

History of the ACVO/ABVO Reorganization

(originally submitted by Dr. William Miller, 2016 current as of October 2017)

In 2010 the Governance Committee, under the leadership of Dr. Mark Nasisse, was charged to develop a pathway and documentation for separation of American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) membership from credentialing activities. There were a number of reasons for separating membership from credentialing functions.

The first reason was due to a potential conflict of interest when an organization requires certification to become a member of that organization and controls the certification process. For example, a member of the Examination Committee could have foreknowledge of a final year resident coming into their area as competition and fail that individual to prevent them from obtaining Diplomate status. Members of the Examination Committee could conspire to limit the number of new Diplomates if they believe the market for veterinary ophthalmologists was becoming saturated.

Another reason was a need to protect the ACVO members. An organization without separate membership and credentialing may put the entire membership at risk of litigation if a candidate for the examination felt they were unfairly treated and brought legal action against the ACVO.

Third was the potential for perceptions of anti-trust or unfair trade restriction litigation. Despite completing a residency, passing the examination, and being awarded Diplomate status in order to maintain specialist designation, a person was required to pay annual dues to the ACVO. If annual dues were not paid, the individual would not be reported to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) as being an Active Diplomate and would not be considered a veterinary specialist. Therefore the individual not paying annual dues could not perform eye certification examinations or present themselves as a specialist to the public.

Finally was the need to maintain public trust. Creating the American Board of Veterinary Ophthalmology (ABVO), as the organization solely responsible for residency training, credentialing and certification, and for maintenance of certification, creates a mechanism which eliminates potential conflicts of interest between the ACVO and ABVO. The ACVO, being a member organization, has an interest in acquiring as many members as possible to make the

organization as strong as possible. The ABVO has a duty to protect the public by determining only individuals adequately trained, credentialed and certified can represent themselves to the public as veterinary ophthalmology specialists.

History of ACVO/ABVO Reorganization

ACVO Past-President, Dr. Mark Nasisse, recognized the need for separation of membership and credentialing activities many years before it became a reality. An initial attempt was made in 2000 in Montreal, Canada. A motion was made and passed at the annual business meeting that year to separate credentialing from membership. Details of the credentialing functions were not clear to everyone, the American Board of Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) received several complaints from ACVO members, and therefore at a subsequent business meeting the membership voted to rescind that action and return the ACVO to its original state and Bylaws.

Despite the initial set back to separating membership and credentialing functions, the need for separation (as outlined above) did not abate. Therefore in 2010 the Governance Committee was charged by the ACVO Board of Regents (BOR) to develop a plan and mechanism to separate, or reorganize, these two ACVO activities. It was recognized that the separation process would require rewriting ACVO's Bylaws, writing a Charter to serve as the founding document for the ABVO, and development of an internal campaign aimed at educating ACVO Diplomates about the need for and process of reorganization. The ABVO Charter was completed in 2011, and it was revised in May 2014, with an anticipated update in 2018. Revision of the ACVO Bylaws to represent the reorganized functions of the ACVO was also performed in 2011.

An ad-hoc ACVO Transition Committee was formed in 2012 to facilitate transition from the previous organizational structure to the current one. Consultation with and careful monitoring by the ABVS occurred throughout this period to ensure protection of the membership, future ACVO Diplomates, the public, and organized veterinary medicine. During this time there was some opposition to the proposed change but ultimately the majority of ACVO Diplomates recognized the need for restructuring and the new ACVO Bylaws and ABVO Charter were approved in 2012.

ABVO Organization

The ABVO's organizational structure was based on information in the book, *Certification and Accreditation Law Handbook*, and its author, Jerald A. Jacobs, who served as legal counsel throughout the process. The book describes three organizational structures and the advantages

and disadvantages of each. The first method of certifying members was how the ACVO had accomplished the task since its inception. Members within the organization form committees to ensure future members have the minimum qualifications needed for certification, in our case board certified veterinary ophthalmologists. In this structure there is no separation of membership and certifying responsibilities; the potential downfalls of this structure have already been discussed.

The second organizational structure to be considered was one where a separate, yet semi-autonomous organization is formed within the original organization. While a semi-autonomous certifying organizational structure is unquestionably better than one where membership and certifying duties are commingled, it is not the ideal structure. This was the most cost-effective method available to the ACVO at that time, and so was selected. To effect this organizational restructuring, the ACVO BOR “*delegated to the ABVO all responsibility for the academic accreditation and professional certification activities of ACVO, with no recourse or appeal to the Board of Regents*”. Although the ACVO BOR delegated complete autonomy regarding certification to the ABVO and its committees, the ABVO remains fiscally dependent upon the ACVO. This leads to the term “semi-autonomous” sometimes being used for this organizational structure.

The third type of certifying organizational structure is completely autonomous. A completely autonomous structure is what the physicians use to certify new members of many of their specialty organizations. In their case the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is made up of members of a number of medical specialties, and it is this organization that oversees residency programs, maintains and administers certifying examinations, and awards accreditation to all who complete their training and certification process. The individual who completes the requirements to become a physician specialist as outlined by their specialty college, administered through the ABMS, becomes a specialist and thus can then become a member of that particular specialty college. For more information on this process, one should refer to their web site www.abms.org.

This full separation type of certifying organizational structure may be considered by the ACVO in future. Cost is the major factor in establishing a completely autonomous organization, and it was, at the time, considered beyond the scope of the ACVO to consider. However, as other veterinary specialty colleges see the need for separating membership from certifying responsibilities, the American Board of Veterinary Specialists may become the vehicle to isolate the certification process from membership collectively for all of the veterinary specialty colleges.

Formation of the ABVO

The inaugural ABVO Board was elected by the ACVO membership at the Fall 2012 annual meeting of the members. Initial members consisted of Dr. Cynthia Cook, Dr. Carmen Colitz, Dr. David Maggs, Dr. Mark Nasisse (Chair), and Mr. Douglas Jack (Public Member). Since that time, and as dictated by their Charter, they have developed (and continually refine) Policy and Procedures documents for all residency training, credentialing, certification, and maintenance of certification activities, and for any appeals arising from these activities. All of ABVO's documents are publicly available on their website (www.ABVO.us). As needed, they coordinate with and assist the ACVO BOR in ensuring that the documents of the two bodies are aligned and in harmony.

Role of the Governance Committee, excerpted from the ACVO's Bylaws:

“As per the ACVO Bylaws the Governance Committee consists of a Chair and at least (3) additional Voting Members of the ACVO, none of whom is a current Officer or Regent of the ACVO or Officer or member of the ABVO, or its committees. The Governance Committee is a standing committee of the ACVO. It is responsible for determining that the activities of the ACVO and ABVO adhere to their respective Charters, Bylaws, and Policies and Procedures. At the request of either the ACVO or ABVO leadership, the Governance Committee will develop additions to or modification of respective Policies and Procedures.”

The Governance Committee should serve as a ‘checks and balance’ to both the ACVO BOR and ABVO ensuring that the Policy and Procedures and other documents of the two bodies and their committees are consistent with ACVO Bylaws and are written in a homogenous and complementary manner.

Bylaws should be rarely modified with recent changes made more for clarification rather than organizational purposes. When charged by the ACVO Board of Regents, the Governance Committee will review the proposed changes to ensure they are appropriate and in line with current Policies & Procedures, before being sent to the ACVO membership for vote.