



COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

POST-MASTER'S SOCIAL WORK FELLOWSHIP ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

May 2022
www.cswe.org

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INTRODUCTION

Fellowship programs accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)'s [Commission on Accreditation \(COA\)](#) provide training and supervision to master's-level social work practitioners within one or more defined areas of social work practice.

The *Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Handbook* was developed to supplement the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) and identifies the accreditation policies and procedures that apply to post-master's social work fellowship programs, specifically.

CSWE has accredited master's social work programs since its inception in 1952 and baccalaureate social work programs since 1974. In 2021, following a pilot, COA began accrediting post-master's social work fellowship programs. Unlike the academic programs accredited by COA, fellowship programs are practice based, hosted by sites offering social work services, and not tied to degree programs in colleges and universities. Therefore, the accreditation requirements and review process for fellowship programs differ from those used for the accreditation of baccalaureate and master's programs. Namely:

- The [Fellowship Review Committee \(FRC\)](#) serves as the primary review body for fellowship programs seeking initial or continued accreditation and is responsible for making accreditation decision recommendations to the COA. The COA considers FRC recommendations and ratifies accreditation decisions.
- The [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#), approved and adopted in September 2021, serve as the basis to evaluate the quality of the fellowship program offered and to hold the program accountable to these expectations to the community, the profession, and the public.

This handbook is comprehensive but not exhaustive. Processes and policies outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) may be adapted for post-master's social work fellowship accreditation, as deemed appropriate by CSWE and COA.

Any questions regarding this handbook, or the fellowship accreditation process in general, may be directed to fellowship@cswe.org. Please note, this handbook is subject to change. Always confirm that the program is utilizing the most current version of the handbook as programs are solely responsible for implementing, demonstrating, and maintaining compliance with accreditation requirements.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility requirements define the scope of CSWE-COA's post-master's social work fellowship accreditation. For a program to seek accreditation, it must meet each of the following eligibility requirements:

1. The program is hosted by a site offering social work services in the United States, its territories, or on U.S. military installations.
 - If more than one organization sponsors the fellowship, there must be a contractual agreement between the organizations that outlines specific responsibilities and ownership for the fellowship.
2. The program is practice-based and includes supervision. Practice refers to any of the three types of social work practice: micro-level, mezzo-level, and macro-level. Social work practice experience is defined as providing social work services to individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities.
3. The program's curriculum is competency-based and provides training and supervision within one or more defined areas of social work practice. The program identifies the focused area(s) of practice based on the individuals,

families, groups, organizations, and communities served by the host site and the resources and expertise available (e.g., staff expertise, supervision availability) to provide a suitable training program. (See Fellowship Standard 2.2)

4. The program is structured to be 1,000 total hours minimum including 100 didactic instruction hours and 900 practice hours, minimum. The program is also structured to be completed in no fewer than 9 months and no longer than 36 months. (See Fellowship Standards 2.3.1 and 2.3.2)
 - o Program provides at minimum 900 hours of practice experience to trainees throughout the course of the program. These are hours of social work services provided by the trainee to the individuals, families, groups, organizations, or communities the fellowship's host site serves. (See Fellowship Standard 2.3.2)
 - o Of the 900 practice experience hours, at least 100 hours are supervision. Supervision is instructional guidance provided to the trainee by an experienced social worker throughout the course of the program. Supervisors hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and have 2 years of post-master's social work practice experience. (See Fellowship Standards 2.3.2, 2.4, and 3.4.1)
5. The program requires that trainees hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program prior to commencing the program. This includes individuals whose degree was recognized as equivalent through CSWE's [International Social Work Degree Recognition and Evaluation Service \(ISWDRES\)](#) and graduates from Canadian social work programs accredited by CASWE covered by the [memorandum of understanding between CSWE and CASWE](#).
6. The program appoints a program director to administratively oversee all aspects of the program. If the program director does not hold a master's degree in social work from a CSWE-accredited program and have 2 years of post-master's social work practice experience, then the program appoints a program coordinator with these qualifications. (See Fellowship Standard 3.5.2).

If an accredited program is found to be out of compliance with Eligibility Requirements, the COA may initiate an adverse action.

FELLOWSHIP STANDARDS

CSWE uses the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#) (Fellowship Standards) to evaluate and accredit post-master's social work fellowship programs. The Fellowship Standards focus on four categories: (1) Program Mission and Goals, (2) Curriculum, (3) Learning Environment, and (4) Assessment. The program mission and goals serve as the foundation of the program. The curriculum and learning environment are developed with fulfillment of the mission and goals in mind. The assessment mechanisms implemented by the program serve to assess if the program is meeting its mission and goals.

The Fellowship Standards describe the operational and programmatic structural elements that CSWE deems essential to a quality program. The fellowship standards provide consistency and quality of the fellowship program for the trainees and the individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities they serve. Achieving accreditation demonstrates to the public and prospective trainees that the program meets a standardized level of educational quality.

While accreditation status is reviewed at periodic intervals, programs are expected to maintain compliance between review cycles. Social work programs are solely responsible for implementing, demonstrating, and maintaining compliance with the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#) at all times.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The following process is followed by fellowship programs seeking initial accreditation.

