



NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education



National League for Nursing
Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education Program
APPLICANT HANDBOOK

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Contact Information

Organizations interested in the NLN's Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education Program are invited to contact the NLN's program manager via email: momar@nlm.org or by phone: 202-909-2497.

Purpose and Goals

The NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education program is designed to recognize schools¹ of nursing, schools within a system, and health care organizations that have achieved a level of excellence in one of four designated areas. This recognition is designed to distinguish those organizations that: demonstrate sustained, evidence-based, and substantive innovation in the identified 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 organization as a whole to pursue and sustain excellence in a selected area.

Goals

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

- Identify and reward those schools and organizations 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 research in nursing education.
- Encourage the development of innovative schools and organizations 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.
- Identify and reward health care organizations that promote the academic progression of their nurses.
- Facilitate discussion among faculty, students, program graduates, and employers about excellence in nursing education and how to promote it.
- Encourage academic-practice partnerships.
- Influence the development of public policies that benefit nursing education, support nursing education research, and promote excellence in nursing education.

¹ 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"; "system" refers to a school that encompasses more than one educational setting.

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirements for Individual Schools

- Applicants must be NLN member schools of nursing accredited by CNEA, ACEN, or CCNE.
- COE applicant school must have NLN membership at the time of initial application and is required to maintain accreditation and NLN membership 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 system eligibility.

Eligibility Requirements for Health Care Organizations

- Applicants must be accredited by the appropriate health care body (i.e., JCAHO, NCQA, AOA).
- Applicant must have an NLN agency or associate membership at time of initial application and is required to maintain membership during the designation cycle.
- All acute care, long term care, and homecare organizations are eligible to apply.
- Organizations must show evidence of partnership with an academic institution(s).

Eligibility Requirements for Schools and Health Care Organizations within a System

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. A single application will be submitted for the system that addresses all criteria as required. 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.
- The same policies and procedures must be used throughout the system.
- The same systematic evaluation plan must exist throughout the entire system.

FOR SCHOOLS: There must be an integrated nursing education curriculum serving the entire system.

Timeline and Fees

Application timeline	
October 31	Application of intent to pursue designation and filing fee due.
January – March	Virtual visit from COE adviser to school.
April 17	Final application and fee due.
May	COE Review Panel reviews applications
June	COE Review Panel meets to discuss applications and make recommendations to the Board of Governors. NLN Board of Governors reviews designations recommended by COE Review Panel. All applicants are notified of NLN Board of Governors' decisions.
August	Schools and organizations may publicly announce designation. Official designation begins on August 1, and ends on July 31, four or five years later. ²
September	COE recipients are announced and celebrated at the NLN Education Summit. A representative from the school is required to attend the Summit to accept the honor at the NLN's Honors Convocation event.

Fees	
Filing fee	\$250 – new designation Free – FIRST continuing designation \$250 – subsequent designations
Adviser expenses	Variable-arrangements made by applicant and adviser (Virtual advisor visits).
Final application fee	\$2,500 – new designation \$1,500 – FIRST continuing designation ³ \$2,500 – subsequent designations

² See page 20 for information on continuing designation, which is valid for 5 years.

³ A school/institution is only allowed to receive the first continuing designation discount once, no matter how many COE designations the school/institution has earned. Schools/institutions do not receive the discount once per designation, they receive it one time only.

Expectations of Designees

Applicants selected as NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education will be expected to participate in interviews about achievements related to each criterion, the impact the Center of Excellence designation had on recruitment and retention, contributions to nursing science, and other relevant outcomes.

COE designees are presented at the NLN Education Summit, which occurs each September and is attended by approximately 1,200 nurse educators. Those receiving COE designation are expected to send representation to the NLN Education Summit in September to receive the official awarding of this status.

- These recipients are also announced in NLN publications. Press releases are sent to national and local media (nursing, education and general), and information about COE-designees is posted on the NLN website, with a link to the applicant's own website.
- Finally, each COE awardee is provided with a COE logo to be used on stationery, the website, or other appropriate material (notepads, etc.). While awardees will not be able to use the NLN logo itself, there is a special COE logo that will be available to awardees. Schools and organizations may begin using the logo on August 1st, the year of the designation, and must cease use of the logo on July 31st, the year that their designation ends. Recipients that apply for continuing designation will be given a new logo for the continuing designation.
- NLN COE designees are encouraged to market and publicly announce the designation as long as it is in effect.

