

Program Advisory Committees



Purpose

No organization exists in a vacuum. This adage applies aptly to educational institutions – particularly those that serve to enhance the workforce – in significant ways. The opportunity to obtain input, feedback, ideas, and multiple perspectives from individuals with a personal stake in the success of the institution and the student population is a critical component to the success, growth, and improvement of a career school or college. For ACCSC-accredited schools, the purpose of the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) is to provide external input into the design, development, ongoing evaluation and improvement of the programs. Accordingly, ACCSC has established standards related to PACs which require each accredited institution to have an independent PAC for each occupational program area as a means to enhance institutional success and to provide students with employment ready knowledge, skills, and competencies. These committees are comprised of appropriately qualified representatives external to the institution (i.e., non-school employees) who are able to provide a meaningful review of the school's programs and supporting resources and materials.



Note: Adjust the roles and tasks according to your specific team's structure and responsibilities.

Standard Requirements

Scope

The standards pertaining to Program Advisory Committees are found in *Section II (A)(4)(b)(i)* of the *Substantive Standards and Appendix III - Program Requirements, Standards of Accreditation*. These standards require that an institution has a PAC for each program, or a group of related occupational programs referred to as a “program area.” To determine whether programs can be considered “related,” evaluate the similarity of the following areas:

- Educational Objectives
- Curriculum Content
- Employment Opportunities and Licensure
- Faculty
- Resources

For example, an institution may offer several “allied health” programs such as Medical Assistant, Dental Assistant, Respiratory Therapy, and Surgical Technology. Although these programs are all in health-related fields, objectives are quite different. A Medical Assistant could not competently comment on or review a Dental Assistant program and vice versa. Thus, in our example here, this institution would need four distinct PACs, one for each program. An example of a group of related programs might be Medical Assistant and Phlebotomy, or Medical Front Office and Medical Billing and Coding programs. As a point of reference, when you see a reference to “the program,” in this monograph, this can mean either the single program or the “program area” under review.

Membership

According to the *Standards of Accreditation*, the purpose of the PAC is to review the established curricula of the program, instructional-related program materials, equipment and facilities, and student achievement outcomes as a means to provide the school with an external review of its programs.¹ These standards have been established in a tiered approach so that for each additional level added to an institution and its programs, additional PAC requirements attach. The outline below shows how this progression of requirements works:

All Program Areas Must Have:	An independent and diverse PAC that includes representatives from the employment community, practitioners, and others from the field of education.
Graduate Degree Programs Areas Must Also Have:	At least two individuals with graduate level education experience qualified to review and comment on the school’s graduate level education.
Institutions with Distance Education Programs Must Also Have:	At least one additional individual with experience in the delivery and administration of distance education programs who can review and comment on the school’s distance education platform, methods, processes, procedures, and infrastructure in the context of the program/course content and objectives.

Meeting Requirements

The Standards of Accreditation require that the school conduct at least one regularly scheduled meeting of the PAC each year. At least three members that represent the employment community and/or practitioners from the program area must be in attendance in order for the meeting to be considered a Program Advisory Committee meeting. If the Program Advisory Committee meeting is not held at the physical campus of the school, then the school must provide the committee with a sufficiently detailed description and virtual tour of the equipment and facilities representing current conditions at the school. The Standards of Accreditation permit multiple affiliated schools to use a single PAC to review the same established curricula of a program area and student achievement outcomes across the system of schools; the review of a school's learning resources, facilities, and equipment must be fulfilled for each individual campus. For example, a school may use a non-local Program Advisory Committee to review the program curriculum offered across a system of affiliated schools and use a local Program Advisory Committee for the campus-level review of the school's learning resources, facilities, equipment, and outcomes.

Review and Comment

The standards require that Program Advisory Committee reviews and comments in the following areas:

- The established curriculum of the program and comment as to the appropriateness and adequacy of the program objectives, program length, curriculum content (including academic general education or applied general education as appropriate), learning resources, and the adequacy of facilities and equipment.
- Student graduation, graduate employment, and where required, state licensing examination outcomes of each program.
- For any new program, the appropriateness of curriculum objectives, program length, and curriculum content of all new programs prior to submission for Commission approval.