STEP 1: FELLOWSHIP ACCREDITATION ELIGIBILITY APPLICATION

A fellowship program must first complete and submit a [Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application](#) and pay the nonrefundable Eligibility Fee (see [Fees](#)).

- *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Applications* are accepted at any time. However, a program should note that once a *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application* is accepted, it must proceed toward accreditation. Specifically, the program must complete and submit a *Self-Study* within 2 years; failure to do so may result in CSWE ceasing review of the program.
- Full payment of the nonrefundable Eligibility Fee is due when the *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application* is submitted.
- *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application* submissions that are incomplete or incorrectly formatted (see [Document Submission Guidelines](#)) may result in a request to revise and resubmit before it is reviewed.
- *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Applications* are reviewed by CSWE staff, and if needed, by the FRC to determine completeness of the form and readiness of the fellowship program to proceed with the accreditation process.
- *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Applications* for programs that do not meet eligibility requirements will be rejected without substantive review.

STEP 2: SELF-STUDY

After a fellowship program's *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application* is reviewed and approved by CSWE staff, the program completes and submits a *Self-Study* using the required [Fellowship Accreditation Self-Study Template](#).

1. Programs must have at least one trainee enrolled in the program when the *Self-Study* is submitted.
2. Programs must submit the *Self-Study* within 2 years of approval of the fellowship program's *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application*; failure to do so may result in CSWE ceasing review of the program.
3. Full payment of the nonrefundable Initial Accreditation Fee is due when the self-study is submitted. *The Initial Accreditation Fee* covers the cost of the visit (see [Fees](#)).
4. After a fellowship program submits a *Self-Study*, it must not make any substantive changes (see [Substantive Changes](#)). Should a program make a substantive change, it must notify CSWE staff immediately, and CSWE may suspend consideration of the fellowship program.
5. The *Self-Study* processing date determines when the program will be reviewed. The FRC meets 3 times per year and only 2 self-studies are reviewed per meeting (for a total of 6 programs per year). Once a *Self-Study* is submitted, and payment of the Initial Accreditation Fee is verified, the *Self-Study* is processed, and the program is placed on the next available FRC meeting agenda and corresponding review timeline. Therefore, programs are encouraged to submit a complete *Self-Study* as soon as they are ready. Submission of an incomplete, or incorrectly formatted document (see [Document Submission Guidelines](#)) may result in a request to revise and resubmit before the program is placed on an FRC meeting agenda.

Once a fellowship program's *Self-Study* is received and processed, the program is placed on an FRC meeting agenda for review. The program will be notified of the corresponding review timeline and will be asked to identify any conflicts of interest with FRC members (see [Conflicts of Interest and Confidentiality](#)).

STEP 3: FELLOWSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE REVIEW OF SELF-STUDY

The FRC meets 3 times per year (in January, May, and September) and reviews up to 2 self-studies per meeting. Ahead of each meeting, CSWE staff members assign two FRC members to review each program on the agenda. *If at any point a fellowship program no longer wishes to seek accreditation, the program may withdraw from accreditation review at any time by notifying CSWE staff in writing.*

Self-studies are provided to assigned FRC members for review:

- By early November for programs on the January FRC agenda
- By early March for programs on the May FRC agenda
- By early July for programs on the September FRC agenda

Each assigned FRC member is provided 4 weeks to review the *Self-Study* they're assigned to and completes an *Initial Accreditation Self-Study Review Brief* documenting their findings.

During each FRC meeting, the FRC reviews the programs placed on that agenda for a *Self-Study* review and makes one of three decisions:

1. Authorize a site visit;
2. Defer an authorization decision pending receipt of additional information. This may include asking the program to revise and resubmit the *Self-Study*; or
3. Recommend that COA deny a site visit.
 - a. Any recommendations made by the FRC to COA are confidential. Whenever the FRC decides on a recommendation to COA at one of their scheduled meetings, the program is placed on the following scheduled COA meeting agenda.
 - b. COA may accept the recommendation made by the FRC or it may choose to take an alternative action. COA decision options outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) (3.3.11. COA Decisions for Commissioner Visit I and 3.4.8. COA Decisions for Commissioner Visit II) may be adapted for post-master's social work fellowship accreditation. The COA has sole and complete authority as the final arbiter of compliance with *the Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards* or other evaluative criteria as the decision-making body. All accreditation decisions are ratified by the full 30-person COA at its final plenary session. Official COA decision letters are emailed to program directors thirty (30) days following the COA meeting.
 - c. A program is denied a site visit if the FRC and COA find the program's *Self-Study* to be inadequate. The program has two options in response to the decision: (1) to accept the decision or (2) to appeal by requesting a reconsideration of the decision. (See [Appeals](#))

Programs that are asked to supply additional information (**not** revise and resubmit) are placed on the following FRC meeting agenda for review. For example:

- If the FRC defers a site visit authorization decision pending additional information at a January meeting, the program will have until March 1 to provide the clarifying information so that the site visit authorization decision may take place at the May meeting.
- If the FRC defers a site visit authorization decision pending additional information at a May meeting, the program will have until July 1 to provide the clarifying information so that the site visit authorization decision may take place at the September meeting.

- If the FRC defers a site visit authorization decision pending additional information at a September meeting, the program will have until November 1 to provide the clarifying information so that the site visit authorization decision may take place at the January meeting.

