



**Center of Excellence  
in Nursing Education**

# National League for Nursing Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education™ Program HANDBOOK



✧ *Distinction, Visibility, Engagement* ✧

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## PURPOSE AND GOALS

### Purpose

The NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education Program is designed to recognize schools\* of nursing that have achieved a level of excellence in one of three designated areas. This recognition is designed to distinguish those schools that: demonstrate sustained, evidence-based, and substantive innovation in the selected area; conduct ongoing research to document the effectiveness of such innovation; set high standards for themselves; and are committed to continuous quality improvement. Such recognition indicates a commitment by the school as a whole to pursue and sustain excellence in student learning and professional development, development of faculty expertise in pedagogy, or advancing the science of nursing education.

### Goals

The designation of a school as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education is a voluntary process that involves preparation of material by the school itself and peer review. Recognizing the uniqueness of each school relative to its mission, the Centers of Excellence Program sets high standards and serves to truly distinguish and publicly recognize those schools that excel in a particular area. The goals of the program are as follows:

- Identify and reward those schools that excel in creating environments that enhance student learning and professional development, promote the pedagogical expertise of faculty, or advance the science of nursing education.
- Encourage faculty to continually improve their schools.
- Encourage research in nursing education.
- Facilitate discussions among faculty, students, program graduates, and employers about excellence in nursing education and how to promote it.
- Encourage the development of innovative schools that attract and retain highly qualified students and faculty.
- Facilitate positive changes that reform nursing education based on the application of evidence gleaned from research in practice and education.
- Influence the development of public policies that benefit nursing education, support nursing education research, and promote excellence in nursing education.

\* For this program, "school" includes any designation for the nursing unit in the institution (i.e., College of Nursing, School of Nursing, Department of Nursing, etc.); "program" refers to the type of nursing program (i.e., practical nurse, associate degree, diploma, baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral), offered by the "school."

# ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

## Eligibility Requirements for Individual Schools

- Applicants must be NLN member schools of nursing accredited by the NLNAC or CCNE.
- COE designated schools must be NLN members at the time of application and are required to maintain NLN membership and accreditation throughout the designation cycle.
- Schools with more than one program must show evidence of excellence in all programs since COE designation is awarded to the school of nursing as a whole.
- Schools applying as a system must show evidence of excellence in all programs and degree-granting entities and meet the requirements of systems eligibility.

## Eligibility Requirements for Systems

The applicant must encompass more than one educational setting comprised of a single governing authority who serves as the lead nursing educational administrator (LNEA). This individual is ultimately responsible for sustaining the standards of nursing and education practices.

Applicants applying as a system must meet each of the following requirements in addition to the requirements for individual programs.

- There must be one organizational mission, vision, and set of values for the entire system.
- There must be one governing board for the entire system.
- There must be one lead nursing educational administrator for the entire system.
- Each component entity shall have a designated RN educational leader.
- There must be an integrated nursing education curriculum serving the entire system.
- The same policies and procedures must be used throughout the system.
- The same systematic evaluation plan must exist throughout the entire system.

A single application will be submitted for the system that addresses all criteria as required.

## CATEGORIES AND CRITERIA

The choice of category to pursue for COE designation is a decision that the faculty and nursing administration of each school makes based on its strengths, goals, and areas of distinction. Each school will identify the area in which it demonstrates excellence and in which it has created an environment that all faculty are committed to sustaining.

### Categories of Designation

- Creating Environments that Enhance Student Learning and Professional Development
- Creating Environments that Promote the Pedagogical Expertise of Faculty
- Creating Environments that Advance the Science of Nursing Education

### Criteria

Designation is based on the extent to which the evidence provided in the application indicates excellence and innovation in the selected category as specified by the criteria delineated below. These criteria were developed based on insights gained from a search of the relevant literature and research related to the educational process.

#### *Creating Environments That Enhance Student Learning and Professional Development*

Research in nursing and higher education supports the need to engage students in the educational endeavor. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:

1. A comprehensive and ongoing plan that develops students' values and socializes them to new roles, professional involvement, commitment to lifelong learning, and creativity has been developed and implemented by the faculty as evidence of their shared vision.
2. Pedagogical research is used to develop innovative program designs that prepare graduates to engage in high-quality, evidence-based practice.
3. All curricula are flexible, dynamic, current and relevant and empower students to achieve their personal goals and interests as they learn or advance their knowledge in the practice of nursing.
4. Collaboration among faculty, students, and clinical partners ensures innovative, individualized, and evidence-based nursing education.
5. Students and faculty are actively engaged in their communities, resulting in enhanced student learning and professional development, as well as advancement of the profession.
6. Faculty are encouraged and supported to develop new pedagogies that create and sustain dynamic learning environments.

