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Introduction

On behalf of the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC), thank you for accepting the invitation to serve as team chair for a comprehensive peer review visit. In doing so, you have expressed your commitment to improving educational quality and continuous improvement in the region and your willingness to assume responsibility for fostering that improvement. While chairing a site visit represents a major investment of time and energy, we hope you will find this experience to be valuable and rewarding. As team chair, you will find yourself playing many different roles:

• **Representative of the ACCJC and Peer Review Advocate.** Peer review is acknowledged as the most appropriate and desirable approach to evaluating the complex environment of higher education. It serves as a rich and diverse resource for quality improvement for colleges. As team chair and a representative of ACCJC, you are called upon to develop a supportive and nurturing relationship with your assigned college and its staff, as well as with members of your peer review team.

Please be familiar with Commission Policies and Accreditation Standards and with ACCJC operating procedures. In addition, you and the team will receive information about special emphases in the peer review process that are required by U.S. Department of Education (ED) regulations concerning both accrediting bodies and institutions. There is much to keep track of, and the ACCJC staff liaison assigned to the institution is available to address questions at any time during the processes of preparing for and conducting the peer review visit, and completing the Peer Review Team Report. The assigned staff liaison to the college will be available to support you and the college throughout the process.

• **Team Leader, Manager, and Spokesperson.** Teams are composed of outstanding professionals, but they arrive as a collection of individuals. The team chair is the team builder, mentor, orchestrator of the review visit, coach, and spokesperson for the team in all of its dealings with the institution.

• **Author of the Peer Review Team Report.** The Peer Review Team Report is the most lasting outcome of the team visit, and it is the document that forms the basis for the Commission’s decision on the accredited status of the institution. It also provides the framework for the institution’s continued improvement. Each team member will contribute to that report, and the assigned ACCJC staff liaison will assist you in editing the draft Peer Review Team Report. As team chair, you are the author of the report and responsible for the report’s quality and content.

• **Mentor to New Team Chairs.** The Commission calls on experienced team chairs to mentor those serving as chair for the first time. One of the best ways to contribute to the peer review process is to share your insights, experiences, and resources with those new to the role. Mentors and mentees will be paired during chair training.

This *Team Chair Manual* will assist you in assuming the chair responsibilities and will provide samples of materials which are part of a typical site visit. The *Manual* describes each of the major component stages of a comprehensive review visit, and includes the forms, worksheets, and documents suggested for your use at each stage.
You will receive a link to ACCJC’s file service (cloud service), which contains this *Manual*, including the sample forms and letters, and the resources you will need to lead the review. This electronic material will expedite your communications with the peer review team and the institution being evaluated. The documents are formatted in Microsoft Word.

Each team chair puts his/her individual stamp on a visit. The Commission encourages you to make improvements in the process, and to feel free to adjust the materials to fit your leadership style and the needs of the college you are reviewing. You are also encouraged to make suggestions to improve this *Team Chair Manual* and the conduct of site visits. Please communicate your suggestions and feedback to your assigned ACCJC staff liaison.
1. Preparation for the Peer Review Team Visit

Communication with the Institution
About two years before the anticipated date of the comprehensive peer review visit, the ACCJC staff liaison advises the institution of the upcoming comprehensive review and provides training to the college on its Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. This training is ongoing and frequent. The college and Commission staff work together to select dates for the visit.

Team Chair Selection
The staff liaison begins inviting team chairs with the goal of selecting persons appropriate for the institution’s needs. Persons invited to serve as team chairs are experienced peer reviewers and represent the best professional practice. In order to keep replenishing ACCJC’s pool of team leaders, experienced chairs are asked to mentor first-time chairs.

Team Selection
The staff liaison develops the teams from a database of experienced educators who have exhibited leadership, a commitment to peer-based accreditation, and balanced judgment. In compliance with federal regulations, teams comprise academics and administrators. An average team has three academics, instructional and student services administrators, a chief executive officer, a financial services administrator, and a researcher. Teams consist of individuals with expertise and/or experience in curriculum and instruction, learning outcomes and learning resources, distance/correspondence education, planning, research, and evaluation. Diversity is a priority in the selection of peer review team members, along with professionalism, expertise, integrity, and demonstrated ability to function well as an accreditation team member.

Team Chair Training
All team chairs must attend a Team Chair training prior to the site visit. The training is offered a few weeks prior to team training and helps chairs to understand their role and responsibilities, receive updates on the comprehensive review process and other accreditation matters, and norm accreditation standards and policies, among other topics.

Team Training
All chairs and team members must attend a Team Training on using the Accreditation Standards and the Guide to Institutional Self-Evaluation, Improvement, and Peer Review prior to the visit. A new reviewer must successfully complete the ACCJC’s online course, Accreditation Basics. Team training helps all peer reviewers understand how to conduct the review in the context of the institution’s mission and provides time for the chair to work with the team. Training topics also include interpreting the standards, writing effective recommendations and commendations, and Commission policies and federal regulations.
1.1 Team Chair Preparation

Overview
The Team Chair training and the materials included as checklists in this Manual are designed to facilitate your preparation for the comprehensive peer review site visit. As team chair you will organize the team for the most effective use of time and resources and set a positive tone for the visit for both the team and the institution. Samples of correspondence with teams and institutions, a Team Chair Timeline and Checklist, and a summary and timeline for key team chair responsibilities are included on your Team Chair cloud folder.

Team Assistant
The choice of a team assistant belongs solely to the team chair. However, the Commission urges team chairs to select assistants who will assist with the review. An outline of typical team assistant responsibilities is included in the Team Chair Manual. Team assistants must attend Team Training along with the team.

Materials from ACCJC
The institution’s annual report data and annual fiscal report data, and data from the Federal Scorecard are also included on the Team Chair’s cloud folder. The team chair will also receive any applicable third party comments that have been received regarding the institution.

As soon as the team composition is complete, the team chair receives a team roster from the Commission office. This signals that the team chair can begin making arrangements for the visit. Additional changes in the team composition may occur if members drop off for various reasons and Commission staff will update the team roster if changes occur. Team members will not be replaced if those drops occur after Team Training.

Various templates, including the Peer Review Team Report, are included on ACCJC’s cloud folder for the Team Chair, along with sample correspondences.

Materials from the College
Sixty days before the comprehensive peer review visit, ACCJC will upload the institution’s Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and evidence to the team’s cloud folder. Team cloud folders are unique to each institution, and team members only have access to the specific materials of the institution they are reviewing.

Pre-Visit Conversation
The team chair is expected to conduct a pre-visit conversation (either via phone or videoconference) with the college CEO. The purpose of this conversation is to help the team chair and college CEO to develop a collegial relationship, built upon the common goal of assisting the college within the context of the comprehensive site visit. The pre-visit will give the team chair the opportunity to establish communication with key individuals facilitating the peer review team visit, and to receive any requests from the CEO for special team attention or assistance to specific areas of institutional quality related to the standards. The pre-visit conversation also allows
the CEO an opportunity to notify the team chair of major changes that may have occurred since the institutional self-evaluation report was completed and that may materially affect the course and conduct of the site visit. The team chair is encouraged to be open with the college CEO on areas where the team will need to focus, so that the college may be accurately reviewed. This conversation will also help to establish the logistical requirements of the peer review visit—the physical layout of the team room, hotel accommodations, transportation to/from the hotel and college, the availability of food, technology support for the team’s work, electronic access to DE programs and services, logistics for visiting off-campus sites, and access to electronic data and files that the institution may have compiled in support of its application for reaffirmation of accreditation.

