



BUILDING A CERTIFICATION PROGRAM: HOW AN EXPERIENCED PARTNER IMPACTS CRITICAL DECISIONS

"Building a brand new certification program is one of the most rewarding things we do. Right from the start, we are able to guide clients on best practices for building a solid program, ensuring their accreditation goals are met, and their stakeholder needs satisfied."

~ Janice Moore, CEO, SeaCrest

SUMMARY: In 2014 the Behavior Intervention Certification Council (BICC) contracted with SeaCrest for the development of a new certification program supporting the organization's desire

to offer a formal credential to those using Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) in the treatment of autism spectrum disorder. SeaCrest spearheaded the development of BICC's entire credentialing program, including governance of the 501(c)(6) organization housing the program, essential program elements, the exam, eligibility and recertification requirements and more. Offering assistance in certification program development, administration and evaluation, SeaCrest's experience ensured BICC leaders were armed with the information necessary to make fully informed decisions, creating the Board Certified Autism Technician (BCAT).

BACKGROUND

BICC offers the BCAT, recognizing individuals who demonstrate autism competency using the principles and procedures of applied behavior analysis. Those who earn the BCAT designation are equipped with the training and knowledge required to ensure that individuals with autism receive evidence-based, autism-specific treatment to maximize their potential. BICC contracted with SeaCrest because of their inherent knowledge and expertise in building solid, sustainable certification programming from the ground-up and their ability to guide clients through what can be a complicated, rigorous, yet consequential, process.

THE CHALLENGE

"The field of autism treatment had no autism-specific credential, and we felt it was important to set training, education, and experience standards that protect the quality of treatment and consumer safety," said Lauren Whitlock, executive director, BICC. As a result, BICC wanted to create a high-quality certification program using a nationally recognized process to define the role. The program had to meet

the needs of those providing behavioral therapy within the autism community—protecting both practitioners and the families they serve by adding rigorous background checks and a robust complaint and disciplinary process.

The new certification program also had to meet the NCCA standards for eventual accreditation. Because of the rapid timeframe involved—the program had set a goal to be running and accredited within a year—it was essential that BICC onboard a partner with the expertise, capability and flexibility to maximize the time without minimizing quality.

THE SeaCrest APPROACH

ANALYSIS, PRE-WORK, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SeaCrest first initiated a job analysis study, assessing the current practice in autism-specific ABA. Results of the study were used to develop the BCAT certification examination and requirements. SeaCrest facilitated design of a program to meet BICC's goals while establishing realistic parameters for a new program. This analysis built the foundation for discussion regarding direction and how to best meet the needs of practitioners, clients, caregivers, and other important stakeholders.

SeaCrest's deep knowledge of the certification landscape was critical in this early phase to ensure the program a solid foundation at inception. Arming BICC with the information necessary so they could make consequential decisions rapidly was key to creating a new program, discussion included:

- What works traditionally and what doesn't
- Consequences of various actions, policies and procedures
- Best practices for engaging staff and volunteers
- Long-term planning for program maintenance
- Program pitfalls and financial considerations

SeaCrest also provided pertinent resources and research, as well as other information relevant to their program so BICC leaders could focus on engaging the Subject Matter Experts (SME) and exam content development.

EYE ON ACCREDITATION

SeaCrest helped establish the BCAT program beginning in September of 2014 and the first exam was proctored in July of 2015. Building a solid program that would meet accreditation standards took priority from inception. BICC's dedication to providing the talent and resources necessary for rapid exam development teamed with SeaCrest's expertise in accreditation standards ensured the program was able to stay within the accelerated timeframe while being built to the thorough specifications of the NCCA accreditation process. *"We would not have become NCCA accredited without SeaCrest's broad knowledge of the credentialing process...Without SeaCrest, there would be no BCAT program,"* added Ms. Whitlock.

KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

Extensive certification experience and knowledge were essential to building the BCAT certification program. Given the time constraints and the growing need for a certification program within this community, SeaCrest effectively counseled BICC regarding how various decisions would likely impact overall programming, time considerations for various projects, which experts to bring into the fold, and all under the accreditation umbrella.

"I have complete confidence in [SeaCrest's] Janice Moore, and that trust was invaluable as we made decisions about policies and timelines." - LAUREN WHITLOCK

ORGANIZATIONAL SET UP

Because this was a new program, all pieces of the BCAT certification had to be created, beginning with foundational elements. SeaCrest guided BICC through the process of establishing leadership and governance—including Board creation—the development of bylaws, and other essential organizational matters. This also included drafting policies and procedures, a candidate handbook, an orientation session for the organization's first Board of Directors, and other supporting materials.

CONTRACTING MEASUREMENT EXPERTS

Bringing on the right partners to assist in measurement and exam building was essential to creating a scientifically sound certification program. SeaCrest contracted with psychometric consultant Dr. Leon Gross to spearhead the process of conducting a national job analysis study, evaluating the most important aspects of BCAT practice to determine a baseline for exam qualifications and exam content. The team worked closely with SME panels in all aspects of building the certification program and examination, including item development, exam eligibility, security, recertification standards and more.