In addition, COE designees are expected to:

- While holding active designation, COE recipients are expected to be available to other organizations seeking to improve their programs.
- Before their COE designation expires, recipients are encouraged 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 should describe the recipient's activities and outcomes related to the Centers of Excellence designation.
- COE designees must be NLN members at the time of application and are required to maintain accreditation and NLN membership throughout the designation cycle.
- COE-designated organizations are encouraged to continue the designation after the initial four-year period. There is no limit to the number of times a school or organization may submit an application for continuing designation as an NLN Center of Excellence. Schools and organizations may hold designations in more than one category simultaneously.

Centers of Excellence Criteria

The choice of category to pursue for COE designation is a decision that the faculty and nursing administration of each school or organization make based on the strengths, goals, and areas of distinction for their programs. Each school should identify the area where it demonstrates excellence and where it has created an environment that all faculty are committed to sustaining. 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. <http://www.nln.org/professional-development-programs/teaching-resources/hallmarks-of-excellence>

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
- Creating Workplace Environments that Promote the Academic Progression of Nurses
- Creating Learning Environments that Impact Climate Change and Planetary Health

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 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 educational endeavors. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:⁴

1. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty creatively develop and implement a shared vision that develops students' values, socializes them to new roles, promotes professional involvement and a commitment to lifelong learning.
2. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty use best available pedagogical evidence to design and implement innovative program(s) that result in graduates being able to engage in high-quality, evidence-based nursing practice.
3. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty design flexible, dynamic, current, and relevant curriculum/curricula to empower students to achieve their professional goals and pursue their interests as they advance their knowledge of nursing practice
4. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty collaborate among themselves, with clinical partners, and students to achieve innovative, individualized, and evidence-based nursing education.
5. Provide evidence and outcomes that students and faculty are actively engaged in their communities to enhance how students learn and develop professionally to advance the profession and benefit the community.
6. Provide evidence and outcomes that learning institutions encourage and support faculty to develop new pedagogies that create and sustain dynamic learning environments.

⁶Please see pages 13 and 14 for additional requirements.

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:⁵

1. Provide evidence and outcomes that through their shared vision, faculty demonstrate pedagogical expertise and excellence in teaching and curriculum development.
2. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty interactions and collaboration with students and colleagues result in innovative and effective pedagogical practices in nursing education.
3. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty use their pedagogical expertise and resources to design and implement educational experiences that enhance student learning.
4. Provide evidence and outcomes that the comprehensive faculty development program is effective in promoting faculty pedagogical expertise.
5. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty engagement in their communities enhances pedagogical expertise resulting in student learning, professional development, and advancement of the profession.
6. Provide evidence and outcomes that evaluative feedback is used by faculty to guide and demonstrate progress toward professional goals related to excellence, innovation, and continued growth of pedagogical expertise.

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:⁶

1. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty advance the science of nursing education through a shared vision and commitment to utilization of pedagogical research.
2. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty regularly undertakes evidence-based pedagogical projects or programs of research that advance excellence in nursing education.
3. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty uses research and evidence-based findings in innovative ways for curriculum design and development of instructional strategies to impact outcomes.
4. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty create mechanisms to measure student learning outcomes, consistent with and relevant to their expressed vision of the science of nursing education.
5. Provide evidence and outcomes that 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. Provide evidence and outcomes that faculty engages students in developing the science of nursing education by involving them in pedagogical projects and evidence-based nursing education.

⁵Please see pages 13 and 14 for additional requirements.

⁶Please see pages 13 and 14 for additional requirements.