The committee may discuss additional items; however, every PAC meeting must provide opportunities for thorough review and comment by the members on these key areas.

Meeting Minutes

To document the review and comment by the Program Advisory Committee, the *Standards of Accreditation* require that written and detailed minutes of each meeting are maintained and include:

1. A description of all members in attendance (i.e., titles and affiliations);
2. The date, time, and location of the meeting; and
3. A comprehensive and clear description of the review of and commentary made by the school representatives and the PAC members.

Taking good meeting minutes is essential for a number of reasons. The minutes include a list of the members in attendance, to demonstrate that the meeting fulfilled the participation requirements. The minutes also provide documentation of what was discussed to demonstrate that the review and comment included all the items required by the standards. Accrediting standards require that the school provides evidence that it gives consideration to Program Advisory Committee input. Evidence in this regard can take many forms, one such being the disclosure of the school's consideration recorded in Program Advisory Committee meeting minutes, whereby a school describes whether recommendations were implemented or not and explains the school's decisions.

A good set of minutes will clearly show that these elements of the standards were accomplished. More importantly, meeting minutes serve as the record of the school's ongoing program evaluation and improvement. Due to the importance of meeting minutes, do not delegate the task of taking minutes to a staff member who has no contextual knowledge of the conversation that will be taking place at the meeting. Minutes will be more effectively taken and serve a more effective purpose when a program leader (e.g., the head of the department, or a lead faculty member) records the conversation ensuring that the proper background, context, and level of specificity are included in the minutes.

At a minimum, the minutes from any PAC meeting, whether face to face, or via telecommunications, must demonstrate a review and commentary of all required areas, and must show an exchange of ideas and perspectives. Providing a survey to PAC members and considering the responses provided, or engaging in individual conversations does not demonstrate review and comment by the group.

Next Level Considerations

Policies and Procedures

Create a mission statement and committee description that provides a framework for the PAC and outlines the process for the PAC to establish its focus, roles, requirements, and procedures. Consider the following areas for inclusion in the school's policies and procedures for PAC:

- Mission or purpose of the PAC;
- General expectation of outcomes;
- Membership qualifications, recruitment, selection process, number of members, term length and limit;
- Member roles and responsibilities;
- A Code of Conduct which outlines the expectations for PAC members;
- Officer roles and election procedures;
- Meeting frequency and duration;
- Attendance and participation requirements;
- Meeting procedures including agenda and minutes recording /distribution and the use of parliamentary procedure;
- Guidelines for interaction with school personnel and students;
- Formats and requirements for reports and communications;
- Requirements of accreditation standards; and
- School support for budget, communications, and meeting set-up.

Budgeting

The benefits of a PAC are evident; however, it is important to make sure there are sufficient resources through the development of a budget. The first step is to develop your goals and objectives for the PAC over the next year, creating a budget to support those activities, including ongoing recruitment of new PAC members. Having an established budget will contribute to a highly effective committee that is able to accomplish the goals of improving the institution and enhancing program offerings.

The financial outlay for the PAC includes items such as any cost of meeting space or investment in the technology to conduct virtual meetings, providing meeting refreshments, paying stipends if the school chooses, and the cost of distributing minutes, orientation packets, and other communication. Some institutions pay for service awards, such as providing a Certificate of Appreciation or Certificate of Dedicated Service in order to recognize the significant contributions that a PAC member has made. Institutions might also consider 'cost' of employee participation in PAC meetings, such as the extra time/pay required to fulfill those responsibilities.

Identifying/Recruiting New Members

Employers, industry representatives, and practitioners comprise the majority of a successful Program Advisory Committee. Seek out representatives with expertise, experience, and interest who understand how the education and training relate to the occupational field and can communicate the desired qualifications. All members must be able to work collaboratively with others in order to complete the established PAC goals. Non-employer representatives might include retired professionals, representatives from local community organizations, representatives from other educational institutions, or graduates who now have professional experience.

In addition to the PAC members, the institution should identify faculty and staff members to support the committee, talk about program specific objectives and activities, as well as outline admissions trends and other institutional activities and initiatives. Staff can offer input, answer questions, and help to facilitate communications such as meeting logistics and the distribution of minutes and agendas.

