



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

CSWE Accreditation for Baccalaureate Programs

Presentation to *The Association of Baccalaureate
Social Work Program Directors*
Saturday, February 28, 2026 at 9:30-10:45am
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

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



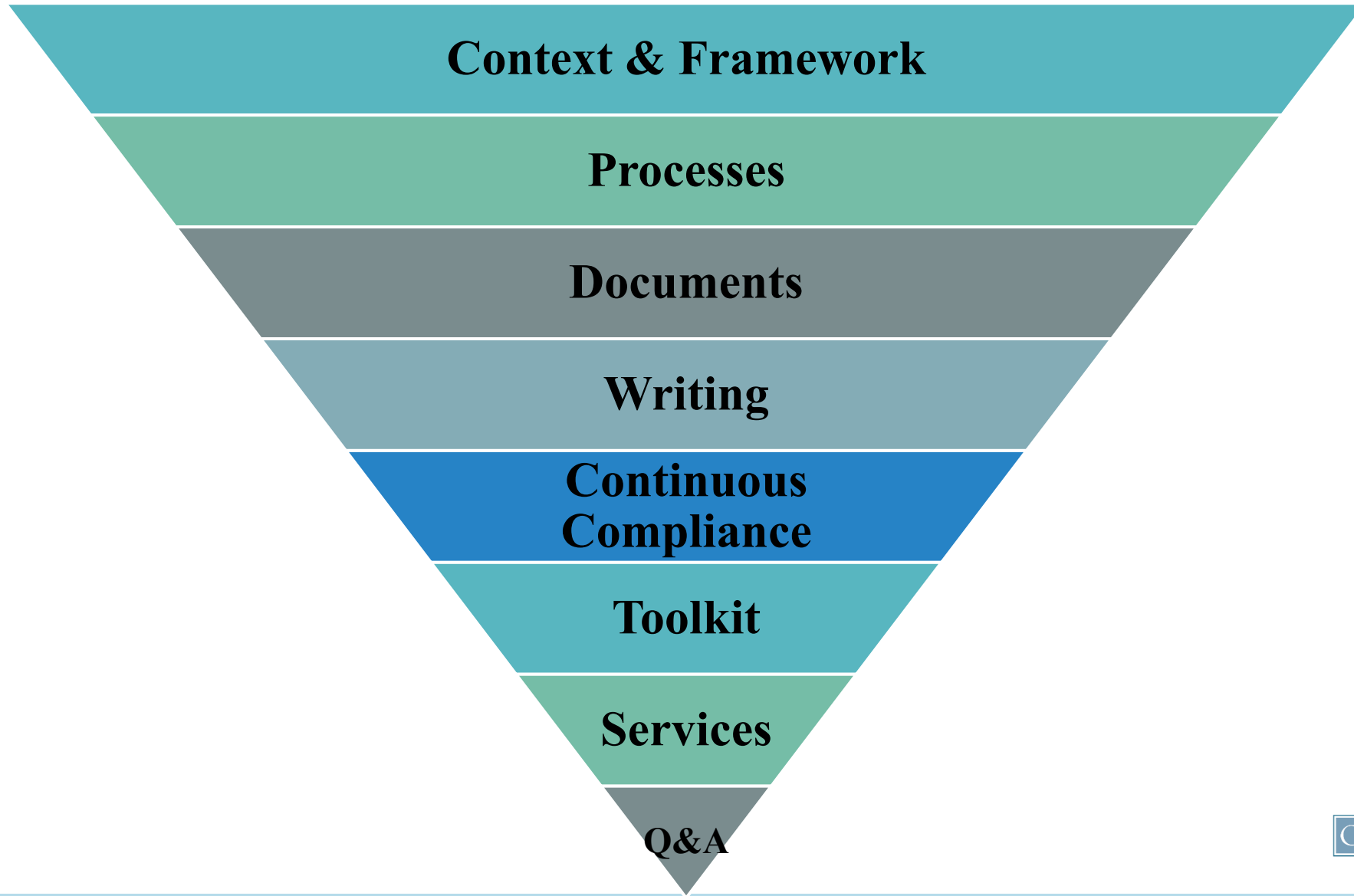
**Katie Gibson-Ledl, BSW,
LMSW-Macro**
Director of Accreditation Services



Slide Access

- **Post-conference** | Slide deck available for download at:
www.cswe.org/accreditationtraining

Agenda





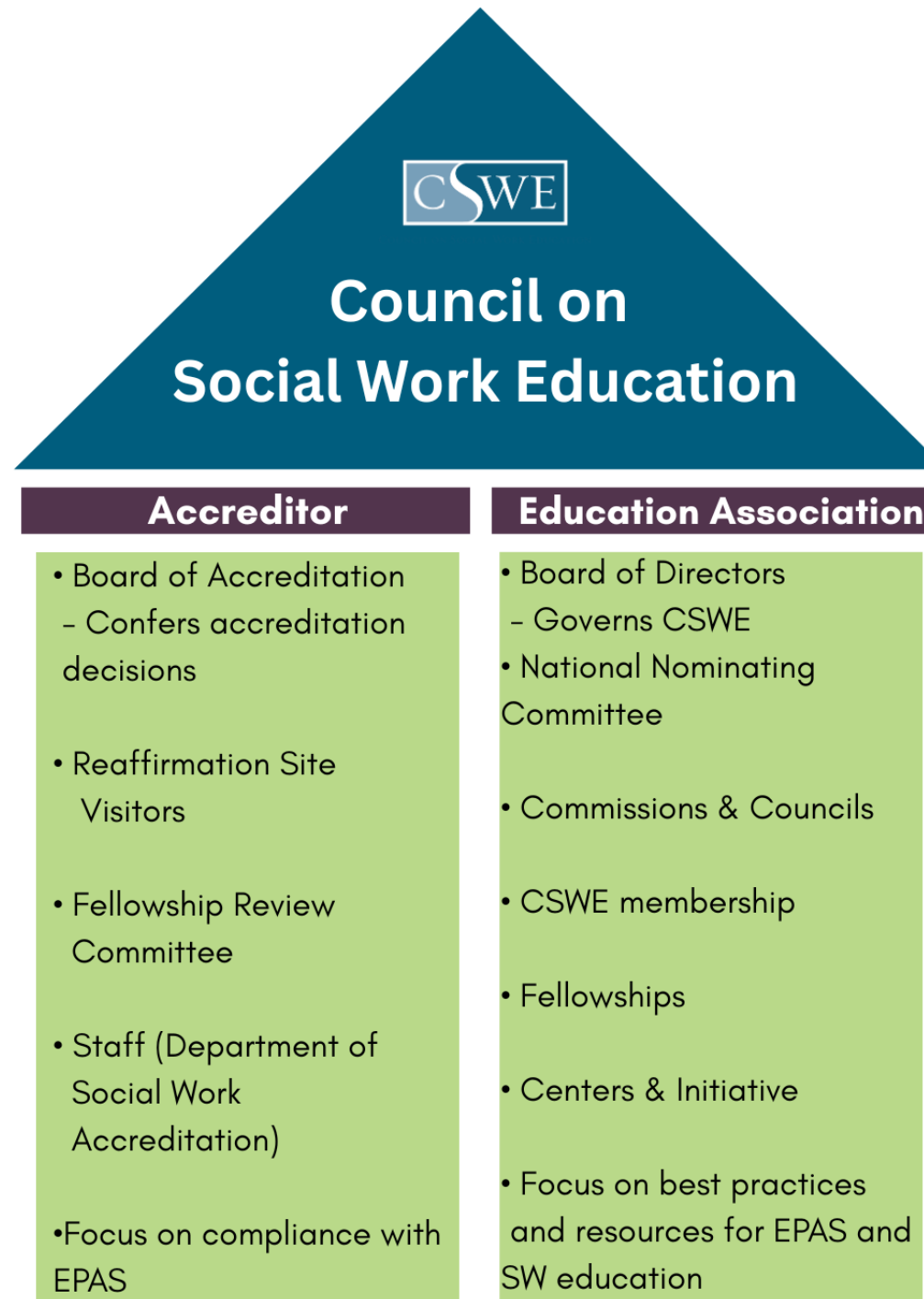
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Context & Framework



