

**2023 – 2024 CODE OF GOOD PRACTICE**

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## Statement of the Issue

Post-graduate administrative fellowships in Healthcare Management (hereafter referred to as “fellowships”) are a critical stepping stone for many early careerists who will ultimately aspire to senior leadership roles. They contrast with other post-graduate positions in at least two important ways:

(1) Fellowships are time-limited, typically lasting between 12 to 24 months

(2) Fellowships emphasize structured learning and leadership development in addition to completion of work

There are also some graduate health management programs that require a residency that spans between 9 to 12 months for graduation. Those students also may compete for and participate in the fellowships described here, however, some fellowships require completion of a degree to apply.

The American College of Healthcare Executives’ **Policy on Appropriate Preparation for Healthcare Executive Management Positions for All New Entrants to the Field** (November 2014) notes, “It is preferred that graduate students complete a postgraduate fellowship or residency.” The Policy goes on to say:

Healthcare executives and employers contribute to the success and development of future leaders by providing postgraduate fellowship experiences. Fellowships help transition a young professional from the world of academic learning to real world experiences. Fellows can make a meaningful contribution to the organization when the fellow is assigned real projects that cross organizational lines. Employers are encouraged to offer these opportunities to assist the entry of students to the field of healthcare management. Employers must also be aware of the rigor of accredited programs, such as those accredited by CAHME, and the advantages of hiring accredited programs' graduates. Healthcare executives share responsibility to elevate both students and stakeholders on the best pathway for success.

Although many fellows report having positive experiences with their fellowship experience, historically, the absence of uniform approaches to these fellowships has resulted in practices that can undermine fairness, including burdensome application, interview, and acceptance practices, which can limit the ability of students to assess the program’s quality and choose a fellowship site that is a best fit for their career goals.

Graduate programs are supportive of fellowships as an effective entrée into the field of practice; however, there are increasing inefficiencies in the system that create substantial work on the part of faculty and administrative members who are tasked to write countless letters of recommendations on a less than optimal timeline in the student’s education.

Similarly, while fellowship site directors are committed to the success of the fellowships, the pipeline development opportunity within the current system creates an equally challenging application and

recruitment environment. Fellowships are faced with increasingly competitive forces to accelerate their recruitment process, in turn limiting their ability to adequately assess and consider the applicant pool and recruit candidates that are a best fit for their particular fellowship.

To address some of the aforementioned challenges, the following guidelines were developed by the National Council on Administrative Fellowships (NCAF). NCAF is a voluntary membership organization of leading graduate health management programs and administrative fellowship sites who work collaboratively to advance the role, availability, and quality of fellowships and the fellowship process.

## Policy Position

NCAF believes that (1) the development of early careerist healthcare leaders and managers can be greatly enhanced by the completion of a high-quality post-graduate fellowship, (2) organizations sponsoring fellowships derive a large benefit from the contributions of high-potential, early careerists to operating and transforming healthcare systems, consulting agencies, pharmaceutical companies, and other health management sectors, and (3) graduate programs, employers, and students will benefit from better coordination across the field in the development and operation of fellowship sites.

The following guidelines were established to support better coordination for all stakeholders involved:

### Graduate Program Directors and Advisors

- Graduate program directors and advisors should take an active role in supporting the fellowship process by:
  - Communicating their support of NCAF fellowship sites and the value of standardized processes, deadlines, and Code of Good Practice requirements to students.
  - Preparing students with the requisite skills for success in fellowships.
  - Developing an understanding of the role of fellowships to future career development.
  - Promoting the value of fellowships to graduate students.
  - Promoting the value of fellowships to alumni who may be in a position to develop fellowship sites.
  - Connecting with healthcare organizations that currently offer fellowships so that students gain increased exposure to potential fellowship opportunities.
  - Seeking feedback from recent program graduates about their experiences with specific fellowship sites.
  - Assisting current students in considering whether, how, and which specific fellowship placements may benefit their career goals, align with their interests, and meet their geographic preferences.
  - Supporting students in putting together competitive applications for the appropriate number of fellowships.
  - Ensuring that faculty members and program directors provide letters of recommendation that quickly and clearly distinguish and differentiate the top and best students, and are submitted in a timely manner, to expediate a student's application verification.

