

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION



The Department developed this draft discussion paper to share with members of the accreditation community. The paper outlines some preliminary steps by Department staff to thoughtfully address the concerns identified by the accreditation community and submitted by the non-federal negotiators regarding the recognition process. The Department enthusiastically supports a continued dialogue and encourages further ideas and suggestions from the community to improve and enhance the recognition process.

Four recurring themes are present in the concerns voiced by the non-federal negotiators regarding the recognition process as currently administered by the Department:

- **Communication**
- **Timeliness**
- **Clarity**
- **Consistency**

The Department believes that a strong commitment to improved **communication** is the foundation for building a better working relationship with the accrediting community. The Department is committed to strengthening communication through a variety of measures. Toward that end, the Department has targeted two areas on which it will focus immediate attention during 2007:

- Annual Workshops
- Written Communication

One-day workshops will be conducted annually for all accreditors. Workshops will be open to all recognized accreditors, accreditors in the process of seeking initial recognition, and interested members of the accreditation community. Of course, attendance is voluntary. The primary focus will be on the recognition process, updates on issues and criteria interpretations, and best practices. The Department will also use this forum as an opportunity to discuss concerns and to solicit solutions from the accreditation community. [We request your input – your ideas -- to make these workshops of maximum benefit to the community.](#)

Three mechanisms will be emphasized for improving communication in documented and verifiable ways: the ASL Guidelines document; the Website; and Dear Colleague letters. The ASL Guidelines document, originally developed in 2000, will be updated in the coming months and sent to the community. ASL will also review its ability to expand its Webpage to include information of greater interest and usefulness to the community. The use of Dear Colleague letters will be expanded as appropriate. [We seek your ideas as to the information you believe may be most useful in these formats.](#)

In terms of **timeliness**, the Department acknowledges its responsibility to ensure adequate timelines and windows of response in the recognition process. This is not only vital to an effective system but is an appropriate expectation for every agency participating in the process. In light of this, in January 2007, the Department established review process timelines for the current review cycle as a recognition of its responsibility in this area. These timelines include an earlier completion date for the draft staff report to agencies, a minimum 30-day window for all agencies to respond to the draft staff report, distribution of the final staff report to the NACIQI members and to agencies 14 days prior to the NACIQI meeting, and NACIQI recommendations to the Secretary within 30 days.

Timelines

- Process Timelines
 - 60-days prior to the meeting: draft analysis to agency
 - 30-days prior to the meeting: agency response window
 - 14-days prior to the meeting: final analysis to agency
 - within 30 days of meeting, NACIQI recommendations to the Secretary

The Department will continue to provide these timelines and windows for response in subsequent review cycles. The ability to maintain this commitment is evidenced by Departmental support for increased resources directed towards the recognition process. The Department has approved a plan to immediately expand ASL staffing levels. These recruitment actions have been widely publicized. [Organizations within the accrediting community were informed of the Department's recruitment actions and solicited to encourage individuals from the community to apply.](#) The investment in expanded staffing along with the implementation of more effective timelines, will net an improved review process.

Initiatives to increase and enhance communication (identified previously) will also have a positive impact on improving **clarity** and **consistency**. In addition, the following refinements to the review process are being implemented:

- Recognition recommendations will be made only after all information (including the agency's response to the draft staff report) is assessed. A staff recommendation for recognition will be provided on the final staff report.
- A written notification of the NACIQI recommendation will be provided to each agency within 7 days of the NACIQI meeting.
- While training is an on-going function, with the addition of several new staff and new NACIQI members, training and staff development will receive greater emphasis. One way this emphasis will be reflected is in the development of a formalized mentoring program for new staff.

In accordance with FACA rules, two changes have been implemented in Committee procedures. First, a quorum will be a majority of the members appointed to the Committee. Currently, all seats on the 15-member Committee are appointed. As a member of the Committee, it is the discretion of the Chairperson to participate in Committee discussions and to vote. The full complement of Committee membership, in addition to the knowledge and perspective of the Chair in the discussion, will enable a more robust Committee review of agencies seeking recognition.

Second, to focus the limited time available to the Advisory Committee to deliberate on agencies seeking initial or renewal of recognition and those agencies having identified deficiencies, the Advisory Committee has opted to establish a consent agenda for agencies submitting interim or progress reports that successfully address the Secretary's concerns. This procedure will be initiated at the May 2007 NACIQI meeting.

The Department is keenly aware that there are opportunities for additional improvements to the Secretary's recognition process. This brief description of initial thoughts and actions by the Department to improve the recognition process is provided to engage the accreditation community in further dialogue. [Your ideas and suggestions for further strengthening of the recognition process are sincerely encouraged and welcomed.](#)