

# Accreditation Standards and Understanding ACCJC's Role in Monitoring Fiscal Health

ACBO Institute II:  
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# Today's Facilitator:



**Melynne Schiel**  
Vice President, ACCJC

# Goals for Today's Session

- **Review ACCJC 2024 standards**
  - Fiscal standards
  - Report narrative and required documentation
- **Provide context for ACCJC's fiscal monitoring practices**
  - Standards 3.4-3.7, 3.10
  - Commission [Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance](#)
- **Give an overview of ACCJC's annual fiscal review process**
  - Annual Fiscal Report contents and submission process
  - ACCJC's composite financial index and other criteria used in monitoring
  - Outcomes of the process, including Enhanced Fiscal Monitoring
- **Answer your questions**

# Who is ACCJC?



- Institutional accreditor recognized by U.S. Department of Education
- Only recognized institutional accreditor specializing in two-year colleges
- Works collegially with member colleges to advance educational quality

# ACCJC's Mission and Values

ACCJC supports its member institutions to advance educational quality and student learning and achievement. This collaboration fosters institutional excellence and continuous improvement through innovation, self-analysis, peer review, and application of standards.



# Principles Guiding ACCJC Standards

- Align with Commission's Eligibility Requirements, policies, and values
- Reflect current norms and practices within US higher education
- Focus on outcomes and improvement
- Reflect the diversity of ACCJC member institutions
- Balance accountability and improvement
- Emphasize achievement for all students



# New Resources to Support the Changes



[ACCJC ACCREDITATION  
HANDBOOK](#)



[REPORT TEMPLATES WITH  
EMBEDDED GUIDANCE](#)



ONLINE CERTIFICATION  
MODULES FOR PEER  
REVIEWERS



WEBINARS

# New Standards and Philosophical Approach

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# General Framework for Reflection & Improvement

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# Looking at the New Standards



Outcomes | Innovation | Improvement

ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR  
COMMUNITY AND JUNIOR COLLEGES

ACCJC.ORG

# Exercise



STANDARD 3.6



WHAT DOES YOUR  
COLLEGE DO?



WHAT IS THE  
OUTCOME?



HOW DO YOU  
KNOW?

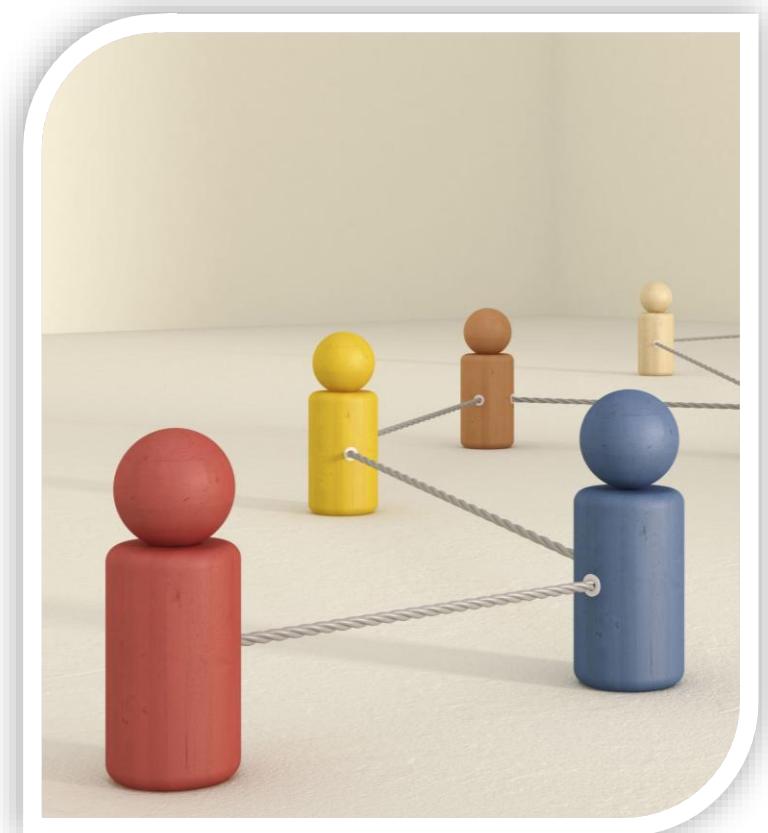


WHAT CAN YOU  
DO DIFFERENTLY?