**Correspondence with the Team/Institution/ACCJC**

The team chair corresponds with the team members to welcome them to the team; make assignments to cover ERs, Accreditation Standards, off campus sites or campuses, DE programs and services, and other elements required by federal regulations; provide information about travel and lodging; establish the team schedule; and generally set the tone of the entire visit. Early communication (via email or video conferencing) is vital to forging a strong, connected, and focused team.

Contact with the institution begins with discussion of the logistics of a pre-visit. Samples of this correspondence are included in the Team Chair Manual and on the accompanying USB Flash Drive.

Please copy your assigned ACCJC staff liaison on all correspondence with the team and with the institution so that they can provide you with effective assistance.

**Initial Institutional Self-Evaluation Report Review**

Please review the college Institutional Self-Evaluation Report upon receipt to determine if it is complete and provides an adequate basis for an accreditation site visit. If you feel there is a substantive issue with the report, please contact the assigned staff liaison. In these instances, Commission staff will consult with the team chair and the leadership of the college to determine a course of action.

**Multi-College Districts**

The Commission schedules the colleges in multi-college districts/systems for simultaneous visits. The Commission requires that a description of the college and district/system delineation of responsibility and authority in multi-college district/system (sometimes called a “Functional Map”) be provided with the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. Its purpose is to provide teams with a clear description of roles and responsibilities in areas which are addressed by the Accreditation Standards, and to provide the Commission with a consistent picture of this delineation so that it can understand how an institution meets Accreditation Standards as well as make appropriate recommendations for improvement.

In order to facilitate peer review team visits to multi-college districts or systems, a “chair of chairs” will be identified to lead the district review team. Team members may be selected from amongst the members of the college teams, or a separate (from the college chairs and teams) district team with a district team chair may be assigned.
The size and structure of the district/system review depends on the needs and size of the district/system.

In either case, the chair-of-chairs is asked to consult with the other team chairs early in the preparation for team visits, and to develop a strategy for coordinating meetings and interviews with district/system representatives and Board members such that unnecessary redundancies are eliminated. Accreditation standards cover many aspects of administrative operations, finance, and governance as well as academic matters and in multi-college districts, the district’s adherence to standards is necessary for the colleges to meet standards. In addition, Standard IV directly addresses district or system/college relationships.

The Commission has a policy and procedure for team visits to multi-college districts/systems. This policy can be found on the ACCJC website at: https://accjc.org/wp-content/uploads/Evaluation-of-Institutions-Multi.pdf.
1.2 Materials Given to Peer Review Team Chairs

From the Accrediting Commission

1. ACCJC Publications
   a. Team Chair Manual (including updates and supplementary material)
   c. Team Training Manual and team materials

2. Team roster including titles, addresses, telephone, and e-mail addresses

3. ACCJC Information on the Institution:
   a. Annual Report and Annual Financial Report for the 3-year period prior to the comprehensive peer review visit,
   b. Summary of complaints against the institution (chair only, if any received),
   c. Applicable Third-Party comments (chair only, if any received),
   d. College Scorecard data from ED

4. Policy on Commission Actions on Institutions

5. Electronic copy of expense form to be submitted separately as applicable for each event: Team Chair Training, Team Training, Focused Site Visit (not applicable for virtual site visits or virtual team meetings)

1.3 Materials from the Institution (also sent to team members)

1. The Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, including evidence

2. Most recent catalog and class schedule
### 1.4 Team Chair Timeline and Checklist

#### BEFORE THE VISIT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>TIMING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receive Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and other documents from college</td>
<td>8 weeks before visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair-of-chairs contacts counterpart Team Chair(s)</td>
<td>8 weeks before visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(simultaneous multi-college visits only)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial communication to team members - welcome, expectations, standard assignments, and distribute Assignment 1 (must be completed prior to team training by each member)</td>
<td>8 weeks before visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-visit conversation with the college. District/System Chair-of-chairs coordinates with other team chairs for simultaneous visit if possible</td>
<td>45 - 60 days before visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Institutional Self-Evaluation Report</td>
<td>As soon as the report is received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop team schedule. District/System Team Chair-of-Chairs develops schedule for joint team meetings with district/system</td>
<td>30 days before visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/System Team Chair-of-Chairs arranges phone or in-person conference times with other chairs to organize schedule of district meetings and discuss initial findings</td>
<td>30 days before visit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### During the Visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial team meeting (can be in-person right before visit, or via video-conference)</td>
<td>Before arriving on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm time and publicity for open meetings and third party comment</td>
<td>During visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with district or system representatives where appropriate. District/System Team Chair-of-Chair leads joint team for these meetings</td>
<td>During visit¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold frequent progress meetings with the team</td>
<td>During visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify team recommendations. District/System Team Chair-of-Chairs develops common team recommendations and commendations on the system</td>
<td>Morning, last day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team chair signs roster verifying all team members assigned to the visit participated in the visit</td>
<td>Morning, last day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily check-ins and final meeting with CEO regarding findings afternoon, last day.</td>
<td>Morning/early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit report to college, Exit report to the District/System by Chair- of Chairs.</td>
<td>Afternoon, last day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### After the Visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send draft Peer Review Team Report to assigned liaison;</td>
<td>Within 10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send Reimbursement forms, with original receipts, to ACCJC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District/System Team Chair reviews draft language text &amp; recommendations on district/system issues with all other team chairs to assure consistency in recommendation language</td>
<td>Within 12 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review feedback from liaison, send draft to college for correction of errors of fact, and to the team</td>
<td>Within two weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send following information to ACCJC</td>
<td>Within four weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Final Peer Review Team Report (send via e-mail as attachment in MS Word)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ For district/system visits, it has become common to visit the district/system the day prior to college visits.
1.5 Role of the Team Assistant

The team assistant serves in a confidential capacity with the team, has access to all materials, and attends team meetings. Expenses of the team assistant are covered by the college as part of team expenses.

Prior to the Team Visit

A. The Assistant facilitates communication between the team and team chair
   1. Assists with correspondence between the chair and the team;
   2. Works with chair to develop agenda of the pre-visit;
   3. Works with chair on all logistics of the site visit.

B. The Assistant facilitates communications with the college
   1. Identifies the person(s) on campus who will be responsible for coordinating the site visit (usually the ALO);
   2. Assists with developing team accommodations, coordinating ground transportation for the team, and other logistics;
   3. Assists team chair in developing team and team chair meeting schedules;
   4. Determines team member needs to be communicated to college, if any.

C. The Assistant attends the Team Training Workshop

During the Team Visit

A. The Assistant participates in discussions; serves as back-up for Standards needing extra assistance or coverage.

B. The Assistant supports the team chair and team members by:
   1. Arranging additional meetings and interviews,
   2. Locating additional documentation as needed,
   3. Coordinating preparation of draft Standard Areas of the Peer Review Team Reports (this may include setting up a cloud-based collaborative work space like Google Docs, Dropbox, etc.,
   4. Reviewing Commission checklist to assure complete coverage,
   5. Reviewing day’s activities with the team chair at the end of each day and planning activities or adjustments for the next day,
6. Ensuring all standards are complete and all federally mandated issues have been covered in the Peer Review Team Report (see Peer Review Team Responsibilities for Compliance with U.S. Department of Education Regulations and Checklist)

7. Collecting and retaining electronic copies of all draft peer review team chapters for the chair. This includes making sure that team documents are disposed of at the end of the visit. See the Statement on the Process for Preserving Confidentiality of Documents Relation to Institutional Peer Reviews at the end of this section.

After the Team Visit

A. Puts all finalized content into the Peer Review Team Report template,

B. Coordinates review of the draft of the final Report with ACCJC staff edits,

C. Assists in production of final Report and assures that ACCJC receives an electronic version. Please note the ACCJC sends the final Peer Review Team Report to the institution.

