



## **CANDIDACY FOR ACCREDITATION**

The first stage in the process for a school, school system, or other education institution to be awarded accreditation by the Commission on Elementary Schools and/or the Commission on Secondary Schools is to seek and be granted Candidacy for Accreditation.

A Candidate for Accreditation is an education institution that:

- a. Has been in successful operation for at least one academic year;
- b. Has satisfactorily met the MSA-CESS Standards for Candidacy (a subset of the Standards for Accreditation);
- c. Has been offered and has formally accepted the offer of Candidacy for Accreditation;
- d. Has had that acceptance affirmed by the President of the Commissions; and
- e. Reflects a willingness and readiness to participate in the self-study and accreditation process;

An institution may be a Candidate for Accreditation for a maximum of three years unless specific approval is requested of and approved by the President.

A Candidate for Accreditation may advertise and include in its publications that it is a Candidate for Accreditation by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Institutions, Middle States Association of Colleges and Institutions.

**Section 1: Initiating a Request for Candidacy.** An education institution that has registered with the Commission(s) and that meets one or more of the categories and types of institutions accreditation (see *MSA-CESS Policy: Scope and Categories of Accredited Institutions*) by the Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Institutions may be invited by the President of the Commissions to submit an Application for Candidacy.

### **Section 2: The Application for Candidacy for Accreditation.**

An institution invited to submit an Application for Candidacy submits the Application to the President who reviews the Application and determines whether a Candidacy Visit should be scheduled. The President will invite the institution to proceed to the next step in the candidacy process if it is determined, based primarily on the information provided by the institution in its Application, that the institution is or is likely to meet the requirements for accreditation.

In certain cases, the President may waive the requirements in above based on pre-established collaborative relationships with an institution's parent organization. That relationship assures that the institution meets the Commissions' requirements for candidacy and has the capacity to succeed in the accreditation process, or if the institution is accredited by one of the accrediting agencies with which the Commissions have a cooperative accreditation agreement.

Standards for Candidacy. The Commissions have established Standards for Candidacy that are subsets of the appropriate Standards for Accreditation. The Standards for Candidacy are:

- a. Philosophy/Mission. The institution has a clearly written and actively implemented statement of philosophy/mission that conveys the general and specific purposes of its educational

program, expresses expectations for quality, and serves as the basis for daily operational and instructional decision making as well as long-range planning.

- b. Governance and Leadership. The institution is chartered, licensed, or authorized by a state, nation, or authority that operates in the public interest.
- c. Improvement Planning. The institution has or has the capacity to develop and implement a written strategic or long-range plan to improve its educational program and services.
- d. Finances. Financial resources are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in the institution's philosophy/mission. Financial records are available for review by the Middle States Association. The majority of resources raised for institution purposes is dedicated to the institution's operations. There is evidence that the institution has sufficient capacity and resources to complete the accreditation process.
- e. Facilities. The institution's facilities are safe, clean, and well maintained. Facilities are appropriate and adequate to implement the philosophy/mission of the institution. Facilities are regularly inspected for effective operation and meet all applicable laws including health and safety code requirements.
- f. Climate and Organization. The institution's organizational structure, operation, and climate facilitate achievement of its core values as expressed in the philosophy/mission. Administrative, instructional, and support staff are qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to effectively provide quality educational experiences.
- g. Health and Safety. The institution provides a safe, orderly, and healthy environment for teaching and learning. The institution adheres to local, state, and federal government health and safety requirements.
- h. Educational Program. The educational program consists of a carefully planned and well-executed curriculum that includes appropriate academic standards, solid pedagogy, and assessment, all based on research and best practices. The educational program is aligned with the institution's mission, approved by the governance and sufficiently financed.
- i. Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning. The institution systematically collects and rigorously analyzes quantifiable and observable evidence of individual learning and growth from multiple valid and reliable sources.
- j. Student Services. The institution provides all students with, or refers them to services that are age- and developmentally appropriate to optimize opportunities for life-long success.
- k. Student Life and Student Activities. The institution provides access to non-discriminatory student activities that are age- and developmentally appropriate to supplement the educational program.
- l. Information Resources and Technology. Information resources, materials, and technology are accessible and of adequate scope, quantity, and quality to facilitate the institution's pursuit of its total educational program.

**Section 3: Candidacy Visit.** If the President determines that an institution should proceed with the candidacy process, an onsite Candidacy Visit is scheduled.

The purpose of this visit is two-fold: a) to determine whether the institution currently meets Standards for Accreditation or is likely to do so in the near future and b) to ascertain the institution's readiness for the accreditation process.

Under certain circumstances, the President has the authority to waive the onsite visit requirement, but never in the case of postsecondary, non-degree granting career and technology institutions that shall always host an onsite visit. The Candidacy Visitor shall submit a written report on his/her findings and a recommendation to the President.

**Section 4: Offer/Deferral of Candidacy.** Based on the institution's Application for Candidacy and the report of the Candidacy Visitor, the President decides to offer candidacy, defer candidacy, or deny candidacy.