However, programs that are asked to revise and resubmit are not guaranteed a spot on the next FRC agenda and will instead be assigned to the next available review timeline. Programs are asked to revise and resubmit when they fail to address all requirements of the fellowship standards sufficiently and/or fail to submit documents in the required format. The request for revision and resubmission reflects substantial issues or errors with program-submitted materials that hinders the review process. Programs in this position will be required to submit a revised *Self-Study* within 6 months. Once the revised *Self-Study* is received, the program will be placed on the next available FRC meeting agenda and corresponding review timeline.

The FRC and COA are solely responsible for selecting among the above actions in response to the review of the program materials.

STEP 4: SITE VISIT

After a site visit has been authorized, a site visit is scheduled in the second half of the trainee's program. Therefore, when a site visit occurs when a site visit occurs is dependent on the length and structure of the fellowship program and timing of when the site visit is authorized. (See [Site Visits](#))

1. A site visit must occur within 3 years of the authorization. If the site visit is not conducted within 3 years, then CSWE may cease review of the fellowship program.
2. Within two weeks of the completion of the visit, the site visitors will provide CSWE with a completed *Site Visit Report*. CSWE staff members will then provide the report to the fellowship program.
3. Site visits may be conducted any time of year. Accreditation decisions generally occur 5-8 months after the site visit.
 - a. If a site visit is conducted between June and September, the program is placed on the January FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.
 - b. If a site visit is conducted between October and January, the program is placed on the May FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.
 - c. If a site visit is conducted between February and May, the program is placed on the September FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.

Following the site visit, any communications between the site visitors and the fellowship program regarding the visit must be conducted through CSWE rather than directly between the site visit team and the program.

STEP 5: FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM'S RESPONSE TO SITE VISIT REPORT

Fellowship programs are required to submit a response to the site visit report within 30 days of receiving the report. In its response to the report, the program:

1. lists each accreditation standard and whether it agrees or disagrees with site visit findings,
2. corrects any errors of fact, and
3. clarifies information that may have been incorrectly understood by the site visitors. Disagreements with the site visit report should be stated clearly, and additional documentation should be provided if necessary.

In addition, if the program supplied the site visitors with any additional materials during the visit, it is the program's responsibility to append those materials to the program's response to the site visit report.

The response to the site visit report serves as the program's final written response to demonstrate compliance prior to the FRC determining an accreditation decision recommendation for the COA's consideration. Submission of an incomplete, or incorrectly formatted document (see [Document Submission Guidelines](#)), may result in a request to revise and may extend the review timeline for the program.

STEP 6: INITIAL ACCREDITATION DECISION

After the fellowship program's response is received, two FRC members review the site visit report and the fellowship program's response. Each assigned FRC member is provided 4 weeks to complete an *Initial Accreditation Final Review Brief* documenting their findings.

During each FRC meeting, the FRC reviews the programs placed on that agenda for an initial accreditation review and makes one of three decisions:

1. Recommend that the COA grant accreditation for 5 years.
2. Defer the accreditation decision recommendation. The FRC may require that the fellowship program submit information or host an additional site visit (See [Site Visits](#) and [Fees](#))
3. Recommend that the COA deny accreditation. (See [Appeals](#))

Any recommendations made by the FRC to COA are confidential. Whenever the FRC decides on a recommendation to COA at one of their scheduled meetings, the program is placed on the following scheduled COA meeting agenda.

- If an accreditation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their January meeting, that program is placed on the February COA meeting agenda.
- If an accreditation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their May meeting, that program is placed on the June COA meeting agenda.
- If an accreditation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their September meeting, that program is placed on the October COA meeting agenda.

COA may accept the recommendation made by the FRC or it may choose to take an alternative action. Full COA decision options outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) (4.6 COA Decisions for Initial Accreditation) may be adapted for post-master's social work fellowship accreditation.

The COA has sole and complete authority as the final arbiter of compliance with the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#) or other evaluative criteria as the decision-making body. All accreditation decisions are ratified by the full 30-person COA at its final plenary session. Official COA decision letters are emailed to program directors thirty (30) days following the COA meeting.

MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION

Post-master's social work fellowship programs are accredited for a period of eight (8) years. Between these regularly scheduled accreditation reviews, programs are solely responsible for implementing, demonstrating, and maintaining compliance with the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#). To maintain accreditation, the

fellowship must continue to meet accreditation requirements, including completing Cohort Reports (see [Cohort Report](#)), submitting Annual Fees (see [Fees](#)), and reporting Substantive Changes (see [Substantive Changes](#)).

Accreditation is an ongoing process and encourages program renewal and continuous quality improvement efforts.

If a program wishes to withdraw from accredited status or discontinue offering the program, the program director and/or their superior sends a formal letter to CSWE staff of its intent and provides its plan for teaching out trainees currently enrolled in the program. A program is expected to remain in full compliance with all fellowship standards during the withdrawal process.

