
Candidate Handbook for State Credentialing

for the
National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination
(NCMHCE)



NATIONAL BOARD FOR
CERTIFIED COUNSELORS



CENTER FOR
**CREDENTIALING
& EDUCATION**

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The Center for Credentialing & Education, Inc. (CCE) values diversity.
There are no barriers to credentialing on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation or national origin.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

All questions and requests for information about state licensure requirements should be directed to the state credentialing board to which you are applying. (Refer to insert for state-specific information.)

All questions and requests for information about the **NBCC examination program** should be directed to

Center for Credentialing & Education
3 Terrace Way
Greensboro, NC 27403
Voice: 336-482-2856
Fax: 336-482-2852
Web site: www.cce-global.org

All questions and requests for information about **examination scheduling** should be directed to

Pearson VUE
5601 Green Valley Dr.
Bloomington, MN 55437
Voice: 866-904-4432
Web site: www.pearsonvue.com

INTRODUCTION

This handbook provides information about the examination and registration process for the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE). It outlines the design and content of the examination and guides candidates through the examination process, from registration through test-taking. For your convenience, this handbook can be downloaded from www.nbcc.org.

ABOUT NBCC

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) is internationally recognized as a leading provider of counselor credentialing examinations. All 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia administer NBCC examinations as part of their counselor credentialing requirements. Based on its reputation for excellence in the examination field, NBCC has provided consultation services for examination and credential development to many other organizations in the United States and abroad, including NBCC's affiliate the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE). NBCC has contracted with CCE to oversee the examination process.

INDEPENDENT TESTING AGENCY

CCE has contracted with Pearson VUE to assist in the administration and scoring of the NCMHCE. Pearson VUE is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, with regional offices in Australia, China, Dubai, India, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

NONDISCRIMINATION POLICY

NBCC, CCE and Pearson VUE do not discriminate against candidates on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation or national origin.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Please check with your state board for specific information about licensure application procedures and any additional requirements. If you have previously achieved a passing score on an NBCC examination, contact your state board to determine if you are exam-exempt. You may be required to apply to your state board prior to sitting for the NCMHCE. Candidates may not schedule an examination with Pearson VUE until they have registered with CCE.

EXAMINATION ADMINISTRATION

The examination is delivered by computer at more than 250 Pearson VUE testing centers located throughout the United States. Generally, there are no application deadlines and a candidate may submit a registration form and fee at any time. Testing is normally during the first two full weeks of each month. The examination is administered by appointment only on dates authorized by CCE, Monday through Saturday beginning at 8 a.m. with the last appointment at 5:30 p.m. Please contact Pearson VUE for particular locations and details. Available dates will be indicated when scheduling your examination. Candidates are scheduled on a first-come-first-served basis. Therefore, candidates are advised to submit registration material approximately 60 days prior to the desired exam period.

HOLIDAYS

Examinations are not offered on the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day (July 4)
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday
- Christmas Eve Day (Limited hours)
- Christmas Day

REGISTERING FOR AN EXAMINATION

Examinees have the option to register online or via a paper registration form. Online registration is the preferred method, as it requires a shorter processing time.

To begin the online registration process, go to <http://procounselor.nbcc.org> and choose the "Register to Take a State Licensure Exam" tab. **Candidates cannot schedule an examination appointment with Pearson VUE until CCE has processed their registration.** Pearson will send e-mail notification to registered candidates with examination scheduling procedures.

To instead request a paper registration form, contact paperreg@cce-global.org. Be aware that a paper registration will require an extended processing time.

REGISTRATION EXPIRATION

A candidate who fails to test within six months after registering with CCE forfeits the registration and all fees paid to take the examination.

EXAMINATION REREGISTRATION

If you are unsuccessful in your examination attempt, you may reregister after a three-month waiting period by following the same registration process. The actual retest date will depend on the monthly testing schedule and site availability. A separate fee is required each time you register for the exam.