1.6 Pre-Visit by the Team Chair (can be accomplished in-person or by other modes of communication, such as video conference)

Intended Outcomes of the Pre-Visit

A. Develop relationship and open communication with the college CEO and his or her staff. Achieve a sense of institutional climate and dynamics, receive updates on new developments since the writing of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, and identify key issues facing the institution.

B. Become familiar with the institution, its physical setting, culture, and student populations.

C. Discuss travel, housing, and other logistical arrangements for team. The college should identify appropriate lodging and work with hotels to secure advantageous rates. ACCJC asks that the team members pay for their expenses and submit reimbursement request to ACCJC.

D. Be prepared to discuss any initial findings the team may have, especially if there are questions on how the college aligns to specific standards.

Topics for Discussion during the Pre-visit

A. Arrange special meetings:
   - Governing Board, administrative staff, committees that prepared the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, Academic Senate, support staff organization(s), student body organization.
• 2 Open Forums for input to team (timed to encourage participation, well publicized by college, institutional senior-level administrators do not attend).

B. Arrange visits to any site where 50% or more of a program may be completed.

C. If the institution has distance education, work with the CEO and ALO on the review of DE courses (see DE review protocol).

D. Request additional supporting documentation to help the college supports its claims in the ISER.

E. Clarify Commission expectations:
   • Communicate the need to minimize social events, and discourage gifts to the team. The Commission wants to avoid all appearances of a college’s having undue influence on the team.
   • Communicate the team’s expectation that all key staff will be on campus and available to the team during the accreditation visit.

F. Arrange team logistics:
   • Team room organization, including campus maps, telephone directories, computer support, and paper shredder.
   • Access for the team to any electronically-mediated services that might be reviewed prior to the team visit to the campus.
   • Campus contact person for team members.
   • Hotel, meals, arrival/departure, and transportation to and from campus and to sites.
   • Maps and directions.
   • Computer hardware and software, printers, availability and locations.
   • Lunches for team meetings on campus during visit.
   • Meeting room at hotel with technology available.
   • Special schedule/time for examination of district or system level services in a multi-institution system.
   • Schedule for visit to off-campus sites.

G. Schedule team member and college staff meetings in advance if possible.
1.7 Team Communications, Team Assignments, and Schedule

Once the team roster is received, it is appropriate to write to or hold a video conference with the team members, welcoming them to the team, and briefly introducing them to your expectations, method of team organization, and any other matters you wish to call to their attention.

The Team Member General Information Form contains information needed to assign team member responsibilities to ensure coverage of all the Standards. Team members should be given a short amount of time to respond because completion of the assignments and schedule depends on that information.

The Commission is recommending that each chair assign team members with a range of expertise to each Standard. The Accreditation Standards have asked institutions to take a holistic approach to their own self-evaluation and to institutional dialogue. It is therefore appropriate that the peer review teams also develop a systems-approach to conducting the site visit. Team chairs should avoid reinforcing silos of expertise on the team and should encourage the team to develop a holistic Peer Review Team Report. Suggested team member assignments are included in this manual, on page 15.

Each visit will be unique in terms of the physical and time demands on the members of the team. The team chair and assistant should develop a working schedule for the peer review visit and communicate it to the College in advance of the visit. Considerations in developing a working schedule for the team include:

- Ensure completion of Assignments 1 (prior to team training) and 2 (prior to the comprehensive visit). Team Training will have embedded time for the chair to lead a discussion about preliminary findings and emerging thinking emanating from the completion of Assignment 1. Following team training, the chair should schedule a de-briefing of Assignment 2 via video conferencing before the comprehensive visit commences.

- Determine when the team members are expected to arrive and depart. NOTE: Generally, comprehensive visits will run Monday through Thursday, with lodging required for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights.

- Decide when team written assignments will be due to you, and how they will be used by the team at its first meeting upon arriving at the team hotel.

- Decide when and where the team will have its first organizational meeting. The Commission recommends this occurs on the afternoon of the arrival day, and allow sufficient time for team discussion of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and the peer review visit. Set the visit’s tone as a helpful, peer review that is focused solely on the Standards and Commission policies.

- Build in several team meetings at regular points during the visit. Make sure you have time for Standards teams’ meetings. Meetings can always be canceled, but they are troublesome to add to the schedule.
- Create a schedule that fits the college; take into consideration if the college has a large evening program, many large off-campus sites or centers, an extensive DE program, or scheduled events such as Board meetings.

- Determine which off-campus sites (where 50% or more of a program is offered) will need to be visited, who will visit them, and how the information will be shared with the team.

- Determine which DE classes and services, if any, are available, who will examine their compliance with ACCJC’s Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education. Determine also how information on DE courses and programs will be shared with the team, and quality compared to onsite courses and programs (see DE review protocol).

- Assign a team member to examine any correspondence education programs, per ACCJC’s Policy on Distance Education and Correspondence Education, that the college offers to ensure compliance.

- If the institution has a baccalaureate program, the team will have an assigned baccalaureate degree specialist. Specific instructions on the review of a baccalaureate degree will be provided during chair and team trainings.

- Make sure to assign team member(s) to review compliance to ACCJC policies and federal regulations according to the ACCJC checklist in the Peer Review Team Report template.

- Schedule a meeting with key staff early in the visit.

- Determine the hours and staffing of the two open forums when the college constituencies can meet with the team.

- Schedule a daily “check in” with the institution’s CEO to hear any input on the college experience with the team visit.

- Set deadlines for reports from team members (oral and written); indicate what assignments are due and when.

- Establish the time and location of the oral exit report by the chair.

- Multi-college Districts/systems. Coordinate team contacts with Board, district officers, and counterpart team chair(s) through the Lead team chair (see later section on visiting multi-college districts/systems.)
**SUGGESTED TEAM MEMBER ASSIGNMENTS***

*(Based on the expertise or job assignments of a typical team)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD I</th>
<th>STANDARD II</th>
<th>STANDARD III</th>
<th>STANDARD IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>CIO or Dean</td>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Trustee or CEO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Instructional faculty</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO or Trustee</td>
<td>CSSO or Counseling</td>
<td>Deans or administrators</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>Team Chair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Team chair may select individuals to serve as Standard leads.*

**Suggested Team Assignments for Addressing Eligibility Requirements 1-5**

*(ERs 6-21 are evaluated within the Standards)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2014 ER</th>
<th>2014 Standard</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Authority</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>The institution must demonstrate it is authorized to operate as a degree granting institution by the State (government).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Operational Status</td>
<td>I.B</td>
<td>Assign to the team member evaluating the institution’s demographic information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Degrees</td>
<td>II.A</td>
<td>Assign to the team member evaluating the institution’s instructional programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Chief Executive Officer</td>
<td>IV.B and/or IV.C</td>
<td>Assign to the team member evaluating the Standards related to the chief executive officer and/or the governing board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Financial Accountability</td>
<td>III.D</td>
<td>Assign to the team member who is evaluating finance and ED Title IV compliance. This individual should also evaluate the institution’s Annual Fiscal Reports (with audits) and the ACCJC Policy on Institutional Compliance with Title IV (including program audits) on the Checklist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Eligibility Requirements 1-5 have requirements that are not contained within the Accreditation Standards. Team members must evaluate each element of these ERs and report on them separately from the Accreditation Standards’ narrative.
1.8 Planning Visits in Multi-College Districts/Systems

The Commission has scheduled simultaneous visits for all colleges in Multi-College district/systems. This facilitates a single comprehensive examination of the quality of district/system services and the degree to which they support institutional abilities to meet or exceed Accreditation Standards. This consistent review avoids multiple and conflicting messages about the efficacy of district/system administrative and other functions. The Commission’s “Policy and Procedures for the Peer Review of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems” details the principles and procedures that guide this review of district/system functions.

