



The AER Accreditation Process

Welcome

The topic for tonight's AER Lift:

AER Accreditation Council – A Path for Organizations, Schools for the Blind and University Preparation Programs To Earn Trust and Build Leadership

Learning Objectives -- Attendees will:

1. Understand how the accreditation process is managed by the AER Council through its Higher Education Accreditation Commission and its Organizations and Schools Accreditation Commission
2. Know how to access the materials for preparing their university, organization or school for accreditation/re-accreditation.
3. Be able to communicate the benefits and importance of accreditation for their university, organization or school.

Introduction of Speakers

Our Speakers:

Lee Sonnenberg, Executive Director of AER and Chair of the AER Accreditation Council

Dr. John McAllister, Chair of Higher Education Accreditation Commission

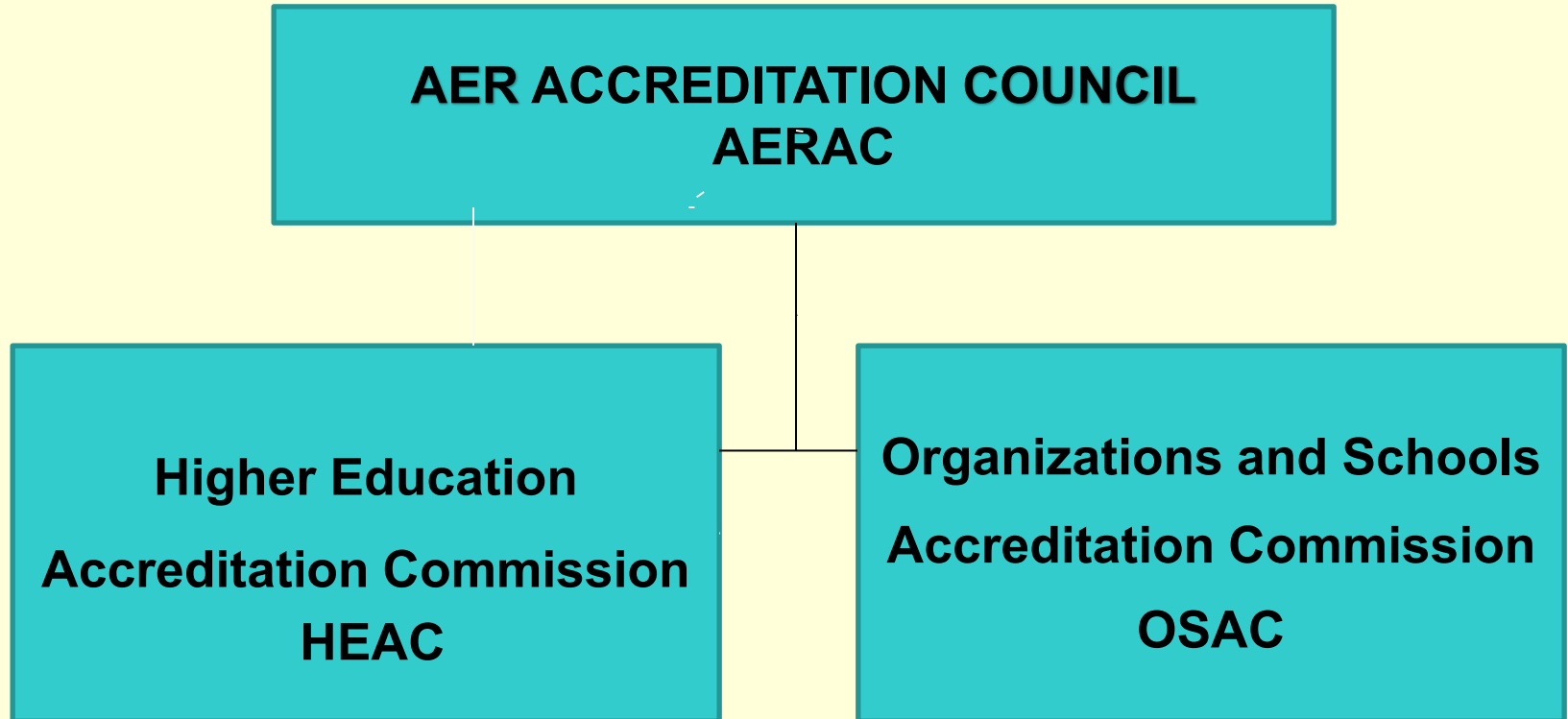
Paul Olson, Chair of Organizations and Schools Accreditation Commission

