



Tennessee Higher Education Commission



Quality Assurance Funding Guidebook: 2026-2031

Contents

Background and Scope	2
Introduction and Philosophy of Quality Assurance Funding	2
Scope of Quality Assurance Funding and Institutional Eligibility	2
Scoring, Weighting, and Funding Allocation	3
Standard 1: Academic Program Quality.....	4
Standard 1A: Programmatic Accreditation.....	4
Standard 1B: Program Evaluation.....	8
Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 1: Academic Program Quality	10
Standard 2: Student Success – Major Field Assessment (MFA) and Licensure.....	12
Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 2: Student Success	17
Standard 3: Student Engagement	18
Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 3: Student Engagement.....	20
QAF Administration and Submission Procedures	21
Administration and Review Cycle.....	21
Submission Procedures, Verification, and Reporting.....	22

Background and Scope

Introduction and Philosophy of Quality Assurance Funding

Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) is the State of Tennessee's quality-focused funding framework designed to strengthen academic quality, promote student success, and ensure responsible stewardship of public resources across higher education institutions. The intended purpose of QAF is to incentivize continuous improvement, not merely compliance. Through a structured set of standards, QAF encourages institutions to evaluate academic programs, assess student learning, and engage in evidence-informed decision-making that supports students, employers, and the broader public.

Scope of Quality Assurance Funding and Institutional Eligibility

This section outlines the standards, processes, and expectations for Quality Assurance Funding.

Institutions Covered Under Quality Assurance Funding

QAF applies to public universities and community colleges coordinated by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), with the exception of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. Participation in QAF is dependent on institutional compliance with reporting requirements, data integrity standards, and eligibility criteria outlined in this guidebook.

Affected Programs

QAF applies to all active and mature academic degree programs. Within this framework, a program reaches maturity after its fifth year, unless an institution opts for the program to enter QAF sooner (which may occur if program accreditation is attained sooner than five years, for example).

Included programs:

- Undergraduate (both associate and baccalaureate) and graduate degree programs that have reached maturity
- Community college certificates

Excluded programs:

- Programs that have not reached maturity
- Programs in phase out or inactive status

- Certificate programs for universities, unless explicitly designated
- Terminated programs

QAF Participation Requirements

To participate in QAF, institutions must

- submit required data and documentation accurately and on time,
- adhere to approved evaluation schedules,
- engage in assessment and review processes consistent with QAF standards, and
- maintain transparency and integrity in reporting.

Scoring, Weighting, and Funding Allocation

Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) uses a structured scoring system to allocate state funding based on demonstrated academic quality, student success, and institutional engagement aligned with quality assurance processes – see Table 1.

Table 1 - 2026-2031 QAF Standards and Scoring

Category	Standard	Indicator	Maximum Points
Academic Program Quality	1A: Programmatic Accreditation	Accreditation or candidacy for all eligible programs, including certificates	60
Academic Program Quality	1B: Program Evaluation	Programs, including pre-baccalaureate certificates, evaluated at least once during cycle using standard THEC rubric	
Student Success	2: Major Field Assessment or Licensure Exam	All programs not measuring licensure must collect major field assessment data at least once per cycle. Licensure programs will report annually	30
Student Engagement	3: Student Surveys	Surveying to be completed annually, focused on engagement, alumni experience, and career readiness	10

Standard 1: Academic Program Quality

60 Points

Standard 1A: Programmatic Accreditation

1. Intent and Quality Rationale

Programmatic accreditation serves as a nationally recognized mechanism for assuring academic quality, professional relevance, and workforce alignment. Accrediting bodies evaluate programs against discipline-specific standards related to curriculum coherence, faculty qualifications, student learning outcomes, assessment practices, and resources necessary to support student success.

This standard recognizes that programmatic accreditation

- requires substantial institutional investment of time, personnel, and financial resources,
- represents a long-term commitment to continuous quality improvement, and
- is valued by employers, licensing bodies, graduate programs, and students.

Accordingly, Quality Assurance Funding acknowledges and rewards institutional efforts to achieve, maintain, and meaningfully engage with programmatic accreditation as a central indicator of academic program quality.

2. Scope and Applicability

This standard applies to all undergraduate and graduate academic programs that are eligible for QAF participation and for which a recognized programmatic accrediting agency exists, as noted in the [Approved Accreditation Agencies](#) list. Concentrations or specializations within an academic program are not evaluated independently and are instead considered at the program level.

