

# NOVA SCOTIA ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

## Professional Development

### Inspiring a Learning Community: September 2015

#### **Description:**

This document is intended to be a best practice guide for registered Social Workers in Nova Scotia prepared by the NSASW in conjunction with the Professional Development Committee.

Is it that time of year again? The time to complete your professional development reporting form outlining the 40 hours of required professional development required by NSASW. This document is intended to be a practical guide with tips and suggestions on how you can go about making your professional development activities work for you.

#### ***What is Professional Development?***

There is no one definition that can define professional development. For the purpose of Social Work competency, professional development is understood to be the act of learning new skills that inform practice. Each profession has different expectations related to professional development. Ultimately, ongoing professional development that happens after the initial credentialing processes is intended to contribute toward continued competency for the individual practitioner.

#### ***How does ongoing professional development related to Social Work practice?***

As Social Workers, we are continually working with individuals, families, and communities in our society. Social Workers are challenged to continue learning about a wide range of issues that are relevant to their practice area. This could include legislative and policy issues, current social research, therapeutic and counselling techniques, etc. Further to this, revisiting and expanding on our understanding of ethical issues and foundational Social Work theory and practice are important components of ongoing competency.

#### ***Who are the stakeholders who benefit from social work professional development?***

Continued professional development benefits all Social Workers as it contributes to a sense of competence, growth and professional maturity. Continued professional development is also beneficial for clients and employers because it increases the quality of the services that are delivered and received. Other professionals who work with Social Workers in multi-disciplinary settings benefit from the knowledge and expertise of competent Social Work practitioners. Local and national Social Work Associations also benefit as representatives of a body of well-trained Social Workers with current knowledge and skills.

***What should Social Workers consider when planning for professional development activities?***

When possible, professional development activities should be planned, and Social Workers should reflect on their skills and abilities regularly to determine a course of action.

Reported professional development activities should be outside of tasks associated with your day to day work expectations. When planning for professional development activities, it is suggested that each Social Workers should consider:

What are their learning needs?

What are the demands of there are of practice?

Accessibility and availability of professional development resources?

Professional interests?

***What are the aims of the NSASW professional development standards?***

These standards are intended to:

- Maintain and enhance the competency of Social Workers on an ongoing basis
- Ensure high standard of ethical and professional practice
- Promote continued learning among social workers
- Create a learning community among Social Workers that allows the community to share knowledge and best practice
- Protect the public by ensuring Social Work practitioners are knowledgeable and current in best practice standards in their field of practice.
- Encourage Social Workers to engage in goal setting and planned professional development activities
- Promote self-directed and peer-supported learning among Social Work practitioners

***What are some guiding principles to consider when choosing professional development activities?***

- Is it congruent with social work values and standards of practice?
- Is it grounded in ethical practice?
- Is it informed by current peer reviewed research?
- Does it promote learning and knowledge transfer?

***How much professional development should Social Workers complete annually?***

Every professional association is different in how they determine the amount of professional development required to meet the standard of continuing competency. Generally, most social work associations in Canada require a minimum of 40 hours annually of professional development activities. The NSASW has adopted this standard and requires a minimum of 40 hours of professional development activities to be reported by each individual member, in conjunction with 5 ethical training hours over 5 years.

***What is considered acceptable professional development?***

It is exciting to consider the many ways that we learn as professionals developing throughout our careers. Some learning happens through experience and through mentorship and peer relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

We also learn from formal course work, workshops and presentations. Much learning also comes from the individuals, families, and communities that we serve. Learning is ultimately a process of exposure to information, reflection and integration into practice. Individual learning styles inform professional development. For the purpose of reporting annual professional development activities, the following are recommended:

**At least 5 hours of specific social work related ethics training  
is required every 5 years**

**Formal professional development activities (max. 40 hours)**

- University courses
- Seminars
- Continuing Education workshops
- In-service sessions
- On line course work
- Journal clubs, conferences
- Webinars
- Presenting at any of the above

**The above could be measured by:**

- A syllabus or general outline of the course provided at the beginning
- Written educational goals and specific, measurable learning objectives
- Clear evaluation procedures
- Web site security for registration, payment and on-line course

The items above would generally be expected to orient Social Workers to current research and peer reviewed materials. Social Workers must report learning hours only.

