
Section D:

The Accreditation Process



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Overview of the General Accreditation Process

The accreditation process, also referred to as a comprehensive review, is a structured, step-by-step process. The accreditation process consists of a preliminary application, a comprehensive self-evaluation report, a materials and information request, a site visit, a draft report of findings, the school's response to the findings, and a decision by the MEAC Board of Directors.

The accreditation process is designed to create and support opportunities for the directors, students, faculty and staff of institutions/programs to evaluate their midwifery education program against national standards as well as any goals set by the institution/program itself. In addition, the accreditation process also provides opportunities for institutions/programs to receive training from MEAC and feedback from peers in the field of midwifery education.

The accreditation process is the primary method for institutions/programs to demonstrate how they meet the MEAC Standards for Accreditation. It should be noted and emphasized that while the accreditation process does provide several opportunities for due process and minor corrections, schools must have done the work to be in compliance with all applicable standards prior to beginning the accreditation process. For initial applicants, the readiness assessment completed during Stage 3 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training will help determine when to start the accreditation process. For current Member Schools, the period from when accreditation is granted to when the reaccreditation process begins is the time to make changes and improvements. **Waiting until the accreditation process is underway before assessing readiness and implementing changes may make it more difficult to demonstrate compliance, complete steps, and stay within the published timeframes. This could jeopardize the school's accreditation.**

Generally, the initial accreditation process takes a little over two years. Those seeking reaccreditation can expect the process to take at least 78 weeks. Institutions and programs seeking initial accreditation and reaccreditation are always welcome to submit materials ahead of schedule and to respond promptly to notifications and requests for additional information during the process. However, early submission and/or excellent materials does not automatically shorten the time that MEAC staff, ARC, and the board need to complete their steps in the review process. Nor does early submission guarantee early review, as workload is planned around the expected deadlines described in Section D across multiple programs/institutions. The timelines presented here in Section D represent approximations based on MEAC's experience of working with many institutions and programs. However, each accreditation process is unique and may take more or less time than estimated. Detailed policies and procedures regarding all accreditation activities, including deadline extensions, can be found in Section G of the MEAC Accreditation Handbook.



Parts of the Accreditation Process Completed or Received by Applicants

MEAC staff will arrange a meeting with the applicant school as part of each of the following steps to ensure there is an opportunity for questions and clarity as well as to ensure progress is being made. Schools are encouraged to also contact their assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator with questions at any time. The accreditation process is a participatory process, so active engagement with each piece is expected.

Required Accreditation Training

Prior to applying for initial or renewal of accreditation, all schools must complete accreditation training with MEAC. Prospective applicants will complete a full four stage training process as they are ready. Current schools applying for renewal of accreditation will be required to attend a training webinar in the fall prior to the calendar year in which their reaccreditation is expected to start.

Optional Preapplication Evaluation

As an opportunity for schools to ensure preparedness for the accreditation process, and readiness for the detailed review that will ensue, MEAC staff are willing to review any preliminary pieces that the school wishes to receive informal evaluation and feedback on. To request this option, schools should contact their assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator. See also voluntary TRAC Reporting.

Application for Accreditation

The Part I Application for Initial Accreditation and the Part I Application for Reaccreditation initiate each accreditation process. This is the step that starts the timeline for the remaining steps in the process.

The application is intended to document the institution's/program's legal authority to provide an education program, explain the ownership and governance structure, provide other necessary background information, and briefly describe the midwifery education program. This allows MEAC to better determine the complexity of the institution/program when planning for the following steps as well as to assess eligibility to continue the process.

For initial applicants, the Application for Initial Accreditation will be provided following Stage 4 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training.

For current member schools, the Application for Renewal of Accreditation will be provided approximately 90 weeks prior to the expiration of your current grant of accreditation.

The application is completed by the program/institution and submitted to MEAC via email.

Self-Evaluation Report

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) is a comprehensive, detailed report prepared by the institution/program. The SER will systematically address each of MEAC's Standards and all applicable benchmarks thereunder for each program included within the grant of accreditation. The SER is completed via the Weave online portal where the institution/program will enter written narrative and supporting documentary evidence to demonstrate compliance with each applicable benchmark.