- NOTE: Applicants are required to submit three (3) letters of recommendation from an academic reference, professional reference, and one of their choosing. There is no requirement for the graduate program director to complete the academic reference.
- NOTE: Student applications are not verified in the NAFCAS system until all letters of recommendation and transcripts are received.
- Assisting students in navigating the offer process for both NCAF and Non-NCAF fellowship sites, by encouraging student's to behave in a professional manner and advising on how to handle multiple offer situations, to ensure students are able to make the best decision for their career.
- By agreeing to participate in NCAF, understand that the graduate program is required to respond to the annual benchmarking survey and provide data on their fellowship and recruitment experience, allowing for the proper collection of fellowship trend data.

## Students

- Students should take an active role in considering whether a fellowship placement may benefit them by:
  - Discussing fellowship opportunities with their program advisors.
  - Investing a sufficient amount of time researching fellowship sites before applying, to ensure they are a good fit for their background as well as career interests.
  - Investing an adequate amount of time preparing fellowship application materials (personal essay, resume, etc.).
  - Attend various educational and networking opportunities made available by NCAF. Visit the [NCHL website](#) to learn more.
- Students who apply for fellowships should exemplify a professional approach to the application, interview, and offer process by:
  - Only applying to and interviewing at fellowship sites where they are genuinely interested in accepting an offer. On average candidates apply to 6 sites during the recruitment cycle.
  - Properly preparing for each specific interview.
  - After the interview process, prioritizing fellowship site preferences to expedite the offer process.
  - The following options are available as formal written offers are received prior to the uniform offer acceptance date (last Friday in October):
    - Students may receive offers anytime after the application deadline of the last Friday in September.
    - If an offer is received, students are allowed ten (10) calendar days to accept or decline the offer. Offers may be accepted, declined, or put on-hold until the last Friday in October.
      - Should an offer be accepted, students must withdraw themselves from the applicant pool.

- Should an offer be put on hold, students may continue to interview and prospect all available options.
    - **Only ONE offer can be on hold at any given time.** If a second offer (or subsequent offer) is received, students will have 24-hours from the time of the second offer to decide which offer to accept or hold AND which offer to decline
    - **Any offer on-hold should be accepted or declined no more than 10 calendar days after the offer is received.** Fellowship sites may elect to extend offers to other alternate candidates for positions that have not been accepted by this time.
    - Should students not be interested in an offer, they are asked to decline in a **timely manner (no more than ten (10) calendar days after the initial offer is received)**. This allows fellowship sites to then move to their next choice. If a student declines an offer, they may continue to interview and prospect all available options until a fellowship is accepted.
  - Understanding that if an offer is received from a fellowship site that is not a member of NCAF and it is not his/her first choice, the student can and should:
    - Ask the fellowship site to provide more time (in conjunction with the Code of Good Practice) for the student to make his/her decision. This allows for the student to know all of the possible options available
    - Contact their first choice, if an NCAF site, for an update on the status of their application.
    - Meet with their graduate program director to discuss their options.
  - Thoughtfully consider options and accept a fellowship offer only with the full intention to serve as a Fellow at that organization.
  - Upon acceptance of a fellowship offer, notifying any other fellowship sites that have extended offers or interviews that a position has been accepted elsewhere and withdrawing their applications.
  - Understand that hospitals generally have defined budgets for fellow salaries and benefits and these are often non-negotiable.
- Students applying via NAFCAS should note that the centralized application service will open on the second Friday in June, and will remain open until the last Friday in September 11:59:59 PM EST.

### Fellowship Site Administrators

- Fellowship site administrators should adopt good recruiting practices by:
  - Providing applicants with an accurate description of their fellowship, including both its strengths and limitations. This includes NCAF's recommendation to share a range of salary and list of benefits for the fellowship position(s) available.
  - Working collaboratively with other fellowship site administrators to provide a coordinated approach to the fellowship recruiting process. This includes:

- Adhering to the uniform application deadline, which is designed to allow fellowship applicants an adequate opportunity to clarify their post-graduate career interests.
      - For Fall of 2023, the Centralized Application Service (NAFCAS) will open on the second Friday in June and will remain open until the last Friday in September.
      - Fellowship Administrators can review applicants throughout the cycle. Sites can hold phone interviews with **verified** applicants any time after the second week in September.
    - Adhering to the uniform offer process, which is designed to allow fellowship sites and applicants more control and transparency.
      - Offers can be made any time after the cycle closes in September.
      - For Fall 2023, the uniform offer acceptance date will be no sooner than the last Friday in October.
    - Ensuring all formal, written offers made are after the uniform application deadline AND do not require fellowship applicants to accept prior to the ten (10) calendar day grace period.
      - For Fall of 2023, formal written offers can be made anytime the cycle closes on the last Friday in September. After receiving the offer, applicants have ten (10 ) calendar days to notify the fellowship site if they are accepting or declining the offer.
    - Formal, written offers should be provided to applicants in a timely manner and it is best practice to include a compensation range and/or amount.
    - Fellowship sites may elect to extend offers to other alternate candidates for positions that have been declined by candidates or have not been accepted by Noon CT on the uniform acceptance date, the last Friday in October .
  - Acting professionally and in good faith to not formally or informally pressure students to accept an offer before the ten (10) calendar grace period.
  - In the extremely unlikely event that a fellowship site withdraws from recruitment on NAFCAS during or after the recruitment period as the position(s) is no longer being offered, it is best practice for the organization to work with NCAF & Liaison to offer a refund to those applicants that applied. Refund will come from the organization, not NCAF or NAFCAS.
  - Providing constructive feedback to graduate program directors regarding the quality of their applicants, when appropriate or requested.
  - If offers are made on the offer acceptance date of the the last Friday in October, applicants must be given at least a 24 hour offer acceptance period from the time of the offer.
  - In the NAFCAS application, consider NCAF’s recommendation to include a salary range and list of benefits for increased transparency.
- During the fellowship engagement, fellowship site administrators should adopt good development practices by:

- Providing a high-quality program and experience for the fellows they recruit and work with
- Ensuring that your fellowship program includes the following:
  1. Provides opportunities to work with high-level executives and insight on the decision-making process within the organization
  2. Provides opportunities to work on all levels of the healthcare organization
  3. Provides opportunities to engage with multiple departments in a meaningful way
  4. Provides opportunities to take initiative and ownership to create and/or improve processes or programs
  5. Provides opportunities to work on and complete well-structured assignments and/or projects

Note: The follow areas are evaluated through the annual benchmarking surveys.

- Providing performance feedback to fellows on a regular basis
- Taking the initiative to discuss post-fellowship employment opportunities no less than three months prior to the scheduled conclusion of the fellowship
- As a follow up to the fellowship experience, fellowship site administrators should conduct post-fellowship evaluations that provide the organization with accurate and timely feedback of their program’s strengths and weaknesses for continuous improvement purposes.
- Fellowship site administrators should strive to build the reputation and value of all fellowships for the healthcare management profession by:
  - Supporting and adhering to efforts to standardize application and acceptance processes and deadlines
  - Supporting applicants’ ability to determine which site is the best fit for their interests and needs
  - Striving to create learning and development opportunities that exceed the expectations of the field of practice for young careerists
- By agreeing to participate in NCAF, understand that the fellowship site is required to respond to the annual benchmarking survey and provide data on their fellowship and recruitment experience, allowing for the proper collection of fellowship trend data.

### National Council on Administrative Fellowships

- NCAF should adopt good management practices by:
  - Promoting the value of fellowships to the field in a variety of healthcare sectors
  - Supporting the activities of the NCAF Steering Committee and Workgroups in their efforts to strategically set the direction of NCAF
  - Supporting data collection and benchmarking research that can be used to analyze and evaluate trends and outcomes of fellowships
  - Providing relevant and updated resources for graduate health management programs and administrative fellowship sites to meet the needs of the membership

- Work in concert with other organizations to benefit the growth and success of fellowships and the health management profession.
- Being good stewards of NCAF membership fees.
- NCAF should adopt good member support services by:
  - Responding to all member inquiries and concerns in a timely manner
  - Maintaining an updated list of NCAF members and contacts to facilitate member communications and collaboration, a prospective members list for broader outreach to the field, and a public-facing directory of NCAF fellowships to assist student applicants in locating NCAF fellowships.
  - Overseeing and coordinating the work of Liaison International for NCAF members for a successful implementation of the National Administrative Fellowship Centralized Application Service (NAFCAS).

The combination of these activities will help ensure that students can attain and are adequately prepared for positions that lead to future leadership roles in the field.