What are the particular desirable characteristics of a PAC member? No single ideal exists for a perfect PAC member, but certain qualities aid in the functioning and productivity of the PAC. Maintaining a committee with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints that will ensure a well-rounded perspective is brought to the table:

Good communicator:
Clearly and assertively gets point across and listens and considers others' input; adequate writing skills
Knowledgeable:
Understands the skills and knowledge required in the profession and can connect that with the course and the program of study;
Committed:
Consistently attends meetings, is prepared, provides meaningful review and thoughtful comments
Reliable:
Completes assigned tasks on time;
Respected:
Holds a good professional reputation in the applicable field and/or is associated with a reputable employer.

Ask for recommendations from staff, faculty, graduates, employers, and local business partners for qualified, interested professionals that exhibit these qualities. It may be helpful to create a job description for the PAC, which explains the responsibilities and duties, and includes a list of the qualities that the institution is seeking in an ideal candidate. Interview committee candidates and choose carefully.

To provide effective leadership of the PAC, consider appointing a chairperson from among the PAC membership to direct the work of the committee. It is helpful if that individual has qualities related to managing groups. First, the leader must be able to establish and follow an agenda. Staying on course is not always easy but it is essential to accomplishing the goals of the meeting and of the group. In addition, the leader will need excellent facilitation skills in order to solicit input from each member and recognize differing opinions. Problem solving and group decision-making skills are also essential.

When selecting PAC members, identify several people who can step into a leadership role at the appropriate time. Consider implementing term limits for both PAC members and the PAC Chairperson in order to ensure a timely change in leadership and membership which can help facilitate bringing in new perspectives.

Now that we have identified some of the desired qualities of a PAC member, the next step is determining where to find them, and to discuss how to persuade these working professionals to serve on your committee.

Institutions should identify a specified number of committee seats to fill each term in order to ensure that the size of the committee remains manageable. If an institution finds more available candidates than needed, keep a file and follow up regularly in order to remain connected with these potential PAC members.

It is important to keep in mind that serving on your PAC represents a commitment of time and can be perceived as "extra work." Potential PAC members need to know the advantages of taking on more work. Therefore, be prepared to communicate with potential members the benefits they will experience by engaging in your program evaluation process.

Resources for finding PAC members:

- Employers in the community;
- Professional organizations;
- Alumni information;
- Trade representatives and trade associations;
- Union representatives;
- Retired trade professionals;
- Recommendations by current or former PAC members; and
- Other individuals in the community who can provide meaningful input for the school.



Answer the following questions that may arise as a PAC member candidate considers membership:

How does this help me/my organization?

What is the level of my involvement?

What is my time commitment?

Will it improve the institution?

Do I believe in it?

Emphasize the purpose of the PAC and the role members have in contributing to the quality of graduates entering the field. Provide a thorough description of the duties and responsibilities of the position, perhaps including a written job description. Be specific about the time commitment based on the person's potential role and information from past committee members. It is critical to be specific about the time commitment, obligations, and expectations so that a potential PAC member understands the breadth of their involvement. In order to highlight the value of participating as a member of the PAC, and given that accrediting standards require institutions to give consideration to PAC feedback, institutions can show how they have incorporated previous PAC feedback as a sign of the school administration's commitment to partnering with the PAC in order to improve the institution.



Other benefits that may be important to consider are more specific to the individual, such as:

	Professional recognition and respect Meeting their employer's expectations for professional development Personal achievement
	Resume builder Networking opportunities Learning and development through working with new topics and people
	Pride for being part of the institution's success.

There may also be other incentives for potential PAC members, such as providing complimentary access to the institution's facilities, classrooms, or offices for corporate events, or providing an opportunity for PAC members to audit certain classes as part of their own professional development. Institutions have also offered to cover all travel expenses incurred by PAC members attending meetings, such as mileage and meals, and some have even offered nominal stipends as a way to recognize the significant commitment made by PAC members. In any regard, discussing the opportunities for these and other benefits can help an institution to recruit qualified, interested PAC members.

