

## 1.2.4 PROGRAM CHANGES

Policies and procedures are detailed for each of the following areas:

- [Section A: Changes that Do Not Require Reporting](#)
- [Section B: Changes that Require Notification to the DOSWA](#)
  - [Changes to Key Personnel or the Program's Directory Listing / Database Record](#)
- [Section C: Substantive Change Proposals](#)
  - *Implementing a New Location-based Program Option*
  - *Implementing a New Online Program Option*
- [Section D: Failure to Report Changes](#)

CSWE's Commission on Accreditation (COA) understands that ongoing change is necessary to improve educational quality. In support of programs' continuous quality improvement efforts, COA encourages experimentation in all aspects of program operations. Social work programs may seek to design educational innovations that reflect their unique context or significantly change methodologies to prepare competent graduates to meet the changing demands of the social work profession and current designs or practices.

Some program changes do not require reporting to the COA or the Department of Social Work Accreditation (DOSWA) (review [Section A](#)).

The accreditation status obtained at initial accreditation or reaffirmation only covers the components that were reviewed in the benchmarks or self-study at the time of the COA review. Changes may take place within the program prior to its next scheduled accreditation review; however, some program changes impact compliance with EPAS and require reporting to the COA or DOSWA (review Sections [B](#), [C](#), and [D](#)).

### **Section A: Changes that Do Not Require Reporting**

The following changes do not require reporting:

- Revision of the program's mission and goals
- Revision of the curriculum, including:
  - Syllabi
  - Course sequencing
  - Required social work courses (including practice and field courses)
  - Electives
  - Prerequisites
  - General education and liberal arts requirements
  - Addition of a social work minor, associate degree, or dual / double major
  - Addition of a learning site or hybrid / blended curriculum design (*review section C of this policy for definitions*)
- Changes in qualified faculty or the composition of faculty, students, or both

- Changes in the program’s policies and procedures relative to admission, transfer, advisement, grievance, or termination
- Changes to the implicit curriculum assessment plan

## **Section B: *Changes that Require Notification to the DOSWA***

### **B1. *Policy***

Program changes that may impact compliance with the EPAS require an email notification to the program’s accreditation specialist no later than thirty (30) days after implementation. Such changes include, but are not limited to:

- Changes to key personnel or the program’s directory listing / database record (review [Section B3](#) for required procedures)
- Reduction in resources (e.g., finances, personnel, technology, etc.)
- Changes in faculty-to-student ratio that falls below the required 2015 EPAS ratios
- Loss of faculty that places the program below the 2015 EPAS minimum number of full-time faculty required
- Changes in program director and / or field director assigned time that falls below the required 2015 EPAS assigned time
- Closing a program option (e.g., main campus, branch / satellite, online, etc.); a teach-out, transfer, or graduation plan must be provided for closure of a program option (*review [Section C](#) of this policy for program option types and definitions*)
- Changes to the program’s host institution's accreditation or recognition status with their a regional accreditor, state or federal governmental agency, U.S. Department of Education, or state, district, or territory-level authority, resulting in issuance of an adverse action, investigation, or withdrawal of accredited status (initiated by the accrediting body or the institution / program)
- Temporary closure of the program or host institution in event of a manmade or natural disaster, other public health emergency, or circumstances beyond the control of the educational environment

As this list is not exhaustive, the program should contact the accreditation specialist to discuss planned and upcoming changes to determine if notification is required.

### **B2. *Procedures***

The notification must be on program letterhead, signed by the program’s primary contact, and emailed. Word documents or searchable PDFs are acceptable. Scanned documents will not be accepted.

The notification must include the following information:

1. Institution name
2. Program level
3. Primary contact’s information
  - a. Name
  - b. Credentials

- c. Title
- d. Business mailing address
- e. Business phone number
- f. Business email address
4. Detailed description of the change
5. List of any standards impacted by the change and the program's time-bound plan for addressing compliance with each standard

### **Review Process**

The accreditation specialist may accept the notification, request clarifying information or supporting documentation, or refer the change to the COA for review.

The accreditation specialist will inform the program's primary contact of the outcome of the notification review via email within thirty (30) days after the accreditation specialist confirms receipt of the notification. In the cases when clarifying information or supporting documentation is requested or the change is referred to the COA for review, the accreditation specialist will specify next steps and applicable deadlines.

If the program reports noncompliance issues, refer to section 1.2.12. *Programs Found Out of Compliance Between Reviews* in the [EPAS Handbook](#) for detailed policies and procedures.

