

# Accreditation for University-Based Nonprofit and Philanthropy Programs:

## Business Plan

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## Accreditation Rationale

This business plan, authored by a group of Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) members, provides a potential model for financing and implementation of a nonprofit/ philanthropy-first accreditation process.

**A nonprofit/philanthropy-first curriculum encompasses nonprofit/NGO studies and management, social entrepreneurship, social-purpose organizations leadership, and philanthropy studies and management, with the express condition that the curriculum places the nonprofit/civil sector at the center of the curricular perspective.**

Several reasons motivate the groundswell of interest in establishing an accreditation body for our field. Existing accrediting systems in related fields are appropriate for those fields (notably including business, public administration, and social work). Many nonprofit programs have grown within those curricular homes, and find that those fields, while receptive to growth in numbers of students seeking nonprofit careers, still base their curriculum on how the nonprofit sector relates to their home sector. For example, nonprofit organizations are seen as service vendors for government agencies – which is a very narrow perspective vis-à-vis the nonprofit/philanthropy sector.

Given the only partial applicability of curriculum designed for other fields for students entering or advancing careers in the nonprofit sector, it may be difficult for both nonprofit/philanthropy faculty to advance their nonprofit research agendas within their institutions, and for nonprofit/philanthropy programs to develop over time to meet the particular needs of the sector. In addition, prospective students may not be able to judge the adequacy of resources in university programs that have “and nonprofit” in their degree title.

The value to existing and robust nonprofit/philanthropy university degree programs is that accreditation serves as a signal to prospective students and prospective faculty that a university has a well-developed

program. Thus, the accredited programs may seek to differentiate themselves from competing programs that are lacking enough resources to offer degrees in the field.

The value to emerging nonprofit/philanthropy university programs is that accreditation provides a brighter line than just guidelines in constructing a curriculum that addresses the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. These developing programs may study the accreditation requirements (even without taking part in accreditation review) to determine where they lack resources and could invest more in their own program to meet the needs of prospective nonprofit/philanthropy students.

### Structural Components of a “Stage 1” Accreditation Model

This paper provides prospective university nonprofit programs, members of NACC, and the larger nonprofit/philanthropy community with the initial model for accrediting nonprofit and philanthropy educational programs in a way that helps elevate the field. We believe that the process and structure outlined in this business plan builds directly from the meetings, summits and conversations about accreditation that have taken place over the past two years, as described in the Position Paper (Hale and Irvin, 2017).

To a large extent this proposal is framed by a number of themes that have been consistent since accreditation discussions began in the summer of 2015. The frameworks called for implementing a NACC accreditation process that is focused specifically on curriculum review and program inputs, cost-effective, and flexible enough to accommodate different academic interpretations of our field. The Stage 1 accreditation process would be a first step, and would only later move towards an outcomes-based analysis. An eventual goal is recognition from and membership in the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The arguments and rationale for the Stage 1 structure of the NACC accreditation process were articulated in the Position Paper. The key features of this accreditation model are;

- The NACC accreditation will initially focus its accreditation efforts on **stand-alone nonprofit masters and bachelors programs**. A “stand-alone” program refers to a full degree program with a primary focus on the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. For example, Master of Nonprofit Management; M.A. in Philanthropic Studies, Bachelor of Nonprofit Administration, etc. A stand-alone degree program may be co-located in an academic unit with other degree programs (MPA, MBA, etc.), but our accreditation will focus only on the nonprofit degree program. NACC will not initially accredit other degree programs with a concentration or specialization in nonprofit or philanthropic studies, nor will it initially accredit certificates or non-degree/noncredit programs.
- The NACC accreditation process will center on **matching the curriculum** taught to students in a specific program with identified best practices in nonprofit and philanthropy pedagogy and curriculum development. This process will largely consist of a process of **curriculum mapping** between the programs’ syllabi and the NACC Curriculum Guidelines and Indicators of Quality.
- The NACC accreditation will provide a voluntary web-based **open space for sharing** innovative and dynamic course development and design practices.

