

Collaborative Schools and Programs

What is the CEPH definition of a collaborative program or school?

CEPH defines collaborative schools and programs as sponsored by more than one institution of higher education but operated as a single organizational unit. Only when two or more separate institutions with [separate regional accreditation](#) function as a single organizational entity for the purposes of offering a public health program or school are they eligible to be reviewed for accreditation as a collaborative. If they do not function as one unit, then the institutions must pursue accreditation independently.

What is CEPH's definition of an "institution of higher education?"

An institution of higher education holds its own regional accreditation. Most state systems, for example, have several campuses that each holds separate regional accreditation.

How many collaborative organizational models have CEPH accreditation? Which programs and schools are CEPH-accredited collaborations?

The most current listing of CEPH-accredited collaborations may be found on the [CEPH website](#).

Which programs/schools are applicants to become CEPH-accredited collaborations?

The current list of CEPH applicants may be found on the [Applicants page](#) of the website.

Do all participating institutions in a collaborative model have to be regionally accredited?

Yes, all participating institutions must be accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the US Department of Education.

Are the same CEPH criteria used to evaluate a single institution and collaborative organizational model?

Yes, collaborative organizational models are evaluated against the same set of criteria as programs and schools sponsored by a single institution, although in some cases there are documentation requests specifically applicable to collaborative programs/schools. These are noted in the criteria documents.

Does CEPH conduct site visits at all of the institutions that are included in the collaborative?

Generally, no. The site visit is held at the site most conducive to conducting the accreditation review. However, depending on the nature of the collaboration and the geographic proximity of the participating institutions, the Council may require, or the school or program may request special accommodations in the structure of the site visit, including visiting multiple sites or extending the duration of the visit. CEPH staff consults with the collaborative program or school on a case-by-case basis.

The criteria refer to a lead institution – what is that?

Collaborative schools must identify a lead institution that possesses all of the minimum resource and organizational requirements of a standalone school of public health. Collaborative programs, however,

do not need to define a lead institution. In collaborative programs, all of the participating institutions can contribute to the minimum resource requirements.

What kind of agreements will CEPH expect among the institutions?

CEPH expects formal written agreements among all partners of the collaborative program/school. Criterion 1.3.e details CEPH's expectations for a formal agreement.

At what point should a formal agreement or a memorandum of understanding be pursued?

It would be in the best interest of the collaborative program/school to develop and formalize an agreement as soon as feasible. The agreement should be reviewed by the program/school at appropriate intervals. CEPH will expect an agreement to be in place by the time of application.

What components should be included in formal agreements or a memoranda of understanding?

Collaborative programs/schools should include as many components as necessary in order to protect the interests of enrolled degree-seeking students. These may include rights and obligations of the participants, resource commitments, clarification related to curricular decision making, committee structure and composition, channels for resolving conflicts and conditions and the method by which an institution may terminate participation in the collaborative program/school, etc.

What happens if one partner decides to separate from the collaboration?

The program/school must report the separation as a substantive change to CEPH BEFORE the separation is permitted to occur. CEPH will review the structure of the collaborative program/school to determine the impact on the integrity of the program/school. Assuming a two institution collaborative, if both parties want to maintain accreditation status as two separate programs/schools, an early site visit review or abbreviated review of each of the two programs/schools may result. Both parties will need to demonstrate that they comply with accreditation criteria. If only one party wants to maintain accreditation status, the remaining accredited party will need to explicitly state the impact and how the lines of responsibility in the program will change without the separating party. In all cases, CEPH will require that the interests of students be protected. At that time, CEPH will make a decision about whether an early site visit, abbreviated review or no review is necessary. The program/school should work closely with CEPH staff on any separation action.

What kind of governance arrangements would be acceptable?

There are a variety of acceptable functioning governance arrangements. These details should be defined in a formal agreement. In general the structure that enables the program/school to comply with CEPH accreditation criteria is acceptable. Partners should have adequate representation in decision-making processes as defined in the formal agreement. However, the program/school must only have one point of contact for communication on accreditation issues, since the program/school must function as one unit.

What kind of budget arrangements might be acceptable?

In a collaborative program/school sponsored by several universities, the budget arrangement must be clear so that the financial contributions of each sponsoring university to the overall program or school budget can be understood. This arrangement must include a description of how tuition and other income is shared, including indirect cost return for research generated by program or school faculty who may have their primary appointment elsewhere.

Does each institution need to confer the degree?

No, each institution does not need to confer the degree. A partner can contribute other components to the program without degree conferral. However, degree conferral should be defined in the formal agreement between the institutions. There are several models of degree conferral among accredited collaborative programs/schools.

What are the expectations for concentrations?

In a collaborative school of public health, the lead institution must offer the five core concentration areas of public health (biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health sciences, health services administration and social and behavioral sciences). Partners may offer concentrations or contribute resources to existing concentrations. Collaborative programs may offer as few or as many concentrations as they have the resources to support. Like standalone public health programs, they may offer concentrations in one or more of the core public health knowledge areas or in interdisciplinary areas (eg, public health practice, urban public health, etc.)

If a concentration is offered at more than one location (ie, by multiple partners), the curriculum must be the same so that, for example, a health education concentration at one institution has the same courses and competencies as a concentration of the same name at another site. Students should be able to take classes interchangeably across sites, though the agreement may further define/specify students' curricular expectations.

How will CEPH evaluate adequacy of faculty?

The same faculty resource thresholds apply to collaborative schools and programs as those that apply to standalone schools and programs, with the following distinctions: 1) in collaborative schools, the lead institution must possess all of the minimum required faculty resources of a standalone school, and 2) in collaborative programs, the faculty resources for a given concentration may be drawn from across the participating institutions.

CEPH's criteria require that a public health program must have three primary faculty who dedicate a majority of their effort to the public health program's instruction, research and service for each concentration offered, including "generalist" degrees. If the program offers a doctoral degree in any concentration, the faculty requirement is five primary faculty who dedicate a majority of their effort to the public health program's instruction, research and service.

A school of public health must have five primary faculty with full-time appointments in the school for each core area (core areas are defined in the accreditation criteria) that offers a doctoral degree. For public health core areas in which the school offers a master's degree only, the school must have three primary faculty plus two full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty. Concentrations offered by schools in areas other than the five core public health knowledge areas are assessed holistically for adequacy.

How are student admissions and curriculum coordinated?

Program/school-wide admission requirements must be negotiated even if students enroll at one partner institution. Students should be offered a coordinated degree experience with equal student opportunities in the program/school. Recruitment and admissions policies should be coordinated and standard across all partners. Advising and career counseling should also be coordinated and compliant with CEPH criteria. If students are enrolled at different partner institutions, their learning outcomes should be the same. The curriculum should be coordinated so that outcomes are the same across campuses. Practical skills, competencies and culminating experiences should be coordinated as well.

How will distance affect a collaboration?

Because there may be large distances between partner campuses, collaborative programs/schools may have additional issues related to student travel (especially programs that mandate students taking courses at some or all of the partner institutions). Programs/schools should assure that distance is not detrimental for students to complete required coursework.

Are distance-based course offerings permissible?

Because collaborative programs/schools are separated, distance-based courses are a popular option. Distance technologies are acceptable, but CEPH criteria require that student outcomes are not different from traditional teaching modalities. Details of evaluation, teaching and support should be stated in the self-study. If the program is making a change from a more traditional teaching method to mostly distance-based methods, it must inform CEPH of this substantive change and explain how student outcomes will not differ.