

The Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries
Commission on Accreditation
Policies and Procedures

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1. Policies and Procedures for ARTS Accredited Members:

    a. Annual Reporting Policies and Procedures - Maintaining Accredited Status:

        Continuing membership in the Association is contingent upon an institution maintaining its accreditation with the ARTS Commission on Accreditation (ARTS-COA). The requirements for maintaining accreditation presented in this document and the Association's Constitution, require the institution to adhere to ARTS-COA Academic Standards, demonstrated by the completion of an annual report.

        The institution's annual report must be submitted to the Executive Director for ARTS-COA by August 1. This allows time for dissemination and review by the ARTS-COA before the October Annual Meeting.

        Institutional reports are reviewed, discussed, and approved by the ARTS-COA with commendations or notations delivered to each institution within 30 business days. The ARTS-COA will document in a Letter of Notation issues it has with the report. Institutions have until the deadline for the next Annual Report (August 1) to resolve all notations. Failure to do so may result in the ARTS-COA moving to place the institution on probation or terminate its accreditation.

        Member Institutions' Annual ARTS-COA Reports shall contain the following:

        i) A copy of the institution's reaffirmation of adherence to the Association's Tenets of Faith, as outlined in the Association's Constitution (Article II, Section 4)

        ii) Confirmation that the ARTS-COA has access to the latest copies of the institution's publications, brochures, promotional material, and information about its websites and social media.

        iii) Institution's annual report (Constitution Article III, Section 1.2 & 1.4) containing:
            1. A copy of the institution's annual directors report.
            2. A copy of the institution's annual financial report.

3. Designation of the institution's representative to the ARTS-Board of Directors Annual Meeting each October.
4. Institutional data highlighting any changes to its programs, degrees, courses, faculty, administration, resources, facilities, capabilities, mission, and objectives/goals/plans.
5. Learning effectiveness assessments highlighting the institution's student learning outcomes and faculty assessments.
6. Any changes to or noted areas of continuous improvement regarding the institution's continuing compliance with the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation. A detailed outline of the contents of this annual report is provided on the Association's website in a documented titled *ARTS Member Annual Reporting and Accreditation Maintenance Requirements*.

iv) Confirmation that all fees and financial obligations, for the current fiscal year, to the Association and ARTS-COA have been met (Constitution Article III, Section 1.3.)

b. Member Reaffirmation Self-Study:

During the fifth year of an institution's initial accreditation period, and every ten years thereafter, an institution will conduct an institutional self-study with respect to its mission, objectives, and ARTS-COA Standards for Accreditation. Once complete the institution will host an evaluation site-visit conducted by the ARTS-COA to determine the status of its reaffirmation of accreditation.

i) The institution will be notified by the Executive Director for ARTS-COA no later than March 1st of its fourth year of initial accreditation or ninth year of its most recent reaffirmation that it should begin conducting its detailed self-study in preparation for an evaluation site-visit. Self-studies must be completed no later than March 1st of the institutions fifth or tenth year of accreditation (called its examination year), allowing time for the Executive Director to schedule site-visits. Site-visits must be completed before August 1st, so that report preparation, dissemination, and institutional replies can be completed before October 1st.

ii) After receipt of the institution's self-study (which it should strive to keep to around 100 pages), the Executive Director will schedule an evaluation site-visit during the institution's fifth or tenth year of accredited status. Visits will be conducted after March 1st and before August 1st of an institution's examination year.

iii) The Executive Director will appoint an evaluation site-visit team to visit the institution in order: (1) verify claims made in the institution's self-study materials; (2) formulate recommendations relative to the institution's continued compliance with the Commission's Standards; and (3) make an overall recommendation regarding the issuance of a Letter of Commendation and Continuance of the institution's accredited status.

iv) An institution may request the Commission adjust its scheduled review cycle so as to (a) synchronize institutional review cycles with another recognized institutional accreditor, or (b) because of a verifiable emergency situation.

v) The evaluation team will communicate both its findings and recommendations to the Executive Director via a written team report no later than 30 business days after the visit. The institution will receive a copy of the team report, which it is free to distribute. All fees and expenses associated with an evaluation site-visit team are the responsibility of the hosting institution.

c. Procedures for ARTS-COA Site-Visit:

The Executive Director, or a designated replacement, is required to accompany the site-visit team to serve as a resource for both the institution and evaluators regarding questions of procedures or understanding ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation.

i) The site-visit team shall be composed of three people, one of whom must be a member of the public (as defined in the Association's Constitution). ARTS-COA Commissioners, but not ARTS-BOD representatives, may serve on site-visit teams unless there are any

institutional or other conflicts of interest between the team member and the institution being visited. The site-visit team will be selected by the Executive Director for ARTS-COA.

ii) The site-visit evaluation team will submit a report of its findings to the Executive Director, for dissemination to the ARTS-COA, no later than 30 business days after completion of the visit. The Executive Director will also send a copy of this report to the institution.