- The NACC accreditation will help programs ensure that they have an **appropriate mix of professional and academic faculty** that is capable of teaching the curriculum. This will require programs to provide proof of the credentials of the teaching staff.
- The NACC accreditation will help programs ensure that they offer the required and elective courses students need to graduate in a timely manner.
- The NACC accreditation process will be **largely conducted electronically** and as a result not require a lengthy self-study report and site visit. This will **lower the costs and time burden** of a NACC accreditation both to NACC and prospective organizations.
- The NACC accreditation process, via review of syllabi, faculty credentials, and scheduling of required and elective courses, **will enable review of truth-in-advertising and adequacy of the curriculum**. That is, if a university claims to have a degree program with “nonprofit” or “philanthropy” in the title, mission, and recruiting materials, they must have the curriculum, scheduled courses, and expertise to fulfill those claims.
- The NACC accreditation Stage 1 will last 6 years. In the sixth year, prior to universities cycling through again, NACC will re-evaluate to determine whether to continue accrediting programs and if so, how to modify and improve the process.

## Stage 2 and Beyond

While it will be important to first go through several years of the Stage 1 process, we could consider for the future several ways to advance the accreditation process.

- A less expensive version of accreditation for universities without standalone degrees. These would include certificates, specializations, concentrations, and non-credit programs.
- Coordination with existing accrediting agencies to reduce duplicative effort and ensure complementary formatting of information reporting (i.e. outcomes assessment and reporting that satisfies multiple accreditor requirements).
- Interviewing current students, faculty, and administrators via Skype.
- Changing the optional outcomes reporting to required outcomes reporting, with guidance on focus and formatting.
- Developmental consulting services for emergent programs.
- Additional fundamental improvements to satisfy recognition requirements for the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (see page 8).

## Assumptions

**Although there may be an initial rush of applicants, we may settle on about 7 programs (masters or bachelors) undergoing accreditation** (initial or re-accreditation) annually. As time goes on, we may add certificates, specializations, concentrations, minors, and non-degree programs to the accreditation mix. This is a small operation, at least initially. Among NACC members, about 30 have masters programs and 8 have bachelors programs focusing specifically on nonprofit/philanthropy studies. The number of universities undergoing accreditation each year is not trivial: If substantially more universities participate, the tasks associated with accreditation will increase, labor expenses will increase, and fee revenue will increase – in other words, the scale of the operation will be bigger than modeled here. If fewer than 7 universities participate each year, on the other hand, the process is not sustainable in the long run.

The Budget (see Appendix) reflects an anticipated 10 universities undergoing accreditation in the first year. With more than ten under accreditation review in the first year, we risk having inadequate resources. Therefore, if more than 10 universities apply, we will select 10 by lottery and have a waiting list as well. Universities that were not chosen by lottery may still claim into perpetuity that they were part of the initial accreditation cohort, even though their accreditation review may be delayed until the second year. We will conduct a poll of NACC members in mid-July 2017 to determine the likelihood of obtaining a full cohort of universities undergoing accreditation in 2018.

We will also assume a **6-year accreditation cycle**. A 7-year accreditation cycle is common in allied academic fields, but the nonprofit/philanthropy field is undergoing rapid change, so a shorter cycle is preferred. The 6-year cycle starts the following fall after the accreditation decision, so if a program is approved for accreditation in December 2018, accredited status is in effect immediately for the 2018-19 academic year. A school seeking re-accreditation will undergo re-accreditation in the 6<sup>th</sup> year (fall of 2023), and if granted re-accreditation, will be re-accredited for another 6 years on September 1, 2024.

## Site Visit Considerations

The lack of a site visit for the accreditation process results in a pricing structure that is about one-third of typical accreditation costs that universities bear. If we were to include a site visit, the accreditor would have to recruit and train site visitors, schedule site visitors' visits (in a fair distribution of site visit team members to each type of campus), and process the site visit team reports. Likewise, universities would have to pay for the site visitors' airfare, meals and accommodation, and devote time to arranging the various meetings during the site visit. It is not just prohibitive costs that discourage a site visit accreditation process, however. As more programs shift to online formats for masters degrees, the site visit becomes less relevant and more evaluation can occur digitally.

Despite the burdens of site visit administration, site visits allow an irreplaceable look at a universities' operations, as the visitors can interact with upper level administrators (important for on-campus leverage of resources), hear directly from students and alumni, and view the quality of the physical facilities devoted to the program. For these reasons, an accreditation process without an on-campus site visit will always be second best.

