

Council on Education for Public Health

Policies on Consulting Relationships

Definition:

A consulting relationship exists when an applicant or potential applicant for accreditation seeks expert advice about the accreditation requirements and guidance about how the school or program may plan and implement public health instructional programs that are likely to satisfy the CEPH accreditation criteria. Consulting relationships may be paid or unpaid.

Rationale:

CEPH seeks to be helpful to applicants and has structured its processes and procedures in such a way that considerable guidance is provided to applicants and prospective applicants throughout the accreditation process. The Council also recognizes that it must maintain objectivity in the decision-making process. When an individual assumes a consulting relationship with an applicant, that individual becomes an advocate for the applicant and loses the neutrality that is essential for service as a CEPH evaluator. Thus, a consultant may not participate in subsequent decision-making processes related to that particular school or program.

Consultation by CEPH Staff

Council staff will provide consultation to individuals, organizations, programs, schools or institutions regarding the procedures, processes, and criteria related to accreditation. Applicants are welcome to initiate telephone inquiries or make scheduled short office visits to learn about procedural aspects of accreditation. There is no charge associated with this type of inquiry.

Consultation may be requested at any time, including prior to an institution becoming a formal applicant for accreditation. However, all first-time applicants for accreditation are required to seek on-site consultation by CEPH staff as part of the accreditation process. For in-office or web-based consultation lasting longer than two hours or for on-site consultation, there is a consultation fee, the amount of which is established annually by the CEPH Executive Committee and is payable to CEPH. The school or program is also responsible for the reimbursement of travel expenses according to CEPH's Travel and Reimbursement Policy.

In addition, the Council will provide extended in-office, web-based or on-site consultation at a university campus. A consultation visit by senior CEPH staff may relate to procedural requirements of accreditation or to substantive educational, organizational and developmental issues. The official position of CEPH is presented only in formally adopted documents, including the procedures manual, criteria documents and policy statements. *Advice provided by a CEPH staff consultant does not represent a commitment to a particular decision, position or interpretation on the part of the Council. Only the board of directors acting as a group is in the position to do this.*

Consultants Referred by CEPH

On request, CEPH staff occasionally will refer applicants to consultants who may be helpful to a school or program and who are familiar with accreditation requirements. These individuals are often asked to assist with mock site visits or other in-depth, organizational or curricular consulting from a faculty perspective which is outside the scope of what CEPH can provide. CEPH does not maintain a list of potential consultants, but staff may identify individuals who have had recent experience with accreditation or who are in institutional settings similar to that of the applicant. CEPH does not recommend nor will it refer former CEPH staff as consultants. CEPH staff consultants as described above are highly trained, senior members of the current

staff and undergo constant calibration with peers to ensure that information given to schools and programs is current and accurate. Former staff do not have this advantage.

Most often, suggested consultants are individuals who were responsible for managing successful accreditation self-study processes at their own institutions. In most cases, staff will recommend more than one consultant and it is the responsibility of the applicant to make a selection and initiate communication if they deem the selection appropriate. In some cases, staff may not know of appropriate consultants and will so advise the applicant. Negotiations for consultation, including remuneration, are solely between the two parties with no payment accruing to CEPH. CEPH assumes no responsibility for the advice given by consultants referred by CEPH. In no case does CEPH staff suggest consultation opportunities to consultants. *Advice provided by consultant suggested by CEPH staff does not represent a commitment to a particular decision, position or interpretation on the part of the Council. Only the board of directors acting as a group is in the position to do this.*

CEPH Site Visitors as Consultants

CEPH site visitors, because of their extensive knowledge about schools and programs and their familiarity with accreditation expectations, are often contacted directly by potential applicants seeking consultation. CEPH site visitors may enter into consulting arrangements with currently accredited schools or programs or with those that may seek CEPH accreditation in the future. However, current or past consulting relationships constitute a conflict of interest that makes it inappropriate to participate in evaluation processes regarding that school or program.

Under no circumstance is it acceptable for a site visitor assigned to a school or program to enter into a consulting arrangement with that institution while an accreditation review is in progress. An accreditation review is considered active from the time the school or program is notified by CEPH about its review cycle, or is approved as an initial applicant, until the accreditation decision has been made and all final letters and reports have been transmitted to the institution.

Consulting relationships subsequent to an active accreditation review in which the consultant has had a CEPH role, such as site visit chair or on-site evaluator, are not permitted. Although these occur at a point when the consultant can no longer influence the accreditation evaluation, they may give the appearance that the site visitor benefits personally and/or financially from the CEPH assignment. The appearance of monetary gain on the part of CEPH site visitors, whether founded or not, undermines the credibility of the accreditation process and diminishes the confidence that the academic and professional community can have in the decisions of CEPH.

Current Councilors as Consultants

During service as a member of the CEPH board, councilors are not permitted to consult with any CEPH-accredited school or program or any school or program that is likely to seek accreditation by CEPH. Consulting relationships that occurred before service as a Councilor constitute a conflict of interest that disqualifies the councilor from participation in decision-making regarding that school or program. Councilors should declare such conflicts and they will be addressed as outlined in the Conflicts of Interest Policy.

Councilors serve on the board as representatives of various constituencies and it is logical that those constituencies will look to their representatives for knowledgeable advice about accreditation. The information-sharing role can be satisfied in a public forum without compromising the position of a Councilor. However, individual advice to a specific applicant or potential applicant is improper and must be avoided. Inquiries of this type should be directed to a CEPH staff member.

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