

Moving Forward: Guidance from AVMA’s Dr. Marci Kirk and a final report from the AAEP Foreign Veterinary Graduate Task Force

The Foreign Veterinary Graduate Task Force was formed in Spring 2024 to help AAEP members understand and support foreign veterinary graduates (FVGs) in their professional roles as they work through the licensure process. Throughout the past year, the Task Force has hosted meetings and webinars to further understand the challenges FVGs and their prospective employers face. We have created several resources and produced webinars that focus on the visa process, as well as spotlight several AAEP members who share their stories of successfully navigating the visa and licensure process. Additionally, we have launched a scholarship program through The Foundation for the Horse to help FVGs with costs associated with visa and licensing fees. Resource links can be found at the end of this article.

During our discussions with FVGs, we identified that the major challenges include working through and selecting the correct visa, and completing the rigorous testing and procedures of the AVMA’s Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) Certificate Program. This four-part program includes an application process, an English language assessment, a basic and clinical veterinary science test and a clinical proficiency exam.

Dr. Marci Kirk, ECFVG Program Manager for the AVMA, provided the following insight to help our membership better understand the ECFVG process.

Dr. Kirk, can you share the history of the ECFVG within the AVMA and how it has changed over the years?

The Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates® is an educational equivalency assessment program that was established in 1959 and is one route for veterinarians who graduated from a non-COE-accredited veterinary school to become licensed in the U.S. The ECFVG certificate is accepted by all U.S. state veterinary regulatory boards and the U.S. federal government as meeting, either in part or in full, the educational prerequisite for licensure for certain types of employment. ECFVG certificate holders will still need to pass the national licensing examination (NAVLE) and any state-specific examination to become licensed.

What is the current flow of the program? How is ECFVG helping candidates navigate the program?

An overview of ECFVG can be found here: <https://www.avma.org/education/educational-commission-foreign-veterinary-graduates>

There are four steps to the program:

- a. Step 1: Application
 - i. This includes registering with the certificate program, providing

proof of graduation, and verification of veterinary college credentials

- b. Step 2: Assess English language ability
 - i. This is done via online assessment. The candidates can choose from three different platforms to complete this step
- c. Step 3: Basic and clinical veterinary science knowledge
 - i. This is a computer-based examination with 225 questions and is offered year-round.
 - ii. Test content includes
 - 1. Anatomy
 - 2. Pharmacology, physiology, and toxicology
 - 3. Pathology
 - 4. Medicine
 - 5. Anesthesia
 - 6. Surgery
 - 7. Diagnostics
 - 8. Animal Welfare
 - 9. Preventive Medicine
- d. Step 4: Clinical Proficiency Exam (CPE)
 - i. This is an in-person exam that occurs over the course of 3 days
 - 1. Currently offered in two locations in the United States
 - ii. 7 sections of the exam
 - 1. Small Animal Medicine
 - 2. Equine Medicine
 - 3. Food Animal Production
 - 4. Necropsy
 - 5. Radiographic Positioning
 - 6. Anesthesia
 - 7. Surgery

Following 2020, there was a significant increase in applicants to the program and a decrease in testing sites that offer the CPE. In response to CPE testing site capacity limitations, the ECFVG has worked with current CPE sites to expand the number of tests offered in 2026 and continues to explore every opportunity to add additional testing sites.

As noted above, seeing an increase in candidates and changes in the number of testing sites resulted in a backlog of candidates within the program. Along with these factors, the pandemic played a big role as it limited our sites' ability to hold in-person assessments, which furthered the backlog. In addition, increases in re-takes of specific CPE sections became more of a factor, thus adding to the total number of individuals in the candidate pipeline who need to either take the full CPE or select sections of the CPE as a retake. The ECFVG staff is working diligently to improve candidate throughput while ensuring that all candidates have a positive customer experience.

A new online candidate portal will launch this fall, giving applicants streamlined access to program requirements, real-time status updates, and improved communication tools. As part of this update and based on candidate feedback, a waitlist will be created for future CPE testing dates. This will help reduce anxiety that has previously been associated with the CPE registration process.

