

**The Continuing Competence
Program for
Psychologists Practicing in
Nova Scotia**

A Guide for Participants

Guide Revised April 2017

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Introduction to the Continuing Competence Program

A Continuing Competence Program is designed to promote safe, ethical and competent practice by ensuring that psychologists at all stages of their careers engage in a learning process that encourages ongoing professional development both in terms of maintaining competencies and acquiring new competencies as required by the dynamic nature of the profession.

Section II.9 of the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists state that:

“In adhering to the Principle of Responsible Caring, psychologists would: Keep themselves up to date with a broad range of relevant knowledge, research methods, and techniques, and their impact on persons and society, through the reading of relevant literature, peer consultation, and continuing education activities, in order that their service or research activities and conclusions will benefit and not harm others.”

At both the provincial and federal level, regulatory bodies in Canada are increasingly expected to be able to demonstrate that their registrants not only attain competence but maintain competence. The NSBEP is required to be accountable to the public and to be able to openly demonstrate that the necessary programs are in place to ensure that all psychologists can demonstrate, throughout their careers, their ability to deliver client services in a manner that is consistent with the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists and the standards of the profession. In addition, the psychology regulatory bodies in Canada have identified five core competency areas that are essential to the responsible and ethical practice of psychology. Responsible practice involves the ability to integrate and apply these competencies in the designated role and setting in which the psychologist practices. Therefore, the NSBEP Continuing Competence Program is based on a framework that includes these core competencies.

The dual objectives of the Continuing Competence Program developed by NSBEP are to provide a framework to assist individual practitioners to address the ongoing challenge of maintaining competence, while also giving the Board a mechanism to support and ensure practitioners maintain competence.

The development of the Board’s Continuing Competence Program was informed by the continuing competency program of the New Zealand Psychologists Board, consultation with the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia, a review of other continuing competency programs for psychologists in Canada, reference to the Report of the ASPPB Task Force on Maintenance of Competence and Licensure (October 2010) and a six month trial of the planned program. The program will continue to be refined annually based on feedback from the psychology community.

1. Standards of Practice.

Psychologists in Nova Scotia must look to the Standards of Practice for the profession in assessing competence in their designated role and setting. The Standards provide guidance to help psychologists determine acceptable practice. In addition to the Standards, the psychologist is expected to be aware of position statements and specific practice guidelines related to their designated role and practice setting. The Board has a combined document that includes the standards, reference to the code of ethics and other applicable legislation and guidelines, which is available via the following URL: http://www.nsbep.org/downloads/Binder_Standards_Legislation_Guidelines.pdf

Psychologists in Nova Scotia must be able to demonstrate that they have attained and maintain competence in the following five Core Competence Areas (see the outline of Core Competencies in the Section containing the Forms):

- Assessment and Evaluation
- Intervention
- Research
- Ethics and Standards
- Interpersonal Relationships

2. What is Competence?

Competence involves the complex interaction of four major components: knowledge, skills, judgment, and diligence.

Knowledge involves having absorbed and understood a body of information sufficiently well to then understand and conceptualize the range of professional issues that one can reasonably expect to encounter. Knowledge is a necessary, but not sufficient foundation for competence.

Skill is the ability to effectively apply knowledge in actual practice.

Judgment involves knowing when to apply which skills, and under what circumstances. It includes self-reflection on and awareness of one's own values, experiences, attitudes, and social context, and how these may influence actions and perceived meaning. Good judgment increases the likelihood that choices made will be beneficial for the individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations with which psychologists work.

Diligence requires the consistent application of knowledge, skills, and judgment in one's professional activities and taking care to give priority to the clients' needs. Diligence also encompasses striving to give the best service to each and every client.

3. What is Continuing Competence?

Continuing competence is a process that involves maintaining the ability to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment and diligence required to practice responsibly and ethically on an ongoing basis by linking life-long learning to the Core Competencies, Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice for the profession.

A continuing competence program provides psychologists with a framework for maintaining and acquiring competence throughout their professional life-span. The program involves opportunities for self reflection, identification of learning needs and opportunities, and the application of learning to practice.. It is an active process of continual learning and review which promotes ongoing professional growth.

4. Who should participate in the Continuing Competence Program?

Psychologists on the Candidate Register are considered to be engaged in developing and refining their competencies during the supervision period. They are required, in collaboration with their supervisor, to develop Goals of Supervision for all five Core Competencies. Supervisors will monitor and evaluate the Candidate's progress in acquiring competencies throughout the supervision process. A Candidate must be rated as "ready for independent practice" in all areas of competence before an oral examination can be requested.

Psychologists (Candidate Register) will complete the Practice Profile annually as part of the renewal of registration. A Candidate is obligated to begin participating in the Continuing Competence program in the year after being transferred to the Register of Psychologists.

