



**CO L O R A D O**

**Department of  
Regulatory Agencies**

Division of Professions and Occupations

Continuing Professional Competency Program Manual

**Social Workers**

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# Social Worker Continuing Professional Competency Requirements

## What is Continuing Professional Competency?

Continuing Professional Competency (CPC) is defined as “the ongoing ability of a licensee to learn, integrate, and apply the knowledge, skill, and judgment to practice as a licensed clinical social worker or as a licensed social worker, as applicable, according to generally accepted industry standards and professional ethical standards in a designated role and setting.”

## Who is required to comply with continuing competency requirements?

All licensed clinical social workers and licensed social workers in Active status are required to satisfy CPC requirements in order to renew or reinstate a license to practice as a licensed clinical social workers or as a licensed social workers in Colorado, regardless of current employment status or number of hours worked.

## How do I comply with continuing competency requirements?

There are three ways to comply:

1. The State Board of Social Work Examiners’ (Board) Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program.
2. **Deem Status:** If you participated in the formalized professional development program of a Colorado state department and that program’s requirements meet the definition of CPC, you may qualify for Deem Status.
3. **Military Exemption:** If you were called to federally-funded active duty for more than 120 days for the purpose of serving in a war, emergency or contingency, you may be eligible for an exemption from CPC requirements.

## Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program Steps

If you cannot claim **Deem Status** or do not qualify for a **Military Exemption**, you must participate in the Board’s CPD Program. The program consists of the following steps:

1. Complete the Professional Practice Rubric;
2. Create a Learning Plan;
3. Execute the Learning Plan. Accrual of **forty (40) Professional Development Hours (PDH)** through the Professional Development Activities (PDA) is **required**; and
4. Document the completed Professional Development Hours (PDH).

## Step 1: Complete the Professional Practice Rubric

Self-reflection upon your practice is required to identify learning opportunities. To assist in this self-reflection, the Board developed the [Professional Practice Rubric](#), which identifies the foundational knowledge areas of the profession according to one's professional role. Reflecting on your practice with honesty and sincerity while completing this tool will assist in the realization of potential areas for improvement and growth. Results from the Rubric will guide you in creating useful learning goals to achieve during the renewal cycle. Learning goals that are set as a result of completing the Rubric will guide which Professional Development Activities (PDA) are completed to meet CPD requirements. Completed Rubrics will not be provided to the Board during an audit.

The [Professional Practice Rubric](#) is available online at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC). This document can be completed as a fill-in document by saving it to your computer and entering the information onto it, or it can be printed from the website and saved in paper format. Either way, a completed copy should be retained to use as a resource during the renewal cycle.

## Step 2: Create a Learning Plan

In accordance with Colorado statute, all licensed clinical social workers and licensed social workers participating in the CPD program are required to develop and complete an official [Learning Plan](#). Learning Plan forms are available at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC).

Learning Plans are to be used as a tool to document professional learning goals and demonstrate completion of required Professional Development Hours (PDH). They should be created at the beginning of each renewal cycle, consist of learning goals that develop new skills or improve upon existing skills, and allow time for completion of all learning goals by the end of each cycle.

[The Learning Plan may be changed throughout the renewal cycle, but it must be final upon the renewal of a license.](#)

Learning goals documented on the Learning Plan may be satisfied by the completion of Professional Development Activities (PDA). Board-approved PDA are outlined in detail below, or can be found at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC).

Completed Learning Plans are subject to inspection upon an audit of completion.

### Step 3: Execute the Learning Plan

After creating a Learning Plan, complete the activities that were planned to meet established learning goals. Activities must be completed during the 2-year renewal cycle that immediately precedes the renewal of a license. Time spent commuting, traveling, scheduling or planning your activities does **not** count towards the 40 PDH required for each renewal cycle.

### Professional Development Hours (PDH)

Professional Development Hours are the units of measurement of active learning used to accrue credit in the CPD Program. One PDH is equivalent to one clock hour (60 minutes).

Document on the Learning Plan form the number of completed PDH and in which PDA category each PDH was completed.

For licensees who obtain their license during the renewal cycle, PDH requirements will be prorated at 1.66 hours per month, including the month the license is issued through the month the license expires.

