

Council on Education for Public Health

Policies on Consulting Relationships

The Council on Education for Public Health encourages consultation to schools and programs pursuing accreditation and provides for such assistance in its adopted procedures manual. A consulting relationship exists when an applicant or potential applicant for accreditation seeks expert advice about the accreditation requirements and guidance about how the institution may plan and implement public health instructional programs that are likely to satisfy the CEPH accreditation criteria. Consulting relationships may be paid or unpaid.

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. While desiring to be helpful, the Council at the same time 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, whether paid or unpaid, may not be a participant in subsequent decision-making processes related to that particular institution.

While applicants often consider consultation to be helpful, a distinction should be made between official guidance of the Council and informal advice from a consultant who is not acting as an agent of the Council. The official position of CEPH is presented only in formally adopted documents, including the procedures manual, criteria documents and occasional policy statements. The Council is not responsible for advice given by a consultant, regardless of whether the consultant has a current or former affiliation with the Council or is recommended by CEPH.

Consultation by CEPH Staff

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

In addition, the Council will provide on-site consultation at a university campus. A consultation visit by the CEPH executive director or other agency representative may relate to procedural requirements of accreditation or to substantive educational, organizational and developmental issues. 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. Arrangements regarding date and location for a consultation visit must be negotiated with CEPH staff. For on-site consultation, there is a consultation fee, the amount of which is established annually by the CEPH Administrative Committee and is payable to CEPH, not to the CEPH staff member personally. The current fee schedule is available on the CEPH website. The school or program is also responsible for the reimbursement of travel expenses according to CEPH's Travel and Reimbursement Policy. CEPH submits an invoice to the school or program following the consultation visit, which includes both the consultation fee and travel expenses.

Consultants Referred by CEPH

On request, CEPH staff occasionally will refer applicants to consultants who may be helpful to an institution and who are familiar with the accreditation requirements. Most often, suggested consultants are former councilors, former site visitors, or individuals who were responsible for managing successful accreditation self-study processes at their own institutions. 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.

CEPH does not maintain a list of potential consultants, but staff often is in the position to identify individuals who have had recent experience in accreditation or who are in institutional settings similar to that of the applicant. 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.

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 and negotiate fees and conditions of employment 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 future evaluation processes regarding that institution. If a consulting relationship has been established prior to invitation as a site visitor, the potential site visitor must declare a conflict of interest and decline participation in the site visit team.

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 institution 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 discouraged. Although these occur at a point when the consultant can no longer influence the accreditation decision, they nonetheless give the appearance that the councilor or site visitor benefits personally and/or financially from the CEPH assignment. The appearance of pecuniary gain on the part of CEPH participants, 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 the accrediting body.

Current Councilors as Consultants

During active service as a member of the CEPH board, councilors are not permitted to seek or accept a consulting assignment with any CEPH-accredited institution or any institution that is likely to seek accreditation by CEPH. Consulting relationships that occurred before active service on the board constitute a conflict of interest that disqualifies the councilor from future participation in decision-making regarding that institution.

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 establishes a perception of impropriety that must be avoided. Inquiries of this type should be directed to a CEPH staff member.

Admonitions to and Expectations of All Consultants

1. CEPH consultants, including current councilors, former councilors and former site visitors, must guard against representing their advice as 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. Hopefully consultants can offer useful advice because of their long experience, but they must be careful to characterize their advice as reflecting only their own judgments. They may not represent themselves as agents of the Council.
2. Individuals who engage in consultation about accreditation, whether paid or unpaid and whether before, during or after service to CEPH, are expected to a) advise CEPH about the consulting assignment, b) decline service as a reader or site visitor for that school or program, c) declare a conflict of interest to be recorded in meeting minutes, and d) refrain from voting or otherwise influencing future decisions about that school or program.

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Adopted: October 2, 1999
Revised: August 5, 2003
Revised: August 15, 2011