Creating Workplace Environments that Promote the Academic⁷ Progression of Nurses

Designation is based on the extent to which excellence in creating partnerships to advance academic progression is demonstrated. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:⁸

1. Provide evidence and outcomes that a comprehensive program that promotes academic progression throughout the organization has been developed and implemented with evidence of a system wide commitment to the program.
2. Provide evidence and outcomes that health care organization representatives are actively engaged with their academic partner(s) in a professional collaboration resulting in a commitment to academic progression.
3. Provide evidence and outcomes that academic/practice partnerships support an educated and diverse nursing workforce to maximize competence and role performance to meet the needs of increasingly complex work environments and to enhance personal & institutional accountability for upholding health equity and health care equity as core values that influence behavior and decision making.
4. Provide evidence and outcomes that the health care organization facilitates academic progression through the provision of resources to support employees in the nursing learner role.
5. Provide evidence and outcomes that academic/practice partnerships yield projects to advance evidence-based nursing practice.
6. Provide evidence and outcomes that health care organization representatives in collaboration with their academic partner(s) disseminate the effectiveness of innovative programs that support academic progression, through local, regional, or national forums.

Creating Learning Environments that Impact Climate Change and Planetary Health

Research supports the importance of educating current and future nurses to enact practices and policy to impact climate change and planetary health. The criteria used to define excellence in this category are as follows:

1. Faculty and their leaders create a vision, expertise, and a shared commitment that lead to strategies and actions to improve planetary health, including human health and wellbeing.
2. Faculty design curricula across programs that integrate the science of planetary health threats, including climate change, and pose nursing and transdisciplinary solutions to develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes for practice.
3. Faculty engage in scholarly endeavors that address climate change and planetary health including their impact on human health and wellbeing.
4. Students and faculty actively engage with their communities to impact awareness, knowledge, and/or action to improve planetary health and sustainable practices.
5. Students, faculty, and school leaders partner with their communities to advocate for policies that promote environmental and climate justice, health equity, planetary health, and population health and wellbeing.
6. Faculty and school leaders engage their clinical partners to advance nurses' knowledge and practices related to planetary health, sustainable practices such as decarbonization, and the health impacts of climate change.

⁷ For definition of academic progression review the 2011 NLN Vision Statement: *Academic Progression in Nursing Education*. It is not staff development.

⁸ Please see pages 13 and 14 for additional requirements.

Initial Application Guidelines

Choosing a Category for COE Designation

The choice of category to pursue for COE designation is a decision that the faculty and nursing administration of each school or organization make based on the strengths, goals, and areas of distinction for their programs. It is suggested that the faculty engage in extended discussions of the extent to which they meet the NLN's Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education® (available at 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:

- Demonstrate sustained, evidence-based and substantive innovation in a selected area
- Conduct ongoing research to document the effectiveness of such innovation
- Set high standards for themselves, and
- Are committed to continuous quality improvement.

Successful applications come from schools and organizations where there is full faculty support for applying to the COE process.

How long does COE designation last?

The first COE designation is granted for a four-year period starting on August 1 of the year of designation and ending on July 31, four years later. For information on continuing designation, please see page 20.

Does the applicant have to meet all the criteria in the category selected, or only a certain number of them?

In order to be recommended for COE designation, an applicant must demonstrate that it has met all of the criteria in the selected category and, for those schools or organizations offering more than one program, demonstrate that the criteria are met in relation to all of those programs. It is important, therefore, that applicants carefully read all the criteria in each category before making a decision regarding participation in the COE program.

Can an applicant 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 designations in more than one area simultaneously. Faculty and administrators need to realize, however, that each application requires a separate document, separate fees, and separate adviser 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. There is only one category applicable to health care organizations.

What is the purpose of the initial application?

Every COE application begins with an initial application. The initial application is the means by which an applicant formally notifies the NLN of its intent to pursue COE designation, and the category it will pursue. It also provides information about the organization and the nursing unit that is used when assigning the adviser and that then provides a context for the adviser who will virtually visit the applicant.

How to Apply

Applicants seeking designation as an NLN Center of Excellence must submit an online Application of Intent to Pursue Designation, accompanied by the filing fee, by October 31.

- This application will provide demographic information about the school or health care organization, indicate the category for which the designation of excellence is being sought, and summarize activities related to each criterion.
- The information provided in this application is used by the adviser to guide the applicant team.

