
NLN CNEA Initial Accreditation Policy

POLICY ON GRANTING INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Programs holding NLN CNEA pre-accreditation candidacy status are eligible to apply for initial program accreditation with NLN CNEA. Initial accreditation may be pursued at any time within the three year pre-accreditation candidacy window of opportunity but must be timed so that all steps of the accreditation process, including CNEA Board of Commissioner action, are completed within the three year timeline. It is the responsibility of the chief academic nurse administrator to determine the appropriate time for the program(s) to pursue initial accreditation based upon a program self-assessment which indicates the capacity to demonstrate compliance with the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation.

If the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners determines that the Standards of Accreditation have been met, initial accreditation may be granted for a period of six years with a mid-cycle report due in year three of the period for which initial accreditation has been granted. ***Accreditation of the program becomes effective the date the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners takes final action.***

STEPS FOR SEEKING INITIAL ACCREDITATION

Upon receiving pre-accreditation candidacy status from NLN CNEA, programs may opt to pursue initial accreditation at any time within the three year time frame, known as the window of opportunity. ***The program must allow time to complete the accreditation process in its entirety within the allotted pre-accreditation status three year time period, inclusive of the Board of Commissioners' action on the program's application.***

There are four steps to the process of seeking initial accreditation from NLN CNEA: 1) formal notification of intent to proceed with the accreditation process; 2) submission of the self-study; 3) participation in an on-site program evaluation visit; and 4) the committee review and board decision-making process. It is imperative that all program personnel understand the time frames for pursuing initial accreditation and the final accreditation decision of the Board of Commissioners so that programs do not face gaps between the expiration of the pre-accreditation candidacy and finalization of the initial accreditation process. The NLN CNEA staff is available to provide guidance to facilitate program personnel through this process.

STEP ONE: FORMAL WRITTEN REQUEST

A formal written request is initiated jointly by the chief academic nurse administrator and the institution's chief executive officer and submitted to NLN CNEA indicating intent and commitment to pursue the initial accreditation review process for the programs that have been granted pre-accreditation status, and the desire to schedule an on-site program evaluation visit. Once NLN CNEA staff has received the formal request and the required accreditation fees, the NLN CNEA staff will work with the chief academic nurse administrator in completing the remaining three steps within the three-year period of pre-accreditation candidacy status previously awarded. ***The formal written request must be received by NLN CNEA, typically***

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between six and 12 months prior to the time of scheduling the on-site program evaluation visit.

The following information must accompany the request to initiate the initial review process and establish institution and program eligibility for initial accreditation:

- a. State Board of Nursing (SBN) program current approval/accreditation status and date of last review; and
- b. Governing institution current accreditation status by a U.S. Department of Education recognized regional or national accrediting body and dates of last and next review. In cases where a state board of nursing approved/accredited program resides in a vocational facility, hospital, other healthcare facility, or virtual platforms, the governing institution must provide documentation of accreditation from a regionally or nationally recognized accrediting agency that is consistent with the mission of the governing institution and stated programmatic goals.

Once these requirements have been reviewed by the NLN CNEA staff and found complete, the staff will contact the chief academic nurse administrator to establish the time frame for the completion of actions to be taken for a program to be considered for initial accreditation.

PLEASE NOTE: Any nursing program seeking NLN CNEA accreditation that has previously been denied accreditation or pre-accreditation status by another accrediting agency must provide documentation related to the conditions of the denial and steps taken to rectify the issues which prompted the denial action.

NLN CNEA may not grant initial accreditation to any program that has pending action, including warning or probationary status, against their operational authority within their state or territory or with another nursing accreditation body. The nursing program will be asked to submit documentation to NLN CNEA explaining the current status of the program.

NLN CNEA will not grant initial accreditation to any nursing program situated within a governing institution that has had adverse action taken, or has pending action, including warning or probationary status, against their operational authority within their state or territory or by a regional or national institutional accreditation body.

In accordance with USDE 34 CFR §602.28, if the NLN CNEA acts to grant initial accreditation to a nursing program subject to any of the above noted conditions in this section, the NLN CNEA must provide notice to the USDE within 30 days of its actions. The notice is to include a comprehensive reporting of its rationale for doing so that is consistent with NLN CNEA's published standards of accreditation and explains why the action of the other regulatory or accrediting body does not preclude the NLN CNEA from granting initial accreditation.