FEES AND REFUND POLICY

Candidates must submit the appropriate fee to register. Online payment must be made by credit card (VISA, MasterCard or American Express). Paper registration forms must include a cashier's check or money order payable to NBCC. (Personal checks are not accepted.) Examination fees are not refundable or transferable and expire if the registration process is not completed within one year.

SCHEDULING AN EXAMINATION

After you have completed the registration process and are approved to schedule your examination, you will receive an e-mail from Pearson VUE with your candidate ID number. There are two ways to schedule an appointment for the examination:

1. Online scheduling is the **preferred** method. To use this service:
 - Retrieve your candidate ID number from the e-mail.
 - Go to www.pearsonvue.com/cce and select "Create Account."
 - Follow the simple, step-by-step instructions to select your examination program and register for an examination.

Or

2. Telephone: Call Pearson VUE at 866-904-4432 to schedule an examination appointment. This toll-free number is answered from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Central time Monday through Friday. **You may experience extended hold times.**

When scheduling an examination, be prepared to confirm a location and a preferred date and time for testing, and to provide your client candidate ID number. Pearson VUE uses this number only for identification in maintaining your record. When you contact Pearson VUE to schedule an examination appointment, you will be notified of the time to report to the testing center. Please make a note of it, because you will **not** receive additional communications confirming your scheduled appointment.

TESTING CENTER LOCATIONS

Pearson VUE testing centers have been selected to provide accessibility to most candidates in all states and major metropolitan areas. A current listing of Pearson VUE testing centers, including addresses and driving directions, is available at Pearson VUE's Web site (www.pearsonvue.com). Specific address information will also be provided when a candidate schedules an examination appointment.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES

CCE and Pearson VUE comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and strive to ensure that no individual with a disability is deprived of the opportunity to take an examination solely by reason of that disability. With supporting documentation, CCE and Pearson VUE will provide reasonable accommodations for candidates with permanent or temporary disabilities or for whom English is a second language. Please note that accommodations must be pre-approved by your state board and/or CCE. Visit www.nbcc.org/directory for state-specific information on special accommodations.

Candidates testing with approved special accommodations must schedule their examination via Pearson VUE's toll-free number (800-466-0450) and inform Pearson VUE of the need for special accommodations. Please note, in order for an accommodation to be approved, the candidate must submit supporting documentation to accommodations@cce-global.org. Supporting documentation must be submitted on letterhead; dated within five years of the request; include the candidate's full name, date of birth, diagnosis and recommended accommodation(s); and be signed by a licensed, qualified professional.

Candidates should not schedule the exam without confirmation of the approved special accommodations. Candidates who schedule their examination date prior to confirmation of the approved special accommodations will forfeit the scheduled exam and the exam date will be rescheduled.

EXAMINATION APPOINTMENT CHANGES

You may reschedule an examination appointment by calling Pearson VUE at 866-904-4432. There is a \$50 fee to reschedule within seven days of your original appointment. You cannot reschedule less than 24 hours prior to your appointment.

MISSED APPOINTMENTS AND CANCELLATIONS

A candidate forfeits the examination registration and all fees paid to take the examination when he or she:

- Intends to reschedule an examination but fails to contact Pearson VUE at least 24 hours before the examination appointment.
- Arrives more than 15 minutes late for an examination.
- Fails to report for an examination appointment for **any reason**.

A separate registration and examination fee are required to reregister for the examination.

INCLEMENT WEATHER, POWER FAILURE OR EMERGENCY

In the event of inclement weather or unforeseen emergencies on the day of an examination, Pearson VUE will determine whether circumstances warrant the cancellation and subsequent rescheduling of an examination. The examination will usually be rescheduled if the testing center personnel are unable to open the facility. If power to a testing center is temporarily interrupted during an administration, your examination will restart where you left off and you may continue the examination.

Every attempt is made to administer the examination as scheduled; however, should an examination be cancelled at a testing center, all scheduled candidates will receive notification by e-mail or telephone regarding rescheduling or reregistration procedures.

EXAMINATION CONTENT

The simulations on the NCMHCE are designed to sample a broad area of competencies, not the recall of isolated facts. Therefore, the simulations assess clinical problem-solving abilities including conducting empirically supported and professionally indicated assessments and formation of symptom-based DSM diagnoses and clinically aligned treatment plans.

