



COMDTINST 1540.10  
10 JAN 2020

COMMANDANT INSTRUCTION 1540.10

Subj: COAST GUARD VOLUNTARY CREDENTIALING PROGRAM (VCP)

Ref: (a) Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, PL 113-291, § 551, 128 Stat. 3292, 3376-3377 (2014)

1. PURPOSE. This Instruction establishes policy on program eligibility, professional credentials and occupations covered, oversight mechanisms for the payment of expenses and benefits, as well as limitations, roles and responsibilities for implementing the Voluntary Credentialing Program mandated by Reference (a).
2. ACTION. All Coast Guard unit commanders, commanding officers, officers-in-charge, deputy/assistant commandants, and chiefs of headquarters staff elements must comply with the provisions of this Instruction. Internet release is authorized.
3. DIRECTIVES AFFECTED. None.
4. BACKGROUND. The Coast Guard’s Voluntary Credentialing Program (VCP) was established to meet the requirements of Section 551 of NDAA 2015 to:

“Carry out a program to enable members of the armed forces to obtain, while serving in the armed forces, professional credentials related to military training and skills that—

- (1) are acquired during service in the armed forces incident to the performance of their military duties; and
- (2) translate into civilian occupations.”

Furthermore, the Coast Guard “shall provide for the payment of expenses of members for professional accreditation, Federal occupational licenses, State-imposed and professional licenses, professional certification, and related expenses.” To meet these obligations, the VCP office will employ Credentialing Assistance (CA), defined as the payment of exam fees,

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maintenance fees, renewals, and membership dues (when applicable) for eligible Service members towards approved credentials.

The VCP office benchmarked the Coast Guard's credentialing and eligibility requirements with the four other military services by conducting extensive interviews with each of their Voluntary Credentialing Program Managers. The results were compared, analyzed, and used to develop recommendations, based upon the military services' commonalities and available resources to sustain the Coast Guard's VCP. This policy has been aligned with the Voluntary Education Program (VOLED) when applicable. The VCP is managed by the Chief, Voluntary Programs, executed by the Education and Training Quota Management Command (ETQC), and supported by Commands, Unit Training Officers (UTOs) and/or Education Services Officers (ESOs) at each unit.

5. DISCLAIMER. This guidance is not a substitute for applicable legal requirements, nor is it itself a rule. It is intended to provide operational guidance for Coast Guard personnel and is not intended to nor does it impose legally-binding requirements on any party outside the Coast Guard.
6. IMPACT ASSESSMENT.
  - a. This task will require the Education Services Officer (ESO) to evaluate the Service member's eligibility for CA and provide a recommendation. This evaluation process should take approximately 15 minutes per applicant, with the number of applicants estimated to be 5% of the Coast Guard workforce.
  - b. No additional training will be provided for this task.
7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECT AND IMPACT CONSIDERATIONS.
  - a. The development of this Instruction and the general policies contained within it have been thoroughly reviewed by the originating office in conjunction with the Office of Environmental Management, Commandant (CG-47). This Instruction is categorically excluded under current Department of Homeland Security (DHS) categorical exclusion DHS (CATEX) A3 from further environmental analysis in accordance with the U.S. Coast Guard Environmental Planning Policy, COMDTINST 5090.1 and the Environmental Planning (EP) Implementing Procedures (IP).
  - b. This Instruction will not have any of the following: significant cumulative impacts on the human environment; substantial controversy or substantial change to existing environmental conditions; or inconsistencies with any Federal, State, or local laws or administrative determinations relating to the environment. All future specific actions resulting from the general policy in this Instruction must be individually evaluated for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions, Executive Order 12114, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) NEPA policy, Coast Guard Environmental Planning policy, and compliance with all other applicable environmental mandates.

8. DISTRIBUTION. No paper distribution will be made of this Instruction. An electronic version will be located on CGPortal:  
<https://cg.portal.uscg.mil/library/directives/SitePages/Home.aspx> and Internet:  
<https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/directives>.
9. RECORDS MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS. This Instruction has been thoroughly reviewed during the Directives clearance process, and it has been determined there are no further records scheduling requirements, in accordance with Federal Records Act, 44 U.S.C. 3101 et seq., NARA requirements, and Information and Life Cycle Management Manual, COMDTINST M5212.12 (series). This policy does not have any significant or substantial change to existing records management requirements.
10. DEFINITIONS.
  - a. *Coast Guard Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (CG COOL)*: Located at <https://www.cool.osd.mil/>, CG COOL is an online tool to help Coast Guard Service members find information on credentials, certifications, and licenses related to their military occupation and duties. The site identifies occupation related credentials, highlights potential knowledge gaps between military training and civilian credentialing requirements, and provides guidance to assist in filling those gaps.
  - b. *Credentialing Assistance (CA)*: The payment of credentialing, certification, and licensing exam fees, maintenance fees, renewals, and membership dues (when applicable) by the Coast Guard for eligible Service members. CA is only offered in the pursuit of credentials listed on CG COOL, and may not be used to pay the expenses of a member to obtain professional credentials that are a prerequisite for appointment in the armed forces.
  - c. *Joint Credentialing Opportunities On-Line (J-COOL)*: A consortium comprised of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps that has developed a set of standards that credentialing bodies must meet in order to be listed on Services' COOL websites.
11. POLICY.
  - a. Eligibility:
    - (1) Current funding only supports CA for enlisted personnel. Should additional funding be identified, it may be used to cover officer voluntary professional credentialing expenses as defined in this Instruction. The CG COOL website remains a resource available for all personnel regardless of CA eligibility.
    - (2) CA will be offered to enlisted SELRES members who meet all participation standards including current readiness metrics as per the Reserve Policy Manual, COMDTINST M1001.28 (series) (12 months before obtaining a credential). This is aligned with VOLED eligibility requirements.