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CSWE Context: Two Pillars



Welcome to the Wonderful World of Accreditation!



- Technical | **compliance**
 - **Accreditation** supports with: standards, interpretations, policies, and procedures
 - Unity in national standards
 - Resources and services to translate standards to your unique context
- Art & Science | **best-practices**
 - **Education association** supports with: idea-sharing, examples, samples, literature, and models

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



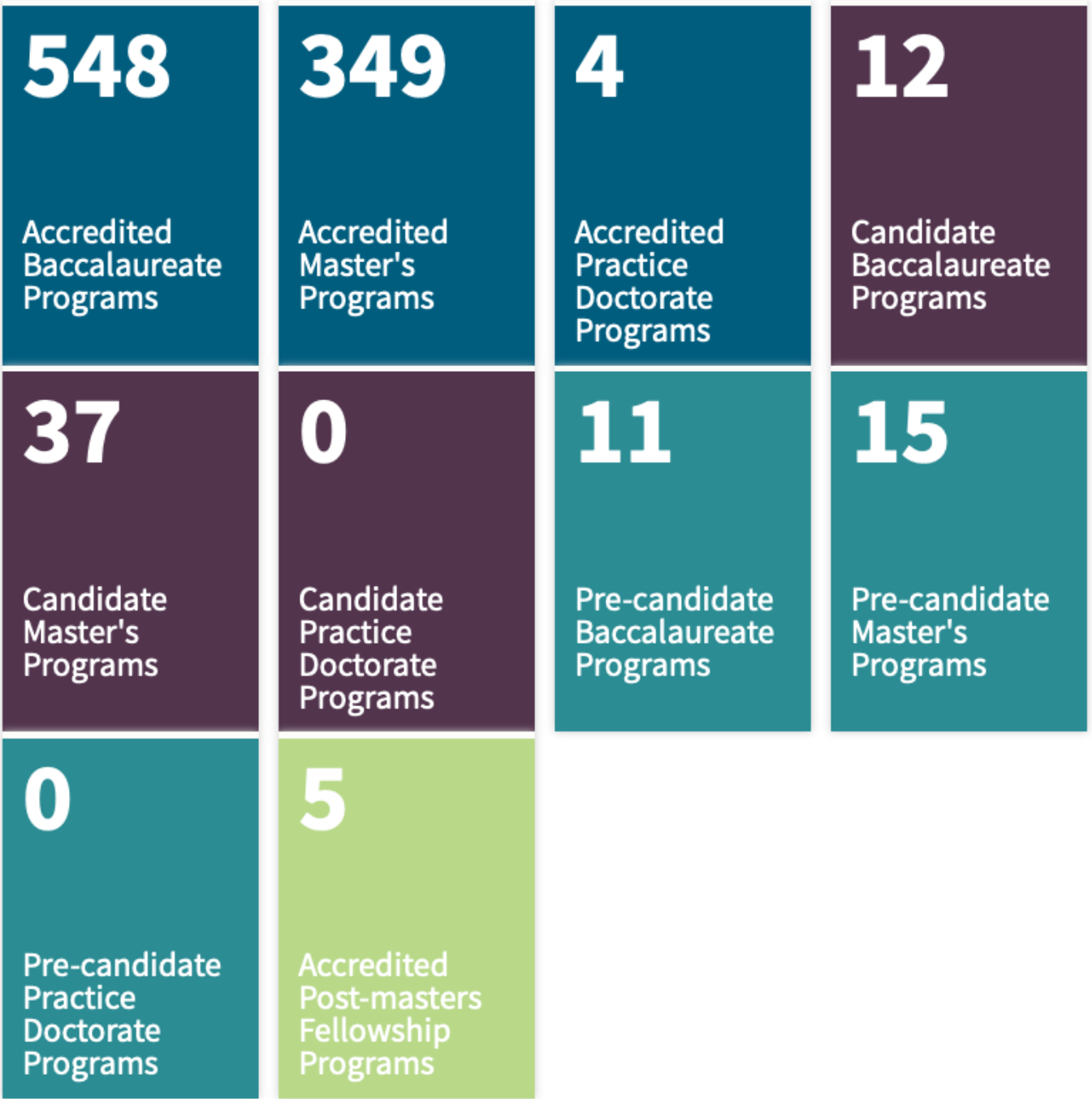
Beyond BOA's scope:

- 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

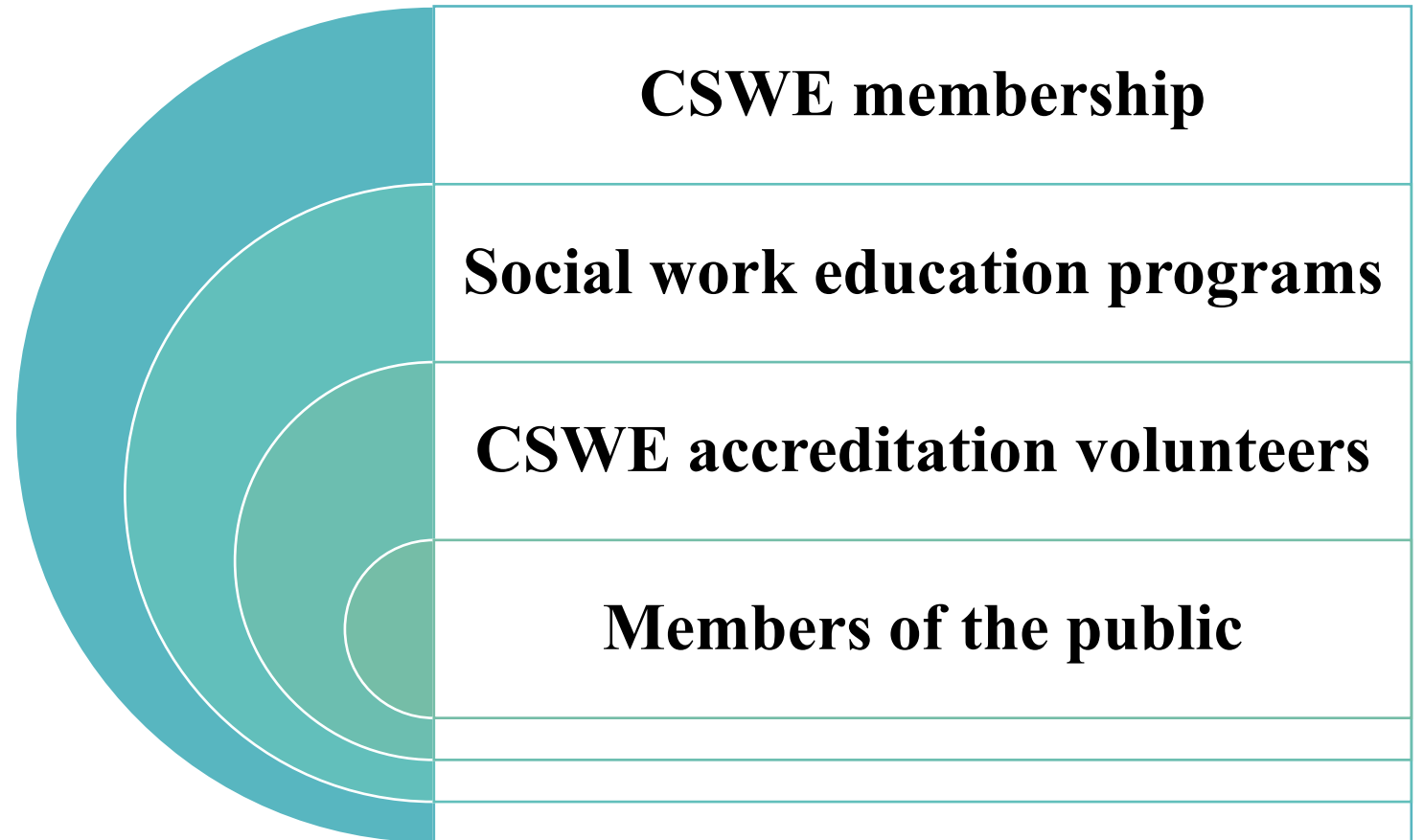


**Total Programs:
981**

as of October 2025



Scope of Service



CSWE accreditation staff provide services, resources, education and training to:



Purposes of Accreditation

CSWE accreditation is a **peer-review** system for **recognizing** social work education programs as having a level of **performance, integrity, and quality**.

The purposes of accreditation are:

Quality assurance

Academic improvement

Professional preparation

Public accountability

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.

Accreditation is a Team Effort

- Team-based approaches
 - Optional Tool: [Team Approach Grid](#)



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



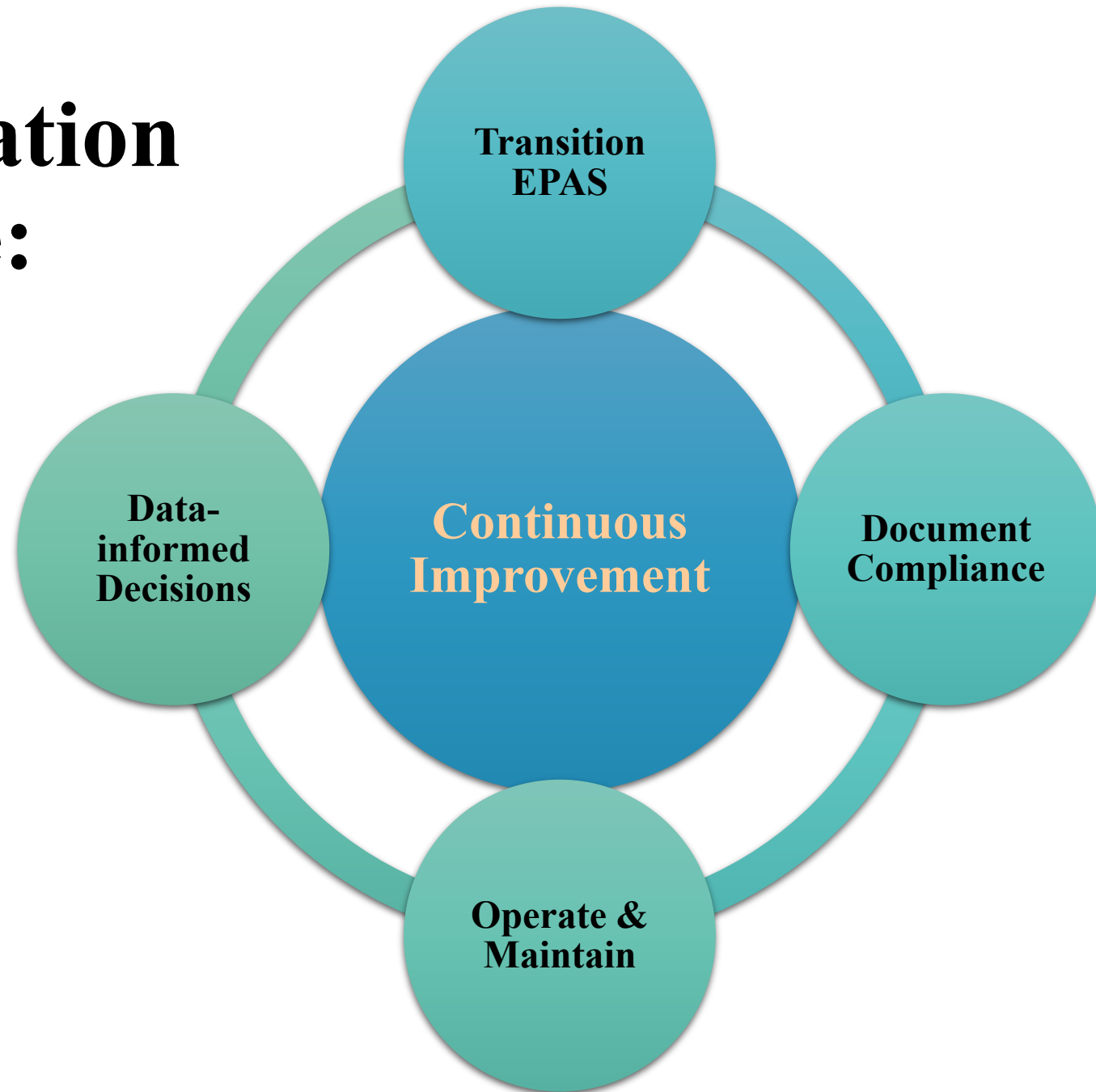
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Accreditation Processes



