



**National Council for  
State Authorization  
Reciprocity Agreements**

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December 20, 2021

## Memo

**To:** Potential Organizational Structure and Effectiveness Consultants

**From:** Rob Anderson, NC-SARA Board Vice Chair

## Organizational Structure and Effectiveness Request for Information

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a nonprofit organization that helps expand students' access to postsecondary educational opportunities and provides a platform for the uniform regulation of interstate distance education programs. Through a central office staff and in concert with the four regional higher education compacts,<sup>1</sup> the organization strives to enhance the quality of and consumer protections in interstate postsecondary distance education. The 24-member NC-SARA Board of Directors is composed of representatives of the regional compacts, states, postsecondary education institutions, accrediting agencies, and other thought leaders within the distance education community. States join SARA as members through their corresponding regional compacts, and institutions participate through each institution's home state approval.

NC-SARA's Board of Directors intends to engage a firm to conduct a two-phase analysis addressing organizational structure, operation, and effectiveness. The first phase will examine and provide recommendations for improving the organization's current structure and functional authorities. It is anticipated this would be examined through direct feedback from participants in the system, documentation of roles and responsibilities, as well as operational practices. Phase two will assess current communication and coordination practices among myriad formal and informal constituent groups with a particular focus on how the organization intersects with external groups who possess unique sets of interests pertaining to the reciprocity agreement. The overarching objective is maximizing effective practices to better serve the mission of the NC-SARA organization as stated within Article I, Section 3 of the Board By-Laws: *Mission: The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, in collaboration with the four regional higher education compacts, was established to develop and implement an effective and efficient reciprocal state-level authorization process for postsecondary distance education. Its mission is to provide broad access to postsecondary education opportunities to students across the country, to increase the quality and value of higher learning*

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<sup>1</sup> Regional compacts are voluntary collections of freely associated states and territories who work together to address myriad policy issues through collaboration, shared knowledge, and innovative solutions to pressing issues. Each compact represents a certain grouping of states and territories and has a central staff to assist with the coordination, implementation, and dissemination of joint resources and projects.



*credentials earned via distance education, and to assure students are well served in a rapidly changing education landscape.*

Phase one will analyze current practices and make recommendations for improving NC-SARA's operational efficiency and effectiveness through potential enhancements to its organizational structure, functional authorities, and decision-making to be reflected in a product including workflow models that capture the nuances of these interactions. NC-SARA operates within a multi-faceted construct involving national, regional, state and campus partners, which all play important roles pertaining to the core function of distance education reciprocity. The effective alignment of these entities as well as the formal and informal authorities that exist or are assumed by different players greatly impact how business is conducted and the effectiveness of the outcomes. This analysis will involve both an examination of organizational documents and interviews with operational partners to determine current organizational operation as well as recommended actions for Board consideration.

There are several specific areas the Board would like to address regarding organizational efficiency and effectiveness. This task will be accomplished through the lens of organizational mission as previously articulated. The objective is to develop a clear understanding of the alignment and misalignment of the current components of SARA as each entity attempts to operationalize the organizational mission.

1. How does the national nonprofit component, NC-SARA, currently function regarding alignment with what is articulated within the Unified Agreement?
2. What functional roles are the Regional Compacts playing and how well is this aligned with the Unified Agreement?
3. Where do we find misalignment between current policies and practices that should be addressed by the Board? This can include but is not limited to contradictory statements between different documents, a lack of clarity in purpose or function, or a lack of definition.
4. What role is the Board of Directors currently undertaking and how can they most effectively support the organizational mission?

Phase two will build on the first phase and provide an analysis of current communication practices that will result in recommended best practices to align organizational resources, partners, and external constituent groups in a manner that most effectively serves the organization's mission. Ultimately, the Board would like to consider a strategy and best approach to these issues that takes into consideration the various internal and external constituent groups resulting in a framework that promotes effective outcomes for all parties.

The reciprocity agreement has grown to include 49 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands, positioning SARA and NC-SARA as an integral component within the higher education landscape. This national positioning and the role the operation serves within distance education has created a dynamic where many organizations are interested in organizational policies and practices and have specific recommendations to advance the work through their specific lenses. Consideration of these requests and communication between entities can become difficult and confusing.

The ad hoc committee is seeking information from potential consultants regarding the following tasks:

- Analyze organizational and inter-organizational structures, practices, documents, and processes with an objective of making recommendations for clarifying roles, divisions of labor, improving alignment, and reducing inconsistencies and duplication.
- Analyze current communication and coordination practices among numerous internal and external stakeholders resulting in recommendations for future practices. A component of this analysis will be to assist in identifying both formal and informal stakeholders who must be considered and systematically included within this important work.

The ad hoc committee will take responsibility for providing the selected consultant with the appropriate information about the unique nature of the organization, including:

- Unified Agreement
- Board bylaws
- SARA Policy Manual
- NC-SARA's 2020-2023 Strategic Plan
- NC-SARA's Board Handbook
- Other relevant reports
- Availability of partners and necessary personnel for interviews

### **Responses to the Request for Information**

The ad hoc committee requests that the analysis begin in February and phase one conclude by April 15. Findings will be presented and discussed at a Board Meeting to be held on May 6 in Denver, Colorado. Phase two should be completed by May 16 in preparation for a June Board retreat.

Responses to the RFI should include:

- An outline of the work to be conducted
- A proposed timeline
- Any pre-work expectations of the committee or Board
- The cost associated with the study

**RFI due date:** January 10, 2022