



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION  
ACCREDITATION GROUP

# **ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK**

In accordance with 34 CFR Part 602  
The Secretary's Recognition of Accrediting Agencies

*For Voluntary use by Accrediting Agencies in 2019 and 2020*

**Revised June 2019**

**For each section, Department staff will issue a recommended finding to be evaluated by NACIQI:**

- Fully compliant – the agency has the appropriate policy, procedure or standard in place and in each example provided or reviewed during the staff analyst’s site visit adhered to those policies, procedures and/or standards. The agency is also compliant if the agency has the appropriate policy, procedure or standard in place, but the agency has not implemented or had the opportunity to demonstrate compliance with the policy, practice or standard during the review period. This may apply to an entire criterion or to one or more elements within a given recognition criterion and follow-up verification may be needed in such circumstances.
- Not compliant – the agency does not have the appropriate policy, procedure or standard in place or has the policy in place or has consistently failed to adhere to it as demonstrated by the examples provided or reviewed during the staff analyst’s site visit.

**NOTES**

- *Where applicable, agencies that oversee both institutions and programs must provide documentation and examples related to their review of both institutions and programs.*
- *During any site visit, Department staff will consult with agency staff in person at the agency’s offices and/or virtually and must be provided with access to agency files and documents, including electronic files, necessary to evaluate the agency’s compliance with any applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. The Department must be able to obtain and archive copies of those documents in either an electronic or paper-based format to serve as evidence for the analyst’s recommended finding and the Department may be required to disclose some or all of these documents to the public under FOIA.*
- *Selection of institutions or programs, and records during the Department staff’s site visit will be made by the Department staff. This will include the random selection of files but will be limited to the review period for which the site visit is being performed. However, the agency can provide any additional files it believes offer a more relevant example of the agency’s or its member institutions’ work.*
  - *An agency is not out of compliance with a standard if it has not had the opportunity to apply the standard during the review period.*
- *Although documents required to verify compliance with the standards in one section may be useful in verifying compliance with another, they are listed under only one section in order to ensure that a single deficiency is not described by the Department as a deficiency for more than one standard. For further information, including up-to-date contact information for Department of Education staff, please visit [ed.gov/accreditation](http://ed.gov/accreditation).*

### Section 602.10 - Link to Federal programs

The agency must demonstrate that:

- (a) If the agency accredits institutions of higher education, its accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of those institutions to establish eligibility to participate in HEA programs; or
- (b) If the agency accredits institutions of higher education or higher education programs, or both, its accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of those entities to establish eligibility to participate in non-HEA Federal programs.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For an applicant for initial recognition: the agency must provide a letter written to it by at least one institution or program attesting that should the accreditor become recognized, the institution or program would rely on the agency’s accreditation to participate in Title IV programs, if applicable, or another federal program.</li> <li>• For agencies applying for renewal of recognition based on a Title IV link: the Department will confirm with FSA that at least one institution accredited by the agency uses the agency as its Title IV gatekeeper.</li> <li>• For non-Title IV programs, the agency must provide the citation for and a copy of the specific portion of the authorizing law, regulation or other Federal requirement stating accreditation by an agency recognized by the Secretary is necessary for an institution or program to participate in the Federal program, and documentation that at least one institution or program relies on the agency's accreditation to participate in such a program.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>No additional documentation required</i></p>

### Section 602.11 - Geographic scope of accrediting activities

The agency must demonstrate that its accrediting activities cover:

- (a) A State, if the agency is part of a State government;
- (b) A region of the United States that includes at least three States that are reasonably close to one another; or
- (c) The United States.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A public statement of the agency’s geographic area of accreditation activities.</li> <li>• A list of accredited institutions and/or programs (including branch campuses and additional locations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agency’s by-laws, constitution, charter, or other governing document that authorizes the agency to accredit institutions and/or programs within the United States or a specific region and the geographic borders of that region.</li> </ul>

### Section 602.12 - Accrediting experience

- (a) An agency seeking initial recognition must demonstrate that it has -- (1) Granted accreditation or preaccreditation --(i) To one or more institutions if it is requesting recognition as an institutional accrediting agency and to one or more programs if it is requesting recognition as a programmatic accrediting agency; (ii) That covers the range of the specific degrees, certificates, institutions, and programs for which it seeks recognition; and (iii) In the geographic area for which it seeks recognition; and (2) Conducted accrediting activities, including deciding whether to grant or deny accreditation or preaccreditation, for at least two years prior to seeking recognition;
- (b) A recognized agency seeking an expansion of its scope of recognition must demonstrate that it has granted accreditation or preaccreditation covering the range of the specific degrees, certificates, institutions and programs for which it seeks the expansion of scope.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For agencies seeking initial recognition, a complete list of all institutions/programs that the agency has accredited or preaccredited, including their geographic location, credential levels included in the preaccreditation or accreditation, the dates on which the institution(s) applied for accreditation/preaccreditation, and the dates on which institutions received accreditation or preaccreditation, if accreditation or preaccreditation has been awarded.</li> <li>For agencies seeking an expansion of scope, a list of institutions/programs that the agency has accredited or preaccredited covering the range of the change in scope request.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For agencies seeking initial recognition: Letter(s) or applications from institutions/programs seeking preaccreditation or accreditation; correspondence from the agency confirming that the institution/program has been approved to initiate the accreditation review process; and a letter from the agency indicating that at least one institution/program has been granted accreditation/preaccreditation.</li> <li>For agencies seeking an expansion of scope: Any additional correspondence from institutions/programs seeking accreditation in one or more of the areas included in the expanded scope; or letter(s) to at least one institution granting preaccreditation/accreditation that includes one or more of the areas included in the expanded scope.</li> </ul>

### Section 602.13 - Acceptance of the agency by others

The agency must demonstrate that its standards, policies, procedures, and decisions to grant or deny accreditation are widely accepted in the United States by --

- (a) Educators and educational institutions; and
- (b) Licensing bodies, practitioners, and employers in the professional or vocational fields for which the educational institutions or programs within the agency's jurisdiction prepare their students.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three letters of acceptance from educators and/or institutions acknowledging acceptance of accreditation by the agency as evidence of educational quality, or acceptance of the agency's policies, procedures, and standards as a sufficient measure of educational quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Representation in agency activities by educators and educational institutions that align with the agency's current and/or requested scope.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If applicable, letters of acceptance from licensing bodies (at least one letter), practitioners (at least three letters) and/or employers (at least three letters) for the scope of recognition of the agency.</li> </ul>	
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**Section 602.14 - Purpose and organization.**

- (a) The Secretary recognizes only the following four categories of agencies: (1) an agency that has a voluntary membership of institutions of higher education, that has as a principal purpose the accrediting of institutions of higher education for which accreditation is a requirement element in enabling these institutions to participate in HEA programs, and satisfies the separate and independent requirements in paragraph (b) of this section; (2) an agency that has a voluntary membership, and has as its principal purpose the accrediting of higher education programs, or higher education programs and institutions of higher education, and that accreditation is a requirement element in enabling those entities to participate in a non-HEA Federal program; (3) an agency that for purposes of determining eligibility for Title IV, HEA programs that either has a voluntary membership of individuals participating in a profession or has as its principal purpose the accrediting of programs within institutions that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, and either satisfies the separate and independent requirements in paragraph (b) of this section or obtains a waiver of those requirements under paragraphs (d) and (e) of this section; (4) a state agency that has as a principal purpose the accrediting of institutions of higher education, higher education programs, or both and the Secretary listed as a nationally recognized accrediting agency on or before October 1, 1991 and has recognized continuously since that date.
- (b) For purposes of this section, the term separate and independent means that—(1) The members of the agency's decision-making body—who decide the accreditation or preaccreditation status of institutions or programs, establish the agency's accreditation policies, or both—are not elected or selected by the board or chief executive officer of any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization; (2) At least one member of the agency's decision-making body is a representative of the public, and at least one-seventh of that body consists of representatives of the public; (3) The agency has established and implemented guidelines for each member of the decision-making body to avoid conflicts of interest in making decisions; (4) The agency's dues are paid separately from any dues paid to any related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization; and (5) The agency develops and determines its own budget, with no review by or consultation with any other entity or organization.
- (c) The Secretary considers that any joint use of personnel, services, equipment, or facilities by an agency and a related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization does not violate the "separate and independent" requirements in paragraph (b) of this section if --(1) The agency pays the fair market value for its proportionate share of the joint use; and (2) The joint use does not compromise the independence and confidentiality of the accreditation process.
- (d) For purposes of paragraph (a)(3) of this section, the Secretary may waive the "separate and independent" requirements in paragraph (b) of this section if the agency demonstrates that --(1) The Secretary listed the agency as a nationally recognized agency on or before October 1, 1991 and has recognized it continuously since that date; (2) The related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization plays no role in making or ratifying either the accrediting or policy decisions of the agency; (3) The agency has sufficient budgetary and administrative autonomy to carry out its accrediting functions independently; and(4) The agency provides to the related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization only information it makes available to the public;
- (e) An agency seeking a waiver of the "separate and independent" requirements under paragraph (d) of this section must apply for the waiver each time the agency seeks recognition or continued recognition.

