



Ontario College of
Social Workers and
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs
sociaux et des techniciens
en travail social de l'Ontario

CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM

Instruction Guide



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Table of Contents

Introduction to the Program.....	4
The Steps Involved in the Continuing Competence Program:	
• Step 1: Familiarize Yourself with the Program	7
• Step 2: Review Your Practice	8
• Step 3: Complete the Self-Assessment Tool	8
• Step 4: Complete the Professional Development Plan Summary Sheets.....	9
• Step 5: Review Your Progress	10
• Step 6: Submit Your Declaration.....	10
The Importance of Retaining Your Continuing Competence Program Materials	11
Frequently Asked Questions	12
Learning Activities.....	17

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

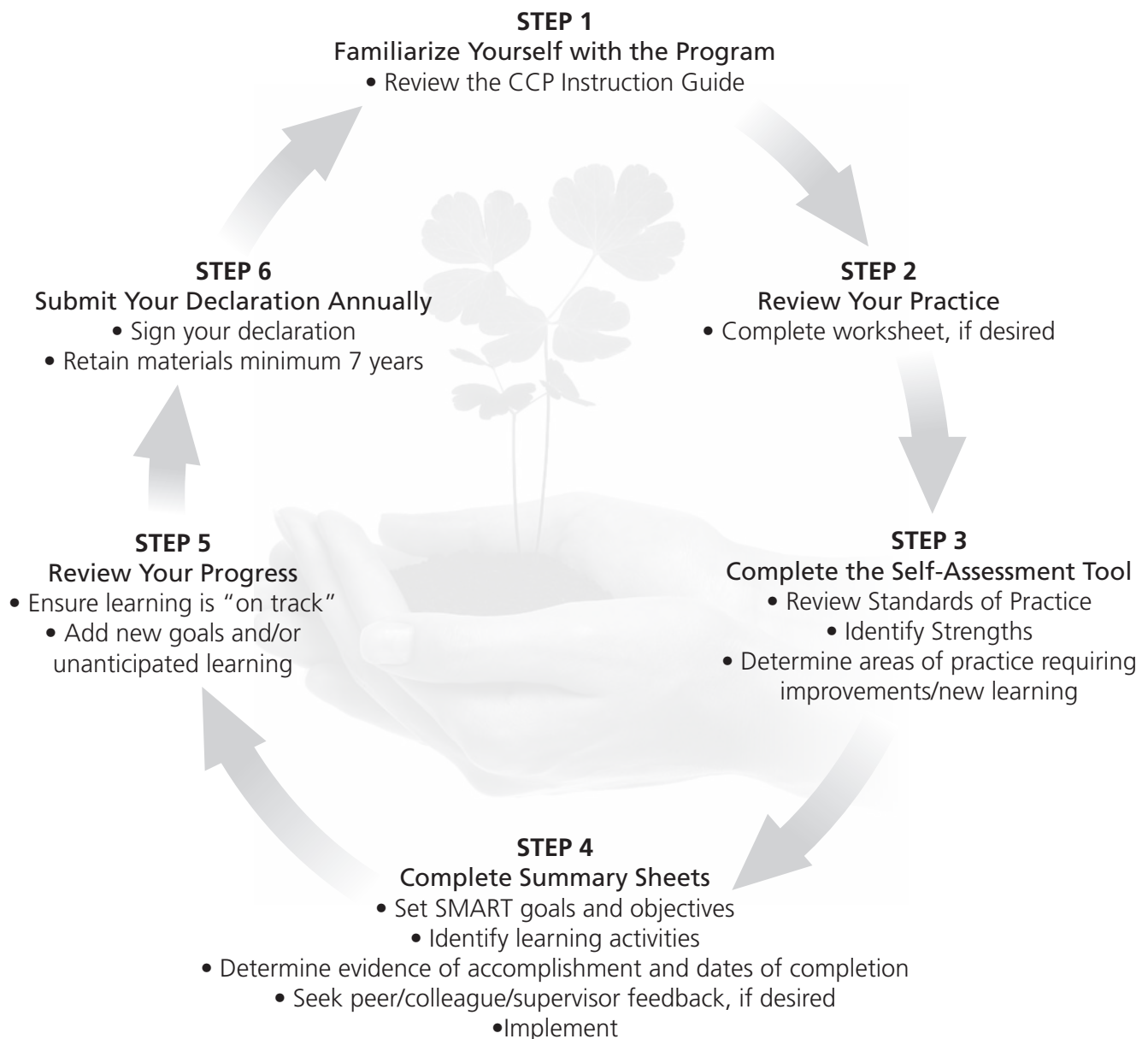
The primary purpose of the Continuing Competence Program is to promote quality assurance with respect to the practice of the professions of social work and social service work, and to encourage members to enhance their practice in an ongoing way. This is one way in which the College fulfils its mandate of protecting the public.