iii) The institution has 30 business days, after receipt of the evaluation team's report, to respond to and clarify any questions or perceived inaccuracies in the evaluation team's report. These are sent in writing to the Executive Director for ARTS-COA.

d. Procedures for ARTS-COA Reaffirmation:

i) After receipt of the institution's response, the ARTS-COA will complete its assessment of reaffirmation of the institution's accredited status. The Commission's decision is based upon the principle that an institution is substantially achieving and can be reasonably expected to continue to achieve its mission and objectives and the ARTS-COA Standards for Accreditation and it is committed to ongoing institutional development.

ii) The decision to reaffirm and issue a Letter of Commendation and Continuance to the institution, or delay reaffirmation and issue a Letter of Notation documenting discrepancies is based on a two-thirds decision of the ARTS-COA. These letters shall be issued by the Executive Director at or before the Commission's Annual Meeting held every October.

iii) Based on the evaluation site-visit team's report, the ARTS-COA may withhold sending the Letter of Commendation and Continuance until it is completely satisfied the institution conforms to the ARTS-COA's Standards. In this case, a Letter of Notation shall be sent by the Executive Director, expressing the Commission's concerns with any area of institutional health, well-being, and standards of compliance,

together with recommendations for action. The institution receiving such a letter shall remain a full member but is expected to respond to the Letter of Notations within 60 business days, expressing its response and indicating actions to be taken to correct any deficiencies, together with deadlines by which those actions will be taken. All notations must be resolved within the year following the date in which the letter was written unless an extension is granted by the Commission for good cause shown. The Executive Director will follow-up with the progress of the institution. When all follow-up requirements have been met, the Executive Director, based on a two-thirds decision of the ARTS-COA, will issue a Letter of Commendation and Continuance to the institution.

iv) If an institution does not resolve all issues of notation within 12 months after the date the Letter of Notation was written, the ARTS-COA shall move to place the institution on probation. In this situation, the institution remains an accredited member of the Association, but loses the privilege of participation in Association meetings and governance (i.e., any involvement in the ARTS-COA and ARTS-BOD Executive Committee must be vacated). The institution is given six months after the date their privileges are suspended to resolve all remaining issues from their Letter of Notation. The institution may, according to the policies and procedures in this document, appeal the decision to be placed on probation.

v) The ARTS-COA, based on a two-thirds decision, may move to terminate an institution's membership when the letters of notation have not been resolved within the required timeframe.

vi) If the ARTS-COA moves to terminate an institution's accredited status, the Executive Director will promptly communicate the decision to the institution, explain the reasons, and indicate the availability of an appeals process.

vii) In accordance with the Commission's Policies and Procedures for appeals, outlined in this document, an institution may appeal the termination of its accredited status.

viii) Accreditation is not guaranteed for any length of time. Negative developments within an institution, with respect to the Commission's Standards, may trigger an out of cycle review that could result in the loss of accreditation.

ix) Once reaffirmed, the institution will repeat the reaffirmation process every ten years.

2. Policies and Procedures for Becoming an ARTS Accredited Member:

The accreditation process consists of three phases: applicant, candidate, and membership.

a. Applicant status is the initial phase, by which an institution begins the process of becoming an accredited member of ARTS.

i) To be eligible for applicant status the institution must first determine it meets the conditions of eligibility stipulated in the Association's Constitution (Article 1, Sec.2) and the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation.

ii) Once the institution determines it is in compliance with these conditions, it declares its intention to become an accredited member of ARTS by completing and submitting its application for membership (found on the ARTS Website), along with stipulated fees to the ARTS-COA.

iii) Upon receipt, the ARTS-COA will review the institution's application and communicate to the Executive Director their two-thirds decision that the application is accepted. The Executive Director will communicate this decision to the institution indicating they have been granted applicant status.

iv) At this juncture, the institution is to begin its self-study prior to becoming a candidate for accredited membership.

b. An institution becomes a candidate for accredited membership once their self-study has been received and approved by two-thirds of the ARTS-COA.

i) The institution is to conduct its comprehensive Self-Study using the manual provided on the ARTS website.

ii) An institution must complete its self-study no later than 24 months from the date of receipt of the letter indicating it has obtained applicant status.

iii) The ARTS-COA will review the institution's self-study and determine if the applicant may become a candidate for accredited membership. In some situations, the ARTS-COA may request the applicant clarify or

expand portions of its self-study to assist in the candidate evaluation process.

iv) The Executive Director will communicate with the institution it has obtained candidate status, which begins the process of constituting and scheduling the site-visit team. The structure and makeup of the site-visit team are the same as that required for institutional reaffirmation of accreditation described in section 1.d of this document, except that a candidate member cannot be placed on probation. For candidate institutions, the only decision resulting from the site-visit is to approve, delay, or deny accredited membership.

c. Association membership and achievement of accreditation from the ARTS-COA are obtained only after the following steps have been completed.

i) The evaluation team has completed their site-visit.

ii) The evaluation team has delivered its site-visit report to the Executive Director for distribution to the ARTS-COA and candidate school. The report includes observations, comments, concerns, and recommendations for improvement, clarification, or that additional information is amended to the school's self-study. Notification will be given to the candidate school within 30 business days.