### ***Creating Environments That Promote the Pedagogical Expertise of Faculty***

Research supports the need for the continuous development of faculty related to the full scope of their academic role. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:

1. All faculty promote excellence in teaching, student advisement, and curriculum development as evidenced by their shared vision.
2. Faculty interactions with students and colleagues promote innovation and contribute to the creation of a preferred future for nursing education.
3. All faculty design and implement educational experiences that enhance student learning utilizing their pedagogical development and resources.
4. Evaluation of the established faculty development program demonstrates its effectiveness in achieving pedagogical expertise.
5. Faculty are actively engaged in their communities, resulting in enhanced student learning, professional development, and advancement of the profession.
6. Faculty professional goals, related to excellence, innovation, and continued growth, are based on evaluations from administrators, peers, students, and self.

### ***Creating Environments That Advance the Science of Nursing Education***

In order to sustain excellence in nursing education, increasing attention has been focused on developing the science of nursing education. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:

1. Faculty endeavors reflect a commitment to a shared vision that supports the utilization of pedagogical research that advances the science of nursing education.
2. Faculty regularly undertake evidence-based pedagogical projects or programs of research that advance excellence in nursing education.
3. Faculty use research and evidence-based findings in innovative ways for curriculum design and development of instructional strategies to impact outcomes.
4. Faculty create mechanisms for the systematic assessment of creative and innovative, evidence-based evaluation methods that enhance student learning.
5. Faculty contributions to the science of nursing education reflect dissemination through publications, particularly in peer-reviewed journals, or presentations in local, regional, and national forums.
6. Faculty engage students in developing the science of nursing education by involving them in pedagogical projects and evidence-based nursing education.

## PROCEDURES

- Schools seeking designation as NLN Centers of Excellence must submit an *Application of Intent to Pursue Designation*\*, accompanied by the filing fee, by **October 15**. This application will provide demographic information about the school, indicate the specific category for which the designation of excellence is being sought, and summarize activities related to each criterion.
- A consultant, selected by the NLN, will visit each school that has submitted a preliminary application to guide faculty and students in highlighting their strengths and emphasizing their uniqueness. Consultants also provide answers to questions related to the Centers of Excellence Program or preparation of the final application. All expenses related to this visit are the responsibility of the school. The consultant will write a summary of the visit and submit it to the school.
- The final application\* must document how *all* components of *each* criterion in the selected category are fulfilled by *all* programs offered by the school. This application must describe relevant activities, initiatives, and outcomes that serve to create an environment where excellence is pervasive. Since the supportive evidence is intended to showcase the school's excellence in the selected category, the material submitted will be unique to each school. This final application is due on or before **May 15** and must be accompanied by the remaining application fee.
- The Centers of Excellence committee will examine all application materials in June and make recommendations to the NLN Board of Governors about Center of Excellence designations.
- All applicant schools will be notified of the outcome of the review and approval process in July.
- Those schools selected as NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education will be granted that designation for the next four academic years and may use the designation and special logo in their promotional material. Schools not selected as Centers of Excellence may re-apply in subsequent years.

\*Application forms can be downloaded from the NLN website: [www.nln.org/excellence](http://www.nln.org/excellence).

## FINAL APPLICATION GUIDELINES

The final application must document how *all* components of each criterion in the selected category are fulfilled by *all* programs offered by the school. This application must describe relevant activities and initiatives that serve to create an environment where excellence is pervasive. Since the supportive evidence is intended to showcase the school's excellence in the selected category, the material submitted will be unique to each school. It is the responsibility of the school to provide convincing evidence that all criteria in the selected category have been met for all faculty and/or all programs offered by the school. Schools applying for re-designation must provide evidence that demonstrates sustained and continued excellence in all programs since the most recent designation.

The narrative must include:

- Documentation of measurable outcomes of excellence initiatives in each criterion
- Supporting qualitative and quantitative data from no more than four years prior to the application
- A clear and succinct description of how the school has created the environment related to the particular COE category selected.
- Evidence that the excellence initiatives have been implemented throughout all programs within the school.
- A clearly organized document which facilitates the assessment of outcomes in each excellence criterion
- Validation of the sustainability of excellence initiatives

Final application formatting guidelines:

- Document limit of 200 pages including appendices.
- Optional DVD or other materials, if submitted, must complement the narrative.
- Format with 1.5 line spacing, 1-inch margins, and a font size of 11 or larger for readability.
- Place all contents in one bound application; no plastic page covers are to be used.
- Eight (8) copies of the final application are to be submitted with the *Final Application Cover Sheet* and application fee to the NLN by the designated deadline.