In accordance with the Registration Regulation made under the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, all members must provide evidence of continuing competence to practise social work or social service work, according to the guidelines set by the College. The expectation that members remain current with knowledge and practice relevant to their area of professional practice is set out in the Standards of Practice. So too is the expectation that members demonstrate their commitment to ongoing professional development.

A major goal of the College is to encourage its members to strive for excellence in their practice. Careful consideration has been given to ensuring that participation in the Continuing Competence Program is feasible for all members, and that learning activities are accessible.

In developing its Continuing Competence Program, the College carried out extensive research of the Continuing Competence Programs of other regulatory bodies in Ontario, other provinces and the United States. The program is based on an adult education model. All members are required to participate.

The Steps Involved in the Continuing Competence Program



The Steps Involved in the Continuing Competence Program

STEP 1. Familiarize Yourself with the Program

It is important to first familiarize yourself with the Continuing Competence Program. Please read the entire Instruction Guide and review the **Frequently Asked Questions** (pg.12–16).

Understanding the various **components of the program** is also important. **As a member you will be required to:**

- Conduct an **annual review** of your practice using the **Self-Assessment Tool**
- Identify your **strengths**
- Determine what areas of practice require **improvement** or **new learning**
- Set **learning goals** and **objectives** which are “**SMART**”—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**imely for those practice areas you have identified as requiring improvement or new learning
- Identify the **learning activities** to attain the goals and objectives which you have set for yourself
- Engage in learning activities
- Review and record the **outcome** of your activities
- Make an **annual declaration** to the College of your participation in the program at the time of annual renewal.

You are *not* required to *submit* the Continuing Competence Program materials (Self-Assessment Tool and Professional Development Plan materials) to the OCSWSSW unless you are requested to do so. However, you *are* required to *retain* all the above materials for at least 7 years. You are also required to make an annual declaration to the College of your participation in the program.

STEP 2. Review Your Practice and Complete the Work Sheet

Before completing the Self-Assessment Tool, it may be useful to think about your current professional responsibilities, and any anticipated new tasks or responsibilities. This will guide your thinking about the areas in which you already have strength, as well as areas in which you need to further your learning or engage in new learning.

Completing the Work Sheet can assist you in this process. Note that completion of the Work Sheet is optional. **However, completing the Self-Assessment Tool and Professional Development Plan is *mandatory* for all members, practising or not currently practising.**

STEP 3. Complete the Self-Assessment Tool

The Standards of Practice Handbook sets out minimum standards of professional practice and conduct to which all members are accountable. The Self-Assessment Tool is based on the Standards of Practice. Be sure to review the Standards of Practice Handbook in its entirety, and note the Explanatory Note which discusses the “Meaning of Client” and “Types of Practice.”

Now turn to the Self-Assessment Tool. If you have completed the optional work sheet, refer to it as you complete the Self-Assessment Tool.

As part of each section in the Self-Assessment Tool (corresponding to each of the eight Principles of the Standards of Practice), you will identify your strengths, as well as areas for improving skills and knowledge/developing new skills and knowledge. These will form the basis of your learning goals. Complete all eight sections (Principles), even if at first glance you do not believe the section (Principle) applies to you. Although you should be familiar with all eight Principles, you are not required to develop a learning goal for each Principle.

STEP 4. Complete the Professional Development Plan Summary Sheets

When you have finished completing the Self-Assessment Tool, turn to the Summary Sheet Examples, found on pages 22–25. Please note that this must be completed by all members including those who are not currently practising.

Transfer the learning goals that you have identified to the blank summary sheets. For each of your goals, specify your learning objectives. Ensure that each of your objectives meets the “SMART” criteria; that is, that each is Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely.