iii) The candidate school appears before the ARTS-COA at an annual or specially called meeting (if specially called the candidate school pays all travel expenses for the entire ARTS-COA and Executive Director). The candidate school's appearance before the ARTS-COA allows for the school to report on their resolution (proposed or actual) of all items noted in the site-visit report. The candidate school will submit an updated self-study (reflecting these resolutions), and answer questions posed by the ARTS-COA.

iv) The ARTS-COA, after the candidate school's appearance, by a two-thirds vote of a quorum of the ARTS-COA, at the Annual Meeting or specially called meeting, only one of the following four decisions.

a. Award accreditation.

b. Award accreditation with a Letter of Notation that must be addressed within the school's first annual ARTS report. Failure to satisfy the Letter of Notation at the next annual ARTS-COA meeting, as determined by a two-thirds vote of a quorum of the ARTS-COA will result in the school being placed on probation. Removal of probation status follows the procedures outlined in this document for accredited members.

c. Recommend the school remain a Candidate and repeat the Candidate to Accredited Member steps including resubmission of fees and self-study, as well as the site-visit process.

d. Deny accreditation.

v) The Executive Director will communicate to the institution the results of the ARTS-COA decision. If an institution is denied membership, it may appeal that decision by following the procedures for appeals outlined in this document.

vi) An institution's initial accreditation membership is for five years, after which it is required to complete a reaffirmation evaluation as described in section 1.d of this document before its accreditation is valid for ten years.

d. Membership Outside the United States. The ARTS-COA considers locations outside of the United States based on the following factors.

i) Analyze the non-US based locations authorizing authorities to determine if ARTS-COA has the ability to conduct accrediting operations without burdensome requirements, restrictions, or obligations.

ii) The ability of the ARTS-COA and members of an accreditation visit team to efficiently and reasonably travel to a proposed non-US based location to conduct accreditation site visits.

iii) The ability of the ARTS-COA and members of an accreditation visit team to effectively and reasonably communicate with the institution at a proposed non-US based location

iv) The ability of institutions at other non-US based locations to attend the ARTS annual meetings, held at US-based locations.

v) The ability of institutions at other non-US based locations to reasonably communicate with other ARTS member institutions.

vi) The necessity that the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation, Policies and Procedures, and other guiding documents require no modification or accommodation for any non-US based institution.

vii) The necessity that institutions at non-US based locations have the ability to pay ARTS dues and fees in US dollars.

viii) The necessity that institutions at non-US based locations adhere to the same statements of faith as required of US-based institutions.

ix) ARTS will conduct an assessment of the ARTS-COA budgets, time requirements, and ability of the COA to ensure proper accreditation assessment.

x) As in the policies stated above, any non-US based location cannot require any modifications or changes to the ARTS-COA operations. The guiding principle in these policies is that the ARTS-COA's operations must remain the same and require no accommodation for an institution at a non-US based institution.

3. Policies and Procedures for Becoming an ARTS Affiliate Member:

> Organizations with a substantial interest in the educational mission of ARTS; who seek to align themselves with the Association; and lack the readiness, qualifications, or inclination to seek accreditation, may become affiliate members.

a. To become an affiliate, an organization shall submit its application (found on the Association's website) along with required fees to the ARTS-COA for review and action.

    i) Based on the organization's application and ARTS-COA review, ARTS affiliates are elected by a two-thirds vote of the ARTS-COA.

    ii) Affiliates may attend ARTS and ARTS-COA meetings but are not permitted to vote. Affiliates, however, may be appointed as full participants in ARTS committees. Affiliates are not permitted to vote at ARTS business meetings, serve in ARTS governance, be commissioners on the ARTS-COA, or be evaluators for site-visit teams.

    iii) Affiliate status is granted for a five-year term and may be renewed.

    iv) Organizations holding affiliate status are not accredited members of ARTS and may not advertise themselves as having ARTS-COA accreditation.

b. Conditions of Affiliate Eligibility:

    i) An institution desiring to become an ARTS Affiliate shall submit an official statement from its chief executive officer reflecting a decision of its board of control to pursue affiliation with ARTS, and the institution affirms the ARTS Tenets of Faith.

    ii) The institution shall provide validation it is a non-profit organization.

    iii) The institution shall provide a clear and publicly stated board of control approved mission statement that is in accord with the ARTS core values.

iv) If the applicant is an educational institution, its curricular offerings should be consistent with the rigor specified in the ARTS-COA Standards for Accreditation. The applicant is to submit copies of academic documents describing its programs.

v) The institution shall submit a completed application form, along with application fees designated in the Affiliate Application form provided on the ARTS Website.

c. Affiliate Requirements, Restrictions, and Conditions:

i) An Affiliate organization must not portray itself, verbally or in print, as an accredited member of ARTS or have achieved ARTS-COA accreditation.

ii) Affiliate organizations that are engaged in education must use the following disclosure statement:

"[Institution Name] is an Affiliate institution of the Association of Reformed Theological Seminaries. As such, it participates in and contributes to collegial and professional development activities of the Association. Affiliate status does not, however, constitute, imply, or presume ARTS accredited status at present or in the future."

iii) Affiliates are required to reaffirm annually in writing adherence to the Association's Tenets of Faith, as set forth in the Association's Constitution (Article II, Section 4). This reaffirmation is to be delivered to the ARTS-COA every August 1st with the institution's Annual Report.

iv) Affiliates are required to remit to the ARTS-COA their annual fees before each ARTS-COA Annual Meeting. Organizations whose annual fees are more than 90 days delinquent may be dropped from the affiliate roster. Annual fees are described in the Affiliate Program document on the ARTS Website.

v) An institution may cease to be an Affiliate of ARTS by 1) voluntarily withdrawing, as stated in a letter of withdrawal, submitted to the ARTS-COA, from its chief executive, 2) failure to pay annual fees, or 3) no

longer subscribing to the Association's mission and tenets of faith (as determined by the affiliate or ARTS-COA.)

vi) Institutions that have withdrawn from affiliate status may seek reinstatement after a two-year absence.

vii) An affiliate institution may appeal a decision by the ARTS-COA to drop or deny its application for affiliate membership as described in the policies and procedures controlling appeals in this document.

d. The ARTS-COA considers locations outside of the United States based on the following factors.

i) Analyze the non-US based locations authorizing authorities to determine if ARTS-COA has the ability to conduct accrediting operations without burdensome requirements, restrictions, or obligations.

ii) The ability of institutions at other non-US based locations to attend the ARTS annual meetings, held at US-based locations.

iii) The ability of institutions at other non-US based locations to reasonably communicate with other ARTS member institutions.

iv) The necessity that the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation, Policies and Procedures, and other guiding documents require no modification or accommodation for any non-US based institution.

v) The necessity that institutions at non-US based locations have the ability to pay ARTS dues and fees in US dollars.

vi) The necessity that institutions at non-US based locations adhere to the same statements of faith as required of US-based institutions.

vii) The guiding principle in these policies is that the ARTS-COA's operations must remain the same and require no accommodation for an institution at a non-US based institution.

viii) ARTS-COA ensures that non-US based locations do not change the manner in which ARTS operates in an assessment of the ARTS-COA budgets, time requirements, and ability of the COA to ensure proper accreditation assessment. As in the policies stated above, any non-US based location cannot require any modifications or changes to the ARTS-COA operations.

4. Policies and Procedures for ARTS-COA Decisions:

In keeping with its responsibility, the ARTS-COA seeks to provide timely information regarding its final accrediting decisions. Accordingly, it has established the following procedures:

a. ARTS-COA Notification Process:

i) The ARTS-COA shall notify the examined institution within 30 business days of a final action to (1) grant, or reaffirm, an institution's accreditation or candidacy, (2) place an institution on probation, (3) issue a Letter of Notation to an institution, or (4) implement an adverse decision (denial, withdrawal, or suspension of membership status).

ii) The ARTS-COA will provide written notification of its decision to the institution. Notice to the public shall be via the Association's website. At the time the ARTS-COA decides to take negative action, they shall make available to all parties involved a summary of the reasons for the decision. The institution has twelve months to resolve all notation or be placed on probation or have accreditation terminated.

b. Rationale for negative decisions:

The ARTS-COA will base its decision for any negative action (probation, termination, Letter of Notation, etc.) solely on the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation. Any negative decision issued by the ARTS-COA will always be fair, impartial, unbiased, and based solely on the facts in the site-visit team's report. If an institution deems that this was not the case, it may appeal the negative decision by following the policies and procedures outlined in this document.

c. Policies on reinstatement:

i) ARTS requires that termination of accredited membership, either voluntary or by an action of the ARTS-COA, or denial of candidate status or initial accreditation, result in the severance of an institution's formal relationship with ARTS for two years. The two-year period begins after all appeals, if any, have been exhausted.

ii) After the two-year period, an institution may reapply for status with the ARTS-COA by following the applicant, candidate, membership process outlined earlier in this document.

5. Policies and Procedures for Appeals:

An appeal is a request by an institution for an independent reconsideration of an action of the ARTS-COA. Any affiliate, applicant, candidate or accredited institution may appeal a decision of the ARTS-COA, which results in adverse action (suspension, termination, or denial of candidacy). An institution may make only one appeal of an ARTS-COA decision of adverse action. Decisions by the ARTS-COA to issue an institution a Letter of Notation is not appealable.

a. Grounds for making an appeal of an ARTS-COA decision are as follows:

i) An institution may base its appeal on grounds that the action of the COA was:

1. A result of misinformation; factual error; bias; or apparent arbitrary rule;

2. A result of the ARTS-COA's failure to follow its published procedures; or

3. Was based solely on the institution's ability to produce audited financial information that the financial problems which led to adverse action have been corrected.

ii) Any appeal not based on one or more of the grounds identified above will not be considered.

b. Process for filing an Appeal is as follows:

i) An institution's appeal must be authorized by its governing board.

ii) The institution's appeal request must be in writing and received by the ARTS-BOD Executive Committee Chairperson within 30 business days of the date the institution was sent a notice of adverse action.

iii) Before a request for an appeal may proceed, the institution must pay any outstanding fees and reimbursements due and remit a check for the amount of $3,000 to pay for the expense of the appeal process.

