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**International Orientation & Mobility Specialist Regional Certification**

**Standards, Policies and Application Instructions**

**[LOGO to be developed for the regional/country certification]**

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**Preface**

In March of 2016 the Board of Directors of ACVREP, in affirmation of its Vision that all individuals receiving vision rehabilitation or education will be provided with services from highly-qualified professionals, restated its Mission to emphasize ACVREP’s commitment to a universal standard for the profession. The Mission now reads as follows:

“To offer professional certification for vision rehabilitation and education

professionals in order to establish a worldwide standard of service delivery

to people who are blind or visually impaired”

To become certified as a COMS there are three criteria that must be met:

1. Minimum educational requirements completed at a university
2. Internship demonstrating application of core competencies and supervised by a COMS in conjunction with a university program
3. Passing a rigorous exam

While ACVREP has always welcomed international applicants for the COMS certification, the two current criteria that have provided a challenge for international candidates are:

* meeting the COMS educational requirements where an applicant must have a minimum of a US-equivalent bachelor’s degree and have taken their orientation and mobility courses at the university level
* completing an internship of a minimum of 350 hours supervised by a COMS under a university program

ACVREP recognizes that the educational systems in other parts of the world may have a different personnel preparation structure than the US system. ACVREP recognizes other regions of the world provide high-quality and comparable standards of training in the area of orientation and mobility although the training may not be university-based. Therefore, it is in that context that ACVREP proposes the following:

* Creating country or region specific orientation and mobility certifications evidenced by a certification name for that country/region
* Eligibility criteria based on the educational and experiential/internship standards of that country/region
* All orientation and mobility applicants, regardless of country/region, take the same universal exam based on a universal Body of Knowledge for orientation and mobility (see Appendix C)
* All fees would be based on current fee structure paid in US Dollars
* Recertification would be required at least every 5 years

This document is intended to serve as a guide to any country or region that seeks to develop a regional O&M certification program in partnership with ACVREP, with locally relevant eligibility criteria, using the COMS exam as a universal measure of O&M knowledge.

A minimum number of 25 applicants at initial set-up is needed to make such a program feasible.

