



# Seeking Approval of Proposed Changes

The Commission recognizes that change within affiliated organizations is as constant and rapid as it is challenging and inevitable. Organizations offering higher learning must be dynamic, and from time to time they make changes in their educational offerings, operations, governance systems, and locations. The Commission is supportive of educational innovation and change to improve educational quality and to respond to new expectations.

Because change is a constant state of affairs at every college and university, the Commission seeks to find the right balance between identifying changes that warrant no Commission review and those that could have an impact on the accreditation relationship. An organization's mission distinguishes it, and its status of affiliation with the Commission is defined, affirmed, or redefined following a comprehensive evaluation or some subsequent process of formal examination.

Because some changes may affect affiliation, the Commission has defined specific conditions under which an organization needs to obtain authorization before implementing them. Through its policies on institutional change, the Commission identifies changes that might signify a departure from an organization's stated mission and purposes operative at the time of the most recent evaluation. Those changes need to be approved by the Commission as being both appropriate to the organization and within the organization's capability of providing education with quality. Whether a college or university uses PEAQ or AQIP to continue its accredited status with the Commission, it will follow the Commission's policies on organizational change. Differences in change approval processes for PEAQ and AQIP are explained in this section.

The Board of Trustees annually evaluates the responsiveness of change policies and procedures to organizational dynamics, their effectiveness in addressing quality assurance issues, and their usefulness in enhancing organizational and educational improvement. The policy references regarding organizational change are presented here in four categories: mission or structure, educational offerings, educational sites, and relationship with the Commission. Because the text follows closely stated Commission policy, which may be modified or amended between printings of this section of the *Handbook*, it is always wise to check for the most up-to-date policy and procedure by going to the Commission's Web site or speaking directly with the Commission staff liaison.

→ Visit our Web site

to review current  
change policies

## Changes Requiring Commission Approval

### Changes in Mission or Structure

Commission approval is required when

- An organization changes, after significant planning, the character and nature of the student body.
- An organization merges with an unaccredited organization (a team visit is required either before approval or within six months after the merger is official).
- An organization merges with a regionally accredited or affiliated organization. Commission staff may give approval upon receipt and evaluation of documentation that the organization or new entity continues to meet Commission Criteria, but will conduct a visit within a year.
- An organization changes institutional affiliation with a sponsoring organization.

► **See Section 7.3**  
for information on  
accreditation of  
closing organizations

- An organization contracts with nonaccredited entities to provide 50 percent or more of a credit-bearing program.
- An organization changes ownership and/or legal status. Commission staff may give approval upon receipt and evaluation of documentation that the organization's mission remains unchanged, that the academic programs will continue, that board governance continues to meet Commission requirements, and that appropriate financial resources continue to support the organization, but will conduct a visit within six months.
- An organization experiences unanticipated but significant changes in the character and nature of the student body (such as by assuming oversight for programs orphaned by a closing college or university). Commission staff may give approval after receipt and evaluation of documentation that the organization's activities, particularly those involving teach-outs, meet Commission and federal requirements; but if the organization's commitment is for more than a limited teach-out, staff may require a visit within a year.

### Changes in Educational Offerings

Commission approval is required to extend accreditation to include

- Program offerings at a new degree level.
- A significant new academic program or major that requires substantial financial investment or substantial reallocation of financial resources.
- A new academic program that shifts the organization's mission.
- Degree programs offered through distance delivery methods.
- Regular course offerings that are not currently included within the organization's affiliated status. Commission staff may give approval after receipt and evaluation of documentation that the offerings are appropriate to the organization's mission, have all necessary approvals, and will be effectively developed and supported.

### Changes in Educational Sites

Commission approval is required to extend accreditation to include

- A new site that houses a full range of instruction as well as administrative and support services (such as a new campus or branch). Commission staff may give approval upon receipt and evaluation of documentation including a business plan, but will conduct a visit within six months of the opening of the site.
- An instructional site at which the organization provides one or more degree programs.
- An off-campus site at which the organization offers 50 percent or more of the courses leading to one of its degree programs and at which it enrolls one hundred or more students (unduplicated head count) in an academic year.
- Five or more courses a year at an out-of-state site or an international site. Commission staff may give approval after receipt and evaluation of documentation that the offerings are appropriate to the organization's mission, have all necessary approvals, and will be effectively developed and supported.