The ARTS-BOD Executive Committee Chairperson will notify the institution in writing the total amount of fees and appeals process payment required. The institution has 30 business days from the date of payment notification to remit all fees and payments.

iv) If payment in full of all outstanding fees and appeals process payments due are not received within the 30 business-day deadline, the institution will be deemed to have waived its right to an appeal and the adverse action taken by the ARTS-COA will become final.

v) An institution's request for an appeal must state specifically the action being appealed and the specific grounds for the appeal. The request for an appeal may not be amended after the deadline for its receipt by the Chairperson of the ARTS Executive Committee.

c. The appeals process will follow all the steps below:

i) The institution must identify any dates when its president would not be able to appear before an Appeal Committee (AC).

ii) The Appeal Committee.

1. The AC shall consist of five members selected by the ARTS-BOD Executive Committee Chairperson in consultation with the Executive Committee of ARTS.

2. At least one member of the AC shall be a representative of the public; three will be from the ARTS BOD members, and one member shall be a faculty member from an ARTS accredited member institution. The AC may not have a member of the ARTS-COA, ARTS EC, or someone from the filing institution.

iii) Within 30 business days of the date, the ARTS Chairperson receives an appeal filing, the Chairperson of ARTS shall provide to the institution the names and affiliations of the five-member AC.

iv) If the institution believes that any of the proposed members of the AC is unable to render an unbiased decision, the institution will have 15 business days

from the date it receives the names to request the exclusion of any member of the AC. The request, which must be in writing, must state the specific reason(s) for the belief that the identified individual(s) are unable to render an unbiased decision based on the criteria detailed in the conflict-of-interest policy described in this document.

v) The Chairperson of ARTS shall review any request to replace a proposed member of the AC.

1. If the ARTS' Chairperson accepts the request to exclude a proposed member, that person will not serve on the AC.

2. The ARTS' Chairperson shall identify the required alternate members of the AC and repeat, per the process defined above.

3. If the institution again takes issue with the alternate AC members, the ARTS' Chairperson will select other replacement members. This selection will be final and will constitute the membership of the AC.

d. Qualifications of Appeal Committee members:

i) Three members shall be taken from the ARTS BOD members, excluding the EC, and one must be a full-time employee of an institution accredited by ARTS, but not a member of the ARTS-BOD. No AC members can come from the institution making the appeal.

ii) Current Members of the ARTS-COA may not serve as members of the AC.

iii) The representative from the public must not be:

1. An employee, member of the governing board, owner, shareholder in, or consultant to, an institution or program that either is accredited, candidate, or application of ARTS; or

2. A spouse, parent, child, or sibling of an individual identified in 1. above.

3. A person who served on the appealing institution's site-visit team.

e. The Appeal Committee:

i) All supporting documentation, which the institution wishes to have considered by the AC must be submitted within 60 days of the date the institution received notice from the Chairperson of ARTS of the adverse action. The documentation must clearly show its relevance to the specific grounds for the appeal.

ii) Only documentation of actions completed by this deadline will be presented for consideration in the appeal. Actions which are proposed to occur or will be completed after this deadline will not be considered in the appeal.

iii) The documentation for each action completed must clearly state whether the institution's actions occurred before or after the adverse action was imposed.

f. Time and Location of Meeting with the Appeal Committee:

i) The Chairperson of ARTS will select a date for the meeting that is between 30 and 60 business days following the day the institution has to submit its documentation.

ii) The date selected for the meeting shall not be a date identified in the notice of appeal as one when the President of the institution cannot be present.

iii) The meeting will be scheduled for one day.

iv) The Chairperson of ARTS shall select the venue for the meeting with the goal of minimizing the institution's expenses.

g. Procedures of Appeal Committees:

i) The AC shall first select a chairperson to preside at the meeting of the Appeal Committee and make rulings regarding time limits, admissibility of evidence, and procedural matters; and will administer oaths.

ii) The institution will bear the burden of proof.

iii) Appeal Committee meetings are closed to the public.

iv) The institution may have no more than three individuals present, one of whom is the President, and all who are present must be able to speak to the grounds for appeal. No consultants may be present.

v) The institution may be represented by counsel and counsel may participate in the institution's presentation.

vi) ARTS-COA may have no more than three individuals present, and all who are present must be able to speak to the grounds for the adverse action.

vii) ARTS-COA may be represented by counsel and counsel may participate in ARTS-COA presentation.

viii) Presentations.

1. The institution will make a presentation of no more than one hour and will be heard first followed by questions by the Appeal Committee.

