

Peer Evaluators Procedures

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Contents

- I. Purpose
- II. Procedures for Recruitment of Peer Evaluators
- III. Procedures for Training of Peer Evaluators
- IV. Procedures for Assignment of Peer Evaluators
- V. Procedures for Statement of Ethical Conduct
- VI. Definitions

I. Purpose

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE or the Commission) seeks to ensure that institutions are reviewed by peer evaluators who are competent, knowledgeable, qualified, trained, and adhere to a code of conduct. The purpose of these procedures is to implement the Commission's *Peer Evaluators Policy* regarding the recruitment, training, and assignment of peer evaluators.

II. Procedures for the Recruitment of Peer Evaluators

- A. Individuals may be identified by staff, recommended by colleagues, or self-nominated. The Commission may recruit individuals from outside the membership as necessary to ensure appropriate expertise.
- B. Interested individuals must apply by completing pre-screening questions and submitting an Evaluator Data Form (EDF) during the open enrollment period. Information about the process to become a peer evaluator is provided on the Commission's website.
 - 1. In certain circumstances, the Commission may accept a current curriculum vitae, resume or other information demonstrating the individual's qualifications in lieu of the EDF.
 - 2. To remain active, peer evaluators are required to update their EDF at least every three years and should update their EDF when any major changes occur.
 - 3. The Commission periodically sends out reminders to update the EDF and EDFs that are not updated will automatically become inactive.
 - 4. Inactive peer evaluators are required to reapply by submitting a new EDF and complete the required training before they will be considered for an assignment.
- C. The Commission staff will review and accept qualified individuals into the pool. The Commission's criteria for selecting peer evaluators include but are not limited to individuals with three or more years of experience in higher education, individuals who are currently employed at an MSCHE member institution; and individuals who have specific expertise that meets the Commission's current needs.

III. Procedures for Training Peer Evaluators

- A. The Commission staff will maintain a comprehensive, systematic and structured training

program for peer evaluators, which will be offered in a variety of modalities. Training will cover the application and interpretation of accreditation standards, requirements of affiliation, policies and procedures, applicable federal regulatory requirements as well as the roles and responsibilities associated with specific accreditation activities (including responsibilities related to the review of distance education or correspondence education).

- B. Peer evaluators who accept an invitation to serve must complete the Commission's training program.
- C. The Commission staff will notify peer evaluators about training opportunities.
- D. The Commission staff may require peer evaluators to complete additional training specific to a particular role or accreditation activity (including but not limited to compliance verification, distance education/correspondence education, substantive change, or appeals).
- E. The Commission staff may make additional training available to peer evaluators to expand or update skills.

IV. Procedures for Assignment of Peer Evaluators

- A. The final assignment of peer evaluators to conduct any accreditation activity rests with Commission staff.
- B. The Commission staff will identify potential peer evaluators with the appropriate qualifications, experience, and training to review the institution's specific programming or mission and methods of delivery as well as the specific circumstances of the accreditation activity being conducted. The Commission seeks to build balanced teams with different levels of experience, specific areas of expertise, institutional type, and diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender.
- C. The Commission staff will invite potential peer evaluators with no known conflicts of interest and the appropriate qualifications, relevant experience or expertise, and training for the type of review.
- D. In order to serve, each peer evaluator must complete the Acceptance of Invitation and Statement of Ethical Conduct pursuant to the instructions provided in Section V.
- E. Each peer evaluator must update the EDF in the secure MSCHE portal (My Profile in the Volunteer Portal). Failure to update the EDF may impact the individual's selection for a team.
- F. In order to serve, each peer evaluator must complete the Conflicts of Interest Disclosure Form in the secure MSCHE portal (Volunteer Portal). The Commission provides training and instructions on disclosing conflicts of interest in the secure MSCHE portal (Volunteer Portal).
- G. Each peer evaluator must complete the *Antitrust Certification of Compliance* in accordance with the Commission's *Antitrust Compliance Policy and Procedures*. The Commission staff will inform peer evaluators about how to complete the certification.