Programs that are creditable may not substitute program review for accreditation unless explicitly approved in writing by THEC.

Guidelines to Request an Exception for Programmatic Accreditation

To request consideration to substitute program review for a program that is accreditable, institutions should submit the following in a memo, signed by the institution's chief academic officer, to the THEC chief academic officer:

- Rationale for the substitution, to include
 - Explanation of how program review will better serve the needs of the institution, the program, and students
 - Specific challenges to seeking or maintaining programmatic accreditation
 - Financial considerations, if applicable
- Attestation, with evidence where possible, that the accreditation is not required for licensure or graduate school admission
- A proposed timeframe for the first program review

3. Requirements for Standard 1A

Institutions submitting proposals for new programs, whether through a New Academic Program Proposal (NAPP) or an Academic Program Modification (APM), must submit programmatic accreditation information when applicable. This information will be stored in the academic program inventory (API).

Programs may demonstrate compliance with Standard 1A through one of the following pathways.

A. Accredited Programs (Good Standing)

Programs holding active accreditation must submit the following:

- official correspondence from the accreditor as it becomes available.
- documentation of accreditation term and status.
- when relevant, evidence of compliance with accreditor reporting requirements, such as annual reports, interim reports, or data updates to the accreditor.

Accredited programs are expected to maintain good standing throughout the QAF cycle. Updates related to programmatic accreditation can be submitted to THEC staff on a rolling basis. Any such updates will be reflected in the API upon submission.

B. Programs Seeking Accreditation

Institutions must document the following:

- the accreditation pathway and anticipated milestones.
- annual progress on required benchmarks.

- timelines and responsible parties for completion of accreditation steps.

Updates on progress toward accreditation can be submitted to THEC staff on a rolling basis. Any such updates will be reflected in the API upon submission.

C. Programs with Delays, Citations, or Loss of Accreditation

Programs experiencing delayed accreditation, significant citations or warnings, probationary status, or loss of accreditation must submit an [Accreditation Progress Form](#) annually until they regain accreditation.

Institutions must clearly document

- unmet accreditor expectations,
- root causes of deficiencies,
- corrective action plans, and
- timelines and accountability mechanisms.

4. Approved Accrediting Agencies

THEC maintains an official list of [Approved Accreditation Agencies](#).

- Institutions are expected to seek accreditation from agencies on the approved list.
- Institutions may petition THEC, with the endorsement of the institution's Chief Academic Officer, to add or remove accrediting agencies from the approved list. (See Part 5 below)
- Decisions regarding accreditor recognition will be based on disciplinary legitimacy, national standing, quality assurance rigor, and relevance to program outcomes.

If an accrediting agency is newly approved, impacted programs are expected to begin the accreditation process within five years. If an accrediting agency is removed, affected programs may transition to Program Evaluation under Standard 1B.

5. Recognition for New Accrediting Bodies

The steps below outline the process to request the addition of an accrediting body to the list of approved accreditors.

Step 1: Institutional Submission

An institution, or group of institutions, may submit an [Accreditor Nomination Form](#) to THEC to recognize a new programmatic accrediting body. The request must include sufficient documentation demonstrating that the accrediting body meets eligibility criteria, including scope, governance, standards, and operational integrity.

Step 2: Public Comment Period (30 calendar days)

Following an initial review, THEC staff will provide notice of the proposed accrediting body to all QAF-eligible institutions for public comment for 30 calendar days.

Public comments are advisory and will be considered as part of the overall evaluation. If significant issues or concerns arise as part of the public comment review, THEC staff will convene campus representatives to deliberate the appropriateness of the proposed accreditor.

Step 3: Addition to List of Approved Accreditation Agencies

Following Steps 1 and 2, THEC staff will determine whether sufficient evidence exists to support recognition of the accrediting body. Furthermore, THEC staff will consider any feedback provided in the public comment period. If the proposed accreditor is approved by THEC staff, they will be added to the THEC Approved Accreditation Agencies list.

6. Performance Levels on Accreditation Standard

Campuses are scored on a 0-3 scale for each program with an available programmatic accreditor as delineated below. Performance across all accreditable programs will be evaluated according to scoring procedures described in "Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 1."