- (3) Service members must be in compliance with weight standards in accordance with Coast Guard Weight and Body Fat Standards Program Manual, COMDTINST M1020.8 (series).
- (4) Service members must be marked as “Ready” (R) or “Not Ready” (X) for advancement on their most recent Enlisted Employee Review (EER). Service members marked as “Not Recommended” (N) are ineligible for CA.
- (5) Members must have at least six months remaining on their service obligation.
- (6) The member’s Command will play a critical role in screening for CA. A Credentialing Assistance Request must be reviewed and approved by the Education Services Officer (ESO).
- (7) CA will not be authorized for:
  - (a) Credentials paid under any other federally funded program where such a payment would constitute a duplication of benefits from the Federal Treasury. The amount of CA authorized will be calculated after grants, scholarships, fellowships, and other forms of financial assistance have been subtracted from the credential fee.
  - (b) Credentials not listed on CG COOL. There is a process for submitting credentials to be considered for addition, outlined in Section 11d(1)(a).
  - (c) Credentialing fees that are paid under a training program.
  - (d) Credentialing exams or fees incurred without authorization by the Education and Training Quota Management Command (ETQC).
  - (e) Second attempts for a credential where the Service member utilized CA but failed to obtain the credential during the first attempt. Service members who fail to earn a credential may apply for a different CG COOL sponsored credential, given they receive approval from their Command and ETQC.
  - (f) Service members awaiting a punitive discharge, in confinement, on appellate leave, or awaiting administrative separation other than honorable or general discharge under honorable conditions. Additionally, Service members convicted by foreign or domestic courts, serving sentences in foreign prisons, or administrative vice punitive discharges will be deemed ineligible for CA.
  - (g) Service members with any misconduct, to include court-martial punishment, judicial punishment, or non-judicial punishment within the last 12 months.

b. Credentialing Criteria:

- (1) CA will be offered in the pursuit of credentials that are aligned to a Service member’s rating, career specialty, out-of-rating assignment, or a collateral duty.

- (2) CA will be offered in the pursuit of credentials related to any prior rating/specialty held by a Service member, so long as the Service member is in good standing with that prior rating/specialty.
  - (3) CA will be offered in the pursuit of credentials that support academic degrees or certificates held by Service members (i.e. a CS that is pursuing a degree in IT may be qualified for some IT credentials).
  - (4) CA will be offered in the pursuit of credentials related to Service members' off-duty training. While CA will not be approved to pay for training or professional development required for a credential, CA may be considered for authorization if a member provides:
    - (a) Documentation of professional development;
    - (b) Verification of training gained outside of their rating/specialty; or
    - (c) Member is assigned to a billet that relates to a credential.
  - (5) As a condition of accepting CA, service members agree to complete and report their exam results to ETQC within 90 calendar days from the date of approval. Upon the attainment of a credential, results must be reported to ETQC within 30 calendar days of attaining a credential, for tracking purposes and recording in Direct Access (DA). ETQC will record credentials in Direct Access (DA). Members who fail to report their exam results, or attainment of a credential, within the prescribed timeframes will be subject to recoupment of CA payment(s).
- c. Credentialing Coverage and Limitations:
- (1) CA will not be provided for the pursuit of credentials that are a condition of employment or are required for a Coast Guard position.
  - (2) CA will be provided on a first come, first served basis. Funding for the program will suspend if/when the fiscal year program funds allocation is reached. Eligible Service members may only apply for one credential (e.g. initial exam, application, renewal, or maintenance fee) per fiscal year.
  - (3) CA may be provided to cover the costs of exams and application fees in the pursuit of credentials. CA may also be provided for renewals or annual maintenance fees on credentials held by eligible Service members. This applies to credentials previously obtained through CA, as well as those earned outside the Credentialing Program, as long as the credential is voluntary (not required for your job/position) and meets the J-COOL standards.
  - (4) CA may be provided for the cost of state license fees, as long as they are not required as a condition of employment.

- (5) CA may be provided for membership fees only when membership is a requirement in order to obtain a credential.
- (6) CA will not cover the costs for training, test preparation, or study guides in the pursuit of credentials.

d. Credentialing Standards:

(1) General:

The Coast Guard encourages credentialing bodies to attain third-party accreditation of their credentialing programs, as it will help ensure that the credential programs utilized by members have met a baseline standard. The J-COOL consortium comprised of the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Marine Corps have developed a set of standards that credentialing bodies must meet in order to be listed on services' COOL websites. These standards are derived from industry recognized accreditation organizations to include the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), the International Accreditation Services (IAS), the International Certification Accreditation Council (ICAC), the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), and the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC).

