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Introduction

The *Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation Manual* outlines the process and requirements for institutions interested in seeking the voluntary status of accreditation with the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC, or the Commission). An accredited status assures students and members of the general public that an institution meets or exceeds broadly accepted standards of educational quality and effectiveness and has the capacity to maintain the quality and effectiveness of its educational services over time. Therefore, ACCJC’s preaccreditation process is intentionally rigorous, and establishes that an institution has the foundational structures and organizational resources in place to successfully meet or exceed the Commission’s Standards\(^1\) and sustain compliance after initial accreditation has been granted.

ACCJC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to accredit institutions with a primary mission of granting associate’s degrees.\(^2\) ACCJC accredits institutions in the United States and its territories and affiliates. ACCJC may accredit non-domestic institutions in other geographic regions at its discretion, provided they have a primary mission of granting associate degrees. Per policy and federal regulation, ACCJC only awards preaccreditation status (also referred to as Candidacy status) to those institutions it determines are likely to be successful in obtaining accreditation and sustaining compliance with the Commission’s Standards.

Interested institutions whose mission and profile fall within the scope of ACCJC’s federal recognition may seek eligibility to apply for ACCJC preaccreditation and initial accreditation following the steps described in this manual. Prior to beginning the process, interested institutions are expected to become familiar with the Commission and its scope and expectations. The Commission expects that interested institutions will review ACCJC Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies (including the *Policy on Preaccreditation*) carefully. These resources are publicly available on the ACCJC website ([http://www.accjc.org](http://www.accjc.org)).

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\(^1\) ACCJC’s Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission Policies are collectively referred to as the Commission’s Standards.

\(^2\) ACCJC member institutions may also award certificates and other credentials, including bachelor’s degrees, in cases where the provision of such credentials is consistent with their institutional mission and, if applicable, authorized by their governmental authorities.
Overview: Steps in the Preaccreditation Process

The diagram below provides a high-level overview of the steps and institutional activities in the preaccreditation process.

Each step is described in greater detail in the sections that follow.

1. Establishing Eligibility to Apply for Preaccreditation Status

1.1 General Information

Per Commission policy, any institution with a primary mission of granting the associate degree may seek to establish eligibility to apply for ACCJC preaccreditation (also referred to as Candidacy). Eligibility is not preaccreditation; rather, it is a precondition for preaccreditation. “Eligibility” or “eligible” refers to a determination by ACCJC that an institution meets the Commission’s Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation (ERs) and may therefore apply for Candidacy status. The term eligibility

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3 See Policy on Preaccreditation.
may also refer to the process through which an institution demonstrates that it complies with Eligibility Requirements.

The Commission’s Eligibility Requirements represent the minimum qualifications for institutions seeking an accredited status with ACCJC. Institutions wishing to pursue ACCJC accreditation must first demonstrate their eligibility to apply for Candidacy status from the Commission. The process for demonstrating eligibility assures that interested institutions fall within ACCJC’s scope of authority and federal recognition, and allows for an assessment of the degree to which the institution complies with all Eligibility Requirements.

Eligibility is not a formal affiliation with the Commission. An eligible institution must not make any representation which claims or implies any relationship or standing with ACCJC, even as it seeks Candidacy status. ACCJC does not list eligible institutions in its directory of member institutions.

Institutions may maintain eligibility for up to three years as they seek Candidacy. If the institution has not achieved Candidacy status within this three-year period, its eligibility lapses and it must submit a new eligibility application in order to proceed. If an eligible institution changes its state of incorporation, its mission, and/or ownership/control during this three-year period, eligibility may be voided; this also necessitates a new eligibility application in order to proceed.

1.2 Initial Inquiry
To begin the process of establishing eligibility to apply for preaccreditation, interested institutions must complete and submit an Eligibility Inquiry through the ACCJC website. Commission staff will review the form and contact the institution to discuss the institution’s mission and alignment with ACCJC’s scope of authority and membership profile. If appropriate, staff will also review next steps and clarify fees for application during this initial conversation.

1.3 Eligibility Application
After meeting with Commission staff and confirming alignment of mission and scope, interested institutions must prepare an Eligibility Application documenting institutional compliance with each of ACCJC’s Eligibility Requirements for Accreditation (ERs). ACCJC staff will provide a template for the eligibility application report to assist the institution with formatting. The specific documents and supporting evidence required to establish alignment with each ER are embedded in the template, and are also provided in Section 1.5 of this Manual for reference.

