NLN Center for Innovation in Education Excellence

National League for Nursing Program of Excellence

APPLICANT HANDBOOK



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Contact Information

Organizations interested in the NLN's Program of Excellence for Research-Focused Doctoral Programs are invited to contact the NLN's program manager via email (tbishaw@nln.org) or phone (202-909-2503).

Purpose and Goals

The NLN Program of Excellence for Research-Focused Doctoral Programs is designed to recognize nursing schools for maintaining high quality research-focused doctorate in nursing programs. Research-focused doctorate in nursing programs are crucial to sustain and grow capacity of nursing schools by matriculating nurses to join the nurse faculty workforce, influence health policy, and advance nursing science.

Goals

The designation of a research-focused doctorate in nursing program as a program of excellence is a voluntary process that involves preparation of material by the program itself and peer review. Recognizing the uniqueness of each program relative to its organizational mission, the NLN program sets high standards and serves to distinguish and publicly recognize those programs that excel in the award criteria. The goals of the NLN program are:

- Identify and reward those research-focused doctorate in nursing programs that excel in creating environments that enhance student learning and professional development, promote the pedagogical expertise of faculty, and advance nursing science.
- Increase the number of nurse scientists in the workforce.
- Encourage the development of innovations in nursing education and science.
- Identify and reward programs that promote the academic progression of their students and faculty.
- Encourage academic-practice and interprofessional partnerships.
- Influence the development of public policies that benefit nursing education, support nursing science, and promote excellence in nursing education.

Eligibility Requirements

Applicant program must have NLN membership at the time of initial application and is required to maintain NLN membership throughout the designation cycle.

Timeline and Fees

Application Timeline

November 30	Application of intent to pursue designation and filing fee due.
April 17	Final application and fee due.
May	Review Panel reviews applications.
June	Review Panel meets to discuss applications and make recommendations to the Board of Governors. NLN Board of Governors reviews designations recommended by Review Panel.
July	All applicants are notified of NLN Board of Governors' decisions.
August	Programs and organizations may publicly announce designation. Official designation begins on August 1 and ends on July 31 five years later.
September	Award recipients are announced and celebrated at the NLN Education Summit. A representative from the program 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
Final application fee	$2,500 – new designation $1,500 – FIRST continuing designation $2,500 – subsequent designations

Expectations of Designees

Applicants selected as NLN Programs of Excellence for Research-Focused Doctorate in Nursing Programs will be expected to participate in interviews about achievements related to each criterion, the impact the Program of Excellence designation had on recruitment and retention, contributions to nursing science, and other relevant outcomes.

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

- Recipients also are announced in NLN publications. Press releases are sent to national and local media (nursing, education, and general), and information about award-designees is posted on the NLN website, with a link to the applicant's own website.
- Finally, each awardee is provided with an award 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 award logo that will be available to awardees. Programs 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 award designees are encouraged to market and publicly announce the designation as long as it is in effect.

In addition, Programs of Excellence designees are:

- Expected to be available to other organizations seeking to improve their programs.
- Encouraged, before their award designation expires, 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 program award designation.
- Required to be NLN members at the time of application and maintain NLN membership throughout the designation cycle.
- Encouraged to continue the designation after the initial 5-year period. There is no limit to the number of times a program may submit an application for continuing designation.

Program of Excellence Criteria

The Program of Excellence criteria are consistent with the NLN's Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education©. Programs considering the pursuit of designation as an NLN Program of Excellence for Research-Focused Doctoral Programs may wish to review the hallmarks to help determine their "readiness" to pursue this distinction.
https://www.nln.org/education/teaching-resources/professional-development-programsteaching-resources/hallmarks-of-excellence

Criteria

Designation is based on the extent to which the evidence provided in the application indicates excellence and innovation specified by the criteria delineated below. These criteria were developed based on insights gained from a search of relevant literature and subject matter experts.

The award criteria, which should reflect evidence and outcomes, are:

1. Fostering an inclusive environment that flourishes nursing research.
2. Establishing and supporting conditions for nursing research-focused doctorate completion.
3. Demonstrating a culture of and commitment to research ethics by faculty and students.
4. Demonstrating research-focused doctorate nursing students' preparation to address interprofessional collaboration, current priorities, and emerging trends in nursing science.
5. Influencing the health of local, state, tribal, national and/or global communities through nursing research.
6. Generating research outputs that impact the broader interprofessional scientific community.
7. Establishing a robust climate for post-graduation success for nursing research-focused doctorate students.

Initial Application Guidelines

Successful applications come from programs where there is full faculty support for applying to the award process.

How long does award designation last?
Designations are granted for 5-year periods starting on August 1 of the year of designation and ending on July 31, 5 years later. For information on continuing designation, please see page 10.

Does the applicant have to meet all the criteria or only a certain number of them?
In order to be recommended for the designation, an applicant must demonstrate that it has met all criteria. It is important, therefore, that applicants carefully read all the criteria before making a decision regarding participation in the awards program.

What is the purpose of the initial application?

Every award 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 the designation.

How to Apply

Applicants seeking designation as an NLN Program of Excellence must submit an online Application of Intent to Pursue Designation, accompanied by the filing fee, by November 30. This application will provide demographic information about the program and organization and summarize activities related to each criterion.

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 the designation. If a program does not meet the eligibility requirements for designation, their initial application will be turned down, and they will be unable to submit a final application. However, the decision regarding designation is made only after the final application is submitted.

If a school has multiple sites, do all sites need to participate?
Schools with multiple sites are encouraged to contact the NLN to discuss their particular situation and how to address that in the 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 award 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.

