



Association of Social Work Boards  
**Approved Continuing Education Program**  
*Guidelines*

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# Program Overview

## Introduction

A program of the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) Program was introduced in 1998 as a way to assist ASWB's member boards with information about quality providers of continuing education. The association also saw the approval of continuing education providers as a way to meet one of its goals, to bring greater standardization to social work regulation. Since it was formed in 1979, ASWB's membership has grown to 61 jurisdictions who share in its Mission:

*"To assist social work regulatory bodies in carrying out their legislated mandates, and to encourage jurisdictional efforts to protect a diverse public served by social workers who are regulated through common values, ethics, and practice standards. The Association will help to foster public and professional understanding of the value, competency, and accountability of regulated social workers."*

ASWB encourages and aids collaborative efforts among its member social work licensure boards in developing compatible standards and cooperative procedures for the legal regulation of social workers, toward the goal of simplifying and standardizing the licensing process. The association's member boards have a longstanding interest in sharing information on continuing education requirements for licensure. ASWB monitors and documents trends in continuing education, including the various criteria of all member jurisdictions, such as hours for renewal, definitions, and documentation.

ACE Approval demonstrates that a provider has been rigorously evaluated and found to offer quality education according to best practices. ACE supports strong standards in CE which translates to competent professionals, helping boards fulfill CE audit responsibilities, and assisting social workers to find CE courses that support licensing requirements. ACE Approved Providers are able to promote CE courses directly to social workers using ACE Search, a free service provided on the ASWB website. Course information is easily managed using ACE Provider, a program which enables immediate, online access to postings.

## Approval Categories

ACE Applicants to the program may apply for one of two approval types:

1. **Single Course Approval:** A single course is approved and may be offered an unlimited number of times, with no changes to content or course format. A "single course" provider may be approved for additional courses; an application fee is charged for each course.
2. **All Courses Approval:** A provider may offer an unlimited number of courses in the approved format(s). The provider may change or develop new content within the approved format(s). There is no limit in the number of course formats which can be approved in the initial application to ACE. There is no fee to add additional course formats and co-sponsorship if submitted at the time of a renewal application. If additional course formats or co-sponsorship are added outside of renewal, an application fee is charged.

## Approved Course Delivery Methods and Formats

Continuing education programming may be offered in two course delivery methods recognized by ACE. The face to face delivery method encompasses courses in which the presenter(s) and attendees are in the same location, with the event occurring at the same time for all participants.

The distance learning delivery method includes courses where presenter(s) and attendees are in different locations, and in which the work may be conducted at different times.

Within each course delivery method, a number of course formats are recognized. To receive approval in a specific course format, applicants must complete the application and submit a course they offer in that specific format. For More information and specific examples and definitions of course delivery methods and formats see the ACE resource document [Course Delivery Methods and Formats](#) for more information.

## Fees

Approval fees are summarized below, see the [ACE Fee Schedule](#) for a complete list of fees.

1. Single Course Approval
  - \$150 application fee for first three years of approval
  - \$150 renewal fee for three-year approval term
2. All Courses Approval
  - \$450 application fee for first year of approval
  - \$900 renewal fee for three-year approval term
  - \$150 to expand approval if not submitted at the time of renewal
3. Add Course Format, Co-Sponsorship or Social Work Ethics Course Approval
  - \$150 if not submitted at the time of first application or during a renewal application

## Eligibility Requirements

An organization who develops and implements continuing education applicable to social work may apply for ASWB ACE Provider approval. Specific eligibility requirements include:

- Applicant has been operational for a minimum of six months
- Applicant has planned and presented three continuing education activities appropriate for social workers
- Applicant has a licensed social worker\* involved in the planning, implementation and monitoring of social work continuing education
- Applicant can supply evaluation and documentation of programs

**ACE approval does not extend to licensure examination preparation courses. CE providers who offer social work licensure examination preparation courses must use the following disclaimer language in all public relations brochures, web site pages and other materials used as part of or to promote or advertise such licensure examination preparation courses:**

*“This licensure preparation program and materials associated with it were not included in the Association of Social Boards’ Approved Continuing Education (ACE) review and*

*are not approved by ASWB for continuing education nor endorsed by ASWB in any manner.”*

## **Provider Agreement**

Applicants must submit a signed copy of the [ACE Provider Agreement](#) with the initial ACE application, and at renewal. The agreement addresses provider responsibilities related to ACE standards and policies in program operations and the use of the online programs *ACEProvider* and *ACESearch*.

