



Statement on Commission Peer Reviewers Serving as Independent Consultants or on Mock Teams to Institutions that are Accredited by or Seeking Accreditation with the Commission

Institutions accredited by or seeking accreditation with the Commission occasionally ask Commission peer reviewers to serve as independent consultants. This statement provides guidance to institutions and peer reviewers who engage in such arrangements.

Commission Policy and Restrictions on Peer Reviewers Serving as Independent Consultants

Peer reviewers may accept independent consulting assignments to accredited institutions or those seeking accreditation unless prohibited by Commission policy. Commission policy restricts individuals who serve as peer reviewers for the Commission from accepting for one year independent consulting assignments to institutions that they previously evaluated as part of an official Commission activity or on which they made a decision as part of any official Commission group.

See Commission Policy PEER.A.10.040: Standards of Conduct
Visit policy.ncahlc.org

In these situations, the peer reviewer must wait one year before accepting a consulting assignment. In addition, the peer reviewer will not be assigned by the Commission to review an institution for which he or she has served as a consultant in the year prior to the Commission assignment. Therefore, it is essential that peer reviewers keep the Commission informed of any consulting activity to its accredited institutions or those seeking accreditation.

Peer reviewer roles include, but are not limited to, service as team members, change panel members, eligibility panel members, readers, review committee members, and AQIP reviewers.

Identification of Peer Reviewers to Serve as Independent Consultants

The roster of Commission peer reviewers is available on the Commission's Website.

The Commission is not recommending these peer reviewers as independent consultants, nor is the Commission sponsoring or directing any consulting assignment that may result from an institution or organization identifying a peer reviewer from the Commission's Web site. The list is available to make the public aware of who serves on Commission teams, rather than to provide a list of available or qualified consultants.

In the past, Commission staff may have provided the names of peer reviewers to institutions seeking an independent consultant. However, because this practice has contributed to confusion over the role of the peer reviewer in such consultancies, the Commission no longer provides this information.

Guidelines Related to Peer Reviewers Serving as Independent Consultants

- A Commission peer reviewer who accepts an independent consulting assignment is **not representing or otherwise speaking for the Commission in this activity. The peer reviewer is acting solely in his or her own personal capacity during the assignment within the scope of an agreement between the peer reviewer and the institution or other organization to which the Commission is not a party.**
- It is the peer reviewer's responsibility to make sure that the institution or other entity requesting the consulting understands that the peer reviewer does not represent the Commission in the consulting activity. All contracts or other written agreements between the peer reviewer and the institution reflect this understanding.
- In considering an assignment, the peer reviewer should be aware of any special conditions, such as a sanction, affecting the institution's accreditation relationship that he or she may not have encountered in previous service to the Commission.
- The peer reviewer acting as an independent consultant should not identify himself or herself as a Commission peer reviewer while on the campus or in any other aspect of the consultancy. The peer reviewer should not wear the Commission peer reviewer name badge. The peer reviewer should not include this role for the Commission on business cards or similar forms of identification.
- Any advice or recommendations coming from this consultancy are not binding on the Commission or the institution and have no bearing on Commission processes or decisions.
- The peer reviewer acting as an independent consultant should refrain from providing recommendations that mimic, or take the form of, Commission team recommendations.
- Commission indemnification or insurance policies do not apply to independent consulting activities conducted by peer reviewers. The peer reviewer is solely responsible for the advice provided and may want to seek professional advice about the risk of personal liability in such activities and the need for appropriate insurance.
- It is the peer reviewer's responsibility to notify the Commission of such consulting activity so that future conflicts of interest can be avoided.

Additional Guidelines Affecting Peer Reviewers Serving on Mock Teams

Note: Independent consulting activities not sponsored or directed by the Commission include the mock team visits that some institutions arrange prior to Commission evaluation visits. Some institutions have reported finding mock visits to be useful if the purposes are to help improve the quality of the institution's written materials and to acquaint the institution with the process of a team review. In this capacity, such service can be conducted by a variety of parties, including colleagues from other institutions who have recently completed a Commission evaluation. Experienced peer reviewers on the institution's own campus can also provide useful guidance.

In addition to the guidelines stated above, the following guidelines apply specifically to peer reviewers who accept assignments for mock team visits:

- Mock visits are not useful to the institution or the Commission when the institution and the mock team do not clearly understand that the mock team members are acting in their own personal capacity when they conduct the visit.
- Mock visits also create problems for the institution and the Commission when they appear to substitute the judgment of the mock visit team for the actual team or set an expectation for or anticipate the outcome of the actual team visit.
- Commission peer reviewers who serve on mock teams should not make specific findings or recommendations or in other ways reproduce the concluding portion of the team visit. Such actions may raise inappropriate expectations and may be construed as formal accreditation advice. They can also seriously interfere with the ability of Commission's teams and decision makers to carry out their responsibilities.

Peer reviewers who have questions should contact peerreview@hlcommission.org.

