



National Council
for State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements

*A voluntary, regional approach
to state oversight of distance education*

Indicate Regional Compact:

Midwestern Higher Education Compact

New England Board of Higher Education

Southern Regional Education Board

Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

Application and Evaluation Form for State Membership in SARA

A state that wants to apply for membership in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) must submit this form and required documentation to its **Regional** education compact's SARA office.

A state may wish to include a cover letter and/or additional documentation to supplement the application and to strengthen the case for a state becoming a member of SARA.

To be accepted into a regional **State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement**, a state must agree that it can and will operate under the criteria for state membership established in the Regional agreements. The requirements for state membership are set forth below. For purposes of SARA, the term "state" includes the District of Columbia and the organized U.S. Territories.

<u>Applicant</u>	<u>Requirements for State Membership in SARA</u>	<u>Evaluator</u>	
State affirms meeting the requirement		State meets the requirement	
Initial here		yes	no
	1. The state is a member of one of the four interstate higher education regional compacts that administer SARA, or has concluded an agreement with such a compact covering SARA activity.		
	2. The state entity responsible for joining SARA has the legal authority under state law to enter an interstate agreement on behalf of the state and has provided a copy of the statutory or other legal authority documenting this.		
	3. The state accepts institutional accreditation by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education as sufficient, initial evidence of academic quality for approving institutions for participation in SARA.		
	4. The state considers applications from degree-granting institutions of all sectors (public, private non-profit and private for-profit) on the same basis and approves institutions that meet SARA standards and agree to SARA processes and commitments without differentiating by sector.		
	5. For private institutions, the state accepts the U.S. Department of Education's institutional federal financial responsibility rating of 1.5 or above (or 1.0 -1.49 with additional justification) as indicating sufficient financial stability to qualify for participation in SARA.		

Requirements for State Membership in SARA (continued)

<u>Applicant</u>	<u>Evaluator</u>
State affirms meeting the requirement	State meets the requirement
Initial here	yes no
<p>6. The state has a clearly articulated and comprehensive state process for consumer protection in regard to SARA activities, both with respect to initial institutional approval and on-going oversight, including the resolution of consumer complaints in all sectors, and has provided a copy of the complaint investigation and resolution process to be used to handle all complaints resulting from institutional operations (public and nonpublic) under SARA.</p>	
<p>7. The state designates a "portal agency" as defined in SARA policies and standards to coordinate SARA matters for the state and provide a principal point of contact for resolution of student complaints.</p> <p>NOTE: The designated agency need not itself be responsible for all oversight activities of SARA providers inside the state, but will be the SARA portal for that state.</p>	
<p>8. The state agrees that it will work cooperatively with other SARA states, regional compacts and NC-SARA to enable success of the initiative. It will follow up on requests for information or investigations from the SARA member states or any SARA regional or national office, providing such data or reports as are required.</p>	
<p>9. The state agrees that it will not impose on an institution operating under SARA from another state any requirements, standards, fees or procedures other than those set forth in SARA policies and rules. This does not preclude the state from enforcing its laws against nondomestic institutions in subject areas outside those covered by SARA.</p>	
<p>10. The state agrees to require each SARA applicant institution to apply for state approval using the standard SARA institutional application and agree to operate under the <i>Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education</i> developed by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC), as summarized in SARA policy 5(2)1-9.</p>	
<p>11. The state agrees to serve as the default forum for any SARA-related complaint filed against an institution approved by the state to participate in SARA. The state's SARA portal agency is responsible for coordinating any such efforts and is empowered to investigate and resolve complaints that originate outside of the state. All other state agencies and governing boards of SARA participant institutions shall assist as necessary in such investigations and report as needed to the portal agency. State remedies, if any, including refunds or other corrective action, must be available to resolve complaints involving residents of other states.</p>	
<p>12. The state agrees to document:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">a) all formal complaints received;</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">b) complaint notifications provided to institutions and accrediting agencies;</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">c) actions taken that are commensurate with the severity of violations; and</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">d) complaint resolutions.</p>	

Requirements for State Membership in SARA (continued)

<u>Applicant</u>		<u>Evaluator</u>
State affirms meeting the requirement		State meets the requirement
Initial here		yes no
13.	The state agrees that it will promptly report complaints and concerns to the institutions about which the complaint is lodged, the home state SARA portal agency responsible for any such institution and, if appropriate, the relevant accrediting bodies.	
14.	The state has clear and well-documented policies and practices for addressing catastrophic events, as follows:	
	a. The state may request assistance from the institution's accreditor as the accreditor applies its standards under §602.24(c) of federal requirements for catastrophic events.	
	b. In the event of the unanticipated closure of an institution, the state has processes to assure that students receive the services for which they have paid or reasonable financial compensation for those not received. Such assurances may include tuition assurance funds, surety bonds, teach-out provisions or other practices deemed sufficient to protect consumers.	
	c. The state requires institutions to have adequate disaster recovery plans, particularly with respect to the protection of student records, or the state provides such a plan.	
	d. A SARA member state agrees to apply its policies and practices for catastrophic events consistently and equally within each sector (public, private non-profit, and private for-profit) to residents of any state.	

Portal Agency Designation and Voluntary State Affirmation

State:

Portal Agency (principal SARA contact agency):

Mailing address of Portal Agency:

Web site of Portal Agency (location of state's SARA information):

Name of staff member in Portal Agency who is principal SARA contact¹:

Phone number of principal SARA contact:

E-mail for principal SARA contact:

I, the undersigned representative of the State of _____, having the authority to commit the state to the SARA interstate agreement, agree that the state will abide by SARA requirements as stated above, have provided proof of those requirements needing documentation, and hereby apply for the state's admission to the SARA interstate agreement.

Signature:

Typed name of signatory officer:

Date signed:

Title of signatory state officer:

¹ The principal contact is the person with whom state agencies and regional compacts should communicate about the state's membership in SARA. It is not necessarily the state signatory officer or the person(s) whom institutions and students should contact regarding institutional membership in SARA, student complaints, and other matters regarding the normal discharge of a state's responsibilities under SARA.

Evaluator Recommendation

For a state to join SARA, the evaluator must find that the state agrees to or meets all of the requirements set forth in sections 1-14. If the evaluator finds that the state meets all required standards, the regional SARA director shall recommend approval of the state's membership to the regional Steering Committee of the compact by signing below.

The evaluator recommends approval of the application to the regional Steering Committee:

Yes

No

Evaluator comments:

Signature of regional compact officer:

Name of regional compact officer:

Date signed:

Title of signatory regional compact officer:

Signature of regional compact president:

Name of regional compact president:

Date signed:

If SARA membership is denied by the regional compact, the regional SARA director will provide to the applicant state a written reason for the denial. The state may reapply at any time, having corrected any deficiencies, or may appeal the denial to the National Council for SARA under procedures to be developed by the Council.

Regional Steering Committee Recommendation

For a state to join SARA, the regional Steering Committee must find that the state agrees to or meets all of the requirements set forth in sections 1-14. If the Committee finds that the state meets all required standards, the Committee Chair shall recommend approval of the state's membership to the regional Executive Committee of the compact by signing below.

The regional Steering Committee recommends approval of the application to the Executive Committee:

Yes

No

Committee comments:

Signature of committee chair:

Name of committee chair:

Date signed:

If SARA membership is denied by the regional compact, the regional SARA director will provide to the applicant state a written reason for the denial. The state may reapply at any time, having corrected any deficiencies, or may appeal the denial to the National Council for SARA under procedures to be developed by the Council.