## **Applying to the Program**

Applicants interested in applying to the ACE program should contact ACE staff at [ace@aswb.org](mailto:ace@aswb.org). ACE staff will send an email containing instructions to begin the application process online using the program ACE Inquiry. When an applicant has established a user name and password their Applicant Number will be created and they will be given access to portions of the application online in ACE Provider. The remainder of the application is completed electronically using the form provided by ACE.

## **Approval Process**

Applicants can contact ACE staff with questions about the program and application materials. Completed Applications are reviewed by the ACE committee. Depending on meeting schedules and the number of applications being processed, ACE approval may take three to six months. Applications are scheduled for committee review in the order in which they are received. Upon approval, providers are given access to the online program *ACEProvider* to post courses for viewing in ACE Search. See?? The ACE committee members are social work professionals in the U.S. and Canada who volunteer with ASWB. This diverse group is made up of social workers with practice or academic backgrounds, who also have regulatory board experience.

The ACE Committee is responsible for developing ACE policy and selection criteria, reviewing applications and recommending continuing education providers to the ASWB Board of Directors for approval. ACE approved providers include universities, professional associations, as well as non-profit and for profit organizations offering continuing education programs for social workers.

The work of the committee in approving providers of CE is confidential, subject to disclosure within the association and to ASWB member boards, upon request, necessary to comply with assessment criteria. Disclosure outside the association will be subject to legal mandate, as advised by ASWB counsel or a court of competent jurisdiction.

When reviewing an application, the committee reserves the right to seek expert advice and relevant information from other external sources, provided that such information is kept confidential by the committee and the advisor.

In the event that ASWB denies an application for initial approval or extension of approval, or terminates approval, the applicant/provider may appeal the decision to the ASWB Board of Directors. Appeals must be made in writing to the Executive Director of ASWB at the association's current address, Association of Social Work Boards, 400 South Ridge Parkway, Suite B, Culpeper, VA. 22701. Appeals must include the non-refundable administrative appeal fee.

## **ACE Standards**

Approved Providers must develop and implement continuing education programming according to ACE Standards. These policies were developed over time through the work of professional social workers serving in a volunteer capacity on the ASWB ACE Committee. As issues in social work professional practice, licensure regulation and continuing education emerge and evolve, the ACE Committee and staff review and revise existing standards and/or develop standards and policies promoting best practices and professional competence.

## **Continuing Education Administration**

The continuing education director must be a visible, identifiable authority, charged with ensuring that each program presented by the provider or presented under the provider's ACE approval number meets the requirements of the ASWB Approved Continuing Education Program.

The applicant must explain the organization's mission and goals for the provision and evaluation of continuing education.

Administrative stability must be demonstrated. The applicant must demonstrate a procedure for the smooth and orderly transfer of administrative responsibilities from one individual to another in the event of an administrative change, including due notification to ASWB of such changes. Care must be taken during transitional periods to ensure familiarity with ASWB standards for ACE-approved continuing education providers.

The applicant must provide ASWB with written notification, within 10 days, of any change in the continuing education director, address, web site address or telephone number

Distance education provider applicants must include email and web site address on their ACE application. Applicants must demonstrate that interactive web sites are secure. ASWB periodically monitors web site security.

## **Required Records**

Approved providers are required to collect and maintain the records listed below for at least seven years:

- Organizational changes
- Co-sponsored events, including co-sponsoring agreements
- Personnel records for continuing education directors and social worker consultants (paid or volunteer)
- Instructor information for each course offered
- Participant attendance (participant name, profession)
- Social worker attendance
- Participant evaluations
- Course title, date, location and credits awarded; course outline/syllabus and learning outcomes; Course instructor's qualifications and professional affiliations;
- Grievances and resolutions
- Requests made for accommodations for persons with disabilities and such services provided to participants

ACE approval status is contingent on providing ASWB with a summary report(s) for review and approval by the ACE Committee at the end of the first approval year, and every three years thereafter (e.g. for renewal of provider approval). ACE approved providers must submit summaries of these records at the time of approval renewal and/or if requested by ASWB.

