Steps Toward Accreditation

2024 Edition

Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools

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Introduction

This *Steps Toward Accreditation* manual is designed to guide institutions through Applicant Status, Candidate Status, Accredited Status, and Reaffirmation of Accredited Status with the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS).

This manual outlines the steps for each of the processes required in moving from one phase of recognition with TRACS to the next. Specific questions regarding the accreditation process should be directed to the TRACS office.

All Accreditation Standards, which serve as the basis of the process toward accreditation, are available in the *Accreditation Manual*. The *Accreditation Manual* may be downloaded from the TRACS website.

NOTE: All of the processes associated with the various progressive categories of recognition with TRACS, including the submission of documents and the fulfilment of other category specific requirements, shall be conducted via the TRACS portal (tracs.edvera.com). Access to and instructions for using the TRACS portal shall be provided to institutions appropriately.

Categories of Recognition

The following are the progressive categories of recognition with TRACS through which institutions will successively proceed:

- *Corresponding*: An institution that has made initial contact with TRACS.
- *Applicant:* An institution whose application has been approved by the TRACS Application Review Committee (ARC) having demonstrated compliance with the Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs) via the application process.
- *Candidate:* An institution that has been granted Candidate (pre-accredited) status by action of the Accreditation Commission, indicating that the institution has demonstrated compliance with the Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs) via the Self-Study and Evaluation Team Visit processes.
    - Candidate institutions are eligible to apply for participation in federal financial aid programs.
    - Credits granted by institutions holding Candidate status are generally transferable to other institutions, according to the practices of the receiving institution.
- *Accredited:* An institution that has been granted Accredited status by action of the Accreditation Commission, indicating that the institution has demonstrated substantive compliance with TRACS Standards via the Self-Study and Evaluation Team Visit processes.
- *Reaffirmation of Accreditation:* An institution that has been granted Reaffirmation of its Accredited status by action of the Accreditation Commission, indicating that the institution has demonstrated substantive compliance with TRACS Standards via the Self-Study and Evaluation Team Visit processes.

Institutional Eligibility Requirements

The Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs) are (1) the Standards associated with The TRACS Accreditation Requirements (IERs #1 - #16) and (2) the Standards noted as Federal Requirements (IER #17) with which an institution must demonstrate compliance in order to be approved as an "Applicant" and subsequently authorized to begin the Self-Study process for consideration by the Accreditation Commission for "Candidate" level recognition. (Note: Some Federal Requirements may not pertain to all applying institutions, i.e., Title IV Participation. If a Federal Requirement does not apply to your institution, simply note such in the appropriate response area during the application process.)

Additionally, institutions holding Accredited status are expected to maintain and as required, demonstrate compliance with the IERs.

The IER's and the Standards associated with them are as follows:

IER #1 – Faith Statement:

1.1 The institution has a Faith Statement which is readily available and included in appropriate official publications.

IER #2 – Mission and Name

2.1 - The institution has a Mission Statement which is current and comprehensive, an accurate guide for the institution's operations, approved and periodically reviewed by the institution's Board, communicated to the institution's constituencies, and accurately reflective of its Faith Statement.

IER #3 – Institutional Objectives

3.1 -The institution has adopted clearly defined written Institutional Objectives which are consistent with the institution's mission, are measurable, and approved and periodically reviewed by the institution's Board. (IER)

IER #4 – Institutional Integrity

4.1 - The institution operates with integrity and is represented accurately and honestly to students, the public, and to TRACS.

IER #5 – Operational Authority

5.1 - The institution has legal authorization to operate from all appropriate governmental agencies (state, federal, territory, country) in which it is located and has filed copies of such authorizations with TRACS. If a governmental requirement conflicts with a TRACS Standard, the institution will be deemed to be in compliance with the TRACS Standard as long as it is in compliance with the governmental requirement.

5.2 - If the institution offers courses and/or programs via Distance Education, the institution has legal authorization to offer such courses and/or programs in US States and territories in which the Distance Education student declares his/her residency. Further, the institution's Distance Education offerings meet all applicable TRACS Accreditation and Federal Requirements.

