

## Acceptable Alternatives to Official Documents Policy

<b>Manual:</b>	Policy – Operations	<b>Policy #:</b>	Op-9
<b>Approved by:</b>	Council and the Office of the Fairness Commissioner	<b>Date:</b>	November 27, 2025 (Council) and January 6, 2026 (OFC)

### 1. Policy Statement

Applicants seeking registration with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the “**College**”) must submit supporting documents in a format and manner deemed acceptable to the College to facilitate the evaluation of their academic qualifications and experience performing the role of a social worker or social service worker.

This Policy outlines the process for applicants seeking registration with the College who, for reasons beyond their control, cannot obtain standard evidence of academic qualifications and experience (i.e.: official transcripts issued and sent directly from the academic institution to the College) or standard forms to demonstrate their experience.

The College is committed to promoting fairness in the application process by accepting reasonable alternative documents in place of official or standard forms to ensure these applicants have an equitable opportunity to have their academic qualifications and experience evaluated.

### 2. Definitions

“*Applicant*” means an individual applying for registration with the College or an individual who is re-applying to register with the College (a former registrant).

“*Affidavit*” or “*sworn affidavit*” means a written statement of facts made before an authorized official, such as a lawyer, notary public, or commissioner of oaths.

“*Allowable circumstances*” means an event or situation beyond the applicant’s control, such as war, natural disaster, institutional collapse, or conditions associated with refugee or asylum status, among others, that prevents them from obtaining documentation that is normally required.

“*Reasonable alternative documents*” means evidence or proof in place of standard official or standard forms for the purpose of evaluating applicant’s academic qualifications and experience.

### **3. Purpose**

The purpose of this Policy is to:

- Define eligibility criteria for the use of alternative documentation (i.e., what constitutes allowable circumstances).
- Describe what constitutes reasonable alternative documents.
- Indicate the criteria, procedure and timelines for considering alternative documentation and outline the possible outcomes.
- Outline flexible, transparent, and consistent evaluation processes to assess whether applicants meet registration requirements through non-traditional documentation pathways.

### **4. Scope**

This Policy applies to all applicants seeking registration with the College, across all application streams, whose situations meet the criteria for “allowable circumstances” as defined in this Policy.

### **5. Guiding Principles**

#### *Public Interest*

The College is the regulatory body for the professions of social work and social service work in Ontario. Its primary mandate is to serve and protect the public by ensuring that only qualified, competent, and ethical practitioners are authorized to practise. As the provincial regulator, the College is committed to upholding the integrity of the professions and maintaining high standards of practice in the public interest.

#### *Transparency, Objectivity, Impartiality and Fairness*

The College is committed to fair, accessible and timely registration practices, in accordance with the principles established under the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act, 2006* (FARPACTA)<sup>1</sup> and *Ontario Regulation 261/22 – General* made under FARPACTA<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*

The College affirms its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion as a foundational principle guiding all aspects of its mandate. In fulfilling its public protection role, the College is committed to fostering a regulatory framework that is fair, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse communities it serves.

#### *Document Integrity and Verification*

The College ensures the authenticity and integrity of all documents used in registration decisions through rigorous verification protocols and comprehensive procedures for the

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<sup>1</sup> [Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act, 2006, S.O. 2006, c. 31 | ontario.ca](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/220261)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/220261>

secure collection, handling, transmission, and storage of documentation.

## **6. Background**

Applicants must provide proof of their academic qualifications and if applicable, experience, to demonstrate that they meet the College's registration requirements set out in the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998*<sup>3</sup> (the "**Act**") and the regulations made under the Act.

In some circumstances, applicants may be unable to provide standard proof of academic qualifications and experience (e.g., official or verifiable academic supporting documents or standard forms to demonstrate their experience) in a format or manner acceptable to the College.

These circumstances include:

- War or conflict
- Civil unrest
- Situations that may expose the applicant to harm or significant risk when seeking the required documents
- Natural disaster
- Permanent closure or destruction of academic institution
- Partial or complete destruction of academic records
- Institution takes an unreasonable amount of time to respond<sup>4</sup>
- Institution refuses to provide documents without justifiable reasons

All other situations will be assessed by the College on a case-by case basis and whenever feasible, the College will accept alternatives, whether or not they are documents, that demonstrate an applicant's experience, knowledge and skills.

## **7. Application**

This Policy applies only in circumstances where traditional, verifiable documents or standard College forms cannot be obtained due to extenuating situations beyond the applicant's control. The Policy does not constitute a waiver of registration requirements outlined in the *Regulation 383/00 – Registration*<sup>5</sup> made under the Act.