The examination consists of 10 clinical mental health counseling cases. Each case is divided into five to 10 sections classified as either Information Gathering (IG) or Decision Making (DM). One of the 10 simulations is included for field-test purposes; it is not scored and only used to generate item statistics for future simulations.

The examination covers the following areas:

Assessment and Diagnosis

Example assessment and diagnosis work behaviors include the following:

- Integrate client assessment and observational data;
- Identify precipitating problems or symptoms;
- Identify individual and/or relationship functioning; and
- Identify relevant family issues.

Counseling and Psychotherapy

Example counseling and psychotherapy work behaviors include the following:

- Inform client about ethical standards and practice;
- Clarify counselor/client roles;
- Implement individual counseling in relation to a plan of treatment; and
- Evaluate referral information.

Administration, Consultation and Supervision

Example administration, consultation and supervision work behaviors include the following:

- Maintain case notes, records and/or files;
- Determine if services meet clients' needs;
- Conduct professional communication; and
- Assist clients with obtaining services.

EXAMINATION FORMAT

A clinical mental health counselor is required to make important clinical decisions regarding the well-being of clients. Therefore, a clinical simulation examination more realistically assesses knowledge of such decision-making.

The NCMHCE is a clinical simulation examination. Each simulation consists of

three components: a scenario, Information Gathering (IG) sections and Decision Making (DM) sections. The scenario provides the setting and introductory client information (e.g., age, gender, presenting problem(s)).

In Information Gathering (IG) sections, you are expected to gather all relevant information for diagnosis and treatment of your client. This might include family background, status of physical health, previous experience in counseling, etc. Be sure to read all options before submitting any selections. To make a selection, click the circle next to a response and then click the corresponding "submit" button to obtain feedback. You should select all options that are appropriate. If you select more or fewer options than are appropriate, this will adversely impact your Information Gathering score.

Decision Making (DM) sections provide opportunities for making clinical judgments or decisions. IG and DM sections may be formatted in one of two ways:

1. **Single Best Option**—There may be more than one acceptable option, but one option is generally regarded as most acceptable.
2. **Multiple Options**—Several options are considered appropriate. These sections address decisions in which a combination of actions is required.

In the Decision Making section described as "Single Best Option," the instructions are to "CHOOSE ONLY ONE" option. You should not assume that your response is incorrect if you are directed to make another selection. The simulation examination format sometimes uses this direction. The "Multiple Options" type of Decision Making section will have instructions to "SELECT AS MANY AS INDICATED." When making a selection, click the circle next to a response and then click the corresponding "submit" button to obtain feedback. If you fail to click the circle and submit button, you will not receive information to determine whether to proceed to the next section.

The procedure for taking the NCMHCE is different from that of multiple-choice examinations. Each simulation is identified by a number and the client's name, and each section by a letter.

SAMPLE CLINICAL SIMULATION

The following is an example of an IG and DM section as it might appear in a problem on the NCMHCE. Remember that in an actual problem, there will be five to 10 sections and four to 14 selections per section (depending on the nature of the section). The responses in the shaded right-hand column are uncovered here. In the actual examination, you will not be able to see the response unless you select and submit the corresponding option.

Simulation 1 - Ms. Wagner: You are a clinical mental health counselor in a small group private practice. Ms. Wagner is a 37-year-old female who has scheduled an appointment with you. She states, "My primary care physician said you probably could help me." For the past three months, Ms. Wagner has been feeling stressed, had problems sleeping, and has not been able to focus on her work.

Section A- Ms. Wagner

During the first session, which of the following would be most important to assess in order to formulate a DSM diagnosis? (**SELECT AS MANY** as you consider indicated in this section.)

A-1.	Mental status	A-1.	Unremarkable **
A-2.	Stressors	A-2.	Single parent of a 10-year-old girl, elementary teacher at a new school, and father had a heart attack 3 months ago**
A-3.	Previous counseling	A-3.	None**
A-4.	Recreation activities	A-4.	Not relevant at this time**
A-5.	Family history of mental illness	A-5.	None**

Seven to nine more choices would appear here on a complete simulation.

