



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

# Navigating the CSWE Accreditation Self- study Process

Presentation to *The Association of Baccalaureate  
Social Work Program Directors*  
Saturday, February 28, 2026 at 12:30-1:45pm  
New Orleans, LA



**Collina D. Cooke, PhD, LCSW-C**  
Executive Director of Accreditation

**Kat Gibson-Ledl, BSW, LMSW-Macro**  
Director of Accreditation Services

# Land Acknowledgement

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## 11 tribes in Alexandria

- Mattaponi
- Pamunkey
- Chickahominy
- Eastern Chickahominy
- Rappahannock
- Upper Mattaponi
- Nansemond
- Monacan
- Cheroenhaka
- Nottoway
- Nottoway
- Patawomeck

CSWE acknowledges that its office is located on ancestral lands of Indigenous Peoples throughout the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and territories. This is true of the cities where CSWE events occur and the areas where council staff and volunteers reside.

Indigenous Peoples had and continue to have extended networks of relatives that include human and nonhuman life as well as the seen and the unseen across diverse geopolitical and ecological spaces. Sacred ties to the land and water distinguish Indigenous Peoples from all other people or cultures. Despite the genocide, relocation, and removal of millions of Indigenous Peoples from those areas, ties to these networks and lands have persevered through centuries of oppression, colonization, appropriation, and other efforts to erase these cultures.

CSWE's office is in Alexandria, Virginia, and we honor the **11 state-recognized ancestral tribes**. Our organization is committed to achieving social justice and equity for Indigenous Peoples in ways that respect their ancient cultures and sovereign rights and that address a legacy of colonization and oppression. Social work education strives to prepare tomorrow's practitioners to effect social change for all people. With humility, we recognize and respect all Indigenous Peoples and their ties to the land. The CSWE, the Indigenous and Tribal Social Work Educators Association, and the Commission on Diversity and Social & Economic Justice have collaborated on this Land Acknowledgment Statement to raise awareness of the global truth and reconciliation movement addressing historical and systemic issues of Indigenous Peoples.



# Your Accreditation Leadership Team



**Collina D. Cooke, PhD, LCSW**  
Executive Director of  
Accreditation



**Katie Gibson-Ledl, BSW,  
LMSW-Macro**  
Director of Accreditation Services



# Slide Access

- **Post-conference** | Slide deck available for download at:  
[www.cswe.org/accreditationtraining](http://www.cswe.org/accreditationtraining)

# Agenda

**Context & Framework**



**Navigating the reaffirmation process**



**Forming a self-study team**



**Developing a robust self-study**



**Strengthening your curriculum matrix and assessment plan**



**Using CSWE's toolkit, services, and training**



**Q&A**



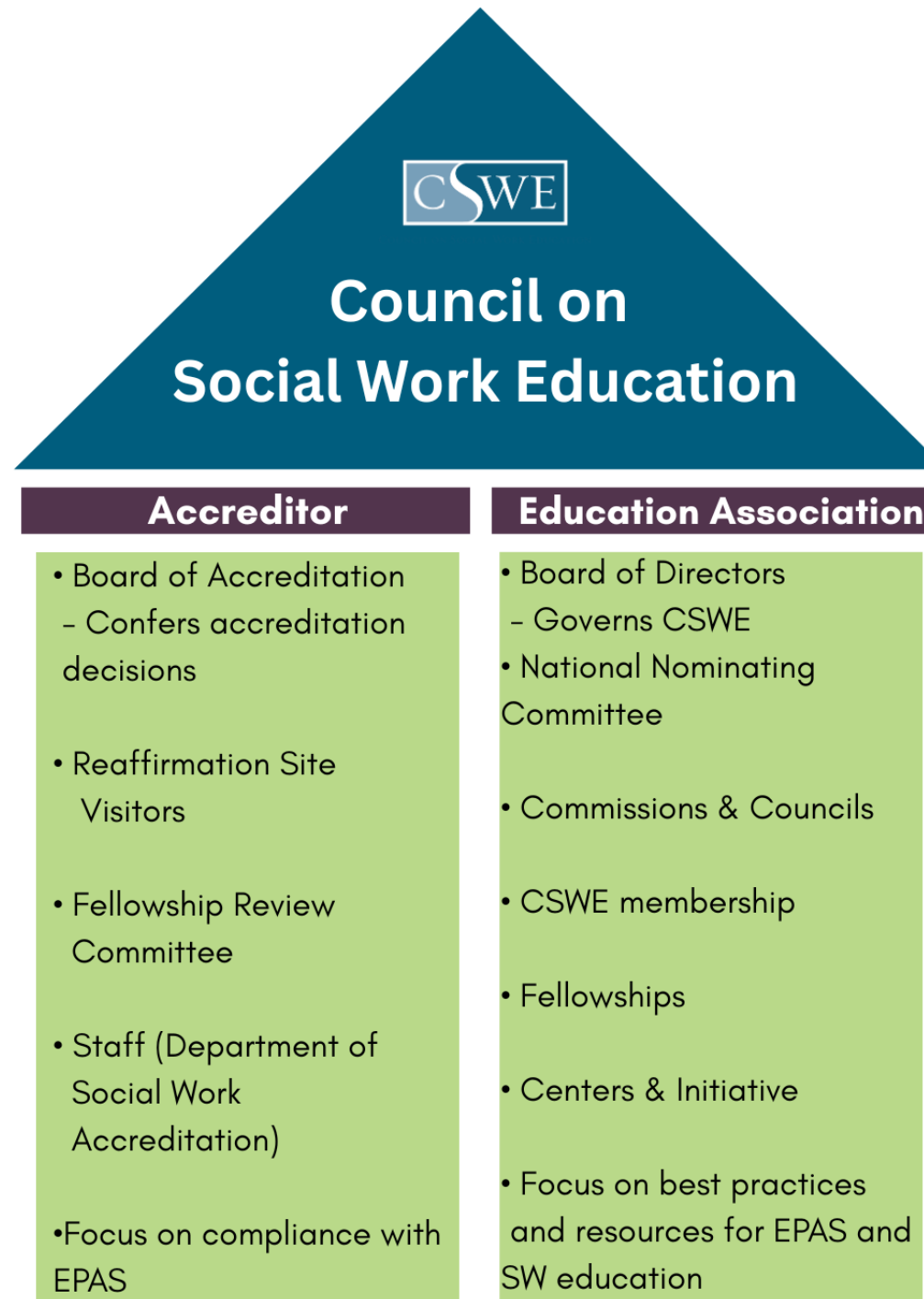
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# Context & Framework



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# CSWE Context: Two Pillars



# CSWE Board of Accreditation (BOA)

Recognized by CHEA to accredit in the United States:

- Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Programs
- Practice Doctorate Programs
- Post-master's Social Work Fellowship Programs



Beyond BOA's scope:

- International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service
- Memorandum of understanding with Canadian social work accreditor

# Peer-Review Process



- BOA is the sole and final arbiter of compliance
- CSWE staff cannot determine compliance



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# Navigating the Reaffirmation Process



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# Accreditation is a Process

**Expands beyond quality control. Accreditation is:**

- Developmental and generative
- Promotes strategic thinking/planning
- Identifies strengths and areas for growth
- Provides educational foundation for competent social work practitioners
- Regularly scheduled reviews
- Expectation of ongoing compliance

