

3. PROGRAM



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1. Objective

1.1 The program's objective is to develop the foundation for a system of accreditation and quality standards for higher distance education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean (Virtual Center) and to conduct preliminary studies of the validity of this foundation through consultations and pilot tests.

1.2 The objectives are: (a) to promote the idea that higher education institutions can successfully develop, launch, and administer distance education programs based in information technology; and (b) to contribute to government's ability to regulate, evaluate, and accredit these distance education programs.

II. Description

2.01 The program will finance the creation of a "Virtual Center for the Development of Higher Education Quality Standards" through the implementation of the following components and their associated activities:

a) Development of the foundations for a Quality Standards system

2.02 Activity One

A team of experts, to be contracted, will analyze a representative sample of the higher distance education courses currently available in Latin America and the Caribbean, considering their standards, technological infrastructure and scope, the contents of both national and international courses, and best practices such as course logistics and effective support systems for distance learning.

Likewise, the demand for and the benefits resulting from a Quality Standards system for public and private universities and institutions of the region should be analyzed.

2.03 Activity Two.

Based on this analysis and through the development of a working paper, the expert team will propose specific standards for the evaluation of virtual and distance courses of Latin American and the Caribbean. We added the sections highlighted in black, as they were the interpretations of the document generated at the meeting in Washington at the IDB headquarters. A potential regulatory framework for virtual courses of international origin will also be proposed, with the goal of assuring quality education in Latin America and the Caribbean.

2.04 This document will be reviewed in a series of consultations with members of the coordinating committee (the executive directors of the UTPL, the CREAD and the AIESAD), a team selected by the coordinating committee composed of academics (the “Academic Group”), specialized institutions (the Universidad Nacional Abierta de Venezuela, the Universidad Central de Venezuela, the Universidad de Costa Rica, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, the Universidad de Brasilia, the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia de España, Penn State University of the United States, and the University of British Columbia of Canada), and ideally with international specialists in distance education through electronic communications. The working paper will be distributed during the technical meeting on standards described in Activity Three.

2.05 Activity Three

In order to improve and assure solid support for the evaluation model, it will be reviewed and updated in a technical meeting. In this meeting the Team of Experts, the Academic Group, the Coordinating Committee, and international specialists will discuss the contents of the working paper, suggest revisions, and approve the document for later publication. The majority of the discussion will focus on the proposed Quality Standards in the revised working document, which will become the catalysts for later online exchanges among distance education

specialists from Latin America and the Caribbean. The initial proposed standards may be modified, expanded, or deleted as a result of this meeting.

2.06 Once the evaluation model incorporating the proposed standards has been defined, the next step will be to identify the technical requirements needed to implement the standards in specific programs in Latin America. The identified needs will be the starting point for the creation of an online communication system aimed at facilitating the use of the evaluation model by universities, educational authorities, and researchers.

b) Creation of a Prototype Communication System

2.07 Activity One.

A team will be formed to design and develop communication instruments and a database which will allow the users to compare the proposed standards, explore the reasons for including the standards, and analyze them from various perspectives. In this way national and institutional educational leaders can determine how their professors categorize the standards incorporated into the evaluation model and compare their results with those produced by institutions or professors from other countries. In addition, they can make various types of comparisons of the characteristics of their distance programs with the Quality Standards. This database will take into account similar existing models in the United States and Europe in order to develop a model that can be widely used by professionals in Latin America and the Caribbean.