## Section 1 - Glossary

1. **ACVREP:** The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals. ACVREP (the Academy) is an independent and autonomous legal certification body governed by a volunteer Board of Directors dedicated to meeting the needs of the vision services field and providing high-quality professional certification in the disciplines of low vision therapy, orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation therapy and assistive technology. The Academy is a member of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE) and strives to conduct its certification programs according to the standards established by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).
2. **Bachelor’s degree**: A degree, often referred to as a baccalaureate degree, awarded to an individual after completion of course work usually taken at an accredited university or college. Course work is typically made up of general studies and major-specific classes. Bachelor's degrees are awarded in specific concentrations and are typically built on a variety of educational foundations (such as Science, Humanities, Arts, or Fine Arts). A bachelor’s degree might take three or four years to complete, depending on the discipline being studied.
3. **Code of Ethics:** The specific performance and behavioral expectations set forth by ACVREP to promote the provision of quality services in manner that is respectful and responsible to all stakeholders. The Academy expects each certified professional to act in accordance to the established Code of Ethics within the specific professional domain for which he/she is certified. In accordance with industry standards, the Academy seeks and utilizes the input of its stakeholders to develop and institute Codes of Ethics that promote professional responsibility and enhance the quality of care and service. See link in Appendix A.
4. **COMS:** An ACVREP Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist. The ACVREP COMS program outlines minimum standards for an entry-level O&M specialist, however O&M specialists may apply to be a COMS at any point during their O&M career. The COMS credential is valid for five years, and a COMS needs to accrue sufficient evidence of continuing professional development for recertification every five years thereafter.
5. **Critical mass:** The minimum number of people needed to make an initiative viable. To be financially viable and demonstrate that there is regional agreement about minimum standards for the O&M profession, a regional COMS program needs at least 25 people committed to applying when the program is established, with numbers expected to increase to at least 50 over a five year period. Countries that cannot meet these numbers are encouraged to collaborate with other countries that have similar O&M personnel preparations and service delivery models
6. **Internship:** A defined period of time in a practicum or work experience setting, whether paid or unpaid, during which a candidate develops and demonstrates skills under the supervision of an experienced O&M professional. Evidence of internship and the applicant’s professional competence needs to be provided to ACVREP for an applicant to be eligible to sit the universal COMS exam.
7. **OMS:**  Orientation and Mobility Specialist. A professional who teaches the skills and concepts necessary for a person to travel with low vision or blindness.
8. **Recertification Eligibility Criteria**: The specific requirements utilized by ACVREP to establish an individual's continued competence within a professional domain in order to maintain Academy professional certification. Such criteria serve to promote the certified professional's commitment to the field and efforts to enhance professional competency.
9. **RPPLE:** The ACVREP Registered Provider of Professional Learning and Education (RPPLE™) program is designed to encourage the development, implementation, evaluation and recognition of high-quality Continuing Education (CE) programs that meet the needs of professionals in the field of vision rehabilitation and education. The purpose of the ACVREP RPPLE program is twofold: 1) to enhance the availability of quality CE activities to vision rehabilitation and education professionals; and 2) to promote and support the integrity of CE activities available to ACVREP certified professionals.The RPPLE Program Requirements can be found at (<http://www.acvrep.org/ce/providers> )
10. **Supervising O&M Specialist:** An O&M specialist overseeing the work of another O&M specialist in the workplace, whether a trainee, new graduate or experienced professional. The Supervising OMS is required to provide evidence (e.g. completed Competency Form) of the candidate’s workplace experience and readiness to sit for the universal COMS Exam.
11. **Subject Matter Expert (SME) Committee:** ACVREP utilizes the education and experience of subject matter experts in the development of key certification activities. In accordance with industry standards established for certification organizations, the SME is responsible for the following activities:
12. Continuously reviews and recommends further development of ACVREP’s professional standards and certification eligibility criteria.
13. Establishes the minimum level of individual professional competency required to meet the responsibilities of professional service.
14. Develops items for the applicable certification exam based on ACVREP’s professional standards.
15. Assists ACVREP in the statistical analysis of the O&M certification exam. This activity serves to maintain certification exams that are rigorous and appropriately measure and assess individual professional competency relative to ACVREP’s professional standards.

All recommendations made by the SME are subject to approval by the ACVREP Board of Directors.

## Section 2 - Establishing a new certification program

### O&M Board / Representational Committee

**Requirements:**

The applying country or region [known hereafter as region] must set up an O&M Board or a representational committee. This group should consist of at least one practicing OMS with at least three years’ experience, one employer of OMS, one personnel preparation representative from each type of preparation program, and a consumer. The Board or Committee is to serve the following functions:

1. oversee the development and implementation of the regional certification program, in partnership with ACVREP
2. undertake the necessary consultation with the O&M industry within the region to get the new OMS certification program established (O&M employers, O&M personnel preparation programs; and O&M funding bodies)
3. ensure compliance with any legal requirements or guidelines for professional certification within the region
4. promote the OMS certification program with O&M personnel preparation programs and O&M employers in the region to increase numbers, recognition and perpetuation of the program

**Submit:**

1. The name, role, and signature of the members of the O&M Board/Representational Committee who will serve as the point of contact for the region and whom will govern the application process.

### Commitment to partnerships and quality

**Requirements:**

A minimum number of 25 people is needed at initial set-up and 50 people within the first five years, for a new COMS program to be financially viable and professionally credible. Countries that have fewer than 25 potential candidates are encouraged to partner with other countries or regions that have similar service models and training pathways for O&M professionals.

Maintaining quality in the O&M profession requires commitment to the certification standards by those offering O&M personnel preparation programs, those employing O&M specialists, and those facilitating continuing education.

**Submit:**

1. The names and signatures of at least 25 O&M Specialists who are committed to engaging the certification process.
2. Signed statements from directors of O&M personnel preparation programs (university or agency) and O&M employers supporting the establishment of a regional certification program.
3. Signed statement by the region’s O&M Board/Representational Committee projecting the critical mass of OMS expected to seek certification for a period of five years.

### Naming the OMS certification program

**Requirements:**

The name of the proposed certification program should be inclusive of any member countries, and anticipate that other countries might seek to be part of the program in the future. For example, COMS-ANZ is not inclusive of Fiji, but COMS-Pacific could include professionals from Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and other Pacific island nations.