<p><b>Documents Required in Petition</b></p>	<p><b>On-Site Review Requirements</b></p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By-laws, articles of incorporation and policies, etc. defining the agency’s membership and principal purposes.</li> <li>• The agency’s standards, policies, and procedures manual(s).</li> </ul> <p>For agencies demonstrating compliance with the separate and independent criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of members of the agency’s decision-making bodies (including its appeals body) including each member’s current position or role on that body and that identifies which members represent the public and the terms of service for each individual.</li> <li>• Page numbers (or URL link) for sections of the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) that define: (1) the members of the agency's decision-making body and their qualifications; (2) the procedures followed for nominating and electing members of the decision-making body; and (3) definition of public members and policies that determine what percentage of the decision-making body must be representatives of the public.</li> <li>• A list of all entities the agency considers to be a related, associated, or affiliated trade association or membership organization</li> <li>• A statement of independence from any related or affiliated trade association and a description of the agency's policies for establishing and collecting dues separate from dues or membership fees paid to any related trade or professional organization.</li> <li>• A description of the process by which the agency establishes and approves its budget and makes financial decisions.</li> <li>• If applicable, a waiver request for “separate and independent” requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resumes or CVs of all members of the decision-making bodies.</li> <li>• Minutes of decision-making body meetings, including the names of decision-makers present, meeting agendas, recusals where appropriate from members that have a conflict of interest on one or more issues (if applicable) and written requests from member institutions that raise concerns about conflicts of interest among members of decision-making bodies (if the agency received any such letters) and responses to those letters that describe the resolution to the concern.</li> </ul> <p>For agencies demonstrating compliance with the separate and independent criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copies of the agency’s approved budgets during the recognition period and meeting minutes documenting when each budget was approved and who was involved in that approval.</li> <li>• Minutes of meetings when decision-making body members are nominated and elected.</li> <li>• Minutes of meetings when the agency’s budget is approved.</li> <li>• Correspondence to members of decision-making bodies indicating that the individual has been nominated/elected to serve on that body.</li> </ul>
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**Section 602.15 - Administrative and fiscal responsibilities**

The agency must have the administrative and fiscal capability to carry out its accreditation activities in light of its requested scope of recognition. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that-- (a) The agency has -- (1) Adequate administrative staff and financial resources to carry out its accrediting responsibilities; and (2) Competent and knowledgeable individuals, qualified by education and experience in their own right and trained by the agency on their responsibilities, as appropriate for their roles, regarding the agency's standards, policies, and procedures, to conduct its on-site evaluations, apply or establish its policies, and make its accrediting and preaccrediting decisions, including, if applicable to the agency's scope, their responsibilities regarding distance education and correspondence education; (3) Academic and administrative personnel on its evaluation, policy and decision-making bodies, if the agency accredits institutions; (4) Educators and practitioners on its evaluation, policy, and decision-making bodies, if the agency accredits programs or single-

purpose institutions that prepare students for a specific profession; (5) Representatives of the public on all decision-making bodies; -(6) Clear and effective controls against conflicts of interest, or the appearance of conflicts of interest, by the agency's --

- (i) Board members;
- (ii) Commissioners;
- (iii) Evaluation team members;
- (iv) Consultants;
- (v) Administrative staff; and
- (vi) Other agency representatives.

(b) The agency maintains complete and accurate records of -- (1) Its last full accreditation or preaccreditation review of each institution or program including on-site evaluation team reports, the institution's or program's responses to on-site reports, periodic review reports, any reports of special reviews conducted by the agency between regular reviews, and a copy of the institution's or program's most recent self-study; and

(2) All decisions made throughout an institution's or program's affiliation with the agency regarding the accreditation and preaccreditation of any institution or program and substantive changes, including all correspondence that is significantly related to those decisions.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational chart with names and position titles.</li> <li>• Resumes, job titles, and job descriptions of senior staff members, including at the executive director, chief financial officer, and academic or accreditation directors (or equivalents).</li> <li>• The agency's most recent two years' fiscal reports audited by a third-party auditor without unresolvable negative findings.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agency's two most recent annual budgets.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• List of agency decisions related to administrative and fiscal capacity that have been made or postponed, flagging postponements due to insufficient staffing to adhere to the published timeline, during the prior two years.</li> <li>• A roster of all individuals serving on decision-making bodies, the role that each filled, and the policies and procedures related to their selection.</li> <li>• A roster of all individuals who in the past year participated on site visit teams with an indication of the specific focus of each member on that team.</li> <li>• Page numbers for the section of the agency's standards and policies manual(s) that describes the process for selecting and assigning site visitors during the prior year or, if not applicable, during the most recent recognition period or the period of time the agency was performing accrediting reviews prior to recognition by the Secretary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff resumes or CVs.</li> <li>• Site visitor resumes, CVs or applications.</li> <li>• Review of letters received from institutions (including those received by the Department and forwarded to the agency) expressing concern regarding the timeliness of agency actions and decisions and its ability to adhere to its published timelines.</li> <li>• Attendance records from one or more of the training programs provided over the prior two years.</li> <li>• Training materials used over the prior two years to educate staff and agency representatives about the agency's standards, policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Resumes, CVs or applications for all individuals who serve on decision-making bodies, to include attestations that public representatives meet the Department's definition.</li> <li>• Signed conflict-of-interest statements for current board members, commissioners, members of site visit teams that participated in visits during the prior two years, consultants, staff and others as appropriate.</li> <li>• Evidence of instances (such as meeting minutes or correspondence with an institution regarding concerns about a potential site visitor, etc.) in which individuals recused themselves from activities or</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of all conflict of interest policies and procedures and the agency’s policies and procedures for avoiding or remedying conflicts of interest among members of its decision-making bodies.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sample conflict-of-interest form(s) of each type used.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The agency’s record retention policy, which includes where and how documents are stored, secured, and retained.</li> </ul>	<p>decisions based on a conflict-of-interest concern, if such instances exist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal complaints relating to conflicts of interest, if they exist, and an explanation of the measures the agency took to resolve the conflict or confirm that none exists.</li> <li>• ED will spot check files to ensure that adequate records are being maintained for each accredited or preaccredited institution, as described in this section.</li> </ul>
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**Section 602.16 - Accreditation and preaccreditation standards**

(a) The agency must demonstrate that it has standards –for accreditation, and preaccreditation, if offered, that are sufficiently rigorous to ensure that the agency is a reliable authority regarding the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions or programs it accredits. The agency meets this requirement if --

(1) The agency’s accreditation standards effectively address the quality of the institution or program in the following areas:

(i) Success with respect to student achievement in relation to the institution’s mission, which may include different standards for different institutions or programs, as established by the institution, including, as appropriate, consideration of course completion, State licensing examination, and job placement rates.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citation for pages within the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) that describe the standards set by the agency for measuring student achievement. These pages must describe the way the agency evaluates adherence to those requirements and the way it enforces compliance.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An agency is not required to establish a single set of student achievement standards for all members. Even within an institution, the standards by which student achievement is measured may differ from one program or department to another.</li> <li>○ The most important consideration should be the alignment between student achievement measures or standards and the mission of the institution or program. These standards may include quantitative or qualitative measures, or both. They may rely on surveys or other methods for evaluating qualitative outcomes, including but not limited to student satisfaction surveys, alumni satisfaction surveys, or employer satisfaction surveys.</li> <li>○ In the event that an agency elects to establish bright-line student achievement standards, it must explain how its methodology is a valid measure of institutional quality (including that it takes into account variables unrelated to program quality, such as student demographics,</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-studies for any institution or program that underwent an accreditation or preaccreditation review by the agency during the recognition period. Staff will review three self-studies (or fewer if there were fewer reviews during the recognition period), unless the agency has performed accreditation or preaccreditation reviews for more than 50 institutions or programs during the recognition period, in which case Staff will select up to an additional three self-studies for review. If no institutions or programs underwent accreditation or preaccreditation review during the recognition period, the agency’s compliance evaluation will be limited to its standards, policies and procedures regarding self-studies.</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit reports and commission decision letters from the same institutions or programs whose self-studies were selected for review.</li> <li>• Meeting minutes, staff notes or other documents that verify a review of annual (or other periodic) reports, and any agency actions taken as a result of those reviews, and the subsequent response to those reviews in the event of a deficiency. This review shall include a review of the annual reports for 3 institutions/programs for an agency that accredits 50 institutions or programs or fewer, and an</li> </ul>



<p>institutional selectivity, and local or national economic trends, including unemployment).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In the event that job placement rates are included in the assessment of student achievement, each item of data needed for the determination of a job placement and calculation of a job placement rate must include a reliable data source that is available to the agency and all institutions required to utilize the measure. The methodology may not rely on self-reported data from students or their employers unless the results are not made publicly available or used in marketing or advertising materials.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A narrative that describes examples of the various student achievement metrics (which have been adopted by member institutions), if the accreditor permits its institutions or programs to establish institutional standards to show success with respect to student achievement. This narrative must include an explanation of how the site visit teams evaluates student achievement metrics and ensures their consistency with the institution's or program's mission.</li> <li>● Page numbers for the section of the agency's standards and policies manual(s) that describes how the agency monitors compliance with the applicable student achievement standards, steps taken when an institution or program is not meeting these standards, and an explanation for instances in which an institution or program may need to revise its standards or obtain a waiver from the agency's decision-making body for one or more standards as a result of circumstances beyond its control, such as local or national unemployment rates, changes in a state's licensure requirements, or the loss of a major employer in the local area. In addition, provide documentation about how such waivers should be explained to current and prospective students</li> <li>● A narrative (and related exhibits not to exceed three) that explain how the agency reviews student achievement outcomes within the accreditation review process.                 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An excerpt related to §602.16(a)(1)(i) of a self-study from one institution selected by the Department.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● A copy of the site visit report and commission decision letter from the same institution.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>additional 3 annual reports for each additional 50 members that the agency accredits or preaccredits, as well as any Board or other decisions related to the results of those annual reports, and documents indicating any action taken against the institution or other resolutions that occurred.</p>
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- (ii) Curricula.
- (iii) Faculty.
- (iv) Facilities, equipment, and supplies.
- (v) Fiscal and administrative capacity as appropriate to the specified scale of operations.
- (vi) Student support services.
- (vii) Recruiting and admissions practices, academic calendars, catalogs, publications, grading, and advertising.
- (viii) Measures of program length and the objectives of the degrees or credentials offered.
- (ix) Record of student complaints received by, or available to, the agency
- (x) Record of compliance with the institution's program responsibilities under Title IV of the Act, based on the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers for the section(s) in the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) that guide the evaluation of this section.</li> <li>• A narrative explaining the agency's expectations for an institution’s or program’s review of its performance against these standards as part of the institution's or program’s self-study process.</li> <li>• A narrative that explains how site visit teams review the institution’s or program’s performance against each type of standard.</li> <li>• An excerpt of a self-study from one institution selected by the Department related to the agency’s review of the institution’s or program’s performance against these standards.</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit report and commission decision letter from the same institution.</li> <li>• NOTE: Nothing in statute or regulation prescribes a particular type of administrative or governance model, including a shared governance model, or requires all programs or institutions accredited by a given agency to rely upon the same model of governance, or all programs offered by an institution to be administered under the same governance model.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-studies as described under 602.16(a)(i).</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit reports and commission decision letters from the same institutions or programs whose self-studies were selected for review.</li> <li>• Records that demonstrate the agency reviews the most recent student loan default rate data provided by the Secretary, the results of financial or compliance audits, program reviews, and any other information that the Secretary may provide to the agency, as appropriate.</li> <li>• A review of other records, based on complaints received by the Department, program review findings, or Department data indicating an institution is high-risk.</li> </ul>

(2) The agency's preaccreditation standards, if offered, are appropriately related to the agency's accreditation standards and do not permit the institution or program to hold preaccreditation status for more than five years.

Documents Required in Petition	On-site Document Review
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of up-to-date preaccreditation standards.</li> <li>• A self-study from one institution or program seeking or in preaccreditation status during the period of recognition, if applicable.</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit report and commission decision letter from the same institution or program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation in agency activities by educators who align with the agency's current and/or requested scope</li> </ul>
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(b) If the agency only accredits programs and does not serve as an institutional accrediting agency for any of those programs, its accreditation standards must address the areas in paragraph (a)(1) of this section in terms of the type and level of the program rather than in terms of the institution. (c) If the agency has or seeks to include within its scope of recognition the evaluation of the quality of institutions or programs offering distance education or correspondence education, the agency's standards must effectively address the quality of an institution's distance education or correspondence education in the areas identified in paragraph (a)(1) of this section. The agency is not required to have separate standards, procedures, or policies for the evaluation of distance education or correspondence education

Documents Required in Petition	On-site Document Review
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Narrative description of the agency's review of distance education and/or correspondence education, if applicable.</li> <li>• Any standards, procedures, or policies related to the review of distance education and/or correspondence education, if applicable.</li> <li>• An excerpt related to §602.16(a)(1) of a self-study from one institution or program reviewed for distance education and/or correspondence education, if applicable.</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit report and commission decision letter from the same institution or program, if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A self-study from two institutions or programs, if applicable.</li> <li>• A copy of the site visit report and commission decision letter from the same institutions or programs, if applicable.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.17 - Application of standards in reaching an accrediting decision.**

The agency must have effective mechanisms for evaluating an institution’s or program’s compliance with the agency’s standards before reaching a decision to accredit or preaccredit the institution or program. The agency meets this requirement if the agency demonstrates that it—

- (a) Evaluates whether an institution or program-- (1) Maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate in light of the degrees or certificates awarded; (2) Is successful in achieving its stated objectives; and (3) Maintains degree and certificate requirements that at least conform to commonly accepted standards.
- (b) Requires the institution or program to prepare, following guidance provided by the agency, an in-depth self-study that includes the assessment of educational quality and the institution's or program's continuing efforts to improve educational quality.
- (c) Conducts at least one on-site review of the institution or program during which it obtains sufficient information to determine if the institution or program complies with the agency's standards.
- (d) Allows the institution or program the opportunity to respond in writing to the report of the on-site review .

