

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

NASW Standards for

Continuing  
Professional  
Education



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Professional  
Education

## **National Association of Social Workers**

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## Contents

- 4 Standards for Continuing Professional Education
- 7 Introduction
- 9 Continuing Education and the Social Work Profession
- 10 Goals and Objectives of the Standards
  
- 11 Standards for Social Workers
- 11 Standard 1. Personal Responsibility
- 12 Standard 2. Continuing Personal Education
  
- 14 Standards for Assessing Providers of  
Continuing Professional Education
- 14 Standard 3. Development and Improvement
- 15 Standard 4. Statement of Mission and Philosophy
- 15 Standard 5. Organized Educational Experience
- 18 Standard 6. Responsible Administrative Practices
- 19 Standard 7. Collaborate with the Community
  
- 21 Standards for Administrators
- 21 Standard 8. Implement Agency Policies
- 22 Standard 9. Leadership

# Standards

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## for Continuing Professional Education

### Standards for Social Workers

#### **Standard 1. Personal Responsibility**

Social workers shall assume personal responsibility for continuing professional education.

#### **Standard 2. 48 Hours Every Two Years**

Social workers shall complete 48 hours of continuing professional education every two years.

#### **Standard 3. Development and Improvement**

Social workers shall contribute to the development and improvement of continuing professional education.

### Standards for assessing providers of continuing professional education

#### **Standard 4. Statement of Mission and Philosophy**

Providers of continuing professional education shall have a written statement of mission and philosophy that reflects the values and ethics of the social work profession.

#### **Standard 5. Organized Educational Experience**

Providers of continuing professional education shall plan an organized educational experience.

#### **Standard 6. Responsible Administrative Practices**

Providers of continuing professional education shall conform to responsible administrative practices.

**Standard 7. Collaborate with the Community**

Providers of continuing professional education shall collaborate with major stakeholders in the community.

**Standards for Administrators**

**Standard 8. Implement Agency Policies**

Administrators shall implement agency policies in support of continuing professional education.

**Standard 9. Provide Leadership**

Administrators shall provide leadership for continuing professional education.

Approved by NASW Board of Directors June 28, 2002.





## Introduction

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The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) views continuing education as an essential activity for ensuring quality social work services for clients. By consistent participation in educational opportunities beyond the basic, entry-level professional degree, social workers are able to maintain and increase their proficiency in service delivery: New knowledge is acquired, skills are refined, professional attitudes are reinforced, and individual's lives are changed.

Continuing education is a self-directed process, which requires social workers to assume responsibility for their own professional development. However, with the rapid growth of knowledge, coupled with the upsurge in continuing education opportunities for social workers across the country, NASW recognized the need for standards to guide and facilitate social workers' involvement in continuing education. This document, *Standards for Continuing Professional Education*, was developed to meet that need.

The standards provide guidance to social workers who want to match their continuing education activities with professional expectations. The standards also serve as a resource to assist social workers in the selection and provision of continuing education. In light of these broad purposes, the standards are intended for use by individual practitioners, by providers of continuing education, and by agency administrators who have responsibility for social work staff.

For the practitioner the standards encourage self-assessment with regard to continuing education activities and provide the means to assess the

qualifications of those offering continuing education. For the provider the standards set professional expectations to help plan continuing education events and to help ensure that continuing education offerings are responsive to the learning needs of social workers. For the administrator the standards establish policy and practice guidelines for social work staff's involvement in continuing education.

It is expected that all members of NASW will adhere to the *Standards for Continuing Professional Education*, and it is hoped that the standards will stimulate the establishment of programs to recognize social workers for their commitment to continuing education. Most states have established continuing education requirements for social work licensing, and some NASW chapters have taken steps to establish continuing education approval programs. These programs help ensure that continuing education offerings meet professional expectations for educational quality and breadth.

*Social workers are reminded that this document represents professional standards. Social workers who hold state licenses or other credentials and/or are required from employers and managed care companies to complete a certain amount of continuing education credits are reminded to refer to those entities for guidance and requirements.*

## Continuing Education and the Social Work Profession

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Belief in the client's right to have knowledgeable and skillful assistance provides the basis for the social worker's participation in continuing education. A commitment to continuing education also is grounded in an ethical principle articulated in the *NASW Code of Ethics*: "Social workers practice within their area of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise." Continuing education further provides the social worker with the opportunity to acquire new and necessary information; demonstrate a conscious self-directed and continuous effort toward personal and professional development; strengthen qualifications for professional licensure, certification, or registration; meet changing career demands; and explore new careers in social work.

