New England Commission of Higher Education
301 Edgewater Place, Suite 210, Wakefield, MA 01880
Tel: 781-425-7785 I neche.org

Procedures for the Focused Evaluation Visit

The focused evaluation provides a means of monitoring specific developments or concerns within an institution between comprehensive evaluations. When the Commission requires a focused evaluation, the institution submits a report on specified areas, and a small team visits the institution to validate the information provided in the report, evaluate the areas of focus, and report its findings and its recommendations to the Commission. The Commission considers the institutional report, the team report and confidential recommendation, and the institution's response to the team report and takes action, if appropriate, on the institution's accreditation status.

Notification to the Institution
Several months before the visit, the Commission sends a reminder to the institution about the upcoming evaluation and works with the chief executive officer on the selection of dates for the visit. The Commission staff selects a prospective team, usually two or three persons including the chairperson, and requests the president's comments on the proposed team before appointing its members. When the team is complete, the institution and team members are informed, and appropriate evaluator materials are sent to the team from the Commission office.

An institution scheduled for a focused evaluation is urged to contact Commission staff for assistance in developing its report and making preparations for the evaluation.

Arrangements for the Team Visit
Upon receipt of the team list, the institution contacts the team chairperson to discuss the schedule for the visit, accommodations, and other arrangements. The institution notifies each team member directly about accommodations and communicates with the team chairperson about all other matters related to the visit. The institution arranges to have all hotel accommodations, and meals if possible, billed directly to the institution. After the visit, the Commission bills the institution for the team members' out-of-pocket expenses, primarily travel costs. Reimbursement should be made directly and promptly to the team. In keeping with Commission policy, the institution is billed for the focused evaluation fee.

The Institutional Report
When the focused evaluation follows submission of the interim (fifth-year) report, the institution should follow the *Guidelines for Preparing Fifth-Year Reports* when preparing its materials. Otherwise, the following procedures apply.

The report should be a concise narrative containing the following sections:

1. Cover page. Include the institution's name, location, the date, and a brief summary of the subject(s) of the report.

2. Introduction. Indicate the purpose, focus, and limitations (if any) of the report, with specific citation of the Commission's requirements, the processes by which the report was developed, and the organization of the report.

3. Institutional Overview. Describe the institution briefly, including its mission, setting, and any special circumstances which would help in understanding its nature and scope. Discuss any significant changes at the institution since the time of the last comprehensive evaluation.

4. Area(s) of Focus. Describe fully the matter(s) under inquiry and the institution's assessment of the area(s), including strengths or progress achieved, as well as identified concerns and plans for their remedy. Be as explicit and precise as the nature of the materials permits. Discuss how the institution meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* related to the areas of concern. Supporting evidence can be included in the appendices or, if of significant volume, made available in advance to the visiting team by electronic means.

5. Summary Appraisal and Plans. Conclude with a summary appraisal of the institution's continuing development, with particular reference to the area(s) of focus. Briefly describe the institution's ongoing planning and evaluation processes for the next comprehensive evaluation.

6. Appendix. Institutions asked to focus on finance and enrollment should include the Finance & Enrollment (F&E) Data Forms, available on the Commission website. At the same time, the institution sends an electronic copy of the report to each evaluator (and, if requested, a paper copy).

Submission of the Report
At least six weeks before the visit, unless otherwise specified by the Commission, the institution submits an electronic copy (single, searchable pdf file) of its report to the Commission through the NECHE Institution Portal. At the same time, the institution sends a paper copy of the report to each team member that requests one.

Conduct of the Visit
The on-site evaluation follows the customary format described in the Commission's *Evaluation Manual*. In most cases, the visit is one day shorter than the comprehensive visit. It typically begins on Sunday afternoon or evening with a team meeting convened by the chairperson and concludes with an oral report to institutional representatives on Tuesday morning or afternoon. A complex situation may require a longer visit, a matter to be decided by the President of the Commission in consultation with the institution.

For most focused evaluations, a preliminary visit by the team chairperson is unnecessary. However, regular communication by phone should be initiated by the institution, and the chairperson should feel free to contact the institution to discuss arrangements in detail or to request additional materials if team members see a need for them.

Preparation of the Team Report
The steps in the preparation of the team report, and the schedule for its completion, are the same as those prescribed for a comprehensive evaluation. In certain critical situations, the schedule for report preparation may be shortened.