All psychologists on the active Register of Psychologists (Full Registration, Academic Register) must participate in the Continuing Competence Program.

5. Overview of the Continuing Competence Program.

NSBEP believes that the most effective program for continuing competence will allow the registered psychologist to develop learning objectives based on individual needs and learning style. Such a plan would be individually tailored to:

- fit the designated role and setting within which the psychologist practices
- reflect the psychologist's stage of professional development

As such the NSBEP Continuing Competence Program provides registered psychologists in Nova Scotia with a framework for meeting competency requirements without mandating for the psychologist the specific details of their learning plan.

This framework involves guidelines for:

- completing a Practice Profile
- identifying Learning Objectives related to the Core Competencies
- documenting Learning Activities and time devoted to learning

Minimum requirements are provided and it is expected that all registered psychologists in Nova Scotia will meet or exceed them.

Psychologists will be required to complete or update their Practice Profile as part of the annual registration process. It is expected that completing the Practice Profile will assist registrants to reflect on the nature of their current practice and thereby identify relevant learning objectives relative to the five Core Competencies. Psychologists have the option of using Form 1 (see the section containing the forms) to assist in establishing learning objectives and identifying relevant Learning Activities to meet those objectives. However, you are no longer required to review Form 1 with another psychologist or to submit it to the Board if you are selected for an audit of compliance with the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program.

Only the Practice Profile needs to be submitted to the Board each year. As part of the annual renewal of registration, however, all registered psychologists must attest that they are following the Continuing Competency Program. Psychologists are required to document and retain their identified learning objectives, a record of their learning activities and the required documentation for each learning activity being claimed..

Continuing competence activities are to be documented as evidence of the psychologist's efforts to maintain competence. It is expected that these activities can be related directly to the learning objectives that have been identified.. It is understood that there will be a balance between opportunistic and planned learning activities for most psychologists.

6. Guiding Principles.

A continuing competence program must be broad enough and flexible enough to allow psychologists to choose competency activities that directly relate to areas identified for professional development. A competency program must be mindful of the considerable diversity in the profession with respect to area of practice, population and setting and be flexible enough to allow for the development of highly individualized learning plans.

A continuing competency program must be meaningful for psychologists at every stage of their professional development from early through to late-career psychologists and must provide for relevant and accessible learning experiences regardless of area of practice or availability of learning resources in the psychologists physical location. As such, a continuing competency plan based only on continuing education credits is too restrictive.

As a health professional, a psychologist bears the ultimate responsibility both for maintaining and for demonstrating professional competence to practice, as guided by the

Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists and the professional standards and guidelines adopted by NSBEP.

Lifelong continuous learning and improvement is essential to the professional psychologist. Self-reflection, self-assessment, and evaluation are intrinsic to the psychologist's role, both for quality assurance and for professional self-care. There is also a need to keep current with evolving fields of knowledge as the psychology discipline moves forward.

7. Goals

- To support psychologists in developing meaningful and relevant learning objectives
- To ensure the public that all psychologists have a current plan for maintaining competence.
- To work towards developing increasingly meaningful methods of assessing competence.
- To provide a flexible program that will readily allow for changes and updates as knowledge about competence and measurement of competence changes and grows

8. Basic Elements of the Continuing Competence Program.

Kaslow et al., 2007 notes that psychology must establish a culture that values self-assessment and reflective practice. While not all practitioners have the same level of self-awareness and/or the same abilities for self-assessment and self-reflection, NSBEP supports the position that a practice review and a process of self-assessment and self-reflection are, nonetheless, essential to the development of a useful and meaningful learning plan.

It is expected that aspects of the NSBEP Continuing Competence Program will evolve as self-assessment skills are developed and refined and as our knowledge with respect to measuring competence increases. The program is thus designed in a manner that encourages further development of the program, within the context of the identified guiding principles.

Step 1: Practice Profile:

Completing a Practice Profile is the first step in the NSBEP Continuing Competency Program. Obviously, in order to choose the most relevant and meaningful continuing competency activities, one must first have systematically reviewed his/her current practice in a self-reflective manner.

NSBEP provides a form to be used to document the Practice Profile information (see the section on forms for more information). Part A asks about your employment status and setting(s). Please indicate whether your employment status is full or part time. Those working part time please indicate how many hours per week. Then check the applicable practice setting (s) in which you are employed.

Part B of the Psychological Practice Profile asks you to check the **areas** of your psychological practice and estimate **the percentage of time you spend working in each area**. For instance, if you spend four days per week engaged in clinical work and one day per week doing research, you would check #1, Clinical, and #5, Research. You would then write in 80% for Clinical and 20% for Research. The total percentage of time should add up to 100%.