- (a) Members who wish to utilize CA for a credential not listed on CG COOL may submit a request to the CG COOL Mailbox ([CGCOOL@USCG.MIL](mailto:CGCOOL@USCG.MIL)) to have that credential evaluated and approved by the J-COOL consortium.
  - (b) The VCP office reserves the right to suspend or remove a credential or deny CA for a credential that does not meet the J-COOL consortium's credentialing standards.
  - (c) Credentialing Vendors' Certification Requirement: Personnel applying for funding for professional credentialing expenses must comply with the certification agencies' or certification exam vendors' certification requirements (i.e. passing an examination, submission of work experience, application submission, provided documented training, maintain continuing education units, and or maintenance fees).
- (2) J-COOL Review and Coordination. The VCP office will coordinate with the J-COOL consortium on periodic reviews and recommend changes to the approved third-party accreditation organizations. VCP will also review and update the COOL credentialing standards as appropriate, based upon legislative requirements or changes in the licensure and certification process in industry.

## 12. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

- a. Voluntary Credentialing Program, on behalf of the Commander, Force Readiness Command will:
  - (1) Establish policy for the VCP that complies with directives and federal law.

- (2) Represent Coast Guard voluntary credentialing interest throughout the Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and the military departments.
  - (3) Represent the Coast Guard and maintain liaison with appropriate federal and state agencies, private sector organizations, credentialing accreditation and standardization organizations, Department of Labor, Department of Veteran Affairs, and similar credentialing associations whose policies affect voluntary credentialing.
  - (4) Serve as the Coast Guard's representative with J-COOL.
  - (5) Coordinate budget development and execution for VCP.
  - (6) Provide program execution direction to the Commanding Officer, ETQC.
  - (7) Provide Line of Accounting information and budget information to ETQC and FINCEN prior to the start of each Fiscal Year.
  - (8) Act as the Coast Guard champion for voluntary credentialing in general and Military – to – Mariner specifically.
  - (9) Maintain the CG-COOL website.
  - (10) Develop performance support tools for use by field personnel in support of VCP.
  - (11) Manage VCP contracts / MOUs, to include CG COOL site, workforce comparative occupational analysis, and payment program.
  - (12) Maintain a help desk to answer credentialing questions or provide CG COOL support
  - (13) Evaluate the VCP and provide reports of program effectiveness.
- b. Education Services Officer (ESO):
- (1) Endorse for approval Credentialing Assistance Requests.
  - (2) Familiarize eligible Service members with all aspects of the VCP.
  - (3) Assist with completing Credentialing Assistance Requests.
  - (4) Familiarize eligible Service members with SkillPort and MWR book library, which offer various study material to assist the member with completion of the credential.
  - (5) Ensure Service members provide exam results and credential attainment information to ETQC per Paragraph 12.d.(6).

c. Education and Training Quota Management Command (ETQC):

- (1) Adjudicate (approve/disapprove) Credentialing Assistance Requests in accordance with VCP policy.
- (2) Approve requests for reimbursement / obligate funding when presented with a valid receipt.
- (3) Enter earned credentials into Direct Access after they are provided by the member.
- (4) Monitor credential funding obligations while processing Credentialing Assistance Requests.
- (5) Initiate recoupment of Credentialing Assistance per VCP policy.

d. Finance Center:

- (1) Review requests to verify ETQC approval and obligation of funds.
- (2) Verify payment by the member to the certifying body.
- (3) Issue payment via direct deposit to the member's banking institution on file.

e. Member:

- (1) Review and become familiar with policy and procedures applicable to VCP.
- (2) Submit CA requests, containing all applicable information and endorsements.
- (3) Request approval from ETQC at least 14 calendar days prior to scheduling a credentialing exam(s) or incurring any fee(s) (i.e., including registering for, scheduling, or partaking in an exam) that are eligible for reimbursement under the CA program. Members who pay for an exam prior to approval is at the member's expense.
- (4) Electronically endorse and submit Request for Miscellaneous Reimbursement (SF-1164) with valid receipts to ETQC within 30 calendar days of exam or fee payment.
- (5) Complete credentialing exam and submit a legible copy of official exam results, on official agency letterhead (if applicable), to ETQC within 90 calendar days of initial authorization of Credentialing Assistance. Failure to provide a copy of official exam results may result in recoupment of funds reimbursed to member.
- (6) Submit a legible copy of credential(s) to ETQC within 30 calendar days of credential attainment, for entry into Direct Access. Failure to provide a legible copy of credential(s) may result in recoupment of funds reimbursed to member.



13. FORMS/REPORTS. None.

14. REQUEST FOR CHANGES. Submit change requests to:

[CGCOOL@USCG.MIL](mailto:CGCOOL@USCG.MIL); ATTN: Voluntary Credentialing Program Policy

POC: Michael Reynolds, [Michael.A.Reynolds@uscg.mil](mailto:Michael.A.Reynolds@uscg.mil), (757) 628-4197.

B. K. PENOYER /s/  
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