## TIMELINES AND FEES

COE applicant schools must be NLN members at time of application and are required to maintain NLN membership and accreditation throughout the designation cycle.

<b>Application Timeline</b>	
<b>October 15</b>	Application of intent to pursue designation and filing fee due
<b>January- March</b>	COE consultant visits school
<b>May 15</b>	Final application and fee due
<b>June- July</b>	COE committee meets
<b>July</b>	All applicants notified
<b>September</b>	Recipients announced at the NLN Education Summit

<b>Fees</b>	
<b>Filing Fee</b>	\$250
<b>Consultant Fee</b>	Variable- arrangements made by school and consultant
<b>Final Application Fee</b>	\$2,000

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONSULTANT**

The Centers of Excellence consultant IS expected to do the following:

### **Setting Up the Visit:**

- Contact the dean/director/chairperson of the school to arrange dates and coordinate plans for the visit.
- Review the school's initial application prior to the visit.
- Participate in the consultant orientation process and seek clarification from the committee members, if needed.

### **The Visit:**

- Review with the faculty the NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education program.
- Clarify the selection criteria for faculty.
- Assist the faculty to identify how they are meeting each criterion.
- Work with the faculty to identify its unique or innovative qualities that will enhance the application.
- Dialogue with faculty (and others if appropriate) about how the school can best showcase its work and present evidence related to each selection criterion.
- Visit classrooms, clinical sites, and/or other settings that provide a context for understanding the school's activities related to the selection criteria.
- Meet with college/university “officials” for a brief social visit if requested by the school.
- Assist faculty to develop creative and effective ways to prepare the final application.
- Suggest ways to prepare and present the final application.
- Stress that there is no guarantee that the consultant's recommendations about Center of Excellence designation will be similar to the committee’s final recommendation or the Board’s decision.

### **Things to Remember When Consulting:**

- Be as flexible as possible when arranging for the visit.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding discussions with faculty, personal opinions about the school, and disposition of the consultant report.
- During the visit, be creative and open to new ideas during discussions with faculty.
- Act in ways that are consistent with the NLN's mission, goals, and values.

### **The Centers of Excellence consultant is NOT expected to do the following:**

- Review any material prior to the visit, other than the initial application.
- Provide consultation about accreditation criteria or general program development (e.g., whether or not the school should start a graduate program).
- Review student or faculty records.
- Visit with campus “officials,” unless the school thinks this is particularly relevant to its application (i.e. A “social” visit may be arranged if this is usual practice in the institution when a guest is on campus).
- Arrange formal meetings with alumni or clinical agency representatives.
- Review minutes of meetings.
- Make a formal presentation.
- Provide a recommendation about whether or not the school should receive designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education.
- Make suggestions about the outcome of the application.
- Serve on the COE committee.
- Accept an honorarium or any other gifts from the school.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SCHOOL**

**The school applying for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence IS expected to do the following:**

### **Setting Up the Visit:**

- Collaborate with the consultant to confirm dates for the onsite, one-two day visit.
- Collaborate with the consultant to make travel, hotel, ground transportation, and meal arrangements.
- Be as flexible as possible when arranging for the visit.
- Pay the consultant's travel, hotel, ground transportation, and meal expenses in a timely manner.
- Dialogue with the consultant prior to the visit to determine the activities in which she/he will be involved during the visit.

### **The Visit:**

- Encourage faculty (and others, if desired) to talk openly with the consultant in order to (a) fully understand the Centers of Excellence program, (b) fully understand the selection criteria in the school's chosen area of designation, and (c) take fullest advantage of her/his ideas and suggestions.
- Arrange for the consultant to meet with individual or groups of faculty, students, and any other individuals or groups (within reason) that may be relevant to the school's application as appropriate.
- Provide the consultant with information about the school as requested.
- Provide materials to support the consultant's ability to fully understand the program.
- Think about ways to frame questions about the criteria in order to facilitate documentation and full disclosure of evidence.

**Following the Visit:**

- Review consultant report.
- Pursue a brief follow-up with the consultant after the visit, if needed.
- Provide feedback about the school's experience with the Centers of Excellence program as part of the processes used to evaluate the program.

**The school applying for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence is NOT expected to do the following:**

- Provide luxury accommodations or travel arrangements for the consultant.
- Make student or faculty files available to the consultant.
- Give the consultant an honorarium or any other gift.
- Share the consultant's report with anyone, unless the school chooses to do so.

