Fast Track your Certification Program Accreditation

Accreditation is a complex process, but you can fast track your program's accreditation and increase the likelihood of success by following these steps.

1. **Choose an accrediting body.**

   Multiple bodies accredit professional certification programs including the American Board for Specialty Nurse Certification (ABSNC), ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB), International Accreditation Service (IAS), and National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). Choosing an accreditation standard early helps the program to avoid costly and time consuming missteps. When selecting an accrediting body there is no "right or wrong" answer, but there are many factors to consider.

   - Competitive and regulatory environment
   - Name recognition within your practice area
   - International / global certification
   - Costs
   - Application process
   - Standards compliance

2. **Understand the standards and requirements.**

   Understanding the accreditation standards plays an essential role in an efficient application process. Accrediting bodies offer training and workshops to help applicants understand the requirements. Another option is to engage accreditation experts to assist.

3. **Assess current compliance.**

   Conduct an objective review, or gap analysis, of the program against the selected standard to determine the current level of compliance before starting an application. This process helps you to prioritize changes and develop a clear roadmap to addressing areas of non-compliance. The gap analysis should address *all* program areas and accreditation standards so the organization has a comprehensive list of necessary updates.

4. **Complete all updates prior to preparing the application.**

   Preparing the accreditation application is a time intensive process that requires narrative to explain how the program complies with each requirement and the collection of documentation as evidence. Completing the required changes prior to preparing the application helps ensure consistency in the information submitted to the accrediting body and avoid outdated information.

5. Avoid common mistakes.

After completing more than 300 program applications, we have identified seven common problem areas applicants face.

1. Documentation – lack of documentation is one of the most common problems applicants encounter. Documentation is needed as evidence of compliance with the requirements. It is important to document the who, what, when, where, and why of essential certification decisions.

2. Structure & Governance – all accrediting bodies require the certification governing body to be impartial in its decision making regarding key certification decisions. There are several acceptable models to meet this requirement, but it is a common hurdle.

3. Education & Certification – organizations often struggle with the requirement for establishing a firewall between education or training and certification functions to protect the integrity of the certification process.

4. Examination Development – many organizations fail to conduct sufficient exam development activities that are consistent with generally accepted psychometric methodologies.

5. Published Information & Transparency – specific certification information must be publicly available in a clear, organized way. Candidates need adequate information to make informed decisions about becoming certified.

6. Standardization – organizations frequency face pressure to make exceptions to established rules, particularly requirements for earning and maintaining certification. Holding all individuals to the same requirements is essential for fairness.

7. Quality Improvement – as with many other parts of the Standards, it is important that your program has a proactive approach to ensure it periodically reviews policies, keeps them up-to-date, and consistently implements them.

Contact Cynthia Allen at callen@seacrestcompany.com for more information on how SeaCrest can assist your program to achieve accreditation goals.