# Apply the Standard: What does it mean?

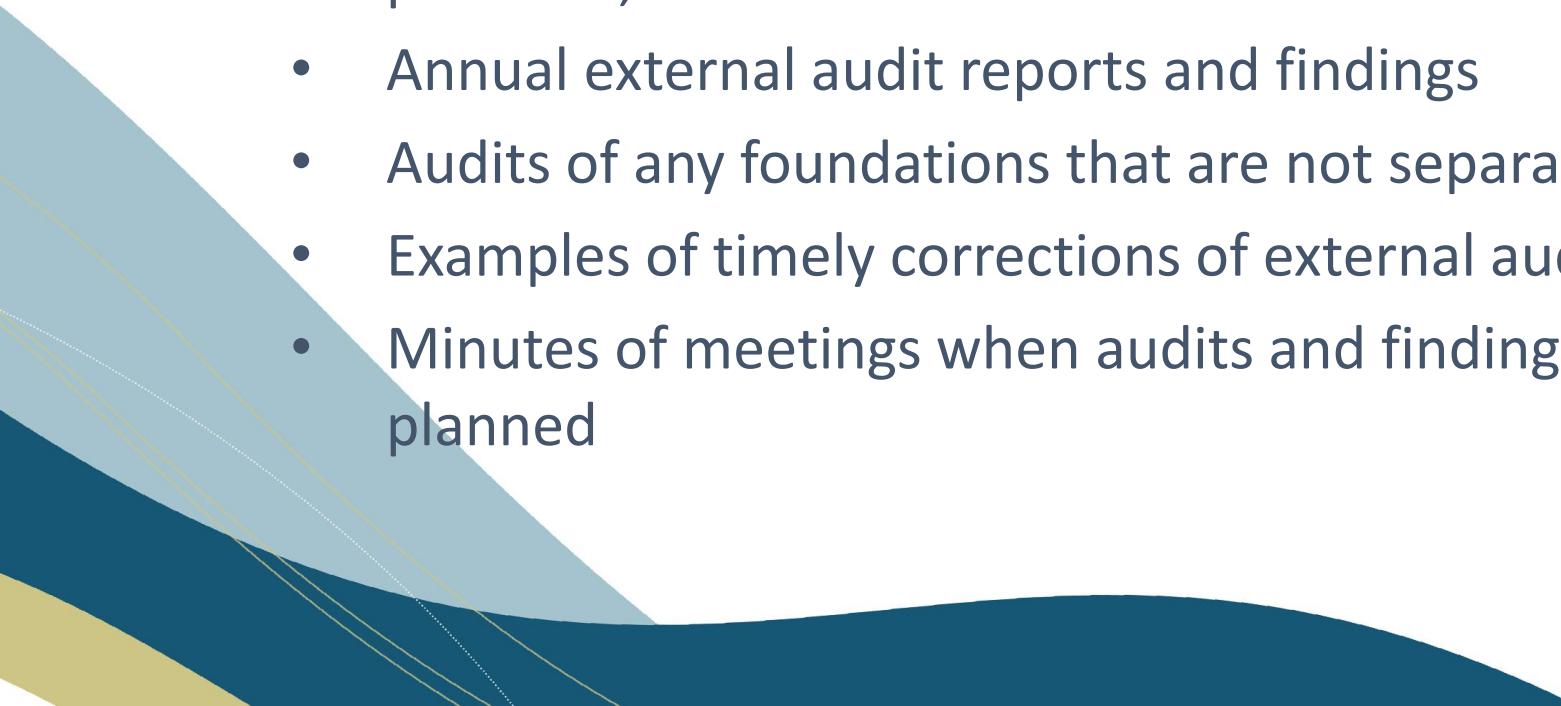
## **Standard 3.6:** (Infrastructure and Resources)

The institution ensures the integrity and responsible use of its financial resources and regularly evaluates its fiscal outcomes and financial management practices to promote institutional mission fulfillment.



## *Standard 3.6 Review Criteria*

- The institution has effective internal and external control mechanisms in place to ensure that dependable, accurate, and timely financial information is available for sound financial decision-making.
- Audits demonstrate the integrity of financial management practices, and audit findings and/or compliance issues are addressed in a timely manner.
- Information about budget, fiscal conditions, and audit results are communicated with stakeholders as appropriate to the institution's mission and structure.



