

# Demystifying the ICF Credentialing Exam

Carrie Abner, ICF Credentials and Standards  
Dr. Gavan O'Shea, ACC, Human Resources Research Organization  
(HumRRO)



**Carrie Abner**

ICF Credentials & Standards  
[Carrie.abner@coachingfederation.org](mailto:Carrie.abner@coachingfederation.org)



**Gavan O'Shea, Ph.D, ACC**

HumRRO  
[goshea@humrro.org](mailto:goshea@humrro.org)

# Welcome & Introductions

- **Why** build a new exam?
- How the ICF Credentialing Exam was developed
- Exam content and format
- Item format
- Exam scoring
- Preliminary exam statistics
- Strategies and tips for exam prep
- Q&A

A hand holding a black pen is writing the word "Agenda" in a cursive script on a white background. The word is written in a fluid, handwritten style. The hand is positioned on the right side of the word, with the pen tip touching the end of the letter 'a'. The background is a solid white surface, and the hand and pen are the only elements visible in this section.



**Why create a new exam?**

# ICF Credential Written Exam

**1998**

Adoption of the ICF Core Competencies

**2017**

ICF Coaching Job Analysis

**2022**

Launch of the ICF Credentialing Exam

ICF Launches the Coach Knowledge Assessment (CKA)

**2015**

*Publication of the Updated ICF Core Competencies*

**2019**



# ICF Credentialing Exam Development

- ❑ Designed to assess candidates' ability to make judgments and decisions that are consistent with the updated ICF Core Competencies (2019)
- ❑ Developed in alignment with global standards for certification assessment development practice
- ❑ Subject Matter Experts involved in each stage of the development process

# ICF Credentialing Exam: Content Domains

## **Domain: Foundation**

- 13% – Competency: Demonstrates Ethical Practice
- 12% – Competency: Embodies a Coaching Mindset

## **Domain: Co-Creating the Relationship**

- 12% – Competency: Establishes and Maintains Agreements
- 13% – Competency: Cultivates Trust and Safety
- 13% – Competency: Maintains Presence

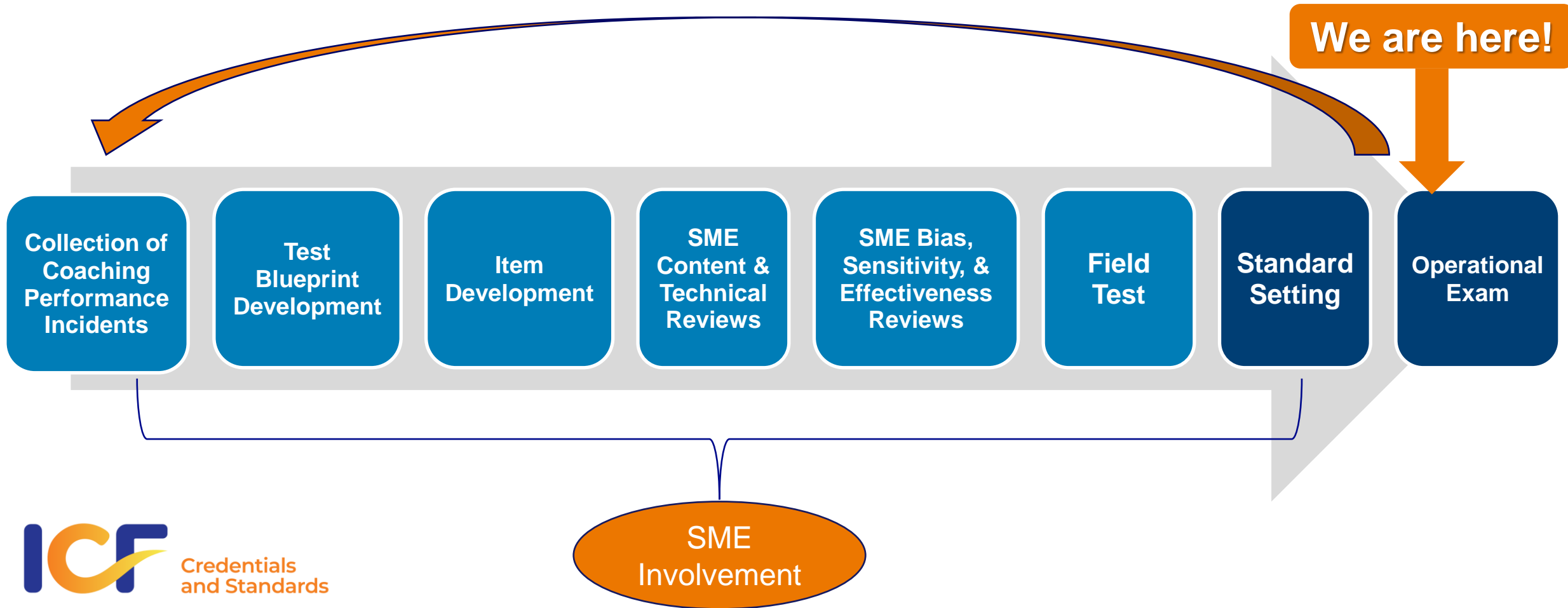
## **Domain: Communicating Effectively**