REAFFIRMATION PROCESS

After receipt of its initial accreditation, a program's accredited status is reviewed for reaffirmation every eight (8) years. The steps in reaffirming a program's accreditation are:

STEP 1: SELF-STUDY

1. The program completes and submits a *Self-Study* using the required [Fellowship Accreditation Self-Study Template](#).
2. The *Self-Study* must be submitted 1 year, but no more than 15 months, prior to the expiration of the program's current accreditation term. Failure to do so may result in a lapse in the program's accreditation.
3. Full payment of the nonrefundable Reaffirmation Fee is due when the *Self-Study* is submitted. *The Reaffirmation Fee covers the cost of the visit (see Fees)*.
4. Submission of an incomplete, or incorrectly formatted *Self-Study* document (see [Document Submission Guidelines](#)) may result in a request to revise and resubmit and may result in an extended review period.
5. A fellowship program undergoing reaffirmation review is discouraged from making any substantive changes (see [Substantive Changes](#)). Should a fellowship program undergoing reaffirmation review make a substantive change after the *Self-Study* is submitted, it must notify CSWE staff immediately. This may result in an extended review period and lapse in the program's accreditation.

STEP 2: FELLOWSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE REVIEW OF SELF-STUDY

CSWE staff members assign two FRC members to review each program's reaffirmation *Self-Study*. Each assigned FRC member is provided 4 weeks to review the *Self-Study* they're assigned to and completes a *Reaffirmation Self-Study Review Brief* documenting their findings and prepare for the site visit.

STEP 3: SITE VISIT

1. A site visit is scheduled for around 6 months prior to the expiration of the program's current accreditation term. (See [Site Visits](#)).
2. Payment of the nonrefundable Reaffirmation Fee must be confirmed prior to the visit being scheduled. If the site visit is not conducted during this time frame, this may result in a lapse in the program's accreditation.
3. Within two weeks of the completion of the visit, the site visitors will provide CSWE with a completed *Site Visit Report*. CSWE staff members will then provide the report to the fellowship program.
4. Site visits may be conducted any time of year. Accreditation decisions generally occur 5-8 months after the site visit.
 - a. If a site visit is conducted between June and September, the program is placed on the January FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.

- b. If a site visit is conducted between October and January, the program is placed on the May FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.
- c. If a site visit is conducted between February and May, the program is placed on the September FRC agenda for an accreditation decision recommendation to be made to COA.

Following the site visit, any communications between the site visitors and the fellowship program regarding the visit must be conducted through CSWE rather than directly between the site visit team and the program.

STEP 4: FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM'S RESPONSE TO SITE VISIT REPORT

Fellowship programs are required to submit a response to the site visit report within thirty (30) days of receiving the report. In its response to the report, the program:

1. Lists each accreditation standard and whether it agrees or disagrees with site visit findings,
2. Corrects any errors of fact, and
3. Clarifies information that may have been incorrectly understood by the site visitors. Disagreements with the site visit report should be stated clearly, and additional documentation should be provided if necessary.

In addition, if the program supplied the site visitors with any additional materials during the visit, it is the program's responsibility to append those materials to the program's response to the site visit report.

The response to the site visit report serves as the program's final written response to demonstrate compliance prior to the FRC determining an accreditation decision recommendation for the COA's consideration. Submission of an incomplete, or incorrectly formatted document (see [Document Submission Guidelines](#)), may result in an extended review period and lapse in the program's accreditation.

STEP 5: REAFFIRMATION DECISION

After the fellowship program's response is received, two FRC members review the site visit report and the fellowship program's response. Each assigned FRC member is provided 4 weeks to complete a *Reaffirmation Final Review Brief* documenting their findings.

During each FRC meeting, the FRC reviews the programs placed on that agenda for a reaffirmation review and makes one of four decisions:

1. Recommend that COA reaffirm accreditation for 5 years.
2. Defer the reaffirmation decision recommendation. The FRC may require that the fellowship program submit information or host an additional site visit. (See [Site Visits](#) and [Fees](#))
3. Place the program on conditional accredited status. (See [Appeals](#))
4. Recommend that the COA initiate withdrawal of accredited status. (See [Appeals](#))

Any recommendations made by the FRC to COA are confidential. Whenever the FRC decides on a recommendation to COA at one of their scheduled meetings, the program is placed on the following scheduled COA meeting agenda.

- If a reaffirmation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their January meeting, that program is placed on the February COA meeting agenda.
- If a reaffirmation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their May meeting, that program is placed on the June COA meeting agenda.

- If a reaffirmation recommendation is decided by the FRC at their September meeting, that program is placed on the October COA meeting agenda.

COA may accept the recommendation made by the FRC or it may choose to take an alternative action. Full COA decision options outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) (2.6 COA Reaffirmation Determination and Decisions) may be adapted for post-master’s social work fellowship accreditation. All accreditation decisions are ratified by the full 30-person COA at its final plenary session. Official COA decision letters are emailed to program directors thirty (30) days following the COA meeting.

FELLOWSHIP REVIEW COMMITTEE

The FRC serves as the primary review body for fellowship programs seeking initial or continued accreditation and is responsible for making accreditation decision recommendations to COA.

The FRC is a volunteer body comprised of social work educators and practitioners. The committee is committed to the following:

- Implementing an accreditation process guided by transparent criteria
- Ensuring fellowship programs meet minimum accreditation requirements
- Fostering continuous improvement and innovation
- Sharing industry knowledge about emerging trends in fellowship practice

SELF-STUDY REVIEW

FRC members are responsible for reviewing each fellowship program’s *Self-Study*; determining whether a site visit is authorized for the program; preparing reports that summarize the strengths, concerns, and areas of improvement of the program; and recommending an accreditation decision to COA.

