

Professional Development Selection and Verification Policy - DRAFT

Overview

- **Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance to:
 - (1) NSCSW members as they select their professional development trainings and activities,
 - (2) the Board of Examiners as they verify members' professional development submissions, and
 - (3) the Professional Development Committee as they create professional development opportunities for NSCSW Members.
- **Principles:** This policy identifies the principles to be used in the selection, evaluation and creation of professional development for NSCSW members.
- This policy will provide further details on these three focus areas on how it will guide members:
 - **Choosing** – Guiding members on choosing PD activities
 - **Verifying** – Guiding the College in verification
 - **Selecting** – Guiding the PD committee on selecting activities for the annual conference

Purpose of Professional Development Selection and Verification Policy

The purpose of the policy is to provide guidance to: (1) NSCSW members as they select their professional development trainings and activities, (2) the Board of Examiners as they verify members' professional development submissions, and (3) the Professional Development Committee as they create professional development opportunities for NSCSW Members.

Professional development is pursued by individual practitioners, after earning their initial credentials, in order to ensure safe practice and the protection of the public, in particular, historically marginalized and oppressed individuals and communities. The purpose of a professional development selection and verification policy is to fulfill the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers' (NSCSW's) legal and moral obligations, as an accountability partner to these communities, and to the broader public. Its goal is to ensure the integration of social work

values into the ongoing education that social workers receive, and to align their learning with the continued unlearning that the social work profession must do as part of its broader commitment to reconciliation and restorative justice.

As clarified in its overarching professional development (PD) policy, professional development are utilized as a strategy by the NSCSW to fulfill the obligation of social workers to decolonize the profession. By clearly outlining guidelines for the selection, evaluation and verification of social work professional development, the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers seeks to fulfill its commitments to protect the public and decolonize the profession.

This policy is intended as a means of ensuring accountability to ourselves and to the public, as well as to ensure better and safer practice that is informed by diverse ways of knowing. The professional development reporting requirements are intended to increase transparency and trust- to ourselves, to one another and the broader public that we serve. This is a collective rather than a hierarchical accountability, and one that is informed by the input of social workers, as well as the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as the Restorative Inquiry- Nova Scotia Home for Colored Children.

Emerging research demonstrates the pervasiveness of unconscious bias, and the risk that this can bring to social work practice. In order to mitigate against this, the NSCSW has therefore established mandatory training as part of its professional development standards. These requirements are grounded in the profession's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and have been developed to support social workers in examining their beliefs and assumptions, and to ensure that new content and best practices related to social work are effectively integrated into every member's practice.

Our Code of Ethics mandates social workers to respect the inherent dignity and worth of every human person, and to reflect the values of integrity and competence in their practice, while advocating for social justice and dedicating themselves to the service of humanity, as defined in the Code.

As social work education in Nova Scotia and across Canada is in the process of focusing upon issues of diversity and cultural safety, as well as decolonizing the profession as a whole, it is imperative that ongoing continuing education requirements mirror this learning process, and that competencies and values that are being taught in the university setting to social work students also be shared with practitioners in the field, in order to ensure that NSCSW members have the most current knowledge and understanding of their work.

As such, social workers registered with the NSCSW are required to complete certain mandatory annual requirements every year, as part of our profession's commitment to fulfill these expectations. These requirements also ensure the protection of the public, especially those populations and communities that are traditionally defined as oppressed, marginalized or otherwise subjected to prejudice and bias.

Selection and Verification of Professional Development: A strategy for decolonization

This selection and verification policy outlines our legal and moral responsibility to the public that we serve, and the means by which we can ensure transparency of the profession and build trust with the communities that we serve. In addition to completing the mandatory requirements, social workers are encouraged to select trainings and activities that align with social work values and fulfill this broader professional responsibility.

The values that should guide social workers' selection of professional development are the same values that will guide the NSCSW in its verification and evaluation of submitted courses. These same values also guide the College's Professional Development Committee in its selection of content for its continuing education offerings.

These values reflect our commitments to decolonize our profession and demonstrate our efforts to unlearn the systemic bias that is intrinsic in this world and in the systems within which we all operate. The degree to which our members join us in selecting educational activities that align with the stated values in this policy, along with the College's completion of regular verification activities will both demonstrate in a tangible way the concrete steps that Nova Scotia social workers are taking to fulfill our stated commitments. These findings will therefore be reported to the public as part of our annual report, and serve as a method of building trust and ensuring accountability with those communities who have historically been harmed by systemic injustice and bias.

The reporting requirement, while not yet reflective of the full decolonization to which we aspire, helps to assure the public that social workers are meeting the annual professional development requirements and engaged in quality learning towards professional practice and to be proactive in addressing risk. The purpose is intended continue to build accountability between the profession and members of the public. This policy will outline the process by which the College will conduct annual verifications based on a criterion and to make this available to the public, in effort to enhance trust, as tangible demonstration of integrity in professional practice.