- 12% – Competency: Listens Actively
- 13% – Competency: Evokes Awareness

## **Domain: Cultivating Learning and Growth**

- 12% Facilitates Client Growth

# ICF Credentialing Exam Development







## Exam Format

---

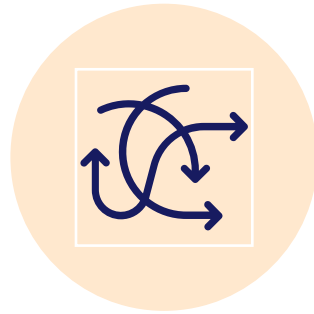
- ✓ Computer-administered exam
- ✓ Delivered in proctored environment
- ✓ Available at test centers or through remote testing service
- ✓ Three-hour (180 minutes) exam
- ✓ Two exam sections with an optional 5-minute break midway
- ✓ 81 exam items
- ✓ Situational Judgement Test (SJT)



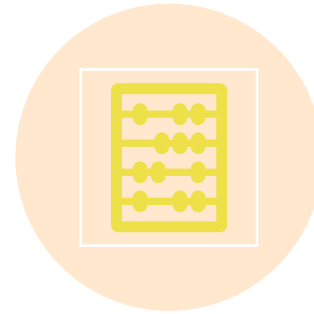
# What is a Situational Judgement Test (SJT)?



TEST KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES,  
AND SKILLS IN COACHING  
CONTEXT



REFLECT SEVERAL “PLAUSIBLE,  
YET NOT EQUALLY EFFECTIVE”  
WAYS OF HANDLING THE  
SITUATION



MORE NUANCED THAN SIMPLE  
RIGHT-WRONG TEST  
QUESTIONS



REQUIRE JUDGEMENT AND  
DECISION MAKING, LIKE  
COACHING ITSELF

# ICF Credentialing Item Format

Candidates are presented with a realistic scenario describing a coaching situation, followed by four response options. Candidates are asked to identify:

- ✓ The Best Action of the four presented
- ✓ The Worst Action of the four presented

# Sample Item

A university biomedical researcher is working with a coach to improve their interactions with colleagues. The client is a very analytical thinker and can easily explain detailed data points and complex graphs, but seems reluctant share anything personal with the coach. In previous sessions, the coach encouraged the client to describe how they felt at social events, but the client seems highly uncomfortable, answering only with short, one-word responses. When the client arrives to their session today, the client silently hands the coach a journal. The client has written several, detailed entries over the last week about their experience attending a university luncheon, a faculty party, and a staff development workshop since their last session. While the client says little to the coach in the moment, their entries show deep reflections about the anxiety the client experienced at these events and their desire to overcome social anxiety. What should the coach do?

What is the Best Action?



What is the Worst Action?



- A. Acknowledge the reflection work the client has done, and ask the client if they feel comfortable exploring some of the emotions they described in their journal.
- B. Ask the client if they would summarize the entries they detailed in their journal for the coach.
- C. Ask the client to identify some steps they can take to overcome the anxieties they wrote about.
- D. Ask the client what new awareness they developed about themselves through the journaling process.

# Exam Questions

- Scenario sets the stage for the questions that follow
  - What do coaches notice?
  - How do they synthesize and use what is presented?
- Why Best action?
  - Can candidates recognize the best option from among several fair and one truly bad one?
- Why Worst action?
  - Deciding what not to do is not the same as deciding what to do
  - Very relevant for the credentialing context (i.e., “do no harm”)

# Exam Scoring

- One point each for identifying best and worst actions
- Correct responses identified by Subject Matter Experts
  - Each scenario originally had 8-10 response options
  - SMEs rated the effectiveness of each response option
  - Ratings help identify options ICF can defend as best and worst
  - Statistical “bands” created around the best and worst actions
- Candidates can flag and review items in each section
- Scaled scores from 200 to 600, with passing score of 460



# Preliminary Exam Statistics

- Average completion time is 122 mins
- Exam pass rate across administrations ( $N \approx 2,500$ ) is approximately 75%
- Pass rate among first attempt candidates ( $N \approx 2,200$ ) is slightly higher
- Of all candidates who have completed the ICF Credentialing Exam, approximately 90% have earned their credential.
  - ACC 91%
  - PCC 90%
  - MCC 86% (NOTE: very small sample size)

# Exam Accommodation

- ICF is committed to ensuring its exams are accessible for all qualified candidates as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Candidates with a documented disability and other qualifying medical condition may request accommodation in the application form
- Exam Accommodation form is sent to the applicant with instructions for submission
- Note: Exam Accommodation form must be submitted prior to scheduling an exam appointment
- Variety of accommodations are available:
  - Extended exam time
  - Separate testing room,
  - Reader
  - Adjustable work station, touchpad or trackball mouse
  - Zoom text
  - Snacks, medical devices
  - Frequent or extended breaks
- Some accommodations are limited to test centers
- More information and sample Exam Accommodation Request Form available at:

<https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/exam-accommodations>

The image shows a sample 'Exam Accommodations Request Form' from ICF Credentials and Standards. The form includes fields for personal information (First Name, Last Name, Date of Birth, Address, City, State/Province, Zip Code, Country, Telephone Number, Email Address) and a section for 'Accommodation(s) Request' with checkboxes for Extended Time, Access to Auxiliary Items, Reader / Scribe, Other, and Nursing Mother Accommodation. It also contains a 'Supporting Documentation' section, a 'Release of Information' statement, and signature/date lines for the candidate. A footer note states: '\*\*\* Please upload the completed form with any required documentation to your credential application \*\*\*' and 'Revised August 2022'.

