



Standards and Criteria for Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists

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AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
CONTINUING EDUCATION SPONSOR APPROVAL SYSTEM

Standards and Criteria

February 2005

PREFACE

This document is the most recent revision of the document originally entitled *APA Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists*, first approved by the American Psychological Association Council of Representatives in January 1987.

This revision is effective as of April 1, 2005, and supersedes all previous versions.

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APA SPONSOR APPROVAL SYSTEM STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

SECTION ONE

A. INTRODUCTION

The American Psychological Association (APA), founded in 1892, is the largest psychological organization in the United States. According to the APA By-Laws, Article I.1:

The objects of the American Psychological Association shall be to advance psychology as a science and profession and as a means of promoting health, education and human welfare by the encouragement of psychology in all its branches in the broadest and most liberal manner; by the promotion of research in psychology and the improvement of research methods and conditions; by the improvement of the qualifications and usefulness of psychologists through high standards of ethics, conduct, education, and achievement; by the establishment and maintenance of the highest standards of professional ethics and conduct of the members of the association; by the increase and diffusion of psychological knowledge through meetings, professional contacts, reports, papers, discussions, and publications; thereby to advance scientific interests and inquiry, and the application of research findings to the promotion of health, education and the public welfare.

B. THE APA CE SPONSOR APPROVAL SYSTEM (CE-SAS) AND THE APA CONTINUING EDUCATION COMMITTEE

APA recognizes the responsibility of psychologists to continue their educational and professional development, building upon the foundations of a completed doctoral program in psychology. The APA CE Sponsor Approval System and the APA Continuing Education Committee work together to establish standards for those organizations wishing to offer continuing education for psychologists and to maintain the highest level of quality in those programs.

Mission Statement of the Continuing Education Committee

The Continuing Education Committee shall have responsibility for developing policy and program recommendations for the Association's continuing education program and for working collaboratively with the APA Office of Continuing Education in Psychology and CE Sponsor Approval System to implement these policy and program recommendations. The Committee's tasks shall include, but not be limited to, (a) developing and delivering continuing education programs and products; (b) providing educational and technical assistance to APA Directorates, Divisions, State Associations, and other sponsors; (c) collaborating with organizations that seek to become approved sponsors of continuing education; (d) providing review of all APA approved sponsors and organizations seeking APA sponsor approval; (e) periodically reviewing the Association's sponsor approval guidelines, and (f) identifying, promoting, implementing and evaluating research, development and innovations in continuing education.

Definition of Continuing Education for Psychologists

Continuing education (CE) in psychology is an ongoing process consisting of formal learning activities that (1) are relevant to psychological practice, education and science, (2) enable psychologists to keep pace with emerging issues and technologies, and (3) allow psychologists to maintain, develop, and increase competencies in order to improve services to the public and enhance contributions to the profession.

Continuing education builds upon a completed doctoral program in psychology. It is **not** a substitute for the basic academic education and training needed for entry to the field of psychology, **nor** should it be the primary vehicle for career changes from one APA-recognized specialty area (e.g. clinical, counseling, school psychology) to another.

SECTION TWO

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION SPONSOR APPROVAL SYSTEM

STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

Sponsors must meet the Standards provided below in order to receive approval from the American Psychological Association as a sponsor of continuing education for psychologists. Each standard includes a general principle followed by the related criterion/criteria. These Standards, Principles, and Criteria are applicable to all CE programs offered to psychologists under the auspices of APA approval.

Association Rule 120-4 gives responsibility for the provision of educational and technical assistance concerning continuing education to the Continuing Education Committee, and the commentary following each standard is provided pursuant to that authority granted to the Committee by the APA Council of Representatives. The various boxes containing educational and technical assistance do not contain Standards of the Sponsor Approval System and, as such, are not approved by Council. They are designed to provide a living document elaborating upon, interpreting and operationally defining the Standards to provide such educational and technical assistance to sponsors. The Continuing Education Committee may revise them from time to time.

Standard A: Goals

PRINCIPLE

Continuing education in psychology builds upon a completed doctoral program in psychology.

Continuing education (CE) in psychology is an ongoing process consisting of formal learning activities that (1) are relevant to psychological practice, education and science, (2) enable psychologists to keep pace with emerging issues and technologies, and (3) allow psychologists to maintain, develop, and increase competencies in order to improve services to the public and enhance contributions to the profession.