Elly du Pré, Manager of AER Accreditation Program

A Brief History of AER Accreditation

- Prior to 1979, AER Divisions separately reviewed University Programs.
- In 1979 the process was consolidated and standardized, and lead to programs being “Approved.”
- In 2017, when AER assumed the NAC program for accrediting organizations and schools for the blind, the University Program reviews were upgraded and began to confer “Accreditation.”

AER Accreditation Structure



Roles and Responsibilities

AERAC

- Approves Accreditation Status Recommendations
 - Adjudicates Appeals
- Follows up on Provisional Accreditations

HEAC and OSAC

- Develop Standards for approval by AERAC
 - Approve Review Panels
- Approve Panel Recommendation/Send to AERAC

Review Panels

- Evaluate Program Materials for adherence to Standards
- Prepare Recommendation for HEAC or OSAC

AER Accreditation Council

- Policy and Standards Approval
- Accreditation Decisions
- Members
 - Chair – AER Executive Director
 - Accreditation Program Manager
 - 3 Representatives of Consumer Organizations
 - 3 Field-related Professionals/Experts
 - HEAC Chair
 - OSAC Chair
 - Public Member (non-AER, not from Field, expert in related field of admin/accred/certification)

HEAC

- Policy and Standards Development
- Approval of Review Panels
- Reviews Panel Recommendations
- 7 Members
 - Chair – Member of AERAC
 - Representative of Low Vision Discipline
 - Representative of Orientation and Mobility Discipline
 - Representative of Teachers of the Visually Impaired
 - Representative of Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Discipline
 - Representative from Assistive Technology Discipline
 - Member at Large

OSAC

- Policy and Standards Development
- Approval of Review Panels
- Reviews Panel Recommendations
- 7 Members
 - Chair – Member of AERAC
 - Representatives from Specialized School f/t Blind
 - Representatives of Organization offering Direct Svces
 - Member at Large

Review Panels

- Reviewers – must have 3 or more years experience in the field, or administration experience, or 10 years related prior experience, and complete training and pass a quiz.
- HEAC teams have 4 members -- One faculty member, two members of the discipline, and one from a related discipline
- OSAC teams have a minimum of 2 members from disciplines related to programs provided by the applicant organization or school.

Steps in Review Process—Part 1

- The program submits letter of intent to apply for review and pays the application fee.
- The program completes self-studies for CORE standards and Program Curriculum standards (HEAC) or Management and Program Standards (OSAC)
- A review panel is appointed by AER accreditation manager following confirmation of no conflict of interest by the University, organization or school.
- An initial zoom call is held to introduce panel members and applicant staff/leadership and make sure all materials are accessible.
- The review panel studies the self study forms and evaluates supporting documentation in terms of adherence to the standards. On at least one zoom call the review panel compiles a consensus rating for CORE/Management and on another zoom call a consensus on programs.
- The review panel conducts separate interviews (phone or virtual) with program leadership and students/consumers. OSAC applicants also provide the panel a virtual tour of the facility.

Steps in Review Process—Part 2

- The review panel meets for a final zoom to discuss all the compiled information and to formulate a report for HEAC or OSAC with a recommendation (Full accreditation, Provisional accreditation, or Denial).
- The Accreditation Manager submits the panel's report along with all consensus self-study reviews to the next meeting of either HEAC or OSAC.
- The HEAC or OSAC reviews the panel's submission and status recommendation.
- The Accreditation Manager submits the HEAC or OSAC recommendation to AERAC for a final decision.
- The decision is communicated by letter to the applicant entity.