A District/System Team Chair will be chosen, usually from among the chairs of all the teams visiting colleges in a district/system or separately by the ACCJC. This chair will have responsibility for coordinating review of district/system functions and for writing recommendations to meet Accreditation Standards or for improvement of the district/system. Each visiting team should identify issues it believes bear investigation at the district or system level. The District/System Team Chair will ask for limited members of each team to participate in the visit to the district/system officers and personnel.

The District/System Team Chair will develop, in consultation with the other chairs and teams, language for any recommendations given for district/system improvement. Consistent language should appear in each Peer Review Team Report written for individual colleges so that the message given about improving district/system functions is consistent.

See the Commission’s “Policy and Procedures for the Evaluation of Institutions in Multi-College/Multi-Unit Districts or Systems”, which can be accessed on the ACCJC’s website at: www.accjc.org.

1.9 Analysis of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report

The peer review team is expected to read, understand, and analyze the college Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) prior to its arrival for the team visit. To facilitate the team’s desk review of the ISER, the team chair should give team members written assignments (“homework”) that must be completed prior to the team’s arrival at the college. These assignments help the team prepare for the site visit and help the team chair identify the strengths and perspectives of team members. The team chair can use the written assignments the team members have produced to frame discussion at the first team meeting.

Assignment 1 should help the team acquire an overview of the ISER as well as its strengths and weaknesses. This assignment will help team members to get an overview of each Standard-area, in order to start to write the General Observations sections of the Peer Review Team Report. See your Team Chair cloud folder for assignment 1 template.

Assignment 2 will help the team member go more deeply into the ISER by working directly with the Standard(s) he or she has been assigned. Team chairs are free to change or vary these assignments, but you are asked to ensure that the team
completes appropriate analysis and written work before the actual team visit, to collect that work, and to share and discuss it with the team as you lead the group in developing a collective perspective on the institution’s quality and the extent to which it meets Accreditation Standards. Team members should cross-check their findings across standards, and sharing the team member’s draft analyses and conclusions is a good means of providing for the triangulation needed to assure accurate conclusions and consistency in the completed Peer Review Team Report. See your Team Chair cloud folder for assignment 2 template and the Peer Review Team Report template.

1.10 Evaluation of a Baccalaureate Degree Program

If the institution has a baccalaureate degree, the team should review it using the ACCJC’s 2014 Accreditation and the ACCJC policy and protocol for the review of baccalaureate degrees. Specific training for the review of baccalaureate degrees will be conducted at team training.
2. A Work Schedule for the Site Visit

2.1 Conduct of the Site Visit

The outline that follows is designed to follow the sequential steps of the conduct of a site visit. The suggestions are those gathered over the years working with team chairs and colleges. The section on Special Considerations is a discussion of issues which the Commission has identified as being of particular interest for these visits and to which the team chair and team are asked to pay particular attention during the visit and in writing the Peer Review Team Report.

A. Monitoring the Process

A successful site visit often depends on the care with which the team chair monitors and assesses the process of the visit. The discussion which follows outlines areas and activities which may need attention throughout, or at any point during the visit.

1. Consult the President and/or ALO early and often
   • Try to determine how the visit is going from their point of view.
   • Is the team talking to the right people/groups?
   • Are there any concerns or problems that college personnel are reporting to the President or ALO regarding the team or the process?

2. Consult with team members early and often
   • Help the team focus on the Standards and the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report.
   • Check with team members, especially first-time team members, individually, not just in team meetings.
   • Monitor team “tone” - is everyone committed to celebrating, supporting, and helping the college?
   • Encourage the team to begin writing early.
   • Look for signs of weak writing skills and provide assistance.
   • Build team responsibility over areas of improvement and excellence.
   • Help the team with consistency across and within standards and clarity when writing the report.

3. Consult with counterpart teams (for simultaneous multi-college visits)
   • Determine what coordination or team consultation will occur.
   • Identify people and mechanisms for team consultation.
   • Compare relevant findings with counterpart chairs.
   • Verify and cross-check differences.
- Share drafts of district/system findings across teams, especially for IV.C and IV.D.
- Prepare unified findings, recommendations, and commendations, if directed at the district/system.

B. General Considerations and Advice to the Team Chair

1. Focus the team’s attention on determining whether the institution meets or exceeds the Eligibility Requirements, Standards, and Commission policies. One method of doing this is to verify the assertions made in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. The team will also evaluate evidence that is found at the time of the peer review team visit. The final evaluation of whether the institution meets the Standards must be done by checking multiple sources of evidence. Make sure team members have examined evidence supplied in advance of the visit and have sufficient time to examine all evidence and collect additional evidence they may need to evaluate the institution. Make sure the team members have triangulated their findings so that one does not write findings and conclusions for a standard that inadvertently contradict another section within the Peer Review Team Report. Make sure the total Peer Review Team Report is internally consistent in its narrative and findings.

2. Urge team members to share critical issues and problems at the institution with the whole team. No member can be allowed to bear the burden of a major issue alone.

3. Urge team members to share commendations—those areas where the college exceeds the standards.

4. Focus on the team dynamics. When there is conflict, ensure the conflict is productive.

5. Provide corrective direction to members who become too closely involved with all or part of the institution or who pursue individual, organizational, or ideological agendas. Team members should not impose their own college’s way of doing things on the institution they are evaluating. Team members should not impose State regulations on the peer review process or prescribe specific solutions.

6. There are no face-to-face classroom visitations.

7. Discourage purely social events. There is a lot of work to be completed during a site visit. While we hope team members and college personnel will have a chance to network, we realize that the accreditation work must come first for the benefit of the institution.

8. District/system office locations, Board meetings or access to Board members, evening and off-campus sites may pose logistical challenges, and you may use delegations of team members to ensure coverage.
9. The team may receive information from individuals or groups that identify concerns about adherence to Standards; cross-validate such information investigating multiple sources by having these issues brought to you, the Team Chair. Team Chairs can then decide which issues may need to be brought to the entire team.

C. Special Issues and Considerations

1. Confidentiality: The team chair should remind team members of the Commission policy on the confidentiality of institutional information. The “Policy on Public Disclosure and Confidentiality in the Accreditation Process” includes the following explanation:

   In order to assure the accuracy and appropriateness of institutional information which is made public, the Commission expects team members to keep confidential all institutional information read or heard before, during, and after the team visit. Except in the context of Commission work, team members are expected to refrain from discussing information obtained in the course of service as a peer reviewer.

2. Compliance with External Regulations, Statutes, or Expectations of other Organizations: Although some institutions may focus significant portions of their institutional self-evaluation reports on external compliance issues, it is not the team’s job to enforce or even address those requirements. The team’s only authority is the Commission Eligibility Requirements, Accreditation Standards, policies, and other requirements and federal regulations on accreditation that are part of team training.

3. Matters under Litigation: The Commission does not become directly involved in matters which are under litigation. A policy discussing the responsibilities of the institution is found in the “Policy Regarding Matters Under Litigation.”

4. Student Complaints: The assigned staff liaison will inform the chair if the college has any complaints that the team must investigate. The team is expected to review the institution’s own student complaint policies and files. The Commission does not adjudicate individual grievances; however, a pattern of complaints may indicate an institutional deficiency in meeting Accreditation Standards. The Commission’s “Policy on Student and Public Complaints Against Institutions” is found on the ACCJC website.