### **Informal professional development activities and independent learning which enhances social work practice (max. 20 hours)**

- Reading (Books, Peer reviewed Journals, etc)
- Videos and Webcasts
- Attending Community Presentations
- Networking activities
- Participating in organized discussion groups
- Developing a new program or procedure
- First Aid / CPR Training
- Information Technology Skills Training

### **Supervision / consultation (max. 20 hours each)**

- Supervising a social work candidate
- Supervising a social work student

### **Volunteer work - related to social work practice (max. 20 hours)**

- Member of NSASW Committee (12 hours maximum per committee)
- Committee Support / Consultation (12 hours maximum)
- Attendance at NSASW Annual General Meeting
- Direct service in a social service agency
- Board and / or Committee work in a social service agency
- Writing an article that relates to social work practice
- Public Education Service about social work and social issue
- International Volunteer Social Service Projects
- Conducting social work research

### **Personal (max. 5 hours)**

- Self-reflection on the learning experiences by keeping a journal
- Developing and maintaining a professional portfolio
- Self-care activities

***How much of each professional development activity should Social Workers engage in annually?***

Each Social Work professional Association has different expectations and criteria for the types of professional development activities social workers must complete. Some Associations require that a portion of Social Work professional development must come from formalized professional development activities that are approved by the association. Other Associations do not require professional development activities to be reported, and annual professional development activities are at the discretion of each individual social worker.

It is a requirement of the NSASW to report 40 hours of annual professional development. Please refer to the specific limits listed above related to support work to the NSASW. Further to this, it is recommended by the NSASW that the following would constitute best practice for professional development activities. Each individual social worker should strive to participate in a balance of all the described professional development activities.

It is recommended that a minimum of 5 hours of annual professional development consist of formal professional development activities. In addition, it is also recommended that social workers limit their required professional development hours to no more than 20 hours per activity.

***What are some barriers to completing the professional development activity requirement of the NSASW?***

Social Workers are challenged often with busy professional careers that have competing needs. A balance of home, work, community, and personal responsibilities can be difficult to achieve. Required professional development activities are not intended to further complicate this balance; rather they are intended to create a foundation upon which ongoing professional work will be maintained. Following are some of the barriers to engaging in professional development activities identified by practitioners:

- Time
- Accessibility of professional development resources
- Lack of employer support
- Limited budget
- Lack of opportunity to plan
- Lack of desire for ongoing professional development
- Illness
- Parental leave

### ***What can Social Workers do to prepare for professional development submission?***

- Plan ahead and think about what professional development goals you have in mind. Try to make your learning needs a priority.
- Talk to your employer about your work plan and negotiate professional development as part of this work plan. Employers do have a responsibility to you and the clients you serve, to ensure that you are a skilled and competent Social Work practitioner. When appropriate, negotiate with your employer to cover a portion of your annual professional development activity expenses.
- Look for free online courses, sessions, etc.
- Talk to other social workers in your area about professional development activities. Create a learning network among your colleagues and local practitioners.
- When possible attend a regional professional development activity sponsored by the NSASW.
- Explore inter-disciplinary learning opportunities in your area.
- Check out the internet as a learning tool. There are many online courses, webcasts, as well as literature in your area of practice available online. If you do not have access to the internet in your home or office, consider utilizing your local public library.
- Use the NSASW List-serve to learn about and promote professional development opportunities for Social Workers.
- Contact the NSASW to find out more about potential professional development opportunities.
- Keep records on file of all the learning you are doing. Having a personal file of all workshops, presentations, copy of reading materials, etc. will help you remember your professional development activities (i.e. record activities on your web-based account profile).

### ***What if a Social Worker is having difficulties meeting professional development standards?***

If you are having difficulties meeting the required 40 hours of professional development, contact the NSASW office. Try to do this early in the reporting year so that there is time to problem solve. Support will be provided to you to determine strategies to help you access learning opportunities.

### ***What happens if a Social Worker doesn't meet the annual requirements for professional development?***

Each Social Worker must complete the minimum requirements for professional development in order to be eligible for registration with the NSASW.

***What should Social Workers do if they have completed more than the 40 hours of required professional development?***

Each individual Social Worker is only required to report 40 hours of professional development. In situations where more than 40 hours of professional development has been completed, it is the Social Worker's discretion as to what is reported. There is no benefit to reporting more than 40 hours.

***Can Social Workers carry over professional development activities from one year to the next?***

No, this is not permitted.

***Can Social Workers receive professional development credit for supervising Social Work students or acting as a candidacy supervisor for newly registered Social Workers?***

Yes, if you choose to supervise a Social Work student (or several students), you may count up to 20 hours annually per student.

***What if I am a registered Social Worker on parental or sick leave.***

Members on parental leave or sick leave (pro-rated up to one year) shall report a minimum of 20 hours of professional development which may be accumulated solely through volunteer activities and/or self-directed study.

***What if I am a First-time Registrant?***

For First-time Registrants, professional development will be prorated on a quarterly basis to reflect the portion of the year in which the RSW was registered (i.e. a member granted registration in June 2015, will have to record 20 hours of professional development when renewing in December 2015. A member granted registration in October 2015, will have to record 10 hours of professional development in December 2015.