An adviser, selected by the NLN, will virtually visit with each organization that has submitted a preliminary application to guide the applicant team in highlighting their strengths and emphasizing their uniqueness.

- Advisers also provide answers to questions related to the Centers of Excellence Program or preparation of the final application.
- All expenses related to this virtual visit are the responsibility of the applicant. The adviser will write a summary of the visit and submit it to the applicant for reimbursement.
- More information about the adviser visit can be found on page 22.

Are any organizations turned down after the initial application?

Yes. The purpose of the initial application is for the applicant to notify the NLN of its intent to pursue COE designation and the category it will pursue. If a school does not meet the eligibility requirements for COE designation, their initial application will be turned down, and they will be unable to submit a final application. However, the decision regarding COE designation is made only after the final application is submitted.

Do all of the programs a school or organization offers have to be accredited in order to seek COE designation?

Yes. Designation as a Center of Excellence in Nursing Education 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 the Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (CNEA), Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN), or the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE).

If a 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 the COE application. Generally, if a 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 the school and will be included in the application. However, if the 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 the application. Given that there are so many possibilities related to multiple-site schools, applicants are asked to contact the NLN prior to submission of the initial application.

If a hospital has multiple sites, do all sites need to participate?

It is assumed that health care organizations with multiple sites have the same mission, policies and procedures related to academic progression. If each site has a different mission, policies and

procedure related to academic progression; the organization can make a decision to apply for designation of one site. If the organization is applying as a system, then all sites are to be included. Given that there are many possibilities related to multiple-site organizations, applicants 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 a school, the application must address how the environments created pervade all programs and how all criteria are met in relation to each program.

Final Application Requirements

This section contains instructions on the content required for major sections of your application, as well as information on formatting and structure. Please note that the application requirements and review process are the same for initial and continuing designation.

Introduction

The introduction section should be no more than 4–5 pages long and provide an overview of the school or workplace. This contextual information will help provide the review panel with a foundation of knowledge before reading the responses to each criterion.

Responding to Criteria

The application should provide a clear and succinct description, including metrics and outcomes, of how the applicant has created the environment related to the particular COE category selected. The final PDF application must document how all components of each criterion⁹ in the selected category are fulfilled. This includes all programs offered by applicant schools and organizations.

The application must describe relevant initiatives and their corresponding outcomes that serve to create an environment where excellence is pervasive. Since the supportive evidence is intended to showcase the applicant's excellence in the selected category, the material submitted will be unique to each applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide convincing evidence that all criteria in the selected category have been met.

The narrative for each criterion must include:

Documentation of initiatives and their measurable outcomes.

- ☐ Outcomes must be supported with quantitative and qualitative data. This data should not be more than four years old (based on the application deadline). If possible, show data over time to demonstrate impact.

Evidence that the excellence initiatives have been implemented throughout all aspects and/or programs of the organization.

Validation of the sustainability of excellence initiatives.

Other Documentation

A scanned copy of each/all of the applicant's letter(s) of accreditation clearly stating the dates of current accreditation is required as the final page(s) of the application.

⁹ There are terms in the criteria that can be interpreted in a number of ways. A deliberate decision was made not to include a glossary so that each applicant can define what terms mean within its particular context. Your responses to the criteria should speak to your unique characteristics and how excellence pervades all aspects of your organization.

Required Application Checklist

One final application will be accepted in digital PDF format only. Instructions for electronic submission will be sent to applicants in early March. Please note that this checklist is required. Failure to follow the checklist will result in your application being rejected from the process.

The “Final Application Cover Sheet” provided by the NLN should be the first two pages of your application and does not count toward the 100-page limit. Please also submit a copy of this coversheet by mail or fax with your payment by the April 17 deadline. (Credit card payment is also available by calling the NLN Membership Department at 800-669-1656.)

Immediately following the cover sheet, please include a faculty or staff roster, whichever is more relevant to your organization. Include name, credentials, and position/appointment for each full-time person.

Table of contents is required, and the criteria must be used as headings in a clearly organized document that facilitates the assessment of outcomes in each excellence criterion.

Use of criteria as headings in your table of contents.

Document limit of 100 pages. (No appendices, media, or hyperlinks are accepted.)