### ***B3. Changes to Key Personnel or the Program's Directory Listing / Database Record***

Changes in key personnel or the program's [Directory listing / database record](#) must be reported to the DOSWA no later than thirty (30) days after the implementation of change to ensure that program records remain accurate and important accreditation communications are delivered to the correct individuals. To change the primary contact\*, the current primary contact on file with CSWE and / or their superior must complete the required form to ensure an authorized transfer of responsibilities.

The program must submit the [Program Database Record Verification and Updates Form](#) to the DOSWA. Programs are only expected to complete the section(s) of the form relevant to the changes. All other sections may be left blank. Submit the form to make any of the following changes:

- Name of institution (i.e., college or university)
- Main program email address
- Main program phone number
- Main address
- Program website
- Institution's logo
- Primary contact\* or their name, credentials, title, email address, or phone number
- Program director or their name, credentials, title, email address, or phone number

- Field director or their name, credentials, title, email address, or phone number
- President / chancellor or their name, credentials, title, email address, or phone number
- Title of degree awarded (e.g., BSW, BASW, MSW, MSSW, etc.)
- Area(s) of specialized practice (applicable to master's programs only)
- Link to program's competency-based assessment plan and outcomes report (Form AS 4B/M)
- Certificates offered
- Dual degree opportunities
- Elimination / closure of a program option, physical location or delivery method
- Plans of study (i.e., full-time, part-time, advanced standing, etc.)
- Transitioned to a new set of EPAS

*\*Review section 1.2.7. Information Sharing and Release of COA Decision Letter in the [EPAS Handbook](#) detailing primary contact responsibilities*

## **Section C: Substantive Change Proposals**

### **C1. Policy**

*Programs are required to complete a Substantive Change Proposal when establishing a new program option, such as a physical location or online delivery method. **The proposal must be reviewed and approved by the DOSWA and / or COA prior to starting a new program option.** The COA considers the start of a program option (implementation date) to be when a majority (51% or more) of social work curriculum is offered for the first time in the new program option.*

As the regulatory body for social work education in the U.S. and its territories, the purpose of the *Substantive Change Proposal* is to verify significant program changes are consistent with the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) and ensure that the planned expansion of program options does not adversely impact the integrity and quality of the current program operations, resources, offerings, and compliance with the EPAS. Social work program accreditation is awarded to and covers all program options; therefore, each program option is required to maintain compliance with the EPAS at all times. Noncompliance issues affecting one (1) program option, impacts the accreditation status of the entire program, inclusive of all program options.

A substantive change is defined as a significant modification, high-impact change, and / or expansion of the nature and scope of an accredited program. The purpose of this review process is to ensure that the substantive change does not adversely affect the capacity of the social work program to continue to meet the EPAS.

The program should not implement any changes that require a *Substantive Change Proposal* during the candidacy or reaffirmation process. The candidacy process begins with the submission of the benchmark 1 document and ends with an initial accreditation

decision. The reaffirmation process begins with the submission of the self-study and ends with a reaffirmation decision.

In addition, programs cannot submit substantive changes in benchmark documents or reaffirmation self-studies. This is a distinct review process, and a *Substantive Change Proposal* must be submitted separately from any other accreditation review process.

Programs should note the following when submitting *Substantive Change Proposals*:

- Programs may submit *Substantive Change Proposals* during the candidacy or reaffirmation process; however, the program cannot implement the change until after an initial accreditation or reaffirmation decision is issued by the COA.
- Programs are not required to wait for acceptance of progress reports in order to submit a proposal.
- Programs may not submit *Substantive Change Proposals* if they are on conditionally accredited status.
- Should a program not achieve initial accreditation or reaffirmation, then the program must adjust the implementation date of their new / additional program option until the current program is successfully accredited.

Programs may market, advertise, and recruit for planned program options in advance of receiving approval; however, the program may not state, or imply, that approval has been granted or that the program option is “CSWE-accredited” in any written materials or verbal exchanges. CSWE’s [Directory of Accredited Programs](#) and CSWE staff can only confirm approved program options. Thus, approval is advised before advertising and recruiting. Approval is not guaranteed, and the program must plan a minimum 3-6 months in advance of their implementation date to request approval. If a program fails to obtain approval of the proposal prior to the implementation date, all written materials must be updated to clarify to constituents that approval is pending.

### **Program Option Types and Definitions:**

*When the policy refers to “curriculum,” this refers to the social work program curriculum, not general education requirements or non-social work curriculum. This includes both generalist and specialized social work curricula. If a student can complete 51% or more of their program online, then that constitutes an online program option. Fully online generalist curriculum, specialized curriculum, or advanced standing programs are also considered online program options.*

**Program Options:** Various structured pathways to degree completion by which social work programs are delivered including specific methods and locations such as on campus, off campus, and virtual instruction (2015 EPAS, pg. 22). Program options are not plans/calendars of study, such as advanced standing, full-time, part-time, 16-months, 2-years, weekend, evening, night, etc.; nor are they population-based plans such as an adult learning option.