2. ARTS-COA will make a presentation of no more than one hour followed by questions by the Appeal Committee.

ix) Appeals are administrative hearings and not subject to the rules of evidence and procedure.

x) The institution may not challenge the competency of members of the Appeal Committee.

xi) Only members of the Appeal Committee may ask questions.

xii) The Appeal Committee will record the proceedings when the institution is present, but not when it is considering evidence or voting. The institution may have a transcript of the proceedings, with the cost of the transcript included in its costs for filing the appeal.

h. Decision of the Appeal Committee:

i) The Appeal Committee shall consider the evidence presented by the representatives of the institution and ARTS-COA after they have been excused.

ii) The Appeal Committee shall review the evidence of the institution's compliance with ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation as of the time the ARTS-COA made the adverse action and the evidence that the institution has come into compliance up to the deadline for submission of institutional documentation.

iii) The Appeal Committee shall give no weight to evidence showing partial compliance or indicate compliance which will occur after the deadline for submission of institutional documentation.

iv) The Appeal Committee shall affirm the decision of the ARTS-COA if it finds the institution has not demonstrated, as appropriate to the appeal that the action of the ARTS-COA was:

1. Based on misinformation; factual error; bias; or apparent arbitrary rule;

2. The result of the ARTS-COA's failure to follow its published procedures; or

3. Based solely on financial information and that the institution can produce verified information that the financial problems which led to the adverse action have been corrected.

v) The Appeal Committee shall amend or reverse the decision of the ARTS-COA if the Appeal Committee finds the institution has demonstrated, as appropriate to the appeal, that the action of the ARTS-COA was,

1. Based on misinformation; factual error; bias; or apparent arbitrary rule;

2. The result of the ARTS-COA's failure to follow its published procedures; or;

3. Based solely on financial information and that the institution can produce verified information that the

financial problems which led to the adverse action have been corrected.

vi) If the Appeal Committee, based on the information available, determines that it is unable to affirm, amend, or reverse the decision of the ARTS-COA or that an applicant institution is not in compliance with ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation, it shall remand the decision to the ARTS-COA for further consideration. In doing so, the Appeal Committee shall identify specific issues that the ARTS-COA must address.

vii) The Appeal Committee shall send its findings and decision to the Chairperson of ARTS and the institution's chief executive officer within 10 business days of the date of the hearing.

i. Effect of the Appeal Committee's Decision:

i) The decision of the Appeal Committee is final and not subject to further appeal.

ii) The ARTS-COA shall act in a manner which is consistent with the decision of the Appeal Committee.

1. If the Appeal Committee affirms the decision of the ARTS-COA, the adverse action imposed by the ARTS-COA is in effect as of the date of the Appeal Committee's notice to the institution.

2. If the Appeal Committee reverses the decision of the ARTS-COA, the institution shall have the accreditation status it had held before the adverse action was imposed by the ARTS-COA.

3. If the Appeal Committee amends the decision of the ARTS-COA, the ARTS-COA shall act on the decision at its first meeting following the notice of amendment and apply the amended adverse action as of the date of that meeting.

4. If the Appeal Committee remands the decision of the ARTS-COA for further consideration, the ARTS-COA shall consider the specific issues identified by the Appeal Committee at its first meeting following the notice of remand. The ARTS-COA shall provide

the Appeal Committee and the institution with its findings within 15 business days of the date of the meeting at which it was considered. The institution shall provide the Appeal Committee with any written response to the ARTS-COA's findings it determines appropriate within 30 business days of the date it received the findings.

j. Costs of an Appeal:

i) If the cost of the appeal exceeds the $3,000 deposit paid by the institution, ARTS shall provide the institution with a statement of the amount of the additional costs. The institution is to pay these costs within 30 business days of receiving the statement.

ii) If the cost of the appeal is less than the $3,000 deposit paid by the institution, there will be no refund of excess monies to the institution.

iii) The institution shall be responsible for its costs.

k. Withdrawal of Appeal:

i) An institution may withdraw its request for an appeal at any time up to the start of the hearing.

ii) The institution's governing board must authorize such a request.

iii) If the institution withdraws its request after the 30 business-day limit for filing an appeal has passed, the institution will not be able to refile the appeal and the adverse action being appealed will continue in force as a final decision with the effective date being the date of the written notice withdrawing the appeal.

iv) If the institution withdraws its request, it forfeits its appeal fee.

l. Computation of Time:

i) The counting of days begins on the day after the triggering event.

ii) If the last day allowed for a response is a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday, the next business day will be deemed to be the last day.

m. Notifications:

i) Any notice that the ARTS Chairperson sends to an institution regarding an appeal shall be sent either electronically with a response requested or by any delivery method that requires a signature upon delivery.

ii) The date any representative of the institution signs or confirms acceptance of receipt/delivery of the notice is deemed to be the date of notification.

iii) Institutional replies should be sent either electronically with a response requested or by any delivery method that requires a signature upon delivery.

iv) The date a representative of ARTS signs or accepts the return receipt shall be deemed the date of notification.

n. Institutional Status During Appeal and Public Notice:

i) During the appeal, an institution shall maintain the status it held with ARTS and ARTS-COA before the adverse action.

ii) Inquiries regarding the accreditation status of an institution which is being appealed shall be answered by explaining the adverse action the ARTS-COA took against the institution and that the institution is appealing that action. Notice will be given within 30 business days.

iii) Public notice of an adverse shall be made once an appeal is withdrawn or the Appeal Committee has issued its decision.