Part C of the Psychological Practice Profile asks you to indicate the **activities and services** you provide within the areas of practice indicated in Part B. For instance, if your clinical work involves Consultation, Assessment/Evaluation, and Intervention/Treatment with Adults you would enter #1 in the appropriate boxes for Adults. Likewise, if your research was with adults, you would enter #5 in the box corresponding to Research and Adults.

The Practice Profile form **must** be submitted as part of your annual renewal of registration with NSBEP.

Step 2: Self-Assessment

This is the second step in the NSBEP Continuing Competency Program. The purpose of the Self-Assessment is to develop an overview of your current practice and thereby identify areas that may require maintenance or further development. It can also serve as an opportunity to identify new or emerging practice activities or populations..

You begin the Self-Assessment by reviewing your Practice Profile, noting in particular any new or emerging areas of activity. You should then consider each identified area of practice against the five Core Competencies of the profession (see the section on forms for more information). Optimally your Self-Assessment should include consideration of any particular challenges or ethical issues associated with each of your areas of practice. You should give any new areas of practice extra scrutiny.

You may find that asking yourself questions like the following can further guide your Self-Assessment. These questions are only offered as examples and are not intended to be exhaustive.

Assessment and Evaluation:

- Has the assessment and evaluation component of my practice changed?
- Do I understand the prescribed use and application of the tests and assessment techniques I use?

- Would I benefit from reviewing the relative strengths and limitations of these assessment methods?
- Are there any new or revised assessment instruments that I would like to learn more about?

Intervention:

- Has the intervention component of my practice changed?
- What intervention models, tools, techniques etc., do I currently employ?
- Are there any new evidence-based intervention techniques that I would like to learn more about?
- Would I benefit from arranging for supervision for new intervention activities that I have identified?
- How do I assess client progress? What do I do when there is a lack of progress?

Research:

- Do I remain current with respect to research in my area of practice?
- Am I familiar with the outcome data related to the interventions I use in my practice?
- Is my practice consistent with the best evidence available?
- What areas of knowledge are particularly relevant to my work?
- Are there areas of research or theory relevant to my practice that I need to brush up on?

Ethics and Standards:

- Is my informed consent process sufficient to ensure my clients fully understand the limits of confidentiality?
- Do I have a good working knowledge of legislation, standards, codes, and guidelines relevant to my areas of practice?
- Am I sufficiently familiar with the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists?
- What ethical challenges have I encountered this year? Am I satisfied with how I dealt with these challenges?
- Do my records contain all of the necessary information required in Principle 7 of the Standards of Professional Practice?

Interpersonal Relationships:

- Can I improve my ways of contributing to the multidisciplinary team?
- Do I work with any diverse groups? Do I need to strengthen my cultural competence?
- Am I able to establish and maintain constructive working relationships with my colleagues?
- Am I satisfied with my communication skills?

- Would I benefit from learning more about the factors that influence the professional relationship (e.g. boundary issues)?

Step 3: Set Learning Objectives

Based on the outcome of your Self-Assessment, identify and record one or more objectives for development (Form 2).

Optimally, your objectives should be specific and attainable. You may, however, have some that are less specific and that are stated in higher level or abstract terms. It is essential that your learning objectives are meaningful to you. Psychologists are expected to establish learning objectives in at least 3 of the Core Competency areas each year. Registrants are encouraged to establish learning objectives for all 5 Core Competency areas across a three-year period.

Record your objectives for future reference and for audit purposes (visit the [continuing competence section of the NSBEP website for example recording forms](#)).

It is possible that additional objectives are identified as professional challenges or learning opportunities arise during the year. These can be added to your learning plan.

Step 4: Develop a Learning Plan

Once your learning objectives are formulated, you should develop a learning plan which will enable you to meet them. You are free to choose from among different continuing learning activities. These activities may include a range of professional activities, academic activities, continuing education activities, or the work involved in seeking board certification (e.g. American Board of Professional Psychology). The majority of the activities chosen should be logically related to the learning objectives that you have identified. See Form 2 for a list of learning activities, the value of the credits assigned to each activity, and the maximum number of credits allowed for each activity in a given year. Record the learning activities associated with each objective on Form 2 as these are completed during the year. Enter the credits you are claiming toward the Continuing Competency requirements. Sum the total credit achieved at year end.

The table included with Form 2 indicates the maximum number of credits that are allowed for each learning activity in a given year. You must achieve a **minimum of 20 continuing competence credits each year**.

Document your plan both for your own purposes and for possible audit (see the [continuing competence section of the NSBEP website for example recording forms](#)).

Step 5: Record activities undertaken towards your Learning Objectives

Record any learning activities undertaken toward your learning objectives and hours spent as these are completed (Form 2) Enter the credits you are claiming toward the Continuing Competence Program requirements. Where appropriate, you should retain the required documentation for each activity being claimed.

The annual renewal of registration naturally leads you to update your Practice Profile and repeat your Self-Assessment to start a new year, making your Continuing Competence Program a cyclical process.