This policy was developed with the input of the professional development committee, which conducted a thorough review of the topic, conducting interviews with other regulatory social work bodies across Turtle Island and beyond, as well as completing a literature review on best practices in this area. The goals outlined above, along with the feedback of our members as well as advocates from historically marginalized or oppressed groups all informed the development of this policy.

A subcommittee of the Board of Examiners will therefore annually randomly select members to verify their professional development submissions. The outcomes of these verification processes will be reported to the public and will also help to inform the NSCSW's own professional development offerings, by providing information on trends and member interests.

Selection and Recording Requirements

Members of NSCSW are required to select, record and submit professional development activities to the College yearly. For formal activities, this may include copies of documents such as a syllabus or a certificate of completion, or a link to the description of the event. For informal

activities, this can be as simple as writing down the details (date, hours, title, author, event link etc.) for later reference.

In addition to the electronic field requiring registrants to upload supporting documentation to provide greater information about their submitted professional development activities, the website will also prompt members to respond to a question regarding the way that the professional development activity or event contributed to their understanding of an issue and will impact their practice. This question serves two functions: it inherently provides additional information to assist with verification, as well as fulfilling the recommendations of the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network (NSRHPN) working group on continuing competency to assure ongoing competence of registrants by promoting critical thinking and reflective practice.

We encourage tracking each activity immediately afterwards, to make record-keeping easier, to increase accuracy and to promote the reflective practice that the professional development activity is intended to provide. Activity tracking must be entered in the online member profile, and the completed inventory is submitted to the College during the annual registration renewal process. Members are also required to maintain a copy of their documents for three years, in case of electronic discrepancies during the verification process.

Registration renewal cannot be granted until all requirements for professional development have been met. If the professional development inventory does not meet the regulatory requirements, the renewal cannot be completed, and the member will not be registered as a social worker for the upcoming year. It is each individual member's responsibility to ensure their own professional development is completed, recorded, and submitted to the College on time each year.

These requirements are necessary to ensure NSCSW's ability to protect the public by ensuring that all social workers have received the most up-to-date and current professional development in order to improve practice and outcomes for clients.

Verification Process

A subcommittee of the Board of Examiners will annually conduct a randomized verification of members' professional development. The College may, from time to time, request that members' complete other activities to support the verification process. For example, if a member submits an activity that does not align with the rubric outlining the values guiding the selection of professional development, the committee will undertake the steps below. These processes are in place to ensure the public that social workers are meeting the annual professional development requirements and engaged in quality learning towards professional practice.

The purpose of the verification is not to scrutinize individual members but to continue to build trust between the profession and members of the public. The NSCSW adheres to a philosophy of "right-touch regulation". The verification process will be conducted in a non-punitive way, and the Registrar and/or the Registrar's representative will seek to work with the social worker to

ensure that the professional development requirements are completed in a timely way that adheres to the spirit of the policy.

However, if upon such verification activities, a social worker is still not meeting the Standards Identified in Standards of Practice 11. then the Registrar may submit a complaint regarding that member's professional conduct.

11.1 Professional Development & Competent Practice

11.1.1. Social Workers shall ensure their skills are in keeping with current knowledge and practices in the field of social work through a minimum 40 hours of professional development annually. Failure to meet this requirement will result in the registrar refusing registration.

11.1.2. Social Workers shall maintain a personal record of their professional development activities with supporting documentation. This documentation may include, but would not be limited to: title of conferences, seminars, workshops, names and credentials of presenters, date of professional development activity, number of hours, title and author of articles and books, titles of chapters in books, number of student and candidate supervision, dates of supervision, etc.

11.1.3. Social Workers shall submit a report of professional development activities annually at the time of registration renewal and use the prescribed online forms to detail their professional development activities.

11.1.4. In order to maintain competency, Social Workers on leave shall complete professional development requirements in accordance with the Professional Development Policy (See Social Work Regulation Sections 22-25).

Verification processes will be completed in order to ensure that the values and principles that guide the NSCSW's professional development are upheld.

Criteria for Professional Development Selection and Evaluation

It is important that social workers select professional development that align with the profession's values, and ensure our profession's commitment to unlearning systemic bias. As outlined in the Professional Development Policy, every social worker is required to complete every year six hours of mandatory professional development in the categories of (1) ethics, (2) Truth and Reconciliation, (3) Diversity and equity, (4) social justice and (5) vicarious trauma. It is also necessary for the remaining hours of professional development reflect the profession's values.

A subcommittee of the Board of Examiners (BOE) will annually conduct a randomized verification of members' professional development. The criteria by which said verification process will be conducted are aligned with the same guiding principles by which professional

development is developed and/or selected by the NSCSW's Professional Development Committee as well as the criteria by which members are invited to select their own discretionary professional development.

Members should keep a record of their professional development hours, to facilitate the verification of their formal activities, as well as be prepared to answer questions related to their submission. Most formal activities will have credentials listed on their promotional material, such as certificates that are provided upon completion. Records should be kept for the previous three years. The College also provides forms and documents to assist members in tracking their learning and growing journey and assist with the verification process.

Values to guide the selection and evaluation of professional development.