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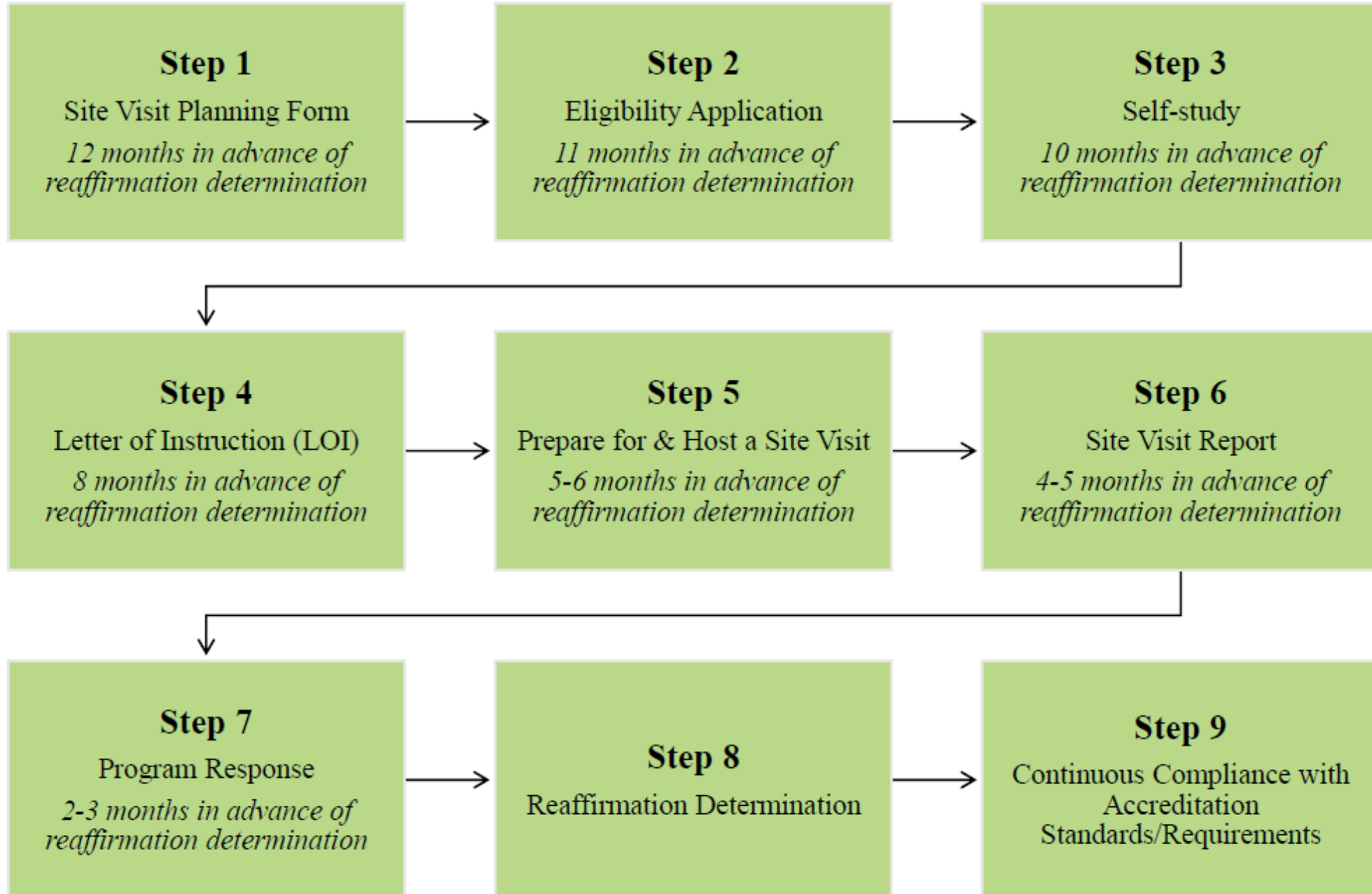
Accreditation Cycle:



Common Accreditation Processes

- **Reaffirmation** | 8-year reaccreditation reviews
- **Candidacy** | 3-year new program development
- **Annual accreditation record audit**
 - Public posting of student outcomes report on programs' website
- **Program Changes**
 - Database/directory listing updates
 - Substantive Change Proposals