The final page of your application is a scanned copy of each/all of the applicant's letter(s) of accreditation clearly stating the dates of current accreditation is required as the final page(s) of the application.

Format no less than 1.5 line spacing, 1-inch margins, and a font size of 11 or larger for readability.

What not to do in your application:

Please do not copy and paste from your accreditation documents. See page 17 for an explanation.

Do not write in a way that is distracting, i.e., dialogue, play-like scripts, etc. Straight-forward, concise writing is preferred.

Do not choose a COE designation without first considering the kind of data your school collects and uses for decision-making processes.

Do not provide a long list of examples of excellence, focus on a few for each criterion and provide outcomes and evidence to support them.

Do not focus on only one program. Please provide evidence and outcomes that show excellence in all programs for each criterion.

Evaluation of COE Applications

All COE applications are reviewed and rated by the COE Review Panel which is composed of individuals familiar with the COE application process; most panel members are from NLN COE schools.

Review Panel members are asked to:

Indicate the extent to which you think this applicant has provided evidence and outcomes across all programs to meet the stated criteria for COE designation in this category. For each criterion, provide your rating and comments to support your evaluation. At the conclusion of your review, please include your initial recommendation about awarding COE designation to the applicant.

The following rating scale is used to rate each criterion of the application:

- 0- No outcomes documented
- 1- Limited outcomes present, inconsistent throughout program(s)
- 2- Limited outcomes present, consistent throughout program(s)
- 3- Sufficient outcomes present, inconsistent throughout program(s)
- 4- Outcomes present, demonstrated evidence pervasive throughout program(s)

In May/June, the review panel thoroughly discusses each applicant using the rating scale above. Their recommendations regarding COE designation are submitted to the NLN Board of Governors who make the final decision to award COE designation. All applicants are notified in writing of the Board's decision sometime in June or July.

Helpful Hints for Navigating the COE Process

Important Information

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 the faculty and administrators at a school or organization are ready to apply for a specific designation. Once these decisions have been made, the formal process begins with the submission of the initial application by October 31. The adviser visit is typically scheduled sometime in February or March, and the final application is due by April 17. Notification of the award occurs in June/July, and the actual award presentation is made at the NLN Education Summit in September. The formal process, therefore, takes approximately one year.

Are any extensions granted during the process?

There are no extensions granted during the process. Applicants are encouraged to develop timelines for completion of the COE process at the outset of the process. If, after submitting the initial application and/or the adviser visit, a school or organization decides not to continue in the process, the NLN staff should be notified in writing to membership@nlm.org.

Which parts of the application process are kept confidential?

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

How is the administration involved in the process?

The educational or institutional leader may initiate the process by inviting a discussion to consider pursuing COE designation. She or he also may be the one to arrange and facilitate forums to discuss the extent to which the organization is fulfilling the NLN's Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing®, the COE category the applicant might pursue, and the distinctive features of the organization that should be highlighted in the application. The educational or institutional leader also participates actively in such discussions. She or he may be involved in preparing parts of the initial and/or final application, facilitating the adviser visit, serving as the contact person throughout the process, and securing resources to facilitate the process.

If a school's or organization's parent organization does not support the decision to apply for COE designation, can they still apply?

While parent organization support is not a specific criterion in any of the COE categories, it would be beneficial to the process. An applicant 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.

For Schools

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 total organization of the applicant.
2. Accreditation focuses on all program areas while the COE process focuses on an area in which the applicant 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 adviser's role is to guide the applicant 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 an applicant apply for COE within the same year as a scheduled accreditation visit?

Yes, it is possible. Having an accreditation visit and a COE adviser visit in the same year is likely to be very time-consuming for faculty and staff, and the nature of the report and visit for each process are quite different. The COE program places no constraints on engaging in both processes in the same year.

Does having an interim or acting educational leader disqualify a school or organization from applying for COE designation?

No. The designation is intended for the organization. If the resources of the applicant are adequate to complete the applications and pay all fees, the application will be considered by the panel.

If a school has pre-licensure and post-licensure programs, 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.

How is faculty involved in the process?