Institutions may submit completed Eligibility Applications to ACCJC for review as soon as they are completed. ACCJC staff will invoice institutions for the eligibility review upon receipt of the application.

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4 See Policy on Representation of Accredited Status.
5 The current ACCJC Fee Schedule is available on the ACCJC website at: https://accjc.org/dues-and-fees-schedule/.
1.4 Eligibility Review
The Commission’s Eligibility Committee reviews Eligibility Applications on behalf of the Commission. The Eligibility Committee and/or ACCJC staff may ask to speak with institutional representatives to clarify information in the application. The Eligibility Committee will review the application materials and take one of the following actions:

1. Approve the application and grant eligibility,
2. Deny the application, or
3. Defer the decision and request additional information from the institution

The Commission will notify institutions of the decision in writing. If the Commission has granted eligibility, the written notification will detail the timeframe for the institution’s next steps in the process. If the Commission does not grant eligibility, the written notification will outline which ERs the institution has not met. Once the institution determines it can meet all of the ERs, it may submit a subsequent Eligibility Application following the process outlined above. Please note that the application fee applies for each new application. Institutions may withdraw an Eligibility Application without prejudice at any time prior to final action by the Commission.

1.5 ACCJC Eligibility Requirements (ERs) and Suggested Documentation
ACCJC’s Eligibility Requirements (ERs) establish baseline expectations for institutional structure, resources, and operations and provide a foundation for institutional compliance with ACCJC Accreditation Standards. Using the eligibility application template provided by ACCJC staff, institutions interested in pursuing an accredited status with ACCJC must provide brief narrative and supporting documentation to demonstrate compliance with each ER. Suggested documentation for each ER is provided below. These suggestions are also embedded in the eligibility application template.

ER 1: Authority
The institution is authorized or licensed to operate as a post-secondary educational institution and to award degrees by an appropriate governmental organization or agency as required by each of the jurisdictions or regions in which it operates.

Private institutions, if required by the appropriate statutory regulatory body, must submit evidence of authorization, licensure, or approval by that body. If incorporated, the institution shall submit a copy of its articles of incorporation.

Suggested Documentation:
- Degree-granting approval statement, authorization to operate, or certificates from appropriate bodies
- Articles of incorporation (private institutions)
ER 2: Operational Status
The institution is operational, with students actively pursuing its degree programs.

*Suggested Documentation:*
- Enrollment history of institution (most recent three years suggested)
- Enrollments in institutional degree programs by year or cohort, including degrees awarded, if any
- Current schedule of classes

ER 3: Degrees
A substantial portion of the institution’s educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees, and a significant proportion of its students are enrolled in them. At least one degree program must be of two academic years in length.

*Suggested Documentation:*
- List of degrees, course credit requirements, and length of study for each degree program
- General education courses and requirements for each degree offered
- Catalog designation of college-level courses for which degree credit is granted
- Data describing student enrollment in each degree program and student enrollment in the institution’s non-degree programs

ER 4: Chief Executive Officer
The institution has a chief executive officer appointed by the governing board, whose full-time responsibility is to the institution, and who possesses the requisite authority to administer board policies. Neither the district/system chief executive officer nor the institutional chief executive officer may serve as the chair of the governing board. The institution informs the Commission immediately when there is a change in the institutional chief executive officer.

*Suggested Documentation:*
- Name, address, and biographical information about the CEO
- Certification of CEO’s full-time responsibility to the institution signed by the CEO and governing board chair

ER 5: Financial Accountability
The institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by an appropriate public agency. Institutions that are already Title IV eligible must demonstrate compliance with federal requirements.

Additional financial accountability for eligibility applicants: The institution shall submit with its eligibility application a copy of the budget and institutional financial
audits and management letters prepared by an outside certified public accountant or by an appropriate public agency, who has no other relationship to the institution, for its two most recent fiscal years, including the fiscal year ending immediately prior to the date of the submission of the application. The audits must be certified and any exceptions explained. It is recommended that the auditor employ as a guide Audits of Colleges and Universities, published by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants. An applicant institution must not show an annual or cumulative operating deficit at any time during the eligibility application process or, if a deficit, the institution must satisfactorily show how it is being addressed.

Suggested Documentation:
- Past, current, and proposed budgets
- Certified independent audits, including management letters (most recent three years suggested)
- Financial aid program review/audits, if the institution is a participant
- Student loan default rates and relevant U.S. Department of Education reports, if the institution is a participant

ER 6: Mission
The institution's educational mission is clearly defined, adopted, and published by its governing board consistent with its legal authorization, and is appropriate to a degree-granting institution of higher education and the constituency it seeks to serve. The mission statement defines institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.