Reaffirmation Process Overview

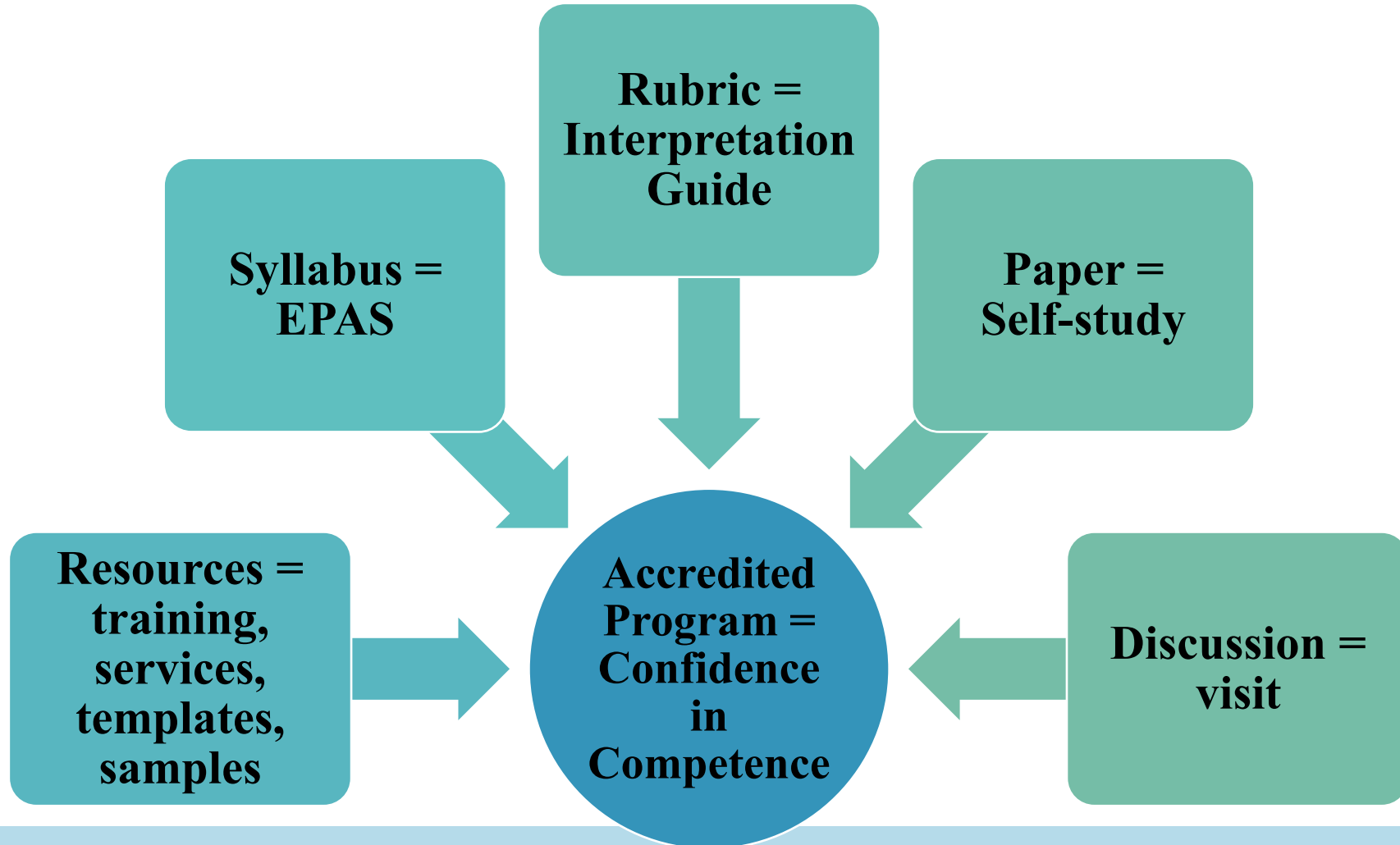


Decision Types

- Familiarize yourself with decision types
- Understand the frequency of each decision type issued
- Set reasonable expectations
 - Vast majority of reviews requests clarifications
- *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

Accreditation Inputs

Best-Practices, Innovation, Literature, & Networking



Trust the Process

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





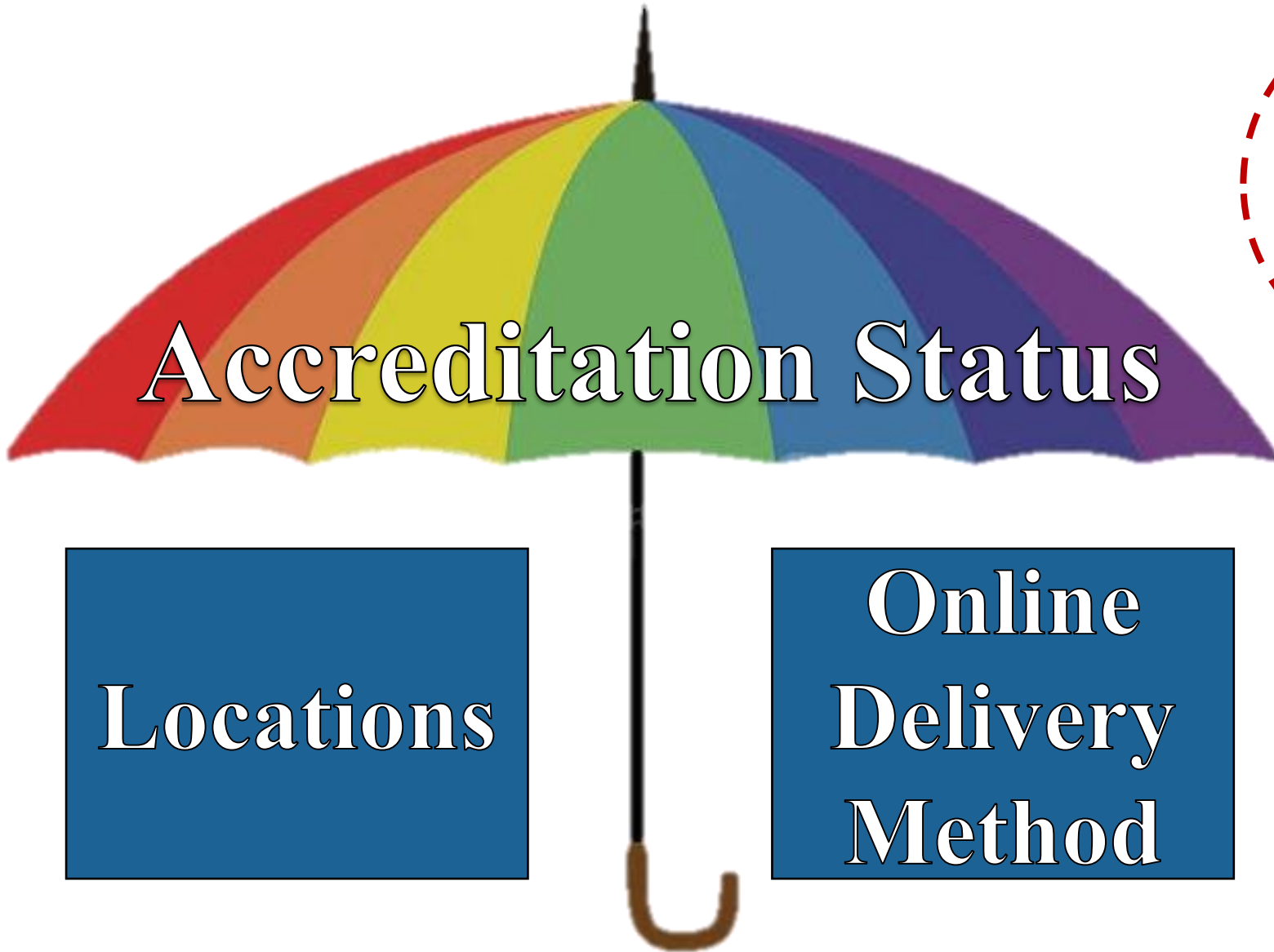
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Accreditation Documents