In later years, we might explore an optional “with site visit” accreditation process with a higher pricing structure for universities that desire a site visit review. We will watch developments from the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) regarding site visit requirements. Site visits are a mainstay feature of accreditors that are recognized by CHEA, yet may be phased out as more graduate programs evolve away from bricks and mortar campuses.

### **Proposed Staffing and Responsibilities**

**Launch Director.** The budget incorporates a \$10,000 grant for a person to plan and implement the first year of operation, and \$5000 annually for the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years. This person should be familiar with accreditation processes and actively engaged in our field as a faculty member, faculty emeritus, or administrator of a university nonprofit program. The NACC Board of Directors, in consultation with the NACC membership, hires the Launch Director.

#### **The Launch Director:**

1. sets up a bookkeeping/billing system with a fiscal agent
2. writes a manual for the Accreditation Coordinator (see below)
3. writes a manual for the External Review Board members
4. recruits and selects External Review Board members, in consultation with NACC membership
5. recruits and selects the Accreditation Coordinator, in consultation with NACC membership
6. Trains both the Accreditation Coordinator and the External Review Board members in year 1. In subsequent years, the Accreditation Coordinator trains the incoming External Review Board members.
7. Selects and/or reviews purchases of supplies, including stationery, certificates, and website development
8. Monitors the process and coordinates with NACC

The **Accreditation Coordinator** is the key administrator of the accreditation system, and is hired and supervised by the Launch Director. Initially this is a part-time position. If the number of universities increases significantly, the position could evolve to full time.

#### **The Accreditation Coordinator (AC):**

1. answers queries throughout the year from universities
2. maintains the informative website
3. announces and solicits accreditation materials annually
4. guides universities through self-study report creation and online submission
5. directs billing to the bookkeeper (fiscal sponsor) and reviews quarterly and annual reports of income, expenses, and net assets carried forward
6. with External Review Board input and oversight, writes a short preliminary review back to each university (about one page, based on a template), asking for additional information if needed
7. collects university responses to the preliminary report and sends the information to the External Review Board
8. receives the External Review Board decisions and communicates them to the universities
9. updates website with accreditation results and materials that inform the profession

- 10. communicates with NACC regularly with progress reports and end-of-year analysis
- 11. assists in training of new External Review Board members.

The **External Review Board** (ERB) is composed of five individuals; two working professionals in the nonprofit or philanthropic sector (Experts in Residence)<sup>1</sup> and three faculty members from separate universities. The Launch Director recruits for candidates and the ERB members are selected by a NACC membership vote.

Under no circumstances should an ERB member have ties to a university undergoing accreditation that would imply a conflict of interest. If a conflict of interest arises, the ERB member must recuse himself or herself from evaluating that university.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to construct a completely diverse board, but care should be taken to select members who show diversity of gender, race, the size of the ERB member’s university, their university’s location, and their university’s affiliated programs (business, public policy/administration, etc.).

ERB members review the initial reports from the six to ten universities and approve the AC’s preliminary review (which points out any deficiencies and asks for clarification or more information). ERB members later review the universities’ responses to the AC’s preliminary report, and give their final decision regarding accreditation. ERB members receive a \$100 stipend for their service per university reviewed, which should be reduced or canceled for late participation or lack of participation.

ERB members should have a term limit of three years, rotating off for at least one year before returning to serve. Aside from the launch year, the ERB is responsible for oversight of the AC, which includes hiring and firing decisions and an annual performance review. The ERB may elect a chairperson if desired.

### Timeline of Annual Accreditation Cycle

This timeline is designed to accommodate the anticipated workload of the AC and the ERB during a normal year of operation. We may want to shift the due dates for the reviews and reports to accommodate in-person meetings in conjunction with the annual NACC members’ meeting in the late Fall (or the summer conference).

<b>Jan, Feb, Mar, April</b>	NACC staff members answer the occasional question regarding accreditation. The university ensures that the required information (program requirements, faculty credentials, and course listings) is publicly available on the university’s website.
<b>May, June, July</b>	AC answers queries 5 hours/week. The university fills out the accreditation form and loads the accompanying materials in the online portal.

