

# **Applying for Accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education:**

**A Guide for Institutions Currently Accredited by an  
Agency that is Recognized by the  
U.S. Department of Education**

**New England Commission of Higher Education**



Copies of this guide are available online at  
[www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org)

New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)  
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## INTRODUCTION

### **Applying for Accreditation by the New England Commission of Higher Education**

Effective July 1, 2020, the U.S. Department of Education passed regulation declaring that "regional" accrediting agencies could expand their scope by accrediting institutions outside of their traditional region.

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) has adopted a formal process to consider applications for accreditation from institutions currently accredited by another federally recognized institutional accreditation agency. To transition to NECHE accreditation, the institution must provide evidence that: 1) it is in good standing with its current accreditation agency, 2) it is financially stable; and 3) it meets NECHE's *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*. The process ensures that institutions will be able to engage in an ongoing relationship with the Commission focused on public accountability and institutional improvement.

The Commission strongly believes that NECHE accreditation is an on-going capacity-building exercise for the institution. There is great value to be gained from attending NECHE's Annual Meeting and Commission workshops, working closely with Commission staff, and getting feedback on draft documents. Commission staff will provide advice throughout the process; there is no need to hire outside consultants.

**The acceptance of an application to become accredited by NECHE does not commit the Commission to an eventual affiliation with the applicant institution.**

Questions may be directed to the President of the Commission.

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## THE APPLICATION PROCESS

### Meet with Commission staff

If an institution wishes to explore the possibility of relinquishing its accreditation with its current accreditation agency and become accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education, its chief executive officer should contact the Commission President to arrange a meeting and presentation of institutional materials.

The primary purpose of the meeting is to understand the reasons for which the institution wishes to relinquish its accreditation with its current agency and become accredited by NECHE. The meeting will also help the Commission learn about the institution and to help the institution understand the NECHE accreditation process and Commission expectations. Following a brief presentation by the institution about its mission, the context in which it operates, the programs it offers, the reasons it is seeking NECHE accreditation and its own assessment of how it meets the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*, Commission staff will provide an overview of Commission policies and procedures, offer a preliminary review of the Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation and discuss next steps. Staff will schedule a one-day campus visit to meet with key constituents.

## APPLICATION FOR ACCREDITATION BY NECHE

### The Application Report

If the institution determines it will pursue accreditation by NECHE, it will prepare a comprehensive report for the Commission that substantiates its rationale for relinquishing its accreditation with its current accreditation agency and documents the ways in which it meets the *Standards for Accreditation and Requirements of Affiliation*. During this process, the institution will submit one or more drafts of its report to NECHE staff for review and feedback.

The final report will include:

1. Cover page
2. Table of Contents
3. Institutional Characteristics Form\*
4. Institutional Overview explaining why the institution wishes to relinquish its accreditation with its current agency and become accredited by NECHE
5. Narrative (40-50 pages) to demonstrate compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation* and the *Requirements of Affiliation*
6. Data First Forms\* to accompany each of the nine standards\*
7. Appendix
  - a. Completed [Affirmation of Compliance](#) (.pdf), signed by the institution's CEO\*
  - b. Two most recent years of audited financial statements
  - c. Auditor's management letter containing specific recommendations to the institution on its financial controls and practices
  - d. Student Achievement and Success: Making Assessment More Explicit (E-Series) forms\*
  - e. A summary of the reports, notification letters, agency actions, and related correspondence between the institution and its accreditation agency since the time of the institution's last comprehensive evaluation (note: these documents will be made available to the visiting team either electronically or in paper format during its visit)

\* these documents are available to download from the NECHE website:

<https://www.necche.org/institutional-evaluations/comprehensive-evaluation/>

An electronic version (single, searchable pdf file) of the report and appendices will be sent to the Commission offices. Prior to the review of the institution's report by the Commission, the contents of the report, appendices, and workroom documents will be validated by a visiting team. Each team member will receive a single, searchable pdf file of the report and electronic access to all appendices and workroom documents. Some team members may request a paper copy of the self-study.