#### Rules for Accruing PDH:

- You must accrue at least 40 PDH during each 2-year renewal cycle.
- Coursework provided by an accredited educational institution or a nationally or regionally recognized professional organization as a single Professional Development Activity may be credited hour for hour for up to the full 40 hour PDH requirement each renewal cycle.
- Other than coursework, no more than 20 PDH will be credited in a single PDA category during a 2-year renewal cycle.
- A maximum of five (5) hours can be carried from the last renewal cycle to the next cycle, if the hours were earned within six (6) months of the renewal cycle and are in excess of the required 40 hours.
- PDH must develop your professional skill and be directly relevant to your competence in social work, the behavioral health field, and your learning goals.
- Unless otherwise noted, PDH cannot be accrued for activities that fulfill duties for your primary role or job description.
- The Board does not pre-approve or accredit specific educational providers or programs.

## Professional Development Activities (PDA) Categories

Professional Development Activities (PDA) are defined as Board approved learning activities undertaken for the purpose of continuing professional development, pursuant to Board Rule. Although a total of 40 PDH are required, with the exception of coursework, no more than 20 PDH in a single PDA category will be credited each renewal cycle. Documentation of completed activities must be retained for at least five (5) years.

**A quick reference for all PDA may be found at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC).**

### Volunteer Service

Volunteer service is defined as service provided at no charge and cannot be a part of job duties or requirements. You cannot be paid for volunteer service being used as PDH. The volunteer service must rely on professional knowledge and skills and be relevant to the social work field.

Examples of volunteer activities include, but are not limited to:

- Volunteering services through a community clinic or non-profit organization, e.g. pro bono, hospice, shelters, health fairs, humanitarian aid groups, etc.
- Responding to a crisis situation at a school, church or as a result of a natural disaster.
- Serving on a Board of Directors—must be related to your professional knowledge and skills and cannot be a part of job duties. **Credit will not be given for serving on a federal, state or municipal board or commission.**

Examples of volunteer activities that will NOT be accepted include, but are not limited to:

- Serving on a church board or board of school governors, etc.
- Boy Scout or Girl Scout Leader (or similar organization)
- Coaching an examination candidate
- Making crafts for fund raising ventures or activities that do not use professional skill or judgement
- Canvassing neighborhoods to collect charitable donations or signatures for petitions
- Charity or volunteer work not involving your professional skill

### Documentation Required:

A verifiable document, such as a letter, issued by the organization or agency and signed by an individual who is able to confirm the volunteer service was completed. The letter must be signed by someone other than the licensee. The document should be on the organization or agency letterhead and must include the name of the licensee, number of volunteer hours completed, dates of volunteer service, description of service provided, etc.

## Consultation

Consultation is a best practice, which constitutes a voluntary relationship between professionals of relatively equal expertise or status wherein the consultant offers his/her professional expertise regarding an individual case or problem for use by the consultee as he/she deems appropriate in his/her professional judgment. Consultation groups must be led by a qualified consultant. Consultation may be provided for individual cases or programs.

PDH may be accrued for either individual or small group consultation. Credit can be earned if consultation is part of work duties.

### Documentation Required:

Consultants and consultees should retain documentation prepared by the consultant that meets the following requirements:

- Consultants should draft an attestation specifying the hours, date or date range, total number of PDH earned, subject area, and name (of the program or individual) for whom the service was provided, etc. The attestation must be signed by both the consultant and consultee.
- Consultee should request a letter from their consultant.

## Supervision

Supervision PDH may be accrued for providing clinical supervision in accordance with Board Rule. Clinical supervision for the purpose of obtaining licensure will qualify for credit. PDH cannot be accrued for activities that fulfill duties for your **primary** role or job description.

### Documentation Required:

Licensees accruing PDH for clinical supervision should provide official documentation in accordance with Board Rule. Documentation must contain the supervisor and protégé (or supervisee) names and signatures, detailed dates of supervision and total number of supervised hours completed (PDH earned).

Documentation is required for every supervision relationship for which you wish to accrue PDH.

## Presenting

PDH may be accrued for preparing and delivering presentations related to one's professional skills or experiences. PDH can be accrued for only the first delivery of a presentation.

PDH may be accrued for both preparation and delivery of a presentation related to a licensee's professional skill and experience. Credit will be given at a 2:1 ratio when the licensee both prepares and delivers a presentation. This means for every hour spent preparing for and delivering the presentation, two (2) PDH will be earned. Only one (1) PDH for every hour will be earned if the licensee does not prepare a presentation and only presents the material.