- (e) Conducts its own analysis of the self-study and supporting documentation furnished by the institution or program, the report of the on-site review, the institution's or program's response to the report, and any other appropriate information from other sources to determine whether the institution or program complies with the agency's standards.
- (f) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that assesses-- (1) The institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards, including areas needing improvement; and (2) The institution or program's performance with respect to student achievement.
- (g) Requires institutions that offer distance education or correspondence education to have processes in place through which the institution establishes that the student who registers in a distance education or correspondence education course or program is the same student who participates in and completes the course or program and receives the academic credit. The agency meets this requirement if it -- (1) Requires institutions to verify the identity of a student who participates in class or coursework by using, at the option of the institution, methods such as --(i) A secure login and pass code; (ii) Proctored examinations; and (iii) New or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying student identity; and (2) Makes clear in writing that institutions must use processes that protect student privacy and notify students of any projected additional student charges associated with verification of student identity at the time of registration or enrollment.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers for the section(s) in the agency's accreditation standards and/or policies and procedures that guide the evaluation of this section.</li> <li>• Requirements for the preparation of self-studies, with a focus on the criteria listed in 602.16(a) for institutions and/or programs. A copy of the self-study review, site visit report, institution/program responses, commission decision letter, appeals and appeal results (where applicable), from three accreditation or preaccreditation reviews (unless fewer than three were performed during the recognition review period), selected in advance by the Department based on the list of upcoming reviews and decisions provided to the Department at the beginning of the recognition review process.</li> <li>• The response, if any, provided by the institution or program to those site visit reports.</li> <li>• Agendas from all decision-making body meetings for the prior two years.</li> <li>• If applicable, policies and procedures related to how the agency reviews student identity verification for distance education and/or correspondence education, and agency requirements on student privacy protection and any additional costs associated with distance education and/or correspondence education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-study reviews, site visit report reports, responses, commission decision letters and related materials associated with the self-studies reviewed above.</li> <li>• Evidence of training on self-studies provided to institutions and/or programs</li> <li>• Minutes from decision-making body meetings for the prior year for comprehensive accreditation reviews.</li> </ul>

### Section 602.18 - Ensuring consistency in decision-making

The agency must consistently apply and enforce standards that respect the stated mission of the institution, including religious mission, and that ensure that the education or training offered by an institution or program, including any offered through distance education or correspondence education, is of sufficient quality to achieve its stated objective for the duration of any accreditation or preaccreditation period granted by the agency. The agency meets this requirement if the agency --

- (a) Has written specification of the requirements for accreditation and preaccreditation that include clear standards for an institution or program to be accredited.
- (b) Has effective controls against the inconsistent application of the agency's standards.
- (c) Bases decisions regarding accreditation and preaccreditation on the agency's published standards.
- (d) Has a reasonable basis for determining that the information the agency relies on for making accrediting decisions is accurate.
- (e) Provides the institution or program with a detailed written report that clearly identifies any deficiencies in the institution's or program's compliance with the agency's standards.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accreditation standards, policies, procedures.</li> <li>• Response to any complaints provided by the Department regarding inequitable application of standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision letters, meeting minutes, and any additional guidance documents or templates (if applicable) used to ensure consistency in decision-making, including guidance on distance and/or correspondence education, if applicable.</li> <li>• Minutes of decision-making body meetings, including appeals body meetings and subsequent decisions if the appeals body is not the final decision-making body for appeals.</li> <li>• Review of any complaints received from institutions or programs regarding inconsistent treatment of institutions or programs.</li> </ul>

### Section 602.19 - Monitoring and reevaluation of accredited institutions and programs

- (a) The agency must reevaluate, at regularly established intervals, the institutions or programs it has accredited or preaccredited.
- (b) The agency must demonstrate it has, and effectively applies, a set of monitoring and evaluation approaches that enables the agency to identify problems with an institution's or program's continued compliance with agency standards and that takes into account institutional or program strengths and stability. These approaches must include periodic reports, and collection and analysis of key data and indicators, identified by the agency, including, but not limited to, fiscal information and measures of student achievement, consistent with the provisions of §602.16(f). This provision does not require institutions or programs to provide annual reports on each specific accreditation criterion.
- (c) Each agency must monitor overall growth of the institutions or programs it accredits and, at least annually, collect headcount enrollment data from those institutions or programs.
- (d) Institutional accrediting agencies must monitor the growth of programs at institutions experiencing significant enrollment growth, as reasonably defined by the agency.
- (e) Any agency that has notified the Secretary of a change in its scope in accordance with §602.27(a)(5) must monitor the headcount enrollment of each institution it has accredited that offers distance education or correspondence education. If any such institution has experienced an increase in headcount

enrollment of 50 percent or more within one institutional fiscal year, the agency must report that information to the Secretary within 30 days of acquiring such data.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers or URL to the pages in the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) that document the agency’s procedures for monitoring during a grant of accreditation or preaccreditation.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A copy of the agency’s annual report.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Copies of notifications to the Secretary for any institution that has experienced an increase in headcount enrollment of 50 percent or more within one institutional fiscal year, if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual reports the agency uses to monitor continued compliance of its institutions and/or programs.</li> <li>• Annual reports the agency uses to monitor headcount at institutions and notations, if applicable, of institutions that have grown by 50 percent or more.</li> <li>• A list of the institutions or programs that have met the agency's definition of significant growth and documentation demonstrating the agency's actions and response to institutions experiencing significant enrollment growth.</li> <li>• Examples of agency responses to information in annual report</li> </ul>

**Section 602.20 - Enforcement of standards**

- (a) If the agency’s review of an institution or program under any standard indicates that the institution or program is not in compliance with that standard, the agency must --
- (1) Immediately initiate adverse action against the institution or program; or
  - (2) Require the institution or program to take appropriate action to bring itself into compliance with the agency’s standards within a time period that must not exceed –(i) Twelve months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is less than one year in length;(ii) Eighteen months, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least one year, but less than two years, in length; or(iii) Two years, if the program, or the longest program offered by the institution, is at least two years in length.
- (b) If the institution or program does not bring itself into compliance within the specified period, the agency must take immediate adverse action unless the agency, for good cause, extends the period for achieving compliance.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers of the agency’s policies and procedures on enforcement of standards.</li> <li>• A list of institutions or programs against which the agency has taken an adverse action during the recognition period, the action taken, the date the action was taken, and any resolution or subsequent final action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the agency’s adverse actions.</li> <li>• Review of files for institutions or programs that have been granted a good cause extension.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.21 - Review of standards**

- (a) The agency must maintain a systematic program of review that demonstrates that its standards are adequate to evaluate the quality of the education or training provided by the institutions and programs it accredits and relevant to the educational or training needs of students.
- (b) The agency determines the specific procedures it follows in evaluating its standards, but the agency must ensure that its program of review --(1) Is comprehensive; (2) Occurs at regular, yet reasonable, intervals or on an ongoing basis;(3) Examines each of the agency’s standards and the standards as a whole; and (4) Involves all of the agency’s relevant constituencies in the review and affords them a meaningful opportunity to provide input into the review.
- (c) If the agency determines, at any point during its systematic program of review, that it needs to make changes to its standards, the agency must initiate action within 12 months to make the changes and must complete that action within a reasonable period of time. Before finalizing any changes to its standards, the agency must --
  - (1) Provide notice to all of the agency’s relevant constituencies, and other parties who have made their interest known to the agency, of the changes the agency proposes to make;
  - (2) Give the constituencies and other interested parties adequate opportunity to comment on the proposed changes; and
  - (3) Take into account any comments on the proposed changes submitted timely by the relevant constituencies and by other interested parties.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers for policies and procedures related to the agency’s review of standards.</li> <li>• Redline versions of standards or other documents that identify the standards that have been updated since the last review.</li> <li>• Narrative description of most recent systematic program of review.</li> <li>• Sample of notices to relevant constituencies of review of standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of comments received by relevant constituencies regarding standards reviews or updates.</li> <li>• Minutes of meetings in which new standards were developed, reviewed and approved by the decision-making body, board or other related body.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.22 - Substantive change**

- (a) If the agency accredits institutions, it must maintain adequate substantive change policies that ensure that any substantive change to the educational mission, program, or programs of an institution after the agency has accredited or preaccredited the institution does not adversely affect the capacity of the institution to continue to meet the agency's standards. The agency meets this requirement if—
  - (1) The agency requires the institution to obtain the agency’s approval of the substantive change before the agency includes the change in the scope of accreditation or preaccreditation it previously granted to the institution.
  - (2) The agency's definition of substantive change includes at least the following types of change:
    - (i) Any change in the established mission or objectives of the institution.
    - (ii) Any change in the legal status, form of control, or ownership of the institution.
  - (iii) The addition of courses or programs that represent a significant departure from existing offerings of educational programs, or method of delivery, from those that were offered when the agency last evaluated the institution.
  - (iv) The addition of programs of study at a degree or credential level different from that which is included in the institution's current accreditation or preaccreditation.