Additionally, a review of the CPE is currently underway. The goal is to determine what, if any, components of the CPE can be moved to a technology-based performance assessment and what must remain as a clinical-based performance assessment. This review will include expertise from psychometricians-specialists who design and validate standardized tests using well-defined and peer-reviewed assessment methods. They will be working with subject matter experts who bring a variety of experiences from across the profession and will offer insight into the required knowledge being assessed.

How can AAEP help?

AAEP plays a crucial role in helping FVGs better understand the options that exist to pursue veterinary licensure in the United States and also providing support as they navigate their chosen path. If that path includes ECFVG, this could also include helping candidates understand the steps in the program as outlined above, connecting candidates with mentors who can help them gain valuable clinical experience and assist with reviewing the Manual of Administration for the Clinical Proficiency exam. A copy of the current CPE Manual of Administration can be found here:

https://ebusiness.avma.org/Files/Downloads/ecfvg/Candidate_Moa.pdf

The AAEP has created multiple resources to help guide members through the licensure process in the United States. What resources do you recommend either within the AVMA or outside of the AVMA? Does the AVMA provide state-by-state guidelines on legal practice for FVGs?

We recommend visiting [ECFVG.avma.org](https://ecfvg.avma.org) for program information. For state-specific information, we suggest contacting their specific licensing board. AVMA maintains a list of state veterinary regulatory board contacts found here:

<https://www.avma.org/education/ecfvg/state-veterinary-regulatory-boards>

What is the best way to contact the AVMA or ECFVG for help on an individual basis?

The best way to contact ECFVG is to email ECFVG@avma.org. Emails are answered in the order they are received. Candidates will also be able to contact us through the updated ECFVG Candidate Portal, which will be launched this fall (2025).

An updated fee structure was recently introduced for 2026 CPE testing dates. What can you share with us that prompted this change?

We appreciate that the cost increase has an impact on all candidates. It was a necessary step to continue offering this program at the quality required for veterinary licensure in the United States. The prices for the 2026 CPE were set based on the current operational costs for running the exam. The costs incurred by the facilities to host the CPE have increased significantly over the past 5 years, with no fee increase. The increase in registration fees ensures that the CPE can continue to be offered by our collaborating testing sites while ensuring the highest level of assessment quality.

The AVMA ECFVG does not receive any revenue or additional administration fees from this pricing change. All increased funds go directly to the CPE hosting site to cover the costs of delivering the examination.

<https://www.avma.org/education/educational-commission-foreign-veterinary-graduates/fees-and-costs>

Dr. Kirk, thank you for your time and dedication to the AVMA and Foreign Veterinary Graduates. Any closing remarks?

We are excited for the future of ECFVG and want to emphasize the guiding principles of the program, which include:

- continuous improvement
- addressing feedback from current and previous candidates
- upholding the rigor of the exam
- staying contemporary with new technology
- maintaining best practices in assessments

Thank you for helping the AVMA educate your members and supporting Foreign Veterinary Graduates. – Dr. Marci Kirk

The AAEP would like to extend its gratitude to the members of the FVG Task Force: Drs. Cole Sciba, Raul Bras, Julie Wilson, Carol Clark, Luis Morales, Chris Elliott and Ernie Martinez. The FVG Task Force will sunset at the AAEP Convention 2025 and its charge will be passed on to the Membership Engagement Committee.

Resource Links:

AAEP FVG Website Resources: <https://aaep.org/guidelines-resources/veterinarian-resources/foreign-veterinary-school-graduate-resources/>

Recorded Webinars: <https://youtu.be/sz677otlgFg?si=tCkmulu6NTZE05p2>

The Foundation for the Horse Scholarships: <https://www.foundationforthehorse.org/fvg-scholarships/>

ECFVG Website: <https://www.avma.org/education/educational-commission-foreign-veterinary-graduates>