Accreditation Open Forum
January 20, 2026
"Separating Myths from Reality"
Questions and Answers

What are the most effective ways to prepare staff for an onsite evaluation?
Clear communication and realistic expectations make the biggest difference. Agencies are most successful when staff understand what accreditation is, why it matters, and what the onsite evaluation will look like. Common best practices include holding short internal briefings, sharing the evaluation agenda in advance, identifying subject matter experts for each chapter, and conducting informal mock interviews or walkthroughs. Emphasizing that evaluators are peers, not auditors, also helps reduce anxiety.

What strategies help secure buy-in from finance, human resources, and information technology departments during the accreditation process?
Early involvement is key. Agencies that engage Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology at the beginning of the process tend to see stronger support throughout. Framing accreditation as risk management, consistency, and operational improvement, rather than a compliance exercise, is often effective. There was a previous Open Forum that addressed this topic, which is available here: https://www.apwa.org/resource/accreditation-open-forum-how-to-achieve-buy-in-across-your-agency-to-become-accredited/

How would you explain the purpose and benefits of accreditation to leaders who struggle to see its value?
Accreditation provides independent validation that an agency is following documented, repeatable, and defensible practices. It reduces organizational risk, supports transparency, and helps ensure continuity during leadership transitions. Many directors also value accreditation as a management tool that strengthens internal alignment, supports budget justification, and demonstrates accountability to elected officials and the public.

If the submitted documentation does not fully demonstrate implementation of a practice, is there an opportunity to provide additional or revised documentation, and what is the typical timeframe?
Yes. Agencies are allowed to clarify or supplement documentation if something is incomplete or unclear. During the evaluation process, evaluators may request additional information, and agencies can upload revised or supplemental materials.

Is there a preferred format for policies, procedures, or standard operating procedures, and does APWA provide templates?
There is no required format for policies, procedures, or standard operating procedures. Agencies may use any format that works for their organization, as long as the documentation clearly demonstrates the intent of the practice. APWA does not provide official templates, as agencies vary widely in size, structure, and governance.

What expenses should agencies anticipate during initial accreditation and reaccreditation?
Agencies should plan for program fees, evaluator travel expenses associated with onsite evaluations, and internal staff time. The application packet will allow an agency to calculate the exact fees to apply for accreditation and re-accreditation. Site visit costs average $3,000 to $5,000, depending on location and the area's cost of living.

For management and leadership roles, what level of time commitment is typical for accreditation?
Time commitments vary by agency, but leadership involvement is usually concentrated at key points in the process, such as kickoff, policy review and approval, interviews, and the onsite evaluation. Accreditation managers often spend more time than other staff evenly across the process, but that may increasJanuarye as the evaluation approaches. Ongoing engagement from all staff helps maintain momentum.

Is it beneficial to designate one staff member with primary or nearly full-time responsibility for accreditation?
Many agencies find it beneficial to designate a primary accreditation manager to provide coordination, consistency, and accountability. However, accreditation is most successful when it is a shared responsibility across the organization, rather than owned by a single individual.

What percentage of agencies use outside consultants to assist with accreditation?
Many agencies complete accreditation without consultants, while others choose to use outside support for organization and project management. The decision typically depends on agency size, staff capacity, and internal experience.

Are there tools, such as a sample timeline or Gantt-style overview, available to help agencies understand the overall process and expected duration?
APWA does not provide Gantt charts or require a specific project management approach. Agencies often develop their own digital tracking tools as they progress through self-assessment and improvement phases. A simple milestone-based timeline is usually sufficient.

Are there recommended software tools that offer simple project tracking or Gantt chart functionality?
Agencies may use any project management tool that fits their needs, and utilizing existing tools is understandable. Some agencies have used Smartsheet, while others use platforms such as Wrike or Slack for task tracking and internal communication. Microsoft solutions are also commonly used, including Microsoft Project for formal Gantt charts, Microsoft Planner for task management, or Microsoft Lists used with Microsoft Teams for simple tracking.

How do we contact someone with more questions or to discuss accreditation?
Contact APWA staff at accreditation@apwa.org. We would be happy to assist your agency.