Suggested Documentation:
- Copy of the mission statement as it appears in a published catalog or other public document
- Minutes of governing board meeting where the mission statement was adopted
- Any recent revisions to the mission statement

ER 7: Governing Board
The institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the academic quality, institutional integrity, and financial stability of the institution and for ensuring that the institution's mission is achieved. This board is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the financial resources of the institution are used to provide a sound educational program. Its membership is sufficient in size and composition to fulfill all board responsibilities.

The governing board is an independent policy-making body capable of reflecting constituent and public interest in board activities and decisions. A majority of the board members have no employment, family, ownership, or other personal financial interest in the institution. The board adheres to a conflict of interest policy that assures that those interests are disclosed and that they do not interfere with the
impartiality of governing body members or outweigh the greater duty to secure and ensure the academic and fiscal integrity of the institution.

**Suggested Documentation:**
- Biographical information about governing board members
- Copy of governing board bylaws
- Copy of conflict of interest policy
- Certification that there is no board majority of persons with employment, family, ownership, or personal interest in the institution; this must be signed by the chief executive officer and governing board chair

**ER 8: Administrative Capacity**
The institution has sufficient staff, with appropriate preparation and experience to provide the administrative services necessary to support its mission and purpose.

**Suggested Documentation:**
- Organizational chart, including names of those in the identified positions
- Names and biographical information about administrative staff

**ER 9: Educational Programs**
The institution’s principal degree programs are congruent with its mission, are based on recognized higher education field(s) of study, are of sufficient content and length, are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered, and culminate in identified student outcomes.

**Suggested Documentation:**
- Names of programs which reflect the mission of the institution, including documentation of at least one degree program of two academic years in length
- Documentation from catalog or other public document which describes courses and curricular sequence of educational programs
- Documentation of location(s) of educational programs, including a list of those offered electronically
- Student learning outcomes for degree programs

**ER 10: Academic Credit**
The institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices for degree-granting institutions of higher education and in accordance with statutory or system regulatory requirements. The institution provides appropriate information about the awarding of academic credit. (Standard II.A.9 and II.A.10)
**Suggested Documentation:**

- Institutional policies on transfer and award of credit (See Commission’s *Policy on Award of Credit* and *Policy on Transfer of Credit*)
- Catalog documentation of credits awarded
- Formula used by the institution to calculate values of units of academic credit, especially for laboratory, clinical, or other learning configurations

**ER 11: Student Learning and Student Achievement**

The institution defines standards for student achievement and assesses its performance against those standards. The institution publishes for each program the program's expected student learning and any program-specific achievement outcomes. Through regular and systematic assessment, it demonstrates that students who complete programs, no matter where or how they are offered, achieve the identified outcomes and that the standards for student achievement are met.

**Suggested Documentation:**

- Catalog statements which establish student learning outcomes for courses, programs, and degrees
- Student learning outcome data from educational program reviews
- Graduation, transfer, job placement, licensure examination pass rate history, course completion, retention term to term, progression to the next course/level, program completion, as appropriate to the institutional mission

**ER 12: General Education**

The institution defines and incorporates into all of its degree programs a substantial component of general education designed to ensure breadth of knowledge and promote intellectual inquiry. The general education component includes an introduction to some of the major areas of knowledge. General education courses are selected to ensure students achieve comprehensive learning outcomes in the degree program. Degree credit for the general education component must be consistent with levels of quality and rigor appropriate to higher education.

**Suggested Documentation:**

- List of general education courses currently offered, including catalog descriptions and evidence of student learning outcomes, wherever they exist, i.e., course outlines, syllabi, etc.
- Course outlines for language and quantitative reasoning courses
- Evidence that general education courses are of higher education rigor and quality

**ER 13: Academic Freedom**

The institution's faculty and students are free to examine and test all knowledge appropriate to their discipline or area of major study as judged by the academic/educational community in general. Regardless of institutional affiliation or
sponsorship, the institution maintains an atmosphere in which intellectual freedom and independence exist.

_Suggested Documentation:_
- Board approved policy on academic freedom

**ER 14: Faculty**
The institution has a sufficient number of qualified faculty, which includes full-time faculty and may include part-time and adjunct faculty, to achieve the institutional mission and purposes. The number is sufficient in size and experience to support all of the institution's educational programs. A clear statement of faculty responsibilities must include development and review of curriculum as well as assessment of learning.

