

INITIAL ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The following steps are provided to guide an institution through the initial accreditation application process. Each of the steps must be followed in order for the institution to be eligible for consideration of accreditation by the Accrediting Commission. While there is no fixed, definitive timeframe for completing the entire accreditation review process, 12-18 months is a reasonable estimate for an institution committed to a serious investment of the necessary effort and resources.

Step 1 - Initial Inquiry

Preliminary Information: An institution requests information regarding the accreditation process through the ACCET website at www.accet.org and/or by contacting ACCET directly.

Inquiry Questionnaire: An institution submits a completed Inquiry Questionnaire and processing fee to obtain a preliminary determination as to whether the institution is eligible for accreditation. Refer to Document 1 – The Accreditation Process for a listing of eligibility requirements for ACCET accreditation, including the requirement that an institution has been under the same ownership and/or control for at least two years immediately prior to application.

Note: An institution will use the Accreditation Management System (AMS) to complete and submit the Inquiry Questionnaire and subsequent documents electronically to ACCET through a password protected log-in on the ACCET website. Following a review of the questionnaire, notification of acceptance or rejection is forwarded to the institution. If accepted, the institution is notified to proceed to the next step with the completion of Document 4 - Application for Accreditation and attendance at the required Accreditation Workshop either before or after the submission of the Application.

Note: An Inquiry Questionnaire expires if: (1) the Inquiry Questionnaire is not officially accepted by ACCET within 60 days of receipt of the questionnaire and/or (2) a completed Application for Accreditation is not submitted to ACCET within six (6) months of the acceptance date of the Inquiry Questionnaire.

Step 2 - Accreditation Workshop

An institution must attend a workshop before the institution's Application for Accreditation is accepted by ACCET, unless a written request is granted to attend the workshop after the acceptance. An institution registers for the required two-day Accreditation Workshop and pays the fee on the ACCET website. Note that an institution must have an accepted Inquiry Questionnaire to register. Accreditation workshops are offered several times each year at the ACCET office in Washington, DC and in the fall at the site of the annual conference. Registration materials are available on the ACCET website, and the accreditation workshop registration form and fee must be submitted online in advance of the workshop. The accreditation workshop fees are outlined in ACCET Document 10 – Fee Schedule.

Step 3 - Application for Accreditation

An institution completes and submits Document 4 - Application for Accreditation through AMS. The application must include the required supporting documentation for the main campus and all branches and auxiliary classrooms, as applicable. An application processing fee is submitted electronically through AMS for the main campus, each branch campus, and each auxiliary classroom included in the application. The application fees are outlined in ACCET Document 10 - Fee Schedule. An application is reviewed, with follow-up evaluation and request for additional information, clarification, and/or resolution, as appropriate. Upon review, an acceptance/rejection letter is forwarded to the institution. However, if an initial applicant institution adds or revised programs, relocates, or changes its name before the official ASER due date, an amended Application for Accreditation must be provided. Such changes may require additional fees or delay scheduling of the visit and final action by the Accrediting Commission.

Note: An application expires 12 months following the date of receipt at ACCET unless: (1) the application is accepted and (2) the Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (ASER), any Branch Analytic Self-Evaluation Report(s), request for the on-site visit(s), and on-site visit fees are received within that timeframe. This 12-month expiration period may be extended one cycle (four months), based on the submission of a written request with compelling reasons for the extension which, if approved, will be subject to the terms and conditions specified relative to fees, scheduling, and updated documentation. Institutions granted extensions must submit the following within the extended time frame: (1) ASER, (2) Request for an On-Site Evaluation Team Visit, and (3) visit fees.

A rejection of an application is not subject to appeal, but may be reviewed for reconsideration as determined by the Commission.

Step 4 - Analytic Self-Evaluation Report

Following acceptance of an application, ACCET provides the institution a projected schedule for submission of the Analytic Self-Evaluation Report (ASER) for the main campus and, if applicable, the Branch Analytic Self-Evaluation Report(s) (BASERs). The institution is directed to the appropriate version of the ASER (Document 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, or 3.4) and any templates applicable to the institution. These documents are explained at length in the Accreditation Workshop, may be viewed/downloaded at the ACCET website, and must be completed and submitted electronically through AMS.

The institution is advised that, upon submission of the ASER, no substantive changes in the institution's operations will be processed or further considered for ACCET approval until after the Accrediting Commission has met, reviewed, and taken final action upon the application for initial accreditation. Substantive changes include, but are not limited to, new programs, major program/course modifications, additional sites, and relocations out of the general market area. Since the ASER presents a comprehensive picture at a given point in time, the Commission wishes to ensure that the accreditation process is accurately focused on a stable representation of the institution's operations.