ACE providers must permit full access to this information (as allowed under applicable state/province and federal laws) upon request by ASWB. The ACE Committee retains the right and authority to audit and/or monitor programs and review provider records and course materials. All audit requests must be met within 21 days of receipt of request. The ACE provider must allow participants access to information about their course participation.

## **Co-Sponsorship**

ACE approved providers who work with other providers in the development, distribution and/or presentation of continuing education courses engage in co-sponsorship. Co-sponsorship is an opportunity for an ACE approved provider to work closely with another provider (approved or not) to arrange quality continuing education courses in full accord with ACE standards. On a limited basis and under specified conditions, ASWB ACE approved providers may co-sponsor with other reputable providers of continuing education for programs that otherwise meet ACE criteria.

Under a co-sponsorship arrangement, the ACE approved provider assumes responsibility for compliance with all ACE program requirements. Early in the planning, the functions of each party shall be identified and documented, including but not limited to financial, administrative and instructional. Failure to abide by ACE standards may subject the ACE approved provider to adverse action by the association and may jeopardize the ACE provider's approval status. Appropriate fees will apply.

Information, recognition numbers and indicators of ACE approved providers are not transferable to any other entity and may not be used or displayed on promotional material, websites or used in any manner that may be misleading to the public. Only ACE approved providers may use the ACE identifying information and recognition numbers. For further instruction see the ACE resource documents [Co-Sponsorship Policy](#) and [Co-Sponsorship FAQs](#).

## **Program Development**

### **Content**

Course content must be pertinent to social work theory, methods and practice, reflecting current research and **best practices**. Materials originally designed for audiences other than social workers must be carefully reviewed and modified as necessary. All continuing education courses, regardless of course format, must meet ACE requirements.

Applicants for ACE approval are required to review the educational requirements of the social work boards in jurisdictions where they provide continuing education to determine if course offerings meet the needs of social workers in those jurisdictions.

The social work consultant must participate in the following:

- Assessing the educational needs of social workers for the purpose of course development.
- Planning organization's continuing education courses.
- Administering organization's continuing education courses.

- Monitoring organization's continuing education courses.
- Assisting organization in infusing cultural competence\* and diversity\* in all programs.

The organization must identify the licensure categories and/or skill levels at which the continuing education program is targeted. Does the course offer a beginning, intermediate or advanced treatment of this particular topic? In the particular content area, course content must be appropriate as stated on materials, for beginning, intermediate, or advanced level practice.

A syllabus or general outline of the course must be made available to participants at the beginning of each course offered. The course must be a minimum of one continuing education hour, in one block of time.

Continuing education programs must include written educational goals and specific, measurable learning outcomes as the basis for evaluation of course effectiveness. The use of a post testing procedure is strongly encouraged to determine how effectively learning outcomes were met. Posttests are required in distance learning courses.

Instructional materials used (e.g. training manual, handouts, outlines, background materials, audiovisual aids, etc.) must enhance the participant's understanding of the topic(s). Include bibliographies and supplemental materials for additional reading by participants. If research is referenced, study and source information must be provided. Appropriate equipment and quality materials must be used.

## **Distance Education**

Distance education is a method for delivering continuing education to social workers. All ACE approval criteria apply. For more information about ACE distance education requirements see the ACE resource document [Distance Learning](#).

Not all jurisdictions currently approve distance learning courses. For a description of course formats see the ACE resource document [Course Delivery Methods and Formats](#). In addition to meeting all other ACE approval requirements, distance education providers must:

- Provide a pilot tested method of determining credit hours (Request ACE Course Development Checklist)
- Provide scheduled access to a contact person
- Provide scheduled interaction between instructor and participant
- Have the capacity for completed assignments to be faxed, mailed, or e-mailed to qualified instructors for correction, grading, comment, and subject matter guidance
- Return corrected assignments to participants in a timely manner
- Provide a method for verifying that the individual participated in the continuing education activity, and that all work was done by the person awarded the credit
- Employ electronic security measures, and reliable technology
- Post-tests, containing questions appropriate to content and credits are required in distance learning courses.
- Provide e-mail and website address information on ACE application
- The course delivery format must be established before the customer takes the course and must be clearly communicated in promotional materials as well as the certificate of completion
- Course "interactivity" must be established before the customer takes the course and must be clearly communicated in promotional materials as well as the certificate of completion