IER #6 – Organizational Structure

6.1 - The institution's Board, of not less than 5 voting members, is the legally constituted body that exists without conflicts of interest, holds the institution in trust, exercises appropriate oversight in matters of policy, and evaluates its own effectiveness. At proprietary institutions, the Board provides a list of all shareholders and adopts a detailed succession plan regarding the holdings in the event of the death or incapacitation of any one shareholder who controls 33% or more of the shares. (IER)

6.2 - The institution's Board appoints and periodically evaluates a full-time Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is not the Chair of the institution's Board or a Chair of any of its sub-committees, and who is granted the legal authority to fulfill the tasks defined in the written job description for this position as the individual responsible for carrying out published Board policies and procedures.

6.3 - A full-time Chief Academic Officer (CAO) is in place who has the credentials, experience, and competence to lead the institution's educational programs toward quality outcomes, and the CAO is periodically evaluated.

IER #7 – Publications and Policies

7.1 - The institution's publications are approved by the board or administration, as appropriate, and include at least the following: Board Manual, Policies Manual, Catalog(s), Faculty Handbook, Student Handbook.

IER #8 – Educational Programs

8.1 - The institution has at least one academic Certificate, Diploma, or Degree (Associate, Baccalaureate, Graduate, or Postgraduate). All degree programs offered are based on at least 60 semester credit hours or equivalent at the Associate level, at least 120 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the Bachelor level, or at least 30 semester credit hours or the equivalent at the Graduate or Postgraduate level.

8.2 - The curriculum clearly relates to the mission and objectives of the institution.

8.3 - Academic programs have adequate enrollment to facilitate student interaction appropriate to quality instruction and to financially sustain the program.

8.4 - Undergraduate academic degree programs offered include an appropriate general education core. General education courses are not narrowly focused nor are they directed toward a specific occupation or profession. Undergraduate bachelor degree programs include a minimum of 30 semester hours, with at least three (3) semester hours, in each of the humanities/fine arts, behavioral/ social sciences, and natural science/math. Associate degree programs include a minimum of 15 semester hours in general education.

IER #9 – Faculty

9.1 The institution employs a sufficient number of full-time and part-time, academically, and spiritually qualified faculty for the programs it offers to teach and perform related duties.

IER #10 – Student Services
10.1 - The institution offers an array of student services that are appropriate to its mission and objectives and which address the needs of its students regardless of location or the mode of delivery of educational programs.

IER #11 – Financial Operations
11.1 - The institution's finances are adequate to support the staffing, facilities, equipment, materials, and support services for the approved programs.

11.2 - A certified external audit of the institution's financial statements is conducted each year under the standards applicable to financial audits contained in the Government Auditing Standards and in accordance with auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America or comparable auditing standards for institutions located in foreign jurisdictions. Final audit reports along with all management letters are submitted to the TRACS office annually within 5 months of the close of the institution's fiscal year. (See definition of Certified External Audit.) Audits demonstrate a recent history of financial stability. (See Definition of Financial Stability.) Institutions organized as non-profit or not-for- profit entities must have their audits prepared using the "net asset" model of accounting consistent with the policies and procedures provided by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) in its document, Audit and Accounting Guide: Not-for-Profit Organizations: 2017, or any later enacted version, or comparable international guidance for such audits.

11.3 - The institution demonstrates credit lines or other liquid reserves adequate to ensure operations at all times. Proprietary institutions demonstrate a pattern of cash distributions to shareholders of no more than 25% of net income.

IER #12 – Institutional Assessment
12.1 - The institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive *Assessment Plan* which includes all aspects of the institution.

12.2 - The institution provides a systematic assessment of whether or not student learning outcomes at the institution, program and course levels are appropriate to its educational mission.

IER #13 – Strategic Planning
13.1 - The institution has developed and implemented a comprehensive, Board approved *Strategic Plan* which is based on both internal and external factors.

IER #14 – Library and Learning Resources
14.1 - The institution furnishes library and learning resources and related services appropriate to support the institution's mission, academic programs, and administrative functions. These resources and services are made available to all students regardless of location or mode of course delivery
14.2 - The institution employs an adequate number of professionally qualified staff who oversee the institution's library and learning resources and related services.

IER #15 – Facilities and Equipment
15.1 - The institution provides, maintains, and controls adequate facilities and equipment (both on and off-campus) that appropriately serve the needs of the educational programs, support services, and other mission related activities.

IER #16 – Health and Security
16.1 - Appropriate health and security measures, including an Emergency Plan, are in place for all institutional facilities and activities.

IER #17 – Federal Requirements
17.1 - Credit Hours: The institution's award of credit hours and length must meet national norms and federal requirements.