**ICF** Credentials and Standards  
**Exam Accommodations Request Form** Please print or type.

First name Last Name Date of Birth

Address

City State/Province Zip Code Country

Telephone Number Email Address

**Accommodation(s) Request**  
Please indicate the accommodation(s) you wish to request.

☐ Extended Time (please specify): ☐ Reader / Scribe\*  
☐ Access to Auxiliary Items (food, beverage, medical device, medicine)\* ☐ Other (please specify):  
☐ Nursing Mother Accommodation

**NOTE:** Some accommodations are only available in Pearson VUE testing centers and are not available via Pearson's OnVUE remote testing service. Accommodations identified with an \* are automatically approved with a private testing room to prevent distractions to other test-takers. Please note that a scribe and/or reader are only approved in circumstances where the candidate is unable to read or write independently, even with extra time.

**Supporting Documentation**  
Accommodation requests, other than for nursing mother arrangements, must also be accompanied by supporting documentation. This may be documentation provided by a qualified, professional evaluator (i.e., physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, etc.) verifying the disability or qualifying medical condition OR documentation of a prior approval for the accommodation for a similar testing experience. For full details on the elements needed in the supporting documents, please visit the Exam Accommodation page of the website.

**Release of Information**  
I grant permission to school officials and/or my healthcare provider(s) to release records related to my education, medical or psychological history to ICF Credentials and Standards and its designee solely for the purpose of reviewing my request for exam accommodations.

Candidate Signature Date

By signing and submitting this ICF Credentialing Exam Accommodations Request Form, I consent to the transfer, collection, processing and use of my information by ICF Credentials and Standards, in accordance with the International Coaching Federation privacy policy, solely for the purpose of evaluating and providing the requested exam accommodation(s). I affirm that all information provided in this form is accurate, and I authorize ICF Credentials and Standards to verify any information submitted with this request.

Further, I understand that ICF Credentials and Standards may disclose and transfer such information to testing provider partners, only as reasonably necessary to provide the requested exam accommodation(s) at the testing site. Such information will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Candidate's Printed Name Signature Date

**\*\*\* Please upload the completed form with any required documentation to your credential application \*\*\***

Revised August 2022


# Exam Language Aids

## Available:

- Arabic (New!)
- Simplified Chinese
- French
- Japanese
- Spanish
- Turkish

## In Development:

- Italian – March 2023
- Russian – April 2023
- Swedish – April 2023
- Czech – Q2
- German – Q2
- Hungarian – Q2
- Korean – Q2
- Polish – Q2
- Portuguese – Q2

A woman with dark, curly hair is sitting at a wooden desk in a bright, indoor setting. She is wearing a yellow, textured sweater and is holding a white coffee cup with both hands. In front of her is an open laptop. To the left of the laptop, there are several small, light-colored sticky notes. To the right, there is a notebook with colorful sticky notes and a yellow pencil. The background is slightly blurred, showing shelves with green plants and other furniture. The overall atmosphere is warm and focused.

# Strategies & Tips for Exam Prep



# Preparing for the Exam

- ✓ Education and experience remain the **best** preparation for candidates.
- ✓ Review the ICF Core Competencies & Code of Ethics.
- ✓ Reflect on common coaching situations and possible responses.
- ✓ What do the Core Competencies look like when effectively demonstrated by a coach?
- ✓ What does it look like when the Core Competencies are *not* effectively demonstrated by a coach?
- ✓ When reading the scenario, don't make assumptions or add details that are not presented in the stem.
- ✓ Remember: the four responses presented may not reflect what the candidate would do. Of the four, which is the most aligned with the competencies? Which is the least aligned?

## Traveling the online testing route

An all-inclusive guide to taking your exam online

# Testing Online

## Pre-Exam Prep

- ✓ Running a system test
- ✓ Preparing testing space
- ✓ Gathering proper ID
- ✓ Reviewing online testing policies

## Exam Day

- ✓ Running a system test (again!)
- ✓ Checking in to appointment
- ✓ Taking check-in photos
- ✓ Starting the exam
- ✓ Contacting Pearson Support during an exam:
  - Exam chat to proctor
  - Online chat on Pearson's ICF OnVUE information page



# Questions & Answers





[Support@coachingfederation.org](mailto:Support@coachingfederation.org)

coachingfederation.org