

Strengthening Professional Competence: What We Changed, What We Learned, and What's Next

2027 Competence Program: What's changing

Based on feedback from registrants and what we learned during the first year of implementation, ACSW is making several changes to the Competence Program for 2027.

What's changing	What this means for registrants
Simpler planning and reporting	You will no longer need to identify specific learning activities or the number of hours you plan to complete at the beginning of the year. You will set learning goals and report the activities you complete at year-end.
Less reflection	By having registrants, reflect on the overall goal, rather than each activity, we have reduced the amount of reflection required.
Professional Engagement and Practice Integration	Professional engagement has been expanded to recognize how social workers apply learning in practice through supervision, consultation, mentorship, collaboration and other professional relationships and how they contribute their professional knowledge, skills and experience.
A clearer registrant experience	We have improved the Competence Program Guide, strengthened instructions in the portal and improved the flow of the competence form.
A revised competence cycle	The 2027 cycle will open earlier and close in November, avoiding the holiday period and providing more time to complete requirements. You will have until February 15 to submit your annual update and plan, and until November 14 to close out your plan for the year.

For 2027, the Competence Program will focus less on predicting and documenting the process and more on meaningful learning, reflection and the integration of learning into practice.

Why we changed the Competence Program

Why we are making these changes

The ACSW Competence Program is a regulatory requirement that ensures social workers are maintaining and developing the knowledge, skills and professional judgment needed for safe, ethical and effective practice.

The first year of the revised program provided important information about what was working and where changes were needed. Registrant feedback, support requests and staff experience showed that some parts of the program were more administrative than intended and did not always reflect how social workers learn and develop in practice.

For 2027, ACSW is therefore making changes to:

- reduce unnecessary administrative work;
- provide greater flexibility;
- recognize the diversity of social work practice;
- make requirements clearer and easier to navigate; and
- maintain the regulatory purpose of supporting ongoing professional competence and public protection.

What we learned from 2026

ACSW began communicating the revised program in 2025 and provided webinars, lunch-and-learns, group support and individualized assistance throughout implementation.

The first year generated a high volume of questions and support requests. In January 2026, traffic to the Competence Program webpage increased by 465% compared with January 2025. ACSW received 4,666 calls and responded to 2,845 emails in January alone.

This experience showed that implementing a significant regulatory change requires more than introducing new requirements. It also requires **clear communication, accessible guidance, ongoing support and opportunities to adjust the program based on experience.**

What worked

- Early communication and informational webinars.
- Multiple ways for registrants to access support.

- Direct interaction with registrants to identify issues.
- Making improvements to resources as issues became apparent.

What was challenging

- The scale of the change was greater than many registrants anticipated.
- Registrants experienced uncertainty about requirements and timelines.
- Some found the new planning and documentation process difficult to navigate.
- Portal usability created challenges for some registrants.

What we learned

- Change management needs to begin early and continue throughout implementation.
- Registrants have different levels of familiarity with ACSW processes and technology.
- Direct feedback is an important source of information for improving the program.
- Regulatory requirements need to be understandable and workable across diverse practice contexts.

What we heard from registrants

ACSW surveyed registrants in April 2026 and considered feedback from support calls, emails and consultations. **262 registrants responded to the survey.**

The feedback showed that registrants generally recognized the importance of continuing competence and the role of regulation in supporting professional learning and public protection.

At the same time, registrants identified several concerns about how the revised program worked in practice.

Planning and flexibility

Registrants said that professional learning does not always follow a plan established at the beginning of the year. Learning opportunities can arise from changing practice needs, new responsibilities, workplace priorities and unexpected opportunities.

Reflection and documentation

Registrants generally saw value in reflection, but some found the number and structure of reflection requirements repetitive. For some, documentation began to feel like an end rather than a tool for meaningful learning.

Portal usability

The registrant portal was a significant source of concern. Some registrants had difficulty understanding what remained outstanding, determining whether submissions were complete, and connecting goals, activities and reflections.

Administrative burden

Many registrants described the revised program as more time-intensive than the previous approach. Planning, documentation, reflection and navigating multiple requirements were identified as sources of administrative burden.

Diverse practice contexts

Registrants emphasized that professional learning looks different across social work practice. Rural and remote practitioners, part-time and private practitioners, senior practitioners, and those working in leadership, education, policy or regulatory roles may have different opportunities and needs.

Professional engagement

Feedback about professional engagement was mixed. While many registrants supported maintaining connection with the profession, others identified challenges related to geography, employment setting and access to opportunities.

What changed for 2027

1. Simpler planning and reporting

Registrants told us that identifying specific activities and hours at the beginning of the year did not always reflect how professional learning occurs.

For 2027, registrants will **set learning goals without having to identify specific activities or hours in advance**. Learning activities can then be identified and reported as part of the year-end process.

We have also reduced the amount of reflection required.

The goal is to place greater emphasis on meaningful learning and less emphasis on documenting the process itself.

2. Professional Engagement and Practice Integration

Professional engagement has been expanded to **Professional Engagement and Practice Integration**.

The revised approach recognizes that competence develops through integrating new knowledge into practice and sharing our professional knowledge, skills and experience to the benefits of boards, committees and communities.

This change recognizes the different ways social workers engage professionally and integrate learning into their work and communities.

3. A better registrant experience

ACSW has:

- strengthened instructions within the registrant portal;
- updated the Competence Program Guide;
- improved the flow of the competence form; and
- adjusted the timing of the competence cycle.

For 2027, registrants will be able to begin their plan requirements earlier, and the competence year will close in **November rather than during the holiday period**.

The Competence Program is a regulatory requirement, and registrants are responsible for completing the requirements that apply to them.

ACSW will continue to provide information, guidance and support, while also looking at how support can be focused where it is most helpful.

As of August 20, 2026, **1,096 registrants had not yet completed their initial 2026 competence requirements**. Of these, 610 had started but not submitted, and 486 had not started. ACSW continues to provide outreach and support to registrants who have not completed their requirements.

Looking ahead

The first year of the revised Competence Program provided important opportunities to learn and improve.

As we look forward, ACSW will be developing its compliance audit and quality assurance processes and determining how to manage registrants who are non-compliant with the Competence Program requirements.

The goal for 2027 is not simply to make the Competence Program easier to complete. It is to make the process more appropriate, flexible and meaningful while maintaining the regulatory purpose of supporting ongoing professional competence and public protection.