SITE VISITS

FRC members are expected to conduct two site visits per year. FRC members are expected to visit the fellowship programs whose *Self-Study* they have reviewed. This includes cases in which a program’s *Self-Study* is assigned for review during an FRC member’s term, but the program’s site visit takes place after the expiration of the member’s term.

Site visit travel expenses are reimbursed by CSWE.

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

The FRC meets virtually three times a year (January, May, and September). FRC members are expected to attend all FRC meetings on time and participate until their conclusion. During these meetings:

- CSWE staff present any updates and provides training,
- FRC discusses any accreditation matters and assess the effectiveness of the accreditation process and makes changes, as needed, to support the development and continuous improvement of social work fellowship training,
- Reconciles site visit authorization decision for self-studies reviewed on that agenda (up to 2 per meeting); and
- Reconciles initial accreditation and reaffirmation decision recommendations for COA’s consideration.

Additional virtual meetings may be scheduled as needed.

COMMISSION ON ACCREDITATION

The [Commission on Accreditation \(COA\)](#) is the sole accrediting body for social work education in the United States and its territories and receives its authority from CSWE's bylaws, and through its recognition granted by the [Council for Higher Education Accreditation \(CHEA\)](#). COA is responsible for establishing professional standards and conducting accreditation reviews to ensure high quality educational programs that prepare graduates to meet the changing demands of professional social work practice.

The post-master's social work fellowship accreditation process established by CSWE and COA is largely supported by the Fellowship Review Committee (FRC). The FRC serves as the primary review body for fellowship programs seeking initial or continued accreditation and is responsible for making accreditation decision recommendations to COA. COA considers FRC recommendations and ratifies accreditation decisions.

Up to two COA members are appointed to serve as liaisons to the Fellowship Review Committee. The liaisons attend the FRC meetings which allows the liaisons to obtain firsthand knowledge of FRC discussions and provide more opportunities to give feedback and direction to fellowship accreditation initiative. During each COA meeting, the liaisons and/or staff present a Post-master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Report and assist with transitioning and clarifying FRC accreditation recommendations to COA, as needed.

COA may accept recommendations made by the FRC or it may choose to take alternative actions. Full COA decision options outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) (2.6 COA Reaffirmation Determinations and Decisions and 4.6 COA Decisions for Initial Accreditation) may be adapted for post-master's social work fellowship accreditation.

The COA has sole and complete authority as the final arbiter of compliance with the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#) or other evaluative criteria as the decision-making body. All accreditation decisions are ratified by the full 30-person COA at its final plenary session. Official COA decision letters are emailed to program directors thirty (30) days following the COA meeting.

A full description of COA, its composition, and responsibilities, can be found in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) (1.1.5 Commission on Accreditation). Also, please note that processes and policies outlined in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#) may also be adapted for post-master's social work fellowship accreditation, as deemed appropriate by CSWE and COA.

DOCUMENT SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

CSWE Staff and the Fellowship Review Committee are responsible for reading materials of several fellowship programs. For that reason, it is vital that the materials provided by programs are concise, complete, straightforward, and well-documented. The following policies and procedures apply to all documents submitted to CSWE, COA, or FRC. This includes but is not limited to:

- Statements of Intent
- Initial Accreditation Self-Studies
- Reaffirmation Self-Studies
- Program responses to visit reports
- Cohort Reports

- Substantive Change notifications

Programs that submit materials that are incomplete or incorrectly formatted may be asked to revise and resubmit. The request for revision and resubmission reflects substantial issues or errors with program-submitted materials that hinders the review process. Should the program fail to submit the accreditation document(s) by the revision due date, the COA may initiate an adverse action.

REQUIRED FORMAT

- Accreditation processes are paperless. All materials are submitted electronically via email.
- Programs will utilize the required templates for submission of Statements of Intent, Self-Studies, or Cohort Reports.
- The entire document must be a single/continuous file with all relevant compliance materials embedded directly into the document. Appendices and separate attachments may not be included in any document submission.
- Acceptable document types include:
 - 1 comprehensive searchable Adobe PDF document; or
 - 1 comprehensive Microsoft Word Document

Documents must be accessible and searchable. Cloud-based documents, scanned documents, or password protected documents will NOT be accepted. Short supporting documentation such as letters or memos are the only exception to the no scanning rule. Any short supporting document that is scanned needs to be legible and incorporated into the relevant narrative response section (not included as an appendix or separate attachment).

- Address each component of the standard and/or prompt in your response and use subheadings when appropriate.
- All required compliance information MUST be documented via a narrative response to the standard and/or prompt. Narrative responses need to be complete. Refrain from responding with “n/a,” “see attached,” or simply providing a web-based hyperlink. Also, refrain from referring the FRC or COA to previously submitted documents. The FRC and COA must be able to review and determine compliance without referring to documents not provided in the current submission.
- All program information and operations reported should be current as of the time of the submission.