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<sup>1</sup> Having practitioners on the ERB may satisfy Council for Higher Education Association requirements that the accreditation process include stakeholder input. The Experts in Residence might be recruited by asking university applicants for the names of 5 local practitioners.

<sup>2</sup> The ERB may have a standby member or members in case a replacement is needed for the recusal.

<b>June 1</b>	University deadline for filing intent to undergo accreditation.
<b>July 1</b>	University self-study report and supporting materials are due.
<b>July</b>	Summer NACC meeting and conference.
<b>July</b>	AC does the following (20 hrs./week during July): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review university's mission</li> <li>2. Review degree program website</li> <li>3. Review degree program's curricular requirements</li> <li>4. Review faculty credentials</li> <li>5. Verify consistent scheduling of courses</li> <li>6. Review syllabi</li> <li>7. Review curriculum mapping</li> <li>8. Summarize findings, noting areas of concern on the preliminary review form (this should be in a template).</li> <li>9. Get approval of the preliminary review from the ERB, then send the preliminary review to each university.</li> </ul>
<b>August 1</b>	Preliminary review is sent to universities with noted areas of concern. The university writes a response to the preliminary findings (clarification, etc.). AC works 20 hours/week.
<b>Sept., Oct., Nov, Dec</b>	AC works 20 hours/week in August and 5 hours/week in Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec.
<b>September 1</b>	Response from universities regarding preliminary review is due.
<b>September 15</b>	Responses sent to ERB members. ERB reviews the responses and issues a final recommendation, with a brief summary of the program's unique features, weaknesses and strengths.
<b>October 15</b>	ERB decisions due to AC.
<b>November 1</b>	Decisions sent by AC to universities. AC writes summary Health of the Field report with ERB input.
<b>November</b>	AC attends NACC meeting in conjunction with the Fall ARNOVA conference.

### **Launch Year Timeline**

May 17, 2017	NACC Board retreat.
June 1, 2017	Send out proposal (process and business plans) to NACC members for comments.
July 1, 2017	Board makes needed changes based on review of comments.
July 15, 2017	Poll member NACC schools to determine how many would undergo accreditation if it were offered (incorporate survey results into business plan). Distribute the final draft

widely.  
 Aug 1, 2017 NACC members at NACC conference in Indianapolis vote.  
 Aug 15, 2017 Additional vote by NACC members not present at Indianapolis NACC Conference.  
 Sept 1, 2017 Announce stop/go decision.

If accreditation is launched,

October-November 2017 Recruit for Launch Director.  
 December 2017 Hire Launch Director  
 January 2018 onward Launch Director hires Accreditation Coordinator and performs tasks listed above on pages 4-5. Accreditation Coordinator performs tasks listed on page 5. The annual cycle of tasks is described on page 6-7 (timeline). NACC membership selects External Review Board members.

### Pricing Structure

Each level of degree (bachelor, master) may pose different challenges for reviewers, so until we have more information on how these differences imply accreditation review workload differences, we will initially start with the same pricing for each degree, regardless of level. If a university undergoes accreditation simultaneously for more than one degree program, a discount of \$800 will reflect the slightly lower costs of time spent communicating with the university about the accreditation process. We have also included a late fee penalty of \$400, to incentivize universities not to slow down the process with tardy submissions. The late fee can apply to both the July 1 submission of their report as well as the September 1 response to the accreditor’s preliminary review. A university may avoid paying a late fee if they opt to postpone their accreditation proceedings until the following year.

<u>Stage One Accreditation</u>	
Masters Degree program	\$2,400
Bachelors Degree program	\$2,400
Discount per additional program	(\$800)
Fee for late submission of preliminary report	\$400

The cost of accreditation described here is less than half of the accreditation cost charged by other accreditors, and also does not include the additional expenses of the site visit.

Using the pricing structures described above, a sample budget is provided in the accompanying Excel file. The budget shows that with the current pricing structure (including a price increase in Year 4), **at least 7 universities (with 8 total programs under evaluation) are necessary to break even**, even with very minimal expenses.