Now document the learning activities that you will utilize to reach your goals and objectives. Note that acceptable learning opportunities are broadly defined and could include such things as web-based learning, independent reading or observing a colleague, as well as attending seminars, workshops or conferences. The main criterion is that a learning activity specifically relates to achieving a learning goal and objective and relates to the practice of social work or social service work. You may wish to refer to the list of Learning Activities found on page 17 of this guide.

Now determine evidence of accomplishment for each of your objectives. How will you know when you have met your goals? What will have changed? What will you know or be able to do? Try to be as specific as possible.

Determine the target date for each objective. It is anticipated that members will have both short-term and long-term goals. Even with long-term goals, it would be important to identify periodic markers to evaluate your progress.

Having completed your Professional Development Plan Summary Sheets, you may wish to set the package aside and return to it a few days later. Reflecting further may help you add to or refine your goals and objectives, or identify alternative learning opportunities. You may also wish to consult a peer or colleague for feedback and ideas. You will then begin to carry out your learning activities. It is your responsibility to carry out the learning activities, and to keep evidence that demonstrates how you are meeting your learning goals. In addition, the College recommends that members spend a minimum of 25 hours per year on meeting their learning goals.

Step 5. Review Your Progress

We suggest that members review their goals every few months to document the goals that have been reached, and to ensure that learning is “on track”. You may also wish to add goals, or note any unanticipated learning that has taken place.

Step 6. Submit Your Declaration

You will be required to sign and submit to the College an annual declaration in the form prepared by the College, verifying that you are participating in the Continuing Competence Program.

The Importance of Retaining your Continuing Competence Program Materials

You are required to retain your Continuing Competence Program materials (including evidence of having completed your goals) for a minimum of 7 years. The College may require that you provide them to the College. The materials that you are required to keep each year from the Continuing Competence Program are: the Continuing Competence Self-Assessment Tool, the Professional Development Plan Summary Sheets that identify learning goals and activities, as well as evidence that demonstrates that the learning activities have been carried out. Evidence could include certificates of completion for courses or workshops, or a list of books or articles that you have read. You are also advised to keep your Work Sheet, if completed. Keeping an electronic folder of evidence may provide greater flexibility, however you can keep a paper folder if you prefer.

Generally, information provided by a member in connection with the Continuing Competence Program will only be used by the department of the College that administers the Continuing Competence Program. In certain circumstances, however, information may be shared with other departments of the College. For more information, refer to Frequently Asked Questions, Question 14.

Need Help?

If you are experiencing difficulty completing any of the components of the Continuing Competence Program, require the material in an alternate format, or have questions, contact the College's Professional Practice Department, 416-972-9882 or 1-877-828-9380, or e-mail ccp@ocswssw.org.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

In developing its Continuing Competence Program, the College carried out extensive research of the Continuing Competence Programs of other regulatory bodies in Ontario, other provinces and the United States. All members are required to participate.

Questions that members frequently ask are addressed in the following FAQs:

1. What are the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program?

The Continuing Competence Program is based on the Standards of Practice, Second Edition. You will be required to:

- Conduct an annual review of your practice using the Self-Assessment Tool
- Identify your areas of strength
- Determine what areas of practice require improvement or new learning
- Set learning goals and objectives which are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (“SMART”) for those practice areas you have identified as requiring improvement or new learning
- Identify learning activities to attain the goals you’ve set for yourself (See Learning Activities)
- Engage in learning activities
- Review and record the outcome of your activities
- Make an annual declaration of your participation in the program

Although you are not required to submit your Continuing Competence Program materials to the OCSWSSW, be sure to keep your completed Self-Assessment Tool, and the summary of learning goals and objectives (Professional Development Plan), evidence of accomplishment of your learning goals and objectives, learning activities, target date and when the goal is attained. Also be sure to keep records of your participation in learning activities. These materials must be retained for a minimum of 7 years. The College may require that you provide them upon request. (Refer to Questions 10 and 14).