Content areas appropriate for continuing education include educational levels and methods of intervention, such as individual counseling, psychotherapy, family treatment, group work, and community organization; administration, management, and supervision; consultation; planning and policy development; teaching and educational methods; research; social problems; advocacy, social change, and social action; cultural diversity and ethics; and specialized services and treatment.

## Goals and Objectives of the Standards

The goals of the standards are to

- maintain and enhance the quality of services that social workers provide
- establish professional expectations so that social workers can monitor, be responsible for, evaluate, and improve their continuing education
- assist social workers in their selection of continuing education offerings of assured quality
- enhance the quality of continuing education for social workers
- facilitate opportunities for social workers to participate in continuing education
- help facilitate and guide program planning.

Toward these goals, the standards also seek to

- define and delineate the various types of continuing education
- establish guidelines on the *minimum* number of hours social workers should devote to each type of continuing education
- facilitate a guide for continuing education providers
- establish guidelines for social workers to use in assessing providers of continuing education
- describe ways providers of continuing education can meet social workers' professional expectations
- describe ways agency administrators can promote continuing education for social work staff
- describe ways social workers can increase continuing social work competence to improve the lives of the individuals they serve.

## Standards for Social Workers

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The standards and guidelines presented in this section are to assist social workers in determining whether they meet professional expectations for continuing education. Building on a foundation of academic preparation for practice, social workers may select from a variety of learning experiences to ensure the timeliness and practical value of their knowledge and skills. This section identifies the types of learning experiences available to social workers and emphasizes that continuing education is a self-directed process, requiring commitments to one's own professional growth, to the advancement of social work, and to improving behavioral outcomes for individuals' served.

### **Standard 1. Personal Responsibility**

Social workers shall assume personal responsibility for continuing professional education.

#### **Interpretation**

The social worker has a threefold responsibility for determining the content and course of continuing education: a responsibility to clients, to self, and to the profession. This responsibility can be demonstrated by

- identification of one's own learning needs
- self-direction in meeting one's own learning needs through pursuit of and participation in relevant continuing education activities
- active involvement in the learning process afforded by each continuing education experience
- assessment of knowledge gained from continuing education and application of that knowledge to practice.

## **Standard 2. Continuing Personal Education**

Social workers shall complete 48 hours of continuing professional education every two years.

### **Interpretation**

In calculating the 48 hours of continuing education over a two-year period, the following guidelines apply.

Types of continuing education include

- formally organized learning events
- professional meetings/organized learning experiences
- individual professional activities.

In a learning situation, an instructional hour is 60 minutes in length. When counting hours, the following exclusions apply: travel time and meeting time devoted to business, committee activities, entertainment, or social activities such as coffee hours, luncheons, dinners, and so forth. (Time for luncheon or dinner presentations that are an integral part of the educational experience may be included.)

The three broad types of continuing education described below are necessary to help the social worker achieve a well-balanced learning experience. Although there are factors, such as availability and accessibility, that may interfere with a social worker's ability to participate in events across all three types, whenever possible, the social worker should map out a continuing education plan that encompasses all three. The Continuing Education Record provided in this document may be used to record activities in each type and to monitor progress toward achievement of a well-balanced learning experience.

**Formally organized learning events** involve interaction with a teacher for the purpose of accomplishing specific learning objectives. Courses, workshops, practice-oriented seminars, staff development, and training activities offered by accredited programs of social work education, NASW chapters, and other providers of continuing education are examples of events. Distance education that uses such technology as interactive audio or video, computer or other electronic technologies and that also includes interaction between the learner and the instructor and among learners also qualifies for credit. Such events provide social workers with the opportunity to integrate theoretical and practice components of all forms of social work, including social change and action, administration and supervision, and planning and policy development.

**Professional meetings and other forms of organized learning experiences** for social workers involve formally structured discussions among professionals about professional issues, whereby participants increase their awareness of new developments in social work and related fields. Conferences, symposiums, and panel presentations sponsored by social work or allied organizations are examples of activities.

**Variety of self-directed professional study activities and growth experiences** include writing papers and books for presentation or publication; making presentations on major professional issues or programs; reading professional journals and books; preparing for initial consultation, teaching, or training assignments; and engaging in independent study, research, or tutorial projects.

## Standards for Assessing Providers of Continuing Professional Education

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The standards and guidelines in this section are directed to the social worker who wants to be an informed continuing education consumer and to the provider who wants to meet professional expectations for continuing education. The social worker can use this section as a guide in assessing the provider's qualifications before enrollment in any given offering. The provider can use this section as a tool for self-evaluation, leading to continuing education of higher quality for social workers.

