

Petitioning for Candidate for Accredited Member Status

Section II of the [Policies and Procedures](#) of the ATS Commission on Accrediting require that an institution seeking Candidate for Accredited Member status follow these three steps.

First: Written notification

The chief administrative officer of the institution should notify the ATS Commission staff in writing (email or mailed letter) that the school intends to petition the Board of Commissioners ("Board") for Candidate for Accredited Member status.

Second: Readiness study

The applicant school shall undertake an internal study of its readiness for Candidate for Accredited Member status. For the purposes of this internal study, the Board provides the following guidelines:

- The study should begin with a brief overview of the school's history, purpose, constituencies, goals, and long-term ambitions.
- The study should provide a general assessment of the way in which the school reflects the [General Institutional Standards](#) for the institution and the [Educational Standard](#) and [Degree Program Standards](#) for degree programs offered by the school. This readiness study is not a self-study; rather, it serves two purposes. First, because the criteria for Associate Membership are not the same as the Standards for Accreditation, this study provides an initial assessment by the applicant institution regarding the ways in which the school reflects the expectations of the Standards of Accreditation. Second, and based on the school's assessment, the institution should identify the changes it will need to make during candidacy in order to be adequately prepared for its initial accreditation evaluation.
- This study should be limited to approximately 50 pages of narrative text, plus appropriate supporting documentation. The text should address each of the Commission Standards of Accreditation. The study should reflect attention to the general guidance of the [General Institutional Standards](#), the [Educational Standard](#), and the [Degree Program Standards](#), and not focus on each subsection. The subsequent self-study, undertaken after the granting of Candidate for Accredited Member status, will provide the opportunity for a more thorough review of each section of the Standards. This study should examine the institution broadly in the context of the Standards and provide answers for questions such as the following: In what ways does the school meet the Standards? In what ways does the school not meet the Standards? What will the school need to do during the self-study period to ensure that it meets the Standards of Accreditation at the time of its initial accrediting evaluation visit? What evidences of institutional strengths and weaknesses become

evident when viewing the institution through the perspective of the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation?

- In addition, this study should describe the institution's tentative plan for undertaking its self-study, if candidacy is granted. Are the faculty, administrative, and financial resources adequate for the effort? What timeline does the institution propose to complete its required self-study within the two years of candidacy?
- The study should reflect the judgments of the faculty and key administrative officers of the schools, but it need not be the result of a lengthy deliberative process. The energy for the longer, more consultative and deliberative process should be reserved for the self-study, if candidacy is granted.

The institution, upon the receipt of its letter of intent regarding petitioning for candidacy, will be assigned an ATS Commission staff member who will work with the school through the application process. The school should consult with the staff member and negotiate an outline for the report prior to beginning the work of the study.

Once the report is completed, the institution should send **two coil-bound, double-sided copies** of the readiness report as well as **two electronic copies of the report and any appendices—saved as book-marked PDF files (on USB flash drives)** to the Commission on Accrediting. For a suggested list of items to include in the appendices, see the list on pages 16–17 of [Chapter Three of the Self-Study Handbook](#) (do not include the last item). Please consult with the ATS Commission staff liaison regarding when these materials should be submitted.

Third: Staff evaluation visit

Upon completion of the readiness study, the ATS Commission staff member will review it and schedule a staff evaluation visit. Because the purpose of the staff visit is evaluative, the staff member will interview students, faculty, administrative leaders, members of the governing board, library staff, alumni/ae, and other persons as appropriate to assess the institution in light of the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation. The staff member will prepare a report on the basis of the evaluation, and the Board of Commissioners will consider the institution's readiness study and the staff report in its consideration of the petition for candidacy.

Candidate for Accredited Member status (i.e., Commission membership) will be granted if the school successfully demonstrates that it either is or, at the conclusion of the period of candidacy, will be operating according to the *General Institutional Standards*, the *Educational Standard*, and the *Degree Program Standards* and that it has the institutional capacity to evaluate its institutional and educational effectiveness.

The institution is responsible for housing, meals, and local transportation expenses incurred in the conduct of the staff evaluation visit, which typically lasts one night and one day for a visit to a main

campus; it may be longer if one or more extension sites are involved. The Board of Commissioners typically is responsible for the cost of transportation to the campus, while the school covers transportation costs to any extension site(s).

Guidelines for candidacy petitions

The guidelines the ATS Board of Commissioners normally follows in granting petitions for candidacy are these:

Grant candidacy on “fast track” (within 2 years of receiving Associate Member status) if a school . . .

- is established for more than five years and/or accredited by another recognized agency;
- demonstrates institutional vitality and educational quality with ample resources and established assessment efforts; and
- seems to meet or be close to meeting all Commission Standards of Accreditation.

Grant candidacy on “normal track” (within 2–5 years of receiving Associate Member status) if a school . . .

- is established for five or fewer years and/or not accredited by another recognized agency;
- demonstrates institutional and educational capacity with sufficient resources and promising assessment efforts; and
- meets most Commission Standards of Accreditation and can meet all within two years.

Not grant candidacy, but extend Associate Member status “beyond usual track” (another 5 years) if . . .

- few of the factors above are present, but school making good progress; and
- if the school formally applies for renewal of Associate Member status (see [Guidelines for Renewing Associate Membership](#)).

The normal period of candidacy is two years, from either February through February or June through June, the two months in which the Board typically meets. That two-year period actually extends until the next meeting of the Board that follows the last month listed; that is, through the following June for a February to February candidacy (with the initial self-study report due by the preceding December 1) and through the following February for a June to June candidacy (with the initial self-study report due by the preceding April 1). Candidate schools who cannot meet that two-year time line may petition for an extension, per ATS Commission [Policies and Procedures](#), II.A. If a school does not petition for and achieve Candidate for Accredited Member status within five years of being granted Associate Membership status, the procedures described in the Association *Procedures*, II.C.4 and II.E, apply.