

leadership ladders:

STEPS TO A GREAT CAREER IN SOCIAL WORK

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transitioning across state lines: licensing tips

Throughout the United States, social workers acquire licensure to formally document their professional competence. Most states and jurisdictions have individualized mandates that require social workers to register and apply for licensure when relocating within their authority. This requirement exists even if a social worker is licensed elsewhere, as the United States does not have a system of reciprocity for social work licensure.

Social workers who relocate to new states and seek to continue their licensure are often confused and frustrated by the varying rules and requirements of each jurisdiction. Frequently, many social workers relocate after having been licensed for an extensive time and may find themselves having to document education, supervision hours, and places of employment long after they occurred. This level of documentation can create challenges and leave many unsure of how to proceed in obtaining such information.

Here are some tips that can be helpful for the transition.

» **KEEP GOOD RECORDS.** Access to hard copies or electronic files including all

documents (e.g. application, supervision verification forms, employment verification forms) submitted for initial licensure can be helpful when re-applying in another state. Many states have similar requirements but mandate that information be documented on forms specific to their jurisdiction. The information from original records can be helpful reminders as time passes. Consider keeping a record of common requirements for licensure applications such as times, dates, and place of supervision hours acquired, graduate school class syllabi, copies of current licensure documentation, etc. It can be a beneficial safeguard to keep records regardless of plans, as one may not be able to anticipate every life transition.



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» **STAY IN CONTACT WITH FORMER SUPERVISORS.** Continued professional contact with the clinical supervisors who signed off on supervision hours can be very helpful in this process. Each state typically uses different forms to document supervision hours and requires original signatures. If the supervisor is deceased or cannot be found, there are generally separate instructions to follow. Informing the former supervisor in advance and making the request specific can help assist in the speedy return of properly completed documents.

» **OBTAIN EDUCATION TRANSCRIPTS.** Most states require official transcripts from a graduate program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Some states require that records be sent directly from the educational institution to the licensing office. Transcripts can usually be ordered for a fee online or through fax or mail. This information is often available on the website of the educational institution.

» **CONTACT THE STATE LICENSING BOARD FOR SOCIAL WORK.** Each state has unique requirements mandated by law and regulated by the state licensing board. Important information and applications are typically available online from the board's website. An application and/or initial licensing fee is common and should be calculated into the transition budget.

» **REGISTER FOR LICENSING EXAM.** Each level of licensure requires a different exam. It is important to check with the state board to determine qualifications for the appropriate level of social work and which exam, if any, is required. Most states utilize the exam administered through the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). (California currently uses a different exam process.) Information regarding the exam and preparation are available on the ASWB website. Most often, applicants can have their exam results transferred through ASWB to a state board once the exam has been passed.

» **REMAIN FOCUSED.** The process of getting licensed after already practicing as a licensed social worker can feel frustrating and unnecessary. The application and information required can be overwhelming to many. It can be helpful to read through the information provided by the state board and separate the requirements into smaller steps. Many times there is a contact person you can speak to directly if you have questions.

RESOURCES

- » **National Association of Social Workers Center for Workforce Studies** provides information on the social work workforce. This information includes helpful resources to enhance professional skills. www.socialworkers.org
- » **Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)** is the non-profit association of social work licensing boards in the United States and Canada. There is a list of licensing boards and contact information available on the ASWB website. www.aswb.org
- » **Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)** is a nonprofit national association representing more than 3,000 individual members, as well as graduate and undergraduate programs of professional social work education. CSWE is responsible for accrediting schools of social work. www.cswe.org
- » **National Association of Social Workers** (2008). *Third Party Reimbursement for Clinical Social Work Services*. Washington, DC: NASW Press. *This book is useful for practitioners, administrators, and students in providing contact information for inquiries about state licensure, insurance and Medicare and Medicaid services.*
- » Groshong, Laura W. (2009). *Clinical Social Work Practice and Regulation*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America. *This book provides a summary of the fifty-one licensure laws and regulations which govern licensed clinical social work practice.*