_Documentation:_
- Full-time and part-time faculty roster, including degrees and experience (note that faculty degrees must be from U.S. accredited institutions or the equivalent)
- Faculty responsibilities statement or contract outlining faculty responsibilities
- Current schedule of classes identifying faculty responsible for each class

**ER 15: Student Support Services**
The institution provides for all of its students appropriate student support services that foster student learning and development within the context of the institutional mission.

_Suggested Documentation:_
- Demographic characteristics of students
- Evidence the institution assesses student needs for services and provides for them
- List of student support services provided which reflect the mission of the institution
- Description of programs for special student populations

**ER 16: Admissions**
The institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its mission that specify the qualifications of students appropriate for its programs.

_Suggested Documentation:_
- Copy of admissions policy from the college catalog or other published document
- Copy of enrollment application
- Statement of student qualifications for admission
- Statement of roles and expectations of admissions personnel
ER 17: Information and Learning Support Services
The institution provides, through ownership or contractual agreement, specific long-term access to sufficient information and learning support services adequate for its mission and instructional programs in whatever format whenever and wherever they are offered.

Suggested Documentation:
- Profile of holdings and resources, including electronic resources
- Copies of agreements for access to external resources

ER 18: Financial Resources
The institution documents a funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support student learning programs and services, to improve institutional effectiveness, and to assure financial stability.

Suggested Documentation:
- Past, current, and proposed budgets and financial statements
- Documentation of any external foundation or other funding support
- Documentation of funding base

ER 19: Institutional Planning and Evaluation
The institution systematically evaluates and makes public how well and in what ways it is accomplishing its purposes, including assessment of student learning outcomes. The institution provides evidence of planning for improvement of institutional structures and processes, student achievement of educational goals, and student learning. The institution assesses progress toward achieving its stated goals and makes decisions regarding improvement through an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, integrated planning, resource allocation, implementation, and re-evaluation.

Suggested Documentation:
- Current written institutional plans that describe ways in which the institution will achieve its educational goals
- Evidence of how results of institutional plans are used to guide resource planning and allocation, facilities plans, and other significant institutional planning efforts and decision making processes
- Evidence the institution engages in regular self-reflective evaluation of its operations and of student learning outcomes, and uses the results to identify strengths and areas in need of improvement for purposes of developing institutional plans and maintaining educational quality
- Evidence that well-defined decision-making processes and authority serve to facilitate planning and institutional effectiveness
ER 20: Integrity in Communication with the Public
The institution provides a print or electronic catalog for its constituencies with precise, accurate, and current information concerning the following:

General Information
- Official Name, Address(es), Telephone Number(s), and Website Address of the Institution
- Educational Mission
- Representation of accredited status with ACCJC and with programmatic accreditors, if any
- Course, Program, and Degree Offerings
- Student Learning Outcomes for Programs and Degrees
- Academic Calendar and Program Length
- Academic Freedom Statement
- Available Student Financial Aid
- Available Learning Resources
- Names and Degrees of Administrators and Faculty
- Names of Governing Board Members

Requirements
- Admissions
- Student Fees and Other Financial Obligations
- Degree, Certificates, Graduation and Transfer

Major Policies Affecting Students
- Academic Regulations, including Academic Honesty
- Nondiscrimination
- Acceptance and Transfer of Credits
- Transcripts
- Grievance and Complaint Procedures
- Sexual Harassment
- Refund of Fees
- Locations or Publications where Other Policies may be found.

Suggested Documentation:
- Catalog or other public document which serves that purpose
- Recent print or other media advertisements
- Policies regarding public disclosure

ER 21: Integrity in Relations with the Accrediting Commission
The institution provides assurance that it adheres to the Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards and Commission policies, describes itself in identical terms to all its accrediting agencies, communicates any changes in its accredited status, and
agrees to disclose information required by the Commission to achieve its accrediting responsibilities. The institution will comply with Commission requests, directives, decisions and policies, and will make complete, accurate, and honest disclosure. Failure to do so is sufficient reason, in and of itself, for the Commission to impose a sanction, or to deny or revoke candidacy or accreditation.