**1. In-person / Face-to-Face / Traditional** – Any physical location in which the instructor(s) and student(s) are concurrently in-person together. This allows for live synchronous interaction between instructors and students.

**1a. Main / Primary Campus** – A majority, 51% or more, of the curriculum is delivered in-person at a primary physical location, such as a main campus.

**1b. Branch / Satellite Campus** – A majority, 51% or more, of the curriculum is delivered in-person at a location physically detached from the main campus.

**2. Distance Education** – Any curriculum delivery method in which there is a separation, in time or place, between the instructor(s) and student(s). This includes both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (self-paced or pre-recorded) education models.

**2a. Online** – A majority, 51% or more, of the curriculum is delivered online.

**2b. Broadcast Site** – A majority, 51% or more, of the curriculum is broadcasted via television, audio, telephone, internet radio, livestream, computer-based video, or other modes of technology to students collectively convened in-person at program-established classroom location(s) physically detached from the main campus. Each physical classroom location to which the curriculum is broadcasted is considered a separate program option.

**2c. Correspondence** – The whole curriculum delivered through mailing materials (videos, texts, assignments, etc.) electronically or through the post to students.

**The following are not identified as a distinct program option and do not require a *Substantive Change Proposal*:**

**3. Learning Site** – Sites where only limited portions (50% or less) of the curriculum is offered offsite at a location physically detached from the main campus. A learning site is not considered an additional program option. A learning site does not require a *Substantive Change Proposal* and should not be identified as a distinct program option in accreditation-related documents.

**4. Hybrid / Blended** – Locations where a majority (51% or more) of the curriculum is delivered at a previously established CSWE-approved location (e.g., main campus, branch campus, etc.) and limited portions (50% or less) of the curriculum is delivered online. This model includes 50% or less of courses delivered fully virtually. This model may also include any percentage of individual hybrid / blended courses delivered partially in-person and partially virtually. A hybrid curriculum design is not considered an additional program option. Rather, it is a face-to-face program option with online course offerings / elements. A hybrid curriculum design does not require a *Substantive Change*

*Proposal* and should not be identified as a distinct program option in accreditation-related documents.

**Scope:**

Scope includes local, regional, national, or international and refers to the program's primary focus for providing education to students. Programs are solely responsible for securing the appropriate levels of approval and permissions to operate in additional jurisdictions or expand their scope. COA's approval of a *Substantive Change Proposal* does not supersede any approvals also required from the social work program, institution, state regulatory agency, and / or regional accreditor.

**C2. Procedures**

The required *Substantive Change Proposal* template is located on the CSWE website and in policy 1.2.4 *Program Changes* in the [EPAS Handbook](#).

The program will declare on the template which set of EPAS they are currently operating under. Programs are not permitted to have different program options complying with different sets of standards.

Should the program plan to comply with the EPAS uniformly across program options (e.g., same faculty, courses, policies, resources, assessment plan), a new physical location or online delivery method where a majority (51% or more) of the curriculum is considered a separate program option requiring a *Substantive Change Proposal*.

The program should expect approximately 3-6 months between proposal submission date and decision date. This timeline is subject to change depending on the outcome of the review. The program is solely responsible for planning the implementation timeline in accordance with the 3-6-month review process, maintaining compliance with the EPAS, and adhering to the EPAS Handbook policies and procedures in between reaffirmation review cycles. Submissions that do not plan for a 3-6-month review process are not guaranteed to be reviewed in accordance with the program's desired timeline. There are no options for expedited review processes.

Separate *Substantive Change Proposals* must be submitted for each new program option proposed. Also, separate *Substantive Change Proposals* must be submitted for each program level (i.e., baccalaureate, master's, etc.) for which a change is proposed.

**Proposal Submission for Location-based or Online Program Options:**

*Substantive Change Proposals* for addition of a **location-based program or online option** are accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis. Upon receipt, the proposal is placed in a review queue and reviewed in order of receipt.

*For example:* If a program intends to implement a new location-based program option in the fall of a given year, a *Substantive Change Proposal* should be submitted by February 1st of the same year to ensure at least 3-6 months is granted for review.

The proposal must be emailed to [DOSWA's Associate Director of Accreditation Services](#) by the program's primary contact.

### Formatting & Submission

The proposal must be a single Word document or searchable PDF, may not include separate attachments nor appendices, and must be searchable. No scanned documents will be accepted.