The institution is responsible to award credit hours in accordance with accepted practices in higher education and in compliance with the Federal definition of a credit hour which is as follows: "A credit hour for Federal purposes is an institutionally established equivalency that reasonably approximates some minimum amount of student work reflective of the amount of worked expected in a Carnegie unit: key phrases being 'institutionally established,' 'equivalency,' 'reasonable approximate,' and 'minimum amount.'"

The institution must have policies determining credit hours awarded for course and programs. Determining a credit hour should be equivalent to the following: (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks for one semester or trimester hour of credit, or ten to twelve weeks for one quarter hour of credit, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time; or (2) at least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other activities as established by an institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading toward to the award of credit hours.

The institution must demonstrate peer review of a credit hour for courses regardless of mode of delivery. TRACS staff, peer evaluators, and/or the TRACS Accreditation Commission will review the assignment of a credit hour to determine the reliability and accuracy of the assignment and process. - §600.2, §602.24(f)

17.2 - Program Length and Cost: The institution's programs must be appropriate to the institution's mission and objectives and must demonstrate that program lengths are comparable to accredited institutions of higher education.

Program-specific fees and tuition must be published and appropriate for the program length and objectives. - §602.16(a)(1)viii

17.3 - Student Complaints: Institutions must record student complaints. Records must be kept of student complaints received, the process for addressing the student complaints, and the manner in which the student complaint was handled in accordance with the institution's policies and procedures. The institution's student complaint policy must include, at a

minimum: a method for receiving confidential student input, clear step-by-step procedures for due process, an appropriate office that securely maintains all information and records of complaints, appeals, proceedings, and instructions for filing a complaint with TRACS and any other relevant government agencies. - §602.16(a)(1)ix

17.4 - Transfer of Credit Policies: The institution has published policies and procedures for accepting transfer of credits. Published policies include criteria for evaluating, awarding, and accepting credit transfer, credit by examination, experiential learning, prior learning assessment, advanced placement, and professional certificates. Policies and practices must ensure that course work is at the collegiate level. The institution is responsible for the quality of course work and credit given on the transcript.
The policies and procedures must be published and communicated to those who administer the policies. Articulation agreements must be disclosed and the institution listed with which the agreement is made. - §602.24(e)

17.5 - Distance Education and Correspondence Education: The institution demonstrates that programs and courses offered via Distance Education and Correspondence Education are in compliance with the Federal definition. of Distance Education and Correspondence Education (Title IV funds are available for Distance Education only):

Distance Education Definition: Education that uses one or more of the technologies listed 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 the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if used in a course in conjunction with any of the technologies listed above.

Correspondence Education Definition: 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; interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; correspondence courses are typically self-paced; and correspondence education is not distance education. - §602.3

[NOTE: This definition for Correspondence Education is provided to ensure that the institution's Distance Education meets the definition of Distance Education and does not fall to the level of Correspondence Education. Correspondence Education is not reviewed by TRACS and is not included in an institution's scope of recognition with TRACS.]

17.6 - Verification of Student Identity: An institution offering Distance Education as stated in Federal definitions must have a process to verify that the student who registers for a Distance Education program or course is the same student who participates in, completes, and receives credit. Methods to verify the student include but are not limited to: a secure login or passcode, proctored examinations, or new or other technologies and practices that are effective in verifying the identity of the student.

Institutions must notify the student at the time of registration of any additional charges associated with the verification of student identity. - §602.17(g)1

17.7 - Student Privacy: The institution has a written procedure for protecting the privacy of students enrolled in Distance Education programs or courses. - §602.17(g)2

17.8 - Public Information: The institution makes the following information available to students and the public through the institution's Catalog(s), website and/or other methods: academic calendar, grading policies, refund policies, admission policies, program requirements, and information regarding tuition and fees. - §602.16(a)(1)vii

17.9 - Advertising and Recruitment Materials: The institution's advertising and recruitment materials must accurately represent the institution's practices and policies. - §602.16(a)(1)vii

17.10 - Fraud and Abuse: The institution must not engage in fraud or abuse and practices or procedures that are designed to deceive students or falsify information to students. - §602.27(6)

17.11 - Student Achievement: The institution's assessment of student achievement includes, at a minimum, the collection and analysis of retention rates and graduation rates for Associate and Bachelor programs. Additionally, as appropriate to its mission and program specific expectations, the institution's assessment of student achievement includes the collection and analysis of course completion rates for Certificate programs, job placement rates, transfer rates, pass rates for state or other licensing examinations, and other appropriate measures. Student achievement information is made available to the public on the institution's website and/or via other appropriate means in an easily accessible and understood format. (IER) - §602.16(a)(1)

17.12 - Title IV Participation: The institution maintains and demonstrates compliance with its program responsibilities under Title IV of the most recent Higher Education Act as amended.