## *Standard 3.6 Possible Sources of Evidence Could Include:*

- Budgets, financial reports, audit reports, and/or similar documents
- Finance department program review, including evaluation of effectiveness of internal controls
- Practices for evaluating the effectiveness and integrity of financial management practices, and the results of such evaluations
- Annual external audit reports and findings
- Audits of any foundations that are not separately incorporated
- Examples of timely corrections of external audit reports and findings
- Minutes of meetings when audits and findings are discussed, and responses are planned

## *Standard 3 (Infrastructure and Resources) – Required Documentation:*

3i. Written policies and procedures for human resources, including hiring procedures

3ii. Employee handbooks or similar documents that communicate expectations to employees

**3iii. Annual financial audit reports (3 prior years, include auxiliary organizations, if applicable) (ER 5)**

**3iv. Practices for resource allocation and budget development (including budget allocation model for multi-college districts/systems)**

**3v. Policies guiding fiscal management (e.g., related to reserves, budget development) 3vi. Policies, procedures or agreements (e.g., AUAs) related to appropriate use of technology systems**

### FOR TITLE IV PARTICIPANTS

3vii. Documentation that the institution's student loan default rates are within the acceptable range defined by ED, or – if rates fall outside the acceptable range – documentation of corrective efforts underway to address the issue

### REQUIRED ONLY IF APPLICABLE

3viii. Documentation of any agreements that fall under ACCJC's Policy on Contractual Relationships with Nonaccredited Organizations 3ix. Written code of professional ethics for all personnel including consequences for violations

# Context for ACCJC's Fiscal Monitoring Practices

## **Federal regulations require that recognized accreditors:**

- Have Standards related to institutions' fiscal capacity
- Monitor institutions to identify potential issues related to ongoing compliance
- Take into account institutional strengths and stability during the review cycle

## **ACCJC implements these requirements through:**

- Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards (esp. Standard 3)
- Comprehensive Review processes
- Annual Fiscal Report monitoring (See [Policy on Monitoring Institutional Performance](#))

# ACCJC's Annual Fiscal Review Process

## **Annual Fiscal Review process designed to:**

- Assess and affirm institutions' fiscal health
- Take into account areas of strength and stability
- Identify potential issues related to ongoing compliance with Standards
- Allow time for institutions to make corrections in response to emerging issues
- Meet federal regulations related to institutional monitoring (34 CFR §602.19(b))

## **Process relies on:**

- Institutions' self-reported data (most recent FY & two prior FYS)
- Input from practitioners at ACCJC member institutions (Fiscal Review Team)

# Annual Fiscal Report: Process & Submission

## **Report Preparation Process:**

- Annual Fiscal Report must be completed online
- Unique survey link is sent to college ALO (mark your calendars!)
- ALO shares the link
- ACCJC Webinar to launch the Annual Fiscal Report and discuss any updates etc.
- College CBOs enter data (collaborating w/ District CBOs if applicable)
- College CEO, CBO, or ALO reviews and submits final report to certify

# Annual Fiscal Review: Overview of the Timing

Approximate Date	What Happens
Early February	ACCJC opens <b>Annual Fiscal Report</b> survey and holds webinar to assist the field/address questions
February – March	Each CCC college completes/submits its Annual Fiscal Report
Early April	<b>Final Certified Annual Fiscal Reports due to ACCJC</b>
April – May	ACCJC staff conduct an initial scoring of all Annual Fiscal Reports using ACCJC's Composite Financial Index
June-August	ACCJC's Fiscal Advisory Group meets (multiple times) to discuss context and weighting of individual criteria on the Composite Financial Index

# Current Fiscal Advisory Group Composition

## ACCJC Representatives:

### ACCJC Commission Chair

Kathleen Burke

### ACCJC Commissioner

Michael Zimmerman

### Aaron Christopher

*ACCJC Fiscal Review Associate/  
Interim CFO*

### Melynne Schiel

*ACCJC Vice President*

## Member College Representatives:

### Mario Rodriguez

*Vice Chancellor, Finance and Administration  
Los Rios Community College District*

