

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of
Social Workers

**Continuing Professional
Education Policy**

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Policy initially developed 1996. Revised: 1998, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

INTRODUCTION

The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW) is the regulatory body and professional association for registered social workers. The vision is *Excellence in Social Work*. The NLASW is responsible for regulating the practice of social work under provincial legislation titled the *Social Workers Act (2010)*.

Registered social workers in every field of practice are committed to offering the highest quality professional services to the public. This commitment is expressed, in part, through the endorsement of the principle of lifelong learning and continuing professional education (CPE) which is a cornerstone of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics (2005) and the CASW Guidelines for Ethical Practice.

According to the CASW Code of Ethics (2005), “social workers have a responsibility to maintain professional proficiency, to continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills, and to apply new knowledge in practice commensurate with their level of professional education, skill and competency...” (p. 8).

The National Association of Social Workers Standards for Continuing Professional Education (2003) identifies the following as the purpose of CPE:

Continuing education 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 should take into account the social worker’s education level and can include 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.

The range of content areas reflects the range of activities included in the scope of practice of the profession and the definition of social work as stated in the *Social Workers Act (2010)*:

“social work” means the assessment, remediation and prevention of psycho-social problems and the enhancement of social, psycho-social functioning and well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities by

- (i) Providing direct counselling and therapy services to a client,
- (ii) Developing, promoting and delivering human service programs, including those done in association with other professions,
- (iii) Contributing to the development and improvement of social policy, and
- (iv) Conducting research in the science, technique and practice of social work.

CPE POLICY BACKGROUND

The CPE Policy was originally developed by the Continuing Professional Education Committee in 1996 in accordance with the Social Workers Association Act (1992), the Regulations of the Act, and the CASW Standards of Practice (1995). Following the initial implementation of the policy in 1996, it has been consistently reviewed and revised incorporating feedback to reflect the changing context of practice. A process of random audits of this policy began in 2007 and is conducted annually at the time of renewal of social work registration. The audit has confirmed that registered social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador are committed to lifelong learning. The average number of credits accumulated by registered social workers exceeds the requirements of the policy.

CPE POLICY STATEMENT

This policy is based upon an expansive and holistic vision of CPE. It endorses the principle of life-long learning and it recognizes that CPE also takes place outside of formal, structured events. This policy recognizes the fact that while registered social workers learn in their day to day practice, continuing education should involve activities whereby learning is the major focus of the activity. CPE credits reflect the learning associated with an activity as opposed to the hours associated with that activity.

The policy statement is as follows:

*Registered social workers are required to complete a minimum of 40 continuing professional education credits each registration year. Registered social workers are required to attain at least 20 CPE credits for participating in activities in the **required credits** category. The remaining balance of CPE credits may come from either the **required** or the **elective credits** category.*

Required credits are obtained through structured activities such as conferences, courses, workshops, the provision of professional education services, and field instruction. Knowledge acquired is considered necessary for the profession and transferrable across a range of practice settings. It is important to recognize that although the completion of learning activities may be mandatory for one's employment, this does not necessarily mean that it qualifies as a required credit.

Elective credits tend to be more informal, flexible or specific to one's employment. **Elective credits** refer to learning that takes place through such activities as reading journals and books, mentoring, committee work, and offering public presentations. Elective credits may also be obtained by attending structured learning events such as seminars and workshops which are focused upon material which is unique to the place of employment and not transferrable to other practice settings.

Each registered social worker is responsible for managing their CPE. Beyond the responsibilities discussed in the CASW Code of Ethics, the responsibilities of registered social workers are:

- To complete 40 CPE credits each registration year (March-February) in a manner that is consistent with the policy,
- To maintain a personal file that contains documentation verifying all CPE activities in which one has been involved,
- To participate in the random audit of CPE credits if selected,
- To make a written request for proration, waiver, or deferral of CPE credit hours if the minimum 40 credit hours has not been attained.

THE CREDIT SYSTEM

Required Credits

A registered social worker **must** obtain 20 or more hours per year of CPE credits that fall within the following activities:

Courses: An academic course that enhances or relates to social work practice, of at least 36 hours, completed at an accredited university. For activities that are classified as a course but not completed at an accredited university, it may be possible for registered social workers to claim these credits under workshops.