The institution's leaders should also expand the PAC membership beyond the minimum requirements outlined in the *Standards of Accreditation*. Ensuring strong attendance at a regularly scheduled PAC meeting can be a tremendous challenge given that PAC members, particularly practitioners and those from industry, often have significant job responsibilities that may interfere with their ability to engage in PAC meetings on a regular basis. Keep in mind that at least three members from the employment community and/or practitioners from the program area must be in attendance at all PAC meetings in order to demonstrate compliance with accrediting standards. By expanding the membership of the PAC, an institution can have a greater chance of success in terms of meeting the requirements for member participation. Another way to ensure strong attendance is to be flexible with the meeting dates and to engage the PAC members in the scheduling process months in advance of the actual meeting.

The *Standards of Accreditation* do state that a PAC should be "diverse" and include representatives from the employment community, practitioners, and others from the field of education. Consider a guidance counselor, teacher, or administrator from your local high school as a means to show how well your school takes care of and prepares students for success in the workplace. Consider a local community librarian to assist in the review of your own learning resource system. Consider a representative of your local Chamber of Commerce as means to show how your school contributes to the local economy and workforce development. The point here being that your PAC can and should be used in dynamic ways to help the school and its programs develop and improve.

PAC Leadership

Schools may decide to assign roles to certain PAC members to help the PAC function more effectively, such as:

Chairperson or Team Leader: schedule and arrange meetings; create agenda; manage meetings; follow up on assigned tasks

Secretary: approve minutes of meetings and make sure that minutes, agendas, and other publications of the PAC are distributed to members in a timely fashion

In addition, it may be helpful to assign school staff to specific roles in assisting the committee, such as:

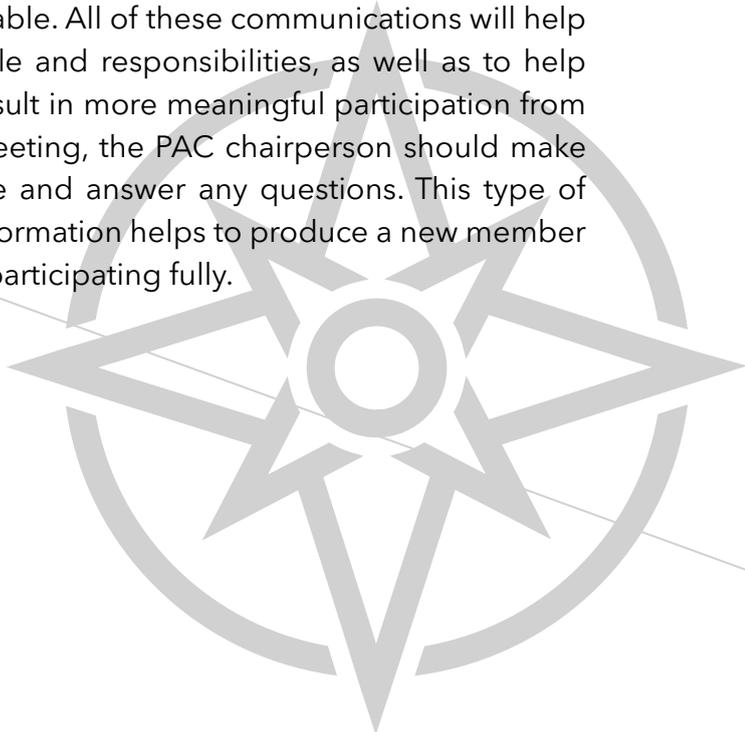
Faculty Representative: provide input and information to assist the PAC; make requests for assistance to the PAC from the program staff;

Administration Representative: give input and information to assist the PAC; apply influence in recruiting new members to the PAC; provide accessibility to the program, school, and personnel when needed; monitor PAC functioning; and

Support Personnel: may assume actual word processing, mailing, and other support duties under the direction of the PAC.