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STEP TWO: SELF-STUDY SUBMISSION

The submission of a self-study document that addresses the program(s) ability to meet NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation is required prior to the on-site program evaluation visit. The NLN CNEA Program Review Committee and Board of Commissioners rely on informational accuracy and completeness in the presentation of self-study materials. Information must be relevant and substantive in its ability to support the program's demonstration of meeting the quality indicators designated for each accreditation standard. Reflected in the self-study should be examples of a commitment to the process of continuous quality improvement. The self-study report including supplemental appendices is electronically submitted to the NLN CNEA office no less than six weeks prior to the previously scheduled on-site program evaluation team visit.

STEP THREE: ON-SITE PROGRAM EVALUATION VISIT

An on-site program evaluation visit by an appointed on-site program evaluation team is the third step in the accreditation process. The purpose of the on-site program evaluation visit is to validate and clarify information contained in the self-study, and to provide a concise systematic observational validation of the ability of the program(s) under review to meet the published accreditation standards in place at the time of the visit. On-site program evaluation visits are conducted within a defined biannual time frame (fall and spring).

The chief academic nurse administrator, in consultation with faculty, vets on-site program evaluators prior to the scheduled on-site visit and can request the replacement of a visitor if there is a perceived conflict of interest noted by the chief academic nurse administrator. The number and composition of on-site program evaluators is determined by NLN CNEA based upon the size of the program, number of educational sites, type and number of programs under review, and the integration of distant/distributive education or other innovative educational options.

The length of the on-site program evaluation visit is also determined by the characteristics listed in the previous paragraph. However, visits are normally completed within a three day time span. Exceptions to this common practice are negotiated with the NLN CNEA executive director and the chief academic nurse administrator prior to scheduling the visit.

STEP FOUR: REVIEW AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

The NLN CNEA Program Review Committee meets three times a year to deliberate and recommend accreditation status for programs that have submitted a self-study and hosted an on-site program evaluation visit. Following the on-site program evaluation visit and prior to the scheduled Program Review Committee meeting, a program may submit additional documentation that is factual and believed to be relevant to the published accreditation standards or clarifying factual comments made in response to the on-site program evaluators' team report. As part of their review process, the Program Review Committee will review the self-study, the report from the on-site program evaluators' visit, and any other relevant

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materials pertinent to the program(s)'s request for initial accreditation. The Program Review Committee provides the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners with a written analysis of the program's compliance with the quality indicators for each CNEA standard. This analysis is accompanied by a recommendation regarding initial accreditation and forwarded to the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners for a final action and accreditation decision.

The NLN CNEA Commissioners, after review of documents generated through the review process, are accountable for the final initial accreditation outcome. Each program submitted by the academic nursing unit is judged separately on its merit and final program accreditation decisions may differ based upon each program's ability to meet the NLN CNEA published standards.

When initial accreditation is granted by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners, this accreditation status is effective on the date of the Board of Commissioner's decision.

THIRD-PARTY COMMENTS

NLN CNEA expects the engagement of communities of interest in the accreditation process including faculty, students, administrators, alumnae, and community as an indication of stakeholder commitment to program quality and integrity. As part of the self-study process, the academic nursing unit is required to communicate information regarding the NLN CNEA accreditation process and established timetable to their defined community of interest.

Following the formal written request to pursue initial accreditation and prior to submitting the self-study report, the program is required to publicly post a notice informing students, communities of interest, and other members of the public of their rights and responsibilities to submit comments directly to the NLN CNEA staff regarding the program(s) under review. The program must submit evidence of such posting when submitting the self-study. Third-party comments will be shared with the on-site program evaluation team, and considered by the NLN CNEA Program Review Committee and the Board of Commissioners during the review process. The comments will be shared with the chief academic nursing officer who be given an opportunity to respond to the comments if desired. Third-party comments and a program's response are not part of the self-study but are considered additions to the self-study materials submitted for review. Third-party comments must be received by the NLN CNEA no later 14 days prior to the on-site program evaluation visit.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION DECISIONS

There are four possible initial accreditation decisions that the Board of Commissioners may act to grant to programs.

1. **Grant Initial Accreditation:** The Board of Commissioners may act to grant initial accreditation to a program for a maximum term of six years without a quality improvement conditions report requirement. The program will be expected to submit a mid-cycle report in the third year of the initial accreditation term.