**Process encourages:**

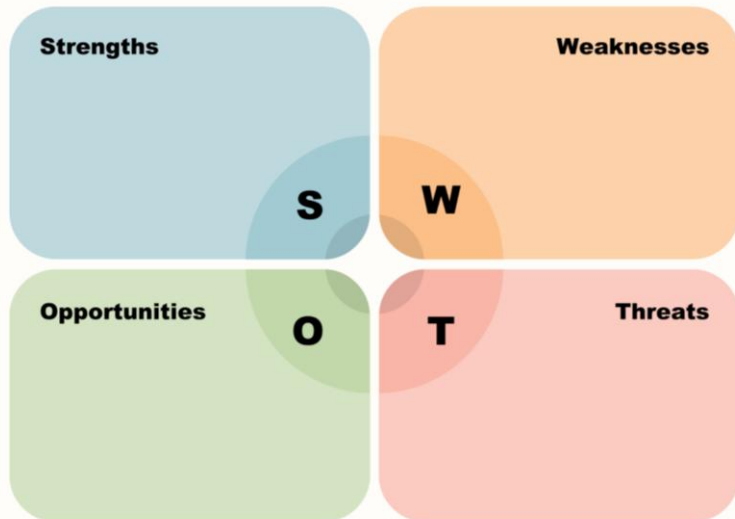
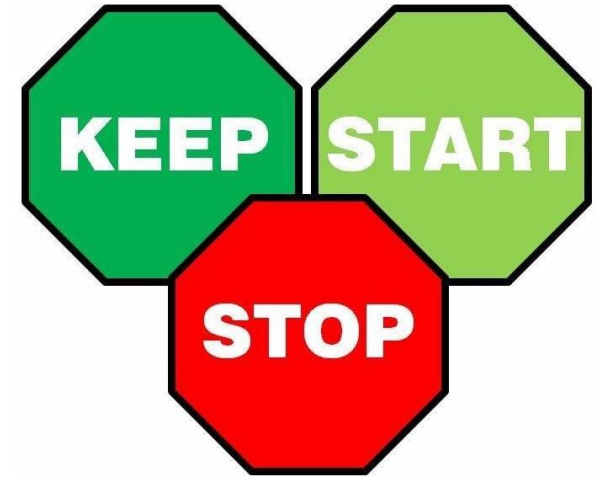
- Continuous quality improvement
- Data-informed decision-making
- Innovation



**Accreditation is not a one-time event.**

# New Standards ≠ Overhaul

## DESIGN THINKING



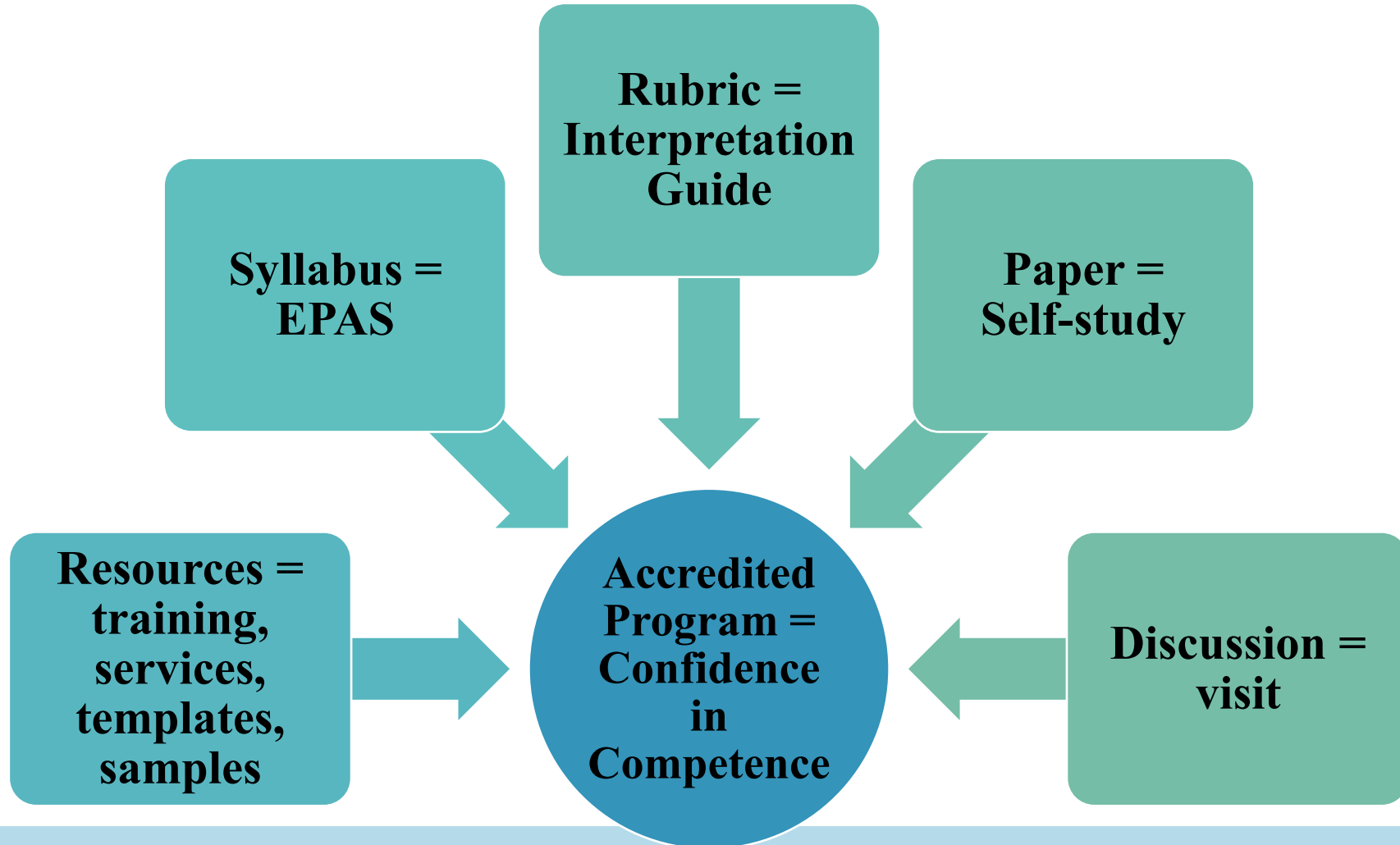
# Trust the Process

- Lead with curiosity
- Utilize your resources
- Embrace this strategic planning opportunity
- *Make the process work for you!*