Onboarding New Members

New members bring fresh perspective to an institution's PAC. In order to maximize their input, create new member orientation materials which provide information not only about the institution and the programs offered, but also copies of pertinent ACCSC standards, PAC policies and procedures, a volunteer job description for PAC members, a document with brief member biographies and contact list, and a document highlighting the group's purpose, current goals, and summary of accomplishments. The institution should create a welcome letter from the program leader and PAC chairperson, and send the most recent meeting minutes, the logistical information for the next meeting, and an agenda if it is available. All of these communications will help a new PAC member to understand their role and responsibilities, as well as to help minimize the ramp-up time which should result in more meaningful participation from the start. Prior to the new members' first meeting, the PAC chairperson should make contact to welcome them to the committee and answer any questions. This type of personal contact along with the packet of information helps to produce a new member who feels knowledgeable and comfortable participating fully.



Communication

PAC operation will have several built-in forms of member communication, including agendas, minutes, meetings, and new member orientation materials (discussed in the next section). If your PAC meets only once per year, this creates a challenge in maintaining communication between the institution and the PAC. One way to overcome these communication gaps between meetings is to make a sustained effort to keep PAC members updated on school news and events. This can be accomplished by sending copies of the school's newsletter or regular updates to the members, sending copies of any official public documents, such as the institution's annual report, particularly if this report shows progress on initiatives driven by PAC feedback. Consider inviting PAC members to participate in events such as graduation, or a career day, which will deepen the connection between the institution and the PAC member. Include PAC members in the planning of community activities, such as food drives, clothing drives, or other local community service initiatives. Keep PAC members informed of staffing or organizational changes. Regular communications will reinforce that PAC members play an important role in the day-to-day operation of the institution.

Teambuilding

The highest performing PACs work together as a team; and a lack of cohesiveness can lead to less meaningful results and unmet goals. Teambuilding facilitates the production of high-quality work in an efficient and effective manner that best reflects the purpose and intent of the PAC.



Here are a few ideas to promote a team environment:

Ask members to submit brief biographical information and photos to distribute to all members via mailing or a website.

Provide networking opportunities for members as part of any scheduled activity. This will help PAC members to gain a better understanding of each committee members' backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Provide member orientation and updates so that everyone understands and can contribute to PAC discussions.

Model appropriate speaking and listening skills during meetings.

Introduce techniques and provide a framework for the group discussions to ensure that all members have the opportunity to participate in a meaningful fashion.

Use decision-making tools that promote consensus in the group.

Address any obstacles to teambuilding privately with those involved.

Planning and Meeting Management

The success of your PAC depends, to a great extent, on the success of the meetings. Although pre-meeting and post-meeting communications are important, the bulk of the committee's meaningful work occurs during the meetings. Careful planning and meeting management can make the difference between a committee which contributes significantly to the success of the institution and one which simply meets and reviews topics. Planning and running effective meetings take skill and tact.

Planning PAC meetings involves choosing a time, place, and atmosphere that suits the group and is within the established budget. Generally, meeting planning and the establishment of the agenda would be the responsibility of the PAC chairperson; however, the institution may want to serve as the guiding force in scheduling future meetings. Regardless of the location, the institution should make a concerted effort to confirm the meeting place and time with PAC members well in advance of the meeting date. The institution should arrange for any handouts to be prepared and distributed in advance of the meeting to provide an opportunity for PAC members to reflect on the information which will lead to a more detailed and meaningful conversation as the meeting begins.

A comprehensive **agenda** is often a leader's most effective tool for accomplishing the goals of the meeting in an effective and efficient manner. For a PAC meeting, a typical agenda will be driven by the requirements in the accrediting standards, as well as by the PAC members and institutional leaders. A PAC meeting agenda might read as:

Calling the meeting to order
Introduction of guests and new committee members
Approval of minutes from the previous meeting
Special presentations, if any
Review, comment, and evaluation of: The established curriculum, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Program objectives;• Program length;• Curriculum content;• Learning resources; and• Adequacy of facilities and equipment And student achievement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student graduation rates;• Graduate employment rates; and• Where required, state licensing examination outcomes objectives
Old or unfinished business including subcommittee reports
New business
Information for the next meeting, including tentative meeting dates and locations
Adjournment

The agenda does not usually contain time constraints on discussions, but the PAC chairperson should make notes as to how long each discussion should last to keep the total meeting time as established. Additionally, the institution should provide a tentative agenda to PAC members well in advance of the meeting and should provide an opportunity for PAC members to add agenda items for consideration by the group. By providing this opportunity, the institution will have a better opportunity for strong member participation as these agenda items were identified by PAC members, and not just the institution representatives, as important areas of discussion.

