

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

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AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

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AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

**Standards and Criteria**

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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 August 2015, and supersedes all previous versions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL OF SPONSORS OF CONTINUING  
EDUCATION FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

SECTION ONE

Page

A. Introduction .....1  
B. Background of the APA Office of CE Sponsor Approval (CESA) .....1

SECTION TWO

Standard A (Goals) .....3  
Standard B (Program Management) .....4  
Standard C (Educational Planning and Instructional Methods).....5  
Standard D (Curriculum Content).....6  
Standard E (Program Evaluation) .....7  
Standard F (Standards for Awarding Credit) .....8  
Standard G (Promotion and Advertising of Programs).....9

# STANDARDS AND CRITERIA FOR APPROVAL OF SPONSORS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

## 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 OFFICE OF CE SPONSOR APPROVAL (CESA) 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 Office of CE Sponsor Approval 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. **The Standards and Criteria for Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists are focused on CE regarding the science and profession of psychology that has been empirically established and supported.** Emerging technologies and techniques are extremely important to the field of psychology, and scientific inquiry into them is encouraged. However, providing formal CE credit for programming that does not yet meet these standards is premature.

#### 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 Office of CE Sponsor Approval 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 the most current scientific evidence regarding assessment, intervention, and education as well as important legal, statutory, or regulatory issues ; 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

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. Failure of sponsors to follow the standards once approved may lead to loss of APA approved status.

*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 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/or science; (2) enable psychologists to keep pace with the most current scientific evidence regarding assessment, prevention, intervention, and/or education, as well as important relevant legal, statutory, leadership, or regulatory issues; 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 psychologists for proposed CE programs 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; the confidentiality of any individuals or organizations referenced within the content of programs that would require confidentiality; and the privacy of participants.
4. Sponsors must have **written procedures for addressing participant complaints** in a reasonable, ethical, and timely fashion.
5. Sponsors must both select instructors and develop program content 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 Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists. This includes, but is not limited to, having a copy of the most recent submissions to the Office of CE Sponsor Approval (application, status report, etc.), being aware of report and fee submission deadlines, and keeping the Sponsor Office of CE Sponsor Approval 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.*

*Examples of possible areas of concern as it relates to confidentiality include materials kept in offices, electronic information, and materials imparted during program.*

*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 Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists 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 use of appropriate educational methods that are effecting in achieving those objectives; 3) a clear connection between program content and the application of this content within the learner's professional context; and (4) the selection of instructional personnel with demonstrated expertise in the program content.

### CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must develop educational objectives that clearly describe a) what participants are expected to learn; and b) how participants can apply this knowledge in practice or other professional contexts.
2. Sponsors must include instructional methods that actively engage the learner to enhance acquisition of knowledge and, where appropriate, facilitate translation into practice.
3. 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 Approval of Sponsors of Continuing Education for Psychologists.

Although it is not required that instructors be psychologists, they must have expertise and be competent in the areas in which they teach. Expertise 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 intended to maintain, develop, and increase conceptual and applied competencies that are relevant to psychological practice, education, and science. All CE programs offered for CE credit for psychologists must comply with Standard D criteria. CE programs must be grounded in an evidence-based approach. CE programs that are focused on application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods must include content that is credibly supported by the most current scientific evidence. CE programs may also provide information related to ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards that impact psychology.

### CRITERIA

1. Sponsors must document that the content of each CE program meets one of the following:
  - 1.1 Program content focuses on application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that have overall consistent and credible empirical support in the contemporary peer reviewed scientific literature beyond those publications and other types of communications devoted primarily to the promotion of the approach;
  - 1.2 Program content focuses on ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards that impact psychological practice, education, or research;
  - 1.3 Program content focuses on topics related to psychological practice, education, or research *other than* application of psychological assessment and/or intervention methods that are supported by contemporary scholarship grounded in established research procedures.
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 empirical 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, and/or science.
5. Sponsors must have a process to identify any potential conflict of interest and/or commercial support for any program offered, and they 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. Individual presenters must disclose and explain the presence or absence of commercial support or conflict of interest at the time the CE program begins.

## Educational and Technical Assistance

### Program Content

Acceptable programs must adhere to the definition of continuing education in that they improve service to the public and enhance contributions to the profession. Acceptable programs must also adhere to the American Psychological Association policy on Quality Professional Development and Continuing Education (APA, 2013). **Determination of eligibility is not made on the basis of topic alone.**

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 encourages innovative programs, only if clear and sufficient evidence is provided that demonstrate the criteria for Standard D are met by these programs.