- Course “interactivity” must be described in the ACE application

## **Instructors**

Instructors or presenters of continuing education courses offered by ACE providers must have professional qualifications in good standing with their professional regulatory board, if applicable, and meet one or more of the following:

- Be a faculty member of an undergraduate or graduate school of social work
- Have received specialized graduate or postgraduate level training in the subject taught in the program
- Have extensive experience to include no less than five years of practical application or research involving the subject taught in the course
- Instructors providing social work ethics courses must be licensed social workers in good standing.

In the ACE application, applicants providing distance education course work must document instructor availability to participants. Applicants/instructors must possess the technical expertise to communicate the course subject matter effectively.

## **Evaluation**

Effective continuing education courses must be professionally relevant. Relevancy can be assessed on three levels: 1) by individual participant evaluation, 2) by course evaluation, and 3) by program evaluation. The applicant must develop and implement participant evaluations. Course and program evaluations are recommended. See the ACE resource document [Developing Evaluations](#) for more information. Evaluation requirements are discussed in further detail in the Appendix, Item 4.7.6 Section E.VII Evaluation.

- Course Evaluation - ACE providers are expected to use educationally sound methods to evaluate courses. Participant evaluations should be analyzed, summarized and interpreted as a means to improve the provider’s continuing education courses.
- Program Evaluation - Course quality reflects program quality. The ACE provider is expected to make modifications [to the overall program](#) based on course evaluation information.

## **Attendance & Certificate of Credit**

For on-site and distance learning courses, ACE providers must have procedures for documenting participation by program attendees; e.g. an attendance roster, sign-in/sign-out log, and program evaluations completed by attendees.

The ACE provider must issue a completed and signed certificate verifying attendance and credit awarded to each participant who completes the course. These certificates may only be provided after the participant has completed the course, and must be provided within 30 days after the event. Duplicate or replacement certificates must be clearly marked as “replacement copy” or “duplicate copy.” [Sample Certificate](#)

Certificates of credit and/or other means of documenting credit must include:

- Title, location, date(s) of the course
- Course delivery format

- For distance learning courses: if the course is interactive or non-interactive; a description of the interactive aspects of the course
- Name of participant and license jurisdiction; (if required by jurisdiction) social work license/certification/registration number
- Amount of credit awarded/clock hours
- Designation of clinical hours (CEUs) or social work ethics hours, if applicable
- Approved provider sponsoring or co-sponsoring the course (Provider name, ACE approval #)
- ACE approval statement

“This organization (provider name and approval number) is approved as a provider for continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards. [www.aswb.org](http://www.aswb.org). ASWB Approval Period: \_\_\_\_\_ (dates). The (organization name) maintains responsibility for the program. Social workers should contact their regulatory board to determine course approval.

Social workers will receive \_\_\_\_\_ (clinical or social work ethics) continuing education clock hours in participating in this course.”

## Assigning Credit

[ACE Resource Assigning Credit](#) In order for a course to qualify for continuing education credit, it must:

- Be one hour or more in length
- Meet ACE requirements for specific learning outcomes
- Contain demonstrable social work content and/or be applicable to social work practice
- Meet ACE requirements for evaluation
- May have one or more presenters who meet ACE requirements for instructors (brief bio: license and/or credentials, appropriate experience, education)

Providers must adhere to a uniform system for assigning credit based on the continuing education hour, defined as a 60-minute hour with no less than 50 minutes of uninterrupted instruction. The number of continuing education credits must be determined before the course is offered. The course must be a minimum of one continuing education hour, in one block of time. Attendance of the individual who receives the certificate must be verified

Instructors must adhere to the published time schedule in order for full credit to be given. Distance learning courses must be pilot tested to determine credit hours. See the ACE resource document [Distance Learning](#)

## Promotion & Advertising

ACE providers must promote and advertise each course in keeping with **social work ethical conduct** and **core values** (e.g. as defined under applicable state and federal laws). Adequate and accurate advance information must be provided to prospective participants. There are a number of required topics that must be addressed in promotional materials in order to meet the ACE Standard, these include:

1. Specific learning outcomes for the course:
  - Must be measurable and/or observable
  - Illustrate what participant will be able to demonstrate after attending the course
  - Course target audience

2. Targeted social work practice and/or content levels:
  - Beginning level
  - Intermediate level
  - Advanced level
3. Instructors and their qualifications
4. Course fees, including what is covered and deadlines for cancellations and refunds
5. Course syllabus, outline or agenda
6. Continuing education hours offered
7. Course delivery format (distance learning interactivity must be clearly indicated and described)
8. Clear information about jurisdictional approvals and specific CE requirements
9. Instructions for requesting accommodations for disability (ADA in US)
10. ACE provider number, approval statement and expiration date, and/or other approver information
11. Course completion requirements, e.g. completing the course evaluation, participating in all sessions, etc.
12. Statement of when and how certificate will be awarded
13. Where both educational and non-educational sessions are offered, the courses for credit must be clearly identified.
14. Instructions for addressing grievances, CE provider contact information

Approved providers must conspicuously place the following statement on all publications and materials associated with social work continuing education courses:

*“This organization (Provider Name and ACE Approval Number) is approved as a provider for social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) [www.aswb.org](http://www.aswb.org) through the Approved Continuing Education (ACE) Program. The (Provider Name) maintains responsibility for the program. ASWB Approval Period: (Insert Dates). Social workers should contact their regulatory board to determine course approval for continuing education credits. Social workers participating in this course will receive (Insert Number) (Indicate Clinical or Social Work Ethics) continuing education clock hours.”*

An important note for independent Contractors: Applicants acting as independent contractors and who present courses through other organizations are responsible for following ACE standards and polices as detailed in the [ACE Application](#), [ACE Guidelines](#) and [ACE Resource Independent Contractors Requirements](#). The following information must be included in promotional materials:

- Contact information for independent contractor/instructor
- Contact information for agency offering the course
- Provide a statement informing participants who to contact for assistance for specific issues. (Example: “If you have questions or concerns about the course content, references or content evaluation, contact (your email address) [instructorname@info.net](mailto:instructorname@info.net). If you have questions or concerns about registration, facilities or course administration, contact (the contracting agency) [independentmgtcorp@info.net](mailto:independentmgtcorp@info.net)).

## **Grievance Policy**

ACE Providers must respond to all complaints received by the provider, a regulatory board, or ASWB in a timely and ethical manner. The ACE provider must have policies and procedures for grievance

management; e.g. refund requests, complaints about course content and/or facilities, non-receipt of certificates, etc. These policies must be in a written format to assure due process for all complainants. The social worker consultant\* must be involved in all grievance resolutions.

## **ACE Resources**

ACE resource documents provide necessary program information and an in-depth look at the ACE standards which must be implemented to receive and maintain ACE Approval. The following list gives a brief description of the documents available. Use highlighted text to locate each document on the ACE section of the ASWB website.

### **[Glossary of Defined Terms](#)**

### **[Fee Schedule](#)**

## **Course Development**

### **[Course Development Checklist](#)**

### **[Course Delivery Methods and Formats](#)**

### **[Continuing education requirements for license categories, skill levels](#)**

### **[Using a Reference List or a Bibliography](#)**

### **[Developing Learning Outcomes](#)**

### **[Cultural Competence and Diversity in Social Work Continuing Education](#)**

### **[Developing Evaluations](#)**

### **[Assigning Credit](#)**

## **Co-sponsorship**

### **[Co-Sponsor FAQs](#)**

### **[Co-Sponsorship Policy](#)**

## **Distance Learning**

### **[Distance Learning](#)**

### **[Online Security](#)**

### **[Guidelines for Developing Posttest questions](#)**

### **[Promotion and Advertising Requirements](#)**

### **[Grievance Policy Guidelines](#)**

### **[Record keeping requirements](#)**

### **[Provider Agreement](#)**

### **[Use of the ACE Logo and Provider Number](#)**

### **[Independent Contractors](#)**

## **Sample Documents**

### **[Sample Flyer](#)**

### **[Sample Promotional Brochure](#)**

### **[Certificate of Course Completion](#)**

### **[Sample Conference Session Evaluation](#)**