Meeting management requires skill in soliciting input from all members, managing conflicts that arise, and applying group decision-making processes. These actions take place in the framework of the agenda. The PAC Chairperson should make a determined effort to adhere to the established agenda and should prepare strategies, in advance, for bringing meetings back on course when members have strayed from the established agenda. The goal is to engage each participating member with the discussions and to ensure that all members are treated fairly and equally during the meeting.

Encouraging Participation Communication skills of a strong leader encourages input from all members. When this fails, the leader might try brainstorming and utilize techniques that force each member to take a turn. If the leader perceives a reluctance of a member to state a point of view, a technique that involves reflection writing might facilitate a better response. Small group discussions might bring out a quieter member, and breaking complex issues down into individual components may help the group members understand and respond.

Conflict Management Ask the parties to identify their goals for the issue or what they want to achieve in the discussion. Start by finding shared goals, purposes, strategies, and any points in common. Let each party have uninterrupted, but limited, time to give their input. Then work at the best ways to achieve the shared goals and diminish the differences. By beginning with points of agreement, members in conflict become more willing to consider other approaches.

Current Curriculum and SWOT Analysis

Identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) to the current curriculum may be helpful in conducting a thorough program evaluation. The SWOT analysis was originally employed by the General Electric Growth Council in the 1980's because the process concentrates on the most impactful issues. This may be a useful tool in focusing and deepening the PAC's discussion. Also, the SWOT analysis is useful when a very limited amount of time is available to address a complex strategic situation. SWOT is best understood with an example. In this case, we will refer to a fictitious New Image College of Technology and their Medical Assistant program:

Strengths:	Weaknesses:	Opportunities:
<p>Over the past three years, 93% of graduates from the New Image College of Technology's Medical Assistant program have successfully gained employment in the field within 3 months of graduation. The Medical Assistant program uses up-to-date equipment that reflects current occupational practice which prepares students for employment.</p>	<p>There are not enough qualified faculty members to adequately provide one-on-one instruction for students in the labs.</p>	<p>The Medical Assistant program should explore opportunities to identify new techniques utilized in the career field. The Medical Assistant program should explore expanding the internship program to ensure more guided teaching in a work environment. Graduate employment rates have decreased in the previous two quarters. Loss of two teachers in the Medical Assistant program in the last year.</p>

The institution affords the PAC with an opportunity to review, evaluate, and revise the SWOT analysis. The results of the SWOT analysis and PAC review equip program faculty and school administration to make well-informed decisions about the programs.

Vocational Performance

The overall goal of each ACCSC accredited institution is successful student graduation and graduate employment in the career field for which training was provided. During each PAC meeting, there should be a comprehensive evaluation and discussion about the rates of student graduation, and the rates of graduate employment, including any licensure exam results, when applicable. By providing the applicable statistics to the PAC prior to each meeting, members will be able to review and be prepared to comment on the trends shown in the data and make recommendations for areas needing improvement.

Questions to facilitate discussion include:

- Do graduates demonstrate the foundational skills needed to perform at an exceptional level in their field of study?
- Do graduates demonstrate the workplace competencies needed to perform at an exceptional level in their field of study?
- Do graduates demonstrate the technical competencies needed to perform at an exceptional level in their field of study?

Workforce Skills

PACs serve as an institution's formal link to industry standards and are a formalization of the school's commitment to produce graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes demanded by the employment community served. The question guiding the PAC's evaluation of an institution's program offerings is whether or not the training offered provides potential employers with the quality employees they need. If so, PACs will become the institution's greatest ally in a competitive market.

The assessment of workforce readiness includes the following:

- Knowledge of the philosophy, traditions, and practices of their industry;
- Skills needed to perform the duties and tasks;
- Workplace skills that help them to effectively communicate and work collaboratively with other employees; and
- Problem-solving skills that will help them overcome challenges in the workplace and will assist their employers to be leaders in their industry.