### David Martin

*Vice President of Administrative Services  
Sierra College*

### Stevenson Kotton

*Vice President for Business and Administrative  
Affairs*

### Russ Lebo

*Chief Financial Officer  
Ember Education/SJVC/Carrington College*

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

- Scoring discussed by ACCJC's Fiscal Advisory Team
- Composite Financial Index (CFI) methodology
- CFI developed in partnership with the field and drew on:
  - *Strategic Financial Analysis for Higher Education*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition by KPMG & National Association of College and University Business Officials
  - CCCCO's Sound Financial Management Assessment Checklist
- Consistent with principles in CCCCO *Fiscal Forward* training
- Contains 12 criteria that are used to score fiscal health

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

## Composite Financial Index Criteria for CA Community Colleges

Criterion	Description	Standards
<b>1. Primary Reserve Ratio</b>	Fund balance percentage: Ending UGF balance ÷ total GFU expenses <i>* Each year is scored individually</i>	3.4, 3.7, 3.10 <i>Required Documentation: Policies guiding fiscal management (related to reserves)</i>
<b>2. Operating Revenue Ratio</b>	Surplus or deficit ÷ total revenue	3.4, 3.7
<b>3. Surplus or Deficit</b>	Total GFU revenue – Expenditures	3.7

### Notes:

1. Calculations for criteria 1-3 do NOT include one-time transfers-in as revenue
2. Calculations for criteria 2-3 use three-year averages for all variables.

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

## Composite Financial Index Criteria for CA Community Colleges

Criterion	Description	Standards
<b>4. Compensation Percentage</b>	Salaries & benefits as a percentage of total expenditures	3.4, 3.7
<b>5. College Enrollment</b>	Percent change in FTES over the three-year reporting period	3.4, 3.7
<b>6. Funded Ratio: OPEB</b>	Funded percentage of Total OPEB Liability (most recent FY only)	3.7

### Notes:

1. Calculation for criteria 4 uses three-year average for all variables.
2. Calculation for criteria 6 uses the most recent FY only.

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

## Composite Financial Index Criteria for CA Community Colleges

Criterion	Description	Standards
<b>7. Change in Cash Balance as percentage of expenditures</b>	Change from 2 years prior to current FY as % of expenditures	3.7, 3.10
<b>8. Audit Concerns</b>	Number of findings, and qualified or modified opinions (Most recent report year)	3.6, <i>Required Documentation: Annual Financial Audit Reports – prior three years</i>
<b>9. Student Loan Default Rate</b>	Official cohort default rate from US Department of Education	<i>Required Documentation: Documentation that the student loan default rates are within the ED acceptable range for federal compliance</i>

### Notes:

1. Calculation for criteria 9 uses a three-year average.

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

## Composite Financial Index Criteria for CA Community Colleges

Criterion	Description	Standards
<b>10. Cash Flow Projections</b>	Consideration of cash flow projections	3.7
<b>11. Active negotiations</b>	Consideration of the state of any open negotiations	3.7
<b>12. Excessive Changes in College and District Leadership</b>	Consideration of leadership stability	3.4

# Annual Fiscal Report: Review & Scoring

## CFI criteria that *most frequently* contribute to low scores

Criterion	Concern
<b>1. Primary Reserve Ratio</b>	Fund balance of <10%
<b>2. Operating Revenue Ratio</b>	Negative ratio (3-year average)
<b>3. Surplus or Deficit</b>	3-year average deficit
<b>5. College Enrollment</b>	Large decreases in college-level FTES over 3-year reporting period
<b>6. Funded Ratio: OPEB</b>	Less than 50% funded
<b>8. Audit Issues</b>	Excessive findings, and modified or qualified opinions
<b>12. Leadership Changes</b>	4 or more, combined with numerous interim and/or vacancies

# Annual Fiscal Review: Potential Results

Based on scoring against the CFI, colleges fall into one of three categories:

Category	Next Steps for College
<b>Healthy</b>	None; college is not notified
<b>Monitoring or “Watch”</b>	None; college is not notified
<b>Enhanced Monitoring</b>	<p>Respond to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formal communication from ACCJC Staff (Level 1)</li><li>• Commission Action Letter (Level 2)</li></ul>

# Enhanced Monitoring

## Level 1

- First and second year of Enhanced Monitoring
- “Staff Level” monitoring: Commission is not yet formally involved
- Typically involves a letter with additional info and/or outlining corrective actions and requires a response from the college

## Level 2

- Third year of Enhanced Monitoring
- Commission monitoring begins
- May take action to request a special report and/or fiscal monitoring visit

# What questions remain?



# More questions?



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