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Accelerated Pathways to Initial Accreditation: Guidelines for Institutions Not Already Accredited

The standard pathway for unaffiliated institutions seeking initial accreditation from the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) typically involves the following three steps following an initial visit by a NECHE staff member: Eligibility (meets the Commission's *Requirements of Affiliation*); Candidacy (likely to meet the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation* within a period of up to five years), and Initial Accreditation (meets the Commission's *Standards for Accreditation*).[1] Each step, further detailed in the Commission's *Becoming Accredited: A Guide to Eligibility, Candidacy, and Initial Accreditation,* requires preparation of a report by the institution that is then followed by a site visit conducted by a team of NECHE peer evaluators and, except for Eligibility, an appearance before the Commission.

The New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) recognizes that some well-established institutions seeking Initial Accreditation may believe that they already meet the Commission's *Requirements of Affiliation* and its *Standards for Accreditation.* Such institutions may be approved by the Commission to pursue initial accreditation using one of the following accelerated pathway options:

Option 1: If after the initial staff visit the President of the Commission determines that the institution may already be in compliance with both the *Requirements of Affiliation* and Standards *for Accreditation,* the institution may request that the Eligibility and Candidacy visits be combined.

Option 2: At the time Candidacy is granted, a biennial report with focused evaluation is normally scheduled at the midpoint to initial accreditation to ensure that the institution is making reasonable progress toward accreditation. After the granting of Candidacy, should the institution believe it has already progressed to meeting all the *Standards for Accreditation*, it may request from the President of the Commission that the biennial evaluation be replaced with a review for Initial Accreditation. The Commission also has the option to waive the biennial report and instead schedule a review for Initial Accreditation.

Option 3: While Candidacy is the normal route to accreditation, after being found eligible by the Commission to apply for accreditation, long-established institutions believing themselves in compliance with all the Commission's criteria for accreditation may petition the Commission for permission to forgo Candidacy and move directly to Initial Accreditation. (See *Policy on the Meaning and Criteria of Candidacy.*)

September 2026

[1]Accredited institutions looking to change to or add NECHE accreditation should instead consult the Commission's *Guide for Currently Accredited Institutions*.