### Changes in Relationship with the Commission

Commission approval is required to

- Change the stipulations within the current affiliation status.
- Change the date of a comprehensive visit beyond the cycle established by policy.
- Change the date of another visit or required report. Commission staff may make the decision after receipt and evaluation of documentation that shows that such changes are appropriate.
- Transfer accreditation to a new entity. Commission staff may give approval after receipt and evaluation of documentation that the organization or new entity continues to meet Commission Criteria, but will conduct an evaluation within a year.

► **See Section 8.2**  
for information on  
site visits under the federal  
compliance program

## Determining a Separately Accreditable Organization

The accreditation of an organization includes all its components, wherever located. A component of a larger organization may be separately accreditable if a significant portion of responsibility and decision making for its educational activities lies within the component and not in the other parts of the larger system.

For organizations operating solely within the North Central Region, the Commission determines, following consultation with the CEO of the organizational system, (1) whether the system will be accredited or whether its components will be separately accredited, and (2) how the evaluation will be conducted.

An instructional site located in a region other than that of its home campus must seek separate accreditation in the region in which it exists if it functions independent of operational control of the parent college or university. An instructional site will be deemed operationally independent and accreditable by the host region when it meets these criteria:

The instructional site

- Has, under board policy, substantial financial and administrative independence from the home organization, including matters related to personnel
- Has a full-time chief administrative officer
- Is empowered, under board policy, to initiate and sustain its own academic programs
- Has degree-granting authority in the state or jurisdiction in which it is located

Each regional commission will determine if any of its affiliated organizations have instructional sites that appear to be separately accreditable. Following consultation with the host commission and the organization, and upon learning from the host region the site's potential to meet its eligibility requirements, the home region will make the determination about the status of the site. The host region agrees to take deliberate steps toward reviewing any instructional sites identified as operationally independent in keeping with its policies and procedures for applying organizations. An institution identified as separately accreditable will continue to be included in the accreditation of the parent college or university until it achieves separate accreditation.

Off-campus instructional sites, regardless of location, not found to be operationally independent are included in the accreditation of the home campus. The operational independence of such sites is periodically reviewed under this policy.

## Documentation to Support a Change Request

➔ **Visit our Web site**

*to review the current change policies and procedures*

The organization's written request and supporting documentation serve as the basic reference for the Commission's decision to approve or deny a request to extend accreditation to include a significant organizational change. Approval of the request results in the modification or expansion of the organization's relationship with the Commission.

A request for approval of a proposed change needs to provide a well-written and comprehensive analysis. To assist the organization in preparing its request, the Commission poses six major questions to address and proposes narrative and documentation that should be part of the request. They need to be answered even if the organization includes copies of applications that have been submitted to other agencies, such as state governing boards.

### 1. What change is being proposed?

- State the specific change that is proposed.
- State the expected outcomes of this proposed change (for example, enrollment growth, enhanced services, financial growth).
- Project the impact of this proposed change on the organization's current mission, the numbers and types of students to be served, and the breadth of educational offerings.
- Identify from this list the Commission's policy/policies relevant to this change:

- Change in mission or structure (policy I.C.2.a)
- Change in educational offering (policy I.C.2.b.)
- Change in educational sites (policy I.C.2.c.)
- Change in relationship with the Commission (policy I.C.2.d.)

**2. What factors led the organization to undertake the proposed change?**

- Describe the relationship between the proposed change and ongoing planning.
- Describe the needs analysis related to this proposed change.
- Describe the involvement of various constituencies in developing this proposed change.

**3. What necessary approvals have been obtained to implement the proposed change?**

- Identify the internal approvals required, and provide documentation confirming these actions.
- Identify the external approvals required, and provide documentation confirming these actions.

**4. What impact might the proposed change have on challenges identified by the Commission as part of or subsequent to the last comprehensive visit?**

- Identify challenges directly related to the proposed change.
- Describe how the organization has addressed the challenge(s).

