

FREE FOUNDER'S TOOLKIT · 2026 EDITION

Mastering the CIE Approval Process in Florida: *The Founder's Handbook* to Licensing Your Institution

Everything you need to obtain — and keep — your license from the Florida Commission for Independent Education: the 14 required forms, the Commission calendar, filing deadlines, deficiency triggers, and the proven path from concept to approval.

115+

INSTITUTIONS
LAUNCHED

98%

FIRST-SUBMISSION
APPROVAL

8mo

FASTEST CIE
LICENSE



WRITTEN BY

Dr. Sandra Norderhaug

Founder and CEO, Expert Education Consultants

What's Inside This Handbook

This handbook distills what Expert Education Consultants has learned taking founders through the Florida Commission for Independent Education — including two of the fastest CIE provisional licenses on record. Each chapter is written to be acted on, not just read.

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CHAPTER 01

Why CIE Licensure *Matters*

If you plan to operate a non-public postsecondary institution in Florida — degree-granting or non-degree — a license from the Florida Commission for Independent Education is not optional. It is the legal foundation everything else is built on.

1.1 Legal Authorization to Operate

Florida law requires nonpublic postsecondary institutions to be licensed by the Commission before operating. Operating without a license exposes you to fines, legal action, and closure. More practically for a founder: **an institution may not advertise, recruit students, accept any fees or tuition, or hold classes until the printed Provisional License is physically received.** Every week of delay in your application is a week of delayed revenue.

1.2 Credibility With Students, Faculty, and Partners

CIE licensure signals that your institution has cleared a rigorous state review of its programs, finances, facilities, and leadership. For a new institution without an accreditation track record, the license is your first — and for a while, your only — external validation. It matters to prospective students comparing options, to faculty deciding whether to join, and to landlords, lenders, and vendors deciding whether to do business with you.

1.3 The Gateway to Accreditation

Institutional accreditation — the credential that unlocks Title IV federal financial aid — requires you to first operate as a licensed institution. Accreditors like DEAC, ACCSC, COE, and TRACS expect to see a licensed, operating school with enrolled students before they will evaluate you. Your CIE license is step one on that path, and the quality of your licensing application (policies, catalog, financials, governance) becomes the raw material for your accreditation self-study later. Do it well once, and you're building both at the same time.

IMPORTANT — SET EXPECTATIONS CORRECTLY

A CIE license authorizes you to operate in Florida. It does **not** make your institution accredited, and it does not make your students eligible for Title IV federal financial aid. Licensing and accreditation are separate processes with separate authorities — Chapter 7 covers how to sequence them.

1.4 Accountability That Protects Your Investment

The approval process forces discipline: a real business plan, defensible enrollment projections, compliant student-facing documents, and qualified faculty files. Founders sometimes see this as bureaucracy. In our experience across 115+ institution launches, it is closer to free due diligence — the weaknesses CIE staff finds in your application are the same weaknesses that would have cost you far more after launch.

CHAPTER 02

Understanding the *Commission for Independent Education*

2.1 Who the CIE Is

The Commission for Independent Education operates under the Florida Department of Education and licenses and regulates nonpublic postsecondary institutions in the state. Its mandate is consumer protection: ensuring institutions meet standards of quality, integrity, and financial stability before — and while — they serve students.

2.2 The Legal Framework: Chapter 1005 and Rule 6E

Two sources govern everything the CIE does. **Chapter 1005, Florida Statutes** establishes the Commission's authority, licensure requirements, and enforcement powers. **Rule 6E, Florida Administrative Code** contains the detailed operating standards — the specific requirements your catalog, enrollment agreement, refund policy, finances, and facilities must meet. When CIE staff issues a deficiency notice, it cites Rule 6E. Read it before you write a single institutional document, and align every policy to it from the start.

2.3 Jurisdiction and Scope

The CIE licenses nonpublic postsecondary institutions offering degrees, diplomas, or certificates in Florida — including vocational, technical, and career programs. Accredited institutions fall under a lighter-touch regime (see License by Means of Accreditation below), while certain religious institutions may qualify for exemption. A note of caution from experience: **never assume an exemption applies to you.** Request a formal determination from CIE staff before making any public claims or enrolling students on the basis of an exemption.