(v) A change from clock hours to credit hours.

(vi) A substantial increase in the number of clock or credit hours awarded for successful completion of a program.

(vii) If the agency's accreditation of an institution enables the institution to seek eligibility to participate in title IV, HEA programs, the entering into a contract under which an institution or organization not certified to participate in the title IV, HEA programs offers more than 25 percent of one or more of the accredited institution's educational programs.

(viii) (A) If the agency's accreditation of an institution enables it to seek eligibility to participate in title IV, HEA programs, the establishment of an additional location at which the institution offers at least 50 percent of an educational program. The addition of such a location must be approved by the agency in accordance with paragraph (c) of this section unless the accrediting agency determines, and issues a written determination stating that the institution has--  
(1) Successfully completed at least one cycle of accreditation of maximum length offered by the agency and one renewal, or has been accredited for at least ten years;

(2) At least three additional locations that the agency has approved; and

(3) Met criteria established by the agency indicating sufficient capacity to add additional locations without individual prior approvals, including at a minimum satisfactory evidence of a system to ensure quality across a distributed enterprise that includes--

(i) Clearly identified academic control;

(ii) Regular evaluation of the locations;

(iii) Adequate faculty, facilities, resources, and academic and student support systems;

(iv) Financial stability; and

(v) Long-range planning for expansion.

(B) The agency's procedures for approval of an additional location, pursuant to paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section, must require timely reporting to the agency of every additional location established under this approval.

(C) Each agency determination or redetermination to preapprove an institution's addition of locations under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section may not exceed five years.

(D) The agency may not preapprove an institution's addition of locations under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section after the institution undergoes a change in ownership resulting in a change in control as defined in 34 CFR 600.31 until the institution demonstrates that it meets the conditions for the agency to preapprove additional locations described in this paragraph.

(E) The agency must have an effective mechanism for conducting, at reasonable intervals, visits to a representative sample of additional locations approved under paragraph (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section.

(ix) The acquisition of any other institution or any program or location of another institution.

(x) The addition of a permanent location at a site at which the institution is conducting a teach-out for students of another institution that has ceased operating before all students have completed their program of study.

(3) The agency's substantive change policy must define when the changes made or proposed by an institution are or would be sufficiently extensive to require the agency to conduct a new comprehensive evaluation of that institution.

(b) The agency may determine the procedures it uses to grant prior approval of the substantive change. However, these procedures must specify an effective date, which is not retroactive, on which the change is included in the program's or institution's accreditation. An agency may designate the date of a change in ownership as the effective date of its approval of that substantive change if the accreditation decision is made within 30 days of the change in ownership.

Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, these procedures may, but need not, require a visit by the agency.

(c) Except as provided in (a)(2)(viii)(A) of this section, if the agency's accreditation of an institution enables the institution to seek eligibility to participate in title IV, HEA programs, the agency's procedures for the approval of an additional location where at least 50 percent of an educational program is offered must



provide for a determination of the institution's fiscal and administrative capacity to operate the additional location. In addition, the agency's procedures must include--

(1) A visit, within six months, to each additional location the institution establishes, if the institution--

(i) Has a total of three or fewer additional locations;

(ii) Has not demonstrated, to the agency's satisfaction, that it has a proven record of effective educational oversight of additional locations; or

(iii) Has been placed on warning, probation, or show cause by the agency or is subject to some limitation by the agency on its accreditation or preaccreditation status;

(2) An effective mechanism for conducting, at reasonable intervals, visits to a representative sample of additional locations of institutions that operate more than three additional locations; and

(3) An effective mechanism, which may, at the agency's discretion, include visits to additional locations, for ensuring that accredited and preaccredited institutions that experience rapid growth in the number of additional locations maintain educational quality.

(d) The purpose of the visits described in paragraph (c) of this section is to verify that the additional location has the personnel, facilities, and resources it claimed to have in its application to the agency for approval of the additional location.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers of the agency's standards and policies manual(s) that describe the agency's policies and procedures associated with substantive change.</li> <li>• A copy of a substantive change review (application, correspondence, and decision letter) for each type of substantive change request made during the current recognition period.</li> <li>• A list of substantive change requests made by institutions and the status of those requests during the current recognition period.</li> <li>• A list of additional locations that have been opened during the current review period, if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of files for institutions that have requested substantive changes.</li> <li>• Review of files for institutions that have requested additional locations.</li> <li>• Documentation demonstrating changes to the agency's method for tracking substantive changes over time.</li> <li>• Records of site visits for additional locations, including decisions made by the agency.</li> <li>• Minutes from meetings of the agency's decision-making bodies in which substantive changes or additional locations were reviewed and approved/denied.</li> <li>• Records of site visits of additional locations among institutions that operate more than three additional locations, if applicable.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.23 - Operating procedures all agencies must have**

- (a) The agency must maintain and make available to the public written materials describing -- (1) Each type of accreditation and preaccreditation it grants; (2) The procedures that institutions or programs must follow in applying for accreditation or preaccreditation; (3) The standards and procedures it uses to determine whether to grant, reaffirm, reinstate, restrict, deny, revoke, terminate, or take any other action related to each type of accreditation and preaccreditation that the agency grants; (4) The institutions and programs that the agency currently accredits or preaccredits and, for each institution and program, the year the agency will next review or reconsider it for accreditation or preaccreditation; and (5) The names, academic and professional qualifications, and relevant employment and organizational affiliations of -- (i) The members of the agency's policy and decision-making bodies; and (ii) The agency's principal administrative staff.

- (b) In providing public notice that an institution or program subject to its jurisdiction is being considered for accreditation or preaccreditation, the agency must provide an opportunity for third-party comment concerning the institution’s or program’s qualifications for accreditation or preaccreditation. At the agency’s discretion, third-party comment may be received either in writing or at a public hearing, or both.
- (c) The accrediting agency must—(1) Review in a timely, fair, and equitable manner any complaint it receives against an accredited institution or program that is related to the agency’s standards or procedures. The agency may not complete its review and make a decision regarding a complaint unless, in accordance with published procedures, it ensures that the institution or program has sufficient opportunity to provide a response to the complaint; (2) Take follow-up action, as necessary, including enforcement action, if necessary, based on results of its review; and (3) Review in a timely, fair and equitable manner, and apply unbiased judgment to, any complaints against itself and take follow-up action, as appropriate, based on the results of its review.
- (d) If an institution or program elects to make a public disclosure of its accreditation or preaccreditation status, the agency must ensure that the institution or program discloses that status accurately, including the specific academic or instructional programs covered by that status and the name, address, and telephone number of the agency.
- (e) The accrediting agency must provide for the public correction of incorrect or misleading information an accredited or preaccredited institution or program releases about -- (1) The accreditation or preaccreditation status of the institution or program; (2) The contents of reports of on-site reviews ; and (3) The agency’s accrediting or preaccrediting actions with respect to the institution or program.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pages of the agency’s website (or other forum) where public materials are posted, including the list of accredited programs or institutions, and the information listed in this section.</li> <li>• Page numbers within the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) that describe the agency’s polices related to the requirement of this section, including those related to: complaints received against its institutions/programs, complaints against itself; public disclosure of accreditation status, and public correction of misleading information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If applicable, examples of third-party comments received and reviewed by the agency.</li> <li>• Documentation of the review, decision, and, if applicable, action taken on any complaints received during the agency's period of recognition for institutions/programs or against itself.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.24 - Additional procedures certain institutional accreditors must have**

- If the agency is an institutional accrediting agency and its accreditation or preaccreditation enables those institutions to obtain eligibility to participate in Title IV, HEA programs, the agency must demonstrate that it has established and uses all of the following procedures:
- (a) Branch campus. (1) The agency must require the institution to notify the agency if it plans to establish a branch campus and to submit a business plan for the branch campus that describes--(i) The educational program to be offered at the branch campus; (ii) The projected revenues and expenditures and cash flow at the branch campus; and (iii) The operation, management, and physical resources at the branch campus. (2) The agency may extend accreditation to the branch campus only after it evaluates the business plan and takes whatever other actions it deems necessary to determine that the branch campus has sufficient educational, financial, operational, management, and physical resources to meet the agency's standards; and (3) The agency must undertake a site visit to the branch campus as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the establishment of that campus.

