditation is granted for a period of 5 years, beginning with the date of approval. Providing no major changes have been made to the accredited certification program, accreditation must be renewed annually by submitting the Annual Compliance Report and paying appropriate fees. Annual reports must be submitted to ABSNC to confirm continuing compliance with Standards.

Organizations must seek reaccreditation every 5 years. Renewal notices are circulated to accredited organizations 24, 18, and 12 months before the accreditation expiration date. Applications must be submitted no later than 6 months before the expiration date to allow time for review before accreditation expires. Expiration occurs on the first of the month.

RECOGNITION OF ACCREDITATION

Upon approval of accreditation or re-accreditation, an organization’s certification program is recognized with a framed certificate and listing on the ABSNC website www.absnc.org.

Organizations with accredited programs are encouraged to communicate this achievement on their websites and on all publications. ABSNC logo art will be provided in conjunction with the recognition process.

APPEAL OF ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

In instances in which accreditation is not awarded, the applicant organization will be given specific reasons for the denial of accreditation. A copy of the ABSNC "Reconsideration and Appeal of Accreditation Decision" policy and procedure will accompany notice of denial of accreditation or reaccreditation.

FEES

Application Fee

A non-refundable application fee (check payable to "ABSNC") must be submitted in association with the application and cover sheet. Applications submitted without the application fee will not be processed until the application fee is received.

ABNS Regular Member organizations benefit from reduced accreditation application fees. The application fee for organizations with no approved programs is \$1000 per certification program submitted. The fee for ABNS members is \$750 for 1 – 2 certification programs, and \$1000 for 3 – 5 certification programs. Multiple certification programs must be submitted at the same time to obtain the reduced fees.

Annual Renewal Fees

Upon notification of approval of initial accreditation, the applicant organization will pay annual accreditation fees within 60 days of receipt of notification of approval. These fees are prorated based on the quarter in which the application is approved. An invoice will be sent to the organization by the ABSNC office.

Annual renewal fees are based on a formula using candidate numbers as of June 30 each year. Annual renewal fees are due to ABSNC by August 1 of each year. Fees for an organization's first accreditation are prorated depending on the time of year an application is submitted.

For organizations submitting an application for reaccreditation, fees are paid annually as noted on the annual invoice sent by the ABSNC office.

ACCREDITATION OF JOINTLY OWNED CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

ABSNC accepts applications for accreditation of certification programs jointly owned by more than one nursing certification organization. In the case of jointly owned certification programs:

- ALL accreditation standards apply to all owners.

- ALL policies and procedures adopted for the management of the program must be adopted and implemented by all owners.
- ALL owners must submit copies of policies and procedures that govern their individual functions as requested in the standards (e.g., public member; autonomy from the member organization in terms of governance, finance and certification program management).
- A copy of the agreement between owners must be provided as part of the accreditation application. Information related to financial impact may be redacted if desired by the organization.

Checklist for Submission of Accreditation Application

- ✓ Confirmed use of the most current Accreditation Standards found on the ABSNC website, www.absnc.org.
- ✓ Organized the final bookmarked PDF application document into three sections: Narrative, Tabs, Appendices.
- ✓ Included a table of contents for each of the three sections that includes a list of the documents in each section.
- ✓ Confirmed (1) the application and each tab and appendix is bookmarked in the final PDF file, (2) each tab and appendix corresponds correctly with the narrative to which it refers, including page numbers, and (3) references in the application are hyperlinked to the correct document.
- ✓ Checked that all bookmarks and hyperlinks are functioning.
- ✓ Issued a check payable to "ABSNC" for the appropriate application fee.
- ✓ Completed the Application Cover Sheet found on the last page of this document for submission with your application.
- ✓ Requested access to the collaborative platform to submit the application.

Application for ABSNC Accreditation

Cover Sheet

Please check one: ___ Initial Accreditation ___ Re-accreditation

Name of Organization		
Street Address		
City	State	Zip Code
Phone		
Contact Person	Title	
Address and Telephone Number (if Different from Above)		
Email		
Title of Certification Program(s) Submitted for Accreditation		
Credential(s) Awarded		
Date Application Submitted		