2.4 Florida's Three License Types

LICENSE TYPE	WHO IT'S FOR
Provisional License	Initial authorization for new, unaccredited institutions. This is where every new school starts — and the focus of this handbook.
Annual License	Ongoing authorization after your institution demonstrates sustained compliance under the provisional license.
License by Means of Accreditation	Streamlined licensure for institutions holding recognized institutional accreditation — your destination once accreditation is achieved.

2.5 Ongoing Monitoring

Licensure is a relationship, not a transaction. The CIE monitors licensed institutions through annual reporting, periodic site visits, and review of student complaints. Institutions that drift out of compliance face fines, probation, or revocation. Chapter 7 covers how to stay comfortably on the right side of this.

FOUNDER'S STRATEGY NOTE

The winning approach we use with clients is **parallelization**: assemble the CIE application, stand up governance and core policies, and begin accreditation readiness at the same time. What the state sees, what your future accreditor sees, and what your operations actually do should be one aligned system from day one — it is dramatically cheaper than reconciling them later.

CHAPTER 03

The Application Package: *All 14 Required Forms*

A Florida CIE new school application is fourteen official forms plus supporting documentation, submitted together as one package. Below is every form, grouped the way we prepare them for clients — with what CIE staff actually looks for in each. Always download the current versions from the official FLDOE New Institution Application page.

Group 1 — License Application & Fees

FORM	WHAT CIE STAFF LOOKS FOR
Provisional License Application	Internal consistency above all. Your programs, budget, catalog, and enrollment agreement must tell the same story everywhere — mismatches are the #1 deficiency trigger.
Application Fee Form	Correct fee amounts and a properly completed transmittal. Incorrect fees are a surprisingly common cause of rejected packages.
Student Protection Fee Form	A separate transmittal funding Florida's student protection mechanism — never combine it with the application fee.
Criminal Justice Background Fee Form	Background screening fees for owners and controlling principals. Every principal listed in your application must be accounted for.

Group 2 — Programs & Faculty

FORM	WHAT CIE STAFF LOOKS FOR
Program Outline — Degree	One per degree program. Credit-hour math and course sequencing must reconcile exactly with the catalog.
Program Outline — Non-Degree	Clock-hour totals aligned with your enrollment agreement and tuition schedule.
Instructional & Administrative Personnel Form	A qualified chief administrator and clear lines of academic oversight.
Faculty Listing	Each instructor's credentials mapped to assigned courses — degrees must match or exceed the level taught.

Group 3 — Compliance Checklists (Rule 6E Self-Audit)

FORM	WHAT CIE STAFF LOOKS FOR
Checklist — Catalog	The document reviewers read most closely. Every Rule 6E required disclosure must be present and current.
Checklist — Enrollment Agreement	Tuition, program length, and refund terms matching the catalog word-for-word.
Checklist — Refund Policy	Terms that meet or exceed Florida's prescribed minimums in every enrollment scenario.
Checklist — Finances	Positive working capital, profit/surplus, or an acceptable improvement plan or surety. Weak financials are the most common denial reason.

Group 4 — Business Plan & Budget

FORM	WHAT CIE STAFF LOOKS FOR
Form 605 — Business Plan	Executive summary, facilities, program descriptions, marketing plan, pro forma financials, break-even analysis, teach-out plan, and business continuity plan. The Commission reads this cover to cover.
Form 606 — Budget (Excel)	Tuition revenue projections and expenses built on defensible enrollment assumptions consistent with Form 605.

PRACTICAL SUBMISSION RULES

Completed applications are emailed to **cieinfo@fldoe.org** (or mailed to the Commission in Tallahassee). Keep each email under **30 MB** or it may be rejected without warning; if you must split across emails, label them clearly ("Email 1 of 2"). The CIE mailbox sends an automatic confirmation — **if you don't receive one, your application was not received**. The Commission also publishes tutorial videos for eight of the forms on the FLDOE New Institution Application page — watch them before completing each form.

CHAPTER 04

The Commission Calendar & *Filing Deadlines*

The single most expensive mistake founders make is discovering the deadline rhythm too late. The Commission meets every other month — six meetings per year — and your application must be filed months before the meeting at which it is heard. Miss a deadline by one day and you wait an entire cycle.

The Deadline Rhythm

LEAD TIME	WHAT IT APPLIES TO
~5 months before the meeting	New-institution applications. File September 1 for a late-January meeting, November 1 for late March, and so on through the year.
~4 months before the meeting	All other applications — program additions, location changes, and any action requiring Commission review. These fall one month after the new-institution deadline for the same meeting.
~3 months of preparation	What a complete, deficiency-free application package realistically takes to assemble: business plan, budget, program outlines, faculty files, catalog, and enrollment agreement.