The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) lists five workplace competencies that every employer expects from their employees:

Resources:

Identifies, organizes, plans and allocates resources, (e.g., time, money, materials & facilities, human resources);

Interpersonal:

Works with others (member of a team, teaches others, serves as a client/customer, exercises leadership skills, negotiates, works with diversity);

Information:

Acquires and uses information (acquires, interprets, organizes, maintains, evaluates, communicates information);

Systems:

Understands complex inter-relationships (understands systems, monitors and corrects performance, improves or designs systems); and

Technology:

Works with a variety of technologies (selects, applies, maintains, troubleshoots).

These skills identified in the SCANS report should be integrated in each program regardless of the career area. The PAC is a great resource to understand where these skills integrate into the daily workplace and can guide the institution on how to integrate these skills into the curriculum.

New Programs

Below are key questions that will help the PAC assist the institution in evaluating whether the school has sufficient capacity to successfully launch a new program:

	How does this program fit within the career field?
	Are resources currently available to support this program? If not, can employers assist in a plan for obtaining these resources prior to the first student entering the program?
	What are the admission standards for students entering this program?
	What are the student learning outcomes for this program?
	What is the first date that students are expected to graduate from this program?
	What are the employment opportunities for program graduates?
	Are current faculty qualified to teach this program?
	Are current classrooms and labs adequate for the school to offer this program?
	Are current facilities/space capable of supporting this program?
	Are the educational institution's library and/or learning resource center capable of supporting this program?
	What is the projected amount of the educational institution's overall resources invested in this program, and are these projections adequate?
	Are operational, management, and physical resources available for this additional program?
	Are there any special challenges to offering this program?
	Will current faculty and staff have the time to develop the new program?
	Will current staff have the time to support the new program?
	Is there a commitment of support from PACs, administration, faculty, and staff for the new program?

Expanded Opportunities

Recognizing and Rewarding the PAC

As part of the efforts to maximize the effectiveness of the PAC, one area that does not often get enough attention is how the institution recognizes and rewards the dedication of the PAC members. Given that one of the goals for any institution is to develop and maintain strong relationships with its PAC, an effort should be made to pay tribute to those individuals that have dedicated their time and effort to helping the institution succeed. Some ideas for recognizing PAC members include:



- Provide a Certificate of Appreciation/Certificate of Dedicated Service to PAC members upon the completion of their term;
- Consider implementing a PAC “Wall of Fame” at the institution that includes a photo of each participating member and identifies the organization they represent;
- Include the roster of all PAC members, with photos and organization information in the school catalog;
- Take an advertisement out in the local paper thanking the PAC members and the company they represent for their service;
- Invite the PAC members to give a guest lecture or to speak at special events, such as graduation or career days;
- Provide institutional gifts, such as sweatshirts, hats, or other memorabilia that displays the institution’s name and brand;
- Provide an opportunity for PAC members to have complimentary access to the facilities for corporate meetings and events; and
- Provide an opportunity for PAC members to audit classes as part of their own professional development.

These measures will reinforce the relationship that the institution has with its PAC is one to be celebrated.

Retaining and Replacing Members

Facilitating an efficient and effective PAC meeting is the best way to keep PAC members engaged. Members who believe they can accomplish goals and make a difference in the program are more motivated than those who feel as if they are just filling a seat. Positive group dynamics facilitated by the tone that the PAC chairperson sets, also enhance the PAC member experience. Focus on creating a balance between engaging the members without overwhelming them with extra responsibilities. The PAC chairperson and institution leaders should make PAC members feel as if they are making a valuable contribution to the institution.

Additionally, an institution should consider establishing a policy regarding term limits for PAC members, which can result in the generation of more energy and new ideas from new members with fresh perspectives. Typical term limits for general members might be 2-3 years, while PAC officers might hold positions for up to two years. The institution can also consider adopting policies which permit a former PAC member to come back to the committee after a designated period of time away. In situations where the institution has enough faculty support, the institution should also consider rotating the responsibility of being the designated PAC liaison every 2-3 years.