The institution will make available to the visiting team its accreditation reports and correspondence since the times of the last comprehensive evaluation. Workroom documents will include:

- a. Most recent self-study, team report, institution's response to the team report, and agency's notification letter
- b. Most recent interim/mid-term report, team report, institution's response to the team report (if a visit was conducted in connection with the interim/mid-term report) and agency's notification letter
- c. Last two Annual Reports
- d. All reports submitted since the last comprehensive review, including but not limited to: Progress reports, substantive change reports, enrollment and/or finance reports, along with correspondence between the agency and the institution related to these reports
- e. All correspondence received from the current accreditation agency during the NECHE accreditation process
- f. Any complaints about the institution that were reviewed by the agency along with the agency's notification letter responding to the complaint(s)

### **Staff Visit**

Commission staff will schedule a convenient day to visit the institution's campus. The purpose of the staff visit is to verify the location of the institution and meet with key constituents. Staff may also present a workshop related to becoming accredited through the New England Commission of Higher Education.

## **APPLICATION VALIDATION VISIT**

### **Selection of the Visiting Team**

Institutions are asked to select dates for the visit from several possibilities during the academic year. (Team visits are typically from Sunday to Wednesday.) Well in advance of the campus visit, Commission staff, with consideration for the nature of the institution, propose a visiting team chair to the chief executive officer of the institution. If the selection of the chair is approved by the chief executive officer, the chair is invited to serve. Team chairs are normally institutional presidents and provosts from comparable NECHE-accredited institutions with extensive experience in accreditation activities. To ensure objectivity in the evaluation process, institutions are asked to review the proposed chair and team members for any actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

After the team chair has been confirmed, a visiting team (typically about 3-5 individuals from NECHE-accredited institutions) is selected from the Commission's database of peer evaluators. While the Commission always reserves the right to appoint the visiting team, the views of the institution are important in ensuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of the visiting team and in preventing

conflicts of interest. The Commission relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment where even the slightest potential for conflict of interest exists. As soon as all NECHE team members have accepted appointment, Commission staff inform the institution.

### **Preliminary Visit by the Team Chair**

Prior to the evaluation visit, the chair of the visiting team makes a preliminary visit, either virtually or in person, to the institution. This visit is designed to help the institution understand how the team will operate and to enable the chair to assess the institution's application report and discuss the institution's arrangements for the visit. The chair communicates with the institution's chief executive officer to discuss the upcoming visit, the team's time of arrival, schedule, accommodations, and related matters.

### **The Application Visit**

The on-campus evaluation is typically scheduled for a three-day period, from Sunday afternoon through Wednesday afternoon. The team's work begins on Sunday afternoon to review team assignments and the protocol for the visit. That evening, the team meets with senior administrators, faculty, and board members over dinner. The following days of the visit are spent meeting with the institution's senior leadership, governing board, faculty, staff, and students and preparing the team's report and recommendation. Classroom observations are not necessary and typically are not helpful. The exact schedule of the team is arranged in advance through discussions between the team chair and institutional staff.

On the final day, the team chair first meets privately with the chief executive officer of the institution to discuss the team's findings. The chief executive officer and team chair determine who, in addition to the full visiting team, will be present to hear those findings presented at a meeting known as the "exit report." The session may be an open one for the entire institutional community or a gathering of just the senior leaders of the institution. At the exit report, the team chair provides an oral preview of major points that will be included in the team's written report.

The institution should arrange for charges for the visiting team's lodging and meals to be billed directly to the institution. The visiting team members are guests on the institution's campus, but they are also outside evaluators with a job to do, and objectivity is crucial to their work. Hospitality should be considerate, but it need not be lavish. Gifts are not appropriate.

## **AFTER THE APPLICATION VISIT**

### **Team Report and Confidential Recommendation to the Commission**

The visiting team chair, with the assistance of the other team members, is responsible for the preparation of a written report for submission to the institution and the Commission. This report is an assessment of the extent to which the institution meets the *Standards for Accreditation* and the *Requirements of Affiliation* and its potential for becoming an accredited member of the New England Commission of Higher Education.

A team visit and the resulting team recommendation do not constitute an affiliation with the Commission.

### **Institution Response to the Team Report**

The team chair will submit the draft report to the institution to review for **factual errors** (e.g., misspelled names or incorrect data). The institution will also have an opportunity to provide the Commission with its response to the final team report.



### **Commission Decision**

A semester after the application visit, the Commission will review the institution's application report, the report and confidential recommendation prepared by the visiting team, and the institution's response to the team report to determine if the institution should be declared an accredited member of NECHE.