Materials and Information Request

Following submission of the SER, your school's assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator will review the SER for completeness. If there are benchmarks/demonstrations that have not been answered, if your response references evidence that didn't get submitted, or if there are responses that didn't fully answer the benchmark, you will be notified with the Materials and Information Request. The Materials and Information Request has three sections:

1. Materials Requested (where items are missing or incomplete¹)
2. Information Requested (where is it unclear how the school meets the benchmark)
3. Opportunity to Respond to Noted Deficiencies and Possible Noncompliance (where there aren't any requests for additional information as it is clear what the school is doing). *This section is specifically provided as an opportunity for due process.*

The school will be given the opportunity to respond to each section of the Materials and Information Request.

Guidance for Site Visit

Your school will be assigned a team of peer-reviewers that will evaluate the school's written submissions and compile a list of remaining questions. These questions will be provided to the school with any additional information for preparing for the site visit.

Site Visit

Your school's assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator and the assigned team of peer-reviewers will conduct a site visit to answer questions and verify the information provided in the school's submissions. The site visit will be conducted by MEAC and will use a combination of virtual and in-person tours, audits, interviews, and surveys. *The site visit is another opportunity for due process.*

Draft ARC Report

The Draft ARC Report is prepared by MEAC following the site visit. This report contains a summary of findings and is the first time the program/institution will be able to see the preliminary benchmark scoring for all applicable benchmarks. A copy of the Draft ARC Report will be provided to the program/institution and the program/institution will be able to respond to the preliminary benchmark scoring and findings. *The school's response to the Draft ARC Report is the final opportunity for due process prior to the Board decision.*

The assigned peer-reviewers will update the ARC Report based on the program/institution's response and will send their final recommendations for scoring and overall outcome to the Board of Directors for a decision.

Board Report

Prior to making an accreditation decision, the MEAC Board of Directors will review all the materials from each step of the accreditation process, including the Final ARC Report. Two Board Members will take the lead in this review and will also present their recommendations to the full Board for a decision. Following discussion and a decision, the Board's overall accreditation decision will be put into a Board Report and sent to the program/institution. The Board Report will also include official benchmark scores, any requirements for further reporting or adverse action, and details for appeal if warranted.

¹ Note that if there is an inordinate amount of materials that are missing or incomplete, such as entire benchmarks, the SER will be outright rejected, sent back to the school to complete, considered not submitted on time, and late fees will be assessed.



If the decision includes adverse action (denial, suspension, or withdrawal of accreditation), the program/institution will have further options for due process. *See MEAC's Accreditation Handbook, Section G, Appeal and Due Process policy for more information.*

Initial Accreditation Timeline of Steps

	Due Date	Step	Details
	-	Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training	All prospective schools must complete Stages 1-4 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training.
PART I 6 weeks	Spring Track: February 28 Fall Track: August 31	Preliminary Application and Part I Fee Received	<p>Prospective schools have one year from completion of Stage 4 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training to submit the application. (Schools not meeting this one-year deadline must repeat Stages 3 and 4 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training).</p> <p>MEAC will accept Part I applications in February and August of each year only. Depending on administrative capacity, up to two applicants will be selected to move forward. Selection will be based on those demonstrating a clear readiness for accreditation.</p> <p>Applicants who are not selected to move forward in a given cycle will be refunded the application fee, provided explanation on what can be improved, and invited to apply again during the next cycle.</p>
	Spring Track: April 15 Fall Track: October 15	Applicant Notification of Part I Acceptance	<p>This step confirms that the process timeline has started.</p> <p>If accepted, the applicant will be granted access to the Weave online portal and given instructions for completion of the SER.</p>
PART II- 50 weeks	Spring Track: September 15 Fall Track: March 15	Completion and Submission of the SER and SER Fee	<p>The applicant will have 22 weeks from the date of notification of Part I acceptance or access to the Weave portal (whichever is later) to complete and submit the SER and SER Fee.</p> <p>MEAC will contact the applicant two weeks prior to the due date to remind the school of the deadline, as well as to request the current enrollment count so that MEAC can send an invoice for the SER fee.</p>
	Spring Track: December 1 Fall Track: June 1	MEAC Staff Review of SER	<p>MEAC staff will review the SER for completeness, compile a list of missing, incomplete, or unclear pieces, and notify the applicant via a Materials and Information Request.</p> <p>Note that if there is an inordinate amount of materials that are missing or incomplete, such as entire benchmarks or lack of evidence submitted, the SER will be outright rejected and the school will need to reapply.</p>
	Spring Track: January 15 Fall Track:	Applicant Response to the Materials and Information Request	<p>The applicant will have six weeks to provide the requested materials and information.</p> <p>The applicant will also need to submit a prospective teach out plan, as required by federal regulation, prior to the</p>