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

- When responding to concerns, specify the actions that have been taken and provide documentation that they have been completed. If any concerns remain to be clarified, the program clearly identifies the plan, the schedule, and provides evidence of commitment of resources for accomplishing the plan.
- CSWE accreditation is voluntary and, as such, the burden of proof regarding compliance with accreditation requirements is the responsibility of the fellowship program. When addressing a concern, avoid a defensive response that refutes reviewer or site visit comments and instead demonstrate the desire to provide clarification or documentation that supports program compliance with accreditation requirements. In addition, refrain from referring the FRC or COA to previously submitted documents. The FRC and COA must be able to review and determine compliance without referring to documents not provided in the current submission.
- Any revisions made are clearly highlighted, marked, or underlined to facilitate review.

ACCREDITATION FEES

The following fees must be paid by programs seeking initial and continued accreditation:

Amount	Type
\$2,000	Eligibility Fee
\$2,000	Initial Accreditation Fee

	(includes the cost of the site visit)
\$1,000	Annual Accreditation Fee
\$2,000	Reaffirmation Fee (includes the cost of the site visit)
\$2000	Site Visit Fee
<i>All fees associated with accreditation are nonrefundable and subject to change.</i>	

ELIGIBILITY FEE

The eligibility fee is paid by a fellowship program seeking initial accreditation. The fee is submitted alongside the program's *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application*. *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Applications* are accepted on a rolling basis.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION FEE

Fellowship programs seeking initial accreditation will submit the initial accreditation fee alongside the initial accreditation *Self-Study*. The fee covers the cost of the site visit (see [Site Visit Fee](#)).

ANNUAL ACCREDITATION FEE

All accredited fellowship programs must pay an annual fee each year in order to maintain accreditation. Annual fees are invoiced in January and due by February 28.

If an accredited program fails to submit an Annual Fee on time, the COA may initiate an adverse action.

REAFFIRMATION FEE

Fellowship programs seeking reaffirmation will submit the reaffirmation fee alongside the reaffirmation *Self-Study*. The fee covers the cost of the site visit (see [Site Visit Fee](#)).

SITE VISIT FEE

The Initial Accreditation Fee and Reaffirmation Fee each cover the cost of a site visit. Should an additional site visits be required, the fellowship program must pay the Site Visit Fee once the visit is scheduled. If the site visit fee is not paid sixty (60) days before the date of the scheduled visit, the site visit will be cancelled and CSWE may cease review of the fellowship program or the COA may initiate an adverse action.

SITE VISITS

All programs seeking initial accreditation or reaffirmation undergo a site visit. There may be times when additional or subsequent site visits are required by the FRC or COA to determine compliance with accreditation requirements. *The program bears the cost of any site visit (see [Fees](#)).*

SITE VISIT PURPOSE

The site visit is an integral part of the peer-review process. It allows the FRC and COA to ensure that, in the best judgment of a group of qualified professionals, the fellowship meets accreditation requirements. Specifically, site visitors validate findings and information present in the *Fellowship Accreditation Eligibility Application* and *Self-Study* and collect

information to be used by the FRC and COA to determine the extent to which the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#) are met.

Site visits occur so that a site visitor may gather information. Please note that site visitors do not make judgements, recommendations, or compliance determinations.

SITE VISIT COMPONENTS

Site visits are conducted in-person by two FRC members. Whenever possible, the same FRC members will review the fellowship program's *Self-Study* and complete the fellowship's site visit.

Site visits are generally conducted over the course of one day. Depending on the fellowship program size or structure, a longer visit may be warranted. The major components of the site visit include the following:

- Meeting with the fellowship program director. This meeting helps orient the site visitors to the program and establishes the relationship with the program director as primary contact for the duration of the visit. Should the program director wish, they may invite other constituents to participate in their meeting.
- Meeting with the department administrator or program director's superior. Depending on the program structure, it may be appropriate for the site visitors to meet with a designee instead. The purpose of the meeting is to learn more about the role and place of the fellowship program within the host site. The program director may or may not be present for this meeting.
- Meetings with fellowship program instructors. These meetings may take place individually or as a group. The term "fellowship instructors" refers to both the staff responsible for any of the non-supervision learning activities as well as the staff providing the 100 required hours of supervision (see Accreditation Standard 3.4 in the see [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#)). The program director may not be present for these.
- Meetings with current fellowship trainees. These meetings may take place individually or as a group. The site visit is conducted in the second half of the trainee's program to facilitate triangulation of information by the site visitors. Only trainees must be present for these.
 - If the program has recent graduates that can participate in the site visit, it is helpful to include meetings with these individuals as part of the visit. Their meetings may also be conducted individually or as a group or may be combined with the current trainee meeting(s).
- Tour of the host site demonstrating the office and learning spaces used by the program.
- Dedicated and private time and space for the site visitors to meet privately to prepare for the closing summary.
- Closing Summary with fellowship program director and site visitors. During this session, the site visitors summarize their findings, and the program may ask clarifying questions. Other stakeholders may be invited to participate at the fellowship program director's discretion.
 - Please note that the site visitors are only present to gather information and do not make judgements, recommendations, or compliance determinations. The closing session is not intended to be a discussion or debate of findings. Following the visit, the program will be given the opportunity to respond to the Site Visit Report before a compliance determination is made.