## EXPECTATIONS OF COE-DESIGNATED SCHOOLS

- Schools selected as NLN Centers of Excellence will be expected to participate in interviews about achievements related to each criterion, the impact the Center of Excellence designation had on student and faculty recruitment and retention, contributions to nursing science, and other relevant outcomes.
- COE-designated schools are encouraged to continue the designation after the initial four year period. Schools that wish to continue this distinction for an additional four years should review the information about Continuing Designation (p.15). There is no limit to the number of times a school may submit an application for continuing designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education, and schools may hold designation in more than one category simultaneously.
- Throughout the four years they carry designation as Center or Excellence, schools will be expected to be available to other schools seeking to improve their programs.
- Before their four-year COE designation expires, these schools are required to submit (a) an abstract for presentation at an NLN Education Summit, and (b) a manuscript for review and possible publication in the NLN's journal, *Nursing Education Perspectives*. Both of these submissions must describe the school's activities related to the Centers of Excellence designation.
- COE designated schools must be NLN members at time of application and are required to maintain NLN membership and accreditation throughout the designation cycle.

## CONTINUING DESIGNATION INFORMATION

Continuation of designation as an NLN Center of Excellence (COE) in Nursing Education is not automatic. During the last year of the designation, schools are encouraged to reapply for continued designation.

An application is **only** considered a continuing designation if applying in the same category as the original application. Application for COE designation in a different category is considered a *new application* and all published procedures, timelines, and fees apply.

Applications for continuing designation will undergo the same rigorous review by the COE committee as all other applications. Continued designation will be recommended only if the school provides evidence that all criteria were met.

### Procedure for **FIRST** continuing designation

The first continuing designation is granted for four (4) years.

1. Submit *Intent to Pursue Continuing Designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education* form by October 15 (Filing fee is waived)
2. A consultant visit is not required but can be arranged if requested with the intent form.
3. Final application is due May 15 and must address current criteria for the selected category with a focus on what has been done to sustain excellence and continually improve the environment during the four year designation period. Keep in mind the reviewers do not know what was in the original application, so the application must address all unique programs/initiatives again.
4. Final application fee: \$1,000

### Procedure for **SUBSEQUENT** continuing designations

After a second four year designation in a particular category, a school may apply for continued designation in the same category; the subsequent continuing designations are granted for five (5) years.

1. Submit *Intent to Pursue Continuing Designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education* form with filing fee of \$250 by October 15.
2. A consultant visit is not required but can be arranged if requested with the intent form.

3. Final application and final application fee due by May 15 and must address current criteria for the selected category with a focus on what has been done to sustain excellence and continually improve the environment during the four year designation period. Keep in mind the reviewers do not know what was in the original application, so the application must address all unique programs/initiatives again.

### Continuing Designation Summary

	<b>FIRST Continuing Designation Application</b>	<b>SUBSEQUENT Continuing Designation Applications</b>
<b>Filing Fee</b>	Waived	\$250
<b>Consultant</b>	Optional	Optional
<b>Final Fee</b>	\$1,000	\$2,000
<b>Length of Designation</b>	4 Years	5 Years

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *ABOUT THE COE PROGRAM ITSELF***

### **How is the COE process different from the accreditation process?**

There are three (3) major differences between the COE process and the accreditation process:

1. Accreditation focuses on a particular program while the COE process focuses on the entire school of nursing.
2. Accreditation focuses on all program areas while the COE process focuses on an area in which the school excels.
3. The role of the site visitor in the accreditation process is to verify, clarify, and amplify material presented in the self-study report, while the COE consultant's role is to guide the school in identifying and documenting its strengths, weaknesses and uniqueness prior to submission of the final report, and then to offer suggestions about preparation of that final application.

### **Can a school have an accreditation and a COE visit within the same academic year?**

Yes, it is possible. You should realize that having both visits in the same academic year is likely to be very time-consuming for faculty, and the nature of the report and visit for each process are quite different - see FAQ #1. However, it is your decision, and the COE program places no constraints on engaging in both processes in the same year.

### **Can a school apply in more than one category?**

Yes, a school may apply for COE designation in more than one category in a given "cycle" or apply for designation in different categories in consecutive cycles. It is possible, therefore, for a school to hold COE designation in more than one area simultaneously. Faculty and administrators need to realize, however, that each application requires a separate document, separate fees, and separate consultant visits. This requires extensive human and material resources, but if your school wishes to pursue this course of action, there is nothing to prohibit it.