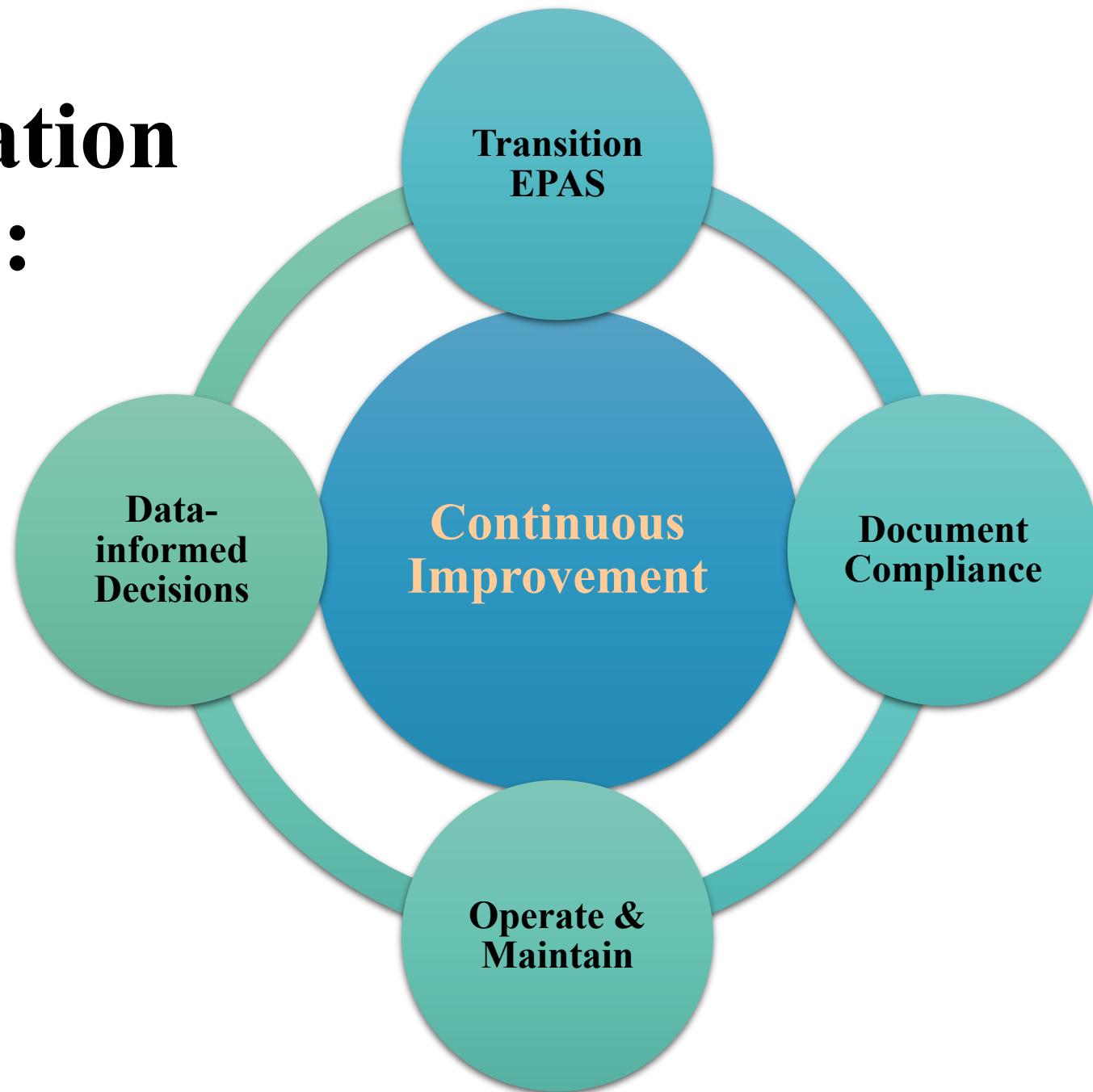


# Accreditation Inputs

Best-Practices, Innovation, Literature, & Networking

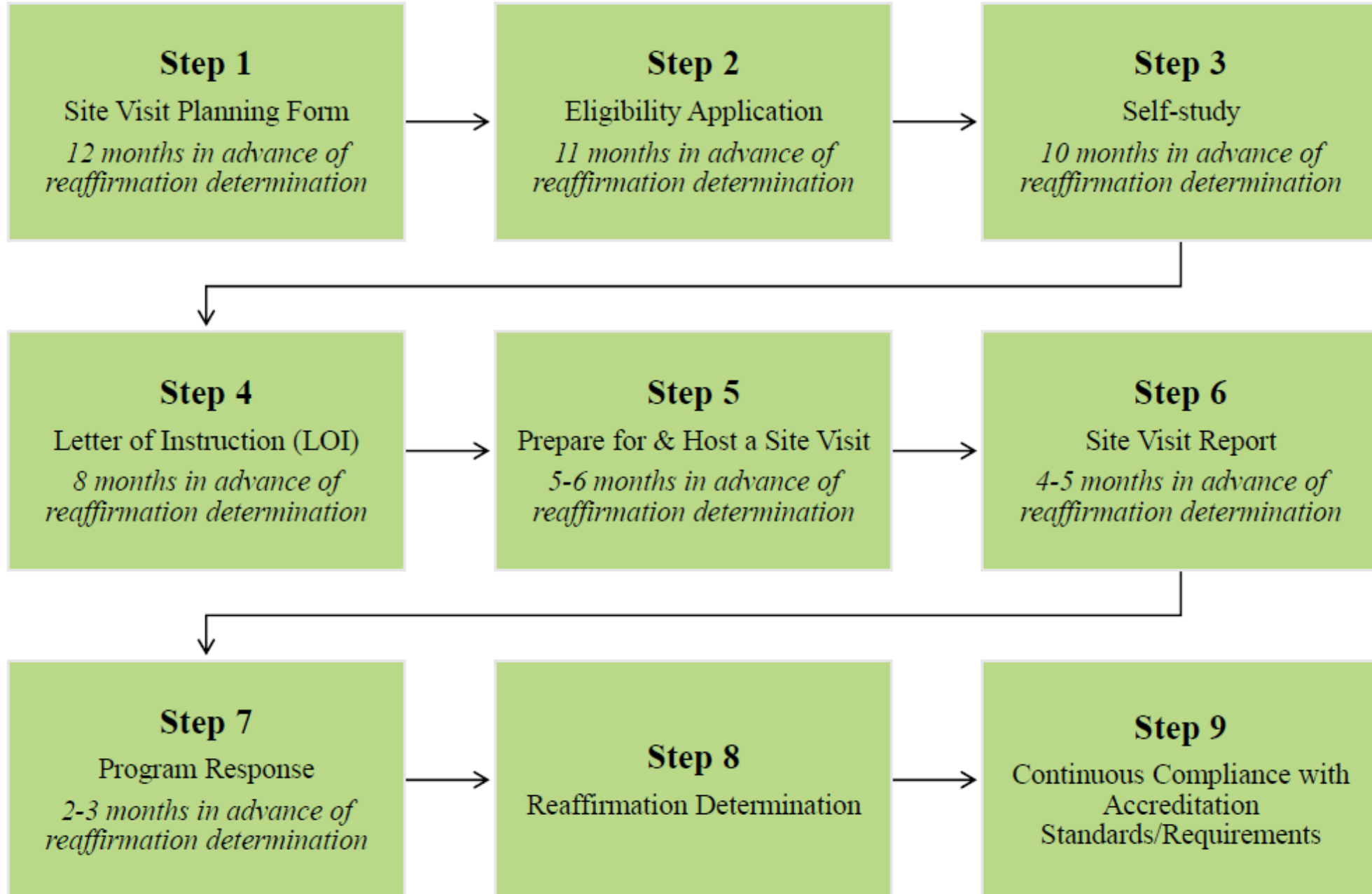


# Accreditation Cycle:



This is the  
self-study  
production  
phase!

## Reaffirmation Process Overview



# Letter of Instruction (LOI)

- Set reasonable expectations for an LOI with both general and specific questions
  - Use the [General Questions Bank](#)
  - Specific questions are highly customized and based on findings from the self-study review
- *Rare*: revise & resubmit requests
  - Usage of outdated forms, templates, or accreditation materials
  - Formatting and submission errors
  - Failure to address all standards
  - Pervasive issues within the document

# Scope of the Site Visit

- Visitor's role = **information gatherer**
- Visitors do not:
  - Determine compliance
  - Recommend a decision type
  - Offer advice, suggestions, feedback, opinions, or instructions
  - Go “off script” – they are bound by the LOI



# Preparing Stakeholders for the Visit

## *Options:*

- Allow access to the self-study and LOI
- Prepare an executive summary PowerPoint or handout explaining the program's plan for responding to the LOI
- Share the [General Questions Bank](#) with all involved in the visit
- Hold a mock site visit or prep meeting



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# Forming a Self-study Team



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# Accreditation is a Team Effort



- Team-based approaches
- Encourage participation:
  - Administrators
  - Full-time and part-time faculty
  - Staff
  - Students
  - Field instructors
  - Board members
  - Additional parties