	July 15	and Submission of Teach Out Plan	preaccreditation decision. The prospective teach out plan is a student protection in the event the school is not successful in receiving initial accreditation.
	Spring Track: April 1 Fall Track: October 1	ARC Review of School submission MEAC staff review of Teach Out Plan	The ARC will review the full submission and conduct an abbreviated audit to ensure compliance with the required benchmarks for preaccreditation. Following review, the ARC will give preliminary scores for each benchmark, will make a recommendation for preaccreditation, and will compile a list of questions for the site visit if preaccreditation is recommended. MEAC staff will review the Teach Out Plan for adequacy. An inadequate plan may delay readiness for the Board's Preaccreditation Decision.
Preaccreditation Decision 4-8 weeks	Spring Track: April Meeting Fall Track: October Meeting	Board of Director's Preaccreditation Decision	The MEAC Board of Directors will consider the ARC's recommendation and the applicant's submission before deciding whether to grant or deny preaccreditation status. Written notification of either decision will be provided, as well as public notice of each. Grant of preaccreditation allows an applicant to continue with the initial accreditation process. Denial of preaccreditation may be appealed but means an applicant cannot continue with the initial accreditation process and must wait one year from final decision before applying again if the decision is upheld.
	Spring Track: April 30 Fall Track: October 31	Notification of Preaccreditation Decision	The Preaccredited School will be provided with a Notification of Preliminary Scoring and Guidance to Prepare for the Site Visit.
PART III 12 weeks	Spring Track: May 15 Fall Track: November 15	Scheduling Site Visit	MEAC Staff will coordinate with the ARC and Preaccredited School to schedule a site visit, to occur no more than 12 weeks out from notification of preaccreditation. MEAC will issue an invoice for the site visit.
	Spring Track: May 31 Fall Track: November 30	Part III Fee Due	Preaccredited School submits payment for the site visit.
	Spring Track: No later than July 31 Fall Track:	Site Visit	MEAC Staff and the ARC will conduct a site visit with the Preaccredited School.

	No later than January 31		
PART IV 34 weeks	Spring Track: September 30 Fall Track: March 31	Drafting ARC Report	MEAC Staff will prepare the Draft ARC Report with updated preliminary benchmark scoring following the site visit.
	Spring Track: October 15 Fall Track: April 15	Approval and Notification of Draft ARC Report	The ARC reviews/revises the Draft ARC Report and MEAC Staff will send the report to the Preaccredited School.
	Spring Track: February 1 11 weeks Fall Track: August 1	School Improvement Period and Response to Draft ARC Report	The period of time from notification of the Draft ARC Report until this deadline for responding to the report is time Preaccredited Schools can use to make corrections, changes, or improve systems to better meet MEAC's Standards. This period is unique to the initial accreditation process. At one month prior to the deadline for the school's response to the Draft ARC Report, the school will meet with their assigned MEAC Accreditation Coordinator and the Director of Accreditation to check on the school's progress, answer any remaining questions, discuss outstanding concerns, and review next steps and options.
	Spring Track: April 1 Fall Track: October 1	ARC Review of Response to Draft ARC Report/ Independent Board Review of School materials	The ARC will review the applicant response, finalize benchmark scores, and adopt the Final ARC Report. The Final ARC Report will also include a recommendation to either grant or deny initial accreditation. Two members of the Board of Directors will be assigned to conduct a thorough review of the Preaccredited School's materials, review the ARC's process, and finalize a recommendation to the Board to grant, grant with compliance, or deny initial accreditation. The IBR will also recommend the length of accreditation and any follow-up reporting.
PART V 4 weeks	Spring Track: April Meeting Fall Track: October Meeting	Board Accreditation Decision	The MEAC Board will review the school's materials, the Final ARC Report with recommendation, the IBR Report with recommendation, and will make a decision regarding accreditation.
	Spring Track: April 30 Fall Track: October 31	Notification of Accreditation Decision	MEAC will provide the school with a full written explanation of the decision, including detailed benchmark scores and required reporting.