CRITERION

1. Sponsors must have a statement of goals for their CE program that reflects this Principle.

Educational and Technical Assistance

Many approved sponsors offer continuing education programs to a wide target audience, and there are other professional licensing boards that accept CE credits earned from APA-approved sponsors (although the licensing board in question should be contacted directly for further information). Keeping in mind that CE programs may be offered to professionals across a range of disciplines, for this purpose the goal of a CE program must specifically address the learning needs of psychologists.

Sponsors must have a goals statement that reflects the type and nature of its CE offerings and target audience.

Standard B: Program Management

PRINCIPLE

Effective program management is essential for maintaining the highest quality in continuing education programs for psychologists.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must include the direct input of psychologists in all phases of the decision-making and program-planning process for the activities offered to psychologists for CE credit.
2. Sponsors must have a clearly designated program administrator who is responsible for ensuring that the organization meets the Standards described in this document.
3. Sponsors must ensure the security of tests and proprietary information, and the confidentiality of individuals and organizations.
4. Sponsors must have written procedures for addressing participant complaints in a reasonable, ethical, and timely fashion.
5. Sponsors must select instructors and develop program materials that respect cultural, individual, and role differences, including those based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status.
6. Sponsors must make all CE programs accessible to individuals with disabilities, according to the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
7. Sponsors must adhere to all Standards in this document in all aspects of CE programs offered under the auspices of their APA approval.

Educational and Technical Assistance

Psychologists must have input in all phases of the decision-making and program-planning process for the activities offered to psychologists for CE credit. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including involvement by psychologists on staff, advisory boards, or planning committees. In cases where the organization is owned and operated by one psychologist, it is strongly recommended that an advisory board be used to provide feedback regarding program planning and areas where a conflict of interest might occur (e.g., resolution of participant complaints). Involvement must be on an active and on-going basis.

Inherent in adhering to the Principle of Standard B is the sponsor's responsibility to maintain a continuing awareness of the policies and procedures of the APA Sponsor Approval System. This includes, but is not limited to, having a copy of the most recent submissions to the Sponsor Approval System (application, status report, etc.), being aware of report and fee submission deadlines, and keeping the Sponsor Approval System aware of any changes in contact information so that we may inform your organization of these deadlines in a timely manner. Sponsors must have a clearly designated administrator of the program, although it is not required that this individual be a psychologist.

Sponsors are required to have written procedures for dealing with participant complaints. While these procedures need not be elaborate, they must clearly indicate the steps that will be taken to resolve complaints, and these procedures must be available in written format for anyone who requests them. See the application for becoming an approved sponsor for a sample grievance procedure.

In order to make available high-quality CE programs to as many psychologists as possible, sponsors are encouraged to jointly collaborate with other organizations as appropriate. "Joint collaboration" should be understood as the mutual planning of an activity by two or more organizations. Regardless of the level of involvement of the sponsor, however, it is ultimately the responsibility of the approved sponsor to ensure that all the Standards of the APA Sponsor Approval System are met. Any degree of joint collaboration does not, in any way, absolve the sponsor of its responsibilities as an approved sponsor

Sponsors are required to make their programs accessible to all individuals. Facilities used by a sponsor must be in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Sponsors must also, to the best of their ability, provide accommodation for individuals with sensory impairments.

Standard C: Educational Planning and Instructional Methods

PRINCIPLE

Successful continuing education in psychology requires: (1) careful educational planning that results in a clear statement of educational objectives; (2) the selection of appropriate instructional methods to achieve those objectives; and (3) the selection of instructional personnel with demonstrated expertise in the program content.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must develop educational objectives that clearly describe what participants are expected to learn.
2. Sponsors must select instructors with expertise in the program content and who are competent to teach this program content at a level that builds upon a completed doctoral program in psychology.

Educational and Technical Assistance

Every program offered for CE credit must have predetermined learning objectives. Rather than a description of topics to be covered, learning objectives should clearly define what the participant will know or be able to do as a result of having attended the program, and these objectives must be stated in measurable terms. As a guideline, there should be three to four objectives for a four hour program; five to six objectives for a seven to eight hour program, etc.

CE activities can be delivered via numerous methods which include, but are not limited to: workshops, seminars, conferences, conventions, grand rounds, lectures, books, videotapes, audiotapes, CD-ROMs, and web-based activities. All CE activities, regardless of the delivery method, must adhere to the Standards of the APA Sponsor Approval System.

Although it is not required that instructors be psychologists, they must have expertise and be competent in the areas in which they teach. Competencies might be demonstrated by some combination of the following: relevant educational experience such as holding a doctoral degree in psychology, review of records of previous teaching experiences, years of clinical experience, publications in areas relevant to the content being taught, evaluation forms from previously offered programs, personal knowledge of the instructor's teaching ability, and references.