Table 2: Accreditation Status Ratings

Rating	Status
0	An approved accreditation agency exists, but the institution is not seeking accreditation
1	Accreditation sought and not attained OR accreditation is lost; the institution is reapplying
2	Probation, citation, warning or other significant negative status; the institution is addressing accreditor concerns
3	Seeking accreditation and making sufficient progress OR accredited and in good standing

7. Reclassification of Accreditable Programs Status

Programs may be reclassified according to Table 1: Accreditation Status Ratings based on documentation provided to THEC staff. Documentation may include letters from accrediting agencies documenting progress and/or a change in formal status, evidence of scheduling a self-study or a site visit, and/or other relevant progress evidence.

Standard 1B: Program Evaluation

1. Intent and Quality Rationale

This standard evaluates the quality and effectiveness of academic programs for which no recognized programmatic accreditation exists through a structured program review process. Program review under this standard is not a substitute for accreditation, but a deliberate quality assurance mechanism designed to

- highlight program strengths and areas of distinction,
- identify risks, gaps, and opportunities for improvement,
- assess program performance against clearly defined priorities, and
- support evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement.

This standard affirms that meaningful program review is a cornerstone of academic excellence and that all academic programs, accreditable or not, are subject to rigorous quality expectations.

2. Scope and Applicability

- This standard applies to all active undergraduate and graduate degree programs and pre-baccalaureate certificate programs without an approved programmatic accreditor.
 - If a pre-baccalaureate certificate is embedded within an associate's degree program, it can be evaluated as part of the program review for the relevant associate's degree program.
 - For QAF purposes, an embedded certificate is defined as a certificate program with curriculum, content, and requirements contained within the requirements of a related associate's degree. The associate degree assumes responsibility for quality control and assurance.
- Programs established through the academic program modification (APM) process are considered mature and are therefore subject to this standard following their implementation date. Relevant information regarding QAF alignment plans should be submitted alongside any request for an academic program modification.

This standard does not apply to:

- Programs with recognized programmatic accreditation (covered under Standard 1A), unless permitted for program review by exception (see [Guidelines to Request an Exception for Programmatic Accreditation](#) above).
- Programs that have not yet reached maturity.
- Programs in phase-out or inactive status.

3. Program Review Framework

Program reviews are rooted in the evaluation of program quality within six categories:

- *Curriculum*, including curriculum coherence and alignment
- *Economic development and program sustainability*, including workforce alignment, career preparation, and career exploration, as well as resource sufficiency
- *Faculty* qualifications, capacity, and support
- *Learning Outcomes*, including program learning outcomes and assessment practices
- *Learning Resources*, including equipment and facilities
- *Student Engagement*, including application and integration of learning, regular opportunities for evaluation, and support services

4. External Review Requirements

- Program reviews must be conducted by a qualified out-of-state reviewer with relevant disciplinary expertise and no conflict of interest with the institution.
- Institutions may opt to have a secondary reviewer from the institution to help with the evaluation. This reviewer shall not participate in the scoring process.

5. Evaluation Schedule and Planning

- Institutions must establish and maintain a program review schedule covering all eligible programs within a five-year cycle.
- Institutions are expected to adhere to the approved schedule.
- Schedule modifications require prior THEC approval.
- Programs reaching maturity during the QAF cycle must be evaluated within five years of maturity, in either the current or subsequent cycle.

6. Reporting and Documentation

For each program evaluated under Standard 1B, institutions must submit:

- the completed Program Evaluation rubric,
- the external reviewer's narrative report, and
- reviewer information on the [Program Review External Reviewer Form](#).

Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 1: Academic Program Quality

Scoring of Accreditation Standard

Each accreditable program will be rated on a 0–3 scale as described [above in section 1A.6](#). The overall score for Standard 1A will be calculated according to the following formula:

Sum of ratings / (number of accreditable programs * 3) = *Accreditation Attainment Average*

Scoring of Program Evaluation Standard

Programs at the associate and pre-baccalaureate certificate levels will be evaluated according to **29** total standards, while baccalaureate and post-baccalaureate degree programs will be evaluated according to **30** total standards. Full performance for all types of programming is delineated in the table below and is based on the “Meets Standard/Expectations” benchmark score.