Applicants are responsible for demonstrating their academic qualifications and experience by submitting clear, credible, and verifiable evidence in support of their application.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/98s31>

<sup>4</sup> A delay is considered significant when it substantially exceeds the published service standard of the issuing institution or the typical response time of comparable institutions within the same jurisdiction – such as delays exceeding 60 days.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/000383>

## 8. Procedure

Applicants facing extenuating circumstances must complete and submit the form provided by the College to request consideration for alternative documentation. The request should include the rationale for their request; the details regarding why the applicant is unable to submit standard documentation; and a description of all reasonable efforts made to obtain the required documents. The applicant may also be asked to complete a competency mapping or narrative that describes how their academic background aligns with the College's entry-to-practice competencies.

Requests for consideration for alternative documentation should be addressed and sent to: Manager, Registration and Renewals at [registration@ocswsw.org](mailto:registration@ocswsw.org).

Applicants may request a consultation with College's registration staff to assist in preparing their request for alternative documentation and ensure clarity on evidentiary expectations.

The College will acknowledge receipt of request within ten (10) business days and indicate whether further documents or information is required. Each request will be reviewed on an individual basis by a panel of the College's registration staff to determine whether this Policy applies. Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome and subsequent next steps within ten to thirty (10-30) days of the review.

If the College determines that the Policy applies to an applicant's case, the College may accept one or a combination of the following reasonable alternative documents:

- Official copies of academic credentials and transcript(s) directly to the College from another post-secondary institution, regulatory body, or recognized credential assessment agency. These may be accepted in lieu of standard documents such as an official transcript directly from the academic institution or a third-party credential evaluation report submitted directly to the College by the assessment agency.
- Copies of academic credentials and transcript(s) submitted by the applicant, accompanied by a signed and notarized affidavit attesting to their authenticity.
- Affidavits or letters from third parties (e.g., institution officials, faculty members, fellow students, past or current supervisors) confirming that the applicant completed the required academic and practicum requirements and was awarded the credential or confirming applicant's experience performing the role of a social worker or social service worker.
- Evidence of successful completion of entry-to-practice examinations relevant to the profession.
- Letters of reference from applicant's current or past supervisors in lieu of the College's standard *Length of Practice and Supervision Form* attesting to the applicant's experience performing the role of a social worker or social service worker.

- Any other documentation or supporting information, whether or not they are documents, deemed relevant to assist the College in evaluating the applicant's experience performing the role of a social worker or social service worker.

## **9. Review Process**

A panel of the College's registration staff will review the alternative documents provided by the applicant on an individual basis. The information and documentation provided must be substantial enough to allow for a comprehensive evaluation of applicant's academic qualifications and experience.

The College will apply a risk-based assessment framework to ensure public protection when evaluating alternative documentation. The level of risk will be weighed against the inability to obtain traditional documentation.

## **10. Translation Requirements**

All documents submitted to the College must be provided in English or French. Translations must meet the [criteria](#) established by the College.

## **11. Potential Outcomes**

Upon completing its review of the alternative documents, the College may make one of the following decisions:

- Direct the applicant to submit standard documents required for the evaluation of academic qualifications and experience.
- Direct the applicant to provide additional information or documentation if the information or materials provided are incomplete or insufficient to complete the evaluation of academic qualifications or experience.
- Accept the alternative documents provided by the applicant as sufficient to support the evaluation.
- Accept the alternative documents provided by the applicant in part, with an explanation outlining the rationale and any identified risks and/or limitations.
- Accept alternative documentation conditionally and require successful completion of supervised practice to address gaps or risks identified during the evaluation.
- Decline to accept the alternative documents and provide applicant with rationale for the decision.

All decisions will be communicated to applicants in writing.

Applicants may request a reconsideration of the College's decision to reject alternative documentation by submitting additional evidence or clarification within thirty (30) days of receiving the decision. Upon receipt, the College will review the additional evidence and

determine whether to accept the additional evidence or uphold the original decision.

## **12. Publication and Contact**

This Policy will be publicly accessible and posted on the College's official website. It will also be available in alternative formats upon request to the College. Inquiries concerning this Policy should be addressed to Manager, Registration and Renewals at [registration@ocswssw.org](mailto:registration@ocswssw.org).

## **13. Monitoring, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement**

The College will track both the volume and types of alternative documentation submissions.

The Policy will undergo a formal review at least once every three (3) years, or sooner if circumstances warrant. Findings from these reviews will be benchmarked against best practices established by other regulatory bodies, credential assessment agencies, and organizations such as the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials.

To foster continuous improvement, the evaluation process will incorporate feedback from both internal and external engagement groups. To support the implementation, the College will deliver targeted training to staff.

## **14. Policy Effective Date**

This Policy is effective as of January 1, 2026.

## **15. Evaluation**

This Policy will be reviewed by the Office of the Registrar every three (3) years or as required. Changes to the Policy will be recommended by the Office of the Registrar to Council for approval.

The College will consult with the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (the "**OFC**") when proposing revisions to the Policy to determine if the proposed changes are material enough to necessitate formal submission for review and approval. If a re-submission is necessary, the updated version will be submitted to the OFC.