5. International Programs: Colleges offering international programs for non-U.S. nationals include an addendum to the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report which demonstrates how the program conforms to the “Policy on Principles of Good Practice in Overseas International Education for Non-U.S. Nationals”. Other relevant policies are “Policy on Contractual Relationships with Non-Regionally Accredited Organizations” and “Policy on Distance Education and on Correspondence Education.” Federal regulatory requirements ask institutions to submit evidence that their campus-based programs for international students, including English language programs, are reviewed as part of the institution’s accreditation and are found to meet quality standards.
The First Day (Monday): The Team Meeting

It is remarkable that a group of strangers can meet, quickly organize around a common purpose, comprehensively review an institution, agree on commendations and recommendations, and produce a significant report, all in four days. A special merging of expertise and personalities occurs. The result is an experience which is not duplicated in any other professional activity.

The team will meet at the hotel on the day preceding the visit to the college. The team chair sets the time for the meeting, and team members are expected to arrange their travel in order to be present for this meeting. Team chairs can contribute to the development of a team identity by providing leadership in the following areas either with assignments before the site visit or on the first day of the visit.

1. Provide an overview of accreditation and reinforce the team member role.

2. Ensure the team understands the role of the ACCJC staff liaison.

3. Provide an orientation to the college and information about issues and events which have occurred at the college since the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report was completed. If there are controversial issues, develop a team strategy for dealing with them.

4. Discuss the team member reports for each Standard.
   a. Discuss the team member analyses of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documentation.
   b. Work with team members to identify their individual strengths and weaknesses, especially their writing and analytical skills.

5. Identify the preliminary themes and questions that the team will address.

6. Review the team schedule, meetings, interviews, assignments, schedules for visits to centers or campuses or a district or system office; and plans for review of DE programs and services.

7. Develop a sense of team cohesiveness and purpose and an open, supportive atmosphere in which thoughtful observation, analysis, and dialogue are encouraged.

8. Give team members the format for their section of the Peer Review Team Report.

9. Recognize the great work the college is doing by actively looking for areas where the college exceeds the standards (commendations). Remind the team to distinguish between recommendations which address deficiencies in meeting Accreditation Standards and those which are recommendations for improvement.
2.3 The Second Day (Tuesday)

Each review visit takes on its own characteristics, and each will proceed in its own way. The activities and elements which follow are typical for most site visits, but the team chair should feel free to modify the sequence to fit institutional and team needs.

1. Meet with president and key staff for introductions and informal contacts.

2. Take a brief campus tour (depends on size, complexity of campus).

3. Ensure team members meet with key people/groups, review evidence, and utilize these inputs to iteratively refine their initial findings and thinking based upon the ISER and Assignments 1 and 2.
   a. Team members come prepared with key individuals/groups to interview identified. Interview appointments should be made in advance.
   b. Visibility on campus is important, although not everyone will be interviewed.
   c. Pay attention to evening and off-campus programs and DE.
   d. Contact some of those who were involved in the committees that prepared the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report.

4. Conduct open forums.
   a. Forums should be highly publicized by the college.
   b. They should be held at times which will encourage participation.
   c. Identify a small number of team members to attend and conduct the forums.
   d. Forums are opportunities for individuals to come forward, not a presentation by the team.
   e. The institution’s senior-level administrators do not attend open forums.

5. Hold team meetings.
   a. Schedule several throughout the day(s); cancel if not needed.
   b. Seek cross validation. Don’t accept testimony from a single source; encourage sharing of issues—no single team member “owns” a problem; be on lookout for factions or individuals who would plead a special cause.
   c. Begin identification of any interrelated areas of concern—e.g., data analysis and planning—to help the team frame possible recommendations.
   d. Establish means for team members, especially those with more than one Standard assignment, to share their findings.

6. Communicate with district/system leadership and counterpart team (multi-college districts/systems).
   a. Hold in-person or telephone meetings with other chair(s).
b. Implement strategies for team members to coordinate activities, e.g., Board of Trustees, district/system officers and departments.

c. Decide role of district officials in site visit.

d. Develop strategies for recommendations that are district/system in nature.

7. Check with college president and others for feedback on college reaction to the team. Chair should let the CEO know of his/her intent to check-in regularly for feedback during the visit.

8. Have dinner as a team to continue discussions and sharing of observations. Please be aware of your location and the confidentiality of discussions, and the financial impact on the college.

9. Keep editing the report.
   a. Begin drafting preliminary findings, evidence, conclusions sections in the organization of the report.

2.4 The Third Day (Wednesday)

1. Continue interviews, meetings, class/site visits.
   a. Look for comprehensiveness of review, cross-validation.
   b. Identify the areas that have not yet been covered.
   c. Adjust team assignments as appropriate.

2. Hold team meetings; discuss core themes and findings.
   a. Identify core commendations and issues.
   b. Discuss issues that encompass more than one standard and develop a strategy for handling in the report. Discuss the holistic or systemic quality of the institution.
   c. Review to confirm that all Standards in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report are being validated.
   d. Assign additional team members to assist where needed.
   e. Discuss formats for team member written statements and for writing effective recommendations and commendations.²
   f. Remind team of role to analyze the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and review the college in terms of the Accreditation Standards and the mission of the institution, not other state regulations, statutes, or other perspectives.

3. Hold open forums, depending on previous day's schedule.

² Note: Because of the importance of these two items, separate sections on writing recommendations and the team statements are included in this Manual.
4. Meet with the institution’s CEO regarding her/his perceptions of the visit and ensure that appropriate college staff have been involved in discussions with the team.

5. Provide guidance to the team for writing reports.
   a. Encourage team members to share a draft of a section with their Standard Team, the team chair or team assistant early (especially rookies).
   b. Warn team members of the need to balance evidentiary and explanatory detail in the findings sections and to cite each Standard as it is covered.
   c. Assure that critical statements are firmly tied and referenced to something in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and/or the Standards and policies.
   d. Develop references to the college’s evidence (or lack thereof) in the evidence sections of the report.
   e. Develop conclusions that are concise and recommendations and commendations that reference the Standards.

2.5 The Fourth Day (Thursday)

1. Finish up loose ends, last-minute visits/interviews.

2. Conduct the final team meeting.
   a. Shift emphasis to statements of team factual findings, recommendations and commendations.
   b. Review team member reports and achieve agreement on recommendations and commendations.
   c. Consolidate recommendations where appropriate; avoid multiple recommendations on the same issue, e.g., half a dozen separate recommendations on “communication.” (See “Writing Effective Recommendations” section in this Team Chair Manual for examples.) If you consolidate recommendations, please ensure the appropriate Standards are referenced accurately. Use the team’s prior discussions of the holistic or systemic quality of the institution to identify key areas in which consolidated recommendations are needed.
   d. Agree on which recommendations deal with matters of not meeting Standards and which are matters of institutional improvement where Standards are clearly being met. Identify same in the “Conclusions” sections of the Peer Review Team Report. Make sure recommendations are clearly connected to observations and findings.
   e. Be absolutely sure to reference Standards (and/or Eligibility Requirements, Commission policies) on each recommendation.
3. Collect team members’ written reports on assigned Standards. The team chair must have these in written form before the team disperses if the timelines for completion of the final Peer Review Team Report are to be met. Keep electronic copies of the draft reports submitted by the team until the final Peer Review Team Report is completed.

4. Agree on the team’s comments on the Quality Focus Essay and the institution’s planned projects; provide constructive advice and encourage strong projects for improvement.

5. Compose the exit report (see sample exit report outline on your team chair USB drive).

6. Clean out team room.

   IN THE INTEREST OF MAINTAINING STRICT CONFIDENTIALITY, PLEASE:
   • Be sure to delete all team files from hard drives and desktops of college computers in the team room and at the hotel.
   • Remove all USB flash drives from the college computers in the team room and at the hotel.