# Self-study Team Work Timeline

## 2-3 Years in Advance of Self-study Submission

- Create a team or committee
- Match team members by strengths and/or expertise
- Establish a meeting schedule
- Select a shared or cloud-based drive to collab from
- Download your program's reaff timetable
- Backwards map goals to the timetable

## 2 Years in Advance of Self-Study Submission

- Enroll in CSWE trainings and utilize services
- Study your program's alignment with the national standards
- Renew strengths
- Change, update, or retool areas of misalignment
- Revisit curriculum matrix
- Revisit assessment plan
- Review Student Handbook and Field Manual

## 1 Year in Advance of Self-Study Submission

- Complete CSWE trainings and utilize services
- Begin writing process
- Delineate authors by section or standard
- Select a final editor to give one voice and use Interpretation Guide as final compliance checklist



# Optional Tool: Team Approach Grid

## Educational Policy 1.0 — Program Mission and Goals Accreditation Standard 1.0 — Mission and Goals

2022 EPAS Standard	Primary Writer	Editor*	1 <sup>st</sup> Draft Due to Primary Editor	Suggested Changes to Align with EPAS	2 <sup>nd</sup> Draft Due to Primary Editor	Suggested Changes to Align with EPAS	Final Version Due to Primary Editor
<b>AS 1.0.1</b> Program-level Mission Statement & Consistency with Profession’s Purpose and Values	Name	Name	Date	List Changes	Date	List Changes	Date
<b>AS 1.0.2</b> Mission Statement Consistency with Program’s Context	Name	Name	Date	List Changes	Date	List Changes	Date

*\*Consider selecting a final editor to review the entire accreditation document and give the narrative one consistent voice.*





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# Developing a Robust Self-study



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# Reaffirmation Self-study

- Documentation evidencing compliance
- Tell your program's story
- Use required template
- Use Interpretation Guide as a checklist



*8-year review cycles with no interim reports*

**Framing:** Asking BOA to assure public and constituents the program is providing quality social work education for nearly the next decade

# Required Self-study Template

## Required Reaffirmation/Initial Accreditation Self-Study Template

**Accreditation Standard 4.1.5:** The program does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.

**a. The program provides the policy indicating that it does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.**

**The policy explicitly states that the social work program does not grant social work course credit for: 1) life experience, and 2) previous work experience:**

- Yes
- No

**Policy:**

Insert full policy text here and cite location of written policy

**b. The program describes how this policy is articulated.**

**How stakeholders are actively informed**

Insert text here

**Location of the written articulation**

Cite the location of the written articulation [i.e., name of documents, manuals, handbooks, syllabi, platforms, or websites; and page numbers (if applicable)]

**c. The program addresses all program options.**

**Check One:**

- The program has only one (1) option.
- Our response/compliance plan is the same for all program options.
- Our response/compliance plan differs between program options in the following ways:

*[Delete this help text before submission: Insert text here, if applicable and the program complies differently across program options]*

# Interpretation Guide Example

[www.cswe.org/2022EPAS](http://www.cswe.org/2022EPAS)

**Accreditation Standard 4.1.5:** The program does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.

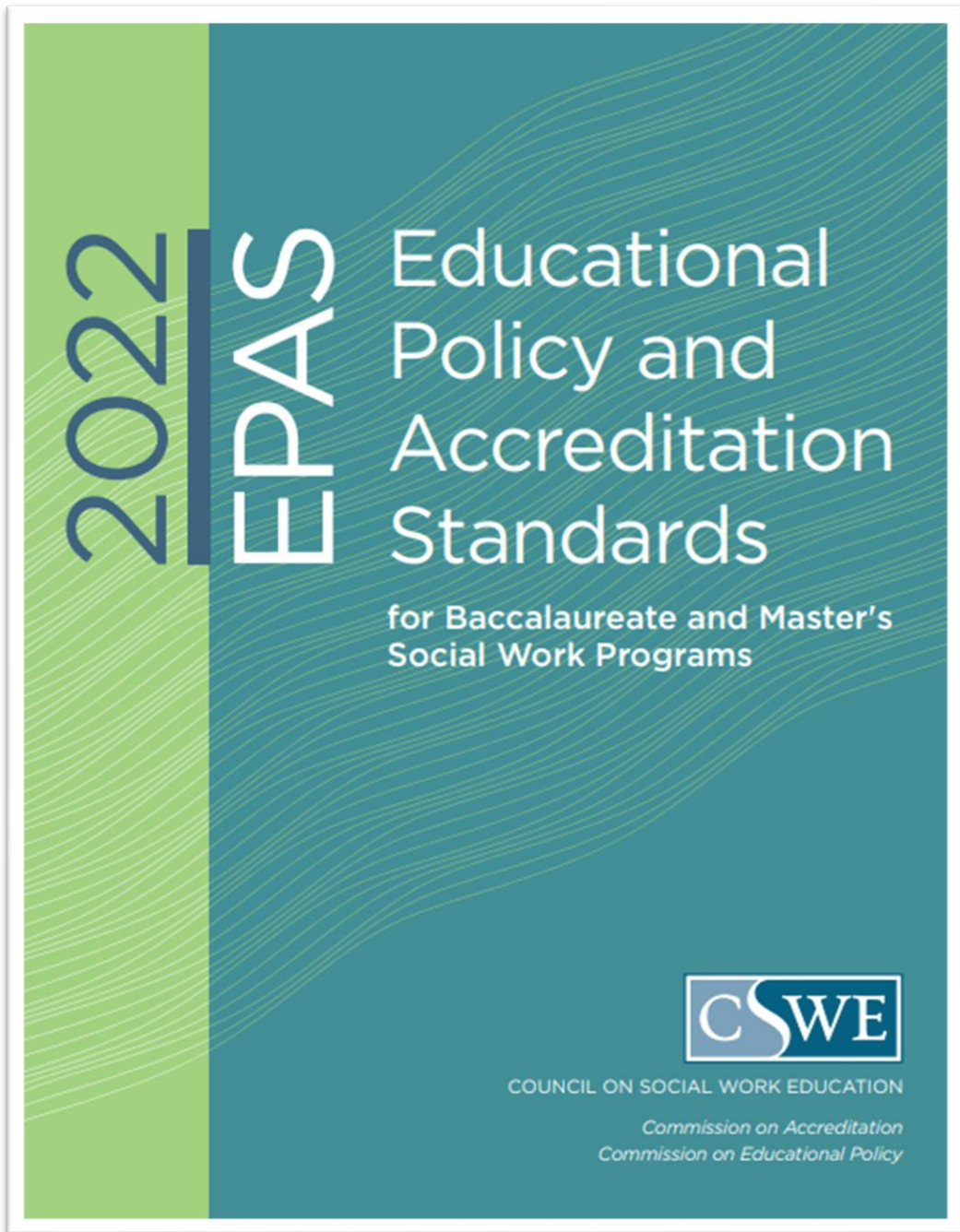
COMPLIANCE STATEMENT	BOA INTERPRETATIONS, COMPLIANCE RUBRIC, & WRITING CHECKLIST	DEFINITIONS & TIPS
<p>a. The program provides the policy indicating that it does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Copy/paste the written policy explicitly stating that the social work program does not grant social work course credit for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Life experience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Previous work experience</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cite the location of each written policy, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Name of documents, manuals, handbooks, syllabi, platforms, and/or websites</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Page numbers (if applicable)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Definition:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Articulation</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Course Credit</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Examples of how this policy is articulated:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prospective student materials</li> <li>○ Admission packet</li> <li>○ Syllabi</li> <li>○ Learning management system</li> <li>○ Orientation</li> <li>○ Advising sessions</li> <li>○ Webinars/online modules</li> <li>○ Newsletters or other communications</li> <li>○ Websites</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>b. The program describes how this policy is articulated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explain how stakeholders are actively informed, including where and how the information is accessed by relevant stakeholders.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cite the location of the written articulation, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Name of documents, manuals, handbooks, syllabi, platforms, and/or websites</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Page numbers (if applicable)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If applicable, describe how this information is actively articulated to students and field personnel beyond written materials (e.g., orientation).</li> <li>• Use subheadings to clearly address each component of the standard.</li> </ul> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <p><b><a href="#">Candidate Programs</a></b>   <i>AS 4.1.5 is reviewed for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approval at Benchmark 1</li> <li>• Compliance at Benchmark 3</li> </ul>
<p>c. The program addresses all program options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly address each program option.</li> </ul>	

# Minimum Compliance

- Considered quality threshold
- Meet minimum requirements using the standards and Interpretation Guide
- Flexibility to exceed the minimum requirements
- CSWE-BOA sets the floor; programs set the ceiling!



