

Quality Initiative Proposal Process

Information for Institutions and Peer Reviewers

The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) expects that institutions are always engaged in quality improvement. The Open Pathway requires an institution to designate one major improvement effort it has undertaken as its **Quality Initiative** for reaffirmation of accreditation. The Quality Initiative should suit the institution's present concerns or aspirations. It takes place between years 5 and 9 of the 10-year Open Pathway Cycle. A Quality Initiative may begin and be completed during this time, or it may continue an initiative already in progress or achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative. The Quality Initiative falls entirely outside the Assurance Process.

HLC encourages institutions to use the Quality Initiative to take risks, innovate, take on a tough challenge, or pursue a yet unproven strategy or hypothesis. Thus failure of an initiative to achieve its goals is acceptable. An institution may learn much from such failure. What is not acceptable is failure of the institution to pursue the initiative with genuine effort. Genuineness of effort, not success of the initiative, constitutes the focus of the Quality Initiative review and serves as its sole point of evaluation.

The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5 and is due no later than August 31 of Year 7.

Designing the Proposal

An institution may design its own Quality Initiative or it may choose from an HLC menu of Quality Initiative topics or HLC-facilitated programs. Sample topics are listed on

the Open Pathway pages of HLC's website, hlcommission.org/open. At present, HLC has two facilitated programs, the Assessment Academy and the Persistence and Completion Academy. Institutions that wish to join an Academy in order to use it as their Quality Initiative should complete an Academy application and not the Quality Initiative Proposal template. Information on HLC's Academies and applications for participation can be found at hlcommission.org/academies.

Quality Initiative Proposal and Its Submission

The institution submits a Quality Initiative Proposal to HLC for approval. For initiatives other than HLC's Academies, the institution completes the proposal using the provided [template](#). Quality Initiative Proposals should be:

- No longer than 4,500 words.
- Submitted electronically in PDF format to pathways@hlcommission.org with a file name that follows this format: QI Proposal No Name University MN. The file name must include the institution's name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.
- Accompanied by the signed submission form.

Quality Initiative Approval

Although HLC staff may advise an institution in the development of its proposal, the final approval of the proposal requires evaluation by a peer review panel. HLC

staff screens the Quality Initiative Proposal, discusses it with the institution only if necessary, and then forwards it for peer review.

- **Peer Review and Approval.** A panel of two peer reviewers evaluates the Quality Initiative Proposal, at distance, based on sufficiency of scope and significance; clarity of purpose; evidence of commitment and capacity; and appropriateness of timeline. (The section below delineates the Quality Initiative review categories.) The panel either approves the proposal with or without minor modifications or, in exceptional circumstances, requests resubmission of the proposal. The panel also provides observations and constructive commentary to assist the institution in beginning or continuing its initiative. There is no penalty or negative action attached to a request for resubmission. The panel completes its review using the provided [template](#).
- **Institution Notification.** At the completion of the review process, HLC sends the panel's review to the institution. The institution is free to begin its Quality Initiative except in the unusual circumstance that the panel requires the institution to resubmit its proposal. Resubmissions are due within 30 days of receipt of the panel's request. The same or a new panel of peer reviewers will evaluate the resubmission.

Review Categories for the Quality Initiative Proposal

The following review categories are effective March 2013.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

- Potential for significant impact on the institution and its academic quality.
- Alignment with the institution's mission and vision.

- Connection with the institution's planning processes.
- Evidence of significance and relevance at this time.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

- Clear purposes and goals reflective of the scope and significance of the initiative.
- Defined milestones and intended goals.
- Clear processes for evaluating progress.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

- Commitment of senior leadership.
- Commitment and involvement of key people and groups.
- Sufficiency of the human, financial, technological and other resources to the plan and timeline.
- Defined plan for integrating the initiative into the ongoing work of the institution and sustaining its results.
- Clear understanding of and capacity to address potential obstacles.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

- Consistency with intended purposes and goals.
- Alignment with the implementation of other institutional priorities.
- Reasonable implementation plan for the time period.

HLC's Quality Initiative Proposal review process will be completed in approximately 8–12 weeks unless resubmission is required. 🌿