**5. What are the organization's plans to implement and sustain the proposed change?**

- Describe the involvement of appropriately credentialed faculty and experienced staff necessary to accomplish the proposed change (curriculum development and oversight, evaluation of instruction, and assessment of learning outcomes).
- Describe the administrative structure (accountability processes, leadership roles) necessary to support this proposed change.
- Describe how the organization will make learning resources and support services available to students (student support services, library resources, academic advising, and financial aid counseling).
- Provide financial data that document the organization's capacity to implement and sustain the proposed change (projected budgets, recent audit reports, revenue streams, cost of facilities, and projected facility and equipment costs).
- Specify the timeline used to implement the proposed change.

**6. What are the organization's strategies to evaluate the proposed change?**

- Describe the measures the organization will use to document the achievement of its expected outcomes.
- Describe how the assessment of student learning is integrated into the assessment program.

## Timing the Submission of a Change Request

Any affiliated organization may request at any time Commission review of changes it plans to introduce. The only organizations limited in this regard are those appealing a decision of the Commission. For changes that require Commission action, careful attention should be paid to the timing of the request.

The written request must be made early enough for the proposed change to be reviewed by the appropriate approval process (staff, Evaluators Panel, focused or comprehensive visit and appropriate review process) and for final action to be taken before the date on which the organization plans to effect the change. Some approval processes can be as short as two months and some, particularly those involving a focused visit, may take as long as five or six months.

➔ **Visit our Web site**

for the current  
Commission calendar

➤ **See Section 7.1**  
for a discussion of  
focused visits to  
review change requests

➔ **Visit the AQIP Web site**

at <http://www.AQIP.org>  
for details and follow the link  
for organizational change

The organization should write or call the Commission staff liaison early in the consideration of a change to determine the appropriate review process and to develop a realistic timetable for seeking approval. This applies to organizations in both PEAQ and AQIP. The organization's representative and the Commission staff liaison will need to determine the appropriate means of Commission review. That decision will establish a tentative timeline for the approval process, allowing the organization to know when the change can be implemented if it receives Commission approval.

With few exceptions, Commission action on a request for organizational change is handled by the Institutional Actions Council, which meets bimonthly during a calendar year.

## Processes for Approval of Change Requests

Once an organization notifies the Commission about specific aspects of its planning and submits a change request to that effect, the staff liaison determines the appropriate process under which the request will be evaluated. The process options are an **evaluation by the staff**, an **Evaluators Panel**, or an **evaluation team**. The recommendation resulting from that process is sent to the next scheduled meeting of the Institutional Actions Council. In some limited situations defined by policy, the Commission staff may take action on behalf of the Commission. Those actions are reported to the Board for information. When a visit is conducted, a Readers Panel evaluates the recommendation before it is sent to the IAC.

In determining the appropriate process for evaluating a change request, the Commission staff weighs such variables as the following.

- The clarity of the connection between the organization's mission and the proposed change
- The history of the Commission's relationship with the organization
- The organization's history of successfully initiating a change request
- The scope of the proposed change
- The potential impact of the proposed change on the organization
- Response to the proposed change by other review bodies (such as state agencies and program accrediting bodies)
- The strength of the evidence provided in the organization's request that it can effectively initiate the change and evaluate its effectiveness

### Evaluators Panel Process

An Evaluators Panel consists of three peer reviewers. Each panel member conducts an independent review of the written request, then participates in a conference call to discuss his/her recommendation, and, finally, recommends either forwarding the change request to the Institutional Actions Council for approval or scheduling a focused visit to evaluate the change. If the latter is the decision, the organization may request a visit, or it may withdraw its change request. If the request for change is withdrawn, the organization must wait one year before resubmitting a request for an Evaluators Panel review of the same change.

### AQIP Change Approval Process

All institutions participating in AQIP for the purpose of maintaining accreditation are obligated to follow the Commission's change policy discussed in this section. AQIP is working to bring its procedures for reviewing change requests more in line with its other procedures, but the underlying policies remain the same. AQIP participants considering a change request should phone or e-mail any of the AQIP staff member.