

## **Third-Party Comments**

### **What is the purpose of third-party comments?**

The request for third-party comments provides a school or program's stakeholders with the opportunity to submit feedback to CEPH on the school or program and its practices, procedures and policies.

### **Who are a school or program's stakeholders? Who can submit a third-party comment?**

Students, alumni, faculty, staff, community partners and members of the general public are all stakeholders who may make a third-party comment during this process. Anyone who feels that he or she has relevant information may submit a third-party comment, including individuals who are also participating in the site visit and self-study, if they feel they have something additional to add.

### **Our school or program already plans to circulate drafts of the self-study document to various stakeholders for comment, throughout the process. Does this satisfy the requirement that we invite third-party comment?**

No. CEPH encourages schools and programs to solicit as much feedback as possible and to involve stakeholders as much as possible at various points in the self-study process. The third-party comment process, however, is a broader, more general call for comment. It is different from other types of feedback you will seek because 1) respondents' comments may be sent directly to CEPH, whereas other types of feedback should go to your self-study team so that you can consider them and 2) it does not require reference to the self-study document. It may be a more general comment about the program or school's operations, quality, etc.

### **How should we make the request for comments?**

The form of such notice is at the discretion of the school or program. Notification methods might include a notice posted in a visible location, an announcement in a regular newsletter for constituents, an advertisement in the campus newspaper, a notice published on the website, e-mail listservs, or in the mail or other means of communication.

### **Should third-party comments be directed to the school or program, or to CEPH?**

All third-party comments should be sent directly to CEPH. Provide the e-mail address for the team coordinator assigned to your visit, and provide CEPH's mailing address as well.

### **What information should our request for third-party comments contain?**

The notice must 1) notify the public that a CEPH accreditation review is scheduled, 2) indicate that CEPH is accepting written comments until 30 days before the site visit, 3) include CEPH's mailing address and the e-mail address of your team coordinator and 4) provide the specific deadline for submitting written comments.

### **When must we announce the opportunity to provide third-party comments?**

Approximately three months before the scheduled site visit, a school or program should notify its major stakeholders about the opportunity to submit third-party comments.

### **What is the deadline for submitting third-party comments?**

Comments from third-parties will be accepted by CEPH until 30 days before the scheduled site visit.

**Is there a required format for the submission of third-party comments?**

Third-party comments may take the form of e-mail, printed mail or any other written form. Comments must be in writing and must be specific. Comments received by phone or in person will not be accepted or considered.

**Do I need to attach my school or program's self-study to the request for comments?**

No; while schools and programs are not required to attach their self-study to the request for comments, they can feel free to do so if they choose.

**What should a school or program do with any third-party comments it may receive? Can these be forwarded directly CEPH?**

The intent of the third-party comment process is to provide an outlet for individuals who prefer to provide information directly to CEPH. We encourage the school or program to view this as a *complement* to the school or program's own process for seeking feedback from stakeholders.

We encourage you to establish and emphasize opportunities for your stakeholders to give feedback directly to you. The third-party comment process exists for those individuals who would prefer to comment directly to CEPH instead.

**Where and how do I document my school or program's efforts to solicit third-party comments?**

The electronic resource file should contain information and documentation that allows site visitors to verify the process through which the school or program provided opportunities for third-party comments during the accreditation process. Methods of soliciting third-party comments should also be verifiable by an on-site evaluation team.

**How are third-party comments considered in the review process?**

The team coordinator simply provides all third-party comments, in full, to the other members of the site visit team. The team uses these comments in the same way it uses all other information associated with the visit, such as documents provided by the school or program, information in the self-study and information provided by participants in on-site interviews. Reviewers use their professional expertise and judgment, gained through experience as academics and practitioners, to consider all of the available information.

**Does CEPH share the third-party comments it receives with the corresponding school or program?**

No. Third-party comments are confidential, viewed only by the site visit team and other CEPH personnel, if needed.

**How does CEPH differentiate between third-party comments and official complaints?**

Third-party comments and complaints are completely separate processes and should not be confused. 1) Complaints may be submitted at any time, while third-party comments are submitted in the months immediately preceding a site visit. 2) Complaints must follow a very specific format and address specific topics and requirements, as outlined in CEPH's Procedures (see the section titled "Complaints"). Third-party comments may take any written form. 3) The Procedures define a specific protocol for CEPH's and other parties' responses to a complaint. Third-party comments act as information only for the current accreditation review. There is no additional process for CEPH, the commenter or the school or program after CEPH receives a third-party comment.

**What is the relationship between the third-party comment requirement and CEPH's public disclosure requirements?**

Public disclosure is an important component of the CEPH review process, but it is distinct from the call for third-party comment.

The public disclosure requirement means that schools and programs must publish and make available to the public two documents: 1) the final self-study document and 2) the final accreditation report (after adoption by the Council). Such reports are public documents, and CEPH's [Procedures](#) are specific about the manner in which schools and program make these documents available. See the procedures section titled "Release of Reports and Information About Actions" for further information.

The public comment requirement occurs in advance of the production and disclosure of these final documents.