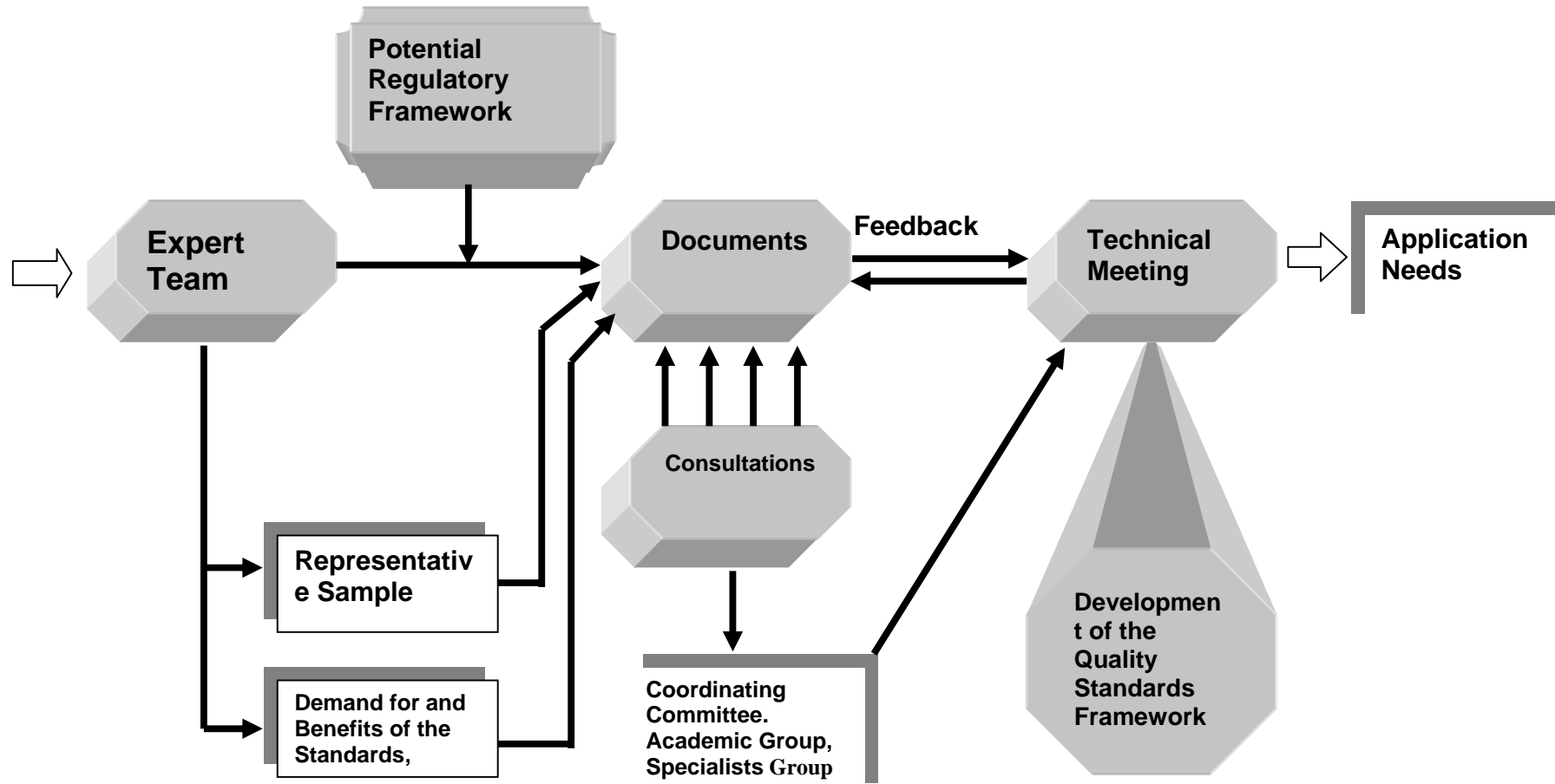
2.08 This communication system includes an online format for comparisons and information collection as well as “interactive discussions” which will permit the users to share relevant comments for the use and development of the evaluation model.

2.09 Activity Two.

A pilot test will be implemented to verify that the system is operational by incorporating it into four higher education institutions. These institutions, from a variety of countries, will be selected based their previous experience offering higher distance education. Technicians will analyze the feedback received regarding the ease of use of the system and suggestions for augmenting or revising it. The final step will be to make the final version of the system available to institutions, governments, and educators in the field of distance education, facilitated by a public site on the internet.

a)

GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIO



b)