Section D- Ms. Wagner

Based on the information obtained about Ms. Wagner, what is the *DSM* diagnosis?

(**CHOOSE ONLY ONE** unless you are directed to "Make another selection in this section.")

D-1. Generalized anxiety disorder D-1.

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

D-2. Major depressive disorder,
single episode D-2.

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

D-3. Adjustment disorder with
depressed mood D-3.

Indicated.**

D-4. Persistent depressive disorder
(dysthymia) D-4.

Not indicated.
Make another selection in this section.**

This section might have one to two more alternatives on a complete simulation.

PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION

Your primary objective in preparing for the examination is to pass. Other objectives such as learning new material and reviewing old material are critical to this objective. Begin by developing your strategy for success.

A good study strategy includes preparation. To prepare, determine first what you need to learn, choose your study materials, and select a quiet, comfortable place that allows you to focus. Before you begin, check to make sure you have everything you need. Try to avoid interruptions.

Developing a study plan will allow you to learn the most as you study. Include setting goals in your study plan. Review what you have studied as often as possible. The more you review, the more you will retain.

TAKING THE EXAMINATION

Your examination will be delivered by computer at a Pearson VUE testing center. You do not need advanced computer experience or typing skills to take the examination. (You will be required to select answer choices and in some instance scroll to the end of the current page using a mouse.) On the day of your examination appointment, please plan to arrive at the testing center early. For your convenience, signs indicating Pearson VUE testing center check-in will be posted at the testing center.

A candidate who arrives more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time will not be admitted and will forfeit their registration fee.

IDENTIFICATION

To gain admission to the testing center, you must present two forms of identification, one with a photograph. The name on your registration and on your photo ID **must** be identical. Both forms of identification must be current and include your current name and signature. You will be required to sign a roster for verification of identity.

Acceptable forms of photo identification include a current driver's license, a current state identification card, a current passport or a current military identification card. Employment ID cards, student ID cards and any type of temporary identification are **not** acceptable as the primary form of identification.

You must have proper identification to gain admission to the testing center. Failure to provide appropriate identification at the time of the examination is considered a missed appointment, and a refund of your examination fee will not be granted.

SECURITY

NBCC, CCE and Pearson VUE maintain the highest degree of administration and security standards. The testing center is continuously monitored by audio and video surveillance equipment for security purposes.

The following security procedures apply during the examination:

- No cameras, notes, tape recorders, personal digital assistants (PDAs), pagers or cellphones are allowed in the testing room.
- No calculators are permitted.
- No guests, visitors or family members are allowed in the testing room or reception areas.
- No personal items, valuables or weapons should be brought to the testing center. A locker is provided for storing keys, wallets and cellphones. Pearson VUE is not responsible for items left in the reception areas.

EXAMINATION RESTRICTIONS

- Writing materials will be provided during check-in.
- You must return all writing materials to the proctor at the completion of testing, or you will not receive a score report. No documents or notes of any kind may be removed from the examination room.
- No questions concerning the content of the exam may be asked during the examination.
- You may take a break when you choose, but you will not be given additional time to test.
- Eating, drinking or smoking is not permitted in the testing center.

MISCONDUCT

Individuals who engage in any of the following conduct may be dismissed from the examination and forfeit their scores and fees:

- Creating a disturbance or being abusive or otherwise uncooperative;
- Displaying and/or using electronic communications equipment such as pagers, cellphones or PDAs;
- Giving or receiving help or being suspected of doing so;
- Attempting to record examination questions or make notes;
- Attempting to take the examination for someone else; or
- Being observed with notes, books or other aids.

COPYRIGHTED EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

All examination questions are the copyrighted property of NBCC. It is forbidden under federal copyright law to copy, reproduce, record, distribute, display or share these examination questions by any means, in whole or in part. Those who do so may be subject to severe civil and criminal penalties.

