



## Section D1: The Initial Accreditation Process

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# Overview of the Preaccreditation/Initial Accreditation Process

## Accreditation

Accreditation is a structured, step-by-step process consisting of a Preliminary Application, a comprehensive Self-Evaluation Report, an Additional Information Request, a Materials & Information Request, a Site Visit, a Draft ARC Report, the school's response to the findings, a Final Board Report, and an accreditation decision. The accreditation process has 5 steps or parts:

- Accreditation: Part I - Preparing for Accreditation
- Accreditation: Part II - The Self-Evaluation Report
- Accreditation: Part III - The Site Visit
- Accreditation: Part IV - The Draft ARC Report & IBR Review
- Accreditation: Part V - Final Board Report

The accreditation process is designed to create opportunities for and to support the directors, students, faculty, and staff of institutions/programs in evaluating their midwifery education programs against national standards and goals set by the institution/program. This process is the primary method for institutions/programs to demonstrate compliance with MEAC's Standards of Accreditation.

While the accreditation process provides several opportunities for due process and minor corrections, schools must have done the work to comply with all applicable standards before beginning the accreditation process. For initial applicants, the Readiness Self-Assessment is completed during Stage 3 of the Prospective Applicant Accreditation. When training is complete, the accreditation process begins. Preaccreditation can typically be accomplished in less than a year; however, the initial accreditation process generally takes about two years to complete.

## Accreditation Training for Schools Applying for Preaccreditation/Initial Accreditation

Institutions/programs interested in MEAC accreditation must complete a four-stage training series with MEAC. The Training Stages include the following:

### Accreditation: Part I

#### Stage 1: Self-study

- Read through the Accreditation Handbook Sections A-F and prepare questions for the Director of Accreditation

#### Stage 2: Pre-accreditation training with the Director of Accreditation

- Best Practices in Accreditation
- Introduction to the Weave accreditation portal
- Responding to Materials and Information Requests

#### Stage 3: Readiness Self-Assessment

- Complete a readiness self-assessment and submit it to the Director of Accreditation

## Accreditation: Part II

### Stage 4: Prepare the school's Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

- Upload SER and evidence to Weave

## Preaccreditation Process

### Self-Evaluation Report (Accreditation: Part II)

The Self-Evaluation Report is due within 22 weeks of Part I Notification. 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 for each program included within the grant of accreditation. The SER is completed via the Weave online portal, where the institution/program will enter a written narrative and supporting documentary evidence to demonstrate compliance with each applicable benchmark. A SER template is available. The institution/program should be able to describe its self-evaluation process, how the staff, faculty, students, Program Advisory Committee, and other external interests contribute to the school's self-evaluation, and how it is a meaningful, significant, and ongoing process.

Two peer reviewers (Accreditation Review Committee [ARC]) will be assigned to evaluate the institution's/program's SER. The Director of Accreditation will prepare a report that outlines any additional materials or information needed to complete the evaluation of the preaccreditation Benchmarks.

Institutions/programs must submit a **complete** SER for evaluation before they will be considered for preaccreditation.

To earn preaccreditation, an institution/program must show current compliance in the following Benchmarks:

- I.A1: Mission
- I.B1: Program Goals & Assessment
- II.A3: Curriculum - Academic
- II.A5: Curriculum - Clinical
- II.B4: Learning Activities
- II.C1: Assessment of Learning
- III.A1: Academic Faculty Qualifications
- III.A2: Non-Core Academic Faculty Qualifications
- III.A3: Majority of Faculty are Midwives
- IV.B1: Library & Learning Resources
- IV.C1: Clinical Site Sufficiency
- IV.C2: Clinical Site Selection

Institutions/programs have 22 weeks to submit a complete SER.

### Additional Information Request (AIR)

Following submission of the SER, the Director of Accreditation (DA) will review the preaccreditation report and contact the institution/program to request additional information in areas that were weak. The DA has six weeks to review the SER and send the AIR. The institution/program has eight weeks to respond. If all required preaccreditation Benchmarks are scored as Met-2 or above, the DA will bring the institution/program to the Board of Directors for a preaccreditation vote. If the Board votes in favor of preaccreditation, within 30 days the DA will notify the school and the Department of Education.

From the date the SER is submitted, the preaccreditation process may take up to 14 weeks.

## Initial Accreditation Process

### Self-Evaluation Report (Accreditation: Part II Continued)

Upon preaccreditation approval, the institution/program has one year to gain initial accreditation. (See the timeline on pages 5-6).

### Materials and Information Request (MIR)

Following preaccreditation approval the DA will review the remaining Benchmarks in the SER for completeness. If some benchmarks/demonstrations 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 incomplete)
2. Information Requested (where it is unclear how the school meets the benchmark)
3. Opportunity to Respond to Noted Deficiencies and Possible Noncompliance (where there are no requests for additional information, as it is clear what the school is doing). This section is specifically provided as an opportunity for the school to comply.

The institution/program will be able to respond to each section of the Materials and Information Request before the site visit.

### Site Visit (Accreditation: Part III)

#### Preparation for Site Visit

The Director of Accreditation will meet with the institution/program before the site visit to discuss logistics, additional requirements, and other pertinent information. MEAC will provide a Site Visit Manual and a tentative schedule for preparation. The Site Visit will be scheduled to take place within 90 days following the vote of preaccreditation MIR.