Final Application Guidelines

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 program and school. 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 award criteria. **The final PDF application must document how all components of each criterion are fulfilled.**

The application must describe relevant initiatives and their corresponding outcomes that serve to create an environment where excellence is pervasive. Because the supportive evidence is intended to showcase the applicant's excellence, the material submitted will be unique to each applicant. It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide convincing evidence that all criteria 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. These data should not be more than 5 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 of the program.
- Validation of the sustainability of excellence initiatives.

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 70-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 and staff roster. Include name, credentials, and position/appointment for each full-time person. This roster does not count towards the page limit.

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 70 pages. (No appendices, media, or hyperlinks are accepted.)
- 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.
- Do not write in a way that is distracting, i.e., dialogue, play-like scripts, etc. Straight-forward, concise writing is preferred.
- 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.

Evaluation of Program of Excellence Applications

All Program of Excellence applications are reviewed and rated by the Review Panel, which is composed of individuals familiar with the application process.

Review Panel members are asked to:
Indicate the extent to which they think the applicant has provided evidence and outcomes to meet the stated criteria for designation. For each criterion, they provide their rating and comments to support their evaluation. At the conclusion of their review, they include their initial recommendation about awarding 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 designation are submitted to the NLN Board of Governors who make the final decision to award designations. All applicants are notified in writing of the Board's decision sometime in June or July.

Helpful Hints for Navigating the Application Process

Important Information

How long does it take to complete the process from beginning to end?
The process to pursue designation as an NLN Program of Excellence begins well before the submission of the initial application. It begins by engaging in discussions about whether the faculty and administrators at a program and school are ready to apply for designation.

Once these decisions have been made, the formal process begins with the submission of the initial application by November 30. 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 process at the outset of the process. If, after submitting the initial application and/or the adviser visit, a program decides not to continue in the process, the NLN staff should be notified in writing to membership@nln.org.

Which parts of the application process are kept confidential?
All parts of the application process are kept confidential. The NLN staff, committee members, and review panel keep all information related to applications confidential. It is the applicant's decision to share information about its application for designation 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 designation. They 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 award criteria, 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. They may be involved in preparing parts of the initial and/or final application, serving as the contact person throughout the process, and securing resources to facilitate the process.

If a program's school or parent organization does not support the decision to apply for designation, can they still apply?
Although parent organization support is not a specific criterion, 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.

Does having an interim or acting educational leader disqualify a school or organization from applying for Program of Excellence designation?
No. The designation is intended for the program. If the resources of the applicant are adequate to complete the applications and pay all fees, the application will be considered by the panel.

How is faculty involved in the process?
Each applicant will determine the extent to which faculty are involved in the process of applying for designation. For example, the decision to pursue this designation to apply may be decisions of the administrator or faculty. Many parties may be involved in preparing the initial and/or final application or attending the Summit if the designation is awarded. Schools with successful outcomes typically demonstrate strong faculty engagement in the preparation of the Program of Excellence application.

How are students involved in the process?
The extent of student involvement in the process is likely to vary. Programs can include students during any and all aspects of the process, although not required. Programs also may opt to send students to Summit along with faculty to receive the award designation.

Unsuccessful or Incomplete Applications

What is the most common reason applicants fail to be designated?
The most common reason for failure is because programs 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 Program of Excellence.

If a program is unsuccessful with their application, can they reapply during the following year?
Absolutely. Given that a program has contributed significant time and resources to developing the application, a reapplication seems most prudent. Please note, however, that a program may need more time to "put pieces in place" that will help the application to be more successful in the future. The final decisions about reapplying in the following year rest with the applicant.

If a program 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 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 designation program and fees need to be collected to cover those costs.

If a program is unable to complete the process, will a refund be given?
No, the NLN has invested resources to implement the designation program based on projected program costs related to processing applications, selecting reviewers, maintaining records, and carrying out other aspects of the program. These costs are incurred regardless of whether 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 review panel, and they are invited to contact the NLN for clarification of any of those points.

What kind of feedback can a program expect if it fails to receive designation?
If the applicant is not successful in application for designation, the program 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 review panel as new designations; continuation of designation is not automatic.

What is different about continuing designation?

- 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.
- During the last year of the designation, recipients are encouraged to reapply for continued designation. Continuing designations are granted for 5-years (see subsequent continuing designations below).
  - A recipient may apply for continuing designation up to 1 year after their previous designation has expired. If 2 years have passed, the application will be considered as a new application.
- Submit the same intent to apply application form but indicate that the program is pursuing continuing designation. The online form is due by November 30 and is free to file.
- The final application is due April 17, and must address current criteria with a focus on what has been done to sustain excellence and continually improve the environment during the 5-year designation period.
- Final application fee for the FIRST continuing designation is $1,500. The fee is due by April 17, along with the final application.

Procedure for SUBSEQUENT Continuing Designations

After a second 5-year designation, a school may apply for continued designation; the subsequent continuing designations are granted for 5 years.

- 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 November 30.
- Final application fee is $2,500. The final application is due April 17th.

Frequently Asked Questions about Continuing Designation

How does continuing designation differ from the initial designation?
Continuing designation is an award given to a previous designate using the same application and rigorous review process. The difference is in the fees: those applying for a second designation receive discounted application fees.

Does the Program of Excellence review panel have access to a program'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.

How much information is needed for each criterion?
It is the responsibility of the applicant to provide convincing evidence that all criteria 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 designation?
Designation including use of the Program of Excellence logo can only be used by currently designated Programs of Excellence organizations. If a program chooses not to reapply for designation or is unsuccessful in their bid for continuing designation, they are no longer eligible to use the designation or specially designed logo.

May we contact other Programs of Excellence-designees for advice?
YES, the NLN highly recommends that organizations applying for the 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.

What kind of support is expected from the NLN regarding this process?
For questions related to the overall Programs of Excellence program, or any procedural matters, please contact the NLN's recognition program manager for clarification and assistance: membership@nln.org.