BEGINNING THE EXAMINATION

After your identification has been confirmed, you will be directed to a testing carrel. The system will monitor you via video throughout your examination session. Following the examination instructions, you will begin the timed examination. When you begin the exam, the first page displayed is the nondisclosure agreement (NDA). Candidates must agree to the terms of the agreement to proceed with the exam.

Please read carefully and click "Yes" if you agree to the terms of the NCMHCE. You will have five minutes to agree to the NDA, or the examination will terminate.

INSTRUCTIONS

After you agree to the terms of the NDA, you will click the "Next" button and arrive at the tutorial for the examination. You have 10 minutes to review how to navigate and respond to the examination items. When you finish the tutorial, you may begin the exam. You will have three hours to complete this examination.

EXAMINATION SCREEN

Two windows appear on the screen, the simulation and options windows. A scroll bar is available when necessary to view all text in either window. The **scenario window** displays the current simulation on the left side of your screen. Scenarios are brief paragraphs that provide preliminary information about a client. The **options window** on the right-side of your screen displays the current IG or DM section, which is composed of an item and four to 14 selections (options). Each options window will also provide the candidate with specific instructions about whether to "CHOOSE ONLY ONE" response in the section or to "SELECT AS MANY" responses as appropriate to gather information about the client.

The **case progress review screen** is located in the top right-hand part of the screen. Selecting this box opens a window to review previous sections and feedback provided for previously selected options.

After a candidate selects and submits an option, he or she cannot reconsider and "unselect" it, since the information from that option has been revealed.

In sections where a candidate is instructed to "SELECT AS MANY," the candidate should select all of the options believed appropriate or necessary. Click the corresponding "Submit" button, read the feedback for each of the submitted options, then click "Next" at the bottom right of the screen to continue to the next section. A dialog box will appear requesting that the candidate confirm he or she wishes to continue to the next section and warning that returning to this section to make additional submissions will not be possible. Selecting "Yes" takes the candidate to the next section of the client simulation.

In sections where a candidate is instructed to "CHOOSE ONLY ONE unless directed to make another selection," the candidate should carefully review each option and then choose the best option following the procedure described above. A dialog box will then appear presenting the results for the choice. The result will either request that the candidate select another response or move to the next section or simulation.

FOLLOWING THE EXAMINATION

After completing the examination, candidates are asked to complete a short evaluation of their examination experience. Then, candidates are instructed to report to the examination proctor to receive their unofficial score report. Your score report will indicate "pass" or "fail."

The unofficial score report will include your name, examination identification number, and a report of your score and how you performed on Information Gathering and Decision Making sections of the test.

After verifying that you have abided by testing policies and procedures during the administration of your exam, CCE will report your official scores to your licensing organization. Passing the examination does not guarantee

licensure. NBCC, CCE and Pearson VUE reserve the right to withdraw or void official scores if it is found a candidate engaged in misconduct, wrongfully sat for the examination, or violated the regulations of the respective organizations. Scores are reported in written form only and not over the telephone, by e-mail or fax.

PASS/FAIL SCORE DETERMINATION

Examination scores are only determined by an individual's performance on the exam. Neither individual scores nor passing scores are compared or influenced by the performance of other test takers. Test scores will not be modified based on work history, quality of clinical work, or other personal or professional variables (e.g., taking the test multiple times, belonging to honor societies, or holding other professional credentials).

The passing score for the version of the examination you were administered was established prior to administration of the examination. The IG and DM passing scores for each form of the NCMHCE were set by subject matter experts. The exact passing score may vary from one form of the examination to another depending on the scored simulations included. The examination committee follows predetermined guidelines when selecting the simulations for each examination form.

In order to assist candidates to evaluate their performance on the examination, score reports display an examinee's total scores for both IG and DM sections. Examinees must obtain a passing score on both the IG and DM areas of the examination.

The total score for Information Gathering and Decision Making represent the sum correct points for IG and DM for all nine scored simulations on your examination. As previously discussed in this handbook, this examination includes one unscored (field-test) simulation used to generate item statistics.

