



## AST POLICIES FOR THE APPROVAL OF STATE ASSEMBLY CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Effective January 2010  
Revised September 2018

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The *Policies for the Approval of Continuing Education Programs* are provided to state assemblies offering continuing education (CE) programs for the CST® and CSFA®. This manual is designed to assist applicants in developing CE programs for the CST and CSFA in submitting the program application. To have a thorough understanding of the approval process, it is recommended that each section of the manual be reviewed.

The Association of Surgical Technologists (AST) is recognized by the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) as the responsible authority for the approval of CE programs for the CST and CSFA, including responsibility for CE credit processing and maintenance, which is subject to NBSTSA audit or verification. The NBSTSA is the responsible authority for all aspects of the certification process including, examination eligibility criteria, examination fees, renewal requirements, and renewal fees.

AST and the NBSTSA work collaboratively on the development of the *Policies for the Approval of Continuing Education Programs*.

## **Philosophy**

AST believes surgical technology and surgical first assisting are professional practices that are directed towards providing patient care anywhere invasive therapeutic or diagnostic procedures are performed and provide this care primarily through service to the surgeon and under the delegatory authority of the surgeon. Therefore, we believe that the allied health professions of surgical technology and surgical first assisting are a subdomain of medicine and the CST and CSFA complete education, training, and continuing education to fulfill the roles, duties, and tasks required in surgical services.

AST believes that continuing education should be a process that is designed to advance the competence and skills of the CST and CSFA adult learner in surgical practice. Continuing education provides the opportunity for CSTs and CSFAs to maintain their skill level proficiency, master new competencies, and enhance and advance their knowledge of perioperative patient care. CSTs and CSFAs should understand that the completion of continuing education is essential to promoting the delivery of quality surgical patient care in a health care environment of rapidly changing technology and methods of surgical treatment. Therefore, the continuing education providers must also be aware of these challenges that the CST and CSFA face in remaining current with clinical practice and provide a variety of learning experiences that meet their needs and interests as well as serve as a resource of providing up-dated, current, thoroughly-researched clinical practice information.

## **AST Continuing Education Mission**

AST supports quality surgical patient care by promoting the completion of continuing education to assure the public, certifying bodies, and other health professionals that CSTs and CSFAs are maintaining current standards in the field of surgical technology and surgical assisting.

## **Goals**

The overall goal of AST is to ensure the delivery of quality continuing education that contributes to furthering the knowledge of and enhancing the skills of the CST and CSFA to support the provision of quality surgical patient care.

Specifically, AST will:

1. Analyze and update the AST CE policies on a periodic basis to reflect policy changes and current trends.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of the CE offerings in meeting the needs of the CSTs and CSFAs.
3. Evaluate the CE offerings of State Assemblies to determine their meeting the AST CE policies.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of AST**

AST recognizes and establishes the CE credit as the standard for all CE programs that are completed by the CST and CSFA. AST reviews CE programs for adherence to the AST CE policies, and only those CE programs approved by AST will be awarded CE credits.

## **Continuing Education Definition**

Surgical technology and surgical assisting continuing education are defined as formal learning to enhance the competency of the CST and CSFA in order to foster the development of the surgical technology and surgical assisting professions.

## **Definition of a Program**

A CE program is defined by AST as a live program including but not limited to a conference, seminar, symposium or workshop in which the CST and CSFA attend CE lectures and/or clinical demonstrations.

## **Eligibility to Apply for CE Approval of a Program**

All State Assemblies that are in good standing with AST are eligible to apply for AST approval of continuing education programs.

## **Approval Status**

After AST has reviewed an application, the applicant will be notified of the approval status of the program(s):

APPROVED                      The provider may award the CE credits that AST granted for the activity.

APPROVAL DENIED      State Assembly can do one of the following:  
(a) Revise application and resubmit as a new application;  
(b) File an appeal (additional information provided in Section I)

## **SECTION I: POLICIES SPECIFIC TO PROGRAM APPROVAL**

### **Introduction**

The following policies apply to State Assemblies of AST planning a CE program for CSTs and CSFAs. The State Assembly must adhere to these policies to ensure the ongoing educational development of CSTs and CSFAs and demonstrate to the public, certifying bodies and other health professionals the profession's commitment to providing quality surgical patient care.

AST reserves the right to request additional documentation concerning the qualifications of speakers or instructors, program format, level of presentation, and attendance. AST reserves the right to deny approval if the program is deemed to be not relevant to the medical-surgical practice of surgical technology and surgical first assisting.