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Program Options



Tip! Substantive Change Proposal required 6-months before implementing



CSWE-BOA Approach

- In-service to social work education and profession
- Mutual trust
 - Not investigative or “gotcha!” approach
- Multi-phased to provide due process
- Multi-modality to understand rich context
- Accountability via minimum compliance with the standards

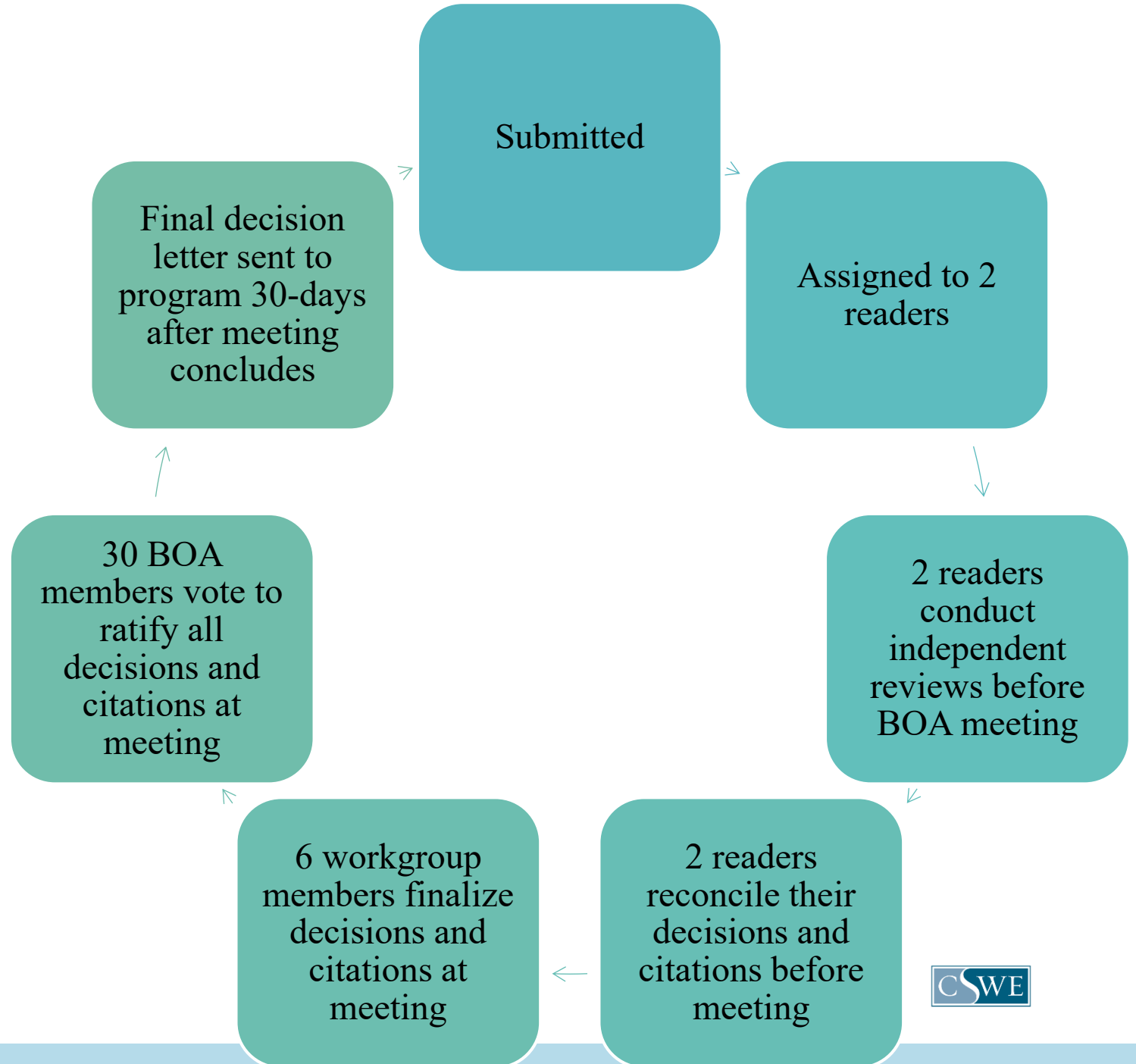
Minimum Compliance

- 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!*

Life Cycle of an Accreditation Document



Reaffirmation Self-study



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

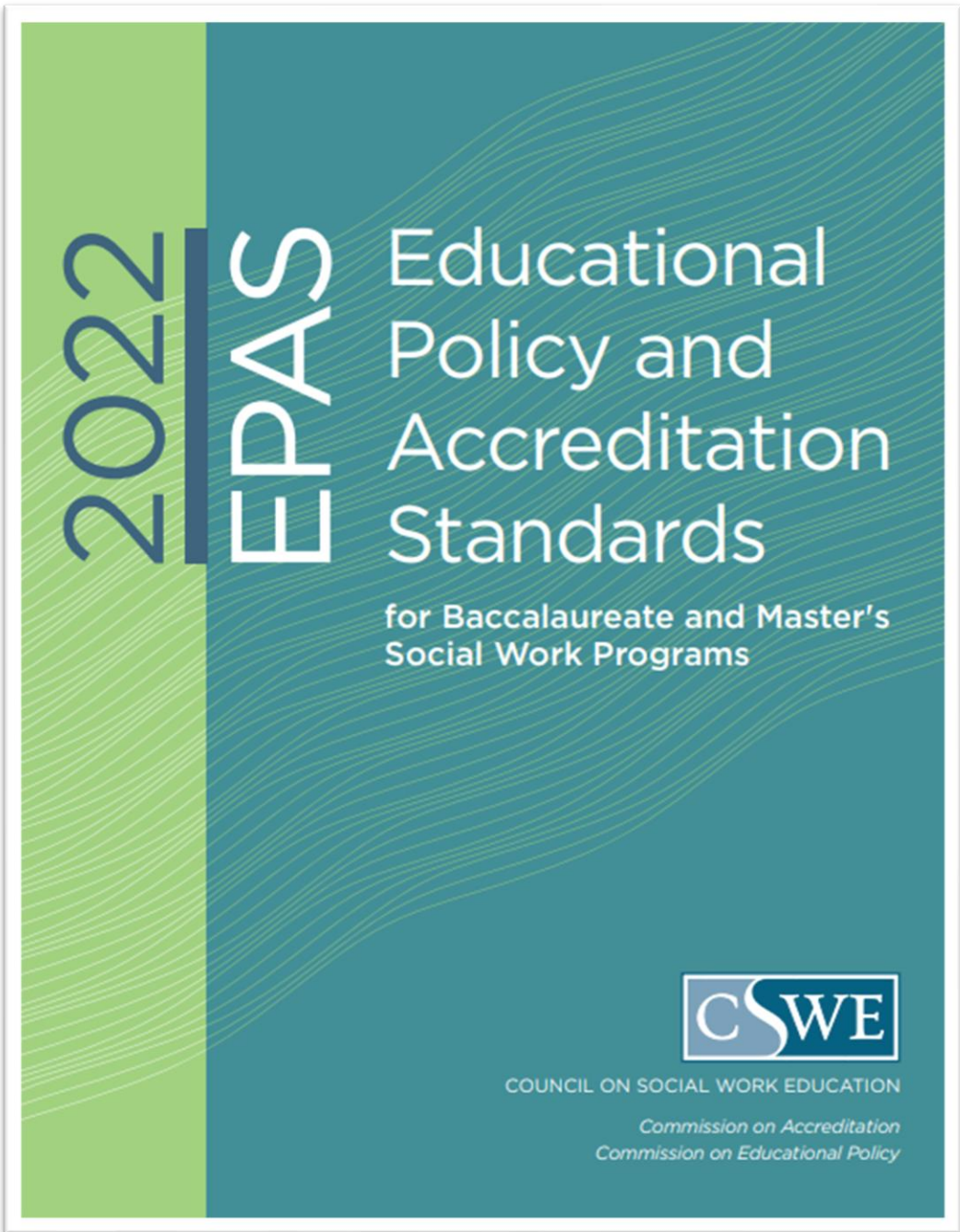


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Writing an Accreditation Document



