



ACCJC sees significantly happier staff and increased efficiency with accreditation management solution for higher education

We partnered with ACCJC to develop an accreditation management system that supports peer review and evaluation to foster institutional excellence and advance student outcomes.

ACCJC

The Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that accredits associate degree-granting institutions in the United States and its territories. ACCJC supports its member institutions to advance educational quality and student learning and achievement.

Mac Powell, president of ACCJC, noted, *“As an organization, our success is really the success of our students. ACCJC’s 137 member institutions collectively serve about 2.2 million students.”*

Peer review is the unique and essential component to the American system of higher education accreditation. About 1,000 volunteers support ACCJC’s peer review processes and work with ACCJC and member institutions to uphold accreditation standards through cycles of reports, monitoring, and regular campus visits. This collaboration fosters institutional excellence and continuous improvement.

The work of higher education accreditation is an unsung but important part of societal progress. Powell shared, “The public often forgets the tremendous economic engine that higher education is, and its function as a tool of incredible social mobility. Accreditation helps institutions stay focused on what I believe is most important, which is students and their outcomes.

“Campuses have very divergent viewpoints across stakeholder groups about decision-making and resource allocation. What I have always found powerful about accreditation is that it brings all of these different perspectives and stakeholders together by asking two questions—how well do we serve our students and how can we do it better—accreditation puts those questions at the forefront and asks how institutional decision-making comes from a student-centered, data-informed point of view.”

“We relied heavily on Sara and her team’s prior work with other accreditors. Because they have so much experience in the space, they were able to take what they had learned, map it onto our processes, and through a conversation of what we might change and how Salesforce could be modified, we came up with a plan that was realistic, manageable, and affordable.”

—Mac Powell, President, ACCJC

75%

Time savings in key accreditation management functions

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Tens of thousands of dollars saved in evaluator instruction and onboarding



A single source of truth for business data



Significantly happier staff

ACCJC'S GOALS

ACCJC had been working with paper-based accreditation processes for the majority of its existence, sending and receiving institutional documents through the mail, and scanning those documents into their servers. The organization also used email and a server-based strategy to manage individual electronic files. Two years ago, ACCJC made the decision to move towards a cloud-based engagement strategy.

The organization wanted to increase transparency of information across a diverse set of stakeholders, from tracking deadlines and processes to sharing results. The ACCJC team also hoped to streamline their data architecture and improve their sharing abilities using always-current digital contact and timeline information that would be available on a self-service basis, without staff involvement.

Another goal of the organization was to translate organizational processes into a cloud-based system, because many of ACCJC's ways of working were contained only in the minds of staff and the organization's oral narrative.

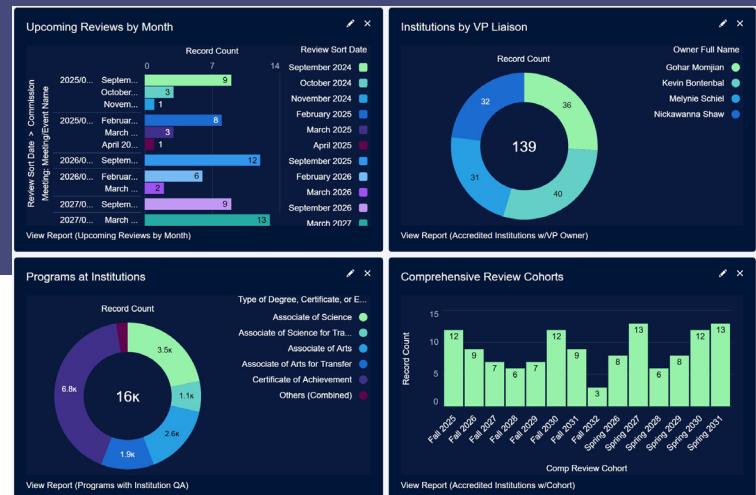
WHAT WE BUILT

ACCJC reached out to our team to develop and implement an accreditation management solution for them on the Salesforce platform. One of their leaders had enjoyed working with us in the past and had a lot of trust in our experience with other accreditation systems. The initial launch happened within six months, and we've continued to expand and adapt their system to grow along with their organization.

To date, the system we built for them features the following:

- A database providing all-staff access to institutional, peer reviewer, and commissioner contact tracking, institutional accreditation cycle tracking and project management, accreditation standards, and more
- Stakeholder portals on Salesforce Experience Cloud:
 - Institution portal to give institutions immediate and ongoing access to share required information and to review information about accreditation expectations, processes, and approvals
 - Volunteer evaluator portal that serves as a container for peer reviewers to evaluate institutions, take online workshops with a MapleLMS integration, keep personal information current, project manage their volunteer service, and other needs
 - Commissioner portal for accessing institutional review data, building agendas, and organizing meetings
- Reporting and dashboards to visualize institutional success
- Document storage organized in the cloud with a Box.com integration

The accreditation solution we built has helped transform ACCJC to a sleek cloud-based organization. Powell found it ease of use, transparency, and data security impressive.



Data dashboard on the ACCJC Staff System Homepage – fully customizable with relevant institutional and report data

We developed all of ACCJC's portals on Salesforce Experience Cloud to provide affordable access for external users. The simultaneous access and information-sharing between staff, institutions, and peer evaluators creates a lot of time savings for staff and means all parties share a single source of truth. Online forms and user interfaces that evaluators, institutions, and commission members work with correspond directly to records on the "back end" of Salesforce that staff can view. These underlying records refresh when a user makes an update, saving staff from duplication of effort and keeping data current and organized.