Standard D: Curriculum Content

PRINCIPLE

The content of continuing education is the crucial component of programs intended to maintain, develop, and increase conceptual and applied competencies that are relevant to psychological practice, education, and science. CE programs may include content related to well-established psychological principles, or may be based on content that extends current theory, method, or practice. CE programs may provide information related to ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards that impact psychology.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must be prepared to demonstrate that information and programs presented are based on a methodological, theoretical, research, or practice knowledge base. This requirement must be met by at least one of the following:
 - 1.1. Program content has obtained credibility, as demonstrated by the involvement of the broader psychological practice, education, and science communities in studying or applying the findings, procedures, practices, or theoretical concepts;
 - 1.2. Program content has been studied according to established procedures of scientific scrutiny that can be reasonably relied upon;
 - 1.3. Program content has peer reviewed, published support beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach;
 - 1.4. Program content is related to ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards that impact psychology.
2. Sponsors are required to ensure that instructors, during each CE presentation, include statements that describe the accuracy and utility of the materials presented, the basis of such statements, the limitations of the content being taught, and the severe and the most common risks.
3. Sponsors must offer program content that builds upon the foundation of a completed doctoral program in psychology.
4. Sponsors must be prepared to demonstrate that content is relevant to psychological practice, education, or science.
5. Sponsors must clearly describe any commercial support for the CE program, presentation, or instructor to program participants at the time the CE program begins. Any other relationship that could be reasonably construed as a conflict of interest also must be disclosed.

Educational and Technical Assistance

Program Content

Because psychologists work in a variety of professional settings, sponsors are encouraged to offer a wide range of topics that can meet the diverse CE needs of psychologists. The Committee strongly encourages innovative programs, assuming that Standard D is met.

Programs that are appropriate for CE will allow psychologists to improve services to the public and enhance contributions to the profession. Programs that include content related to ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards that impact psychology are considered appropriate (e.g., HIPAA, risk management, ethics). Appropriate content can be demonstrated in program titles, learning objectives, and promotional materials.

Career management programs (e.g., programs that are primarily for the purpose of career advancement) should be carefully considered to determine whether or not the content of the program can be deemed appropriate CE content for psychologists. The Committee recognizes that while such programs may be beneficial to psychologists by helping them grow their businesses, advance their academic careers, or otherwise increase their earnings, the content may not actually be related to the professional practice of psychology, education, administration, or research (e.g., programs on how to build a more profitable fee-for-service practice, or how to get tenure are usually not considered appropriate for CE).

The Committee will ultimately consider the best interest of the public and the program participants when making decisions about appropriate content of CE programs and its relevance to psychology.

Full Disclosure

Sponsors ensure that instructors provide a sufficient basis for the interpretation of program information by informing participants of limitations of the content being taught, including contradictory evidence and its source. For example, presentations that include discussions of clinical assessments, treatments, or interventions also describe the evidence for this information, including the basis (e.g., research, established psychological practice, clinical expertise, patient acceptability) of such descriptions or claims, their limitations, and the severe risks, if any, and also those risks that are most common.

Sponsors are required to provide information that demonstrates their adherence to Standard D. In the normal course of program preparation, instructors should be able to provide information that demonstrates compliance with the standard. Sponsors could address this in some combination of the program learning objectives, participants' evaluation of content, citations to research references, or a clause in a contract with instructors.

Standard E: Program Evaluation

PRINCIPLE

Evaluation of CE programs is for the purpose of improving future programs.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must obtain the CE participants' evaluation as to how well each educational objective was achieved.
2. Sponsors must assess the participants' satisfaction, using a written evaluation form, with the overall program.
3. Sponsors must ensure that there is a method in place to assess what the participants have learned from the program.
4. Sponsors must use the results of the abovementioned evaluation processes to improve and plan future programs.

Educational and Technical Assistance

All programs, regardless of delivery method, require a direct assessment of participant learning. This assessment can be achieved in a variety of ways, and the method used should vary depending on the particular delivery method. Some ways of assessing learning include post-tests, informal discussions between instructor(s) and participants, question and answer sessions at the end of a program, etc. If using informal means for assessing learning, sponsors must be prepared to document the method being used.

CE programs that are not conducted in person require a different process for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. For these types of programs (e.g., books, audiotapes, videotapes, CD-ROMS, online [non-real time], etc.), sponsors are required to assess achieved learning. This test must be of sufficient depth to adequately determine the level of learning that was achieved. There must also be a specified criterion for successful completion of the program (i.e., passing grade, see also Standard F. Standards for Awarding Credit). For programs that use essays to determine achieved learning, a grading grid must be provided.