### **AST CE Credit Value for Programs**

CE credit for programs is defined as a unit of measurement that AST describes as a learning activity that is either didactic (e.g., lecture) or clinical demonstration (e.g., hands-on workshop). Included in the total calculation of a program's CE credits is time for questions/answers, evaluations, pre- and post-tests. Meals and break times are not included, nor is the time scheduled for viewing exhibits.

AST assigns the value of one (1) CE credit equaling 50 – 60 minutes of learning activity. Partial CE credits are accepted by AST. However, the CE learning activity, such as a lecture, must be a minimum of 30 minutes (0.5 CE credits). Partial CE credits are accepted in 15-minute increments past the required minimum of 30 minutes.

### **Elements of the AST Application for State Assembly CE Program Approval**

The following are the key elements of the application. Regardless of the number of CE credits being offered, the State Assembly must demonstrate that the program meets the criteria for approval by submitting a completed application; incomplete applications will be returned to the provider.

#### Planning Committee

The State Assembly must have a planning committee that is responsible for the development and planning of the CE program. The lead planner must hold the CST or CSFA credential with currency.

#### Evidence of Methods for Identifying the Need for the CE Program

The State Assembly must provide evidence as to the methods used to collect information that the need exists for the CE program, and indicate how the CE program meets the CE needs of the CST and CSFA.

#### Learning Objectives

- A minimum of three (3) learning objectives must be developed. The learning objectives must be published in any hard copy or electronic advertisement of the CE program, including the program brochure/program agenda.
- The State Assembly must provide evidence of the methods used to assess the achievement of the learning objectives by the CST and CSFA.

#### Program Speakers or Instructors

- The State Assembly shall confirm that speakers or instructors (henceforth the term “speaker(s)” will be used to refer to both) are qualified by surgical experience and/or educational background to be a presenter. The speaker should have experience giving CE presentations.
- The speaker must hold the CST or CSFA credential with currency.

Exemptions to this requirement are physicians (MD, DO, DPM) since surgical technology is a subdomain of medicine, and non-CST content experts, e.g., keynote speaker, featured speaker, or commercial interest organization (CIO; see Definitions) representative on a subject relevant to surgical technology that is free from conflict.

State Assemblies that have direct oversight of the planning and content of a CE program can schedule individuals to provide a CE lecture that has an affiliation or financial relationship/interest with a CIO.

The following is recommended by AST in regard to speakers who have an affiliation or financial relationship/interest with a CIO:

- Avoid scheduling CIO representatives to provide CE lectures due to the perceived or direct conflict of interest.
- If CIO representatives are scheduled to provide CE lectures, it is recommended that not more than 10% of the program agenda is CE lectures provided by CIO representatives.
- It is recommended the CIO representative should have the CST or CSFA credential.

### **JOINTLY SPONSORED PROGRAMS**

For approvals of a *jointly sponsored program* between another organization (using AORN chapter as an example) and an AST state assembly, adherence is as follows:

- An AORN chapter does not need to apply to AST when jointly sponsored with an AST state assembly. However, the AST state assembly needs to apply, as with all state assembly programs, submitting the current Application for Approval of State Assembly Continuing Education Programs. There is no application fee for CE credit state assembly programs.

- If a workshop registration fee is charged, it must be a written revenue-sharing agreement between the state assembly and AORN chapter. The state assembly must present proof of payment from the AORN chapter and an accounting of all revenues and expenses. If all revenues go to an AORN chapter, it is not considered a jointly-sponsored program.
- Only when a jointly-sponsored program is approved by AST, the approval language, as well as the state assembly logo, may be used. The AST national logo *cannot* be used.
- A CST or CSFA will need to be involved in the planning, review the program prior to the CE program application being submitted, and listed on the CE program application as the reviewer.

### **Certificate of Attendance**

The interactive workshop *Certificate of Attendance Form* is available at [stateassembly.ast.org](http://stateassembly.ast.org). Must be a current State Assembly Board Member to access. Board Members can also access the form online by using their AST member login.

To receive the CE credits, participants must submit a copy of the *Certificate of Attendance* to the AST Member Services Dept.

### **Submission of the Application and Review Process**

- The *Date Request Form* must be received by AST 120 days prior to the date(s) of the program. Additionally, the form must be received by the first (1<sup>st</sup>) of the current month for the program to be published in the next month of the AST monthly journal *The Surgical Technologist*. Submit the interactive form to [stateassembly@ast.org](mailto:stateassembly@ast.org).
- The *Application for State Assembly CE Program Approval* must be received at least thirty (30) days prior to the date(s) of the program. The application is accepted electronically by email. An application submitted post-program will not be accepted. No program is granted approval retroactively.
- The completed application reviewed by the AST State Assembly Department.
- If the application is approved, a confirmation letter of approval is sent electronically by email to all State Assembly Board Members. The letter will include the number of CE credits that AST has awarded the program.
- If the application is not recommended for approval, the AST State Assembly Dept. will contact the State Assembly to request clarification of submitted information or request additional information to be submitted in order to correct deficiencies. When the clarification or correction of deficiencies has been achieved by the State Assembly, the approval process will continue.