PDH may be accrued for serving as the Primary or Co-Presenter so long as it is not the licensee's primary role and job responsibility. Presentations must be related to the licensee's practice area, professional knowledge or skill and experience and be relevant to the field of social work.

Examples of presentations include, but are not limited to:

- State, national or international workshops, seminars or conferences
- In-service training or instruction
- Guest lecturing

Documentation Required:

A verifiable document from the organization or agency for which the presentation was conducted. If such a document is not available, a verifiable copy of the program listing can be provided. The presenter's name, date, time-including duration of the presentation, and title of the presentation must be indicated on the letter (or program listing), as well as evidence that the presentation is relevant to the licensee's practice area, professional knowledge or skill and experience.

## Coursework

PDH may be accrued for many types of coursework including academic courses, continuing education, seminars, and conferences. Coursework must be provided by an accredited educational institution or a nationally- or regionally-recognized professional organization. Coursework should expand or refine your professional skill and experience.

**All 40 PDH may be earned in the Coursework PDA category.**

Documentation Required:

Verifiable evidence issued by the organization/school indicating the completion of a course, e.g. certificate of completion, transcript, letter from the provider, etc. The documentation must include the participant's name, the name of the course, date, content, speaker/instructor, number of hours, etc.



## **Publication**

Publishing activities are those undertaken as an author or co-author to design/implement research, draft, edit and submit material for publication. It is not necessary for your work to have been published in order to accrue PDH for the publication activity. It is recommended that publication activities be peer reviewed before using as PDH. PDH may also be accrued for writing grant applications. PDH earned in this category must enhance, improve or maintain your competence as a marriage and family therapist but cannot be part of your primary role or job responsibility.

Examples of publishing activities include, but are not limited to:

- Professional newsletters or articles
- Newspaper articles
- Professional books
- Writing content for professional websites/electronic media
- Professional journal submissions
- Research design and implementation\*
- Information drafting for the purpose of publication

\*You may not accrue PDH for research projects that are a part of your primary role. If you work in Research, please choose a different learning strategy.

Credit will not be granted for blogs, social media, etc.

Documentation Required:

Verifiable documentation is required for every publication or project that you wish to accrue PDH. Examples of documentation include, but are not limited to:

- A copy of the publication (do not send if lengthy), article, chapter, etc.
- A copy of the book cover or cover page showing the name of the licensee
- A confirmation letter from the publisher or funding agency (confirming receipt of submission, intent to publish, etc.)
- Grant funding number

## **Independent Learning**

Independent Learning is a structured learning experience that takes place outside of traditional learning environments and can take many forms. Independent Learning should represent high quality activities/opportunities and must rely on professional knowledge and skills and be relevant to the social work field.

Independent Learning includes professional development strategies such as:

- Reading journals, text books, continuing education articles and professionally relevant literature
- Conducting a self-study series
- Curricula development
- Study Groups, Learning Communities, Peer Consultation Groups, Book/Journal Club

## Documentation Required:

Complete and retain the [Independent Learning Form](https://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC) available at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](https://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC). If undertaking more than one Independent Learning topic, complete a separate form for each topic or activity. The Independent Learning Form requires a summary of the activity completed, what was learned and a summary of how the information learned is relevant to your learning goal(s) and professional practice.

### Step 4: Documentation

Document your PDH according to the requirements described in this manual or in the quick reference [PDA Chart](#). Documentation must be kept for a period of five (5) years from the license expiration date of the renewal cycle for which PDH was accrued. **Do not send any documentation to DORA unless specifically requested.**

Additional forms to be saved with the documentation of completed activities, as applicable, include the Learning Plan form and the Independent Learning Form. These forms can be completed as fill-in documents by saving them to your computer and entering the information onto them, or they can be printed from the website and saved in paper format.

All forms can be found online at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](https://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC).

### Multi-Licensed Professionals

Licensees holding two (2) mental health licenses are granted an exemption of 40 hours. This means if you are dually licensed, you need to accrue a total of 40 PDH each two-year renewal cycle. Licensees holding three (3) licenses are granted an exemption of 80 hours. This means if you are triply licensed, you need to accrue a total of 40 PDH. **You do not need to accrue 40 hours per license.**

For example: A licensee holds an Active LSW or LCSW license and is also licensed as an LPC. They only need to accrue 40 hours to renew their LSW/LCSW and LPC licenses. They must still participate in the respective Professional Practice Surveys/Rubrics and maintain a learning plan for each certificate or license. The separate learning plans may log the same activities and hours.