**Suggested Documentation:**

- Copy of the policy adopted and published by governing board assuring compliance with this criterion
- List of other accreditations held by institution and information regarding status with those organizations
- Copy of directory pages or website which describe the institution’s representation by those accrediting bodies

2. Establishing Candidacy Status (Preaccreditation)⁶

2.1 General Information

Once the Commission has determined that an institution meets Eligibility Requirements and is eligible to apply for preaccreditation, the institution may begin working towards Candidacy. Candidacy refers to a status granted by ACCJC, or to the process through which institutions attain this status. The Commission only grants Candidacy status to eligible institutions that are likely to successfully obtain initial accreditation and sustain compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. Therefore, ACCJC’s Candidacy application process is rigorous and involves a full comprehensive review, site visit, and preparation of a Teach-Out Plan in accordance with Commission policy and federal requirements.⁷

Candidacy status represents a formal association with ACCJC. Institutions that have earned this designation are listed in the ACCJC directory as member institutions, and must identify themselves to the public in accordance with the Commission’s **Policy on Representation of Accredited Status**. As ACCJC members, institutions with Candidacy status are expected to make Commission action letters publicly available in accordance with the **Policy on Rights, Responsibilities, and Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions**. Institutions with Candidacy status are assessed annual dues and may submit substantive change applications, if required. All credits and degrees earned and issued by an institution or program holding Candidacy status are considered by the U.S. Department of Education to be from an accredited institution or program. In some cases, institutions with Candidacy status may be eligible to participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs.⁸

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⁶ ACCJC uses the term Candidacy in its policies and manuals to reflect the status and state of preaccreditation. ACCJC policies and procedures related to Candidacy are subject to federal regulations pertaining to preaccreditation.

⁷ See **Policy on Teach-out Plans and Agreements** for more information.

⁸ In accordance with federal policies and regulations, a public or other non-profit institution must complete the Candidacy phase of accreditation to receive Title IV federal financial aid; for-profit institutions must achieve Initial Accreditation before being qualified to apply for Title IV financial aid.
Institutions may remain in Candidacy for two years. If conditions warrant, the Commission may extend Candidacy for an additional two years (for a maximum of four years). If the Candidacy period lapses or is withdrawn, the institution may not reapply for Candidacy for at least two years and must reestablish its eligibility (see Section 1) before reapplying.

2.2 Preparing the Candidacy Application

Once the Commission has determined that an institution is eligible to apply for Candidacy, the institution may begin preparing for the Candidacy review. The application for Candidacy consists of:

1. An Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER), complete with supporting evidence and documentation, demonstrating the institution’s compliance with Accreditation Standards and Commission policies.

2. A Teach-Out Plan.⁹

Following the submission of the Candidacy application materials, the institution will undergo a comprehensive review and site visit by a peer review team comprised of academic and administrative representatives from ACCJC member institutions. The ISER serves as the foundational document for the peer review team during the institution’s candidacy review and site visit.

ACCJC staff will work with the institution to develop a reasonable timeframe for the institutional self-evaluation, ISER submission, and site visit. ACCJC staff will provide training for the institution’s staff as they begin the self-evaluation. Institutions are strongly encouraged to refer to the Guide to Institutional Self Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review frequently throughout the process, particularly Part 2, which contains suggestions for possible evidence to support each Standard. Institutions must use ACCJC’s ISER Template to ensure that all required elements are present in the report. Institutions applying for Candidacy are not required to include a Quality Focus Essay (QFE) in their ISERs; however, a QFE will be required as part of the application for initial accreditation, and institutions are encouraged to consider the findings from their self-evaluation as they develop the QFE.

Institutions must submit all materials prepared in support of their Candidacy Application (including the ISER, evidence, and Teach-Out Plan) to ACCJC no less than 60 days prior to the date of their scheduled site visit. ACCJC will invoice the institution for the Candidacy Application fee upon receipt.

2.3 Candidacy Review

Following the submission of the ISER to the Commission, the institution will undergo a comprehensive review and site visit by a peer review team comprised of academic and administrative representatives from ACCJC member institutions. The peer review team will review the ISER and evidence to verify the degree to which the institution is

⁹ See Section 7 of ACCJC’s Guidelines for Preparing Institutional Reports to the Commission for detail regarding the required contents and format of the Teach-Out Plan.
aligned with the Commission’s Standards and determine its readiness for Candidacy status. In the weeks directly prior to the visit, the institution should be prepared to receive requests for supplemental evidence from the team chair. The team chair will also provide the institution with a list of individuals or groups with whom the team would like to meet during the visit.