If the decision is to offer Candidacy for Accreditation, the President makes a formal offer to the institution, in writing, within 60 days of the decision and the reasons for the decision.

If the decision is to defer offering Candidacy to an institution, the President informs the institution, in writing, the reasons for the decision.

**Section 5: Offer and Acceptance of Candidacy for Accreditation.**

An offer of Candidacy for Accreditation must be accepted by an institution within one calendar year of the date of the offer. All offers not accepted within one year may be rescinded by the President.

A form for accepting an offer of Candidacy is included with the offer letter and must be returned to the President of the Commissions within the time prescribed.

Notification of Candidacy Actions. The President will inform the Commissions regarding all actions related to Candidacy for Accreditation at the Commissions' semi-annual meetings.

Responsibilities of Candidate Institutions. Institutions that are Candidates for Accreditation shall fulfill, as appropriate, all expectations expressed in Policy: Expectations of Accredited Institutions.

**Section 6: Term of Candidacy for Accreditation.**

An institution that has been offered and has accepted Candidacy for Accreditation may remain as a Candidate for Accreditation for a period not to exceed three years.

During the term as a Candidate for Accreditation, the institution must complete a self-study, receive a MSA-CESS-appointed visiting team, and be granted Accreditation by the appropriate Commission(s).

If an institution is unable to be granted Accreditation within the time prescribed, its status as a Candidate for Accreditation is removed by the President.

If unusual conditions arise that preclude an institution that is a Candidate for Accreditation from meeting requirements for Accreditation within the period prescribed, the institution may seek approval, in writing, for extension of the term of Candidacy. Decisions on extension of the term of Candidacy are made by the President. Under no circumstances, however, will the term of Candidacy term exceed five years.

**Section 6: Candidate Fees and Dues**

A Candidacy Fee is billed when an institution requests to register as an institution seeking accreditation by the Commission(s) and is payable immediately and submitted with the registration.

The institution will also be required to pay applicable travel costs for the Candidacy Visit.

When an institution accepts an offer of Candidacy for Accreditation, it will be assessed annual dues, effective with the acceptance of the offer of candidacy, in the same manner and according to the same dues schedule applicable to Accredited institutions.

## Section 7: Candidacy for Accreditation<sup>1</sup> for Postsecondary Institutions

General. The first stage in the process for a school, school system, or other education institution to be awarded accreditation by the Commission on Elementary Schools and/or the Commission on Secondary Schools is to seek and be granted Candidacy for Accreditation.

A Candidate for Accreditation is an education institution that:

- a. Has been in successful operation for at least one academic year;
- b. Has satisfactorily met the MSA-CSS Standards for Candidacy (a subset of the Standards for Accreditation);
- c. Has been offered and has formally accepted the offer of Candidacy for Accreditation;
- d. Has had that acceptance affirmed by the President of the Commission; and
- e. Reflects a willingness and readiness to participate in the self-study and accreditation process.

A Candidate for Accreditation may advertise and include in its publications as follows:

The XYZ Career and Technical Institute is a Candidate for Accreditation by the Commission on Secondary Schools of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. (267-284-5000).

Initiating a Request for Candidacy. A career/technical institution that offers career and technical programs for adult students and has registered with the Commission may be invited by the President of the Commissions to submit an Application for Candidacy.

The Application for Candidacy for Accreditation. An institution invited to submit an Application for Candidacy submits the Application to the President who reviews the Application and determines whether a Candidacy Visit should be scheduled. The President will invite the institution to proceed to the next step in the candidacy process if it is determined, based primarily on the information provided by the institution in its Application, that the institution is in compliance with or is likely to come into compliance with the Standards following a period of self-study.

Standards for Candidacy. The Commissions have established Standards for Candidacy that are subsets of the appropriate Standards for Accreditation. The Standards for Candidacy are:

- a. Mission. The institution has a clearly written and actively implemented statement of Mission that conveys the general and specific purposes of its educational program, expresses expectations for quality, and serves as the basis for daily operational and instructional decision making as well as long-range planning.
- b. Governance and Leadership. The institution is chartered, licensed, or authorized by a state, nation, or other civil authority to operate an educational institution.
- c. Improvement Planning. The institution has or has the capacity to develop and implement a written strategic or long-range plan to improve its students' performance and the institution's capacity to produce the levels of student performance stated in its Profile of Graduates.
- d. Finances. The institution has financial resources that are sufficient to provide the educational opportunities defined in the institution's Mission and Profile of Graduates. Financial records are available for review by the Middle States Association. The majority of resources raised for institution purposes are dedicated to the institution's operations. There is evidence that the institution has sufficient capacity and resources to complete the accreditation process.
- e. Facilities. The institution's facilities are safe, clean, and well maintained. Facilities are appropriate and adequate to implement the Mission of the institution and provide the institution's career/technical programs. Facilities are regularly inspected for effective operation and meet all applicable laws including health and safety code requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> MSA-CESS uses the term Candidacy for Accreditation to refer to the pre-accreditation stage of the accreditation process.