7. Conduct exit discussion with institution’s CEO. (If the visit is part of a district/system, the district/system chair will meet with the district/system chief executive and provide an overview of district/system issues if any.)

8. Closing exit report is delivered to the institution. It should not be filmed or recorded. The chair should NOT read team recommendations or commendations during this report as they are subject to future editing. One suggestion from experienced team chairs is to provide the areas of improvement first, and then provide the commendations. This way the team leaves the college on a positive note (see sample exit report outline on your USB drive).

9. Team leaves campus following the exit report is given to the college.
3. The Peer Review Team Outcomes

Before the site visit ends, the team must produce a draft Peer Review Team Report. This section of the manual provides guidance for the team chair in overseeing the Peer Review Team’s onsite work products.

In crafting the completed Peer Review Team Report, the chair is best served if the Standard Areas of the Peer Review Team Reports submitted by the team at the end of the site visit are well written and contain adequate reference to Accreditation Standards, federal regulatory requirements of accreditation in the appropriate standards chapter, adherence to ACCJC policies, and to evidentiary materials that led to the team’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Thus chairs are advised to guide their team carefully as it prepares the Standard Areas of the Peer Review Team Report and recommendations. It is important to bear in mind that the chair’s completed Peer Review Team Report should not merely be an edited compilation of the Standard Areas of the Peer Review Team Report prepared by the peer review team, but must be a coherent and internally consistent document that can serve those using it after it is completed: the institution, the Commission, future peer review teams, and the public.

3.1 Developing the Standard Areas of the Peer Review Team Report

Each standard team will contribute a draft report to the chair before the conclusion of the visit. The final Peer Review Team Report, however, is not merely an edited compilation of segments prepared by the standard teams. It must be a coherent statement of evaluation. Team members need to understand that the final Peer Review Team Report is written by the team chair, and that their standard reports will undergo review and editing as the final Peer Review Team Report is prepared. At the same time, chairs can make the task much smoother by providing clear guidance to team members regarding organization, content, style, and tone of the Standard reports.

The team is responsible for collectively drafting a clear, concise, well-organized, and coherent Peer Review Team Report that will endure under the careful scrutiny of a wide variety of readers. The report should honestly reflect the views of the team and indicate any significant differences within the team. The report should set forth the limitations and difficulties which the institution is experiencing and the plans and potential it has for overcoming them.

A main purpose of the Peer Review Team Report is to help an institution and the Commission determine how effectively the college is meeting the Accreditation Standards. To achieve this purpose, the Peer Review Team Report should be clear and focused, and the sources of evidence for each recommendation should be noted. The purpose of the accreditation review is defeated if the team glosses over or ignores areas where an institution does not meet Standards. This report should identify deficiencies in meeting Accreditation Standards, and offer constructive recommendations for improvement. As well, the report should identify commendations, where the college exceeds the standards. The findings contained in the Peer Review Team Report represent the observations of the team at the time of the visit.
Guidelines for the Peer Review Team Report

1. Evaluate the institution in light of its own stated mission, its objectives, and the Accreditation Standards. Wide variations in the capabilities, interests, needs, and circumstances of students require corresponding responses by institutions. Not every institution has to respond to these variations in exactly the same way, but institutions should address each Standard within their own framework. Describe how well the institution is achieving its mission, using the institution’s presentation and analysis of student achievement data.

2. Make favorable comments when praise is due. Praise in the form of a commendation is appropriate when a college clearly exceeds accreditation expectations. It is appropriate to encourage a college in its efforts and progress toward meeting a Standard, but commendations should be reserved for truly excellent achievements.

3. Remember that the purpose of the Peer Review Team Report is to provide evidence for the Commission’s decision on the institution’s accreditation status, a fair and meaningful estimate of the effectiveness of the institution, and an assessment as to the degree to which it is meeting the standards of accreditation. Just as the Commission asks institutions to provide evidence for their assertions of quality and effectiveness, teams are expected to provide evidence, through their findings, to support their recommendations and commendations.

4. The final Peer Review Team Report is for the institution. In this era of increased accountability and public disclosure, teams need to regard the report as a document that belongs to the many institutional stakeholders and internal and external publics. The Commission requires institutions to make the report available to the public, by posting it on the institutional website. The report has a life of at least seven years, or until the institution undergoes its next accreditation review.

Organization of the Standard Areas within the Peer Review Team Report

Each Standard in the Peer Review Team Report should include a section of general observations. It is in this section of the Peer Review Team Report that an overview narrative is provided which summarizes the degree to which the institution is aligned with the standard, the manner in which it achieves alignment, areas of exceptional quality as related to the standard, and areas in need of improvement as related to the standard. A reader should be able to read the General Observations section and gain a sense of the overarching assessment of the institution relative to the particular standard. This section should serve as an introductory narrative to the findings and evidence section and must be consistent in that regard.

1. Each Standard Area of the Peer Review Team Report should include a section discussing the team members’ findings (specific observations and analyses) about the degree to which the institution’s practices and policies align with each Standard and the evidence the team used to reach that finding. The narrative should cite the Standards discussed at the end of each paragraph, in parentheses. Team members should take care to ensure that each Standard is discussed in the findings and evidence section. This section should include a
discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the college, including areas
where the institution does not meet the Accreditation Standards. This is the
section that provides the rational for the team’s findings, including
recommendations and commendations. All findings must be supported within
the narrative of this section.

2. Each Standard Area of the Peer Review Team Report should include a brief
conclusions section that states whether the institution meets the Standard,
fails below in some areas, exceeds the Standard, etc. This section might also
include some of the general observations, and should include any
commendations the team wants to make on this Standard.

3. Each Standard Area of the Peer Review Team Report should include a section of
recommendations, if any, for the Standard. At the final team meeting, these
draft recommendations may be accepted, modified, combined with other
recommendations, or deleted. It is important that all recommendations be
those which the entire or a majority of the team accepts, not just the
perspective or interests of one person.

Elements Which Should Not Be Part of the Standard Areas of the Peer Review
Team Reports
1. Individuals should not be named, either in praise or blame. Comment, if
necessary, on the office or position, not the officeholder.

2. Avoid advocating individual educational or governance theories.

3. Neither advocate for, nor advise against, specialized accreditation. Program
specific accreditation is an institutional matter. The results of specialized
accreditation should be given due regard, and may be used effectively by the
institution as part of the supporting evidence included in the Institutional Self-
Evaluation Report.

4. Do not cite the formulas or requirements of legislative statutes, specific
organizations or associations, governmental departments or other agencies. If
an institution has adopted such standards/benchmarks as its own measures of
quality or effectiveness, it is appropriate to cite them as evidence presented
by the institution in forming a judgment about overall institutional quality and
adherence to accreditation standards.

3.2 Writing Effective Recommendations and Commendations

One of the most difficult parts of the peer review team visit is drafting
recommendations and commendations to the college. Recommendations are based on
the team’s evaluation and identify areas where the college does not meet the
standard and/or areas for improvement, but a team cannot prescribe solutions the
college must take to address those areas. Commendations should only be identified
when the college exceeds the standard(s).

In writing recommendations and commendations, be thoughtful about the institution’s
need for specific language or more general language. A brief diagnostic statement of
the problem, linked to the appropriate accreditation Standard is sufficient, leaving the specific remedy to be worked out by the institution. In rare cases, an institution may seek very specific advice on how to remedy deficiencies. In that case, the college’s assigned ACCJC staff liaison should work with the college for clarification.