- H. The institution will have the opportunity to review the team roster and affirm that there are no conflicts of interest with any individuals on the proposed team roster through the secure MSCHE portal.
 - 1. Conflicts of interest are defined in the Commission's *Conflicts of Interest: Commission Representatives Policy*.
 - 2. The institution's president must notify the Commission of a perceived or actual conflict of interest with an individual on the roster within the timeframe indicated in the procedures for that review. The team roster is considered affirmed when the timeframe expires.
 - 3. The Commission staff will reassign a peer evaluator if a conflict of interest is identified in accordance with Commission policy and procedures. The Commission staff will revise the team roster until a team of peer evaluators with no known conflicts of interest is finalized.
- I. Previously undisclosed conflicts may arise, without notice, through accreditation processes. In those cases, the Commission staff must be informed as soon as possible but not later than 5 calendar days by any party who has knowledge of an actual or perceived conflict so that Commission staff can work with the parties to maintain the integrity of the peer review process and adherence to Commission policy and procedures.
- J. Upon completion of accreditation activities, Commission staff will conduct appropriate assessments, including at a minimum an assessment by the team chair for each team member and by team members of the team chair. The information collected is used internally to inform the content of future training and the assignment of peer evaluators to future accreditation activities.

V. Procedures for Statement of Ethical Conduct

- A. The Commission has developed a Statement of Ethical Conduct which includes but is not limited to the following expectations for peer evaluators:
 - 1. Uphold expectations for professional conduct and collegial behavior;
 - 2. Fulfill all responsibilities related to my assignment;
 - 3. Decline any gifts;
 - 4. Uphold, honor, and abide by all Commission policy and procedures.
- B. In order to serve, peer evaluators must accept the invitation in the secure MSCHE portal.
 - 1. Acceptance of the invitation notifies the Commission staff and is a critical component of the team-building process.
 - 2. By accepting the invitation, the peer evaluator certifies that they agree to the Statement of Ethical Conduct.
 - 3. Peer evaluators should not accept the invitation if they are unavailable or will not agree to all of the statements under the Statement of Ethical Conduct.
 - 4. Violations of Commission policy and procedures as an evaluator may result in sanctions, including but not limited to reporting the issue to the institution impacted, reporting the issue to the evaluator's home institution, barring an evaluator from future service with the Commission, or other sanctions as may be appropriate depending on the violation.

- C. Other individuals observing an accreditation activity but not serving as a peer evaluator (e.g. observers, assistants, state or system representatives) must also agree to the Statement of Ethical Conduct for Non-Team Members. The Commission staff will contact non-team members with instructions about how to complete the Statement of Ethical Conduct.

VI. Definitions

The following definitions are used in this policy and/or procedures:

- A. **Academic personnel.** An individual who is currently or recently engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary teaching and/or research, or other appropriate professionals with sufficient responsibility to the institution to assure the continuity and coherence of the institution's educational programs (*definition from the MARCHE Bylaws*).
- B. **Administrative personnel.** An individual who is currently or recently directly engaged in a significant manner in postsecondary program or institutional administration (*definition from the MARCHE Bylaws*).
- C. **Peer evaluator.** An individual who is selected and assigned to an accreditation activity by the Commission staff. This individual is part of the multi-level accreditation decision-making process and will participate in the proposal of an accreditation action. Peer evaluator is not intended to include a Commissioner serving in an official Commissioner capacity on a committee or the Commission. Peer evaluator is not intended to include an assistant or any other observer of an accreditation activity.
- D. **Public representative.** An individual who is not an employee, governing board member, owner, shareholder, or consultant of an institution accredited by the Commission or a candidate for accreditation by the Commission; who is not a member of any trade association or membership organization related to, affiliated with, or associated with the Commission; and who is not a spouse, parent, child, or sibling of any of the above (*federal definition found in 34 CFR §602.3 and in the MARCHE Bylaws*).

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Related Documents: *Antitrust Compliance Policy; Antitrust Compliance Procedures; Communication in the Accreditation Process Policy; Communication in the Accreditation Process Procedures; Conflicts of Interest: Commission Representatives; MARCHE Bylaws; Peer Evaluators Policy; Statement of Ethical Conduct; Travel Policy; Travel Procedures;*

Federal Regulations: *34 CFR Part §602.15(a)(2) Competent and knowledgeable individuals and §602.15(a)(3) Academic and administrative personnel;*