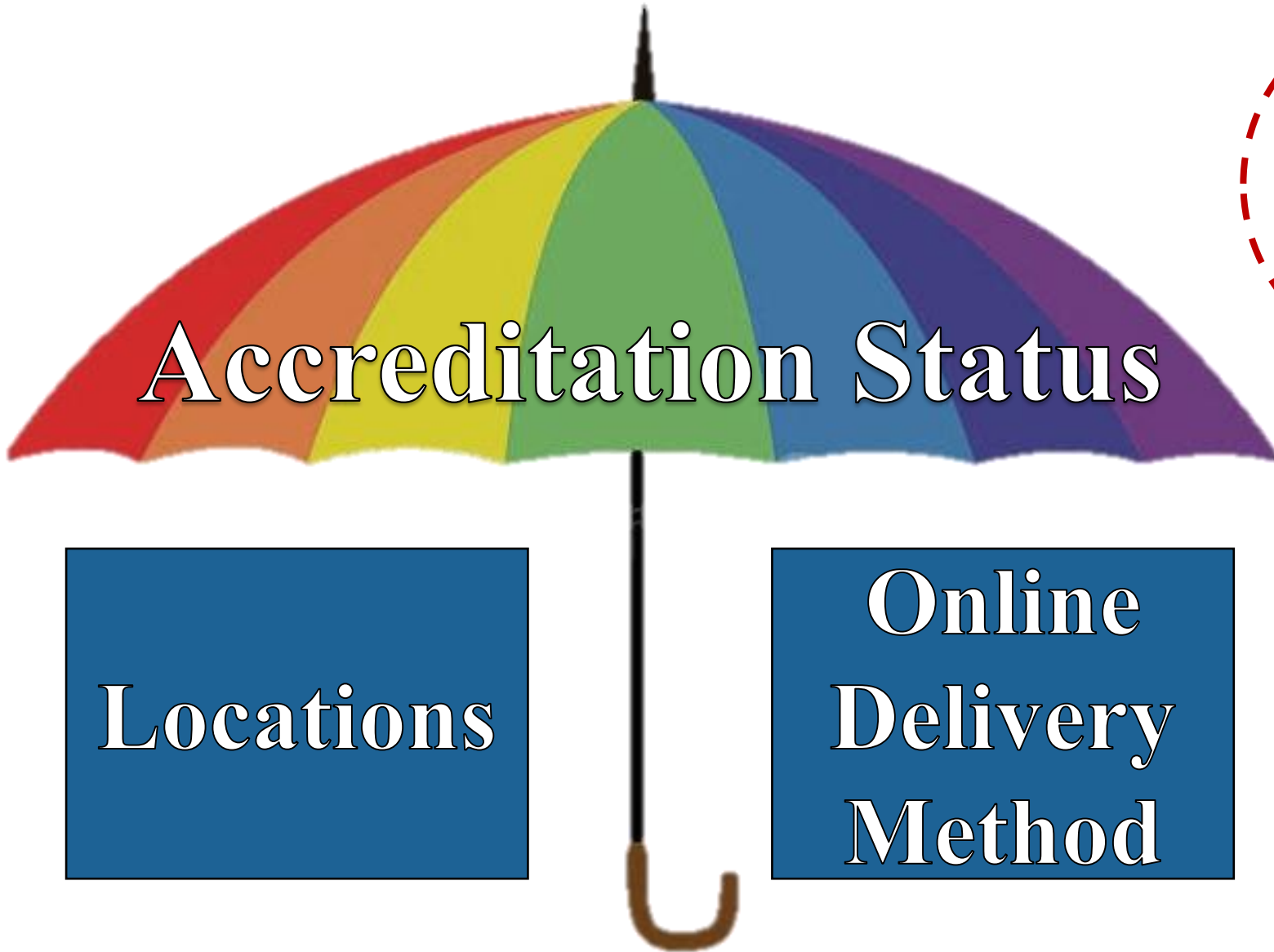
*The sky is  
the limit!*



# Structure of the EPAS



# Program Options



**Tip!** Substantive Change Proposal required 6-months before implementing.  
Cannot implement during active review.



# Anatomy of an Accreditation Standard

## 4.1.5

The program does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.

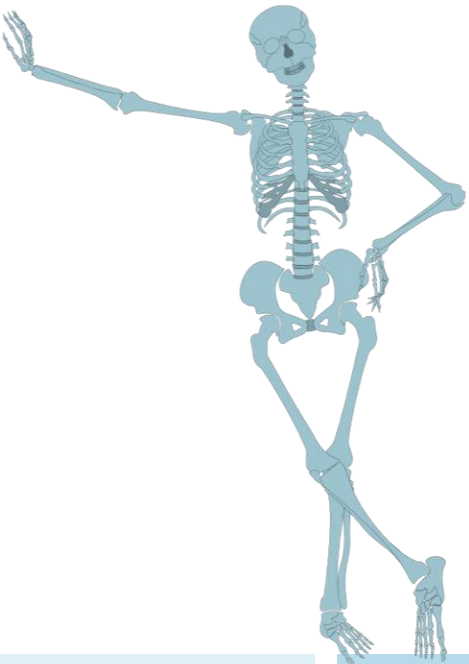
- a. *The program provides the policy indicating that it does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.*
- b. *The program describes how this policy is articulated.*
- c. *The program addresses all program options.*

**Standard**

**Compliance  
Statements**

## 3 components to demonstrate full compliance for AS 4.1.5:

1. Written policy
2. How policy is articulated/shared
3. Similarities/differences for complying across all program options



# Aligning with the EPAS

- Use these to aid your program alignment efforts:
  - [2022 EPAS accreditation toolkit](#)
  - [2022 EPAS FAQs](#) (question #17)
  - [2015 EPAS vs. 2022 EPAS Crosswalk](#)
- Use the [2022 EPAS Interpretation Guide](#) as a compliance checklist
  - Arrange internal meetings to request resources (e.g., time, personnel, policies, etc.) needed to meet EPAS requirements



# Writing Tips



- Write clearly and concisely
  - Be specific, not general/vague
  - BOA cannot assume anything
  - Don't bury the evidence
- Use the standard language in your responses
- Employ a final editor to give the document one cohesive voice
- Most common reasons for citation:
  1. Failing to understand the official interpretations (vs. the program's own interpretation)
  2. Failing to use the Interpretation Guide writing checklist, missing one or more elements of the standard

# Accreditation Policy Handbook

[www.cswe.org/accreditationpolicies](http://www.cswe.org/accreditationpolicies)



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

**Board of Accreditation (BOA)**

**Department of Social Work Accreditation (DOSWA)**

## ACCREDITATION POLICY HANDBOOK

*for Baccalaureate and Master's Social Work Program Accreditation*

**version 1.2024**

Accreditation policies are subject to change. Periodic updates to this handbook are effective immediately. When updates occur, program primary contacts are notified, and the handbook is posted publicly. Visit the accreditation webpages at [www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org) to ensure use of the current version of this handbook.

