



Cycles of Improvement

AQIP is a quality improvement program *and* a quality assurance program for higher education organizations. It operates by involving participating institutions in three distinct cycles that occur simultaneously. Each cycle has a different duration and sequence of distinctive processes.



Action — This **one-year cycle** drives continuous improvement by having every AQIP college or university tackle three or four **Action Projects** that it has chosen, committed to completing in a few months or years, and published in AQIP’s on-line **Action Project Directory**. Organizations can complete Action Projects and begin new ones at any time. Each fall, they provide **Action Project Updates** to AQIP on the progress of current projects, and AQIP provides written feedback on these reports. Improvements in the processes an institution employs or the performance results it achieves are incorporated into its published **Systems Portfolio**.

Strategy — This **four year cycle** drives improvement by having every AQIP organization create and maintain an up-to-date **Systems Portfolio** describing key systems and processes the organization uses to achieve its goals and the performance results it obtains from them. A **System Appraisal** of the Systems Portfolio provides institutions with written, actionable feedback they can use to create strategies and actions that will move them quickly toward achievement of their goals. Participation in a **Strategy Forum** drives organizations to use this feedback in shaping new strategies, aligning systems, and creating specific Action Projects.



Accreditation — This **seven-year cycle** reviews evidence from both the action cycles and strategy cycles, evidence that demonstrates that an AQIP organization continues to comply with the Higher Learning Commission’s *Criteria for Accreditation* – and that continuing its participation in AQIP will result in measurable performance improvement. A **Check-Up Visit** to the institution a year or two before its **Reaffirmation of Accreditation** review confirms the improvements it is making as well as the accuracy of the evidence it has provided to AQIP while providing helpful feedback and consultation on specific issues of its choosing.

New AQIP institutions concentrate their first Strategy Forum on selecting initial Action Projects that will launch their quality initiative with energy. In the three years following this first Strategy Forum, they create their Systems Portfolio. Subsequent Strategy Forums concentrate on using the feedback from the Systems Appraisal to identify broader institutional improvement strategies, while continuing to use Action Projects to implement these strategies.