Each applicant 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 administrator or faculty. Many parties may be involved in preparing the initial and/or final application, meeting with the adviser virtually during her/his visit or attending the Summit if the designation is awarded. Schools with successful outcomes typically demonstrate strong faculty engagement in the preparation of the COE application.

How are students involved in the process?

The extent of student involvement in the COE process is likely to depend on the category selected. If a 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 adviser during her/his visit, providing testimonials for inclusion in the final application, or attending the Summit if the designation is awarded.

For Health Care Organizations

How does the Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education program compare with the Magnet Recognition Program® available to hospitals?

Just as the Magnet Recognition 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 efforts. In both instances, the designation is conferred upon the entire nursing department (i.e., the hospital nursing service), and not on any single component of it (e.g., only the ICU).

How does academic progression differ from staff development?

Academic progression is the formal educational process that may also include support of staff in generic nursing programs. Academic progression is often a part of professional nursing staff development mission and programming within a health care organization.

Health care organizations applying for designation as a Center of Excellence in academic progression are encouraged to review NLN documents on academic progression:

<http://www.nln.org/about/position-statements/nln-living-documents>

How is collaboration with academic partners defined?

Collaboration with academic partners is unique to each relationship between a health care organization and an academic partner. It is important to describe how the collaboration supports and strengthens the academic progression of the nursing staff.

If a school or organization promotes the academic progression of all staff, not just nurses, should it include these people in the application?

A strong mission, policies and procedures that support academic progression of all staff will support the application for Center of Excellence designation. However, the focus of the application must be on the academic progression of the nursing staff.

Unsuccessful or Incomplete Applications

What is the most common reason applicants fail to be designated?

The most common reason for failure is because schools list many excellent activities and initiatives, but do not provide evidence and outcomes for these activities. It is better to pick a few relevant activities and initiatives and be explicit as to why they are excellent, and how they make the applicant a center of excellence.

If a school or organization is unsuccessful with their application, can they reapply during the following year in the same category?

Absolutely. Given that a school or organization has contributed significant time and resources to developing the COE application, a reapplication in the same area seems most prudent. Please note, however, that a school or organization may need more time to “put pieces in place” that will help the application to be more successful in the future. In addition, it is possible that another category may be more appropriate for the school or organization. The final decisions about reapplying in the following year and the category to pursue rest with the applicant.

If a school or organization re-applies, does it have to pay new fees?

Yes, all fees need to be paid when an applicant reapplies after an unsuccessful bid for COE designation, and another adviser 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.

If a school or organization is unable to complete the process, will a refund be given?

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

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. Applicants that are not successful in the process are provided with feedback about the strengths and 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 a school or organization expect if it fails to receive designation as an NLN Center of Excellence?

If the applicant is not successful in application for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence, the school can ask to receive a brief overview from the review panel stating areas that did not meet expectations. These points will relate to the criteria and outcomes expectations published in this handbook.

Continuing Designation Information

Applications for continuing designation will undergo the same rigorous review by the COE review panel as new designations; continuation of designation is not automatic.

What is different about continuing designation?

1. Review panel members do not know what was in the original application, so the application must address all unique programs/initiatives again, as if the institution is applying again for the first time. Continued designation will be recommended only if the applicant provides evidence that all criteria were met within the selected category.
2. During the last year of the designation, recipients are encouraged to reapply for continued designation. Continuing designations are granted for five (5) (see subsequent continuing designations below).
 - A recipient may apply for continuing designation up to one year after their previous designation has expired. If two years have passed, the application will be considered as a new application.
3. Submit the same intent to apply application form but indicate that the school or institution is pursuing continuing designation. The online form is due by October 31 and is free to file.
4. The final application is due April 17, 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.
5. An adviser visit is not required but can be arranged if requested on the intent form. If four (4) or more years have lapsed since your previous designation expired, an adviser is required. If changing categories, an adviser visit is recommended.
6. Final application fee for the FIRST continuing designation is \$1,500. The fee is due by April 17, along with the final application.¹⁰

Procedure for SUBSEQUENT Continuing Designations

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

1. Submit the same intent to apply application form but indicate that the school or organization is pursuing continuing designation. The online form with filing fee of \$250 is due by October 31.
2. An adviser visit is not required but can be arranged if requested on the intent form.
3. Final application fee is \$2,500. The final application is due April 17th.