The team report has the following format:

1. Cover Page (templated provided in Visiting Team Resource Guide)

2. Preface Page to the Team Report (provided by Commission office)

3. Introduction and Institutional Overview. This section provides a description of the nature and purpose of the focused evaluation as well as a brief overview of the institution and its significant changes since the last comprehensive evaluation.

4. Area(s) of Focus. The major section of the report addresses the area(s) identified for the focused evaluation, specifically whether the institution has or has not satisfactorily addressed the concerns identified by the Commission. It also describes how and how well the institution fulfills the Commission's standards related to the area(s) of concern.

5. Summary. The report should conclude with a list of identified strengths and concerns related to the area(s) of focus.

A draft of the team's report is made available to the institution through the NECHE Institution Portal. The institution is provided an opportunity to review a draft of the evaluation report for factual accuracy and also to write a substantive response to the final team report (also made available through the portal).

Team's Confidential Recommendation to the Commission

In keeping with Commission procedures, the team develops a confidential recommendation based upon its findings in evaluating the area(s) of focus. The nature of each recommendation will depend on the specific purpose of each visit. The Evaluation Manual has additional information about the preparation of the confidential recommendation.

The recommendation should contain the following elements:

1. The team's recommendation on the institution's accreditation status, if appropriate. Instances of deferral, Notice of Concern, Notation, and probation always require a recommendation on the institution's status of accreditation or candidacy.

    - When the purpose of the visit is to review the Commission's deferral of action on an institution's accreditation status, the options for the team recommendation are: (a) reaffirmation when the institution has adequately responded to the concerns that led to deferral, or (b) show-cause for probation or withdrawal of accreditation when the institution has not addressed the concerns.

    - For the evaluation of institutions on Notice of Concern/Notation, if the institution has satisfactorily addressed the concerns that led to the Notice of Concern/Notation, the team should recommend removal of the Notice/Notation. If conditions remain largely unchanged, the team should recommend continuation of the Notice/Notation. If conditions have worsened and the institution appears not to meet one or more of the *Standards for Accreditation*, the team should recommend show-cause for probation or withdrawal of accreditation.

    - For the evaluation of institutions on probation, if the institution has satisfactorily addressed the concerns that led to probation, the team should recommend removal of the status together with reaffirmation of accreditation. If some progress has been made, there are realistic plans to achieve further progress, and the institution has not reached the end of the probation period, the team should recommend continuation on probation. If adequate progress has not been made and there is evidence that the persistence of the problem(s) that led to probation prevents the institution from meeting the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* or candidacy requirements, the team should recommend withdrawal of the institution's accreditation or candidacy.

2. The team's recommendation on the timing and content of the next focused visit or progress report. A recommendation for subsequent focused visits or progress reports related to the area(s) of concern is advisable if the team concludes that further monitoring of the specific situation is necessary.

If the institution has satisfactorily dealt with the area(s) of concern, subsequent reports or visits are not appropriate. However, if the institution has made no progress in the area of concern, a recommendation for Notice of Concern, Notation, or probation status should be considered.

3. The team's recommendation on the timing of the next comprehensive visit. Except in cases of deferral, the Commission has established the schedule for the next comprehensive evaluation of the institution. Such visits must occur at least once every ten years. When evaluating institutions on less than a decennial cycle, focused visit teams should review the timing for the subsequent comprehensive evaluation in light of their findings. The determining factor in making a recommendation to shorten or lengthen the time before the next comprehensive visit should be the Commission's need to monitor the institution. A deteriorating situation may suggest the need for an earlier visit. Conversely, demonstrable ability to address problems satisfactorily would suggest a lengthening of the time until the next evaluation. However, in no case can the next comprehensive evaluation occur later than ten years from the last comprehensive visit.

   In cases of deferral where no subsequent evaluation has been scheduled, the team is charged with making a recommendation for the timing of the next visit or visits, focused and/or comprehensive. Again, the Commission's need to monitor the institutional situation should be the basic consideration in making this recommendation.

4. The rationale for the recommendation. Reasons should be given in narrative form for each component of the recommendation.

The team chair uploads the confidential recommendation to the Commission office through the NECHE Evaluator Portal.

Commission Action

The team report and confidential recommendation, along with the institutional report and response, are considered by the Commission at one of its two regular meetings the semester following the visit. As a part of its consideration of the institutional report and evaluation, the Commission normally asks the team chair and institutional chief executive officer to attend at the hour set aside for the report. Both are informed at an early date of the time and place of the Commission meeting. The institution and team members are informed of the Commission's action shortly after the meeting.

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