Conferences: Events of one to five days wherein a common theme is explored, possibly through the use of different presenters discussing a variety of topics of relevance to social work practice. Generally, the goal of a conference is to increase a professional's knowledge of the thematic area.

Field Instruction: Offering field instruction to social work students enrolled in accredited social work degree programs. Field Instruction means "primary responsibility for education, evaluation and recommendation of grade. This includes being available and involved, and coordinating the student's total field experience" (BSW Policies and Procedures for Field Internships, School of Social Work, Memorial University of Newfoundland 2008).

Regardless of the number of students per field instructor, a registered social worker may claim 40 CPE credits for field instruction in the first year and may claim up to 20 CPE credits for each subsequent year as a field instructor. Credits are claimed in the registration year in which the field instruction is completed (i.e. field instruction occurring during the January – April semester is submitted in the following registration year). If a registered social worker is sharing field instruction with another registered social worker, then half of the CPE credits (i.e. 20 CPE credits in the first year of shared field instruction; 10 CPE credits for each subsequent year of shared field instruction) may be claimed.

Workshops: An educational event revolving around one topic with set learning objectives. Workshops focus on increasing skills in a particular area of social work practice. Workshops can encompass varying lengths of time and may be offered intermittently or in a series.

Professional Education Delivery: Registered social workers may claim a **maximum of 10 CPE credits** annually for the preparation and delivery of conferences or workshops that are intended to promote the professional development of social workers and/or other professionals. CPE credits cannot be earned for subsequent presentations of the same material unless the content is substantially modified. Time spent authoring a professional article for publication is included in this category.

Elective Credits

Registered social workers may claim a maximum of 20 CPE elective credits a year. These 20 credits may be obtained from a combination of any of the following five categories:

Self-Directed Learning: Individual or group activities such as reading academic journals related to social work practice and course preparation.

Mentoring: Time spent mentoring social work and other students. This differs from field instruction in that the mentor is not the primary evaluator. However, with non-social work students, the mentor may be the primary evaluator.

In-Service Training: Continuing education that is designed primarily to increase one's effectiveness in carrying out the tasks involved in one's specific job. The knowledge gained from in-service training is more specific to one's job rather than transferable to one's

profession (e.g. learning a computer program to assist in preparing monthly statistics, MDS, CRMS).

Committee Work: Involvement in a committee that is working on tasks that relate to the purpose and function of the professional practice of social work. Committee work should involve either furthering the social work profession or representing the social work profession.

Public Education Delivery: Preparation and delivery of public education events related to the problems or issues dealt with by the social work profession or topics related to the purpose and function of social work. CPE hours cannot be earned for subsequent presentations of the same material unless the content is substantially modified. Time spent preparing an article for publication through mass media is included in this category.

Proration, Waivers and Deferrals

Proration of CPE credits is available to first time registrants and registered social workers who were on leave during the preceding registration year. The purpose of proration is to recognize that in a given registration year, a social worker may be unable to meet the minimum CPE requirements because of circumstances related to leave. Prorating of credits refers to calculating the minimum required credits in proportion to the period of the year during which the registered social worker was working. **Registered social workers who work part time or were unemployed during the registration year are not eligible for proration of credits.**

Waiver of CPE credits may be granted to registered social workers who are not eligible for proration but who have been prevented from completing the required minimum credits because of exceptional circumstances. Waiver of CPE credits refers to absolving the registrant from having to complete any further CPE for the previous year of registration.

Deferral of CPE credits may be granted to registered social workers who are not eligible for proration or waiver of the required minimum credits. Deferral of CPE credits refers to delaying the completion of the required minimum credits until a designated time during the upcoming registration year. Deferred credits are completed in addition to the required minimum 40 credits, for that upcoming year.

Registered social workers are encouraged to contact the NLASW office throughout the registration year to discuss any issues related to completion of CPE. Formal requests for proration, waiver or deferral of credits would be submitted at the time of registration renewal in the CPE section of the online registration system.

THE POLICY EXPLAINED: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Some of the central questions that have been posed since the inception of the CPE policy relate to the nature of the credit system and the method of recording and submitting CPE credits. This section provides answers to the most common questions as a means of explaining the details of the policy.

How to use the credit system

Q1. What is a CPE credit?