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Structure of the EPAS



Anatomy of an Accreditation Standard

4.1.5

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

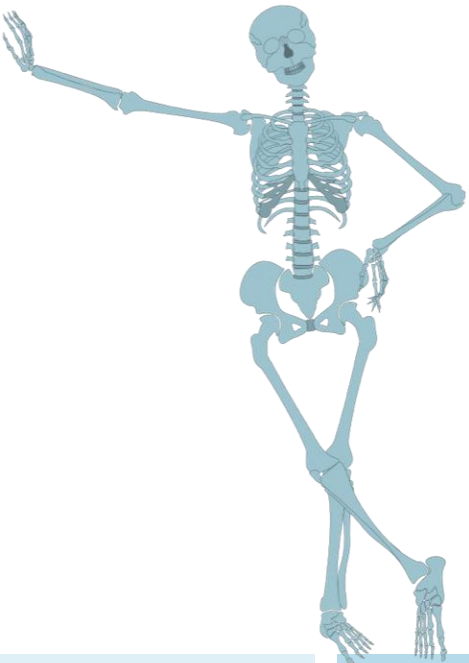
- a. *The program provides the policy indicating that it does not grant social work course credit for life experience or previous work experience.*
- b. *The program describes how this policy is articulated.*
- c. *The program addresses all program options.*

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



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

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



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Continuous Compliance



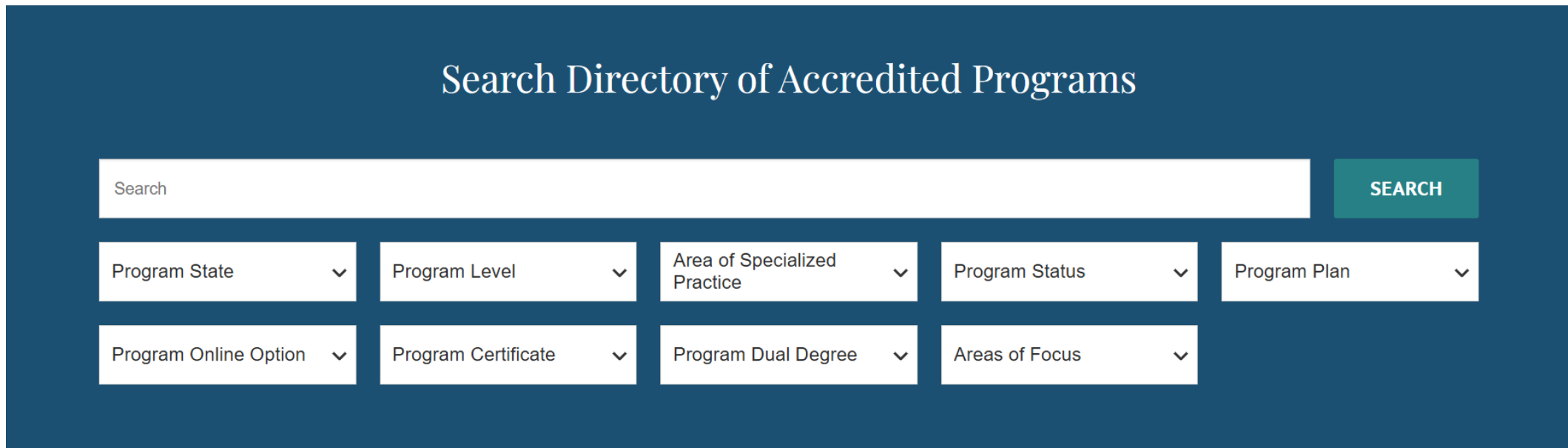
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Maintaining Compliance Between Review Cycles