Incomplete or incorrectly formatted proposals will not be reviewed, and DOSWA staff may ask the program to revise and resubmit. Documents that require revision and resubmission delay the review process and the program may be reviewed at a future COA meeting.

Refer to section *1.2.11 Document Submission Policy* in the [EPAS Handbook](#) for detailed formatting and submission requirements.

### Review Process

Programs implementing a new location-based program option, such as a branch / satellite campus, broadcast site, or correspondence option, or an online program option will be reviewed by the DOSWA's Associate Director of Accreditation Services.

The program's primary contact will be notified of the outcome of the *Substantive Change Proposal* review process via email on a rolling basis, in order of receipt.

The email notification will include a formal letter. Any citations included will be based upon concerns regarding missing or insufficient information in any section of the proposal. Impact statements are based upon the EPAS and focus on ensuring that the planned expansion of program options does not adversely impact the integrity and quality of the current program operations, resources, offerings, and compliance with the EPAS. These statements also ensure that the program's compliance plans for the new program option aligns with EPAS requirements.

The following decision types are possible:

Decision Types for <i>Substantive Change Proposal</i>	
Approve the <i>Substantive Change Proposal</i>	Approve the program's compliance plan with all accreditation standards for the new program option, finding that the addition of this program option will not adversely impact the integrity and quality of the current program operations, resources, offerings, and compliance with the EPAS.

Defer Decision for One Meeting and Request Clarifying Information to be Reviewed by the Associate Director of Accreditation Services	The program’s documentation is insufficient to make a decision, and the program must submit documentation or clarification necessary for DOSWA to make a decision at or before the next COA meeting. Associate Director of Accreditation Services reviews are conducted on a rolling basis in-between or at the next COA meeting.
Defer Decision for One Meeting and Request Clarifying Information to be Reviewed by the COA	The program’s documentation is insufficient to make a decision, so the program must submit documentation or clarification necessary for COA to make a decision at their next meeting.
Order a Modified Site Visit	The addition of this program option may adversely impact the integrity and quality of the current program operations, resources, offerings, and compliance with the EPAS. The program may be out of compliance with one or more accreditation standards. A site visitor is sent with instructions and the program is reviewed at the next COA meeting following the visit.

The Associate Director of Accreditation Services or COA may defer the decision multiple times until all requested documentation or clarification is provided by the program. Once all questions and concerns are resolved, DOSWA staff will inform the primary contact of approval of the *Substantive Change Proposal*.

A formal letter is sent within thirty (30) days following the Associate Director of Accreditation Services or COA approval and effective the date of approval. The substantive change approval will be reported to COA at their next regularly scheduled meeting.

*Note: While the Associate Director of Accreditation Services may approve the proposal, staff do not determine compliance as the COA is the sole arbiter of compliance. A full compliance review will occur during the program’s regularly scheduled reaffirmation review.*

**Section D: Failure to Report Changes**

It is the sole responsibility of the program to report changes to the COA and / or the DOSWA according to the policies and procedures detailed in this section of the Handbook. Programs are encouraged to contact their program’s assigned accreditation specialist to discuss planned and upcoming changes to determine if notification or a *Substantive Change Proposal* is required.

Failure to report required changes or submit a *Substantive Change Proposal* in advance of the implementation date may adversely impact the program’s accreditation status.

Programs cannot operate additional program options without obtaining appropriate approvals in advance of implementation of a significant change. In order to fulfill a primary purpose of accreditation and protect the public, CSWE staff cannot confirm accredited status of program options that are not approved and reflected in CSWE's official database records via the [Directory of Accredited Programs](#). Thus, failure to obtain approval of a substantive change may adversely impact students and their future licensing, employment, educational enrollment, or other post-degree pursuits.

When the DOSWA becomes aware of a program change without the receipt of notification or submission and acceptance of a *Substantive Change Proposal*, the program will receive email communication from the department requesting the proper documentation within sixty (60) days. If the program successfully submits the required documentation by the deadline provided, the notification or proposal will be reviewed by the accreditation specialist for notifications of changes, by the Associate Director of Accreditation Services on a rolling basis for location-based program options, or by the COA at their next available regularly scheduled meeting for online program options. The proposal will be processed according to the policies and procedures documented in this section of the Handbook.

If the program fails to submit the required documentation by the deadline, it may result in the program being referred to the COA Executive Committee for placement on conditional accredited status. Conditional status is an adverse action, and programs may request reconsideration. Refer to section *1.2.6. Appeals of COA Decisions* in the [EPAS Handbook](#) for information on how to request reconsideration.