

## Associate Membership Application Instructions for The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

Membership in The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) is open to schools in North America that offer graduate professional theological degrees, are demonstrably engaged in educating professional leadership (i.e., offering at least one professional graduate degree) for communities of the Christian or Jewish faiths, and meet the [Association's membership eligibility criteria](#). Current ATS member schools reflect a broad spectrum of doctrinal, confessional, and theological perspectives.

Alternatively, the Association offers an Affiliate status for interested organizations that are ineligible for membership. See the ATS website for information on [pursuing Affiliate status](#) (please do not complete or submit this form).

### **Description of Membership**

There are two sequential levels of membership. **Associate Membership** refers to ATS member schools seeking accreditation by the Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools (COA). Neither the member school's degree programs nor any additional locations are reviewed or approved at the Associate Member level. Because an Associate Member is not yet accredited by the COA, the school is not entitled to participate in Title IV financial aid programs from the US Department of Education Office of Federal Student Aid. **Full Membership** refers to ATS members that have been accredited by the Commission based on an institutional self-study report and an onsite evaluation visit by a committee of peer and public reviewers. Full Members of ATS are also Accredited Members of the COA bound by the Commission [Standards of Accreditation, Policies and Procedures](#), and [COA Bylaws](#). Free-standing, accredited schools become eligible to participate in Title IV funding by virtue of this class of membership. An Associate Member becomes a Full Member by following one of the pathways described in the [Guidelines for Achieving Initial Accreditation](#). All member schools—Associate Members and Full Members—pay [annual membership dues](#) and submit [Annual Report Forms](#), as described in the [ATS Bylaws](#).

### **Overview of Application Process**

Prior to submitting an application, the prospective applicant school should review [documentation about the membership process](#) posted on the ATS website, which includes ATS staff contact information. This information should help the school's governance, faculty, and administration discern whether to apply. When a school has decided to pursue ATS membership, it should designate a senior school official (e.g., president, provost, dean) to prepare the application, which is estimated to take ten months or more. Given the timeline, by fall of an even-numbered year (e.g., fall 2024 or fall 2026), this school official should initiate preparation of the application for membership and work with ATS staff, as needed, over the following months.

The application fee is \$5,000 (payable in two installments), and the school is expected to cover any visit-related costs incurred by ATS. Invoiced fees and costs are nonrefundable, regardless of application outcome. Applications are received year-round but will only be reviewed during the academic year preceding the ATS/COA Biennial Meeting (held in June of even-numbered years). Therefore, the school should be prepared to submit information *current as of the summer prior* to the submission deadline. To assist in the school's discernment and coordination of this application, the following outline provides a helpful overview:

1. **Identify timing:** Note that the application is due September 1 of odd-numbered years (e.g., 2025, 2027).
2. **Determine feasibility:** Decide how the school will coordinate necessary resources (e.g., documents, fees).
3. **Complete form:** [Access the online application form](#) and complete all required fields, providing URLs as needed. You will be able to save and return to this form as needed.
4. **Gather documentation:** Upload the requested supporting documentation (eight PDF files).
5. **Submit application:** At the time of submission, ATS staff will confirm within five business days whether the application is sufficient for staff review.
6. **Await initial review:** ATS staff will inform the applicant school by October 15 of the staff's determination whether the application will move forward in the process.

***If the application is determined by ATS staff to warrant continuation in the process . . .***

7. **Schedule visit:** An ATS staff person will arrange a one- or two-day visit to the school, at a mutually agreeable time (usually between October and February), in order to verify the application information. The school is responsible for providing, as needed, the following accommodations: local transportation to and from the nearest airport, lodging at a local hotel (usually for one night), and meals during the one- or two-day visit.
8. **Resolve initial invoice:** ATS will invoice the first installment of the nonrefundable application fee, in the amount of \$1,000, which must be paid prior to the staff visit.
9. **Solicit letters of support:** The applicant will arrange for ATS to receive five letters of support from [any current ATS members](#) of the applicant school's choosing (directions: [here](#)) to be received by ATS prior to the staff visit.
10. **Await substantive review:** In April, the ATS Board of Directors will vote whether to recommend applicants for membership—based upon the application materials, support letters, and the visit report.

***If the ATS Board of Directors affirmatively recommends this application for a vote . . .***

11. **Resolve final invoice:** The remaining balance of the application fee, in addition to any visit-related costs incurred by ATS, would be due by the end of May. (*Note: ATS will invoice the second installment of the nonrefundable application fee in the amount of \$4,000.*)
12. **Await final outcome:** The school may register online to attend the two ATS/COA Biennial Meeting events, which take place in June of even-numbered years (e.g., 2024, 2026, 2028):
  - a) the online Biennial Meeting, during which the vote on membership takes place, and
  - b) the in-person Biennial Meeting, which participants are welcome to attend at the school's expense.

Attendance at these events is encouraged, but optional, and has no bearing on the vote for membership. Two-thirds of ATS members at the online meeting must vote favorably for Associate Membership to be granted.

***If Associate Membership (a five-year term) is granted . . .***

13. **Seek accreditation:** Review the [Guidelines for Achieving Initial Accreditation](#) and communicate with the school's Commission staff liaison—to be assigned in July—in order to determine next steps. The term for Associate Membership is five years, being renewable once at discretion of the ATS Board of Directors.

***Please email [Leah Wright](#), ATS Accrediting Records Coordinator, with any questions related to this application.***