Do not submit a formal request for a dual or triple license exemption, Board Rule extends the exemption to all licensees who hold more than one license and participate in the CPD program.

## Deem Status

Deem Status is one way for licensees to comply with CPC requirements. You may qualify for Deem Status if you meet the formalized professional development requirements of a Colorado state department, and those requirements meet the state's definition of continuing professional competency. The intent of Deem Status is to eliminate the duplication of professional development efforts by licensees.

Deem Status commonly occurs through employment with a Colorado state department or through employment with an agency that holds a contract with a Colorado state department. Licensees should contact their HR department or training coordinator if they are unsure whether or not they qualify for Deem Status through their employer.

You likely qualify for Deem Status if you can answer "yes" to the following questions:

- Did you participate in a Colorado state agency's formalized professional development program for the purpose of maintaining or enhancing your practice as an addiction counselor?
- Did you participate in the program during the 2-year renewal cycle that immediately precedes the renewal of your DORA license?

It is incumbent on the licensee to determine if they qualify. Licensees claiming Deem Status are subject to an audit of compliance.

A licensee claiming Deem Status may have their employer sign the [Deem Status Verification Letter](#). This letter template is a helpful tool designed to aid social workers and their employers in documenting a specific social worker's Deem Status. **Completion of this letter is NOT REQUIRED for a social worker to claim Deem Status.** Verification letters should be retained for a period of five (5) years. The letter is available for download at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC).

## Military Exemptions

A Military Exemption is one way to comply with continuing professional competence requirements. A Military Exemption must be pre-approved by the Division Professions and Occupations (DPO).

Pursuant to Colorado statute, a licensee who has been called to federally-funded active duty for at least 120 days for the purpose of serving in a war, emergency or contingency may be eligible to receive an exemption from the continuing professional competency requirements for the renewal of a license. The time frame of a renewal cycle is defined as the period from six (6) weeks prior to the expiration date of the current license through 60 days following the expiration date. The qualified service period must fall within the defined renewal period or up to six (6) months prior to the renewal period.

A licensee seeking a Military Exemption from licensing fees and continuing professional competence requirements must submit a request in writing following the procedure found on DPO's website at [dpo.colorado.gov/Military/FeeWaiver](http://dpo.colorado.gov/Military/FeeWaiver). Questions regarding military exemptions can be emailed to [dora\\_dpo\\_licensing@state.co.us](mailto:dora_dpo_licensing@state.co.us).

## Audit of Compliance

Audits of compliance will be conducted each renewal cycle. All licensees who participate in the CPD Program and Deem Status can be audited. Do not send documentation of your compliance unless you receive a notice of audit. **Any documentation received that was not specifically requested will not be retained by the CC Program and will NOT be returned to you.**

A licensee will be notified by email if they have been selected for an audit of compliance. Addresses of record and email addresses must be kept current with DPO. Instructions for updating an address can be found at [dpo.colorado.gov](http://dpo.colorado.gov).

## Audit Documentation

### For Licensees participating in the CPD Program:

- A signed and completed Learning Plan Form—the completed form must contain your learning goals and list the PDH completed in each PDA category. The form is available on the Board's CPC webpage at [dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC](http://dpo.colorado.gov/SocialWork/CPC); AND
- Documentation of all 40 PDH listed on your Learning Plan Form. Documentation requirements can be found in the PDA Chart and the PDA Categories section of this manual. Include the following as applicable: Independent Learning Forms.

The CPD Program allows substantial flexibility to determine the course and subject matter of learning; however, licensees are expected to comply with Board requirements. In an audit, you may be asked to defend your PDH, PDA and Learning Plan, especially if activities appear to be outside the normal scope of requirements.

### For Licensees Participating by Deem Status:

- Verifiable proof that the Colorado State Department's continuing competency program, or formalized requirements, meet the definition of continuing professional competency, e.g. letter from supervisor or HR that explains the Colorado State Department's continuing competency requirements, copies of employee manual or contract explaining the State Department's continuing competency requirements, etc., AND
- [Deem Status verification letter](#) signed by the licensee's employer, confirming participation in the program during the renewal cycle for which Deem Status was claimed.