(b) Change in ownership.

The agency must undertake a site visit to an institution that has undergone a change of ownership that resulted in a change of control as soon as practicable, but no later than six months after the change of ownership.

(c) Teach-out plans and agreements.

(1) The agency must require an institution it accredits or preaccredits to submit a teach-out plan to the agency for approval upon the occurrence of any of the following events: (i) The Secretary notifies the agency that the Secretary has initiated an emergency action against an institution, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(G) of the HEA, or an action to limit, suspend, or terminate an institution participating in any title IV, HEA program, in accordance with section 487(c)(1)(F) of the HEA, and that a teach-out plan is required. (ii) The agency acts to withdraw, terminate, or suspend the accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution. (iii) The institution notifies the agency that it intends to cease operations entirely or close a location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program. (iv) A State licensing or authorizing agency notifies the agency that an institution's license or legal authorization to provide an educational program has been or will be revoked; (2) The agency must evaluate the teach-out plan to ensure it provides for the equitable treatment of students under criteria established by the agency, specifies additional charges, if any, and provides for notification to the students of any additional charges; (3) If the agency approves a teach-out plan that includes a program that is accredited by another recognized accrediting agency, it must notify that accrediting agency of its approval, (4) The agency may require an institution it accredits or preaccredits to enter into a teach-out agreement as part of its teach-out plan; and (5) the agency must require an institution it accredits or preaccredits that enters into a teach-out agreement, either on its own or at the request of the agency, with another institution to submit that teach-out agreement to the agency for approval. The agency may approve the teach-out agreement only if the agreement is between institutions that are accredited or preaccredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency, is consistent with applicable standards and regulations, and provides for the equitable treatment of students by ensuring that--(i) The teach-out institution has the necessary experience, resources, and support services to \_ (A) Provide an educational program that is of acceptable quality and reasonably similar in content, structure, and scheduling to that provided by the institution that is ceasing operations either entirely or at one of its locations; and (B) Remain stable, carry out its mission, and meet all obligations to existing students; and (ii) The teach-out institution demonstrates that it can provide students access to the program and services without requiring them to move or travel substantial distances and that it will provide students with information about additional charges, if any.

(d) Closed Institution. If an institution the agency accredits or preaccredits closes without a teach-out plan or agreement, the agency must work with the Department and the appropriate State agency, to the extent feasible, to assist students in finding reasonable opportunities to complete their education without additional charges.

(e) Transfer of credit policies. The accrediting agency must confirm, as part of its review for initial accreditation or preaccreditation, or renewal of accreditation, that the institution has transfer of credit policies that -- (1) Are publicly disclosed in accordance with § 668.43(a)(11); and (2) Include a statement of the criteria established by the institution regarding the transfer of credit earned at another institution of higher education.

(f) Credit hour policies. The accrediting agency, as part of its review of an institution for initial accreditation or preaccreditation or renewal of accreditation, must conduct an effective review and evaluation of the reliability and accuracy of the institution's assignment of credit hours.

(1) The accrediting agency meets this requirement if-- (i) It reviews the institution's--(A) Policies and procedures for determining the credit hours, as defined in 34 CFR 600.2, that the institution awards for courses and programs; and (B) The application of the institution's policies and procedures to its programs and coursework; and (ii) Makes a reasonable determination of whether the institution's assignment of credit hours conforms to commonly accepted practice in higher education. (2) In reviewing and evaluating an institution's policies and procedures for determining credit hour assignments, an accrediting agency may use sampling or other methods in evaluation, sufficient to comply with paragraph (f)(1)(i)(B) of this section. (3) The accrediting agency must take such actions that it deems appropriate to address any deficiencies that it identifies at an institution as part of its reviews and evaluations under paragraph (f)(1)(i) and (ii) of this section, as it does in relation to other deficiencies it may identify, subject to the requirements of this part. (4) If, following the institutional review process

under this paragraph (f), the agency finds systemic noncompliance with the agency’s policies or significant noncompliance regarding one or more programs at the institution, the agency must promptly notify the Secretary.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The agency's policies and procedures related to the requirements of this section, including those related to branch campuses (as defined by the Department in 600.2).</li> <li>• One example of the application for, approval of and site visit to a branch campus during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> <li>• One example of the application, approval of and site visit for a change of ownership, if applicable.</li> <li>• One example of demonstrating review of a teach-out plan and of a written teach-out agreement during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> <li>• One example of notification to any other recognized agency of the approval of a teach-out plan or agreement, if applicable.</li> <li>• An example of the review of credit hour assignment by the agency and any subsequent action taken by the agency to remedy deficiencies, if present.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An example of notification to the Secretary of any systemic noncompliance with the agency’s credit hour policies, if applicable.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional examples of branch campus applications, approvals and site visits, if applicable.</li> <li>• Additional examples of change of ownership applications, approvals and site visits, if applicable.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional examples of teach-out plans, during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Additional examples of notification to recognized agencies, during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> <li>• Additional examples of teach-out agreements, during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> <li>• Two examples of the review of transfer of credit policies during the recognition period.</li> <li>• Two examples of the review of credit hour assignment during the recognition period.</li> <li>• Examples of any actions taken by the agency to address credit hour assignment deficiencies during the recognition period, if applicable.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of notification to the Secretary of any systemic noncompliance found during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

### Section 602.25 - Due process

The agency must demonstrate that the procedures it uses throughout the accrediting process satisfy due process. The agency meets this requirement if the agency does the following:

- (a) Provides adequate written specification of its requirements, including clear standards, for an institution or program to be accredited or preaccredited.
- (b) Uses procedures that afford an institution or program a reasonable period of time to comply with the agency’s requests for information and documents.
- (c) Provides written specification of any deficiencies identified at the institution or program examined.
- (d) Provides sufficient opportunity for a written response by an institution or program, regarding any deficiencies identified by the agency, to be considered by the agency within a timeframe determined by the agency, and before any adverse action is taken.
- (e) Notifies the institution or program in writing of any adverse accrediting action or an action to place the institution or program on probation or show cause.
 

The notice describes the basis for the action.
- (f) Provides an opportunity, upon written request of an institution or program to appeal any adverse action prior to the action becoming final- - (1) The appeal must take place at a hearing before an appeals panel that--(i) May not include current members of the agency's decision-making body that took the initial adverse action;(ii) Is subject to a conflict of interest policy;(iii) Does not serve only an advisory or procedural role, and has and uses the authority to make the following decisions: to affirm, amend, or reverse adverse actions of the original decision-making body; and (iv) Affirms, amends, reverses, or remands the

adverse action. A decision to affirm, amend, or reverse the adverse action is implemented by the appeals panel or by the original decision-making body, at the agency's option. In a decision to remand the adverse action to the original decision-making body for further consideration, the appeals panel must identify specific issues that the original decision-making body must address. In a decision that is implemented by or remanded to the original decision-making body, that body must act in a manner consistent with the appeals panel's decisions or instructions. (2) The agency must recognize the right of the institution or program to employ counsel to represent the institution or program during its appeal, including to make any presentation that the agency permits the institution or program to make on its own during the appeal.

(g) The agency notifies the institution or program in writing of the result of its appeal and the basis for that result.