Table 3: Program Type and Benchmarks

Type	Program Level(s)	Total Standards	Benchmark Score
A	Associate’s Degree Programs and Pre-Baccalaureate Certificates	29	58
B	Baccalaureate and Post-Baccalaureate Degree Programs	30	60

Institutional performance on the program evaluation standard is determined through the following calculations:

(Average of Type A Program Scores / 58) = Percent Attained, Type A

(Average of Type B Program Scores / 60) = Percent Attained, Type B

If an institution only has programs in one type (A or B), the Percent Attained for that type is the overall Program Review Attainment Average. If institutions have both Type A and Type B programs, that institution must identify the proportion of each type of program. The overall attainment average will be calculated with the following formula:

(Percent Attained, Type A * proportion of Type A programs) +
(Percent Attained, Type B * proportion of Type B programs) =
Program Review Attainment Average

The Attainment Average will be translated to a percentage of points earned according to the following table.

Table 4: Attainment Average Score Table

Attainment Average	Percent of Points Earned
≥100	100%
<100	Varies dependent on percentage attained

Variable Point Distribution for Standard 1

Total points are allocated based on the percentage of accreditable versus non-accreditable programs by institution, as delineated in the following table.

Table 5: Variable Point Distribution for Standard 1

Accreditable Programs	Reviewed Programs	Points for Accreditation	Points for Program Review
100%	0%	60	0
90 – 99%	1-10%	55	5
80 – 89%	11-20%	50	10
70- 79%	21-30%	45	15
60- 69%	31-40%	40	20
51-59%	41-49%	35	25
50%	50%	30	30
41-49%	51-59%	25	35
31-40%	60- 69%	20	40
21-30%	70- 79%	15	45
11-20%	80 – 89%	10	50
1-10%	90 – 99%	5	55
0%	100%	0	60

Scoring Example:

Institution A has 70% accreditable programs and 30% reviewed programs, and thus the 60 points for Standard 1 will be divided based on Table 5 above. The institution's Accreditation Attainment Average is 95%, and their Program Review Attainment Average is 90%. The institution would receive 95% of the possible 45 points for accreditation and 90% of the possible 15 points for review.

$$(45 \times .95) + (15 \times .90) = 56.25 \text{ total points}$$

Standard 2: Student Success – Major Field Assessment (MFA) and Licensure

30 Points

1. Philosophy and Quality Rationale

The Major Field Assessment and Licensure Standard evaluates the extent to which undergraduate programs ensure students achieve discipline-specific knowledge, professional competence, and readiness for employment or graduate studies.

Additionally, the standard recognizes both nationally standardized professional assessments and valid, institutionally developed assessments to ensure rigorous, fair, and context-appropriate evaluation of student achievement.

The standard is designed to ensure that

- student learning outcomes are directly measured,
- assessment results are credible, comparable, and appropriately benchmarked, and
- assessment data are used to inform program-level improvement.

Programs with licensure requirements carry additional responsibility, as licensure outcomes directly affect graduates' eligibility for employment and reflect program alignment with professional standards.

2. Scope and Applicability

This standard applies to all undergraduate academic programs that have reached maturity and are eligible for Quality Assurance Funding participation. Exemptions for major field assessment will not be granted except for programs placed on phase-out or inactivation.

This standard includes

- programs requiring student licensure for professional practice,
- programs utilizing approved national major field examinations, and
- programs validated through approved locally developed assessments when appropriate assessment alternatives do not exist or are not aligned with program outcomes and priorities.

This standard does not apply to

- graduate programs,
- programs officially declared inactive or in phase-out,

- certificate programs without associated licensure or professional certification,
- general or interdisciplinary degree programs, and
- programs that have not yet reached maturity.

3. Program Definition, Eligibility, and Assessment Cycle

For purposes of this standard, a program is defined as all academic offerings at the same degree level bearing the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code.

- Programs sharing the same CIP code (e.g., B.A. and B.S. in Psychology) are considered a single program for assessment, reporting, and scoring.
- Closely related programs may be aggregated upon institutional request with approval from THEC staff.

Programs Elevated from Concentrations

Non-licensure programs elevated from existing concentrations are considered mature programs with established enrollment and must be scheduled for assessment within two academic years.