### **Standard 3. Development and Improvement**

Social workers shall contribute to the development and improvement of continuing professional education.

#### **Interpretation**

To help ensure the quality of continuing education, social workers need to contribute to the development of continuing professional education activities within their community or state. Contributions may take the form of

- active participation on a continuing education committee sponsored by NASW or an accredited program of social work education
- recommendations to providers of continuing education on topics that could meet social workers' specific learning needs or that reflect current social work practice issues
- communication with providers of continuing education on additional ways they could meet social workers' expectations and educational needs after announcements about upcoming events or after participation in the events
- submission of written evaluations at the close



- of the continuing education activities, including recommendations for future activities
- direct provision of continuing education in areas of expertise.

#### **Standard 4. Statement of Mission and Philosophy**

Providers of continuing professional education shall have a written statement of mission and philosophy that reflects the values and ethics of the social work profession.

#### **Interpretation**

By examining the provider's statement of mission and philosophy, the social work consumer can determine the direction and leadership afforded by the provider. A clearly articulated statement serves as the basis for the provider's educational goals and objectives. In addition to the values and ethics of the social work profession, the statement should reflect the broad tasks of social work education: promoting quality instruction, knowledge, and skills building and improving service provision.

#### **Standard 5. Organized Educational Experience**

Providers of continuing professional education shall plan an organized educational experience.

#### **Interpretation**

When planning a continuing education activity (face to face or distance education) for social workers, the provider needs to consider six essential program elements. The guidelines that follow delineate those elements and establish respective professional expectations of providers. The social work consumer, in turn, can use these guidelines as the basis for inquiry about a provider's qualifications, leading to better decisions about which offerings to pursue.

- **Program Development**—Adequate and responsive continuing education program development requires interaction among sponsoring administrators, the instructor or educational leader, and potential social work consumers. The provider needs to involve social workers in the identification of learning needs, in the selection and development of educational events to meet those needs, and in the establishment of appropriate evaluation mechanisms. Involvement of social workers with content expertise and an understanding of the educational objectives are recommended as well.
- **Program Content**—Continuing education events for social workers should clearly relate to social work practice, theory, and methodology; to the level of social work education; to social policy; or to administration, planning, and research related to human services. As a guide for participation, learning objectives and content designed to meet those objectives should be specified for each event. The way in which the content will meet the learning needs of social workers also should be made clear. Such information should be provided on promotional materials or upon request.
- **Participants**—Selection of participants for continuing education events must not discriminate by reason of gender, age, race, ethnic background, sexual orientation, physical abilities, or other characteristics. Promotional materials should state clearly the educational level of the social worker for whom the event is geared but not limited to, as well as any prerequisites.
- **Program Format and Instructional Methodology**— The provider should be able to demonstrate that the format and methods selected for continuing education were influenced

by contemporary adult learning theory; the identified learning needs of the participants; and the learning objectives, the educational content, and the size and composition of the participant group. Methodologies need to be diverse and encourage the active participation of the learner in the educational process. A variety of teaching techniques should be considered; any assignments, such as readings or structured exercises, should be related to the conceptual content, and any audio-visual resources should be used in a planned manner.

- **Qualified Instruction**—The sponsor of a continuing education event must make sure that the instructor, speaker, or educational leader is qualified. Individual providers have responsibility for offering only those events for which they are qualified. Specific qualifications include
  - competence in the subject matter
  - ability to transmit the educational content to the participants' understanding of continuing education objectives
  - knowledge and skill in instructional methodology, learning processes, and the use of emotionally laden material
  - capacity for self-evaluation and modification of future offerings in response to evaluations conducted by self, sponsor, and participants
  - maintenance of an appropriate certification, credential, or license for subject matter.
- **Program Evaluation**—Formal evaluation of each continuing education event is essential for maintaining or improving the quality and effectiveness of future events. Measures of evaluation need to be established during the planning phase and linked directly with the event's learning objectives. Two distinct but related measures of evaluation may be

appropriate. The first is the instructor's, sponsor's, and participants' assessment of the event with respect to content, format, methodology, instruction, and facilities.

The second is assessment of the knowledge acquired by participants and is based on

- demonstration of a taught skill
- an oral or written test
- a project or report
- a self-assessment checklist
- another instrument designed to collect data on changes in participant knowledge or performance attributed to the educational experience.

The instructor and sponsor together should review the evaluation outcome and revise subsequent events accordingly.

#### **Standard 6. Responsible Administrative Practices**

Providers of continuing professional education shall conform to responsible administrative practices.