The following guiding principles and values have been determined by the NSCSW to be those by which all NSCSW professional development activities will be selected and form the criteria by which submitted professional development will be assessed.

Relevance

Professional development (PD) acquires relevance when it is grounded in practice and closely aligned to specific contextual goals. Explicit, realistic and challenging, and matched to individual, community and/or system goals, effective PD initiates and sustains collective and individual PD goals. Members are encouraged to select PD that is relevant to their specific or desired area of practice, or to select PD that is relevant to the NSCSW's mandatory PD content.

Collaborative

All professional development for social workers must be grounded in the profession of social work's values, ethics, practice and research. When PD connects social workers and leaders to their colleagues within and across organizations and to external experts, its benefits are magnified and spread. Furthermore, by integrating multiple points of view within the field of social work, it can help expand social workers' understanding of the many influences impacting their clients and support them more effectively in their practice. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, PD must actively involve multiple points of views: social work practitioners, leaders and researchers as well as first-voice perspectives in its design, participation and evaluation. It is essential that all PD observe the principle, first emerging from the disability rights movement: "nothing about us, without us" and that any continuing education program about a group of people include the voice and perspective of members of that group.

Justice-Focused

It should adhere to principles that promote a social work practice that is rooted in the profession's commitment to social justice and that advance an understanding of the intersectional and evidence-based principles on the NSCSW Social Policy Framework as well as its Code of Ethics. How does this professional development connect to what social work is and what it means to the profession itself? How much of the content reflects the value-based culture of social work?

Practice-based

When PD focuses on both the social workers' practice and best interest of clients, it can lead to significant, sustained positive impacts on client outcomes. PD should emphasize social workers' knowledge of theory into practice with a focus on its impacts on diverse clients.

Future-focused

Future-focused PD seeks to build social workers' capacity to adapt to the changes that arise from our rapidly changing, interconnected world. From pioneering new practice models, to emerging technologies, to innovative techniques, exposure to new developments in theory and practice supports teachers to deal with the challenges that these rapid changes pose. Since change of this nature can challenge current practice, effective PD provides support for this process. Effective PD helps social workers to understand what these new practice models mean, when to use them and how to apply them. Future-focused PD encourages innovation and adaptability and equips social workers with the capabilities to generate new responses to existing challenges.

Fostering critical thinking and self-reflection

Effective social work professional development must focus upon improving client outcomes by integrating best practice and research with first voice perspectives and encouraging social workers to engage in self-reflection and to reshape dissonant understandings with emerging insights. Due to the risk of unexamined bias and systemic racism causing harm to members of historically marginalized and oppressed communities, social workers are encouraged to engage in professional development that seeks to expand their understanding of those traditionally labeled as being in the "minority" and intentionally commit to self-reflection and experiential education to integrate new learning into their practice.

As part of the professional development reporting requirements, members are encouraged to reflect upon how their learning can be applied to their practice. Members should include reflection of their own privilege and social location. Finally, members should ensure that any professional development that is acquired from listening to non-social work voices or perspectives (for example psychology or psychiatry) are then reflected upon and translated into learning that reflects social work values and principles.

Sustained, sustainable and applicable

No matter how well-conceived or well-intentioned PD is, without focused and sustained implementation, it can fail to change or impact on practice and client outcomes. Within learning cultures that are sustainable, social workers and leaders' model and nurture practice and provide time and resources to support and evaluate impact. Impactful, sustainable PD requires an ongoing commitment over time.

To sustain change, social workers should move from superficial compliance with a myriad of sporadic PD programs towards more selective and deeper implementation in a few areas of focus over an extended period of time. The required content is designed to fulfill this criteria, and members are encouraged to delve deeper into these areas. Sustainability practice in social work professional development ought to also emphasize attention to the ways that vicarious trauma and secondary distress can impact social workers' practice.

Finally, applicability to social work practice is a value that is essential to determining the relevance of any professional development. How can the content of the professional development activity be applied to a social worker's context and practice? How does it align with Social Work's values and ethics?

The Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network is an independent collaborative self-regulation initiative that has made recommendations regarding professional development in order to ensure critical thinking and reflective practice. This policy seeks to identify the specific ways that social workers can implement these recommendations. In particular, it identifies professional development as an important way that regulated health professionals can stay up to date with best practices in their own profession, while also improving their ability to collaborate inter-professionally.

In order to ensure that such content reflect the deeper goals of the professional development requirements that every social worker must fulfill, and also remain grounded in the profession's values, members are encouraged to select professional development activities that are either: (1) taught by social workers, (2) offered by a CASWE-accredited academic program, or (3) offered by the CASW, the NSCSW or another social work organization, such as the Association of Black Social Workers.

The NSCSW recognizes that social workers work in interdisciplinary settings, and frequently may select professional development offerings that are taught by non-social workers. In such situations, social workers are encouraged to use the values identified above, as guidelines for their selection of educational activities, as well as to reflect upon the ways that the content of their professional development can be applied into their practice, reflects these values or advances the social work profession more broadly. These same criteria will be utilized in the verification and evaluation of members' submitted activities.

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