### **How long does COE designation last?**

COE designation is granted for a four-year period. During the last of those four years, the school would need to complete the entire process (i.e., initial application and fee, consultant visit, and final application and fee) and once again be recommended for COE designation by the committee and approved for this honor by the NLN Board of Governors. Continuation of designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education is not automatic.

### **What kind of recognition will my school receive if designated as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education?**

COE-designated schools are presented at the NLN Education Summit, which occurs each September and is attended by approximately 1,500 nurse educators. These schools also are announced in NLN publications and in an advertisement in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Press releases are sent to national and local media (nursing, education and general), and information about COE-designated schools is posted on the NLN website, with a link to the school's own website. Finally, each COE-designated school is provided with a logo that it can use on stationary, the website, or other appropriate material (notepads, etc.).

### **When is COE designation awarded?**

The committee generally meets in June. Their recommendations are forwarded to the NLN Board of Governors, who make the decision about designating schools as NLN Centers of Excellence. All schools participating in the process are notified of the Board's decision in July. Those schools receiving COE designation are expected to attend the NLN Education Summit in September to receive official awarding of this status.

**Do all of the programs our school offers have to be accredited by NLNAC in order to seek COE designation?**

Designation as a Center of Excellence assumes that all programs offered by a school have met standards as outlined by the State Board of Nursing and a nursing accrediting body. Therefore, the school must be in good standing with Board of Nursing in its State, and each of its programs (with the exception of the doctoral program, for which there is no accreditation) must be fully accredited by either the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC) or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

**Does our school have to be a member of the NLN in order to pursue COE designation?**

Yes, your school is required to be member of the NLN to seek or obtain designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education and, if awarded designation, must maintain membership during the designation period.

**Our school has an undergraduate and graduate program. Will the designation apply to both programs?**

Yes, designation as an NLN Center of Excellence is given to the school as a whole, and not to individual programs offered by that school. Therefore, the application must speak to how criteria are met for all programs offered, and how the environments created by the school pervade all programs. When COE designation is awarded to a school, all programs offered by that school are included.

**Our school has multiple sites. Do all sites need to participate?**

Schools with multiple sites are encouraged to contact the NLN to discuss your particular situation and how to address that in your COE application. Generally, if your school's sites are merely locations away from the main campus where courses are offered on a regular or sporadic basis, it is assumed that those courses (as well as the students enrolled in them and the faculty who teach them) are part of your school and will be included in the application. However, if your school's sites are independent campuses with their own faculty, program of study, degree-granting privileges, accreditation status, and so on, then each of those sites would need to pursue COE designation separately, as they would not be included in your application. Given that there are so many possibilities related to multiple-site schools, you are asked to contact the NLN prior to submission of your initial application.

**Is the COE program only for schools with baccalaureate and graduate programs?**

No. Schools that offer any type of nursing program - practical nurse, associate degree, diploma, baccalaureate, master's, and/or doctoral - may apply for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education. If more than one program exists in your school, your application must address how the environments created pervade all programs and how all criteria are met in relation to each program.

**We have an interim or acting dean/director/chairperson. Does this disqualify us from applying for COE designation?**

No. The designation is intended for the school of nursing. If the resources in the school are adequate to complete the applications and pay all fees, the application will be considered by the committee.

**How does the COE designation relate to the NLN's Hallmark's of Excellence in Nursing Education®?**

The NLN's Hallmark's of Excellence in Nursing Education may be used as a guide to determine whether your school is committed to and characterized by excellence. The COE criteria are congruent with the NLN Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education, but they are not duplicative of them.

**Do we have to meet all the criteria in the category we select, or only a certain number of them?**

In order to be recommended for COE designation, a school must demonstrate that it has met all the criteria in the selected category and, for those schools offering more than one program, demonstrate that the criteria are met in relation to students and faculty involved in teaching all of those programs. It is important, therefore, that you carefully read all the criteria in each category before making your decision regarding participation in the COE program.

**If my parent organization does not support our decision to apply for COE designation, can I still apply?**

While parent organization support is not a specific criterion in any of the COE categories, it would be beneficial to the process. A school that does not have support from its institution to pursue and be acknowledged for excellence may need to reflect on the reasons for such circumstances and whether it affects their efforts to achieve and continually sustain environments of excellence.

**How much does it cost to pursue designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education?**

Fees that must accompany the initial and final applications are published on the NLN website and in the COE promotional flyer. Fees for the consultant's visit are variable and include travel costs (including ground transportation), hotel expenses, and meals. It is expected that the consultant will work with you to make the visit as economical as possible without unduly burdening her/him (e.g., multiple travel connections, long layovers or other significant inconvenience for the sake of discounted travel expenses).

