Co-Providing: Understanding the Logistics

abstract

Co-providing is two or more organizations working together to plan, implement, and evaluate a continuing nursing education (CNE) activity (American Nurses Credentialing Center [ANCC], 2009). The provider and the other organization(s) develop a collective plan for how they are going to go about their work together. This is not the provider unit’s delegation of authority to another organization to do the work and then the provider unit granting the contact hours for the learning activity. That would be classified as “approving,” which is not acceptable within the ANCC accreditation criteria.

STRUCTURING THE RELATIONSHIP

The accredited or approved provider has the authority to enter into a relationship with one or more groups to co-provide a CNE activity. The provider unit’s lead or designated nurse planner (LNP/DNP) has responsibility for ensuring that all requirements are followed for a co-provided activity just like any other activity developed by the provider unit. The activity file must contain the co-provider agreement specifying that the provider unit will be accountable for the items listed in the Sidebar and including any other negotiated points between the parties. The co-provider agreement is best signed by the LNP/DNP as a representative of the provider unit and a person representing the co-provider. If there are several co-providers, signatures should reflect the agreement of all parties.

Possible scenarios for provider/co-provider relationships were described in a previous issue of The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing (Dickerson, 2010). Typically, a co-provider relationship exists between two or more organizations involved in CNE. Multidisciplinary groups could be involved in a co-provider relationship as well. Note that in continuing medical education, the term sponsor is used to mean what nursing refers to as provider. To prevent confusion, it might be helpful to word the advertising as “The College of Nursing and the College of Medicine at Caring University are collaborating to offer . . . .”

NEGOTIABLE ISSUES

Although the items listed in the Sidebar are non-negotiable, there are numerous other points that can be negotiated between the groups working together to plan the activity. These might include marketing, registration, staffing of a “live” event, preparation of handouts or learner materials, and handling the activity budget.

A co-provider might offer to develop and print the advertising brochures for a conference. It would still be the responsibility of the provider’s LNP/DNP to ensure that the brochure contained the correctly worded and formatted provider statement. Additionally, if the brochure is the selected vehicle for providing pre-activity disclosures to learners, the LNP/DNP has the responsibility of ensuring that all appropriate disclosures are included. Remember, too, that the brochure, web advertising, or any other notification should be published with the provider prominently mentioned.
and the other organization(s) listed as co-providers.

If a co-provider is printing copies of handouts, certificates, or other documents, the provider’s LNP/DNP must carefully proof all documents prior to printing. This helps to avoid problems with issues that might occur because the co-provider and the printer did not know that the provider should be prominent in the advertising, the provider’s address should be on the certificate, or the learner handouts could not include information indicative of bias in the presentation.

Registration for a learning activity can be handled by a co-provider. This often includes receiving information from the expected learner and generating a registration form or sign-in sheet for a workshop or conference. Remember that one of the obligations of the provider is to safeguard confidentiality of learner information. To aid in this process, a sentence might be included in the co-provider agreement stating that the co-provider agrees to handle registration, with the understanding that learner-specific information will be maintained in a confidential manner and will be transmitted to the provider at the conclusion of the learning activity.

Registration might include collection of fees from prospective participants. There should be clear understanding of how this will be handled. If the co-provider is collecting the fees, what will happen to that money? Any arrangement that has been negotiated by the involved parties can work, but to avoid misunderstanding (or worse consequences), any agreement about finances should be clearly written into the co-provider agreement.

In addition to collection of registration fees, a co-provider might have responsibility for paying some or all of the expenses related to the learning activity. For example, the co-provider might pay for beverages or faculty honoraria, while the provider pays for the conference room and AV support. There are no criteria regarding how these decisions are made, but they should be part of the activity planning process and documented as part of the provider/co-provider agreement.

A representative of the co-provider organization might have the responsibility of staffing a registration table or providing other types of technical or supportive assistance during the event. It is important that the provider LNP/DNP has clearly explained things like criteria for successful completion. This helps to avoid situations where a co-provider representative is staffing a registration table and a participant arrives 20 minutes after the event has started or wants to leave an hour early. If criteria for successful completion require attendance at the entire event, the registration attendant must have clear instructions for dealing with these situations. Ultimate accountability is with the LNP/DNP of the provider organization, not a representative of the co-provider group.

A frequent question is whether a provider can charge a fee for co-providing. This is a potentially challenging area that requires careful consideration. Remember that a co-provider relationship means that the groups are working together. The LNP/DNP from the provider organization might be spending time away from his/her usual duties to attend planning meetings or do other work in preparation for the activity. In that case, for the provider to charge the co-provider for the LNP/DNP’s time and expertise would be reasonable. Sometimes, those agreements are negotiated as flat-rate fees for the learning activity; other times, the agreement is that the co-provider will pay the provider a designated amount of money for each attendee. Any approach is acceptable, but be sure all parties are clear on the financial expectations and obligations and have these agreements specified in writing. There does need to be clarity that the co-provider is not paying the provider for approval of the activity; nor should there be any perception that the co-provider is “buying” certificates or contact hours from the provider. Active involvement of the provider’s LNP/DNP will prevent this potential pitfall.

CONCLUSION

Co-providing is an excellent way for groups to collaborate in planning and implementing CNE activities. Understanding the logistics will prevent confusion and help the process to work smoothly.

REFERENCES