Testing Population

Institutions must strive to assess all students before they graduate. The response rate for each program will be submitted to THEC. If a program's response rate is less than 80%, the narrative should include a brief explanation of potential causes of low engagement and the institution's and/or program's remediation efforts.

Assessment Scheduling

Institutions must submit a multi-year assessment schedule demonstrating that approximately 20 percent of eligible programs are assessed each year, ensuring full coverage across the Quality Assurance Funding cycle. Assessment schedules are subject to review and approval by THEC staff.

4. Accepted Demonstration Pathways of the Standard

Programs may demonstrate student success through one of the following approved pathways:

A. Licensure Examinations

Programs requiring licensure or professional certification for graduate employment must report licensure outcomes annually for all undergraduate programs and certificates resulting in licensure. Institutions must submit

- first-time pass rates,
- total pass rates when applicable, and
- official documentation from the licensing or certifying entity.

Licensure performance will be evaluated using established comparison benchmarks, such as national averages or state-defined performance standards, where available.

B. National Major Field Assessments

Programs without licensure requirements may utilize an approved national discipline-specific assessment. Acceptable assessments must

- align with program learning outcomes,
- provide comparative benchmarks,
- provide appropriate national comparison groups, and
- demonstrate established psychometric validity.

Programs using national assessments are generally reported once per QAF cycle, unless otherwise required.

If an institution would like to request an addition to the list of approved national discipline-specific assessments, an institutional representative should complete the [National Assessment Addition Request form](#). Once a form is received, THEC staff will share the proposal with institutional representatives across the state for a 15-day public comment period. THEC staff will review the proposal and any public comments before determining whether to add the assessment to the approved list.

C. Approved Local Assessments

When neither licensure nor national standardized assessments are suitable, institutions may submit locally developed assessments for approval. Locally developed assessments must demonstrate

- clear alignment with stated student learning outcomes,
- documented validity and reliability,
- external or independent expert review, as appropriate,
- a defined baseline year for performance comparison, and
- consistent administration and scoring methodology.

Local assessments follow the **planning** → **baseline** → **reporting** development model outlined in the [Major Field Test – Local Development Plan form](#). Approval must be granted prior to implementation. Institutions may continue to use local assessments that were previously approved and are already in use. Revisions to existing assessments can be made

at the discretion of the institution. However, if changes over the course of one QAF cycle affect more than 50% of the instrument, a new [Local Development Plan](#) must be submitted.

5. Consortium-Based Assessments

To strengthen efficiency, comparability, sustainability, and rigor, THEC recognizes multi-institutional, consortium-based assessments as an approved form of local assessment.

Under this model, two or more institutions offering the same or closely related programs may collaboratively design, administer, and evaluate a shared major field assessment through a formal consortium arrangement.

Purpose

Consortium assessments are intended to

- enhance efficiency of assessment development efforts,
- strengthen disciplinary rigor through shared expertise,
- enhance comparability of student learning outcomes, and
- increase the defensibility of locally developed assessments.

Eligibility

Consortium participation is limited to programs that

- share the same or closely aligned CIP codes,
- operate at the same degree level, and
- demonstrate comparable program-level learning outcomes.

Closely related programs may be approved upon institutional request and THEC approval.

Governance and Design

Consortium assessments must demonstrate

- a documented agreement defining institutional roles,
- joint faculty ownership of assessment design and review,
- alignment with agreed-upon disciplinary learning outcomes, and
- standardized administration and scoring procedures.

A lead institution must be designated for coordination and communication with THEC.

Consortium Assessment Requirements

Consortium assessments must include

- external or independent expert review of the instrument, ensuring objectivity and independence from participating institutions,
- pilot testing prior to baseline implementation,
- documented validity and reliability, and
- standardized reporting formats across institutions.

Reporting Responsibility

Each participating institution is responsible for reporting its own participation rates and submitting program-level results. Failure to maintain approved consortium standards may result in loss of eligibility for this pathway.

6. Major Field Assessment Transition Policy

Programs may change assessment instruments only under approved conditions, including

- significant curriculum change,
- professional or disciplinary assessment evolution,
- discontinuation or loss of alignment of prior instrument, and/or
- demonstrated need based on validity concerns.

Requests for change assessments must be submitted using the [Major Field Assessment Transition Notification Form](#), which include

- a rationale statement,
- a transition strategy and timeline, and
- a data continuity plan.

