



meac

midwifery education
accreditation council

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.

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

A team of two peer reviewers (Site Visit Team or 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 (responding to **all benchmarks not just the preaccreditation benchmarks**) 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

Additional Information Request (AIR)

Following submission of the SER, the Director of Accreditation (DA) will review the Self-Evaluation 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 six weeks to respond. Two reviewers (ARC) will be assigned to review the SER once the institution/program has responded to the AIR. The ARC reviewers will do a complete review of the SER scoring all Benchmarks. If **all of the 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, the DA will notify the school within 7 days and the Department of Education within 30 days.

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 ARC scoring and material requests of the remaining Benchmarks. 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 90-120 days following the vote of preaccreditation. During this time, the institution/program will work to respond to all items in the MIR so that they can demonstrate compliance at the time of the site visit.

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. If the school/program is brick and mortar, the site visit will be in person. The site visit will include clinical site visits. If the institution/program offers most of its coursework via distance education, the site visit will be conducted virtually. For distance education programs, the DA will schedule a time to conduct in-person visits to the administrative offices and to clinical sites. (see Section F: Site Visit Preparation).

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 six 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 Review Auditor Review

One Independent Review Auditor (IRA) will be assigned to review the Draft ARC Report. The IRA has eight weeks to complete their review. The Independent Review Auditor serves as an objective, oversight-focused authority responsible for ensuring the integrity, consistency, and compliance of the accreditation review process. This role operates independently from assigned reviewers and evaluates the quality, accuracy, and adherence of reviewer findings, benchmark scoring, and recommendations against established accreditation standards and policies. The Independent Review Auditor verifies that evidence supports all determinations, identifies inconsistencies or bias, and ensures that due process and procedural requirements have been followed.

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 institution/program. 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 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/Initial Accreditation Timeline

(80 Weeks from Notification of Part I Acceptance)

	Step	Details	Timeline
PART I	Accreditation Training	Prospective schools must complete Accreditation Training.	Up to 52 Weeks
	Preliminary Application	Prospective schools have one year from completing the Prospective Applicant Accreditation Training and to submit the application.	
	Readiness Self-Assessment	MEAC will inform the school if it is deemed ready to begin the preaccreditation process. If ready, the school will submit the Part I fee.	
	Part I Fee	Due before Part I is officially accepted.	
	Notification of Part I Acceptance	MEAC Staff will review the application within two weeks of receipt and 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.	2 Weeks
Upon notification, the preaccreditation timeline begins.			
	Site Visit Scheduled	MEAC will coordinate with ARC and the school to schedule a site visit.	
PART II	Complete Self-Evaluation Report (SER)	Due within 22 weeks of Part I notification.	22 Weeks
	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).	6 Weeks
	Applicant Response to AIR	The applicant has six weeks to provide the requested AIR.	
	Teach-Out Plan	Complete Teach-Out Plan before preaccreditation decision. MEAC staff will review the Plan.	6 Weeks
Preaccreditation Decision	Preaccreditation Decision	MEAC Board of Directors reviews ARC and Director of Accreditation recommendation.	Next Board Meeting

	Notification of Preaccreditation	MEAC notifies the school of the preaccreditation decision within 7 days of Board vote.	7 Days
PART III	Materials & Information Request	DA has two weeks to review SER and send a Materials and Information Request (MIR) if necessary.	2 Weeks
		School has eight weeks to respond to MIR.	8 Weeks
	Part III Fee	Due before site visit (2 weeks).	2 Weeks
	Site Visit	MEAC and ARC will conduct a site visit.	1 Week
PART IV	Draft ARC Report	MEAC Staff prepares the Draft ARC Report with updated benchmark scoring following the site visit.	6 Weeks
	Approval of Draft ARC Report	ARC reviews/revises the Draft ARC Report, and MEAC Staff sends the report to the Preaccredited School.	6 Weeks
	School Improvement/Compliance	The school has six weeks to respond to the Draft ARC Report.	6 Weeks
	MEAC Staff/ARC Review of School Response	MEAC Staff/ARC will review the applicant's response, finalize the benchmark score, and approve the final ARC report.	6 Weeks
	Independent Review Auditor (IRA) Review	An IRA is assigned to conduct a thorough review of the preaccredited school's materials, ARC's review and final report, and finalize the accreditation recommendation.	8 Weeks
PART V	Accreditation Decision	MEAC Board reviews the school's materials, final ARC report, and recommendations, and the IRA report and makes decisions regarding accreditation. DA presents a summary of findings at the Board meeting for Board vote.	Next Board Meeting
	Notification of Accreditation Decision	MEAC provides the school with a full written explanation of the decision.	7 Days
MAXIMUM TOTAL TIME			129 Weeks*

*Includes one year of prep time