**Submit:**

1. The proposed certification name and desired acronym for the certification program.

The definition of all countries or regions that will be eligible to the certification. Note, upon certification approval, countries or regions cannot be added to a certification without again completing the application process.

## Section 3 - Eligibility Criteria for Certificants

An application to develop a regional Orientation & Mobility Specialist (O&M) Certification Program in partnership with ACVREP will need to include information that addresses the following eligibility criteria:

1. Academic Qualifications
2. O&M Core Domains
3. Internship
4. Code of Ethics
5. ACVREP O&M Certification Exam
6. Recertification Requirements / CE Providers

### Academic Qualifications

**Requirements:**

**Minimum Education Level**

1. Certified O&M specialists need a diverse, post-secondary education that equips them to engage confidently with other professionals, undertake independent inquiry, think at an abstract level, and synthesize information from different professional disciplines.
2. The minimum level of educational qualification for an OMS certificant should be equivalent to other entry level teachers or allied health professionals who work in the region. This will usually be a bachelor’s degree, and might be in a discipline other than O&M (e.g., education, health sciences, or community services). If the certificant has this minimum academic standard, then the O&M body of knowledge might be learned either through a university program or through an accredited O&M personnel preparation program outside the university sector.

**Submit:**

1. How formal post-secondary education in the country or region is organized and regulated at the level of government (e.g., federal, state, local authorities), educational institutions (e.g., universities, colleges) and O&M providers (e.g., employment criteria).
2. Who accredits and teaches post-secondary programs such as a bachelor’s degree, and awards qualifications, (i.e., universities, colleges, other registered training providers).
3. How and where available O&M personnel preparation programs fit into the education or training system in the region.
4. Detailed O&M training syllabi which must include the
   1. length
   2. program content
   3. required number of hours of blindfold and visual simulation activities

If the official curriculum received is not in English, an official English translation of it is required for submission. ACVREP will accept an official translation completed by a certified translator or an independent translation certified as authentic by your school. Both versions of the curriculum are required for submission

### O&M Core Domains

**Requirements:**

1. The ACVREP-approved O&M Body of Knowledge that is assessed in the universal COMS exam is organized by domain areas and is detailed in the Core Domain checklist (“CDC”). A region may add items to their proposed CDC but they must include those listed on the abovementioned website.
2. The regional program will need to show ACVREP how the Body of Knowledge is taught and learned in the region.
3. The application must describe and define the inclusion of alternative learning activities.

**Submit:**

1. A statement to adopt the current COMS CDC or provide a proposed region-specific CDC. A region-specific CDC will be reviewed and approved by ACVREP Orientation and Mobility Subject-Matter Expert Committee (SME) in collaboration with the region’s O&M Board/Representational Committee. However, additional CDC items are not guaranteed to have representation on the ACVREP O&M Certification Exam.
2. A list of current and previous O&M personnel preparation programs available in the region that a regional COMS applicant might have undertaken, indicating
   1. who accredited each program (government body, university, agency)
   2. the duration, locations and methods of delivery
3. A description of how each program covers the required O&M body of knowledge (such as a matrix that cross-matches the ACVREP core domain checklist against local O&M course content or syllabi).

### Practical/Clinical Internship

**Requirements:**

The application must describe and define the “Practical” or “Clinical” Internship requirements in conjunction with academic, experiential and/or workplace competence training.

**Submit:**

The requirements of the internship must be specifically outlined with the following components if the region is NOT adopting the current COMS Internship requirements:

* + - * 1. Required O&M experience and/or coursework required prior to starting internship and if the candidate must complete all courses/training prior to starting the internship.
        2. Potential sites or locations for internship placement (ex: public/private school, agency, etc.).
        3. Include the minimum duration of hours, weeks, and/or months with a stipulation of the direct instructional and indirect hours, with examples, are required.
        4. Outline the experience and/or certification required for the O&M Specialist supervising the practical or clinical internship and/or the potential use of an ACVREP Off-Site COMS Supervisor.
        5. Require the submission of the O&M “Practical” or “Clinical” Competency Evaluation for each internship placement that at a minimum measures the successful implementation of the practical skills that are currently measured on the COMS form. The region can add additional skills to be measured if they choose. This evaluation form can either be the current ACVREP COMS CCE form (click on this link to download the most current CCE form [www.acvrep.org/certifications/coms](http://www.acvrep.org/certifications/coms) under Step 3 quick links) or the region may choose to develop and submit a ‘region-specific’ competency form for review and recommendation by the ACVREP O&M SME Committee to the ACVREP Board of Directors for final approval.