Step 5 - Readiness Visit

Following acceptance of an application for initial accreditation, an institution is scheduled for a Readiness Visit unless the institution submits written notification of its decision not to have the Readiness visit. At least one review cycle prior to the full on-site team evaluation, the one-day Readiness Visit is conducted by an experienced ACCET representative to assist an institution in its preparation for the subsequent on-site team evaluation. Prerequisites for the Readiness Visit are: (1) completion of a draft ASER and (2) attendance at an Accreditation Workshop. To schedule the Readiness Visit, an institution must submit ACCET Document 8 – Request for On-Site Evaluation Team Visit and the Readiness Visit fee. Upon completion of the Readiness Visit, the institution will assess whether it should proceed as scheduled with the full on-site team visit or delay the team visit to allow additional time for the institution to more fully address the issues in the ASER relative to compliance with the standards.

Step 6 - On-Site Evaluation Team Visit

Request for On-Site Visit: Concurrent with the submission of the final ASER/BASER(s), the institution submits a completed Document 8 – Request for On-Site Evaluation Team Visits and an electronic check for the on-site fee, based upon the schedule for the projected review cycle in which the institution is assigned (April, August, or December). The on-site evaluation visit fees are outlined in ACCET Document 10 – Fee Schedule.

On-Site Evaluation Team Visit: After the ASER/BASER materials are received, the assigned Commission Representative contacts the institution to set the date for the on-site visit and forwards specific information regarding the visit team and team members when the final arrangements have been made. The on-site evaluation team visit(s) is scheduled and conducted to verify the information reported in the ASER and determine whether the institution meets ACCET Standards.

The on-site evaluation team visits and conducts a review of the institution based on the ACCET Standards for Accreditation. The institution's self-analysis (ASER/BASERs) provides the framework for the team to evaluate operational activities/results in the context of ACCET's standards, policies, and procedures. At the end of the on-site visit, the team presents a brief oral exit briefing.

Note that any programs without enrollees at the time of the ACCET on-site visit will neither be evaluated in the team report nor subsequently considered by the ACCET Commission in its review of the institution for initial accreditation. Further, the institution may not offer or enroll students in programs that are not appropriately identified, reviewed, and approved by ACCET.

Except for financial statements, which are reviewed separately by ACCET, items presented with the application must be duplicated and made available to the on-site evaluation team in accordance with the Preparation Checklist for ACCET On-Site Evaluation Visits that is provided to the institution prior to the on-site visit.

Note: For multi-site vocational institutions operating in the United States, on-site visits will be conducted to the main campus and to all branches. For other multi-site institutions, including vocational institutions operating outside of the United States and all avocational institutions, on-site visits will be conducted to the main campus and up to 15 branches as part of the accreditation review process, with additional locations scheduled for on-site visits, as deemed necessary by the Accrediting Commission.

Step 7 - On-Site Evaluation Team Report and Institutional Response

Team Report: Within approximately 30 calendar days of the on-site visit, a written follow-up Team Report(s) is sent to the institution through AMS for its review and response.

Response to Team Report: Within 14 calendar days of receipt of the Team Report(s), an institution submits its response(s) to the Team Report(s) through AMS. This response allows for the institution to provide new and/or clarifying information regarding the findings reflected in the Team Report. The failure to submit a timely response to the Team Report is considered by ACCET to be a self-executed withdrawal of the institution's application for accreditation.

Step 8 - Accrediting Commission Deliberation and Action:¹

Commission Decision: The Accrediting Commission reviews and makes a decision to grant, deny, or defer initial accreditation. Information that is available to the Commission for its deliberation and action includes the Application for Accreditation, the ASER/BASER(s), the On-site Evaluation Team Report(s), the institution's response(s) to the team report(s), financial statements, and any other information that might have a bearing on accreditation. Document 11 - Policies and Practices of the Accrediting Commission describes the actions that may be taken by the Commission.

Notice of Commission Decision: A notification of the Accrediting Commission's decision is sent to the institution within 30 calendar days following the conclusion of the Commission meeting. Refer to ACCET Document 11 – Policies and Practices of the Accrediting Commission.

¹ An institution may voluntarily withdraw its application for initial accreditation at any time up until the date of the first Commission meeting at which the institution is scheduled for consideration of accreditation by the Commission, with written notice of withdrawal required to be received by ACCET prior to the first day of the meeting.