Plan Backwards From the Meeting You Want

Add the numbers and the strategy becomes obvious: from a standing start, you are roughly **eight months from your target Commission meeting** — three months to prepare a complete package, filed five months before the meeting date. Founders who begin "when we're ready" routinely lose a full cycle; founders who pick a target meeting and work backwards hit it.

WHAT MISSING A DEADLINE ACTUALLY COSTS

Your application rolls to the next cycle — a minimum two-month delay, and up to five or more months if the year's remaining deadlines have passed. Because you cannot advertise, recruit, collect tuition, or hold classes until the printed Provisional License arrives, a missed filing deadline translates directly into delayed enrollment and delayed revenue. Deadline discipline is launch discipline.

LIVE RESOURCE — ALWAYS-CURRENT DEADLINES

Meeting dates and filing deadlines change every year. We maintain a live Florida CIE deadlines page — every Commission meeting, every filing date, and all 14 official forms — updated against the official FLDOE calendar, with deadline status computed automatically: **bppe.consulting/get-state-approval/florida**. Bookmark it, and always confirm against the official FLDOE CIE calendar before filing.

The Approval Process, *Step by Step*

From submission to license in hand, the Commission's review normally takes **4 to 6 months**. Here is the full sequence — and where applications gain or lose time at each stage.

1 **Submit the Complete Application Package**

All 14 forms, all required documentation, all fees — emailed to cieinfo@fldoe.org. "Complete" is the operative word: partial packages start the clock over.

2 **Staff Review Within 30 Days**

Licensure staff reviews your package within 30 days of receipt and checks it against Rule 6E requirements form by form.

3 **Written Deficiency Notification**

Staff notifies you in writing of any omissions or deficiencies. This is where most timelines slip — every deficiency cycle adds weeks. Chapter 6 covers the seven most common triggers.

4 **Respond Timely and Completely**

Answer every point in one complete response. Piecemeal replies create additional review rounds and can push you past your target meeting's agenda.

5 **Site Visit (When Scheduled)**

The CIE may schedule a visit to verify facilities, resources, and readiness. Run a mock inspection first: safety documentation, learning resources, student records systems, and posted disclosures should all be visit-ready.

6 **Staff Finalizes for Commission Review**

Once your file is complete and deficiencies are resolved, staff places your application on the agenda for a Commission meeting.

7 **The Commission Meeting**

Your application is presented to the Commission for consideration. Attend — it is strongly recommended that a representative be present to address any concerns in real time. We prepare clients with anticipated questions and attend alongside them.

Approval — and the Printed License

The Commission grants or denies approval. Remember: operations, advertising, recruiting, and tuition collection may begin only when the printed Provisional License is received.

The Seven Most Common *Deficiency Triggers*

Across 115+ institutional launches, 98% of the applications Expert Education Consultants submits are approved on first submission. That number is not luck — it comes from eliminating the same seven deficiencies we see sink other applications, before the package ever goes out.

1 Internal Inconsistency Across Documents

Tuition in the enrollment agreement that doesn't match the catalog. Program lengths that differ between the program outline and Form 605. Staff reads for consistency first — reconcile every number across every document before submission.

2 Weak or Unsupported Financials

The most common denial reason. You must show positive working capital, profit/surplus, or an acceptable plan or surety — and enrollment projections in Form 606 must be defensible, not aspirational.

3 Catalog Gaps Against Rule 6E

The catalog is the most closely read document in the package. Missing required disclosures — grievance procedures, transfer-of-credit policy, attendance standards — generate line-item deficiencies.

4 Refund Policy Below Florida Minimums

Florida prescribes minimum refund terms. A policy copied from another state, or from an accreditor template, frequently falls short in specific enrollment scenarios.

5 Faculty Credentials That Don't Map

Every instructor must hold credentials at or above the level of the courses assigned. Gaps between the faculty listing and the program outlines are caught immediately.

6 Fee Transmittal Errors

Wrong amounts, combined fees that should be separate, or missing background-screening fees for a listed principal. Small errors, disproportionate delays.