Powell shared, *"Before, every process required manual updating. If contact information changed, if a committee roster changed, if a team roster changed, we would have to go into different files, modify the files, relabel them, re-save them, re-share them. It was a very time-intensive, logistically challenging process. Now, with our Salesforce system, all of the information can be modified and shared instantaneously."*

The system serves as a hub for staff, volunteer evaluators, and commission members to efficiently and asynchronously play their unique roles in the accreditation process, from setting up evaluator teams to reviewing documentation to conducting site visits. Institutions can track their progress and submit required information and updates without communication bottlenecks. Volunteers can participate in virtual workshops and view team assignments. Commission members can access all the data needed to make informed decisions. Staff can seamlessly work across all of the portals, ensuring accurate information and smooth project management for all.

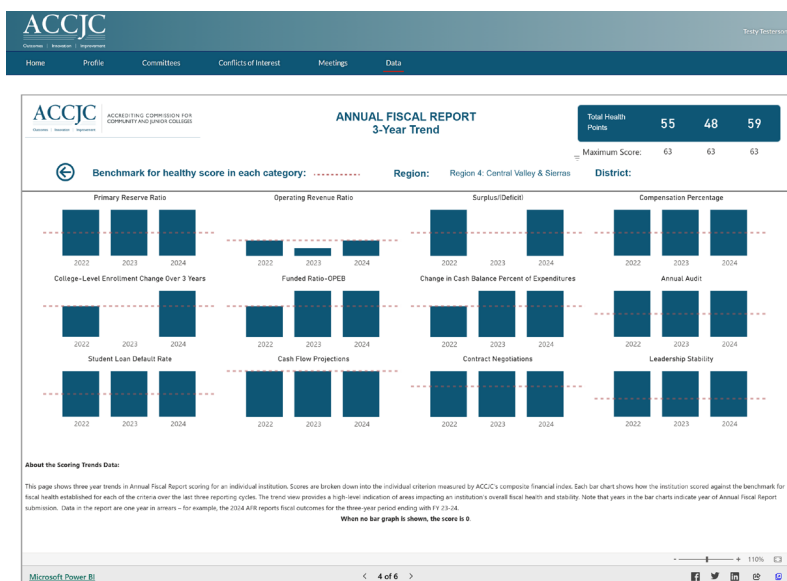
To help staff and institutions see the big picture at a glance, we set up a series of reports and dashboards, which “brings institutional data and accreditation project management alive through visualization as opposed to a set of folders, deadlines, and reports,” Powell said. Some dashboards are even built into the staff homepage and portals, like annual student achievement data for institutions, including information on graduation, retention, and persistence.

The flexibility of the system’s data structure supports the rigorous standards of ACCJC. As just one example of the system’s impressive capabilities, earlier member institutions adhere to older sets of standards, while new institutions follow the current standards—the system is able to accurately manage both.

Once volunteers complete their instruction, the system identifies them as eligible to be peer reviewers. The next step designed within the system is a staffing engine that pairs evaluators with suitable teams based on their skills. Conflicts of interest (like an evaluator from the accredee’s institution) are also auto-flagged in the system. When scheduling visits or meetings, unavailable or ineligible evaluators can be flexibly swapped with appropriate ones in seconds.

“We can create teams with the push of a button and then make modifications to them,” Powell explained. “That process has saved us a tremendous amount of time. Then, rather than having to call or reach out to each one of those evaluators individually, we can use Salesforce communication tools to automatically alert them that they’ve been invited, and they can respond electronically. We have been filling our teams much more efficiently and quickly as a result of this very impressive tool.”

The accreditation management system we built for ACCJC has streamlined their collaboration with higher education institutions, evaluators, and commission members on the critical work of peer review accreditation, and helped precious resources go further towards advancing student outcomes.



ACCJC Volunteer Portal – embedded PowerBI reports from Annual Data Collection

IMPACT ON THEIR WORK

AN ACCESSIBLE, SEARCHABLE SYSTEM

ACCJC has moved from its server-based IT system to a system that is accessible, searchable, and reportable. Powell noted, “By its nature, the system transforms how we think about our information and how we can use it. And from a people perspective, it makes the job of recording, tracking, storing, and sharing information tremendously easier.”

24/7 ACCESS TO ACCREDITATION DETAILS

ACCJC has received feedback that institutions are very excited and pleased with their portal access. Prior to our Salesforce implementation, when institutions wanted information about their accreditation or status or program approvals, an ACCJC staff member would have to go into a server, navigate through myriad folders, and sift through individual PDFs to find the information. Now, much of the information is visualized and can be accessed by them at any time, without waiting.

STAFF WORKLOAD REDUCTION

Key functions of ACCJC’s staff’s work—such as creating agendas, forming rosters, storing and sharing contact information, and distributing accreditation reports and outcomes—have been highly streamlined and simplified because the system can be updated instantly by everyone and viewed by everyone, so information stays consistent.

One staff member had a workload devoted mostly to tracking contacts, titles, and locations of ACCJC’s thousand volunteer evaluators, and that person has been freed up to do important higher-level tasks like engaging with member institutions regularly and monitoring the regulatory environment.

Powell estimated that in many key areas, work takes a quarter of the time to perform the same functions. He added, “I have significantly happier staff. One of the greatest joys of this has been to see a team whose work has been made easier.”

EFFICIENT, COST-EFFECTIVE EVALUATOR WORKSHOPS AND ONBOARDING

Before the new system, ACCJC spent tens of thousands of dollars annually to travel, instruct, and track onboarding of volunteer evaluators. The organization has since transitioned to MapleLMS, a learning management system (LMS) for workshops that we integrated with Salesforce. Powell said, “It’s saved our staff a tremendous amount of time and it’s saved our volunteers a tremendous amount of time because they don’t have to travel to be trained anymore. The efficiency has really been significant, to say the least.” Now volunteers can asynchronously progress through workshops and ACCJC staff can see their progress within Salesforce.