6. ARTS-COA Governance Policies and Procedures:

    a. Conflict of Interest:

        Integrity is the foundation upon which any effective accreditation association operates. It is therefore essential that any individual who participates in the accreditation process (site evaluator, reaffirmation examiner, initial accreditation examiner, accreditation appeals board, commissioner, etc.) be free of conflicts of interest (or even the appearance of a conflict of interest) where circumstances or relationships might call into question a person's capacity to make impartial judgments regarding an institution's or program's compliance with accreditation requirements. Although the Commission has attempted to identify and articulate the types of conflicts that may most commonly arise in its accreditation process, the Commission must also depend upon the participants in the process to police themselves and call attention to potential conflicts of interest, should any questionable matter arise.

    b. Obvious Accreditation Process Conflicts of Interest:

        i. Previous employment as faculty or staff within past five years of an institution being evaluated.

        ii. Previous service as an ARTS-BOD member within the past five years of an institution being evaluated.

        iii. Previous service as a contractor or consultant within past five years of an institution being evaluated.

        iv. Acceptance of substantive gifts, honoraria, or special favors from the institution being evaluated, apart from scheduled fees during the accreditation process, including any appeals processes.

        v. Submission of an application for employment to the institution being evaluated within the past five years.

        vi. Any situation that could affect an individual's ability to be impartial (such as family, business, or personal relationships with the institution being evaluated).

vii. Although it is nearly impossible to develop a comprehensive list, the test of a conflict of interest is whether it could compromise or give the appearance of an impediment to the individual's capacity to make an impartial decision.

c. Persons Subject to the Conflict-of-Interest Policy:

i. ARTS staff (due to the nature of their Association employment) cannot actively participate as decision makers in the ARTS-COA accreditation processes.

ii. The Executive Director of ARTS-COA, due to familiarity with the Association's accreditation processes and procedures, should serve as an advisor to site-evaluators, accreditation examiners, appeals boards, and institutions during any part of the candidacy and accreditation process.

iii. Although the Executive Director of ARTS-COA will strive to make evaluation team assignments free of conflicts of interest, Commissioners, and all accreditation examiners shall sign a form affirming that they are unaware of any conflicts that will affect their ability to make an impartial decision regarding the status of the institution they are assigned to review.

iv. Commissioners will further agree to recuse themselves from consideration of any institution where they are aware of a potential conflict of interest. Recusal means that the Commissioner will declare a recusal before the discussion begins, leave the table, and avoid participating in any discussion related to the institution or the decision that the Commission makes about the institution under consideration.

v. Persons assigned to ARTS-COA accreditation teams (whether an ARTS-COA Commissioner or another selected person) shall sign a form certifying that they are free of conflicts of interest with respect to the institution they are to evaluate.

vi. Concurrently, institutions will be permitted to object in writing to the Executive Director of potential evaluators whom they believe may have a conflict of interest.

vii. Accreditation Appeal Committee members shall sign a form confirming that they are unaware of any conflicts of interest that may affect their ability to make an impartial decision.

viii. Should the Executive Director determine that a conflict of interest has occurred that has not been recognized, the Director will assume responsibility to take whatever action is necessary to mitigate the effects of the conflict. In the case of an egregious action by a Commissioner that creates a conflict of interest, the Commission Officers shall have authority to terminate a Commissioner's status as a member of the ARTS Commission on Accreditation.

d. ARTS-COA Policies and Procedures on Records Management

The ARTS Commission on Accreditation shall maintain complete and accurate records of:

i. The last accreditation review of each institution including site-survey evaluation team reports, the institution's responses, annual reports, letters of commendation or notation, and the institution's or program's most recent self-study materials.

ii. All decisions made throughout an institution's connection with the Commission regarding its accreditation status.

e. ARTS-COA Budget Preparation and Submission

As a means of ensuring independence from ARTS, the ARTS-COA shall develop and approve its annual budget.

i. The Executive Director for ARTS-COA serves as the professional staff member tasked with the responsibility for developing, in conjunction with the Commission officers, the ARTS-COA budget, which considers the following inputs:

1. ARTS-COA staff salaries.

2. The number of site visits, consultations, application reviews, etc. to be held during the budget cycle.

ii. Based on these considerations, the Executive Director for ARTS-COA will prepare a preliminary budget, obtain

ARTS-COA approval, and submit to the ARTS-BOD for overall incorporation into the annual ARTS budget.

iii. The ARTS-BOD and ARTS-COA annual budgets are comprised of the fees, dues, and expense charges, and are found on the Association's website and from the Executive Director.

f. Procedure for changes to ARTS and ARTS-COA governance documents:

i. Any requested change to ARTS and ARTS-COA governance documents (Constitution, Policies and Procedures, Standards of Accreditation, etc.) can only be considered when they are made and seconded in writing to the Executive Director and/or the appropriate ARTS or ARTS-COA chairperson.

ii. Approval of these changes requires a two-thirds vote of an established quorum of a face-to-face meeting or electronic ballot. The ARTS-BOD is responsible for the Association's Constitution, and the ARTS-COA is responsible for the ARTS-COA Standards of Accreditation, Policies & Procedures, and other documents related to accreditation.

g. Complaints:

i. Complaints against ARTS.