7 A Business Plan That Doesn't Hold Together

Form 605 is read cover to cover. Marketing plans with no budget behind them, break-even math that ignores the teach-out reserve, or facilities that don't match the programs described — the Commission notices all of it.

THE DISCIPLINE BEHIND 98%

Before any client package is submitted, we run it through a full internal audit against Rule 6E — the same review CIE staff will perform — and resolve every finding first. One clean submission beats three deficiency cycles, every time.

After Approval: *Maintaining Your License*

7.1 Annual Reporting

Licensed institutions submit annual reports demonstrating continued compliance: updated financial statements, enrollment data, graduation and placement rates, and significant operational changes. Build your student information system to capture these data points from day one — reconstructing them at reporting time is painful and error-prone.

7.2 Renewal — On Its Own Clock

Your license has a defined validity period and must be renewed with updated documentation and fees before it expires. Critically, **annual renewals and fees run on their own cycle — do not wait for a Commission meeting to address them.** Calendar the renewal window the day you receive your license.

7.3 Report Changes Before They Happen

Changes in ownership, location, or programs — additions or discontinuations — must be reported to the CIE, and many require Commission action (which means the 4-month filing deadline applies). Plan material changes around the meeting calendar the same way you planned your original application.

7.4 Complaints and Compliance

The CIE reviews student complaints as part of its monitoring. Maintain a documented complaint-handling process and resolve issues promptly — a clean complaint record is one of your strongest assets at renewal time and, later, in accreditation.

7.5 The Path Forward: Provisional → Annual → Accreditation

The provisional license is a beginning, not a destination. Sustained compliance moves you to an Annual License; achieving recognized institutional accreditation qualifies you for License by Means of Accreditation — and unlocks Title IV eligibility for your students. The strongest institutions treat their CIE application as the first draft of their accreditation self-study, so every hour invested in licensing compounds.

WHERE EXPERT EDUCATION CONSULTANTS FITS

Licensing is one leg of a longer journey. Our team supports the full arc — state licensing, curriculum development, faculty recruitment, LMS/SIS implementation, and accreditation with DEAC, ACCSC, COE, TRACS and others — as a single coordinated engagement, so nothing built for the CIE has to be rebuilt for your accreditor.

CHAPTER 08

Proven in Florida: *Two Case Studies*

Advice is easy; results are evidence. These are two of the fastest CIE provisional licenses on record — both achieved with the exact process described in this handbook.



"Expert Education Consultants was the partner we relied on from day one at Florida Coastal University. From entity formation and curriculum development to faculty hiring and facility setup, they helped us obtain our CIE provisional license in only 11 months."

Raghwa Gopal

Florida Coastal University

✓ Concept to CIE Provisional License in 11 months



"From the initial feasibility assessment through curriculum design, faculty recruitment, and the CIE provisional license application, her team guided every step with precision. We went from concept to a fully licensed institution in just eight months."

Professor Balvir Tomar

Florida Tech University

✓ Concept to CIE Provisional License in 8 months

What Both Launches Had in Common

- ✓ A target Commission meeting selected on day one, with every workstream scheduled backwards from its filing deadline
- ✓ Entity formation, curriculum, faculty files, and the CIE package built in parallel — not in sequence
- ✓ A full internal Rule 6E audit before submission, resolving every would-be deficiency in advance

- ✓ A prepared representative at the Commission meeting to address questions in real time

The same playbook is repeatable — for degree-granting universities, nursing and allied health schools, and career institutions alike. The next chapter of it can be yours.

Your Florida Institution Is *Eight Months Away*. Start the Clock Well.

Every founder we've licensed started exactly where you are now — with a vision and a regulatory mountain in front of it. Expert Education Consultants has taken 115+ institutions from concept to approval, with 98% of applications approved on first submission. Your free strategy call is where we map your specific path: institution type, target Commission meeting, timeline, and budget.

BOOK YOUR FREE STRATEGY CALL

Dr. Sandra Norderhaug — Founder and CEO

Email: sandra@experteduconsult.com

Web: bppe.consulting

Expert Education Consultants · 12724 Gran Bay Parkway West, Bartram Park,
Jacksonville, FL 32258

KEEP GOING — FREE RESOURCES

Live Florida CIE deadlines & all 14 official forms: bppe.consulting/get-state-approval/florida

Complete Florida licensing guide & video library: bppe.consulting/video-library

Blog, video library, and founder toolkits: bppe.consulting