In evaluating the institution's compliance with Title IV program responsibilities, the TRACS Accreditation Commission will rely on documentation forwarded to TRACS by the U.S. Secretary of Education supported by letters of authorization on file from relevant agencies indicating certification of eligibility and Federal Aid audits - §602.16(a)(1)x, §602.27(a)6,7

Achieving Applicant Status

Institutions that have submitted an application (Application Compliance Checklist / ACC) to TRACS are considered corresponding institutions, but not member institutions. Applicant status is granted when an institution's ACC has been approved by the Application Review Committee.

1. **Initial Communication and Orientation**
   a. Institutions interested in pursuing membership with TRACS should complete and submit the *Initial Contact Data* form found on the TRACS website. (tracs.org/start)
   b. Upon submission of the *Initial Contact Data* form, the institution will receive a follow up email with links to pertinent TRACS documents for review. If, after review, the institution decides to continue the process, the institution will submit the *Institutional Profile* data using the link provided in the email.
   c. TRACS staff will review the *Institutional Profile* form to determine the institution's eligibility for membership.
   d. If the institution appears eligible for membership, the institution is assigned a TRACS staff representative. At this point, the institution is considered a "Corresponding" institution.
   e. The institution and assigned TRACS staff representative will schedule the required Application Orientation. The Application Orientation may take place at either the institution's campus, at the TRACS office, at the Application Workshop conducted at the TRACS Annual Conference or virtually via teleconference. If the Orientation takes place at the institution's campus, the institution is expected to cover the staff representative's travel expenses. There is no fee associated with the Application Orientation meeting.
   f. After completing the Application Orientation, the individual identified by the institution as the accreditation liaison will be granted access to the TRACS portal in order for the institution to begin the application process.

2. **Institutional Submissions**
   The application process includes the completion and submission of the following via the TRACS portal:
   a. The *Application Compliance Checklist* along with all required supporting documents
   b. The non-refundable Application Fee according to the current fee schedule

3. **Application Review Committee Procedures and Determination**
   a. The Application Review Committee (ARC) will conduct an initial review of the Application materials. Financial information and documentation are reviewed by the TRACS Vice President of Finance.
   b. The ARC makes one of the following determinations regarding the institution's application. The institution will be notified of the ARC's determination automatically via the TRACS portal.
   - Approve the institution's application - At this point, the institution is considered an "Applicant" institution and may begin the Self-Study Proposal process.
   - Defer the institution's application - If the institution's application is deferred, the application will be reverted to the institution with staff comments citing areas that need to be clarified and any additional documentation that is needed. If the application is initially deferred by the ARC, the institution will be allowed no more

than two additional opportunities to submit clarifying information and/or additional documentation. If the application is not approved after two subsequent submissions, the application will be denied.

- Deny the institution's application - If the institution's application is denied, the institution will be informed of the reason(s) for the denial. If the application is denied, the institution may reapply after one year.

NOTE: Submitting an application does not guarantee the institution will achieve "Applicant" status and be permitted to move toward Candidacy.

Achieving Candidate Status

Candidate Status offers institutions the opportunity to establish an initial, formal, and publicly recognized pre-accredited status with TRACS. Institutions seeking Candidacy must provide evidence of sound planning processes, possess adequate resources to carry out their operations, and be able to achieve Accredited status within the prescribed time period. This status does not guarantee the institution will achieve Accredited status.

Per Federal Regulations, the maximum time period allowed for a Candidate institution to achieve Accredited status is five years. An institution that does not achieve Accredited status within the five-year period will be removed from Candidacy and must wait a minimum of one year before reapplying.

Institutions that have been deferred for Candidate status may reappear before the Accreditation Commission when the deferred institution is able to demonstrate that specified deficiencies have been corrected.