Accreditation Fees - HEAC

- **HEAC applicants** pay the full accreditation fee one time, at the start of the process.
- \$1750 covers the costs of the process for one program. AER offers discounts for applications for multiple programs
 - Second Program \$1500
 - Third Program \$1250
 - Fourth Program \$1000

Accreditation Fees -- OSAC

- **OSAC applicants** pay an accreditation fee at the start of the process, and upon receipt of accreditation pay annual dues to cover the full cost.
- \$500 for first-time applicants.
- \$350 for re-accreditation applicants.
- Annual dues are calculated at 0.001% of total expenses on the IRS 990 form, with a minimum of \$350 and a maximum of \$3000.

Preparing for the Review Process

The AER Accreditation Program website has downloadable HANDBOOKS to facilitate the preparation of a review:

For HEAC:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/higher-education/>

For OSAC:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/organizations/>

Preparing A Review: More Help

The AER Accreditation Manager is always available to answer questions and is available to engage your staff and leadership team in a zoom call to help prepare your review. Email for an appointment at your convenience:

accreditation@aerbvi.org

Preparing A Review: Even More Help

A great way to get in-depth understanding of accreditation reviews is to have a reviewer on your staff. AERAC is always looking for additional professionals to be reviewers.

To learn how to become a reviewer:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/become-a-reviewer/> or contact the Accreditation Manager: accreditation@aerbvi.org

Classification of Standards - HEAC

- Two types of standards are used in reviews of HEAC applicants.
 - CORE standards cover program administration.
 - CURRICULAR standards are applicable to a specific discipline such as O&M, VRT, TSVI, LV, or AT

HEAC Standards

- All HEAC standards can be downloaded at:
<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/higher-education/>
- Core Standards:
 - Administrative Standards
 - Academic Faculty Standards
 - Clinical (Field Based) Faculty Standards
 - Clinical Standards
 - Assessment and Program Evaluation
- Curricular Standards
 - OMS Standards
 - VRT Standards
 - TVI Standards
 - LVT Standards
 - AT Standards

Four Levels of Accreditation Status HEAC

1. Full Accreditation: the university program has fully met all Core and all Curriculum standards.

2. Provisional Accreditation: is granted for a period of one year to candidates for initial accreditation. Provisional accreditation is awarded when the program has demonstrated substantial progress towards meeting all of the standards but needs additional time to come into full compliance. The program is not accredited at this time.

“Substantial progress” is defined as when the program has demonstrated that they offer a high quality educational program to the students, but the program has not submitted evidence that all of the standards have been met.

Four Levels of Accreditation Status – HEAC

3. Probationary Accreditation – is conferred for one year for candidates applying for reaccreditation. Probationary accreditation is awarded when the program is making substantial progress towards meeting all of the standards but needs additional time to come into full compliance. The program remains accredited at this time.

- “Substantial progress” is defined as when the program has demonstrated that they offer a high quality educational program to the students, but the program has not submitted evidence that all of the standards have been met.

Four Levels of Accreditation Status – HEAC

4. Accreditation Denial – is determined if the outcome of the review process determines that the program is not in substantial compliance with the standards.

Accreditation Denial is issued when the college or university program did not meet minimum standards in a large number of criteria and this situation cannot be remedied in the short term.

What Happens If Full Accreditation is Not Awarded HEAC

- Probationary or provisional accreditation will only be granted when a program commits to meeting all core standards and all curricular standards within one year.
- Program commitment is asserted by the applicant in the form of a response to the decision letter, in writing.
- Programs with probationary or provisional status are required to submit a follow-up report within one year of receipt of the accreditation decision.
- The follow-up report should address each standard that was not met, and should include what the program and/or institution has done since its submission of the self-study to meet the standard.
- Evidence should also be included in the follow-up report.