(h)(1) The agency must provide for a process, in accordance with written procedures, through which an institution or program may, before the agency reaches a final adverse action decision, seek review of new financial information if all of the following conditions are met: (i) The financial information was unavailable to the institution or program until after the decision subject to appeal was made; (ii) The financial information is significant and bears materially on the financial deficiencies identified by the agency. The criteria of significance and materiality are determined by the agency; (iii) The only remaining deficiency cited by the agency in support of a final adverse action decision is the institution's or program's failure to meet an agency standard pertaining to finances. (2) An institution or program may seek the review of new financial information described in paragraph (h)(1) of this section only once and any determination by the agency made with respect to that review does not provide a basis for an appeal.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers of the agency’s standards, policies and procedures related to this section                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An example of the notice required by paragraph (c)</li> <li>• An example of a written response described in paragraph (d)                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An example of a notice described in paragraph (e)</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• An example of an appeal, to include the composition of the panel, the panel decision, written notification of decision, and any subsequent decisions made in response to the appeal panel decision, if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of any additional appeals, to include the appeal panel composition, and decisions during the recognition period, if applicable.</li> <li>• Examples of any reviews of new financial information prior to a final adverse action, if applicable, as evidenced by the minutes of decision-making bodies or appeal bodies.</li> <li>• A review of any complaints against the agency regarding due process violations, including any suits filed against the agency or any instances of arbitration to resolve such complaints, and the resolution to those complaints.</li> </ul>

### Section 602.26 - Notification of accrediting decisions

The agency must demonstrate that it has established and follows written procedures requiring it to provide written notice of its accrediting decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public. The agency meets this requirement if the agency, following its written procedures --

(a) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and the public no later than 30 days after it makes the decision: (1) A decision to award initial accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution or program. (2) A decision to renew an institution’s or program’s accreditation or preaccreditation.

(b) Provides written notice of the following types of decisions to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the appropriate accrediting agencies at the same time it notifies the institution or program of the decision, but no later than 30 days after it reaches the decision: (1) A final

decision to place an institution or program on probation or an equivalent status. (2) A final decision to deny, withdraw, suspend, revoke, or terminate the accreditation or preaccreditation of an institution or program. (3) A final decision to take any other adverse action, as defined by the agency, not listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section.

(c) Provides written notice to the public of the decisions listed in paragraphs (b)(1), (b)(2), and (b)(3) of this section within 24 hours of its notice to the institution or program;

(d) For any decision listed in paragraph (b)(2) of this section, makes available to the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, and the public, no later than 60 days after the decision, a brief statement summarizing the reasons for the agency's decision and the official comments, if any, that the affected institution or program may wish to make with regard to that decision, or evidence that the affected institution has been offered the opportunity to provide official comment.

(e) Notifies the Secretary, the appropriate State licensing or authorizing agency, the appropriate accrediting agencies, and, upon request, the public if an accredited or preaccredited institution or program -- (1) Decides to withdraw voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation, within 30 days of receiving notification from the institution or program that it is withdrawing voluntarily from accreditation or preaccreditation; or (2) Lets its accreditation or preaccreditation lapse, within 30 days of the date on which accreditation or preaccreditation lapses.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Page numbers to the agencies policies and procedures related to this section.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of written notices (letter, screenshot of website, etc.) of awarding initial or the renewal of accreditation to the required entities no later than 30 days after making the decision.</li> <li>Examples of written notice (letter, screenshot of website, etc.) of a final decision of probation or an adverse action to the required entities at the same time as the institution/program but no later than 30 days after making the decision, to include notice to the public within 24 hours                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examples of the agency's adverse action summary and institution/program comments (or evidence of response opportunity) to the required entities within 60 days after the decision.</li> </ul>                         Examples of written notice of the voluntary withdrawal of an institution/program to the required entities within 30 days of receipt of notification, if applicable.                     </li> <li>An example of written notice of accreditation lapse to the required entities within 30 days of the lapse, if applicable.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.27 - Other information an agency must provide the Department**

(a) The agency must submit to the Department --(1) A copy of any annual report it prepares;(2) A copy, updated annually, of its directory of accredited and preaccredited institutions and programs; (3) A summary of the agency’s major accrediting activities during the previous year (an annual data summary), if requested by the Secretary to carry out the Secretary’s responsibilities related to this part; (4) Any proposed change in the agency's policies, procedures, or accreditation or preaccreditation standards that might alter its --(i) Scope of recognition, except as provided in paragraph (a)(5) of this section; or

- (ii) Compliance with the criteria for recognition. (5) Notification that the agency has expanded its scope of recognition to include distance education or correspondence education as provided in section 496(a)(4)(B)(i)(I) of the HEA. Such an expansion of scope is effective on the date the Department receives the notification. (6) The name of any institution or program it accredits that the agency has reason to believe is failing to meet its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities or is engaged in fraud or abuse, along with the agency’s reasons for concern about the institution or program; and (7) If the Secretary requests, information that may bear upon an accredited or preaccredited institution’s compliance with its Title IV, HEA program responsibilities, including the eligibility of the institution or program to participate in Title IV, HEA programs.
- (b) If an agency has a policy regarding notification to an institution or program of contact with the Department in accordance with paragraph (a)(6) or (a)(7) of this section, it must provide for a case by case review of the circumstances surrounding the contact, and the need for the confidentiality of that contact. Upon a specific request by the Department, the agency must consider that contact confidential.

Documents Required in Petition	On-Site Review Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers of the agency’s standards and policies manual(s) related to this section.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A report under 602.27(a)(6), if any</li> <li>• An example of a response under 602.27(a)(7), if any</li> </ul> </li> <li>• An example of the review required in 602.27(b), if applicable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional examples of the review required in 602.27(b), if applicable.</li> </ul>

**Section 602.28 - Regard for decisions of States and other accrediting agencies**

- (a) If the agency is an institutional accrediting agency, it may not accredit or preaccredit institutions that lack legal authorization under applicable State law to provide a program of education beyond the secondary level.
- (b) Except as provided in paragraph (c) of this section, the agency may not grant initial or renewed accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution, or a program offered by an institution, if the agency knows, or has reasonable cause to know, that the institution is the subject of--(1) A pending or final action brought by a State agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution's legal authority to provide postsecondary education in the State;(2) A decision by a recognized agency to deny accreditation or preaccreditation;(3) A pending or final action brought by a recognized accrediting agency to suspend, revoke, withdraw, or terminate the institution’s accreditation or preaccreditation; or (4) Probation or an equivalent status imposed by a recognized agency.
- (c) The agency may grant accreditation or preaccreditation to an institution or program described in paragraph (b) of this section only if it provides to the Secretary, within 30 days of its action, a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards, why the action of the other body does not preclude the agency's grant of accreditation or preaccreditation.
- (d) If the agency learns that an institution it accredits or preaccredits, or an institution that offers a program it accredits or preaccredits, is the subject of an adverse action by another recognized accrediting agency or has been placed on probation or an equivalent status by another recognized agency, the agency must promptly review its accreditation or preaccreditation of the institution or program to determine if it should also take adverse action or place the institution or program on probation or show cause.

(e) The agency must, upon request, share with other appropriate recognized accrediting agencies and recognized State approval agencies information about the accreditation or preaccreditation status of an institution or program and any adverse actions it has taken against an accredited or preaccredited institution or program.

<b>Documents Required in Petition</b>	<b>On-Site Review Requirements</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Page numbers of the agency’s accreditation standards, policies or procedures related to the requirements of this section.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of files to ensure that the agency has record of State authorization as required by the Department and the State.</li> <li>• Example of an action an agency took in the event that an institution was not in compliance with State requirements.</li> <li>• Examples of any correspondence to the Secretary providing a thorough and reasonable explanation, consistent with its standards, for granting accreditation in the event of a situation described in 602.28(c).</li> <li>• Examples of a review conducted by the agency in the event that another recognized accrediting agency took adverse action or placed an institution or program on show cause or probation, or of instances in which, on request, the agency shared information with other agencies about an institution or program it has taken action against.                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples of agency inquiries during the accreditation or preaccreditation process as to actions taken with respect to the institution or program by States and other recognized accrediting agencies.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## Definitions

The following definitions apply to this guidebook and the accreditation regulations in 34 CFR 602:

*Accreditation* means the status of public recognition that an accrediting agency grants to an educational institution or program that meets the agency's standards and requirements.