Declaration of Competence

You are required to participate in the NSBEP Continuing Competence Program as part of your ongoing efforts to maintain your competence to practice. As part of your annual renewal of registration, you will be required to declare that in the past year you have met the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program. Your statutory declaration includes statement that:

- You have / have not met the requirements of the Board's prescribed Continuing Competence Program during the previous year, and
- You believe to the best of your knowledge that you are competent to practice in accordance with your scope(s) of practice.

Retention of Records for the Continuing Competence Program

You should record brief notes on all Continuing Competence Program activities undertaken. A balance should be sought between administratively burdensome record-keeping versus sufficient detail to allow a clear record for audit. [Recording forms](#) are offered as an example of streamlined ways of keeping your Continuing Competence Program records.

Records should be retained for a minimum of five years for audit purposes. Psychologists audited in future years may be requested to supply retrospective records as well as those pertaining to the current year.

10. Audit of Compliance with the requirements of the Continuing Competence Program

Each year approximately 10% of registered psychologists will be randomly selected to be audited by the Board. The names of those to be audited will be drawn in late January each year. Random selection means that those selected for an audit in one year have the same chance as others of being selected for audit in subsequent years.

The audit process

1. If you are selected for an audit, notification will be sent to you by email and regular mail on February 1st of the year. (Note: it is your responsibility to ensure that the Board has your current email address and mailing address)
2. You will be required to submit your Continuing Competence Program records by February 28th.
3. An extension to submit the required information may be granted (where reasonably justified).
4. If the Board has concerns regarding the adequacy of the Continuing Competence Program records submitted, they may request additional information.
5. The Board anticipates that all audits will be complete and written notification of the outcome of the audit will normally be sent by May 15th each year.
6. If you have only partially met the requirements of the Continuing Competency Program, the Board may provide feedback and guidance, may ask for further submissions, and may recommend that a Condition be placed on your registration until you have demonstrated that you are on track for the following year. In such instances, the Board may decide to audit you again the following year to ensure you are meeting program requirements.
7. In the unlikely event that a psychologist is unable or unwilling to provide the required documentation or otherwise declines to cooperate with the Continuing Competency Program audit, the Board may decide that the psychologist should be suspended for failing to comply with a registration requirement.

Exemptions from participation

You may apply at any time for exemption from participation in the Continuing Competence Program for a period of one year by writing to the Board, if you will not be practicing for more than 6 (continuous) months during that year. Exemptions may also be granted on compassionate grounds, such as (but not limited to) long-term incapacitating illness, serious illness of a close family member, study leave or parental leave.

What is expected in the audit?

When making your submission, please submit copies of your documentation so that you retain the original record. If your submission does not contain copies, please let us know, so that we can return the originals. Otherwise, the materials will be shredded at the conclusion of the review process.

The Board's aim is that all active psychologists engage in a meaningful process of self-reflective review and an ongoing self-directed learning process. The Board has intentionally avoided prescribing the specific content of each practitioner's professional development plan. The audit will confirm that the required documentation has been submitted and that the psychologist has achieved the minimum number of required learning credits for the year.

What you can expect from the audit

The Board plans to have all reviews completed and results sent by May 15th each year. Audit results will be reported as 'requirements met', or 'requirements not met'. The Board may also provide details of what further steps that need to be taken, if required, to ensure the psychologist gets back on track with his /her participation in the Continuing Competence Program.

The Board is committed to obtaining feedback from registrants about the Continuing Competence Program and the audit process. Consequently, it is expected that the program and its requirements will continue to evolve over time.

The responsible psychologist makes the commitment to remain current in knowledge and skills. NSBEP is mindful of the complex and dynamic nature of the profession. The psychological knowledge base is constantly evolving and in this regard being absolutely current can be considered an ideal or goal. In following a competency program and striving towards this ideal, the psychologist is acting in an ethical and responsible manner.

While a psychologist may be subject to discipline for failing to comply with the mandated requirements of the Continuing Competence Program, a psychologist will not be referred to discipline as a result of documentation submitted as part of the continuing competence program. Should concerns regarding competency arise, the psychologist will be required to work collaboratively with the Board towards a resolution of such concerns.

The Forms

The subsequent forms are part of the Continuing Competence Program:

Form 1 - Self-Assessment & Learning Objectives (optional)

Form 2 - Learning Objectives & Year End Review with Credit Values & Activities

Form 3 - Outline of Core Competencies (reference document)

Form 4 - Psychological Practice Profile (submitted at time of registration renewal)

Electronic copies of all Continuing Competence forms can be downloaded from the Board's website. Cells can then be expanded as necessary to accommodate your information. To download the forms please visit the following URL.

<http://www.nsbep.org/information-for-registrants/continuing-competence/>