### **Withdrawal and Resubmission of an Application**

The State Assembly may withdraw an application for approval at any time by contacting AST of its intent in writing. The letter of withdrawal must have the signature of the lead planner or State Assembly president.

The State Assembly may resubmit a withdrawn application at any time. The application will be considered a new application and must meet the submission deadline of 120 days prior to the program.

### **Appeal Process for an Application Denied Approval**

If an application has been denied approval the State Assembly may file an appeal. The appeal must be submitted in writing to AST within thirty (30) days of the date of denial and prior to the dates of the program – retroactive approval will not be granted. A copy of the application and any other pertinent correspondence and supportive documents should be submitted with the letter of appeal.

The AST State Assembly Department will review the appeal and grant or uphold the original denial of approval. If the State Assembly Department denies the approval the State Assembly may decide to offer the CE program, but it may not advertise the program as being AST reviewed nor AST approved, and CE credits may not be awarded to the CST and CSFA participants.

### **Resubmission of a Denied Application**

If a program application has been denied and the State Assembly decides not to pursue the appeal process, the State Assembly may resubmit a new application. The recommendations by AST as related to why the original application was denied should be used by the State Assembly as guidance in reapplying. The application will be considered a new application and meet the submission deadline date of 120 days prior to the program.

### **Maintenance of Application and Supporting Documentation**

The State Assembly is required to keep a copy of the application, post-program report, and all other supporting documentation for a minimum of three (3) years.

### **Advertising Program**

The State Assembly is not allowed to advertise that the CE program is pending approval by AST.

After receiving the AST letter of approval, the State Assembly is required to include the following statement on any type of advertisement and program brochure/agenda. Additionally, the statement must be included on the certificate of attendance for the specific program that was approved. The statement must be used exactly as worded and may not be revised:

“This continuing education program is approved for (\_\_\_) CE credits by the Association of Surgical Technologists, Inc., for continuing education for the Certified Surgical Technologist, Certified Surgical First Assistant, and Associate members of AST. This recognition does not imply that AST approves or endorses any product or products that are included in presentations.”

### **AST Post-Program Evaluation Report**

The State Assembly must submit an *AST Post-Program Evaluation Report* to the AST State Assembly Department which includes evidence of the method(s) and procedure(s) used by participants to evaluate the program. The report must be submitted within five (5) days of the program.

## **DEFINITION OF TERMS**

### **Appeal**

Process that allows the provider to submit a request to have application and supporting documents reviewed by another review group as related to a denial of approval.

### **Approval**

Decision made by an approval body that the policies for approval of continuing education activities have been achieved.

### **Commercial Interest Organization (CIO)**

AST defines an organization as having a commercial interest if it produces, markets, sells, or distributes healthcare goods or services consumed by or used on patients; or is owned or operated, in whole or in part, by an organization that produces,

markets, sells, or distributes healthcare goods or services consumed by or used on patients; or advocates for the use of the products or services of a CIO.

**Continuing Education**

Systematic formal learning experiences designed to enhance the competency of the CST and CSFA in order to foster the development of the surgical technology and surgical assisting professions.

**CE Credit**

A unit of measurement that AST describes as a learning activity that is either didactic (e.g. lecture), clinical demonstration (e.g., hands-on workshop), or completion of an enduring material (e.g., independent study article).

**Denial**

Decision made by AST based on the CE policies to determine if an application should be approved or not approved.

**Needs**

Difference between what the CE participant desires to learn and what is available.

**Program**

A CE program is defined by AST as a live program including but not limited to a conference, seminar, symposium or workshop in which the CST and CSFA attend CE lectures and/or clinical demonstrations.

**Provider**

An organization or business responsible for the development, planning, offering, evaluation, and record-keeping of continuing education programs or enduring materials.

**Resubmission**

Process provider can utilize to submit a new application in place of a withdrawn application.

**Retroactive Approval**

Approval of a CE program that has already taken place; this is not allowed per the AST CE policies.

**Withdrawal**

Provider retracts original application prior to the beginning of the review process and does not prevent the provider from resubmitting a new application in the future.

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