*Accrediting agency* or *agency* means a legal entity, or that part of a legal entity, that conducts accrediting activities through voluntary, non-Federal peer review and makes decisions concerning the accreditation or preaccreditation status of institutions, programs, or both.

*Act* means the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended.

*Adverse accrediting action* or *adverse action* means the denial, withdrawal, suspension, revocation, or termination of accreditation or preaccreditation, or any comparable accrediting action an agency may take against an institution or program.

*Advisory Committee* means the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity.

*Branch campus* means a location of an institution that meets the definition of branch campus in 34 CFR 600.2.

*Compliance report* means a written report that the Department requires an agency to file to demonstrate that the agency has addressed deficiencies specified in a decision letter from the senior Department official or the Secretary.

*Correspondence education* means:

- (1) Education provided through one or more courses by an institution under which the institution provides instructional materials, by mail or electronic transmission, including examinations on the materials, to students who are separated from the instructor.
- (2) Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student.
- (3) Correspondence courses are typically self-paced.
- (4) Correspondence education is not distance education.

*Designated Federal Official* means the Federal officer designated under section 10(f) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act, 5 U.S.C. Appdx. 1.

*Direct assessment program* means an instructional program that, in lieu of credit hours or clock hours as a measure of student learning, utilizes direct assessment of student learning, or recognizes the direct assessment of student learning by others, and meets the conditions of 34 CFR 668.10. For title IV, HEA purposes, the institution must obtain approval for the direct assessment program from the Secretary under 34 CFR 668.10(g) or (h) as applicable. As part of that approval, the accrediting agency must—

- (1) Evaluate the program(s) and include them in the institution's grant of accreditation or preaccreditation; and
- (2) Review and approve the institution's claim of each direct assessment program's equivalence in terms of credit or clock hours.

*Distance education* means education that uses one or more of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (4) of this definition to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor, either synchronously or asynchronously. The technologies may include—

- (1) The internet;
- (2) One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices;

(3) Audio conferencing; or

(4) Video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassettes, DVDs, or CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of this definition.

*Final accrediting action* means a final determination by an accrediting agency regarding the accreditation or preaccreditation status of an institution or program. A final accrediting action is not appealable within the agency.

*Institution of higher education or institution* means an educational institution that qualifies, or may qualify, as an eligible institution under 34 CFR part 600.

*Institutional accrediting agency* means an agency that accredits institutions of higher education.

*Nationally recognized accrediting agency, nationally recognized agency, or recognized agency* means an accrediting agency that the Secretary recognizes under this part.

*Preaccreditation* means the status of public recognition that an accrediting agency grants to an institution or program for a limited period of time that signifies the agency has determined that the institution or program is progressing towards accreditation and is likely to attain accreditation before the expiration of that limited period of time.

*Program* means a postsecondary educational program offered by an institution of higher education that leads to an academic or professional degree, certificate, or other recognized educational credential.

*Programmatic accrediting agency* means an agency that accredits specific educational programs that prepare students for entry into a profession, occupation, or vocation.

*Recognition* means an unappealed determination by the senior Department official under §602.36, or a determination by the Secretary on appeal under §602.37, that an accrediting agency complies with the criteria for recognition listed in subpart B of this part and that the agency is effective in its application of those criteria. A grant of recognition to an agency as a reliable authority regarding the quality of education or training offered by institutions or programs it accredits remains in effect for the term granted except upon a determination made in accordance with subpart C of this part that the agency no longer complies with the subpart B criteria or that it has become ineffective in its application of those criteria.

*Representative of the public* means a person who is not—

- (1) An employee, member of the governing board, owner, or shareholder of, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited or preaccredited by the agency or has applied for accreditation or preaccreditation;
- (2) A member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the agency; or
- (3) A spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in paragraph (1) or (2) of this definition.

*Scope of recognition or scope* means the range of accrediting activities for which the Secretary recognizes an agency. The Secretary may place a limitation on the scope of an agency's recognition for Title IV, HEA purposes. The Secretary's designation of scope defines the recognition granted according to—

- (1) Geographic area of accrediting activities;
- (2) Types of degrees and certificates covered;
- (3) Types of institutions and programs covered;
- (4) Types of preaccreditation status covered, if any; and
- (5) Coverage of accrediting activities related to distance education or correspondence education.

*Secretary* means the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education or any official or employee of the Department acting for the Secretary under a delegation of authority.

*Senior Department official* means the senior official in the U.S. Department of Education who reports directly to the Secretary regarding accrediting agency recognition.

*State* means a State of the Union, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. The latter three are also known as the Freely Associated States.

*Teach-out agreement* means a written agreement between institutions that provides for the equitable treatment of students and a reasonable opportunity for students to complete their program of study if an institution, or an institutional location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program offered, ceases to operate before all enrolled students have completed their program of study.

*Teach-out plan* means a written plan developed by an institution that provides for the equitable treatment of students if an institution, or an institutional location that provides one hundred percent of at least one program, ceases to operate before all students have completed their program of study, and may include, if required by the institution's accrediting agency, a teach-out agreement between institutions.

**Appendix A: Required Responses (X) by Type of Agency for Applicable Sections of 34 CFR 602**

AGENCY ACCREDITIS- (*If agency accredits programs AND institutions for T4 purposes please follow pink column.)	INSTITUTIONS FOR T4 PURPOSES	INSITUTIONS AND PROGRAMS (NON-T4 PURPOSE)	PROGRAMS ONLY
§§602.10-602.13 - Basic Eligibility Req.	X	X	X
§602.14(a) - Purpose and Organization	X	X	X
§602.14(b)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.14(c)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.14(d) and (e)	X	N/A	N/A
§§602.15(a)(1) &(a)(2)- Admin/Fiscal	X	X	X
§602.15(a)(3)	X	X	N/A
§602.15(a)(4)	N/A	X	X
§§602.15(a)(5) and (a)(6)	X	X	X
§602.15(b)	X	X	X
§§602.16(a)(1)(i-vii) - Standards	X	X	X
§602.16(a)(1)(viii)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.16(a)(1)(ix)	X	X	X
§602.16(a)(1)(x)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.16(a)(2) – Preaccreditation, if appropriate	X	X	X
§602.16(b) – Information only	-	-	-
§602.16(c) - Distance Education, if appropriate	X	X	X
§602.16(d)(e)(f) – Information only	-	-	-
§§602.17(a-f) - Application of Standards	X	X	X
§§602.17(g)(1)&(g)(2)- Distance education, if appropriate	X	X	N/A
§602.18 - Ensuring Consistency	X	X	X
§§602.19(a-c) - Monitoring & Reevaluation	X	X	X
§602.19(d)	X	X	N/A
§602.19(e) - Notification adding Distance Education, if appropriate	X	X	N/A
§602.20 - Enforcement of Standards	X	X	X
§602.21 - Review of Standards	X	X	X
§602.22(a)(1) - Substantive Change	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§§602.22(a)(2)(i-vi)	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§602.22(a)(2)(vii)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.22(a)(2)(viii)(A)	X	N/A	N/A
§§602.22(a)(2)(viii)(B-E)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.22(a)(2)(ix)	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§602.22(a)(2)(x)	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§602.22(a)(3)	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§602.22(b)	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§602.22(c)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.22(d)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.23 - Operating Procedures	X	X	X
§602.24 - Additional Procedures	X	N/A	N/A
§602.25 - Due Process	X	X	X
§602.26 - Notification of Accrediting Decisions	X	X	X
§§602.27(a)(1-5) - Other Information	X	X	X
§§602.27(a)(6) and (a)(7) and (b)	X	N/A	N/A
§602.28(a) – Legal Authorization	X	X- Institutions only	N/A
§§602.28(b-e) - Regard for Decisions of Others	X	X	X