2. Why is the College implementing a Continuing Competence Program?

The implementation of a Continuing Competence Program is one of the legislated responsibilities of the College. According to the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, the primary duty of the College in carrying out its objects is “to serve and protect the public interest.” Among the objects of the College are:

- To establish and enforce professional standards and ethical standards applicable to members of the College
- To promote high standards and quality assurance with respect to social work and social service work

Further to this, the Registration Regulation made under the Act states that the following is a condition of a certificate of registration:

“The member must provide evidence satisfactory to the College of the member’s continuing competence to practise social work or social service work, as the case may be, in accordance with the guidelines approved by Council from time to time and published and distributed by the College to members of the College.” O Reg. 383/00, s.6

3. What does continuing competence mean for me?

As a regulated professional you are accountable for your actions. You are expected to display a sound knowledge base, well-developed skills and sound judgment in carrying out your professional responsibilities. You are also expected to engage in activities to enhance your practice.

The fundamental responsibility for ensuring continuing competence rests with you.

4. How do I know that the College won’t evaluate me based on how I rate myself on the Self-Assessment Tool?

The purpose of the Continuing Competence Program is to promote high standards and quality assurance with respect to social work and social service work. The purpose is not to “police” the practice of members. In keeping with an adult education model, the program is based on the assumption that all members have areas of strength, as well as areas in which they can further develop their knowledge and skills. The College is mandated to ensure that all members are actively involved in the process of self-evaluation, goal setting, and learning activities. The specifics of a member’s self-assessment, learning goals and plan, however, are the professional responsibility of the individual and not determined by the College.

5. Should I be collecting credits or hours?

It is not necessary to collect either credits or hours as the Continuing Competence Program is not based on either of these criteria. However, it is expected that you maintain a record of your learning activities.

6. How much time should I invest in continuing competence?

The learning activities you identify will vary in time commitment. What is most important is that you take the necessary steps to meet your learning goals. While some goals will be met within a short period of time, others will require months or even years. It is recommended that members spend a minimum of 25 hours a year on meeting their learning goals. In many cases members will devote far more time than this.

7. Can volunteer work count as professional development?

Professional development activities stem from the learning goals you've set for yourself through the self-assessment process. As long as a learning activity clearly relates to a learning goal and the Standards of Practice, it is acceptable.

8. Do I need to send Continuing Competence accomplishments to the College?

No. However, you do need to retain your Continuing Competence Program materials for a minimum of 7 years (Refer to Question 1). You will be required to make an annual declaration to the College of your participation in the program at the time of annual renewal.

9. Why should I complete the Self-Assessment Tool? I'm already competent.

Learning is an ongoing process. By completing the self-assessment you will be able to assess your strengths and identify the areas that you can enhance. This will enable you to develop a learning plan based on your personal learning needs. By developing your own plan, you have greater chances of attaining the goals you have set for yourself.

10. What will happen if I don't participate in the Continuing Competence Program?

Participation in the Continuing Competence Program means, on an annual basis, completing the self-assessment tool, completing the professional development plan and engaging in the learning activities identified in the professional development plan. As evidence of their participation, members are required to make a declaration of their participation in the CCP on their Annual Renewal of Registration Form.

According to the Registration Regulation made under the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act*, providing evidence satisfactory to the College of continuing competence is a condition of a certificate of registration. **The Registrar may suspend a member's certificate of registration for failing to comply with this condition.** If your certificate of registration is suspended, you will no longer be able to:

- Use the protected title “social worker”, “registered social worker”, “social service worker”, “registered social service worker” or their French equivalents
- Represent or hold out, expressly or by implication, that you are a social worker, registered social worker, social service worker or registered social service worker.

It is an act of professional misconduct to engage in the practice of social work or social service work while your certificate of registration is suspended. In addition, a notation of the suspension and the reason for the suspension will be entered on the College's register. This information is available to the public.

Not participating in the College's Continuing Competence Program or not providing evidence of participation in the program may also be grounds for professional misconduct. The College will take appropriate steps to respond to such conduct, including referring the matter to a statutory committee of the College.

11. How often do I have to do this?

Depending on your learning plan, some activities may be completed quickly while others may be more long-term. You will be required, however, to complete a Self-Assessment Tool on an annual basis. This will help you develop your learning plan and identify learning strategies. Continuing competence is just that—continuing (Also refer to Question 6).

12. I'm a new graduate. Do I have to participate in the Continuing Competence Program?

Yes. Learning is ongoing regardless of years of experience.