At the conclusion of the visit, the peer review team will prepare a report of findings based on their review of the ISER, evidence, and interviews conducted on site. The team’s report may provide suggestions for strengthening institutional alignment with Standards and/or recommendations for resolving areas of non-compliance with the Standards, if applicable. The institution’s CEO will be provided with an opportunity to review the draft of the Peer Review Team Report in order to correct any errors of fact before it goes to the Commission for consideration. The institution’s CEO will also be given the opportunity to comment in writing to the Commission and/or appear before the Commission prior to the Commission’s action on the institution.

At its next regular meeting, the Commission will review the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and the Peer Review Team Report to determine which of the Standards have been met and which require additional development and/or documentation from the institution in order to demonstrate compliance. Based on this review, the Commission will take action to:

1. Grant Candidacy,
2. Deny Candidacy, or in rare instances,
3. Grant initial accreditation.10

The Commission will notify the institution of its decision in writing through a formal action letter. The action letter will also detail any areas of non-compliance with Standards and, if applicable, any next steps expected from the institution. If Candidacy has been granted, ACCJC staff will begin working with the institution to prepare for initial accreditation (see Section 3, below). As noted in Section 2.1 above, institutions with Candidacy status are considered to be ACCJC members and are therefore expected to make Commission action letters (and any accompanying Peer Review Team Reports) available to the public.11

In accordance with the Commission’s Policy on Institutional Appeals, an institution may file a request for an appeal if the Commission takes an adverse action to deny Candidacy. The institution may also withdraw its application for Candidacy without prejudice at any time prior to the final action by the Commission.

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10 See Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions.
11 See Policy on Rights, Responsibilities, and Good Practice in Relations with Member Institutions.
3. Establishing Initial Accreditation

3.1 General Information
Once the Commission has acted to grant Candidacy status, the institution may begin working towards initial accreditation. In the action letter that grants candidacy, the Commission will identify the specific Accreditation Standards, Commission policies, and/or other topics that the institution must address in its application for initial accreditation. The action letter will also establish the timeline for submitting the application and specify whether a site visit will be required as part of the review process.

Institutions must submit applications for initial accreditation within two years of receiving Candidacy status. The Commission may act to extend the Candidacy period for up to an additional two years, if conditions warrant. Institutions that fail to achieve initial accreditation after four years in Candidacy status must reestablish their eligibility to apply for Candidacy following the procedure outlined in Section 1. Institutions must wait two years before submitting a new Eligibility Application.

3.2 Application for Initial Accreditation
The application for initial accreditation consists of:

1. An Initial Accreditation Follow-Up Report that demonstrates how the institution has resolved any areas of non-compliance identified by the Commission in its action letter granting Candidacy, and
2. A Quality Focus Essay outlining two or three projects that the institution will implement over a multi-year period to improve student learning and/or student achievement.

If the Commission’s action letter indicates that a site visit will be required to validate the contents of the Initial Accreditation Follow-Up Report, ACCJC staff will work with the institution to arrange the schedule.

3.3 Initial Accreditation Review
The Commission will review the institution’s application materials (and the report of the Peer Review Team, if a site visit was required) at the next regular meeting after the application’s submission. Based on this review, the Commission will take action to:

1. Grant Initial Accreditation,
2. Extend Candidacy,
3. Withdraw Candidacy, or

12 See ACCJC’s Guidelines for Preparing Institutional Reports to the Commission for detailed information about the format and structure of Follow-Up Reports.
13 See Section 3.6 of ACCJC’s Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review for detail regarding the requirements for the Quality Focus Essay.
14 See Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions.
The Commission will notify the institution of its decision in writing through a formal action letter. As noted above, institutions that fail to achieve initial accreditation after four years in Candidacy status must reestablish their eligibility to apply for Candidacy following the procedure outlined in Section 1. Institutions must wait two years before submitting a new Eligibility Application.

In accordance with the Commission’s Policy on Institutional Appeals, an institution may file a request for an appeal if the Commission takes an adverse action to withdraw Candidacy or deny initial accreditation.

### 3.4 Expectations for Sustained Compliance with Standards

Once an institution has earned initial accreditation, the Commission expects that it will continue to sustain compliance with Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, and Commission policies. ACCJC member institutions participate in a seven-year accreditation cycle. The institution will be required to submit a Midterm Report four years after receiving initial accreditation, submit annual reports, and will undergo a comprehensive review in support of reaffirmation of accreditation no more than seven years from the date of its initial accreditation.

Institutions that have earned initial accreditation must identify themselves to the public in accordance with the Commission’s Policy on Representation of Accredited Status.