At a minimum, satisfaction evaluations should include assessment of the instructor's level of knowledge and expertise, and teaching ability. Effective satisfaction evaluations should provide feedback that is useful both to the sponsor and the instructor(s) for the purpose of planning and improving future programs. See the application for becoming an approved sponsor for sample participant satisfaction evaluation forms.

For programs where credit is offered on a session-by-session basis (e.g., conferences, conventions, etc.), each session must be evaluated separately.

Standard F: Standards for Awarding Credit

PRINCIPLE

The awarding of CE credit is based on participation in learning activities offered in accordance with the Standards described in this document.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must award CE credit for psychologists on the basis of one credit per one hour of instructional time.
2. Sponsors must provide documentation to each participant that includes the APA approval statement, the name and date of the activity, the number of CE credits earned, and a signature or other verification from the sponsoring organization.
3. Sponsors must be able to verify the awarding of CE credit to participants and provide this verification to individuals who request it for at least three years after completion of the activity.

Educational and Technical Assistance

CE programs must be at least one hour in length.

Credit is awarded only for actual instructional time. For programs where instructional time is difficult to calculate (e.g., books, CD-ROMS, online), sponsors must have a method for determining the number of credits to offer and a rationale for this method. Sponsors are strongly encouraged to utilize field-testing when determining credits for these types of programs. For programs that require a test of achieved learning, the specified passing criterion must be met before credit may be awarded (See also Standard E Program Evaluation).

Variable credit for partial attendance may not be awarded.

For programs that involve a variety of sessions (e.g., conferences, conventions, etc.), credit should be awarded on a session-by-session basis. Each individual session for which credit is awarded must meet the Standards of the Sponsor Approval System, i.e., each session must have its own stated learning objectives, each session must be evaluated separately, etc. Sponsors must have a system for determining which sessions were attended (e.g., sign-in sheet, credit log, etc).

Full attendance is required for all CE activities, and sponsors must have a method for ensuring full attendance (sign-in/sign-out sheets, room monitors, etc.). The Sponsor Approval System is aware that individuals will, on occasion, arrive late or leave early from a CE program. Sponsors should, within reason, evaluate each situation on a case-by-case basis when considering full attendance and the awarding of credit.

See the application for becoming an approved sponsor for a sample documentation of attendance letter.

Standard G: Promotion and Advertising of Programs

PRINCIPLE

CE promotional materials must contain accurate and complete information for potential program participants.

CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must clearly indicate how potential participants may obtain the following information prior to enrolling in a CE program:
 - a. Educational objectives;
 - b. A description of the target audience and the instructional level of the activity (introductory, intermediate, or advanced);
 - c. Schedule;
 - d. Cost, including all fees and the refund/cancellation policy;
 - e. Instructor credentials, including relevant professional degree and discipline, current professional position, and expertise in program content;
 - f. The number of CE credits offered for each activity;
 - g. A clear indication of any activities within a program that are not offered for CE credit.
2. Sponsors must make clearly evident to all potential participants, prior to registration, any known commercial support for CE programs or instructors. Any other relationships that could be reasonably construed as a conflict of interest also must be disclosed.
3. Sponsors must assure that when referring to APA approval, the correct statement is used in all promotional materials such as ads, brochures, and announcements. When referring to APA approval, the following statement must be used:

“(Organization name) is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. (Organization name) maintains responsibility for this program and its content.”

Educational and Technical Assistance

Although the information listed above under Criterion G.1. must be available to potential participants prior to enrollment, the Sponsor Approval System understands that it is sometimes not feasible to include all items in promotional materials. In cases where one or more of the above points is not included in promotional pieces, the means of obtaining this information must be provided (e.g., phone number, web site, etc.).

Multi-session, multi-disciplinary programs will oftentimes contain some content that is not relevant to psychology or is otherwise inappropriate as CE for psychologists. In these cases, promotional and program materials must clearly indicate which sessions are available to psychologists for credit and which are not.

APA approval of sponsors is at the organizational level, not at the level of individual or programmatic educational offerings. In the absence of any APA review process of programs, sponsors must not imply that APA has determined that their educational offerings meet specific APA education and training standards or guidelines. Sponsors must not use the term “APA-approved” (or any variation thereof) when referring to individual course or programmatic offerings or CE credit for psychologists.

Do not use the term “CEU” to refer to CE credit for psychologists. Although other professions may use the CEU when awarding continuing education credit, CE credit for psychologists is granted on a one credit per one contact hour basis. On the other hand, one CEU is granted per every ten hours of contact.