Inevitably, every PAC will experience the loss of a member. By being proactive, an institution can avoid losing PAC members who do not feel that they are an integral part of the group or feel that they are not providing meaningful contributions to the PAC. If the PAC chairperson suspects that a member is not satisfied with the level of their participation, a conversation should occur in order to understand the issue and to determine what changes need to be made. Occasionally, the institution might recruit a PAC member who does not fit with the group. In these situations, the PAC chairperson might notice more conflict with the members than usual, a noticeable lack of participation, or a negative attitude toward the other members of the PAC. At this point, the PAC chairperson should discuss the perceived challenges with this person and develop a strategy to work through the issues.

When a PAC member's term expires, or if a PAC member resigns from the committee, the institution should replace PAC members using the recommendations in the Recruiting New Members section of this document. To keep the right mix of employer and non-employer representatives on the PAC, recruit a member from the same category. In certain situations, employers may want to replace PAC members with another individual employed at the same company to maintain a presence on the PAC; this would be acceptable as the institution's needs will continue to be met.

Evaluating Committee Success

Is your PAC providing meaningful external input into the school's program evaluation process?



Methods to evaluate committee success could include:

- Collecting and analyzing records and meeting minutes;
- Benchmarking processes and results against similar programs;
- Interviewing PAC members face-to-face about their perception and feelings;
- Reviewing policies and procedures; and
- Observing PAC meetings.

By analyzing meeting minutes and the school's consideration of PAC input, evaluate if the recommendations put forth by the PAC were sound, accurate, and useful.



Did the institution implement any new initiatives or make any program improvements based on PAC recommendations?

What were the results?

Did the PAC and the program meet its established goals?

If no, why not?

Through these activities, the institution's leaders should be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the committee. These results will undoubtedly vary over time, so institutions should conduct this evaluation as part of their regularly planned self-evaluation process and should work to improve the weaknesses and tout the successes resulting from the committee efforts to stakeholders.

Making Recommended Improvements

Did the PAC evaluation results show the need for improvement? Now it is the program representative's turn to communicate this to the staff and develop a plan of action. Changes can be made to an established policy or procedure or consider recruiting new members on the PAC in order to further diversify the membership.

The institution should also consider revisiting the mission or established purpose of the group. Overall, the institution should make a concerted effort towards developing goals and objectives for the PAC on an annual basis and document the PAC's efforts in reaching these established goals and objectives. If the PAC falls short of meeting these goals and objectives, the institution should develop a corrective action plan in order to maximize the effectiveness of the PAC on a go-forward basis.

PAC and Institutional Assessment and Improvement

Consider the input from any advisory committee, including the PAC, as part of the institutional assessment and improvement process. Just as you would gather and analyze information internally, analyze the comments of the PAC to identify the program's needs for improvement. The PAC's comments are just one component of the assessment of the effectiveness and appropriateness of any program. Developing and implementing improvement activities based on the PAC input becomes the road to a better program.

The most important recipients of the PAC's findings are those who can effectuate change: program faculty and staff. Provide your staff with a detailed report and a summary highlighting program strengths and areas requiring change. Meet with staff and faculty on a regular basis to create awareness and to begin the improvement process. When all the information has been gathered and analyzed, improvement activities can be designed and implemented. When the PAC provides negative feedback on several issues or on a complex issue, prioritize the list of needs by identifying those areas that have the greatest impact on the institution, as well as any quick fixes or high visibility areas, and place them at the top of the action list.

Assign action items to appropriate program personnel and hold the program faculty and staff responsible for implementing the action items and evaluating the impact of the changes. Report your progress on these initiatives to the PAC regularly and disseminate information to your other stakeholders as needed. Keep in mind that accrediting standards require the institution to provide evidence that it gives consideration to PAC feedback. Accordingly, record all of your assessment and improvement activities in order to demonstrate the role that the PAC has in shaping the programs. The specific actions or changes to be implemented based on PAC findings should target continuous improvement in a manner similar to the accreditation processes, and overall, the endeavors of the PAC should be designed to improve an institution's programs as part of an institution's assessment and improvement efforts. An effective PAC will be an invaluable resource in this regard and will help the institution to continue to meet the needs of students, graduates, and employers in a sustained fashion.