Institutions may change assessment instruments only with prior THEC approval.

7. Documentation and Evidence Requirements

Institutions must submit

- official assessment or licensure performance reports,
- institutional summary analysis, and
- external verification when applicable.

Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 2: Student Success

Institutional performance is calculated as a percentage relative to an approved benchmark:

$$\text{Performance (\%)} = (\text{Institutional Average} \div \text{Benchmark Average}) \times 100$$

Benchmarks may include national averages, licensure first-time pass rates, or approved baseline values for locally developed assessments. Performance attainment is capped at 100 percent.

Benchmark Alignment

Programs are evaluated using appropriate comparison benchmarks based on assessment type:

- Licensure programs: compared to national first-time pass rates.
- National standardized assessments: compared to relevant national or peer group benchmarks.
- Locally developed assessments: compared to an approved baseline year or prior validated results.

Scoring Approach

Performance percentages are mapped to a standardized scoring table to determine point allocation (maximum of 30 points). Scoring is based on demonstrated student outcomes relative to approved benchmarks. Predefined performance bands ensure consistency and transparency across institutions.

Performance Scoring Table

Table 2: MFA and Licensure Scoring Table

Performance (% of Benchmark)	Points	Performance (% of Benchmark)	Points
≥ 100%	30	75 – 79%	15
95 – 99%	27	70 – 74%	12
90 – 94%	24	65 – 69%	9
85 – 89%	21	60 – 64%	6
80 – 84%	18	< 60%	0

Standard 3: Student Engagement

10 Points

1. Intent and Quality Rationale

This standard evaluates the extent to which institutions create meaningful, high-quality educational experiences that actively engage students in learning, career preparation, and skill development. Student engagement data provide critical insight into how students experience curriculum, instruction, advising, and support services, and how effectively institutions connect academic learning with workforce and civic outcomes.

Validated student engagement surveys allow institutions to benchmark performance against national and regional peers while identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. This standard is designed to support intentional use of engagement data, not merely survey administration.

2. Scope and Applicability

This standard applies to all institutions and mature programs eligible for Quality Assurance Funding. Student engagement data may be reported at the institutional level.

3. Accepted Engagement Measurement Tools

Institutions must utilize validated, nationally recognized instruments to assess student engagement. Approved tools include:

- NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement)
- CCSSE (Community College Survey of Student Engagement)
- SENSE (Survey of Entering Student Engagement) for the community colleges
- Alumni surveys in off years for universities (i.e., PEG)

For the 2026 – 2031 cycle, institutions must utilize approved add-on modules, including:

- Career and Workforce Preparation (NSSE)
- Guided Pathways (CCSSE)

4. Measurement Focus and Item Selection

To address survey fatigue and enhance data usability, institutions are not required to analyze all survey benchmarks or items. Instead, institutions must

- select engagement indicators aligned with institutional strategic priorities,
- clearly document the rationale for selected items or modules, and

- ensure selected measures support analysis of learning quality, career readiness, and student experience.

For the current cycle, institutions are encouraged to emphasize career- and skill-focused engagement indicators.

5. Survey Administration

Table 7: Survey Administration Schedule

Institution Type	Instrument	Cycle / Frequency
Universities	NSSE	Every other year, starting in 2026-27
Universities	Alumni Survey	Administered in alternate years between NSSE, starting in 2027-28
Community Colleges	CCSSE	Every other year, starting in 2026-27
Community Colleges	SENSE	Administered in alternate years between CCSSE, starting in 2027-28

Institutions are expected to

- administer NSSE or CCSSE every other year during the QAF cycle,
- maintain participation rates sufficient to ensure meaningful analysis, and
- use SENSE and/or alumni surveys during off years to supplement engagement data.

6. Evaluation of Performance

Student engagement performance is evaluated through comparison to national and/or peer benchmarks and analysis of trends over time. Evaluation emphasizes thoughtful indicator selection, credibility of survey administration, and evidence that results are reviewed and interpreted.

7. Documentation and Reporting

Institutions must submit official survey reports or dashboards and a summary of selected engagement indicators. THEC reserves the right to request supporting documentation or clarification.

Evaluation and Scoring of Standard 3: Student Engagement

Student engagement performance is evaluated based on comparison to benchmark performance, using a percentage-based scoring table.