ARTS has an obligation to the various groups they serve to consider complaints made against the Association, COA, or any of its accredited institutions. The Executive Director reviews and responds to these complaints. The complaint must be made in writing, together with substantial documentation, as appropriate for the circumstance. The Executive Director, in consultation with the ARTS Executive Committee or ARTS-COA leadership (depending on the situation), will determine if the complaint has standing. If the complaint has standing, the ARTS Executive Committee, ARTS-COA leadership or the Executive Director will investigate. The ARTS Executive Committee, ARTS-COA leadership or the Executive Director will communicate its conclusions and actions to the institution and/or the party raising the complaint.

ii. Complaints against a member institution of violating ARTS Standards.

ARTS-COA will only review complaints regarding a member institution's ability to meet the ARTS Accreditation Standards made in a timely manner. ARTS-COA will not mediate disputes between individuals and member institutions or review individual cases (including, but not limited to, admissions, grades, academic policies, fees or administrative decisions) but expects individuals to attempt to resolve personal issues through the institution's own published grievance processes before submitting a complaint to ARTS.

ARTS-COA only considers complaints (1) which explains which standard has been violated or not adhered to, (2) which have transpired within the past two years, (3) are not currently in an institution's formal proceedings or in litigation. ARTS-COA will not act on anonymous complaints, or those submitted on behalf of another individual. All complaints must be submitted to ARTS-COA in writing using the ARTS Complaint Form on the website.

The Executive Director will acknowledge receipt of a complaint in a timely manner, and notify the complainant within 30 business days whether the complaint will be further investigated by ARTS. If ARTS determines a complaint will be further investigated, the named institution in the complaint will be given 30 business days to respond to the complaint before ARTS makes a decision regarding next steps regarding the complaint.

7. General ARTS-COA and Institutional Guidance Policies and Procedures:

    a. ARTS-COA policy for timely notifications of institutions and the public:

        i) ARTS-COA will make available to its constituents and the public all accreditation actions, deliberations, and decisions.

        ii) These actions, deliberations, and decisions are recorded in meeting minutes and will be placed on the organization's website with 30 business-days of the meeting.

        iii) Additionally, the ARTS-COA will send, within 30 business-days of the accreditation activity, a formal letter to the institution's CEO notifying them of the ARTS-COA accrediting activity.

        iv) The institution has the option of agreeing, asking for clarification, or issuing a formal response to the ARTS-COA. This must be done in writing within 30 business-days of receipt of the formal communication. The response will be sent to the ARTS Executive Director, who will confirm receipt of the response and forward to the ARTS-COA for action.

        v) The ARTS-COA will report, via the ARTS Executive Director, the accreditation actions, deliberations, and decisions it has taken at the annual meeting of the ARTS-BOD.

    b. Policy for notification of candidate or membership withdrawal:

        Upon receipt of written notice from an institution's board and chief executive of a decision to withdrawal its membership or candidacy, ARTS-COA will, within 30 business-days, notify its accredited members, affiliates, candidates, and the public that the said institution's wishes for withdrawal have been accepted. No prorated portion of fees or dues will be reimbursed. The institution must wait two years from the date of withdrawal before it can appeal for readmission, and repeat the applicant, candidate, membership process.

    c. Guidelines for sharing curriculum and online courses:

i) Collaborative agreements for sharing curriculum and online courses are viewed by ARTS and ARTS-COA to be of tremendous benefit.

1. It allows institutions to offer online courses without the need to develop extensive online systems. A shared ARTS wide community online education system is a concept that could have tremendous merit.

2. Online or fixed campus courses from other institutions enable ARTS' schools to offer a diversity of courses that they may not have the enrollment or in-house expertise to offer.

3. An exchange of courses amongst ARTS' schools has the benefit of increasing each school's geographic reach and would benefit affiliate organizations seeking to become full ARTS' members.

ii) The association does want to ensure that institutions that enter into these cooperative agreements thoroughly understand that they need to evaluate the external offerings with the same scrutiny they do their own to ensure high-quality education and uniformity of credit-hour transfers.

iii) Additionally, institutions with different per credit hour tuition rates will need to reach cost and revenue sharing agreements that satisfy the needs of both institutions.

iv) It is important to remember that ARTS is not an academic institution, but the Executive Director for ARTS-COA can be consulted to advise how to develop these agreements and evaluate if ARTS supervision/operational management may be beneficial.

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