No portion of the site visit may be recorded. After the visit has concluded, the contact between the program and site visitor must cease. If the program has additional questions or comments after the visit, CSWE staff should be contacted.

SAMPLE SITE VISIT AGENDA

Site visits are generally conducted over the course of 1 day (6-8 hours). Here is a sample site visit agenda:

8:00am	Site Visitors meet with Fellowship Program Director
9:00am	Site Visitors meet with Department Administrator/fellowship program director's superior
9:30am	Site Visitors meet with Fellowship Instructors
11:00am	Tour of Host Site
12:00pm	Lunch & document review
1:00pm	Site Visitors meet with current trainees and graduates (if applicable)
2:00pm	Executive session of site visit team
2:30pm	Closing meeting/Summary of Review with program (may be just Director or include other program staff)

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

CSWE recognizes that scheduled visits may need to be delayed or cancelled due to special circumstances beyond the control of relevant parties. Examples of these special circumstances include inclement weather conditions, natural or manmade disasters, or changes to visitor's or key personnel's schedules due to unforeseen personal matters. As this list is not exhaustive, the visitor or program is encouraged to contact CSWE staff to discuss special circumstances that may affect the completion of the visit. Cancelling or delaying a visit is an extenuating circumstance. Due to complexity in scheduling visits, cancellations and delays will be avoided whenever possible.

Should an emergency arise, and the site visit must be cancelled, please immediately notify the CSWE staff and the other parties (visitor(s) and program) via telephone and email. CSWE staff will correspond with the program and site visitors the next business day to arrange next steps.

In the event that a visit cancellation or delay is prompted by the program, any fees or additional costs associated with the delay must be covered by the program.

COHORT REPORT

Accredited fellowship programs are required to complete a [Cohort Report](#) within sixty (60) days of each cohort's completion date.

The purpose of the Cohort Report is to obtain information on the recent cohort and program assessment activities. The report also includes verification of the program's continued compliance with key accreditation requirements.

If an accredited fellowship program fails to submit a Cohort Report on time, the COA may initiate an adverse action.

SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES

Fellowship programs must notify CSWE in a timely manner of changes that may affect the program's ability to meet accreditation requirements. CSWE must be informed in advance of major fellowship changes, including but not limited to the following:

- Change in fellowship program director
- Change in ownership of host site
- Change in fellowship's mission or purpose
- Change to fellowship format (full-time, part-time)
- Increase in number of trainee positions
- Major modifications to curriculum that result in changes to learning outcomes
- Decrease in resources (financial, personnel, facilities, equipment, trainee positions)

Fellowship programs must submit to CSWE staff a detailed written description of the proposed change(s) and the potential impact on compliance with the Eligibility Requirements and/or [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#). CSWE staff members and, if necessary, the FRC and/or COA, review the fellowship change(s) and may

- Request additional information,
- Request that the program submit a *Self-Study*, or
- Request a site visit (See [Site Visits](#) and [Fees](#))

After the review has been completed, CSWE staff notes the proposed change and includes the information in the next scheduled review or informs the program of any needed immediate additional actions.

The only exception to notifying CSWE in advance is the occurrence of an unavoidable event beyond the reasonable control and anticipation of the fellowship program (e.g., sudden departure of fellowship director, resources affected by a natural disaster). In such instances, it is incumbent on the fellowship program to immediately inform CSWE in writing of the change and to include a proposed plan for maintaining consistency in program delivery and a plan for maintaining compliance with the [Post-Master's Social Work Fellowship Accreditation Standards](#).

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST & CONFIDENTIALITY

To ensure that programs receive an equitable and impartial review from the FRC and COA free from any ethical conflicts or inappropriate influences that could either corrupt the integrity of the accreditation process or could result in any appearance of impropriety, the following conflict of interest and confidentiality policies and procedures shall be in place.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

A variety of situations exist where the potential for ethical dilemmas in the form of a conflict of interest can arise, when volunteers serve in the capacity of an FRC COA member. Some of these potential ethical conflicts are easily discernable and others more nuanced. The questions of whether an FRC or COA member can act in an impartial manner free from any bias, or the potential for the program to believe that any such lack of impartiality exists, should be paramount to determining the existence of a potential ethical conflict of interest.

Some examples of conflicts of Interest include the following scenarios: a representative of CSWE (including members of the FRC and COA) is employed or was formerly employed by the organization whose program is being evaluated, is employed by an organization that is located in close proximity to or that is in direct competition with the organization whose program is being evaluated or attended the organization whose program is being evaluated. Additionally, a personal interest or relationship that would result in a biased review of a program is also deemed to be a conflict of interest.

Programs undergoing review are asked to identify potential conflicts of interest with any FRC member. If a program is aware of any potential conflict of interest issue, they are responsible for immediately notifying CSWE staff of such potential conflict of interest, so that alternative arrangements can be made. Should it later be determined that a program knew or should have known of a potential conflict of interest and did not disclose this, it could have a potential adverse impact on their accreditation status.

Should an FRC or COA member be aware of any potential conflicts of interest, it is also their responsibility to immediately notify CSWE Staff of such potential conflict of interest, so that alternative review or visit arrangements can be made.