**If we are successful in the application process and are awarded COE designation, can we use the NLN logo?**

While you will not be able to use the NLN logo itself, there is a special COE logo that will be available to you and that we encourage COE schools to use.

**Can we use the COE designation to market our school to potential students, potential faculty, or other groups?**

Absolutely. Once your school is designated as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education, you may use that information in any marketing strategy, provided that the years of your designation (e.g., 2010-2014) are included.

**How does the Centers of Excellence program compare with the magnet status program available to hospitals?**

Just as the magnet status program identifies a hospital as a premier health care institution, designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education offers a similar distinction for academic institutions. In both instances, the designation is conferred upon the entire nursing unit (i.e., the hospital nursing service or school of nursing itself) and not on any single component of it (e.g., only the ICU or only the baccalaureate program).

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *ABOUT THE COE PROCESSES***

### **How do we decide which category to pursue for COE designation?**

The choice of category to pursue for COE designation is a decision that the faculty and nursing administration of each school makes based on its strengths, goals, and areas of distinction. It is suggested that the faculty engage in extended discussions of the extent to which they meet the NLN Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education<sup>®</sup> (available at [www.nln.org/excellence/hallmarks\\_indicators.htm](http://www.nln.org/excellence/hallmarks_indicators.htm)), as well as the goals they have set for the school. The focus of the COE program is to distinguish those schools that

- a) demonstrate sustained, evidence-based and substantive innovation in a selected area,
- b) conduct ongoing research to document the effectiveness of such innovation,
- c) set high standards for themselves, and
- d) are committed to continuous quality improvement.

Thus, your school needs to identify the area in which you demonstrate excellence and in which you have created an environment that all faculty are committed to sustaining for all programs offered.

### **There are terms in the criteria that can be interpreted in a number of ways. Is there a glossary to define these terms?**

No. A deliberate decision was made not to include a glossary so that each school can define what terms mean in its particular context. Your responses to the criteria should speak to your unique characteristics and how excellence pervades all aspects of your school.

### **Are any schools turned down after the initial application?**

No. The purpose of the initial application is for the school to notify the NLN of its intent to pursue COE designation and the category it will pursue. The decision regarding COE designation is made only after the school submits its final application.

### **What is the purpose of the initial application?**

The initial application is the means by which a school formally notifies the NLN of its intent to pursue COE designation and the category it will pursue. It also provides information about the college/university and the nursing unit that is used when assigning the consultant and that then provides a context for the consultant who will visit the school.

### **How long does the final application have to be?**

The maximum limit for the length of the final application is 200 pages including appendices. It is recommended that any supplemental material that may be included with the application (e.g., DVDs, testimonials, etc.) be powerful, informative, and complement the narrative. It is the responsibility of the school to provide convincing evidence that all criteria in the selected category have been met for all faculty and/or all programs offered by the school. Be sure to view the Final Application Guidelines (p. 8).

### **If we are unsuccessful with our application, can we reapply during the following year in the same category?**

Absolutely. Given that your school will have contributed significant time and resources to developing the COE application, a reapplication in the same area seems most prudent. Please note, however, that you may need more time to “put pieces in place” that would help you be more successful in the review process or that another category may be more appropriate for your school. The final decisions about reapplying in the following year and the category to pursue rest with the school.

**If we re-apply, do we have to pay all new fees?**

Yes, all fees need to be paid when a school reapplies after an unsuccessful bid for COE designation, and another consultant visit will be scheduled. Resources are needed to process an application (whether it is a new one or a revised one) and to implement the COE program and, fees need to be collected to cover those costs (see p. 16).

**If our school initiates but fails to complete the process in a given year will the initial application fee be refunded?**

No, the NLN has invested resources to implement the COE program based on projected program costs related to processing application, selecting and preparing consultants, maintaining records, and carrying out other aspects of the program. These costs are incurred regardless of whether or not a school completion of the process in a given year.

**How long does it take to complete the process from beginning to end?**

The process to pursue designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education begins well before the submission of the initial application. It begins by engaging in discussions about whether you are ready to apply and the category in which you will apply. Once these decisions have been made, the formal process begins with the submission of the initial application by October 15th. The consultant visit is typically scheduled sometime in February or March, and the final application is due by May 15th. Notification of the award occurs in July, and the actual presentation is made at the NLN Education Summit in September. The formal process, therefore, takes approximately nine months.

**Which parts of the application process are kept confidential?**

All parts of the application process are kept confidential. The NLN staff, consultant, and committee members keep all information related to COE applications confidential. It is the school's decision to share information about its application for COE designation, the consultant visit, or the outcome of the process.