- f. Climate, Organization, and Staff. The institution's organizational structure, operation, and climate facilitate achievement of its core purposes as expressed in its Mission. Administrative, instructional, and support staff are qualified, competent, and sufficient in number to effectively provide quality educational experiences.
- g. Health and Safety. The institution provides a safe, orderly, and healthy environment for teaching and learning. The institution adheres to local, state, and federal government health and safety requirements.
- h. Educational Program. The educational program consists of a carefully planned and well-executed career/technical components that include appropriate standards for student performance, solid pedagogy, and an appropriate program for assessing student performance, all based on research and best practices. The educational program is approved by the institution's governing body (if appropriate), is aligned with the institution's Mission, and sufficiently financed.
- i. Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning. The institution systematically collects and rigorously analyzes quantifiable and observable evidence of individual learning and growth from multiple valid and reliable sources.
- j. Student Services. The institution provides all students with, or refers them to services that are age- and developmentally appropriate to optimize opportunities for learning.
- k. Student Life and Student Activities. The institution provides access to non-discriminatory student activities that are age- and developmentally-appropriate to supplement the educational program.
- l. Information and Technology Resources. Information resources, materials, and technology are accessible and of adequate scope, quantity, and quality to facilitate the institution's pursuit of its total educational program.

#### Candidacy Visit.

- a. If the President determines that an institution should proceed with the candidacy process, an onsite Candidacy Visit is scheduled.
- b. The purpose of this visit is three-fold: a) to determine whether the institution is in compliance with the Commission's Standards for Candidacy; b) whether it is likely that the institution can comply with the Standards for Accreditation for Career and Technical Institutions, and c) to ascertain the institution's ability and readiness for undertaking the self-study and accreditation process.

Offer/Deferral of Candidacy. Based on the institution's Application for Candidacy and the report of the Candidacy Visitor, the President decides to offer candidacy, defer candidacy, or deny candidacy.

- a. If the decision is to offer Candidacy for Accreditation, the President makes a formal offer to the institution, in writing, within 60 days of the decision and the reasons for the decision.
- b. If the decision is to defer offering Candidacy to an institution, the President informs the institution, in writing, the reasons for the decision. The notice includes the institution's right to due process as provided in MSA-CSS Policy 6.3, Section 6.3.13, Appeals from Adverse Accrediting Decisions.

#### Offer and Acceptance of Candidacy for Accreditation.

- a. An offer of Candidacy for Accreditation must be accepted by an institution within one calendar year of the date of the offer. All offers not accepted within one calendar year may be rescinded by the President.
- b. A form for accepting an offer of Candidacy is included with the offer letter and must be returned to the President of the Commissions within the time prescribed.

#### Term of Candidacy for Accreditation.

- a. An institution that has been offered and accepted Candidacy for Accreditation may be a Candidate for Accreditation for a maximum of three years unless approval to extend Candidacy by one of two years is requested and approved by the President.
- b. A one- or two-year extension to Candidacy for Accreditation may be granted but will be the rare exception rather than the rule. Acceptable reasons for approving a one- or two-year extension include:

- 1) A physical catastrophe such as a hurricane, earthquake, or tornado that requires the institution to cease functioning for a period of time that would preclude an on-site accreditation visit prior to the date the institution's term of accreditation will expire;
  - 2) An interruption in the institution's functioning and delivery of its educational program that is beyond the control of the institution, such as governmental coups, wars, and insurrections; and
  - 3) A labor action that causes members of the institution's staff to withhold services and, as a result, prevent them from performing their expected roles in a self-study and accreditation process and visit.
- c. In no case will Candidacy for Accreditation extend beyond five years. Institutions that fail to achieve accreditation within five years will be required to wait at least one calendar year before being permitted to begin the Application for Candidacy again.
  - d. During the term as a Candidate for Accreditation, the institution must complete a self-study, host a MSA-CSS-appointed accreditation visiting team, and be granted Accreditation by the Commission.
  - e. If an institution is unable to achieve Accreditation within the time prescribed, its status as a Candidate for Accreditation is removed by the President.

Candidate Fees and Dues.

- a. A Candidacy Fee is billed when an institution is notified that a Candidacy Visit will be conducted and is payable immediately.
- b. The institution will also be required to pay applicable travel costs for the Candidacy Visit.
- c. When an institution accepts an offer of Candidacy for Accreditation, it will begin to pay annual dues, effective with the date on which the offer of candidacy was accepted.

Responsibilities of Candidate Institutions. Institutions that are Candidates for Accreditation shall fulfill, as appropriate, all expectations expressed in MSA-CESS Policy: Expectations of Accredited Institutions.

Notification of Candidacy Actions. The President will inform the Commissions regarding all actions related to Candidacy for Accreditation at the Commission's semi-annual meeting.