

NEW Policy on Innovative Programs

Proposed policy and approval procedures for innovative pilot programs or pedagogical approaches that do not fully align with ABHE accreditation standards.

ABHE seeks to support institutional innovation within the guardrails of established quality standards. Thus, institutions and programs accredited or pre-accredited by ABHE must apply for approval prior to implementing an innovative program or pedagogical approach that does not fully align with requirements as stated in the ABHE Standards for Accreditation. If approved, innovative programs are considered pilot programs and require regular monitoring reports to assess program effectiveness, with particular attention given to achievement of stated learning outcomes and program retention, completion, and placement rates (if applicable).

Innovative programs may include but are not limited to reduced-credit bachelor degree programs and accelerated Bachelor/MDiv degree programs. Given the complexity of innovative change, institutions are encouraged to consult with their Commission Staff Representative prior to submitting an innovative program proposal.

Institutions applying for approval to implement an innovative program/pedagogical approach must complete and submit the Innovative Program Application posted at <https://www.abhe.org/accreditation/accreditation-documents/>. Innovative Program Applications should be submitted a minimum of six months prior to the proposed implementation date. The application requires that the institution specify the length of the pilot program (3-5 years) during which time the institution will evaluate program outcomes and report findings as required by the Commission approval action. At the time of the final required report, the institution must indicate whether it intends to end the pilot program or is requesting that the Commission approve the program/approach as a limited exception to specific Essential Element requirements. If the latter, the Commission will review the innovative program results and take action to terminate the program or approve as an ongoing exception.

Proposed: February 2026