- 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
- Programs are not static
 - Retain strong elements
 - Be creative, innovate, pilot, and make changes
- Update assessment of competency-based student learning outcomes minimally every 2-years via required form
 - *Data presented must be collected within 2-years at all times*

Annual Accreditation Record Audit

- Updates internal database record and [external directory listing](#)
- Used to collect webpage hyperlinks to publicly posted student assessment data
- Audit is separate from annual survey
 - [Annual survey of social work programs](#) does not collect compliance information **but** vital for collecting social work education stats and trends



The screenshot shows a search interface titled "Search Directory of Accredited Programs" on a dark blue background. At the top, there is a white search bar with the placeholder text "Search" and a teal "SEARCH" button to its right. Below the search bar, there are two rows of filter dropdown menus. The first row includes: "Program State", "Program Level", "Area of Specialized Practice", "Program Status", and "Program Plan". The second row includes: "Program Online Option", "Program Certificate", "Program Dual Degree", and "Areas of Focus". Each dropdown menu has a small downward-pointing arrow on its right side.

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

Interim Accreditation Processes

- Submit substantive change proposals via required template
 - Policy 4.9 in the [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#)
- Self-report issues that may impact compliance with the EPAS
 - Policy 4.9 in the [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#)
- *Optional:*
 - Request copies of BOA decision letters or customized accreditation history letter per policy 4.1 in the [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#)
 - Request a clarification letter or special compliance review if unable to maintain compliance per policy 4.10 in the [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#)
 - Request waivers to certain accreditation standards per policy 4.5 in the [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#)



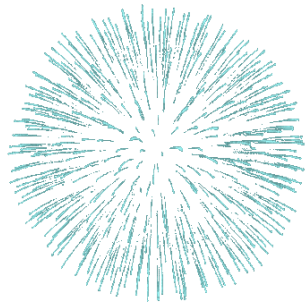
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2022 EPAS Accreditation Toolkit

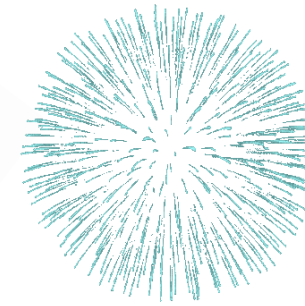


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2022 EPAS Unity Date Has Passed



July 1, 2025



Next Step: Review the implementation timeline for any caveats that may apply to your program.

Use these to aid your efforts:

- [2022 EPAS accreditation toolkit](#)
- [2022 EPAS FAQs](#)
- [2015 EPAS vs. 2022 EPAS Crosswalk](#)



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

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"> <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"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life experience <input type="checkbox"/> Previous work experience <input type="checkbox"/> Cite the location of each written policy, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Name of documents, manuals, handbooks, syllabi, platforms, and/or websites <input type="checkbox"/> Page numbers (if applicable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Definition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Articulation ○ Course Credit • Examples of how this policy is articulated: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prospective student materials ○ Admission packet ○ Syllabi ○ Learning management system ○ Orientation ○ Advising sessions ○ Webinars/online modules ○ Newsletters or other communications ○ Websites
<p>b. The program describes how this policy is articulated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explain how stakeholders are actively informed, including where and how the information is accessed by relevant stakeholders. <input type="checkbox"/> Cite the location of the written articulation, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Name of documents, manuals, handbooks, syllabi, platforms, and/or websites <input type="checkbox"/> Page numbers (if applicable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If applicable, describe how this information is actively articulated to students and field personnel beyond written materials (e.g., orientation). • Use subheadings to clearly address each component of the standard. <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #000;"/> <p>Candidate Programs <i>AS 4.1.5 is reviewed for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval at Benchmark 1 • Compliance at Benchmark 3
<p>c. The program addresses all program options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly address each program option. 	

Accreditation Policy Handbook

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 to ensure use of the current version of this handbook.

Table of Contents





Accreditation Services



How Can We Help?

- Check with accreditation staff before thinking your program "isn't allowed" to do something.
 - **Very few standards explain what a program can't do.**
- Standards explain “what” is required; you tell BOA “how” and “why”
- Traditional and innovative approaches to education are welcome and celebrated
- Many myths to bust in social work education – *so, be sure to ask!*



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.

- **Accrediting organizations welcome questions from programs!**
- Supportive accountability model
- Consultations provided by CSWE accreditation staff are **confidential** (policy 1.4, [Accreditation Policy Handbook](#))



Accreditation Services

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

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



Drop-in Group Consultations



Did you know? We provide monthly drop-in group consultations on:

- **New Baccalaureate & Master's Program Applicants**
- **New Practice Doctorate Program Applicants | Traditional 3-year Pathway**
- **New Practice Doctorate Program Applicants | Temporary Alternative 1-year Pathway**
- **Substantive Change Process**





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CSWE Opportunities



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Volunteer Engagement Snapshot

Total
Accreditation
Volunteers:
283

as of January 2026

230

- Reaffirmation site visitors

30

- Board of Accreditation (BOA) members

13

- Former BOA members conducting candidacy visits

10

- Members of the Fellowship Review Committee (FRC)



Volunteer Perks

- Professional development
- Enhancing accreditation expertise, technical discussion, and writing skills to contribute to one's own social work program's accreditation efforts
- Learning about new, innovative, and promising social work education practices
- A network of peers with expertise in accreditation
- Annual letters of recognition which may be used for promotions
- Contributing to the overall improvement of the social work profession and education community
- Join the annual volunteer celebration at [CSWE's Annual Conference](#)



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](#)



How can BPD members be involved in CSWE?

- Join a CSWE [Commission or Council](#)
- [Submit or review annual conference proposals](#)
- Become a Journal on Social Work Education (JSWE) [reviewer](#)
- Read [CSWE Compass](#) member newsletter for opportunities – **your membership and voice matter!**





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Q & A



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Questions? Let's Chat