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- 2. Grant Initial Accreditation with Quality Improvement Conditions:** The Board of Commissioners may act to grant initial accreditation with quality improvement conditions noted, accompanied by Board stipulated reporting requirements. This status is granted when the program substantially meets established accreditation standards but the Board identifies one or more quality improvement conditions that may impact its ability to continue to demonstrate compliance with the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation over the full initial six year accreditation term. At the time of the accreditation decision, the Commission will specify the nature, scope, purpose, and timeline (not to exceed 18 months) for the required follow-up quality improvement conditions report that the program must submit. The report must address the quality improvement conditions noted by the Board of Commissioners at the time initial accreditation is granted. The program will submit the quality improvement conditions report to the NLN CNEA Program Review Committee for review and recommendation to the Board of Commissioners. If the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners determines that a focused on-site program evaluation visit is warranted after review of the report, the NLN CNEA will formally notify the chief academic nurse administrator of the need to schedule a focused on-site program evaluation visit. Upon review of the quality improvement conditions report and review of the focused on-site program evaluation visit report, the Board of Commissioners reserves the right to take any additional action to modify the terms of the initial accreditation status. The Board of Commissioners' decision to grant initial accreditation with quality improvement conditions is **not** appealable.
- 3. Defer Initial Accreditation:** The Board of Commissioners may act to defer initial accreditation if the self-study and/or the on-site program evaluation visit provided evidence demonstrating that the program has significant and extenuating challenges in meeting one or more accreditation standards but has plans and mechanisms in place to address program deficits not to exceed a 12 month time frame. During this 12 month time frame the pre-accreditation candidacy status of the program will be extended. The Commissioners may also act to defer an initial accreditation decision if there is question of institutional or nursing unit leadership instability and/or fiscal instability at the time of the on-site program evaluation visit, or if such conditions emerge following the on-site program evaluation visit, but prior to the Board of Commissioner's action on the program's accreditation status. The institution's chief executive officer and the chief academic nurse administrator will be formally notified of the action to defer initial accreditation given the unique circumstances of the program(s) under review.

The formal notification to defer accreditation will include rationale for the deferment along with any noted program concerns that relate directly to the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation. The program in question must submit documented evidence of addressing the issues that prompted the deferral and meeting the CNEA Standards of Accreditation within the stated 12 month time frame. The Board of Commissioners' decision at the end of the deferral time will be to grant or deny accreditation status to the program. The decision by the Board of Commissioners to defer accreditation is not appealable.

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4. **Deny Initial Accreditation:** Initial accreditation may be denied by the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners when a program is determined not to have met the NLN CNEA Standards for Accreditation. Denial of accreditation is a reflection of the presence of one or more substantive deficits that negatively affect the programs' ability to meet NLN CNEA accreditation standards and there is no or minimal evidence of plans or mechanisms in place to effectively address the substantive deficits within a specified time period, as noted in the self-study and confirmed by the on-site program evaluation team. If initial accreditation is denied, a program would be considered eligible to reapply for initial accreditation after a one-year wait period. If the wait period extends beyond the one year then the program will need to pursue pre-accreditation candidacy prior to being considered a candidate for initial accreditation. As an adverse decision, the Board of Commissioner's action to deny accreditation is appealable.

If the program appeals the Boards' decision, and the Appeal Panel upholds the determination of denial of initial accreditation, the official date of accreditation denial is consistent with the date of the Board of Commissioners' action in response to the Appeal Panel decision. Following final action on denial of the program's initial accreditation, the academic nursing unit is responsible for removing all information regarding NLN CNEA pre-accreditation status from its published print and electronic program materials. The NLN CNEA staff removes the program from its digital and printed directories and any other related materials, and notifies all appropriate parties of the decision to deny accreditation. In such cases where an official representative of the program and or its governing organization uses a public forum to take issue with this or any other adverse action, the NLN CNEA Board of Commissioners' chair may publicly address the action taken and the supporting rationale as it relates to the NLN CNEA Standards of Accreditation.

Voluntary Withdrawal from Seeking Initial Accreditation

Programs that voluntarily withdraw from participation in the initial accreditation process may reapply for initial accreditation if the action is taken within the originally granted three year time frame of pre-accreditation candidacy status. If a program desires to pursue initial accreditation beyond this three year time frame, the program must reapply for pre-accreditation candidacy status.

PUBLIC NOTICE OF ACCREDITATION STATUS

For programs receiving initial accreditation status from NLN CNEA the nursing academic unit may use the following public statement:

"The (insert name of the institution and program) is accredited by the National League for Nursing Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (NLN CNEA), located at 2600 Virginia Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20037."