SCORES CANCELLED BY NBCC, CCE OR PEARSON VUE

NBCC, CCE and Pearson VUE are responsible for the validity and integrity of the scores they report. NBCC, CCE and Pearson VUE reserve the right to void or withhold examination results if, upon investigation, violation of regulations is discovered.

IF YOU PASS THE EXAMINATION

Your official scores will be forwarded to your state licensure board within 30 days of the end of the testing cycle. Candidates who pass the examination should follow their state board requirements for licensure.

IF YOU DO NOT PASS THE EXAMINATION

Candidates may take the examination once every three months. You can reregister by submitting a new examination registration with the appropriate fee.

APPEALING EXAMINATION RESULTS

Examinees may appeal exam score results. To be considered, appeals must follow the guidelines below.

Administration Appeals

Candidates may base their appeal on:

- Proctoring errors (e.g., proctor failed to check candidates in properly, improper materials in the testing area).
- Site conditions (e.g., distractions, lighting failures).
- Computer failure (e.g., error messages, screen failures).

In order to submit an administration-based appeal, the candidate must immediately report the issue to the testing center staff and file an incident report while on site. Before considering the appeal, CCE must be able to confirm the issue filed in the report through system logs or Pearson staff. If properly submitted, examinees should expect to receive a decision regarding administration errors within 60 days.

Special Exam Accommodations Appeals

An individual can only submit an appeal of accommodations if initially approved for them. For the appeal to be considered, the candidate must file a detailed incident report while on site at the Pearson Testing Center, showing that the approved accommodations were not provided. If properly submitted, examinees should expect to receive a decision regarding special exam accommodations within 60 days.

Content Appeals

In order for the appeal to be considered, the candidate must provide a summary of the item in question and complete primary or secondary references (citations alone are not sufficient) to support the appeal. Primary and secondary source data comes from the pool of knowledge generally acknowledged by counseling professionals (e.g., commonly referenced in research or textbooks). All content appeals must be reviewed by subject matter experts during secure committee meetings; therefore, content appeal decisions may take up to eight months.

Filing an Appeal

To be considered, an exam score appeal must:

- Be submitted within one week of the exam.
- Be e-mailed to appeal@cce-global.org. (Appeals are not accepted by telephone or other e-mail addresses.)
- Include the candidate's full legal name, NBCC/CCE ID number, Pearson candidate ID number, test date and testing center location.

In addition, administration appeals must be accompanied by a Pearson Incident Report. Administration appeals will not be considered without a properly filed Pearson Incident Report.

Issues Not Valid for Appeal

Candidates are not eligible to appeal exam results based on the following:

- Testing errors on the part of the candidate (e.g., failing to scroll through all possible alternatives or unintentionally clicking an item);
- Test anxiety;
- Late arrival for the testing appointment;
- Failure to follow examination instructions as provided;
- Cut score determination; and
- The construction or criterion-related validity of the examination.

FAILING TO REPORT FOR AN EXAMINATION

A candidate who fails to report for an examination forfeits the registration and all fees paid to take the examination. A completed registration form and examination fee are required to reregister for the examination.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information about exam candidates and their examination results are considered confidential. Studies and reports concerning candidates will contain no personally identifiable information unless authorized by the candidate.

SCORE VERIFICATION

Candidates may request score verification for themselves or a third party by submitting a completed Score Verification Request form and payment. This form is available at www.cce-global.org.

SELECTED REFERENCES

NBCC does not endorse any particular study materials for the NCMHCE. The following references are presented as potentially helpful options in preparing for the NCMHCE. NCMHCE performance enhancement is neither implied nor expressed.

American Counseling Association, (2014). *ACA Code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.) Washington, DC: Author.

Corey, G. (2012). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (9th ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Hood, A.B., & Johnson, R.W. (2014). *Assessment in counseling: A guide to the use of psychological assessment procedures* (5th ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Wiger, D. E. (2012). *The psychotherapy documentation primer* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.

NBCC has developed a preparation guide for the NCMHCE that includes a five-simulation sample examination with directions for scoring, explanations for each choice, and additional references. This guide can be purchased for \$44.95 at www.nbcc.org.