

ACA ACCREDITATION INFORMATION

The requirements of the accreditation process are the same for all types of agencies - state, county, federal and private. All programs and facilities sign a contract, pay an accreditation fee, conduct a self-evaluation and have a standards compliance audit by trained ACA consultants prior to an accreditation decision by the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections.

APPLICANT STATUS

In order to enter into Applicant Status, agency staff should contact ACA to obtain the necessary materials to implement the process. Certain narrative information regarding the agency is necessary to confirm eligibility and determine the applicable manual of standards and appropriate fees. An accreditation contract is then executed and sent to the agency. The signed contract must be returned to the Association to initiate the process.

PRE-AUDIT ASSESSMENT

Some agencies have serious concerns and questions regarding preparation for the accreditation audit and often request that an ACA auditor conduct a pre-audit assessment to assist them in determining their levels of compliance prior to scheduling the actual audit. This option is highly recommended for facilities and agencies that are new to the accreditation process, and for facilities that feel a need for special technical assistance prior to the audit.

CORRESPONDENT STATUS

Once the contract is executed, the agency enters into Correspondent Status. During this time, the agency conducts a self-assessment of its operations and completes a Self-Evaluation Report that specifies the agency's level of standards compliance. Agencies must submit the Self-Evaluation Report to ACA for review. In order to request an audit, an agency must comply with 100 percent of the standards designated as mandatory and at least 90 percent of the nonmandatory standards.

CANDIDATE STATUS

The agency enters into Candidate Status with ACA's acceptance of the Self-Evaluation Report. During this period, the agency works toward meeting the required levels of compliance. Once these requirements are met, the agency schedules the standards compliance audit by contacting an ACA regional manager. Candidate Status lasts up to 12 months and continues until the agency is awarded accreditation.

STANDARDS COMPLIANCE AUDIT

The next step in the accreditation process is the standards compliance audit. The purpose of the audit is to measure the agency's operation against the standards, based on written documentation, observations and interviews. A visiting committee composed of two or more auditors conducts the audit. The ACA designates a visiting committee chairperson who is responsible for supervising the committee's activities and preparing the visiting committee report to be submitted to the Association.

ACCREDITATION HEARING

Accreditation hearings are conducted by a panel of three to five commissioners and are held at least twice a year. At the hearing, the agency representative provides information about the agency, speaks in support of its appeals, and/or waiver requests, and addresses concerns the commission panel may have. After completing its review, the panel votes to award or deny accreditation. Accreditation is awarded for a period of three years during which time annual certification statements, confirming continued standards compliance, are submitted to ACA. To ensure continued Accredited Status, accredited agencies apply for reaccreditation approximately nine months prior to the expiration of their current accreditation award.

BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION

Improved staff training and development.

ACA accreditation requires written policy and procedures to establish a training and staff development program for all categories of personnel. The training requirements address all pre-service, in-service and specialized training curricula with clear timelines, and considers the institution's mission, physical characteristics and inmate populations. The professional growth of employees is systematically developed through training plans that annually identify current job-related training needs in relation to position requirements, current correctional issues, new theories, techniques and technologies.

Assessment of program strengths and weaknesses.

An ACA audit involves assessments that cover administration and management, the physical plant, institutional operations and services, and inmate programs. It also assesses issues and concerns that may affect the quality of life at a facility such as staff training, adequacy of medical services, sanitation, use of segregation and detention, incidents of violence, crowding, offender activity levels, programs, and provisions of basic services that may impact the life, safety and health of inmates, as well as staff.

Defense against lawsuits.

Accredited agencies have a stronger defense against litigation through documentation and the demonstration of a "good faith" effort to improve conditions of confinement.

Establishment of measurable criteria for upgrading operations.

Through the standards and accreditation process agencies continuously review agency policy and procedure and have the ability to make necessary improvements when deficiencies are recognized.

Improved staff morale and professionalism.

Accreditation is awarded to the "best of the best" in the corrections field. Staff have a better understanding of policies and procedures and this contributes to improved working conditions for staff.

Safer environment for staff and offenders.

Administrative and line staff, as well as offenders, benefit from increased accountability, attention to physical plant issues and security procedures. Whether a facility or program, the accreditation process ensures a clear assessment of strengths and weaknesses

Reduced liability insurance costs.

As an incentive for agencies willing to participate in ACA's national accreditation program, insurance companies offer a reduction on liability insurance premiums to accredited facilities. Adherence to nationally recognized standards for fire, safety, health and training reduce claim expenses, allowing up to a 10 percent credit on liability insurance premiums. In most cases, the resulting savings on insurance premiums more than offset the actual cost of accreditation.

Performance-based benefits.

Performance-based standards provide data that can be used in the day-to-day management of the facility reducing the occurrence of significant events. Accredited agencies, such as health care facilities, will find it easier to recruit and retain health care professionals. Not only does compliance provide agencies with a cost-effective, proactive approach to offender health care, but it can be used to justify requests for additional funding.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Standards Committee continually revises the standards based on changing practices, current case law and agency experiences. Those standards approved by the committee reflect the views of correctional practitioners, architects, medical and legal experts. The committee is comprised of 20 members: 12 are appointed by the president of the Association and eight are appointed by the chairperson of the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections. The committee meets twice annually in conjunction with ACA's conferences to consider proposals for standards revisions, new standards and draft manuals. Proposals may be submitted for consideration through this link, Proposed Standards Revisions, or by contacting the Standards and Accreditation Department at 1-800-ACA-JOIN, ext. 10072. Deadlines for submitting proposals are approximately 75 days prior to each conference. Each year the Standards and Accreditation Department follows up the Commission Hearings with a newsletter sent to each accredited agency and members of ACA. It contains messages from various ACA officials, and provides auditing news and updates from the Standards Committee regarding revisions the Committee makes on proposed changes to the standards. To serve our members more efficiently, we will soon begin publishing our newsletter online for the convenience of both our members and the general public.