¹⁰ A school/institution is only allowed to receive the first continuing designation discount once, no matter how many COE designations the school/institution has earned. Schools/institutions do not receive the discount once per designation, they receive it one time only.

Frequently Asked Questions about Continuing Designation

How does continuing designation differ from the initial designation?

Continuing designation is an award given to a previous COE designate using the same application and rigorous review process. The difference is in the fees and designation period: those applying for a second designation receive discounted application fees, and those applying for subsequent designations receive a longer designation period: five years instead of four years.

Is it necessary to have an adviser visit if a school or organization has previously undergone the process?

If applying for continued designation in the same category as the original designation, the adviser is optional. However, if applying in a category other than the original designation category, an adviser is strongly recommended. If applying after four (4) or more years have lapsed since the last designation expired, the adviser visit is required.

As with the initial designation, the applicant assumes all costs for the on-site adviser visit, including travel, meals, and lodging expenses. These arrangements are made by the applicant in collaboration with the adviser. See page 22 for more information on the adviser visit.

Does the COE review panel have access to a school or organization's previous application when reviewing the application for continued designation?

No, the review panel does not have a copy of the previous application. Therefore, it is especially important to provide background, highlight exemplars, and provide evidence of sustained excellence. As with the original application, all criteria in the selected category must be addressed across all programs.

How much information is needed for each criterion?

It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide convincing evidence that all criteria in the selected category have been met. Background information as well as a timeline should be referenced with a focus on sustainability, impact, and outcomes.

What happens to a designation if a school or organization chooses not to reapply for COE designation?

COE designation including use of the COE logo can only be used by currently designated Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education organizations. If a school or organization chooses not to reapply for COE designation or is unsuccessful in their bid for continuing designation, they are no longer eligible to use the designation or specially designed COE logo.

Adviser Visit Information

The applicant applying for designation as an NLN Center of Excellence is expected to do the following:

Setting up the Visit:

- Collaborate with the adviser to confirm dates for the virtual visit.
- Collaborate with the adviser to make arrangements.
- Be as flexible as possible when arranging for the virtual visit.
- Discuss reimbursement of the adviser's time in a timely manner.
- Dialogue with the adviser prior to the visit to determine the activities in which she/he will be involved during the virtual visit.

The Virtual Visit:

- Encourage participants to talk openly with the adviser in order to (a) fully understand the Centers of Excellence program, (b) fully understand the selection criteria in the area of designation, and (c) take full advantage of her/his ideas and suggestions.
- Arrange for the adviser to speak with individuals or groups that may be relevant to the school's application as appropriate.
- Provide the adviser with information about the applicant as requested.
- Provide materials to support the adviser'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 the adviser's report.
- Pursue a brief follow-up with the adviser after the virtual visit, if needed.
- Provide feedback about the applicant's experience with the Centers of Excellence program as part of the processes used to evaluate the program.

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

- Provide luxury accommodations or travel arrangements for the adviser (visits will be virtual this year).
- Make personnel files available to the adviser.
- Give the adviser an honorarium or any other gift.
- Share the adviser's report with anyone, unless the applicant chooses to do so.

The Centers of Excellence adviser is expected to do the following:

Setting up the Visit:

- Contact the applicant to arrange dates and coordinate times for the virtual visit.
- Review the applicant's initial application prior to the visit.
- Participate in the adviser orientation process and seek clarification from the committee members, if needed.

The Visit:

- Review with the applicant the NLN Centers of Excellence in Nursing Education program.
- Clarify the selection criteria for the applicant.
- Assist the applicant to identify how it meets each criterion.
- Work with the applicant to identify its unique or innovative qualities that will enhance the application.
- Discuss with applicant how it can best showcase its work and present evidence related to each selection criterion.
- Virtually visit settings that provide a context for understanding the applicant's activities related to the selection criteria.
- Meet with organization "officials" for a brief virtual visit if requested.
- Assist applicant to develop creative and effective ways to prepare the final application.
- Suggest ways to prepare and present the final application.
- Stress that the adviser does not speak to the review panel about the applicant. Therefore, all material and recommendations from the adviser are solely for use by the applicant.