Answer: For the purposes of this policy, one CPE credit equals one hour spent in a CPE activity. Registered social workers can claim credit to the nearest .5 credit (30 minutes). For example, if you completed a series of three 45 minute lunch hour seminars for a total of 2 hours and 15 minutes the credit would be for 2.5 CPE credits. If a category totaled 2 hours and 45 minutes it would be worth 3 CPE credits.

Q2. Can I carry over CPE credits from one year to the next?

Answer: A maximum of 20 required credits can be carried from the current to the next registration year under the following circumstances:

- More than 40 CPE credits have been submitted on the renewal form.
- Of these 40, there are more than 20 in the required category.
- It is important to note that only required credits can be carried forward.

Q3. I have more than 20 elective credits. Can I report them?

Answer: The NLASW recognizes the professionalism of all its social workers. For the purposes of the administrative function of registration, only 20 must be recorded.

Q4. Can I submit only required credits and no elective credits?

Answer: Yes. Registered social workers complete a minimum of 40 CPE credits each registration year. A registered social worker must obtain 20 or more hours per year from the required category. The remaining 20 can come from either required *or* elective credits.

Q5. When should I submit CPE credits for events occurring in January or February of a given registration year?

Answer: CPE credits for events occurring in January or February of a given registration year can be submitted in the present registration year or the following year.

Q6. I am a part-time employee...how many CPE credits must I complete?

Answer: Part-time employees are expected to demonstrate the same skills, knowledge and competence as a full-time employee. For this reason, part-time employees must complete 40 CPE credits a year in accordance with the policy.

Q7. I have been on leave. How many credits must I accumulate?

Answer: To assist you in prorating your credit hours, please note that the minimum number of CPE credits over the registration year is 40 credit hours which means that one month is equal to 3.3 hours. At least half of the total number of credit hours must be from the required category. Registrants using this proration formula would not exceed the minimum 40 CPE credit hours and therefore would not be eligible to carry forward CPE credits. A request for proration would be submitted at the time of registration renewal in the CPE section of the online registration system and should include the time period of leave, the type of leave and the calculation of available credits prorated over the period of time worked during the previous registration year.

Q8. What if I can't get 40 CPE credits in a given year?

Answer: In advance of annual renewal, registered social workers are encouraged to connect with NLASW staff to discuss any issues related to completion of CPE credits. If a member is still unable to complete the full 40 CPE credits and are not eligible for proration, a request for a waiver or deferral should be submitted at the time of registration renewal in the CPE section of the online registration system. A request for waiver of CPE should include the nature and duration of the circumstances that prevented completion of the required minimum credits. A request for deferral of CPE would include a plan and time frame for completion of the remaining required credit hours.

How to record and submit CPE events

Q 9. Does the NLASW require pre-approval and submission of verification of my participation in CPE events?

Answer: No pre-approval is required. This policy is self-directed and designed to provide flexibility in meeting the annual CPE requirement. Registered social workers are still strongly encouraged to acquire verification (signatures, receipts, and letters of completion) for their personal CPE record. Registered social workers selected to participate in the random audit of CPE credits would be required to submit additional CPE details including completion dates and event titles/descriptions.

Q10. How do I submit my CPE credits?

Answer: Registered social workers submit CPE credits at the time of registration renewal in the CPE section of the online registration system. Throughout the year, social workers can track CPE completed by logging into their account through the MyNLASW portal on the NLASW website and clicking *Update my CPE*.

APPENDIX 1

NLASW Responsibilities Regarding CPE

Leadership

- To develop a policy that reflects the profession's ethical obligation to upgrade skills, knowledge and competency.
- To promote the evolution of a culture of "lifelong learning" in the social work profession.
- To advocate on behalf of registered social workers to employers to ensure that they recognize and support the CPE needs of social workers.
- To promote, within the social work education community, responsibility for the development and delivery of acceptable continuing education opportunities and programs.

Program Sponsorship and Delivery

- To sponsor or co-sponsor CPE activities in a manner that ensures equal access regardless of where a social worker resides.
- To enter into mutually acceptable agreements with partner organizations in order to ensure that CPE opportunities and services are available to social workers.

Communication

- To promote awareness of local, provincial and national CPE offerings.

Policy Development and Evaluation

- To regularly assess the CPE needs of registered social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- To ensure that the policy standard is realistic and achievable through regular evaluation and review.