Reaccreditation Timeline of Steps

	Cumulative Timeline	Maximum Time Allowed For Each Step	Step	Details
	-		Accreditation Training	An accreditation training will be held by MEAC in the fall each year. Any school that will be starting a reaccreditation process in the following calendar year will be required to attend the training.
	0 weeks	-	Notification of Time to Apply for Reaccreditation	At 90 weeks before the end of each Member School's expiration of their grant of accreditation, MEAC Staff will send the Part I application and notify each school to begin the reaccreditation process.
PART I 6 weeks	4 weeks	4 weeks	Preliminary Application and Part I Fee Received	Current schools have four weeks to complete and submit the Part I application and fee.
	6 weeks	2 weeks	Applicant Notification of Part I Acceptance or Denial	MEAC Staff will review the application within two weeks of receipt and will notify the applicant of the outcome and next steps. If denied, notification will also include the reason for denial. If accepted, the applicant will be granted access to the Weave online portal and given instructions for completion of the SER.
PART II- 38-46 weeks	20-28 weeks	14-22 weeks	Completion and Submission of the SER and SER Fee	<u>Programmatic applicants</u> will have 14 weeks from the date of notification of Part I acceptance and access to the Weave portal to complete and submit the SER and SER Fee. <u>Institutional applicants</u> will have a minimum of 16 weeks from the date of notification of Part I acceptance and access to the Weave portal to complete and submit the SER and SER Fee. The two extra weeks over that granted to programmatic applicants is due to the more complex nature of an institutional review. Additional time will be given to complete the SER for the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutions that grant degrees (two additional weeks) • Institutions that offer distance education (two additional weeks) • Institutions participating in Title IV (two additional weeks)

				MEAC will contact the applicant two weeks prior to the due date to remind the school, as well as to request the current enrollment count so that MEAC can send an invoice for the SER fee
	28-36 weeks	8 weeks	MEAC Staff Review of SER	MEAC staff will review the SER for completeness, compile a list of missing, incomplete, or unclear pieces, and notify the applicant via a Materials and Information Request.
	34-42 weeks	6 weeks	Applicant Response to the Materials and Information Request and Submission of Site Visit Fee	The applicant will have six weeks to provide the requested materials and information. The Member School will also need to submit the site visit fee. MEAC will send an invoice for this.
	44-52 weeks	10 weeks	ARC Review of School Submission	The ARC will review the full school submission, will give preliminary scores for each benchmark, and will compile a list of questions for the site visit. MEAC staff will coordinate with the ARC and Member School to schedule a site visit, collect contact lists, etc, to occur no more than four weeks following ARC review of the school submission.
PART III 4 weeks	48-56 weeks	4 weeks	Site Visit	MEAC Staff and the ARC will conduct a site visit with the Member School.
PART IV 18 weeks	54-62 weeks	6 weeks	Drafting ARC Report	MEAC Staff will prepare the Draft ARC Report with updated preliminary benchmark scoring following the site visit.
	56-64 weeks	2 weeks	Approval and Notification of Draft ARC Report	The ARC will review and revise the Draft ARC Report and MEAC Staff will send the report to the Member School.
	60-68 weeks	4 weeks	Response to Draft ARC Report	The Member School will have four weeks from receipt of the Draft ARC Report to respond.
	66-74 weeks	6 weeks	ARC Review of Response to Draft ARC Report/ Independent Board Review of School Materials	The ARC will review the applicant response, finalize preliminary benchmark scores, and adopt the Final ARC Report. The Final ARC Report will also include a recommendation to either grant or deny reaccreditation. Two members of the Board of Directors will be assigned to conduct a thorough review of the Member School's materials, review the ARC's process, finalize a recommendation to the Board to

				grant, grant with compliance, grant with probation, or deny reaccreditation, and recommend any follow-up reporting.
PART V 4-8 weeks	68-80 weeks	2-6 weeks	Board Accreditation Decision	The MEAC Board will review the school's materials, the Final ARC Report with recommendation, the IBR Report with recommendation, and will make a decision regarding accreditation.
	70-82 weeks	2 weeks	Notification of Accreditation Decision	
	78-90 weeks	8 weeks	Planning Cushion	To ensure comprehensive reviews can be completed with enough time for full consideration prior to the expiration of the school's grant of accreditation.