

# Council on Education for Public Health

## Policy Statement on Public Disclosure

An accrediting body is viewed as a quasi-public entity which serves the public interest. Its decisions are used in a variety of ways, including but not limited to the federal government in making funding decisions, employers in determining qualifications of job applicants, universities in establishing the acceptability of transfer credit, and prospective students in selecting an educational program. These various publics have a legitimate need to know the actions of the accrediting body. The concept of accountability to these publics demands openness in the manner in which the accrediting body conducts its business. Disclosure of basic and essential information is central to fulfilling the accrediting body's responsibilities to these publics.

At the same time, an accrediting body has certain obligations to other constituent groups, particularly the schools and programs that voluntarily seek accreditation. In the process of assessing conformance of a school or program with the accreditation criteria and in promoting the enhancement of educational quality, the accrediting body has access to institution-specific information that may be of a confidential nature. In fact, the ability of the accrediting body to carry out its responsibilities is contingent upon the provision of complete and candid information by the school or program being reviewed. The integrity of the accreditation process can be compromised and the effectiveness of the deliberative process eroded unless the confidentiality of such information is respected.

This policy statement of the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) establishes guidelines about what information is to be disclosed regarding documents generated in the accreditation process and what is to be held in confidence or reserved for limited distribution. It is the basic policy of the Council that it will publicly disclose information about the Council itself, its policies and procedures, and basic and essential information about the schools and programs it accredits. The Council encourages and in some cases requires that schools and programs make public information about their accreditation status, their self-study documents and official accreditation reports.

This document further delineates the Council's policy on disclosure.

1. Published Information – except as otherwise noted, information is published on CEPH's website which is updated on a continuous basis. All items noted below can also be provided, upon request, in paper copy.
  - a. A procedures manual which describes each type of accreditation granted by the Council, identifies the procedures for applying for accreditation, identifies procedures used in carrying out an accreditation review and making decisions about accreditation status.
  - b. The CEPH criteria documents for schools of public health and for program of public health which present the standards against which schools or programs will be evaluated and an accreditation decision will be made.
  - c. Current information about the accreditation status of the schools and programs. This information includes the name and address of the school or program, the name of the dean or program director, the initial date of accreditation and the date by which the next scheduled review must take place.

- d. Current information about applicants for accreditation including the name of the school or program and information about category, date of application acceptance, preliminary self-study due date, site visit date, anticipated accreditation decision date and whether the applicant has been granted an extension.
- e. Following each decision-making meeting, the Council publishes all final accreditation decisions, both affirmative and negative, including the case where a school or program withdraws an application or the case of a decision to deny an application for initial accreditation.

In addition, on an annual basis, the Council publishes all accreditation decisions in its annual report, including those related to accreditation decisions, interim reports, substantive changes and applications.

- f. The names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of the members of the CEPH Board of Councilors and CEPH staff members.
- h. Fee schedule
- i. On request, the Council will make available the following information via electronic or paper copy:
  - articles of incorporation
  - bylaws
  - audited financial statements
  - roster of potential site visitors
  - a list of scheduled site visits for the coming academic year
  - site visit team lists
  - copies of recognition applications submitted by CEPH to the US Department of Education
  - evaluation questionnaires about the accreditation process
  - annual summary evaluation reports
- j. The Council requires accredited schools and programs to make available either by publishing on its website or via direct and easily accessible request, its most recent self-study document. These are also available by contacting CEPH staff, although initial requests will be referred back to the school or program.
- k. The Council on request will make available for reasonable copying costs information that is specified in the Council's adopted procedures manual as being available to the public, including a copy of a school or program's official accreditation report, accompanied by a written response (if any) by the school or program. Initial inquiries about the official accreditation report will be referred to the school or program prior to CEPH responding to the request.

## 2. Information that is Not Available

- a. CEPH does not disclose working documents which have not been vetted by the Board of Councilors or documents which have been created by the school or program, except as noted in this policy.

Examples include drafts of the site team report, interim reports submitted by the school or program, written communications between a school or program and CEPH, written third-party testimony about a school or program in preparation for an accreditation site visit and records of investigations or appeals. Written complaints about a school or program will not be made available except as provided for in the CEPH procedures manual.

- b. The Council will not disclose documents and other materials that include institution-specific information that is not already in the public domain.

Examples are notes taken during site visits by team members and staff, confidential materials provided to the site visit team on site, agency files, minutes of CEPH meetings, and written materials prepared for meetings of the Board of Councilors.

- c. The Council will not disclose information which legally cannot be disclosed without the consent of the individual who provides it. The Council will honor the confidentiality of information that is protected by law or comparable privilege which results from certain relationships.

Examples are student and personnel files maintained by an institution or budget information with individual identifiers.