### Meta-accreditation by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)

Any launch of an accreditation system by NACC should bear in mind the best practice structures that CHEA, the accreditor of accreditors, requires. Accreditation by CHEA will be several years in the making,



as is common, and will require many enhancements to the Stage 1 process (see the U.S. Department of Education's report, Accreditation in the United States).<sup>3</sup>

CHEA rules include:

- The accreditor is fiscally separate from the organization serving the member universities. Although an accreditation process could start within NACC, it would eventually need to have a separate entity conducting accreditation.
- The accreditation process must include public input.
- The process for evaluating the accreditation materials and making a decision (and any appeals process) must have clear criteria.
- The accrediting agency must have financial stability.
- The accreditation process must include a site visit or has alternative review processes that CHEA considers to be valid.

The proposed structure outlined above will need considerable development over time before it fulfills CHEA requirements. For example, a review of student learning outcomes would be embryonic at first. We envision a trial phase of several years, where self-reported outcomes measurement leads us to later design more formalized criteria for outcomes reporting.

## Additional Considerations

### Appeals process

Universities whose accreditation was denied may appeal by submitting an updated self-study in the following cycle. If the university receives accreditation in this second attempt, the 6-year accreditation cycle will be a 5-year accreditation cycle (in other words, the year in limbo counts against the 6 year accreditation cycle window).

### Measuring outcomes of the accreditation process itself

Universities that have undergone accreditation should complete a short survey afterwards. The survey should solicit information on how the process could be improved, including timing, information requested, ease of communication with the AC, clarity of the procedure, what influence the accreditation process had on program curriculum or staffing, and how the university is publicizing its accreditation status.

### Health of the Field Report

The Health of the Field Report will provide statistics from each accreditation cohort on enrollment, curricular focus of the programs, and other summary information that is useful to the profession. This report may build later into an annual reporting of data from all currently accredited programs.

### Proposed coordination with membership fee structure

In order to apply for accreditation, universities should be NACC members for at least one year immediately prior to the accreditation review year.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "Accreditation in the United States: Basic Eligibility Requirements." Accessed April 24, 2017. [https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation\\_pg13.html](https://www2.ed.gov/admins/finaid/accred/accreditation_pg13.html)

APPENDIX: Accreditation Financing | Distributed at the NACC Member Meeting, July 31, 2017

	Launch	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
<b>REVENUE</b>					
Fee Income					
Univ 1		MA + BA \$ 4,000	MA + BA \$ 4,000	MA + BA \$ 4,000	MA + BA \$ 4,100
Univ 2		MA + BA \$ 4,000	MA + BA \$ 4,000	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,500
Univ 3		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,500
Univ 4		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,500
Univ 5		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,500
Univ 6		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,500
Univ 7		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400	BA \$ 2,400	BA \$ 2,500
Univ 8		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400		
Univ 9		MA \$ 2,400	MA \$ 2,400		
Univ 10		BA \$ 2,400	BA \$ 2,400		
Late fees		\$ 400	\$ 800	\$ 400	\$ 400
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>		<b>\$ 27,600</b>	<b>\$ 28,000</b>	<b>\$ 18,800</b>	<b>\$ 19,500</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
Fiscal Agent Fee	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000
Technology	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 1,000		
Accred Coordinator Salary	\$ 10,850	\$ 11,393	\$ 11,962	\$ 12,560	\$ 13,188
External Review Board Stipends	\$ 2,500	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 3,500	\$ 3,500
Travel, Supplies and Services	\$ 3,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000	\$ 2,000
Training for Accred. Coordinator	\$ 3,250	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
Launch director	\$ 10,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 5,000	\$ -	\$ -
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$ 34,600</b>	<b>\$ 25,393</b>	<b>\$ 25,962</b>	<b>\$ 19,060</b>	<b>\$ 19,688</b>
<b>SURPLUS (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>\$ (34,600)</b>	<b>\$ 2,208</b>	<b>\$ 2,038</b>	<b>\$ (260)</b>	<b>\$ (188)</b>

**Notes**

The mix of universities is for illustrative purposes.

The Accreditation Coordinator works 310 hours/year at \$35.00/hour, with 5% annual increase in salary and/or hours.

The five External Review Board members are paid a stipend of \$100 per university per year (launch year \$2500 is for training)

Accreditation is \$2400 per program, increasing to \$2500 per program in Year 4