**Table of Contents**



# Organizing Tips

- Create a central file on your institution's shared drive (e.g., OneDrive, SharePoint, Google Drive, etc.)
- Organize documents by year
- Ensure files and documents are searchable (not scanned)
- Save all BOA decision letters
  - Accreditation staff can reissue BOA decision letters if lost
- Leave your legacy/successor well-organized documents
- **New!** Accreditation certificates now mailed after reaffirmation is achieved

# Guidance for Successful Reviews

Learn the standards and official interpretations

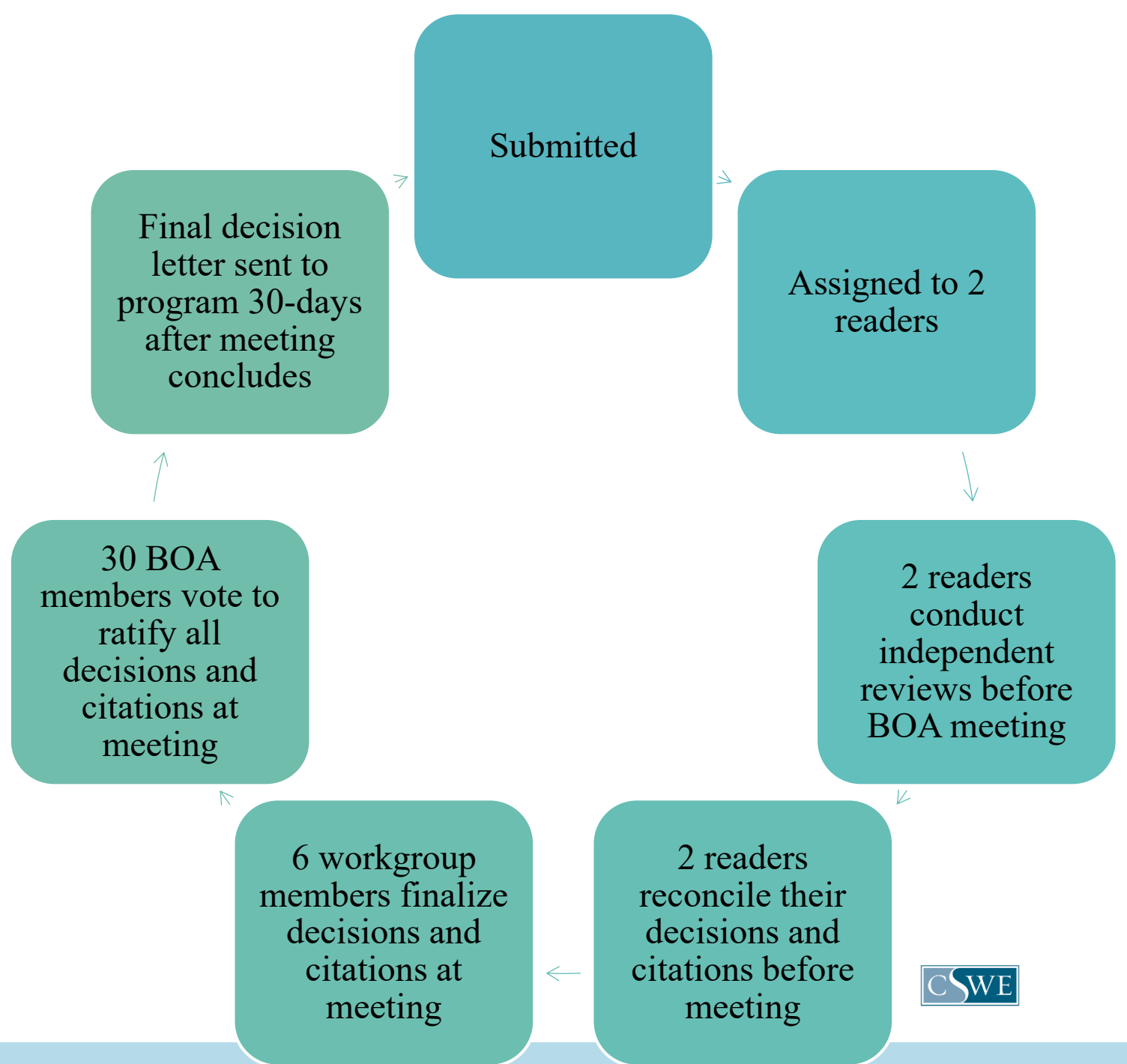
Evaluate the program's alignment with the standards by writing the self-study

Use self-study findings to renew program offerings and operations or retool/make changes

Set realistic expectations by being open to BOA's clarifying questions

Use CSWE resources and services to deepen knowledge

# Life Cycle of an Accreditation Document





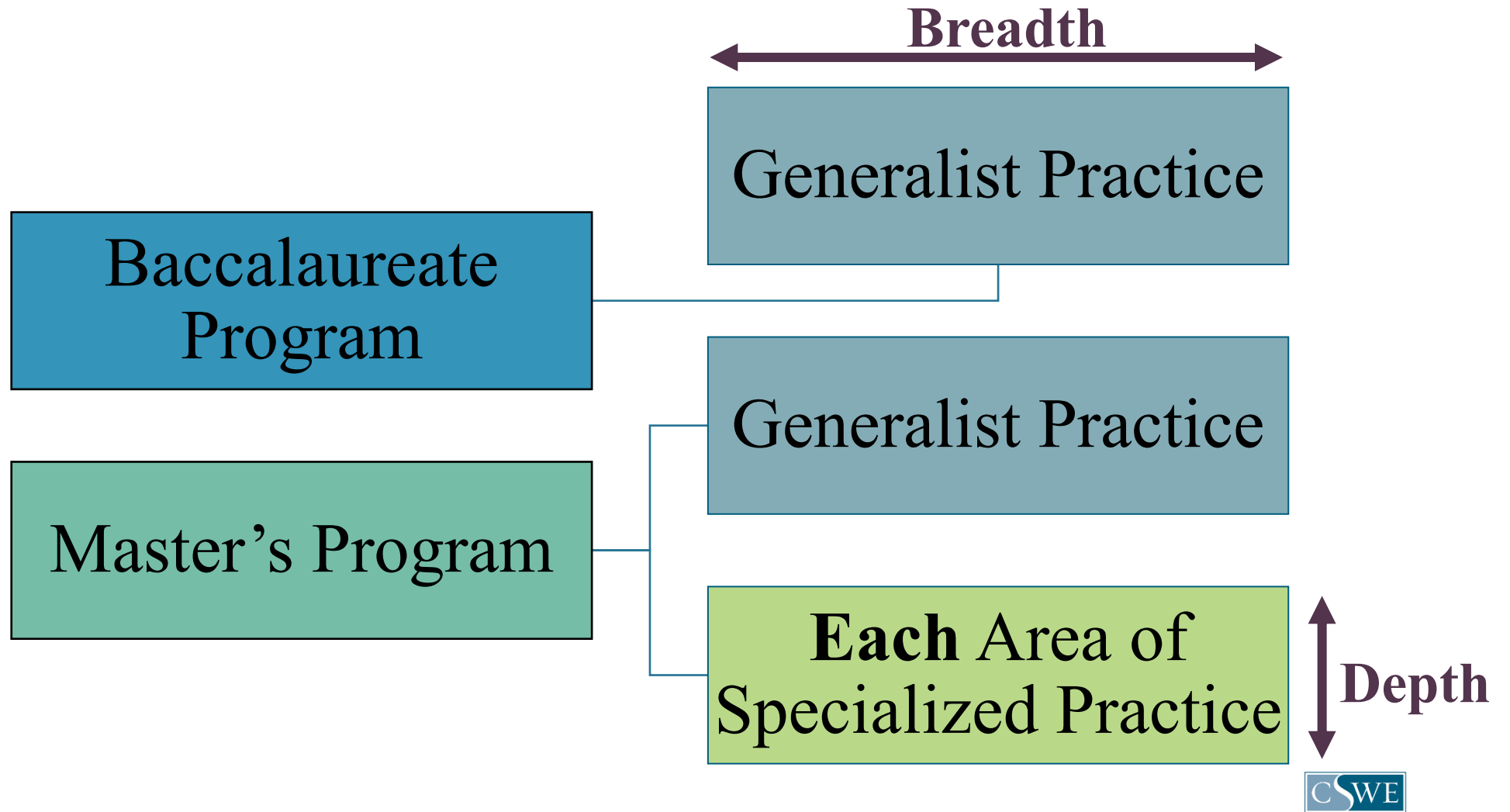
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# Strengthening Your Curriculum Matrix & Assessment Plan