What Happens If Full Accreditation is Not Awarded HEAC

- Follow-up reports will be reviewed by a panel of reviewers assigned by HEAC, with a preference for assigning members of the original Reviewer Panel, as available.
- Based on the evidence provided by the program, the Review Panel will make a determination as to if the program has met or not met each standard.
- This determination will be sent to HEAC, who will then review and make a recommendation to AERAC for a final decision.

What Happens If Full Accreditation is Not Awarded HEAC

- Programs with probationary or provisional approval that have demonstrated that they meet the conditions stipulated by HEAC within one year from the date of review will be granted full accreditation.
- If the probationary/provisional status is not satisfied in that one-year time frame, the accreditation status will be reclassified as denied.
- Students who enter a program with a status of provisional or probationary approval, and who successfully complete the degree, are considered to have completed an accredited program.

Classification of Standards - OSAC

- Two types of standards are used in reviews of OSAC applicants.
 - MANAGEMENT standards cover organization administration.
 - Program standards are applicable to a specific programs.

All standards can be downloaded here:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/organizations/>

OSAC Standards

Management Standards:

- Policy and Administration (PA)
- Financial Management (FM)
- Staff and Volunteers (SV)
- Buildings and Grounds (BG)
- Community Relations, Public Education & Fundraising (CRPEF)
- Community and Consumer Involvement (CCI)
- Program Evaluation and Improvement (PEI)

One copy of the Management Self Study Summary also must be submitted.

All standards can be downloaded here:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/organizations/>

OSAC Standards

Program Standards: The applicant organization selects the programs for which it is seeking accreditation.

Program Standards – All Ages

- Orientation and Mobility Instruction Services (OMIS)
- Assistive Technology (AT)
- Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT)
- Vocational and Rehabilitation Counseling (VRC)
- Low Vision Clinic Services (LVCS)
- Recreation Program (RP)
- Residential Facilities and Health Care (RFHC)

OSAC Standards

Program Standards – All Ages –Continued

- Itinerant Services (IP)
- Short Term (STP) and Support Services Programs (SSP)
- Community Integration Services (CIS)
- Outreach Services (OS).
- Provision of Reading Materials (PRM)
- Blindness Prevention (BP)
- Industries Employment Services (IES)

OSAC Standards

Program Standards – Birth Through School Age

- Early Intervention Programs (EIP)
- Preschool Programs (PP)
- K-12 Programs (K-12)
- Supplemental Learning Curriculum (SLC)
- Multiple Disabilities Programs (MDP)
- Identification and Referral (IR)
- Assessment of Need (AN)
- Program Design (PD)

One copy of the Self-Study Summary also must be submitted for all Programs being submitted for accreditation

Three Levels of Accreditation Status OSAC

- **Full Accreditation:** has met **100%** of the standards designated as absolute and has met at least **95%** of the standards designated as critical.
- **Provisional Accreditation:** did not meet minimum standards in one of the absolute standards and/or has only met between **85% and 94%** of the areas designated as critical, and the program **agrees to rectify this shortcoming(s)** within one year
- **Not Accredited:** did not meet minimum standards in a large number of standards

Appeals

If the applicant organization disagrees with the decision, it can appeal.

This process is explained in the AERAC Policies and Procedures Manual.

It can be downloaded here:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/>

Annual Follow-up

- Accredited programs must annually complete and submit the Annual Update Form which is downloadable:
 - For HEAC: <https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/higher-education/>
 - For OSAC: <https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/organizations/>
- If violations of standards are found, the program has 60 days to rectify identified violations and file a revised report. Failure to do so may result in withdrawal of program accreditation.
- If a program ceases to exist for more than 12 months, the program must submit for review
- Programs that are fully approved will maintain their accreditation status for five years, assuming no major changes in the program are noted in annual update reports.

Who is Accredited?

- Accredited HEAC programs are listed on the AER Website:

<https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/higher-education/>

Why Be Accredited?