**How are faculty involved in the process?**

Each school will determine the extent to which faculty are involved in the process of applying for COE designation. For example, the decision to pursue this designation and the category in which to apply both may be decisions of the total faculty. Faculty also may be involved in preparing the initial and/or final application, meeting with the consultant during her/his visit, or attending the Summit if the designation is awarded.

**How are students involved in the process?**

The extent of student involvement in the COE process is likely to depend on the category you select. If your school chooses the "Student" category, students are likely to play an integral role, perhaps by helping to prepare the initial and/or final application, meeting with the consultant during her/his visit to your school, providing testimonials for inclusion in the final application, or attending the Summit if the designation is awarded.

**How is the administration involved in the process?**

The dean/director/chairperson may initiate the process by inviting faculty to consider pursuing COE designation. She/he also may be the one to arrange and facilitate forums where faculty discuss the extent to which the school is fulfilling the NLN Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing, the COE category the school might pursue, and the distinctive features of the school that should be highlighted in the application. The dean/director/ chairperson also participates actively in such discussions, may be involved in preparing parts of the initial and/or final application, facilitates the consultant visit and meets with that individual, serves as the contact person throughout the process, and secures resources to facilitate the process.

**If we are unable to complete the process, will a refund be given?**

Once the fees are submitted, there are no refunds.

### **How do we start the process?**

Once your school has decided to pursue COE designation in a particular category, you may start the formal process by submitting the initial application and appropriate fee. The initial application asks for descriptive information about your school, a brief summary of activities related to each criterion in the category you have selected, and information about how you learned about the program and how you expect COE designation will benefit your school. All these materials are due on or before October 15th.

### **If a program is not successful in the application process, is there an appeal mechanism that can be pursued?**

No. The decision of the NLN Board of Governors is final, and there is no appeal process. Schools that are not successful in the process are provided with feedback about the weaknesses noted by the COE committee, and they are invited to contact the NLN for clarification of any of those points.

### **What kind of feedback can we expect if we fail to receive designation as an NLN Center of Excellence?**

If your school is not successful in your application for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence, you will receive a list of weaknesses noted by the committee as they reviewed and discussed your application. These points will relate to the criteria that were published and used as the basis for the committee's recommendation to the NLN Board of Governors.

### **What should our final application convey?**

Your final application should document how each criterion has been met and “tell the story” of how your school creates environments that pervade all the programs you offer and all faculty endeavors. This application should include a comprehensive description of activities and initiatives in which your school is engaged that provide evidence of how you have met each criterion. It may be accompanied by such documentation as videos, websites, CDs, conference brochures, etc., but you should remember that any such supplemental material (a) is not required, (b) should not be burdensome to the review panel, (c) should be powerful in helping to “tell your story,” and (d) should complement, rather than repeat, the narrative.

### **Who decides whether or not a school receives COE designation?**

All applications are thoroughly reviewed by the COE committee, who submits their recommendations regarding COE designation to the NLN Board of Governors. The NLN Board makes the final decision about awarding COE designation to a school.

### **How will we be notified of the final decision about our application for COE designation?**

The committee typically meets in June and forwards their recommendations to the Board of Governors. All applicant schools are notified in writing of the Board's decision sometime in July, and those schools not recommended for COE status are informed of the weaknesses in their application.

### **Are any extensions granted during the process?**

There are no extensions granted during the process. Schools are encouraged to develop timelines for completion of the COE process (including the preparation and mailing of the final application) at the outset of the process or at least prior to sending in the initial application. If, after submitting the initial application and/or the consultant visit, a school decides not to continue in the process, the NLN staff should be notified in writing.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS *ABOUT THE CONSULTANT AND AVAILABLE SUPPORTS***

### **How are people selected to be on the COE committee or to serve as consultants?**

All consultants and committee members must be current members of the National League for Nursing. The NLN issues a call to its members to nominate themselves or their colleagues for these important roles. In addition, COE schools are asked to nominate individuals for these roles, and those who fulfilled either role in the past are asked about their interest in continuing. The qualifications for each role are clearly defined in the call that is issued, and all nominations are reviewed by the NLN's director of excellence initiatives and the chair of the COE committee, which then makes all appointments. Individuals are chosen who have (a) extensive experience and current knowledge of trends and issues in nursing education, (b) a commitment to excellence and innovation, (c) an openness to new ideas; and (d) an ability to review material objectively. An attempt is made to have a balance in the consultant group and in the committee members of new and continuing individuals, and individuals from COE-designated and non-COE-designated schools.