The content of the findings and conclusions sections of the Peer Review Team Report should logically and clearly set the stage for any recommendation that the team wishes to make. All recommendations should be followed by a citation of the Standard(s) in question, assuring that the institution will understand what is being recommended and what Standard(s) are related. Narrative of those citations must support the team’s findings. The peer review team should review all draft recommendations as a group during and at the conclusion of the team visit but the chair is required to consider editing them later to improve clarity and eliminate inconsistencies that may exist.

Principles of Writing Effective Recommendations

1. Recommendations should set expectations that an institution take an action or complete a task, using language such as “complete the program review,” “implement the new budgetary process,” etc.

Recommendations that tell an institution to “design a new budgetary process” often result in an institution’s failure to implement the recommendation, and recommendations that tell an institution to “review” or “consider” something frequently result in no action or improvement.

2. Recommendations should reference the Standards.

Both the college and the Commission should be able to tell at a glance which Standard(s) are being addressed. This can be accomplished by a reference to the Standard at the end of the recommendation. An example of a recommendation with appropriate Standards cited follows.

“...should establish clear written policies and procedures delineating the roles and responsibilities of the various campus constituencies that participate in institutional governance.” [Standards IV.A.2, IV.A.3]

3. Recommendations should flow logically and clearly from the findings and conclusions in the Peer Review Team Report.

The college will have difficulty responding to and understanding the rationale for a recommendation that has no prior reference in the report. The team should cite evidence it uses to conclude non-compliance with accreditation requirements.

4. Recommendations should make it clear whether they are designed to bring the institution to a level that meets the Standard (“In order to meet the Standards, the team recommends that the college ...”) or whether they are designed to strengthen a condition that already meets the standard.

The content of the findings and conclusions sections of the report should include a comment on whether or not the institution meets the Standard.
5. **Recommendations that relate to several Standards should be combined into overarching recommendations.**

This will help to avoid repeating recommendations over and over for each relevant standard. Standard references should be rechecked when recommendations are combined since sometimes in the consolidation process the links to specific Standards are weakened or lost. This SAMPLE combined recommendation has been carefully linked to Standards.

**Sample Recommendation #1:**

“In order to meet the Standards the college must complete a full review of its processes related to the assessment and review cycle of student learning outcomes for all instructional courses/programs to ensure that all courses, programs, and directly related student services are improved (II.A.2, II.A.16).”

6. **The report should be consistent in its stance on key issues.**

Complimenting a college and making a recommendation on the same issue elsewhere in the report leads to confusion, and such inconsistencies will only serve to weaken the impact of the report. Recommendations should be consistent with the findings and evidence, and conclusions sections of the Peer Review Team Report.

7. **Clarity and Directness.**

Colleges benefit most from clear and direct team statements that don’t “beat around the bush” and that don’t leave room for a good deal of debate about the team’s intent or meaning. It is challenging, but necessary, to be as direct as possible.

**Recommendations Should Not:**

1. **Contain references that are not part of the ERs, Standards, and Commission policies.**

Terms like “Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA),” “shared governance,” “matriculation” and “collegial consultation” have specific meaning in some of the districts/systems which govern some member institutions. While the principles included in these terms may be embodied in the Accreditation Standards, avoid creating confusion that may result from the use of these specialized terms.

The following **examples of poorly written** recommendations use terms that derive their meaning from sources other than the standards.

“The team recommends that the college review and validate instruments for cultural bias, meeting matriculation guidelines, and regulating cutoff scores.” (Standards xxx)

“The College should complete its Minimum Qualifications equivalency review of faculty.” (Standard xxx)
2. Be based on the standards/regulations of governmental agencies, the legislature, or other organizations.

The relevant Standards for the team are those of the Commission. Team member concerns about compliance with external laws or regulations can creep into a team's recommendations, as in the following example of an inappropriate recommendation:

“The College President should ensure the full implementation of the new College quantitative program review model and ensure implementation of the Accountability Model derived from Assembly Bill 1725.”

3. Be vague.

The college needs to know what the problem is and not be put in the position of trying to guess what the appropriate response might be. The same comment might be made about recommendations which are clichés, or unsupported generalities. Some examples of what not to write are:

- “The Physical Science building has some safety problems.”
- “The College needs to do planning.”
- ”Cultural diversity needs to be clarified and communicated to the college community.”

4. Contain a “Standards dump” of every loosely related Standard imaginable.

Recommendations are intended to give clear direction on the areas where the college needs improvement. Such “Standards dumps” may confuse or overwhelm the college. Cite only those Standards that will be directly impacted by the recommended action, not those that will be indirectly impacted.

5. Be prescriptive.

Describing how a problem should be solved should be left up to the institution. Note how these recommendations are written; they are not to be emulated.

“The ventilation fan in the Central Duplicating area should be replaced with a heavy duty model.”

“The college should have a Diversity/Affirmative Action Officer on campus in order to coordinate training for faculty screening committees and to provide multi-cultural awareness training for all staff.”
4. Team Chair Reports

The team chair is responsible for two major reports: an exit report to the college which is delivered orally at the end of the site visit, and a Peer Review Team Report which is submitted to the Commission and the institution. Although the efforts of the peer review team contribute to both reports, the team chair bears primary responsibility for them.

4.1 Exit report at Conclusion of the Team Visit

The exit report given at the end of the visit is the first public statement by the team concerning its major findings and a broad description of its recommendations and commendations. It also helps the college by providing closure to their comprehensive review process. Depending on the issues that are prominent on the campus, concerns which were identified in the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report or during the course of the visit, and the general atmosphere of the institution, the Exit report is an opportunity to commend the college, to note major findings, and to underscore the general nature of key recommendations. The chair speaks for the team and conveys the essence of the team's message to the college. An effective Exit report can do much to bring a positive closure to the entire effort and to prepare the college for the Peer Review Team Report and ultimately the Commission action.

- Diplomacy is in order, but so is candor. Although the Exit report is generally one that outlines findings and broad recommendations that need attention, commendations for excellence are appropriate and encouraged.

- Operate on the principle of “no surprises.” If the team has identified an issue that should be addressed quickly, this should be communicated to the college. No college should be led to believe that all is well if the team has found serious issues at the college.

- Refrain from generalizing the findings to other institutions. For example suggesting that every institution has deficiencies, such as “everybody gets a recommendation on planning…” in a particular area is not appropriate or helpful.

- Recognize the effort made by the college to produce the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and to prepare for the comprehensive peer review visit. If appropriate, asking those who participated to stand as a group is one more way to validate the process and to reinforce the institution's ownership of the enterprise.

- All members of the team should be present at the exit report. Only the team chair speaks, and no questions are taken. The team chair should not permit the Exit report to be filmed or recorded—the final Peer Review Team Report will contain all the important information.

- Describe (in general terms) the college personnel that were interviewed, the number of attendees at the open forums, etc.
Outline for Exit report at Conclusion of Team Visit

A. Introductions/Acknowledgments
   1. Introduce team and comment on their background and experience.
   2. Thank college for its cooperation and acknowledge any whose contributions were especially helpful such as the individuals who participated in writing the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and key support staff.

B. Review Purposes of the Exit report
   1. Provide some closure for the visit.
   2. Provide summary of preliminary substantive findings and recommendations to the institution.
   3. Remind the college that only the final, written, Commission-approved report is official.

C. Review Major Purposes of the Team Visit
   1. Evaluate the college as a whole using the Accreditation Standards.
   2. Evaluate how well the college is achieving its stated purposes (mission) by assessing the college as it carries out its activities.
   3. Determine whether the institution meets Accreditation Standards.
   4. Provide recommendations for quality assurance and institutional improvement.
   5. Provide information to the Commission and the public about the institution’s quality.