- Earn Consumer Confidence
- Build Leadership

Earning consumer confidence

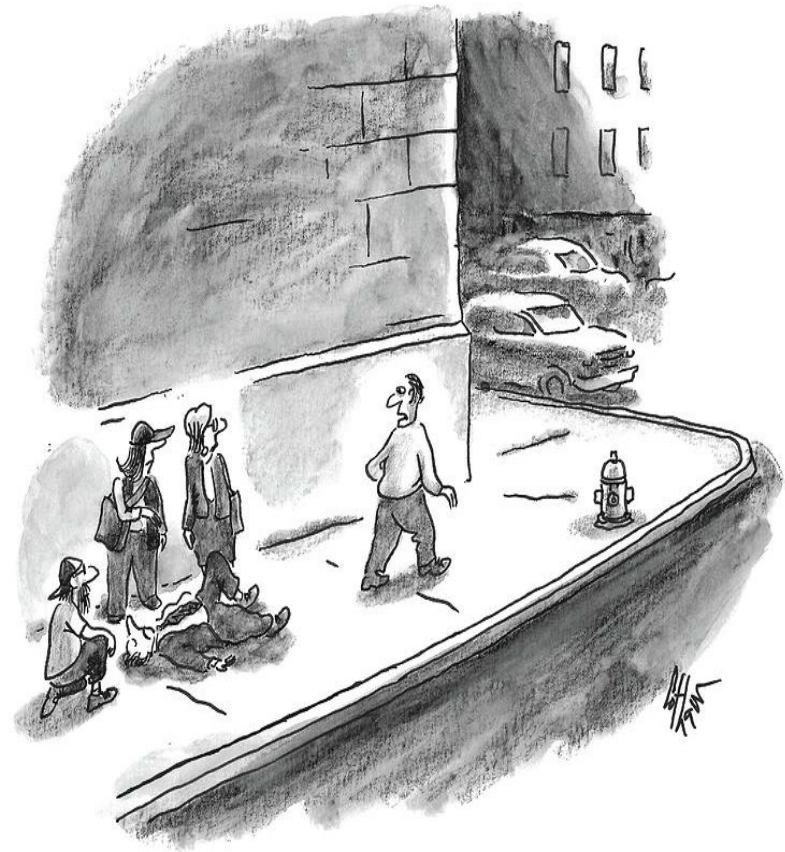
In 1962, President John F. Kennedy presented a speech to the United States Congress in which he extolled four basic consumer rights — later called, The Consumer Bill of Rights.



That Same Year

... the American Foundation for the Blind formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Accreditation out of which was born the Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services for the Blind. That COMSTAC Report called for the creation of the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped (NAC) and this demand was met on January 1, 1967.

ALL THESE
MESSAGES
HAVE ONE
THING IN
COMMON--THE
PRESUMPTION
OF "CHOICE."



"I'll go shop around for a doctor."

How much choice do most communities really provide?

Many consumers are lucky if there is even one professional in their community...or one agency.

Many potential professionals are students who don't know our field exists, or how a preparation program will get them to the career they want.



SO HOW DO YOU KNOW
YOU'RE GETTING GOOD HELP?



GETTING GOOD HELP – IT STARTS WITH GOOD INFORMATION



GOOD INFORMATION

A simple definition of accreditation is that it is a way to ensure that consumers, who don't know what to expect or how to evaluate what help they receive, receive information from ethical and knowledgeable professionals and experts specifically in the field of education and rehabilitation of the blind and visually impaired...who themselves are supported by strong organizations and university programs.

Earning Confidence, Building Leadership

Accreditation provides individuals who are blind or visually impaired, their families and employers, and students seeking a career in the fields of education and rehabilitation with confidence in the quality of direct services providers and of higher education programs.

Participating in an accreditation process, whether at a place of employment or by being on a review team, builds the leadership skill of seeing the big picture of how our institutions work, plan, become sustainable.

Our Commitment to the Field and the People We Serve

At the time of this presentation (Feb 2023) AERAC is midway in its pursuit of recognition from Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to provide applicant organizations seeking accreditation with the same confidence.

In addition, AER and AERAC are both committed to transparency, diversity, equity and inclusion...and accessibility.