### **Notification of the Commission's Decision**

The institution will receive a formal notification from the Chair of the Commission within about 30 business days after the meeting detailing the Commission's decision. The Commission may take actions that include:

1. Accept the institution's application and accredit the institution for a designated period of time with follow up reporting or focused evaluation visits, as applicable
2. Defer action on the institution's application pending the receipt of additional information
3. Deny the institution's application

If the Commission denies the institution's application for accreditation, the institution will be so notified and given the reasons for the decision. This decision is subject to appeal. If the application for accreditation is denied, the institution may resubmit an application report one year following the Commission's notification.

## **COSTS OF THE APPLICATION VISIT AND AFFILIATION WITH THE COMMISSION**

### **Cost of the Staff Visit**

The institution is responsible for the transportation and accommodation costs associated with the visit. Generally, one staff member conducts this visit. The current fee for the staff visit can be found on the Commission website at [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

### **Cost of the Application Visit**

Members of evaluation teams are volunteers and serve without honoraria. Their transportation and accommodation costs are the responsibility of the institution. In addition, an evaluation fee for the application visit is charged to the institution prior to the visit. The current fee for the application visit can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

### **Cost of Affiliation with the Commission**

Accreditation is a system of peer review. For NECHE, this means that visits are conducted by volunteers (primarily from New England) who serve without honoraria. Fees and annual dues paid by affiliated institutions cover the cost of services provided by the Commission and are the means by which independent, non-governmental accreditation is sustained.

All affiliated institutions pay annual dues based on their full-time equivalent enrollment and total expenses. In addition, evaluation fees are charged for every site visit by a review team. The current schedule of affiliation and evaluation fees is available on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

## **PUBLIC REPRESENTATION OF APPLYING TO NECHE FOR ACCREDITATION**

### **Public Disclosure**

An application for NECHE accreditation is not a formal status or affiliation with the Commission.

If the institution chooses to inform the public that it is applying for accreditation through NECHE, in order to ensure that there is no misunderstanding by the public, institutions must use only Commission-approved language about its application on their websites and in other public communications. It may use only the following public statement in its entirety:

“[Name of institution] has submitted an application to become accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education. This application does not constitute accreditation, nor does it indicate a likelihood of eventual accreditation. Questions about the application or accreditation process should be directed to the President of the Commission.”

Per the Commission’s policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions, the Commission asks that one of the following statements be used for disclosing on its website and in catalogues, brochures, advertisements, etc., that the institution is accredited.

\_\_\_\_\_ College (University) is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.). Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals may also contact:

New England Commission of Higher Education  
3 Burlington Woods Drive, Suite 100, Burlington, MA 01803-4514  
(781) 425 7785  
E-Mail: [info@neche.org](mailto:info@neche.org)

An institution may wish to include within its website, catalogue or other material a statement which will give the consuming public a better idea of the meaning of accreditation. When that is the case, the Commission requests that the following statement be used in its entirety:

\_\_\_\_\_ College (University) is accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (formerly the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Inc.).

Accreditation of an institution of higher education by the Commission indicates that it meets or exceeds criteria for the assessment of institutional quality periodically applied through a peer review process. An accredited college or university is one which has available the necessary resources to achieve its stated purposes through appropriate educational programs, is substantially doing so, and gives reasonable evidence that it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Institutional integrity is also addressed through accreditation.

Accreditation by the Commission is not partial but applies to the institution as a whole. As such, it is not a guarantee of every course or program offered, or the competence of individual graduates. Rather, it provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the institution.

Inquiries regarding the accreditation status by the Commission should be directed to the administrative staff of the institution. Individuals also may contact:

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Use of other language will be viewed as a breach of institutional integrity. Failure to comply with this requirement may result in withdrawal of the application process.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACCREDITED INSTITUTIONS**

### **Reports and Notification to the Commission**

Annual Report. All affiliated institutions are asked to complete and submit an online data form in the spring of each year.

Notification of Substantive Change. Accreditation status encompasses only those aspects of the institution in existence at the time of the application visit. New programs, degree levels, sites, and other substantive changes, as defined in Commission policy, must be reported in advance and approved by the Commission before the institution implements the change. The policy on Substantive Change can be found on the Commission website [www.neche.org](http://www.neche.org).

Next comprehensive evaluation. Newly accredited institutions undergo a comprehensive evaluation after five years. Following that evaluation, the Commission will establish the date of the next comprehensive evaluation and any further monitoring it may deem appropriate.