### The Site Visit

The Director of Accreditation and the assigned team of peer reviewers (ARC) will conduct a site visit to verify the information provided in the institution's/program's submissions. The site visit will be conducted virtually if the institution/program offers most of its coursework via distance education. If the school/program is brick and mortar, the site visit will be in person. For distance education programs, the DA will schedule a time to conduct in-person clinical site visits.

### Draft ARC Report (Accreditation: Part IV)

MEAC prepares the Draft ARC Report following the site visit. This report summarizes findings and is the first time the institution/program will see preliminary benchmark scoring for all applicable benchmarks. A copy of the Draft ARC Report will be provided to the institution/program within six weeks following the site visit, and the institution/program will have eight weeks to respond to the preliminary benchmark scoring and findings. The institution's/program's response to the Draft ARC Report is the final opportunity for due process before the Board's decision.

The Director of Accreditation will summarize the institution's/program's response and approve the ARC recommendations. The final scoring recommendations will be submitted to the Board of Directors for an accreditation decision.

### Independent Board Review

Two Board Members (IBR), with the assistance of the Director of Accreditation, will review the institution's/program's SER and the ARC scores. The IBR will provide their own assessment of the SER and score each Benchmark independently. IBR, with the assistance of the DA, will present their accreditation recommendation to the entire Board for an accreditation decision.

### Final Board Report (Accreditation: Part V)

Before making an initial accreditation decision, the MEAC Board of Directors will review all the materials from each step of the accreditation process, including the Final ARC Report and the Director of Accreditation's summary report. Following discussion and a decision, the Board's overall initial accreditation decision will be put into a Final Board Report and sent to the program/institution. The Final Board Report will include official benchmark scores, requirements for further reporting, and adverse action with details for appeal if warranted. If the decision consists of adverse action (denial, suspension, or withdrawal of accreditation), the institution/program will have further options for due process. For more information, see MEAC's Accreditation Handbook, Section G, Appeal and Due Process policy.

## Preaccreditation and Initial Accreditation Timeline

Total initial accreditation time (including preaccreditation period) =  $\geq 27$  months (2.25 years)

	Step	Details	Timeline (How long you should expect the process to take)
<b>PART I</b>	Accreditation Training	Prospective schools must complete Accreditation Training.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
	Preliminary Application	Prospective schools have one year from completing the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training to submit the application.	
	Part I Fee	Due before Part I is officially accepted.	
	Notification of Part I Acceptance	Upon notification, the preaccreditation timeline begins.	
<b>PART II</b>	Complete Self-Evaluation Report (SER)	Due within 22 weeks of Part I notification.	<b>22 Weeks</b>
	Teach-Out Plan	Complete the Teach-Out Plan before the preaccreditation decision; MEAC staff will review the plan.	
	SER Fee	Due before the end of the 22 weeks.	
	MEAC 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 an Additional Information Request (AIR). The DA has 6 weeks to review.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
	Applicant Response to AIR	The applicant has 8 weeks to provide the requested AIR.	<b>8 Weeks</b>
<b>Preaccreditation Decision</b>	Accreditation Review Committee (ARC) Review of SER	ARC reviews full SER for completeness and conducts an audit of the 12 preaccreditation Benchmarks to ensure compliance, assigning scores for each benchmark.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
	Preaccreditation Decision	MEAC Board of Directors reviews the ARC and the Director of Accreditation's recommendation	<b>Next Board Meeting</b>
	Notification of Preaccreditation	Preaccredited schools will receive a Notification of Preliminary Scoring (Draft ARC Report) and Guidance to Prepare for the Site Visit.	<b>4 Week (30 days)</b>
	Final ARC Review before Site Visit	ARC has 6 weeks to review the remaining Benchmarks. The DA will review and send an MIR to the school.  The school has 8 weeks to respond.	<b>14 Weeks</b>

	Step	Details	Timeline
<b>PART III</b>	Site Visit Scheduled	MEAC will coordinate with ARC and the school to schedule a site visit no more than 90 days (3 months) from notification of preaccreditation.	<b>12 Weeks</b>
	Part III Fee	Due before site visit (2 weeks).	
	Site Visit	MEAC and ARC will conduct a site visit.	<b>1 week (3 days)</b>
<b>PART IV</b>	Draft ARC Report	DA prepares the Draft ARC Report with updated benchmark scoring following the site visit. The DA sends the Draft ARC Report to the school.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
	School Improvement (Compliance)	The time between notification of the draft ARC report and the deadline for school response.	<b>8 Weeks</b>
	ARC Review of School Response	ARC will review the applicant's response, finalize the benchmark scores, and approve the final Draft ARC report.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
	Independent Board Review (IBR)	Two Board members are assigned to conduct a thorough review of the preaccredited school's materials, ARC's final report, and finalize the accreditation recommendation.	<b>6 Weeks</b>
<b>PART V</b>	Accreditation Decision	MEAC Board reviews the school's materials, final ARC report and recommendations, and the IBR report, and makes decisions regarding accreditation.	<b>4 Weeks</b>
	Notification of Accreditation Decision	MEAC provides the school with a full written explanation of the decision.	
<b>MAXIMUM TOTAL TIME</b>			<b>109 Weeks</b>