Things to Remember When Advising:

- Be as flexible as possible when arranging the visit.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding discussions, personal opinions about the school, and disposition of the adviser report.
- During the visit, be creative and open to new ideas during discussions.
- Act in ways that are consistent with the NLN's mission, goals, and values.
- An adviser functions as a coach to the organization and the responsibility for accepting the recommendations of the adviser lies with the organization.

The Centers of Excellence adviser is NOT expected to do the following:

- Review any material prior to the virtual visit, other than the initial application.
- Provide consultation about accreditation criteria or general program development
- Review student, faculty, or employee records.
- Arrange formal meetings with other representatives.
- Review minutes of meetings.
- Make a formal presentation.
- Provide a recommendation about whether or not the applicant should receive designation as an NLN Center of Excellence in Nursing Education.
- Make suggestions about the outcome of the application.
- Serve on the COE review panel.
- Review final application.
- Accept an honorarium or any other gifts from the applicant.

Frequently asked Questions about the Adviser and Available Support

[How are individuals selected to be on the COE review panel or to serve as advisers?](#)

All advisers and review panel 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 recipients 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 membership director and the chief administration officer. The NLN Board of Governors 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 adviser group, and the review panel of new and continuing individuals, and individuals from COE-designees and non-COE-designees.

[When is an adviser required?](#)

An adviser is required for all new applicants, and all applicants applying for a continuing designation after four (4) or more years have lapsed since the previous designation ended. Additionally, if a current COE designee chooses to seek continued designation in a different category than the original designation, an adviser is strongly recommended.

[Can a school or organization contact the adviser after the visit?](#)

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

[Who pays for the adviser's visit?](#)

The applicant assumes all costs for the on-site adviser visit, including travel, meals, and lodging expenses. These arrangements are made by the applicant in collaboration with the adviser. It is

expected that advisers will submit an expense report to the organization as soon as possible after the visit and that applicants will reimburse the adviser for these expenses in a timely fashion.

Does the adviser receive an honorarium?

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

How is the adviser's report used in making the final decision about an application?

The adviser's written report is the property of the applicant 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 final application, nor should it be submitted to the NLN.

Will the applicant be assigned a different adviser, if not successful with the first application for COE designation?

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

May we contact COE-designees for advice?

Yes, the NLN highly recommends that organizations applying for the COE designation contact others that have already received this honor to solicit information that will be helpful to them. It is important to remember, however, that every applicant has a unique character and an individualized way of presenting its excellence. Therefore, what made sense for one may not be appropriate for another. The applicant should remember to focus on the distinctiveness and excellence of their particular program.

If a school or organization thinks there is a conflict of interest with the assigned adviser, can they ask for a different one?

Yes. If either the applicant or the adviser believes a conflict of interest exists, the NLN will assign a new adviser.

What kind of support, other than an adviser, is expected from the NLN regarding this process? It is the adviser's responsibility to offer suggestions to the applicant regarding preparation of its final application. For questions related to the overall COE program, or any procedural matters, please contact the NLN's recognition program manager for clarification and assistance: membership@nlm.org.

What can we expect from the adviser before, during, and after her/his visit?

The purpose of the adviser's visit is to help applicants (a) understand the criteria in the chosen COE category, (b) highlight the strengths and distinctiveness of the applicant's organization, and (c) identify ways in which the applicant can "tell your story" in the final application. Prior to the visit, the adviser will talk with the educational leader 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 adviser will meet, and dates and other details of the visit.

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

The NLN staff consults with the COE committee to assign the adviser for the applicant. Staff is also available to answer questions and give guidance. When the review panel meets, NLN staff provides support to that group.

Does the adviser confer with the review panel or with anyone else involved in the process? Although the adviser 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 adviser's report?

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

How long should the applicants expect the adviser to stay at their organization?

NLN data shows that the average amount of time the adviser spends is eight to twelve hours, over a one- or two-day period. The specific amount of time the adviser would be at a school or organization depends on the needs of that institution and the availability of the adviser.

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