1. **Self-Study Proposal**
   a. The institution is notified that it has achieved Applicant Status and can proceed toward Candidate status.
   b. The institution downloads *Self-Study Guidelines* from the TRACS website.
   c. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Proposal*, the current required Change of Status Review fee, the staff travel advance fee, and the staff visit fee. (see fee schedule)

2. **Self-Study Staff Visit**
   a. Once the *Self-Study Proposal* and applicable fees have been submitted, TRACS staff will contact the institution to set up a date for a Self-Study Staff Visit (either in person or virtually) with the institution.
   b. TRACS staff will provide the institution information related to the visit in advance.
   c. The visit will ensure that the institution is prepared to move forward in the Self-Study process, provide guidance to the institution in moving forward in the Self-Study process, and finalize the dates for the Evaluation Team visit.

3. **Self-Study Process**
   a. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation according to the established timelines. Submission of the *Self-Study Report* requires separate submission of the travel advance for the Evaluation Team according to the current fee schedule.
   b. TRACS staff will review the *Self-Study Report* and all supporting documents to determine readiness for review by the members of the Evaluation Team.
   c. Once the *Self-Study Report* is approved by TRACS staff and the travel advance has been received, the members of the Evaluation Team are granted access to the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation via the TRACS portal.

4. **Evaluation Team Visit**
   a. The institution hosts the Evaluation Team according to the established dates.
   b. The Evaluation Team conducts the visit and submits a draft copy of the *Evaluation Team Report* to the institution at the conclusion of the visit.

c. Within 10 working days after the Evaluation Team Visit is completed, the institution should report, via the TRACS portal, any errors of fact contained in the draft *Evaluation Team Report*.

d. Institutions utilizing Distance Education exclusively for delivery of instruction should note the following guidelines for hosting the Evaluation Team:
   i. If the institution's facilities are insufficient to allow the Evaluation Team to function properly, the institution is required to secure adequate space for the team to use during the on-site visit.
   ii. The institution is required to have the following personnel available in-person during the on-site visit: CEO, CAO, CFO, Distance Education Director, and Institutional Effectiveness/Assessment Director. Others may participate virtually if necessary.

5. Post Evaluation Team Visit Follow-Up

a. Once the institution has reported any errors of fact, TRACS staff will make any necessary adjustments to the *Evaluation Team Report* and post the finalized report on the TRACS portal.

b. Utilizing a TRACS generated *Compliance Report* on the TRACS portal, the institution will respond, by the date prescribed, to all of the determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards (Findings and/or Recommendations) noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*.

c. An invoice for any outstanding fees and / or visit-related expenses is sent to the institution for payment prior to the institution's appearance before the Accreditation Commission.

6. Appearance Before the Accreditation Commission

a. The institution will appear before the Accreditation Commission at the meeting following the submission of the institution's response to the determinations of the Evaluation Team.

b. At this appearance, the institution will update the Accreditation Commission concerning any progress that has been made at the institution since the submission of their *Compliance Report* and will be given the opportunity to answer any questions raised by the Accreditation Commission.

c. After deliberation, the Accreditation Commission will render and announce one of the following decisions regarding the institution's bid for Candidate status:
   - <u>Grant</u> the institution Candidate status
   - <u>Defer</u> the institution's request for Candidate status based on specified deficiencies
   - <u>Deny</u> the institution's request for Candidate status

d. The President of TRACS will officially notify the institution of the decision of the Accreditation Commission by letter.

7. Compliance Reports for Candidate Institutions

a. Within five years from the Accreditation Commission's approval for Candidate status, an institution must demonstrate compliance with any unresolved determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*.

b. A *Compliance Report* is required regularly (usually March 1 and September 1 of each year) until all determinations noted in the *Evaluation Team Report* have been satisfied.

Achieving Accredited Status

Accreditation offers institutions the opportunity to continue an ongoing formal and publicly recognized professional relationship with TRACS as a member institution.

Institutions that choose to hold accreditation with TRACS and have already achieved Candidate or Accredited Status with any other accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education, must demonstrate compliance with all Standards outlined in the TRACS *Accreditation Manual*. It is understood that the Self-Study data compiled for any other U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting agency may be used without unnecessary duplication of effort. A staff and Evaluation Team Visit are required to verify the contents of the documents submitted.