#### **Interpretation**

A quality continuing education activity (face to face or distance education) must be built on administrative practices that facilitate the learning experience and assure recognition for continuing education participation. The guidelines that follow illustrate ways this standard can be met by the continuing education provider and assessed by the social work consumer. Administrative practices include

- designation of a director for the continuing education program and a contact person for each offering
- provision of accessible and adequate space, physical facilities, and support services conducive to learning

- a system, established by the continuing education sponsor, for responsible recruitment, selection, supervision, and evaluation of instructors and/or educational leaders
- a system for maintaining and verifying records on each continuing education event, including financial accounting, registration and cumulative attendance records, course outlines, objectives, bibliographies, and completed evaluation forms
- establishment in advance of the event of performance requirements for the awarding of relevant continuing education recognition or certificates of recognition to participants including, at a minimum, requirements for attendance (at least 80 percent of the instructional hours for conferences) and evaluation
- a system for making records of attendance available to the participants of continuing education events
- accreditation of the continuing education event by NASW or its chapters in the states that have established a provider approval program.

### **Standard 7. Collaborate with the Community**

Providers of continuing professional education shall collaborate with major stakeholders in the community. Major stakeholders include, but are not limited to, NASW chapters, local accredited programs of social work education, social work state licensure boards, social work employers, consumer groups, and allied professionals.

#### **Interpretation**

To facilitate implementation of this standard, it is expected that NASW chapters and local accredited programs of social work education will take a lead role in establishing mechanisms for

collaboration between each other and among other stakeholders and providers. By working together providers are able to refine their individual offerings and also contribute to the development of a comprehensive program of continuing social work education. Suggested mechanisms for collaboration include

- joint committees on continuing education
- advisory panels with cross-cutting expertise on specialized subject matters
- cosponsorship of assessment studies to determine the learning needs of social workers
- exchanges of faculty and staff for the purposes of training, consultation, and instruction
- cooperative efforts in publicizing continuing education events.

## Standards for Administrators

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The standards and guidelines presented in this section are directed to agency administrators who have responsibility for social work staff. Whereas administrators may or may not be social workers themselves, continuing education remains an important component of staff development. Few agencies, however, have explicit policies and practices that facilitate and encourage staff participation in continuing education. The standards that follow are intended to help administrators establish such agency policy and practices.

### **Standard 8 Implement Agency Policies**

Administrators shall implement agency policies in support of continuing professional education.

#### **Interpretation**

In achieving this standard, agency administrators need to assess whether there are adequate policies that focus on continuing education for professional staff. Areas that need to be examined or developed in policy include

- systematic yearly assessment of the total social work staff's learning needs
- systematic yearly assessment of each individual social worker's learning needs
- provision of time for social work staff to participate in continuing education activities, based on the agency's assessment of learning needs
- establishment of flexible work schedules for social work staff members who want to pursue a plan for continuing education
- whenever possible, reimbursement in total or in part for social work staff's continuing education expenses

- special recognition for social work staff members who complete 48 hours of continuing education within a two-year period.

### **Standard 9. Leadership**

Administrators shall provide leadership for continuing professional education.

#### **Interpretation**

A number of agency practices can be established by administrators to fulfill the intent of this standard. These practices include

- forming an agency task force or committee on continuing education to share responsibility for establishing or reviewing relevant agency policies, assessing social work staff learning needs, and making recommendations on staff participation in specific continuing education activities
- publicizing continuing education for social work staff, including staff development opportunities within and outside the agency
- encouraging social work staff to share information routinely with one another about their involvement in continuing education and the knowledge and skills gained from such involvement
- establishing a system that allows social work staff to have included in their personnel files records of their participation in continuing education
- encouraging social work staff to attend continuing education activities that appear particularly relevant to agency organizational needs and to provide feedback on the quality of offerings after participation
- identifying training that will enhance social workers' skills to improve the behavioral outcomes for individuals served.



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

Continuing Education Record

Total: 48 Hours every Two Years

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Start Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Finish Date

**Formally Organized Learning Events**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS IN ACTIVITIES** \_\_\_\_\_



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\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Start Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Finish Date

**Professional Meetings/Organized Learning Experiences**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS IN ACTIVITIES** \_\_\_\_\_



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

Continuing Education Record

Total: 48 Hours every Two Years

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Start Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Two-Year Period: Finish Date

**Individual Professional Activities**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sponsor or Cosponsor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Title or Description of Learning Activity

\_\_\_\_\_  
Location

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

HOURS OF PARTICIPATION \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS IN ACTIVITIES** \_\_\_\_\_





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