### **Can we contact the consultant after the visit?**

Each school and its assigned consultant should discuss this issue at the time of the visit to decide on arrangements for further contact. Consultants typically are willing to make themselves available after the visit, but the school needs to realize that consultants are not expected or required to provide extensive consultation afterwards, review materials, or engage in any other activities once their report is submitted to the school.

### **Who pays for the consultant's visit?**

The school assumes all costs for the on-site consultant visit, including travel, meals, and lodging expenses. These arrangements are made by the school in collaboration with the consultant. It is expected that consultants will submit an expense report to the school as soon as possible after the visit and that schools will reimburse the consultant for these expenses in a timely fashion.

### **Does the consultant receive an honorarium?**

No, the consultant does not receive an honorarium for making the visit. All consultants volunteer their time and expertise to support the Centers of Excellence program.

### **How is the consultant's report used in making the final decision about a school's application?**

The consultant's written report is the property of the school, and is not used by the committee or the NLN Board of Governors in making recommendations or decisions regarding COE designation. The letter should not be included in the school's final application, nor should it be submitted to the NLN.

### **Is it necessary to have a consultant visit, if our school has previously undergone the process?**

No. The consultant visit is optional for all COE designated schools applying for continued COE designation.

### **Will our school be assigned a different consultant, if we are not successful the first time we apply for COE designation?**

The NLN will assign a different consultant to a school that reapplies after an unsuccessful application. However, if that school wishes to have the same consultant return, the request will be considered.

### **May we contact COE-designated schools for advice?**

Yes, the NLN highly recommends that schools applying for the COE designation contact schools that have already received this honor to solicit information that will be helpful to them. It is important to remember, however, that every school has a unique character and an individualized way of presenting its excellence. Therefore, what made sense for one school may not be appropriate for your school, and you need to remember to focus on the distinctiveness and excellence of your particular program as you prepare your initial and final applications.

**If we think there is a conflict of interest with the assigned consultant, can we ask for a different one?**

Yes. If either the school or the consultant believes a conflict of interest exists, the NLN will assign a new Consultant.

**What kind of support, other than a consultant, can we expect from NLN in preparing our application?**

It is the consultant's responsibility to offer suggestions to the school regarding preparation of its final application. If you have questions related to the overall COE program, or any procedural matters, you are invited to contact the NLN's Director of Excellence Initiatives for clarification and assistance. Depending on the nature of your question, you may be referred to a member of the COE committee (which oversees the COE program and appoints consultants), schools that currently hold COE designation, or a member of the NLN staff.

**What can we expect from the consultant before, during, and after her/his visit to our school?**

The purpose of the consultant's visit is to help you to (a) understand the criteria in the COE category you have chosen, (b) highlight the strengths and distinctiveness of your school, and (c) identify ways in which you can "tell your story" in the final application. Prior to the visit, the consultant will talk with the dean/director/chairperson about the range of activities in which she/he may be involved during the visit, and together they will decide on a plan of action, individuals or groups with whom the consultant will meet, and dates and other details of the visit. Be sure to review the Roles and Responsibilities of the Consultant and Schools (pp. 10-13).

**What is the role of the NLN staff in this process?**

The NLN staff consults with the COE committee to assign the consultant for your school. Staff are also available to answer questions and give guidance, as needed, to schools and consultants. When the committee meets, NLN staff provide support to that group. Finally, all written communications, excluding the consultant report, come from the NLN.

**Does the consultant confer with the committee or with anyone else involved in the process?**

Although the consultant may confer with NLN staff prior to or during the visit to clarify questions, she/he does not confer with the committee, nor is her/his report shared with that recommending body.

**Who sees the consultant's report?**

The consultant's report is sent directly to the school and is not shared with the committee, NLN staff, or any other individuals. If the school wishes to share this report with anyone, that is the school's decision.

**How long should we expect the consultant to stay at our school?**

Our data show that the average amount of time the consultant spends with faculty and others is eight to twelve hours, over a one or two day period. The specific amount of time the consultant would be at your school would be dependent on your needs and the availability of the consultant.

## OTHER INFORMATION

- All schools designated as NLN Centers of Excellence will be announced via various NLN publications, at the annual fall Education Summit, and through other sources of media.
- The Centers of Excellence criteria are consistent with the NLN's *Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education*. Schools considering the pursuit of designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education may wish to review the hallmarks to help determine their "readiness" to pursue this distinction.

### Contact Information

Schools interested in the NLN's Centers of Excellence Program are invited to contact the NLN with questions. Direct inquiries to: Tish Hess, director, membership and excellence initiatives, at [thess@nlm.org](mailto:thess@nlm.org) or 212-812-0374.

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