13. I'm on maternity/sick leave. Do I still have to participate?

As a regulated professional, you are expected to participate in the Continuing Competence Program, regardless of your work status. The learning plan and learning opportunities you've identified can be flexible, (e.g. journal reading).

14. Is the information I submit through the Continuing Competence Program confidential?

Generally yes, but exceptions are possible, as described below:

You will be required to submit an annual declaration verifying that you are participating in the Continuing Competence Program according to the Guidelines for the Continuing Competence Program. The College may also require that you produce your Self-Assessment Tool, Professional Development Plan, learning activities and other Continuing Competence Program materials. Generally, information provided to the College by a member in connection with the Continuing Competence Program will only be used by the department of the College that administers the Continuing Competence Program.

Members should understand, however, there may be circumstances where information obtained in connection with a member's participation in the program or the member's failure to participate in the program may be shared with other departments of the College. For example, a member's failure to provide information regarding his or her participation in the program may raise concern about whether a member has committed an act of professional

misconduct (Refer to Question 10). In addition, if there is a complaint made about you the Complaints Committee may examine “all the information and documents that the College has that are relevant to the complaint”. The information regarding your participation in the Continuing Competence Program may be relevant to a complaint and shared with the Complaints Committee (and other departments of the College).

15. Will the College provide continuing education?

Currently, articles in *Perspective* newsletters aim to educate members about practice issues and legislation. As the College matures, we anticipate the development of additional educational materials.

With over 12,000 members throughout the province, working in diverse practice areas, it would be a challenge to provide continuing education that would be cost-effective, relevant and accessible to all members. In keeping with the adult education model, through the Continuing Competence Program, each member is expected to identify his/her own professional learning needs and activities. The College’s definition of learning activities is broad to allow all members to fully participate in the Program (See “Learning Activities”, page 17).

16. Does the College approve courses and workshops for professional development credits?

No. As indicated in question # 5, the Continuing Competence Program is not based on credits or hours.

17. Can I substitute a copy of my annual performance appraisal for the Self-Assessment Tool?

No. The Continuing Competence Program uses a Self-Assessment Tool, based on the Standards of Practice, to help you to evaluate your own strengths and learning needs. An employer’s evaluation is more limited, focusing on your performance of workplace duties. These are different processes and documents. Certainly, your workplace performance appraisal may provide you with feedback suggesting practice areas in need of improvement, from which you may develop aspects of your learning plan and goals. Likewise, aspects of the Continuing Competence Program may complement your workplace performance appraisal. You may choose to retain a copy of your performance appraisal along with your CCP documents.

18. Is the material from the College available in French or in an alternate format?

Yes. If you have indicated on your registration form that you prefer all correspondence in French, then automatically the material will be forwarded to you in French. Materials are available in alternate format upon request. Please contact the College.

For more information, contact the College’s Professional Practice Department at 1-877-828-9380, 416-972-9882 or e-mail ccp@ocswssw.org.

Learning Activities

To be used when completing the Professional Development Plan Summary Sheets

A learning activity must relate to a learning goal identified through the self-assessment, and relate to the practice of social work or social service work. It is not solely a part of one's work assignment.

E.g. a member may decide she would like to learn skills in teaching. She identifies this in the self-assessment. Her learning activities could include:

- Becoming a field instructor
- Attending a seminar series on field instruction
- Reading books, journal articles
- Participating in a discussion group with other field instructors

Learning activities are broadly defined in order to be accessible to members. Examples are shown in the following table:

Learning Goals	Examples of Learning Activities
1) Continuing Education As participant, organizer or presenter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference • Course • Lecture • Seminar • Workshop
2) Research and Publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting research • Preparation of an article for publication
3) Independent Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading books, journal articles • Distance education • Internet search, courses • CD ROM • Observation of other's setting/practice
4) Applied Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured supervision • In-service training • Co-therapy/co-leading group • Observation of other's setting/practice
5) Professional Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer supervision • Study group
6) Teaching/Mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course or seminar series • Supervision of staff or students
7) Professional Organizations/ Committee Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in a task group outside one's work setting • Participate in a committee of a professional association • Participate in a committee of the OCSWSSW • Board member of a professional association or other organization relevant to the profession



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