D. Review the Team's Approach to Completing Its Task
   1. Study of the college’s Institutional Self-Evaluation Report and supporting documents, the report of the previous team, and any other accreditation reports.
   2. On-campus meetings with individuals and groups, interviews, examination of documents, observation of facilities, visits to off-campus sites and review of DE courses and services where appropriate.
   3. Open sessions in which any member of the college community could meet with the team.

E. Summarize the Team's Assessment of the College
   1. Overall team assessment of the quality of the college’s Institutional Self-Evaluation Report:
   2. Meaningful planning agendas/improvement plans which the college commits to implement.
   3. Quality of writing and organization.
   4. Quality and availability of the supporting documentation and evidence.
   5. Findings and recommendations of the team:
6. Broadly describe the team’s findings regarding the institution’s strengths and opportunities for growth.
7. Do not read the recommendations or commendations.
8. Provide any team comment on the Quality Focus Essay and advice for the institution on its improvement projects.

F. Review Steps Which Occur After the Team Leaves
1. The team chair prepares draft of final Peer Review Team Report.
2. The team chair sends the draft to the Commission office, and staff communicates with the team chair regarding the draft.
3. The team chair sends the report to the team for any suggested corrections.
4. The team chair sends the draft Peer Review Team Report to the institutional CEO for correction of errors of fact, and makes corrections as appropriate.
5. The team chair sends the completed Peer Review Team Report to the staff liaison.
6. The Commission sends a copy of the completed Peer Review Team Report to the college with instructions for the upcoming Commission meeting.
7. The Commission reviews the report at the next (January or June) meeting and takes action regarding the institution’s accredited status.
8. The Commission sends the action letter to the college, within 30 days after the Commission meeting.
4.2 The Completed Peer Review Team Report

The comprehensive Peer Review Team Report is completed by the team chair after the visit is concluded. The format for the report and samples of a title page, summary, and letter to accompany the draft of the report are included in your Team Chair cloud folder. The primary focus of the report should be on the ways in which the institution does, or does not, demonstrate that it meets or exceeds Accreditation Standards and on the findings and recommendations of the peer review team.

The report of the team chair has multiple audiences and has a life of its own long after the conclusion of the visit. The institution will use the report to assess its own self-evaluation effort and to take appropriate actions on the recommendations. It would be naive to ignore the possibility that internal or external special interest groups or individuals may use the report to further their own agendas.

The Commission relies on the report as a primary source in its deliberations concerning the accredited status of the institution, the thoroughness of the team's peer review of the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report, and the cogency of the team's recommendations to the college.

Review of Drafts: A draft of the Peer Review Team Report should first be e-mailed to the Commission office, normally within ten days of the visit. The ACCJC staff liaison assigned to that particular college will carefully review the draft, make suggested edits and email them to the team chair, and discuss it with the chair by telephone within a day or two. The team chair will send the draft report to the team members for their suggestions. The chair will then send the draft report to the institutional CEO for correction of errors of fact. Copies of all correspondence should be sent to the Commission staff member assigned to the chair.

Suggestions to expedite the first draft of the Peer Review Team Report:

- Write your draft immediately. Some team chairs begin writing the introductory material during the visit. Team member assessments of the quality of the institutional responses should also be available before the visit ends.
- Spend enough time and effort on the draft so it looks and reads like a finished product; you should consider the draft report to be a public document.
- Review the draft carefully to avoid terminology specific to one system or group of colleges.
- Review the draft to make sure the recommendations are related to something which is specifically covered by the Standards.
- Review the draft to make sure that the Standards cited are the ones which are applicable to each recommendation.
- Check for and correct any contradictory statements or conclusions about compliance with standards that appear in the team’s written work.

Role of the ACCJC liaison: The ACCJC liaison is there to be a supportive resource to the team chair and college. They will review the report for clarity, consistency, completeness, and the strength of the connections between the findings; the conclusions, commendations, and recommendations; and the Accreditation Standards.
Role of the Peer Review Team: Team members should review the draft to validate that the report accurately reflects the observations and findings of the team and to make suggestions regarding style and tone.

Role of the College: The College may correct errors of fact in the report, but it may not alter the findings or the recommendations. Although the draft of the report is confidential in terms of general release at this time, the president may share its contents with key members of the institutional staff who would have the ability to identify potential errors of fact. The college should be given about a week to complete its review.

Characteristics of the Final Peer Review Team Report

The Peer Review Team Report is an important document in that it is the vehicle by which critical judgments about institutional performance and quality are expressed by the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, and through which formal advice about improvement is given.

- The document is analyzed in detail by the Commissioners of the Accrediting Commission in reaching decisions about the accredited status of the subject institution.
- The Report is read by faculty, administrators, and trustees of the subject institution; and it is used by the institution to develop improvement plans.
- The Report is permanently filed at the college and the Accrediting Commission's office. The institution must post the Report on its website, along with the Commission action letter and the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report. It may be examined by the press, researchers, job applicants, other accrediting bodies, government agencies, or the courts.
- The name of the team chair and team members as author is inevitably connected with the Report.

The Commission asks that the Report be prepared with great care!

Internal consistency: Is the report consistent with no mixed or conflicting messages? Are contradictions among elements of the report avoided, e.g., between observations and summaries and between commendations and recommendations? Does the information in the “findings and evidence” support and lead to the conclusions and recommendations? Have redundancies been consolidated? Are observations, conclusions, and recommendations handled consistently from Standard to Standard?

Clarity: Does the Report say exactly what is intended, so that there can be no accidental or deliberate misinterpretation?

Perspective: Does the Report clearly represent the observations, conclusions, and recommendations as coming from the team as a whole, not just one member or point of view?

Institutional focus: Does the Report deal fairly with the entire institution without advocating selectively for constituency groups or other special interests?
Comprehensiveness: Did the team affirm that the institution meets or exceeds the Accreditation Standards? Did the team examine the institution’s compliance with Eligibility Requirements and ACCJC policies? Did it examine all of the elements covered by federal regulations and the Checklist? Has the team commented on the Quality Focus Essay, and made suggestions to support the institution’s improvement projects?

Documentation: Does the text of the Report support the recommendations? Do the findings and analyses and conclusions sections clearly state the evidence or context on which the statements are based?

(Example: “From discussions with college committees, observation of meetings and review of minutes, the team concludes that . . . ”)

Tone: Is the tone of the Report appropriate to the circumstances and the intended effect? Unduly harsh criticism can affect the climate of an institution and can be harmful to individuals. The institution itself must address recommendations, and the Report should encourage the taking of appropriate actions. Accreditation employs the language of diplomacy, while being direct and clear as to meaning.

Economy: Have redundancies been consolidated, where possible, in the Report?

Audience: Consider who may read the Report and with what purposes in mind? It is an academic document addressed to the college. It may also be read by reporters, government agencies, legislators, or students; they all want clarity and conciseness.
4.3 Peer Review Team Report Transmittal to ACCJC for Commission Review

After the college has responded to any errors of fact, the team chair should make appropriate revisions and send an electronic copy of the comprehensive Peer Review Team Report to the Commission office. Normally, this should be completed within a month after the visit.

The final Peer Review Team Report package should include:

1. Electronic submission of the final Peer Review Team Report via e-mail in MS-Word.

2. Electronic expense forms, if not sent earlier.

The ACCJC office will send final copies of the peer review report to the college prior to the Commission meeting, and allow the CEO to comment on the Report. The CEO may also elect to come to the Commission meeting and address the Commissioners; in such cases the Commission will also invite the team chair to attend in person or by phone.