1. **Self-Study Proposal**
   a. The institution is notified that it has demonstrated compliance with all determinations given by the previous Evaluation Team and that they are cleared to proceed toward Accredited status.
   b. The institution downloads *Self-Study Guidelines* from the TRACS website.
   c. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Proposal*, the current required Change of Status Review fee, the staff travel advance fee, and the staff visit fee. (see fee schedule)

2. **Staff Self-Study Visit**
   a. Once the *Self-Study Proposal* and applicable fees have been submitted, TRACS staff will contact the institution to set up a date for a staff visit (either in person or virtually) with the institution.
   b. TRACS staff will provide the institution with information related to the visit in advance.
   c. The staff visit will ensure that the institution is prepared to move forward in the Self-Study process, provide guidance to the institution in moving forward in the Self-Study process, and finalize the dates for the Evaluation Team Visit.

3. **Self-Study Process**
   a. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation according to the established timelines. Submission of the *Self-Study Report* requires the separate submission of the travel advance for the Evaluation Team according to the current fee schedule.
   b. TRACS staff will review the *Self-Study Report* and all supporting documents to determine if they are ready for review by the members of the Evaluation Team.
   c. Once the *Self-Study Report* is approved by TRACS staff and confirmation of receipt of the travel advance is received, the members of the Evaluation Team are granted access to the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation via the TRACS portal.

4. **Evaluation Team Visit**
   a. The institution hosts the Evaluation Team according to the established dates.
   b. The Evaluation Team conducts the visit and submits a draft copy of the *Evaluation Team Report* to the institution at the conclusion of the visit.

c.   Within 10 working days after the Evaluation Team Visit is completed, the institution should report, via the TRACS portal, any errors of fact contained in the draft *Evaluation Team Report*.

d.   Institutions utilizing Distance Education exclusively for delivery of instruction should note the following guidelines for hosting the Evaluation Team:

   i.   If the institution's facilities are insufficient to allow the Evaluation Team to function properly, the institution is required to secure adequate space for the team to use during the on-site visit.

   ii.   The institution is required to have the following personnel available in-person during the on-site visit: CEO, CAO, CFO, Distance Education Director, and Institutional Effectiveness/Assessment Director. Others may participate virtually if necessary.

5. Post Evaluation Team Visit Follow-Up

a.   Once the institution has reported any errors of fact, TRACS staff will make any necessary adjustments to the *Evaluation Team Report* and post the finalized report on the TRACS portal.

b.   Utilizing a TRACS generated *Compliance Report* on the TRACS portal, the institution will respond, by the date prescribed, to all of the determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards (Findings and/or Recommendations) noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*.

c.   An invoice for any outstanding fees and / or visit-related expenses is sent to the institution for payment prior to the institution's appearance before the Accreditation Commission.

6. Appearance Before the Accreditation Commission

a.   The institution will appear before the Accreditation Commission at the meeting following the submission of the institution's response to the determinations of the Evaluation Team.

b.   At this appearance, the institution will update the Accreditation Commission concerning any progress that has been made at the institution since the submission of their *Compliance Report* and will be given the opportunity to answer any questions raised by the Accreditation Commission.

c.   After deliberation, the Accreditation Commission will render and announce one of the following decisions regarding the institution's bid for Candidate status:

   •   <u>Grant</u> the institution Accredited status
   •   <u>Defer</u> the institution's request for Accredited status based on specified deficiencies
   •   <u>Deny</u> the institution's request for Accredited status

d.   The President of TRACS will officially notify the institution of the decision of the Accreditation Commission by letter.

7. Compliance Reports for Accredited Institutions

a.   Within a maximum of two years from the Accreditation Commission's approval for Accredited status, an institution must demonstrate compliance with any unresolved determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*

b.   A *Compliance Report* is required regularly (usually March 1 and September 1 of each year) until all determinations noted in the *Evaluation Team Report* have been satisfied.

Achieving Reaffirmation of Accredited Status

After the initial five years of Accredited status, institutions are expected to reaffirm their accreditation through a full reaffirmation process comparable to that of achieving accreditation. This first reaffirmation is for a period of up to ten years and includes the required Interim Fifth-Year Review at the mid-point of the ten-year Accreditation cycle.

1. **Self-Study Proposal**
   a. The institution is notified that it is approaching the required Reaffirmation period and is provided information regarding the Reaffirmation process.
   b. The institution downloads *Self-Study Guidelines* from the TRACS website.
   d. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Proposal*, the current required Change of Status Review fee, the staff travel advance fee, and the staff visit fee. (see fee schedule)

2. **Staff Self-Study Visit**
   a. Once the *Self-Study Proposal* and applicable fees have been submitted, TRACS staff will contact the institution to set up a date for a staff visit (either in person or virtually) to the institution.
   b. TRACS staff will provide the institution with information related to the visit in advance.
   c. The staff visit will ensure that the institution is prepared to move forward in the Self-Study process, provide guidance to the institution in moving forward in the Self-Study process, and finalize the dates for the Evaluation Team Visit.

