

## **Principles for the Recognition of Proficiencies in Professional Psychology<sup>1</sup>**

### Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP)

Through a review of documents and discussions about proficiencies in psychology, it has become apparent that psychologists view proficiencies from a variety of perspectives. Thus, the "universe" of proficiencies could extend from a potentially unmanageable series of individual "micro" skills to considerably more organized and complex "near specialties" depending on how a specific array of knowledge and skills is defined. Any set of principles governing the recognition of proficiencies must be clear in its definition.

For purposes of this endeavor, the following definition of a proficiency is adopted:

A proficiency is a circumscribed activity in the general practice of professional psychology or one or more of its specialties that is represented by a distinct procedure, technique, or applied skill set used in psychological assessment, treatment and/or intervention within which one develops competence.

Proficiencies can only be acquired through appropriate education and training focused quite specifically and intensively on defined content. Specialties may include several such proficiencies. While some proficiencies may be unique to only one specialty, others may be shared across specialties or practiced generally. In order to educate and protect the public, the profession has the responsibility to exercise authority over the process of proficiency recognition. The process cannot be abdicated solely to market forces or to pressures brought by external bodies. Nothing in this document precludes a provider of psychological services from using the methods or dealing with the populations of any proficiency, so long as they do so "within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, or professional experience" (APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, 2002).

The American Psychological Association and its Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP) will consider petitions for formal recognition of a proficiency. Petitions that are approved by CRSPPP will be reviewed and acted upon by the APA Council of Representatives. CRSPPP will review the status of each recognized proficiency at least every seven years and recommend whether the proficiency should continue to be recognized.

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<sup>1</sup>These principles are aimed at those areas of practice in psychology which have a history of primarily providing services to the public. Other areas, traditionally identified with the academic and scientific aspects of psychology, are not addressed.

## RECOGNITION PRINCIPLES

Formal recognition of proficiencies in psychology begins with the submission of a petition to the American Psychological Association seeking recognition of the proposed proficiency.

The following principles are used to evaluate any petition for recognition of a proficiency in professional psychology:

**Criterion I. Administrative organizations.** The proposed proficiency is represented by one or more organizations that provide systems and structures that contribute to the organized development of the proficiency, in terms of effectiveness, quality improvement, and provider identification and evaluation.

Commentary: In order to ensure the management of the proficiency, having the resources of national organization(s) willing to assume responsibility is important, so that psychology's scientific and professional integrity can be preserved.

**Criterion II. Documented Need for Proficiency Recognition.** A proficiency shall be clearly responsive to a documented need of the public and the profession.

Commentary: A justification for psychology's recognition of a proficiency is that there exists a documented need for such application.

**Criterion III. Distinctiveness.** A proficiency is represented by a distinct procedure, technique, or applied skill set used in psychological assessment and/or treatment within which one develops competence.

Commentary: A proficiency typically reflects the development of a competence in a circumscribed activity beyond broad and general doctoral training. While it is recognized that there may be overlap among the knowledge and skill bases of various psychological applications (i.e. procedure, technique, or applied skill set), the proficiency does not overlap completely with any other psychological applications.

**Criterion IV. Diversity.** The organization (s) responsible for the proficiency demonstrates the recognition of cultural and individual differences and diversity in the development, modification or evaluation of the proficiency.

Commentary: Consistent with the APA policy statement on Evidence Based Practice (August 2005), this criterion requires that organization (s) responsible for the proficiency demonstrate "the integration of best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences."

**Criterion V. Parameters of practice.** A proficiency is represented by a distinct procedure, technique, or applied skill set that may be applied broadly or to specific populations, settings, and or biopsychosocial problems.

Commentary: This parameter consists of the procedures and techniques utilized in the proficiency. This includes assessment techniques, intervention strategies, consultative methods, diagnostic procedures, ecological strategies, and applications from the psychological laboratory to serve a public need for psychological assistance.

**Criterion VI. Acquisition of knowledge and skills.** A proficiency is acquired through a defined program of study and training that enables psychologists to develop the necessary competence to use this proficiency.

Commentary: Education and training in a proficiency may occur at the doctoral or postdoctoral level or through an organized continuing education program. Irrespective of when it is offered, education and training in a proficiency is of a sequential, integrated nature with organized oversight of didactic and appropriate supervised experience related to the knowledge base and skill sets distinctive to the proficiency. In addition, there are organizational mechanisms in place that provide oversight and coordination of the education and training in the proficiency. When education and training in a proficiency is achieved through interdisciplinary study, organization/s responsible for the proficiency will describe how the proficiency meets the criteria within the context of interdisciplinary education and training.

**Criterion VII. Professional Development and Continuing Education.** The organization (s) seeking recognition for the proficiency is responsible for identifying or providing its practitioners with a broad range of regularly offered opportunities for continuing professional development in the proficiency practice and mechanisms to assess the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Commentary: This criterion requires that petitioners articulate what continuing education is necessary to acquire initial competence in the proficiency or to maintain competency, particularly given the rapidly increasing and ever changing research and information related to the proficiency.

**Criterion VIII. Effectiveness.** A proficiency is characterized by a body of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of the distinct procedure(s), technique(s), or applied skill set(s) that comprise the proficiency.

Commentary: A body of evidence should be presented that is distinctive to the proficiency and documents the best available research. The manuscripts cited should be relevant to the proficiency, drawn from a variety of sources and inform the practice of the proficiency. This commentary reflects the definition of evidence based practice in psychology (EBPP) endorsed by the APA Council of Representatives as policy in 2005.

**Criterion IX. Quality Improvement.** A proficiency promotes ongoing investigations and procedures to develop further the quality and utility of its applications.

Commentary: The public interest requires the best services possible for consumers. A proficiency, therefore, continues to seek ways to improve the quality and usefulness of its practitioners' services. Investigations to improve the quality and usefulness of services may take many forms. Petitions describe how the research and practice literatures are regularly reviewed for developments that are relevant to the proficiency's skills and services, and how this information is publicly disseminated.

**Criterion X. Guidelines for Proficiency Service Delivery.** Proficiency practitioners conform their professional activities, not only to the profession's general practice guidelines and ethical principles but also to any relevant proficiency guidelines.<sup>2</sup>

Commentary: Such guidelines are readily available to proficiency practitioners and to members of the public and describe the characteristic ways in which proficiency practitioners make decisions about proficiency services and about how such services are delivered to the public.

**Criterion XI. Provider Identification and Evaluation.** The administrative organization (s) responsible for the proficiency has sound methods for evaluating competence in the proficiency and recognizing practitioners who have achieved competency.

Commentary: Identifying psychologists who are competent to practice the proficiency provides a significant service to the public. Assessing the knowledge and skill levels of these professionals helps increase the ability to improve the quality of services provided.

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<sup>2</sup>In this context, professional proficiency guidelines refer to modes of conceptualization, identification and assessment of issues, and intervention planning and execution common to those trained and experienced in the practice of the proficiency. Such professional guidelines may be found in documents including, but not limited to, those bearing such a title or as described in a variety of published textbooks, chapters, and/or articles focused on such contents.