### Section 4 – ACVREP Code of Ethics

The application must demonstrate the requirement for all candidates to agree to the ACVREP Code of Ethics for Orientation and Mobility and require that each applicant when submitting their application for certification attest to the following:

*“***I, the undersigned, having read, understood, and agreed with the obligations, responsibilities, and privileges stated in the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Professional Behavior, do promise to support and uphold the code and standards to the best of my ability in order to maintain the highest standards for the purpose of protecting the rights of the individual who must avail himself/herself of my service.**

**I do hereby acknowledge that all the information submitted in connection with my application is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that falsified information on this application is grounds for denial of certification or certification revocation, and may bar me from future certifications”**

### Section 5 - ACVREP O&M Certification Exam

**Requirements:**

The application must demonstrate the requirement for all candidates to pass the ACVREP O&M Certification Examination to demonstrate knowledge of O&M principles and applications.

Applicants taking the exam must agree to the ACVREP Nondisclosure Statement at the time that they take their exam:

**“As a candidate for ACVREP certification, I agree to keep all examination items and the content of the certification examination confidential. I will not discuss the content of this examination now or in the future with anyone. I understand that failure to abide by this Nondisclosure Statement will result in disciplinary action.”**

### Section 6 - Recertification Requirements / Continuing Education Providers

**Requirements:**

The application must demonstrate the requirement for all OMS to engage in on-going continuing education and professional development. Continuing Education (CE) is designed to encourage the development, implementation, evaluation and recognition of high-quality programs that meet the needs of professionals in the field while enhancing the quality of services provided to individuals who visually impaired.

**Submit:**

1. A statement to adopt the current ACVREP Recertification Point Calculations with the expectation that OMS must accrue at least 100 points in 4 categories to recertify (<http://www.acvrep.org/recert/points>).
2. Describe the requirements and/or process a region will mandate to govern the CE opportunities and documentation of participation IF a region does not adopt the current ACVREP RPPLE program guidelines found at (<http://www.acvrep.org/ce/providers>) (Appendix B).

## Section 7 – Additional Items to Strengthen your Application

1. Request National Government Recognition documentation · Documentation sent by the national governmental institution/agency (e.g., Ministry of Health) that approves/accredits schools with professional degrees
2. Demonstrate how your program outline submitted mirrors that of other professional preparation programs in your country/region

**Section 8 – Regional Certification Application Submission and Approval Process**

1. Once your application has been completed please submit in electronic format via email to Kathie Zeider, President at [kzeider@acvrep.org](mailto:kzeider@acvrep.org).
2. Allow 90-120 days for processing and approval. Failure to provide all required information in your initial application may extend that time period.
3. Once a completed application has been received it will be reviewed by the ACVREP O&M SME International Certification Committee that will:
   1. Request additional information from the region if needed
   2. Make a recommendation to the ACVREP Board of Directors to approve or decline the application
4. The ACVREP Board of Directors will review the application and the recommendation made by the ACVREP O&M SME International Certification and make a final decision to approve or decline the application
5. If the application is approved, the ACVREP President will work with the region to establish all operating policies and procedures and implement database certificant application capability. This process may take up to 90 days.

## APPENDIX A

#### Code of Ethics

<https://www.acvrep.org/certifications/coms-code>

## APPENDIX B

#### Recertification Framework

<https://www.acvrep.org/resource/docs/COMS%20Core%20Domain%20Area%20Checklist.docx>

## APPENDIX C

#### Orientation and Mobility Body of Knowledge

<https://www.acvrep.org/certifications/coms-bok>

## APPENDIX D

#### ACVREP O&M Clinical Competency Form

<https://www.acvrep.org/resource/docs/COMS-clinical%20competency%20evaluation%20form.pdf>