**Content related to the professional practice of psychology, business of practice, education, administration, conducting research, or career management programs should be carefully considered to determine whether or not the content of the programs can be deemed appropriate CE content for psychologists.**

Empirical support for the application of psychological assessment methods and interventions can be demonstrated through a variety of scientific methods. In-text citations to recent peer-reviewed journal publications embedded in the Sponsor's narrative response to Standard D are one method to provide this foundation. **It is recognized that some psychological interventions may not yet be supported by positive results from clinical trials, and yet be considered to be sufficiently evidence-based.** The sponsor is responsible for providing sufficient information for the Continuing Education Committee to judge the evidence-based foundations of the proposed content covered.

**The responsibility is on the applicant to provide substantive and convincing evidence that the programs meet the requirements of Standard D.** Applicants must adequately establish the bridge between program content and the elements of the criteria using appropriate evidence. Assertion on the part of the applicant that the program meets the criteria is insufficient. The more distant a topic appears from core disciplinary knowledge, the greater the responsibility of the sponsor to demonstrate the connection to improvement of services to the public and contributions to the profession. **At least three (3) current, relevant, supporting, and complete references (in APA format) must be provided as evidence that program content has met the requirements of a specific D.1. criterion.** The narrative provided for each of the four programs should explicitly link the references provided as evidence to the program content of the program, both of which should be linked to a specific D.1. criterion. In addition to the response to Criterion D.1., appropriate content should be conveyed in program titles, learning objectives, and promotional materials.

If you are teaching psychologists interventions or assessments that they will use with clients, you will address Standard D1.1.

Examples:

Interpersonal psychotherapy for depression  
The utilization of the DSM 5 in children and adolescents  
Behavioral analysis in the treatment of autism spectrum disorder  
Treatment of post-traumatic stress in immigrant families

If you are teaching psychologists about ethical, legal, statutory or regulatory policies, guidelines, and standards in practice or research, you will address Standard D1.2

Examples:

Ethical considerations in telehealth  
Compliance with HIPPA regulations  
Ethical considerations in substance abuse research with adolescents  
Mental health care under the Affordable Care Act

If you are teaching psychologists content other than psychological intervention, assessment, and ethics, you will address Standard D1.3

*Examples:*

*Learning about the “new statistics”*

*Mental health advocacy for marginalized populations*

*Writing for professional psychology journals*

*Neurobiological changes following exposure to trauma*

*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.*

*Potential conflict of interest, commercial support, or commercial interest applies to sponsoring organizations, the presenter, and the content of the presentation. Sponsors should advise participants of the potential biases inherent in accepting inducements that might affect the selection of texts, the use of particular tests, and/or sponsorship of CE courses.*

*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 participant learning.
4. Sponsors must ensure that there is a method in place to assess participant perception of the utility of program-based learning to psychological practice or other professional development.
5. Sponsors must use the results of the abovementioned evaluation processes to improve and plan future programs.

### Educational and Technical Assistance

*At a minimum, satisfaction evaluations should include assessment of the instructor's level of knowledge and expertise, and teaching ability. Activities longer than one hour may be broken into quarter hour increments. 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.*

*All programs, regardless of delivery method, require an assessment of participants' perception of the utility of the knowledge gained from the presentation to practice or other professional context. Emphasis should include how the participants will apply this knowledge in practice or other professional contexts. Program evaluation should document that the program provides practical and useful tools and information that may facilitate the transfer of learning from the CE program to the learner's practice or other professional contexts. This assessment can be achieved in a variety of ways including post-tests. 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]), 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 (e.g., 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.*

*For programs where credit is offered on a session-by-session basis (e.g., conferences, convention,), 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. Activities longer than one hour may be broken into quarter hour increments.*

*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), credit should be awarded on a session-by-session basis. Each individual session for which credit is awarded must meet the Standards and Criteria; e.g., each session must have its own stated learning objectives, each session must be evaluated separately. Sponsors must have a system for determining which sessions were attended (e.g., sign-in sheet, credit log).*

*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.). The Office of CE Sponsor Approval 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. If there is no conflict of interest or commercial support, then that should be clearly stated.
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 Office of CE Sponsor Approval 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.

**The CEC endorses the use of active, experiential approaches to adult learning for which there is empirical support in the literature on educational psychology. Active, experiential approaches to learning offered for CE credit must occur in an instructional context and be designed to contribute directly to the active development of professional skill.**

Experiential exercises that cannot be directly linked to the active development of professional skill may be offered on an elective or required basis as a component of a CE program, but they may not be offered for CE credit. Personal exposure to a specific technique, practice, or intervention may be offered as a component of a CE program designed to promote knowledge and skill associated with the use of that technique, practice, or intervention, but the portion of the program devoted to personal exposure may not be offered for CE credit. When questions arise, it will be the responsibility of the sponsor to document that the experiential exercise is linked directly to the active development of professional knowledge and skill. As required in standard G, sponsors must also be clear in all promotional material which components of a CE program will not be offered for CE credit.

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.