All items, with the exception of open-ended and demographic questions, will be scored against the peer benchmark.

Performance Calculation: $\text{Performance (\%)} = (\text{Institutional Score} \div \text{Benchmark Score}) \times 100$

Table 8: Scoring for Student Engagement

Performance (% of Benchmark)	Points
≥ 100%	10
95 – 99%	9
90 – 94%	8
85 – 89%	7
80 – 84%	6
75 – 79%	5
70 – 74%	4
65 – 69%	3
60 – 64%	2
55 – 59%	1
< 55%	0

QAF Administration and Submission Procedures

Administration and Review Cycle

The Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) framework operates within a defined structure to ensure consistency, transparency, and fairness in the evaluation of academic quality and allocation of funding incentives. This section outlines the roles and review cycles, and procedures that support the effective administration of QAF.

Administration and Oversight

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) is responsible for the overall administration of QAF. This includes

- establishing QAF standards, scoring methodologies, and reporting requirements,
- reviewing institutional submissions and supporting documentation,
- determining eligibility, scoring outcomes, and funding allocations, and
- issuing guidance, clarifications, and updates related to QAF implementation.

THEC may collaborate with advisory groups, system partners, or external experts as appropriate to inform policy development, scoring methodologies, or framework revisions.

Institutional Roles and Responsibilities

Participating institutions are responsible for

- understanding and adhering to QAF standards and timelines,
- ensuring internal review and approval of QAF submissions,
- maintaining documentation supporting reported data, and
- responding to THEC feedback, requests for clarification, or verification inquiries.

Institutions are expected to engage with QAF as an ongoing quality assurance process that supports institutional improvement and accountability.

QAF Review Cycle

QAF operates on a defined multi-year cycle. Within each cycle,

- standards, scoring methodologies, and weightings remain generally stable to ensure predictability and fairness, while allowing for limited, clearly justified adjustments in response to significant external factors or policy changes,
- institutions submit required data and documentation annually, and
- scores are calculated and aggregated in accordance with published methodologies.

At the conclusion of each QAF cycle, THEC will conduct a comprehensive review of the framework in order to

- assess effectiveness,
- consider stakeholder feedback, and
- determine whether revisions are warranted for the next cycle.

Framework Review and Updates

THEC reserves the authority to review and update QAF policies, standards, and guidance within cycles. Substantive changes to standards or scoring methodologies will not be implemented mid-cycle without timely communication of changes to affected parties.

Commitment to Transparency and Continuous Improvement

THEC is committed to administering QAF in a manner that is transparent, consistent, and responsive to the evolving higher education environment. Institutions are encouraged to provide feedback on QAF implementation to inform future refinements of the framework.

Submission Procedures, Verification, and Reporting

Quality Assurance Funding (QAF) relies on accurate, timely, and verifiable data to ensure fairness, transparency, and credibility in funding allocation and quality evaluation. This section outlines institutional responsibilities related to data submission, verification, and reporting under the QAF framework.

Annual Data Submission Requirements and Procedures

Institutions participating in QAF are required to submit data and documentation annually in accordance with timelines and formats established by THEC. Submissions may occur on a rolling basis, but all relevant reporting must be completed by August 1 of each reporting year.

All submissions should occur electronically via the forms linked on [THEC website](#).

Institutional Responsibility and Certification

Institutions are responsible for ensuring all submitted data

- are accurate and complete,
- reflect current and official institutional records, and
- are reviewed and approved through appropriate internal governance processes.

Data submissions must be certified by designated institutional officials, confirming the integrity and accuracy of the reported information.

Campuses are responsible for notifying THEC of staffing changes that may require new access or permissions for submission of QAF materials.

Data Verification and Review

THEC reserves the right to verify submitted data to ensure consistency and compliance with QAF requirements. Verification activities may include

- review of supporting documentation,
- cross-checking with external data sources, and
- follow-up requests for clarification or correction.

Reporting Timelines and Corrections

Institutions must adhere to established reporting deadlines. Failure to submit required data by the specified deadline may affect QAF eligibility or scoring.

If errors or omissions are identified, institutions may be required to submit corrected information within a defined timeframe. Corrected data must be clearly identified and documented. Late or incomplete submissions may result in reduced scoring or delayed consideration for funding.