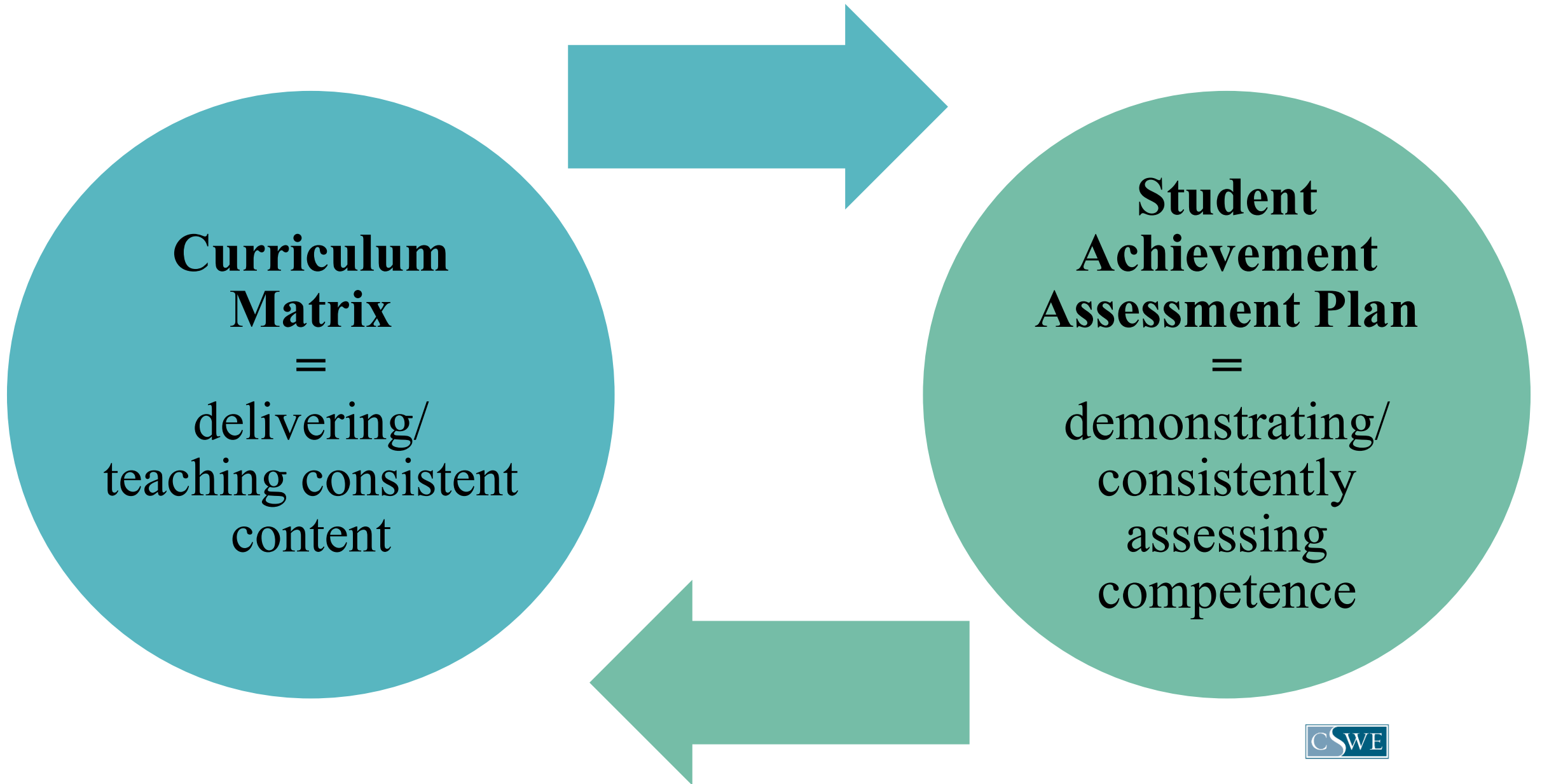


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# Generalist and Specialized Practice Curricula & Assessment Plan



# Curriculum vs. Assessment Plan



# Most Cited Standard: AS 3.1.2

- Generalist Practice Curriculum Matrix
- **44%** of self-study reviews included this citation
- *# of citations:* 47 out of 107 self-studies reviewed

# Form AS 3.1.2

## Competency 4: Engage in Practice-Informed Research and Research-Informed Practice

Course Number & Title	Generalist Course Content	Dimension(s)	Page Number in Volume 2 Syllabi
		<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Values <input type="checkbox"/> Skills <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive & Affective Processes	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Values <input type="checkbox"/> Skills <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive & Affective Processes	

# Form AS 3.1.2

## Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

Course Number & Title	Generalist Course Content	Dimension(s)	System Level(s)	Page Number in Volume 2 Syllabi
		<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Values <input type="checkbox"/> Skills <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive & Affective Processes	<input type="checkbox"/> Individuals <input type="checkbox"/> Families <input type="checkbox"/> Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Communities	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Values <input type="checkbox"/> Skills <input type="checkbox"/> Cognitive & Affective Processes	<input type="checkbox"/> Individuals <input type="checkbox"/> Families <input type="checkbox"/> Groups <input type="checkbox"/> Organizations <input type="checkbox"/> Communities	

# Course Content Checklist

- Content that best aligns with the competency descriptive paragraph.
- Ensure each aspect of the competency title is addressed.
- Identical content is taught across all sections, even by different instructors.
- Content designed to deliver competency-based learning.

# Address the Full Competency

*Competency 2: Advance Human Rights and Social, Racial, Economic, and Environmental Justice*

# Course Content Selection

- It is not required for every required course to be included on the matrix.
- Do not include elective courses or elective course content on the matrix.
- The matrix content **must** match the syllabus content **and** reflect the competency content, dimension(s), and/or system level(s).