3. **Self-Study Process**
   a. Via the TRACS portal, the institution completes and submits the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation according to the established timelines. Submission of the *Self-Study Report* requires the separate submission of the travel advance for the Evaluation Team according to the current fee schedule.
   b. TRACS staff will review the *Self-Study Report* and all supporting documents to determine if they are ready for review by the members of the Evaluation Team.
   c. Once the *Self-Study Report* is approved by TRACS staff and confirmation of the travel advance fee is received, the members of the Evaluation Team are granted access to the *Self-Study Report* and supporting documentation via the TRACS portal.

4. **Evaluation Team Visit**
   a. The institution hosts the Evaluation Team according to the established dates.
   b. The Evaluation Team conducts the visit and submits a draft copy of the *Evaluation Team Report* to the institution at the conclusion of the visit.
   c. Within 10 working days after the Evaluation Team Visit is completed, the institution should report, via the TRACS portal, any errors of fact contained in the draft *Evaluation Team Report*.
   d. Institutions utilizing Distance Education exclusively for delivery of instruction should note the following guidelines for hosting the Evaluation Team:
      i. If the institution's facilities are insufficient to allow the Evaluation Team to function properly, the institution is required to secure adequate space for the team to use during the on-site visit.

ii. The institution is required to have the following personnel available in-person during the on-site visit: CEO, CAO, CFO, Distance Education Director, and Institutional Effectiveness/Assessment Director. Others may participate virtually if necessary.

5. **Post Evaluation Team Visit Follow-Up**
   a. Once the institution has reported any errors of fact, TRACS staff will make any necessary adjustments to the *Evaluation Team Report* and post the finalized report on the TRACS portal.
   b. Utilizing a TRACS generated *Compliance Report* on the TRACS portal, the institution will respond, by the date prescribed, to all of the determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards (Findings and/or Recommendations) noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*.
   c. An invoice for any outstanding fees and / or visit-related expenses is sent to the institution for payment prior to the institution's appearance before the Accreditation Commission.

6. **Appearance Before the Accreditation Commission**
   a. The institution will appear before the Accreditation Commission at the meeting following the submission of the institution's response to the determinations of the Evaluation Team.
   b. At this appearance, the institution will update the Accreditation Commission concerning any progress that has been made at the institution since the submission of their *Compliance Report* and will be given the opportunity to answer any questions raised by the Accreditation Commission.
   c. After deliberation, the Accreditation Commission will render and announce one of the following decisions regarding the institution's bid for Candidate status:
      - <u>Grant</u> the institution Reaffirmation of Accredited status
      - <u>Defer</u> the institution's request for Reaffirmation of Accredited status based on specified deficiencies
      - <u>Deny</u> the institution's request for Reaffirmation of Accredited status
   d. The President of TRACS will officially notify the institution of the decision of the Accreditation Commission by letter.

7. **Compliance Reports for Reaffirmation Institutions**
   a. Within a maximum of two years from the Accreditation Commission's approval for Reaffirmation of Accredited status, an institution must demonstrate compliance with any unresolved determinations of non-compliance with TRACS Standards noted in the *Evaluation Team Report*
   b. A *Compliance Report* is required regularly (usually March 1 and September 1 of each year) until all determinations noted in the *Evaluation Team Report* have been satisfied.

Interim Fifth-Year Review

TRACS institutions that have been granted a ten-year Reaffirmation of their Accredited status are required to participate in an Interim Fifth-Year Review (IFYR) which includes the completion and submission of an *Interim Fifth-Year Review Compliance Checklist* and supporting documents.

The IFYR focuses on the TRACS Institutional Eligibility Requirements (IERs) and occurs during the fifth year of the institution's Reaffirmation status.

The *Interim Fifth-Year Review Compliance Checklist* will be completed and submitted via the TRACS portal along with the appropriate fee and will consist of a narrative addressing the institution's compliance with the IERs along with documentation supporting each compliance narrative.

The various processes involved in the IFYR are detailed in TRACS Policy BP310 located in the TRACS *Policies and Procedures Manual*. The TRACS *Policies and Procedures Manual* can be accessed on the TRACS website. (tracs.org)