Should it be later determined that an FRC or COA member knew or should have known of a potential conflict of interest and did not disclose this, they will be referred to the Executive Director of the Department of Social Work Accreditation for remediation and potentially removed from future service.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Program materials provided to the FRC and COA are strictly to be used in furtherance of the accreditation process for the specific program that developed those materials. These materials are confidential, as is the review process. FRC nor COA member may not use any of that program's materials for any other purpose and must dispose of, delete, and/or destroy any program-related materials following review. Any FRC or COA member who is found to have used program materials for personal gain, consultant work, internal use by their own program, or discusses confidential program material or findings with any external source outside of CSWE staff, will be removed from service.

APPEALS

The following COA decisions are adverse actions and are eligible for appeal:

- Deny a Site Visit
- Deny Initial Accreditation
- Place the program on Conditional Accredited Status
- Initiate Withdrawal of Accredited Status

If a program receives an adverse decision, the COA provides two appeals procedures: reconsideration and panel review. Reconsideration must be completed before moving to the panel review. The procedures are outlined in 1.2.6 Appeals of COA Decisions in the [CSWE Handbook of Social Work Accreditation Policies and Procedures \(EPAS Handbook\)](#).

COMPLAINTS

Formal complaints to the Commission on Accreditation (COA) must pertain to matters related to program compliance with accreditation standards. Persons, groups, or organizations related to the program are considered recognized complainants and may file a complaint.

The COA is not authorized to adjudicate, arbitrate, or mediate individual instructor or trainee grievances against a program. The COA does not accept complaints about individuals. Complainants must use all appropriate institutional and professional channels of appeal before filing a formal complaint with COA CSWE. The institutions in which programs are housed assume responsibility for implementing and enforcing their own policies in these areas. When alleged violations cannot be resolved within the institution, appellate procedures within state systems of higher education or state judicial courts should be used to assess and enforce institutional compliance with policies.

INSTRUCTIONS TO FILE A COMPLAINT

Once you have reviewed all guidelines, please submit a complete [Fellowship Complaint Form](#) electronically to the Executive Director of the Department of Social Work Accreditation.

Formal complaints must be submitted in writing to the Executive Director of the Department of Social Work Accreditation with evidence that the complaint meets the following criteria:

- Filing is by a recognized complainant.
- The complaint is accompanied by documentation showing that the complainant has exhausted all appropriate institutional and professional channels for resolution.
- The complaint is related to a possible violation of one or more accreditation standards.
- The documentation submitted in the formal complaint must be connected to a possible violation of one or more accreditation standards.
- The complainant must provide evidence that the program director, or department administrator, of the program named in the complaint was given a copy of the complaint, including all materials submitted to the COA.

EVALUATION TO DETERMINE IF CRITERIA HAVE BEEN MET

Once you have reviewed all guidelines, please submit a complete [Fellowship Complaint Form](#) electronically to the Executive Director of the Department of Social Work Accreditation.

On receipt of the formal complaint, the Executive Director determines whether the criteria for formal complaints have been fully met and whether the complaint falls within the COA's authority. If the Executive Director determines that the complaint does not meet the criteria for formal complaints or is not within the COA's jurisdiction, the complainant is notified and given specific reasons for the refusal.

If the Executive Director determines the complaint meets the criteria for a formal complaint, the complainant and the program concerned are notified. The program has thirty (30) calendar days from receipt of the complaint to respond. The Executive Director shares the program response with the complainant, who is given two weeks to respond. The Executive Director presents the formal complaint, the program's response, and the complainant's response to the COA during its next regularly scheduled meeting and recommends a decision.

The COA may decide to take one of the following actions.

- Find the program in compliance with the accreditation standards and dismiss the complaint. If the COA dismisses the complaint, the chair notifies the complainant and the program, stipulating the reasons for the COA's action.
- Find the program out of compliance with one or more accreditation standards and place it on conditional accreditation. The program is placed on conditional accredited status if the COA believes that noncompliance issue(s) can be resolved by the program within 1 year. Conditional status is an adverse decision, and programs may request reconsideration. If the program accepts the COA's decision, it submits a restoration report.
- Find the program out of compliance with one or more accreditation standards and initiate withdrawal of accredited status. The COA initiates withdrawal of accredited status if it believes that the program cannot take corrective action within 1 year.
 - The program is required to work with CSWE staff to make arrangements for the graduation or transfer of its trainees and determine the date the accreditation will be withdrawn. The decision to initiate withdrawal of accredited status is an adverse one, and programs may request reconsideration.
- Order a Modified Site Visit. If the COA believes that a program may be out of compliance with one or more accreditation standards, the COA orders a modified site visit to collect more information. A visitor is sent, at the program's expense, to review specific compliance issues. This program is reviewed at the next COA meeting after the site visit.
- Defer action. If the COA finds evidence that the program has made reasonable progress in rectifying the situation, it can defer the decision to a COA meeting within the next year.

- Appoint an investigating committee. If the COA needs more information to make a decision, it will appoint an investigating committee to conduct a confidential investigation with full knowledge and consultation of those concerned. The program pays expenses relating to the investigative visit. The investigating committee reports its findings to the full COA at its next regularly scheduled meeting, and the COA decides if the program is in compliance with the accreditation standards in question.