# Volume 2: Syllabi

- *Volume 2*: include syllabus for each required social work course listed on *Form AS 3.1.2*

# Most Cited Standard: AS 5.0.1(a)

- Competency Assessment Plan
- **44%** of self-study reviews included this citation
- *# of citations:* 47 out of 107 self-studies reviewed

# Types of Assessment

Assessment of student competence

**AS 5.0.1(a-d)**

Related to the effectiveness of your curriculum and content identified in your matrices in AS 3.1.2 & AS M3.2.4

Can be used to justify higher faculty-to-student ratio (AS B/M 4.2.3)

Assessment of ADEI in the implicit curriculum

**AS 5.0.2(a-b)**

Choose one or more examples of ADEI effort(s) in the implicit curriculum in AS 2.0.2

Assessment of program outcomes

**AS 5.0.3**

Bright line quantitative indicators

Can be used to justify higher faculty-to-student ratio (AS B/M 4.2.3)

# AS 5.0.1(a): Assessment of Competencies

## First Instrument

- **Field assessment** (real or simulated practice)

## Second Instrument

- **Portfolio, project, or paper** (e.g., in capstone or seminar)
- **Course-embedded assignments** (e.g., within required courses)
- **Comprehensive exam** (e.g., mock licensure prep)
- **Simulation**
- **Other**



# Form AS 5.0.1(a)

Instrument Name	How Each Instrument is Implemented	When Students are Assessed	Instrument Assesses Student Competence in Real or Simulated Practice in Field Education?	Student Assessment Completed By:	Level of Assessment	Instrument: Expected Level of Achievement	Competency 1: Expected Level of Achievement
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Program Faculty  <input type="checkbox"/> Field Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the behavior level  <input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the competency level		% inclusive of all instruments
			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Program Faculty  <input type="checkbox"/> Field Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the behavior level  <input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the competency level		

# Field Instrument Example | Form AS 5.0.1(a)

Instrument Name	How Each Instrument is Implemented	When Students are Assessed	Instrument Assesses Student Competence in Real or Simulated Practice in Field Education?	Student Assessment Completed By:	Level of Assessment	Instrument: Expected Level of Achievement	Competency 1: Expected Level of Achievement
Field Evaluation/ Learning Agreement	Field Instrument	SWK 123: Generalist Field Practicum  At the end of generalist practice field practicum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Program Faculty  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Field Personnel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the behavior level  <input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the competency level	Students must score a minimum of 4 of 5 points on criteria 1, 2, 3, and 4.	90% inclusive of all instruments

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Instrument Example | Form AS 5.0.1(a)

Instrument Name	How Each Instrument is Implemented	When Students are Assessed	Instrument Assesses Student Competence in Real or Simulated Practice in Field Education?	Student Assessment Completed By:	Level of Assessment	Instrument: Expected Level of Achievement	Competency 1: Expected Level of Achievement
Social Work Ethics and Values Oral Presentation	Presentation	SWK 200: Social Work Ethics and Professional Values  At the end of the 1st term of the generalist practice curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Program Faculty  <input type="checkbox"/> Field Personnel	<input type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the behavior level  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Students are assessed at the competency level	Students must score a minimum of 4 of 5 points on criteria 2, 3, and 4.	90% inclusive of all instruments

# AS 5.0.1(a-d) Logic/Progression

*Change*



AS 5.0.1(a):  
**plan** to collect  
and analyze data

AS 5.0.1(b):  
most recent **data**  
set

AS 5.0.1(c):  
**changes** made  
from data

AS 5.0.1(d):  
**Summary data**  
for public

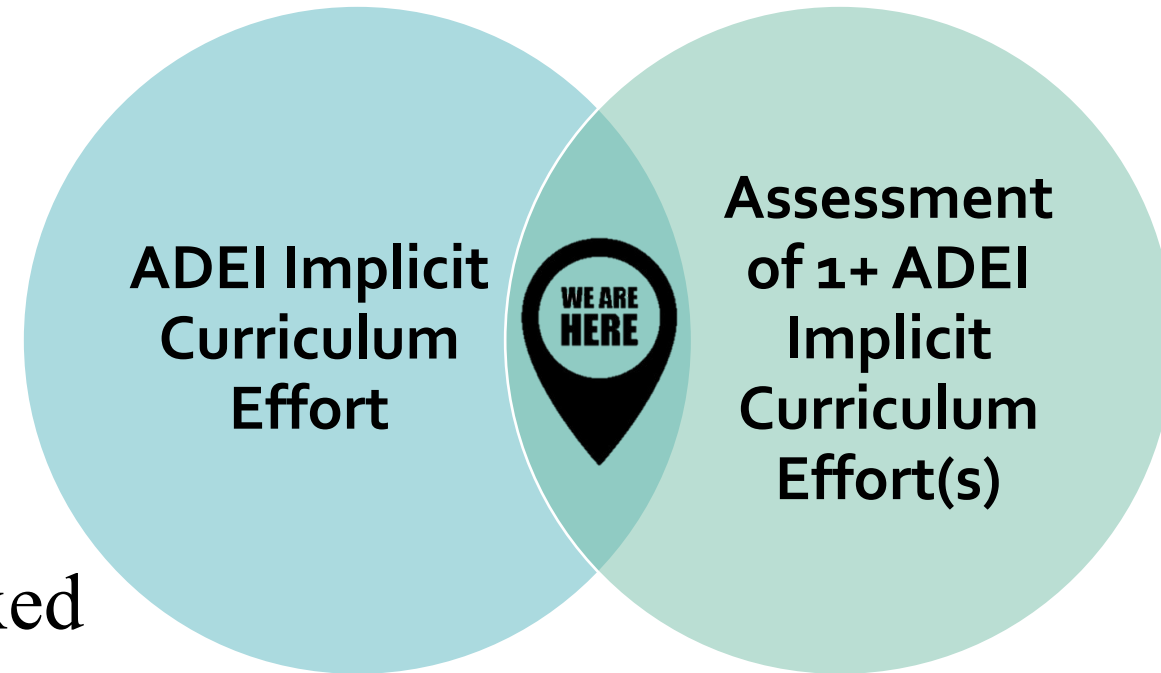


*Continuous  
Quality  
Improvement*



# AS 5.0.2(a-b): ADEI in the Implicit Curriculum

- Must be linked to an example from AS 2.0.2
- One or more efforts, focused on any ADEI element
- Data can be collected from any stakeholders (e.g., students, faculty, alumni, field liaisons)
- Can be qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods
- Data collected by the university can be used *if* it is still program specific



# AS 5.0.3: Program Outcomes

## First Outcome

- Graduation rate

## Second Outcome

- Time to program completion,
- Higher education acceptance rate, or
- Employment rate



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# Accreditation Services



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# Primary Contact



- Self-report database/directory listing updates via required form
  - Policy 4.9 in the Accreditation Policy Handbook
- Keep primary contact current to receive:
  - Access to services
  - Communications
  - Newsletters
  - Invoices

# Services with Social Work Values

*Myth:* Asking an accrediting organization for help alerts it that the program should be placed on unofficial watch for future scrutiny.

- **CSWE welcomes questions from programs!**
- Consultations provided by CSWE accreditation staff are **confidential** (policy 1.4, [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#))



# Accreditation Services

[www.cswe.org/accreditationservices](http://www.cswe.org/accreditationservices)

**Consultations**

**Trainings**

**Year-round**

**Professional  
Conferences**

**Resources &  
Communication**

# Atlanta

#CSWE26

Oct. 22-25



Rooted  
*in* Resilience

HONORING THE PAST,  
GROUNDING THE PRESENT





# Trainings

[www.cswe.org/accreditationtraining](http://www.cswe.org/accreditationtraining)

Hybrid training model with two components:

**Self-paced online learning modules** via the CSWE Learning Academy

**Live drop-in question and answer (Q&A) sessions** via Zoom

# Upcoming Live Drop-in Q&A Sessions

Accredited





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# CSWE Opportunities



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# Ready to Volunteer?

- Applications open on **April 1, 2026**
- Complete the relevant interest form:
  - [Site Visitor Interest Form](#)
  - [BOA Interest Form](#)
  - [Fellowship Review Committee Interest Form](#)





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**Q & A**



**COLLABORATE**

# Questions? Let's Chat

