



Accreditation Open Forum

October 22, 2024— “How to Achieve Buy-In Across Your Organization”

Questions and Answers

- What is the typical timeframe for an organization to be accredited?
 - The typical timeframe for an organization to obtain accreditation is generally within two years from the submission of its application/start of its initial self-assessment. The general process includes conducting a self-assessment, implementing necessary improvements, undergoing a peer review, and making any additional improvements as needed.
- If my agency is not responsible for a particular chapter, i.e. “cemeteries” practice, do we just mark it as “waived?”
 - This is what we call “applicability,” which is different than waivers. To decide if a chapter is applicable, think about its relevance to your agency’s operations and whether your agency is responsible for at least 50% or more of the practices it contains. If the responsibilities fall under another department, agency, or organization, or if those areas don’t exist within your community (for example, cemeteries, beaches, or airports), then the chapter is considered non-applicable. You can mark all practices as such in the self-assessment software and on your agency’s application for accreditation. Chapters 1–10 and all practices within those chapters are required for all agencies seeking accreditation.
- What can we do to get more leadership on board?
 - To engage leadership in the accreditation process, it’s essential to connect the objectives of accreditation with the broader goals of your organization, like operational efficiency, public trust, and service quality. Presenting accreditation as a pathway to enhance accountability, foster collaboration across departments, and achieve meaningful, measurable improvements can be particularly compelling for leaders. Additionally, bringing departments such as HR, IT, and Legal into the conversation early on helps build a foundation of support across the organization.
- Can I please have access to the APWA Accreditation Model Practices Library?
 - If your agency is accredited or currently in the application process, you’re welcome to contact us at accreditation@apwa.org to request a digital link to our model practices. This resource offers examples that can help support your agency’s accreditation efforts. Access is limited to accredited and applicant agencies.
- Can multiple agencies within my organization become accredited by APWA?
 - Combining efforts across multiple agencies for accreditation can bring a number of benefits, particularly for organizations with similar public works responsibilities. By collaborating, agencies can pool resources, such as accreditation software, and coordinate evaluation schedules, which can lead to synchronized expiration dates and lower overall costs. This approach also encourages inter-agency communication and the sharing of best practices. However, it’s important to consider each agency’s unique goals and operational needs before deciding. Some agencies, especially larger and more decentralized ones, may prefer to pursue separate accreditation processes. Please note that only agencies with a “public works function” are eligible for accreditation with APWA.

- Can departments within the same organization pursue accreditation independently, or do all related departments need to apply together? For example, if one department focuses on engineering and public works, can it become accredited without the utility department also seeking accreditation?
 - Yes, both the engineering and public works departments and the utility department (either water and wastewater, both are eligible) can pursue accreditation independently or together, depending on your organization's structure and goals. If the engineering and public works departments wish to become accredited, they can do so without requiring the utility department to apply as well. Conversely, if the utilities department would like to achieve accreditation, they can also pursue it separately. It's important to evaluate the specific functions and responsibilities of each department to determine the most beneficial approach to accreditation.
- Is there a standard memorandum provided by APWA that municipalities can use to give a comprehensive overview of the accreditation process for distribution to various sub-departments? If such a document doesn't exist, would it be possible to collaboratively develop one?
 - APWA staff appreciate this suggestion. We will work on developing some sample documents for agencies to edit and make their own. If you are interested in receiving a copy, please email accreditation@apwa.org. When it is available we will provide it directly to you.
- Do you recommend uploading documents/writing compliance statements for non-applicable chapters/practices?
 - You can certainly upload documents for chapters where less than 50% of the practices apply to your agency or non-applicable practices, however, they will not be evaluated in the accreditation process. While they won't be formally assessed, providing this information can still be beneficial. It can aid in your agency's regular operations. Just be sure to indicate which chapters and/or practices do not apply to your internal staff and on your application so everyone involved has a clear understanding of what will not be formally evaluated.
- Does the accreditation status expire, and therefore, need to be renewed?
 - Yes, the accreditation status does expire and needs to be renewed. Accreditation is granted for four years, after which agencies must undergo a re-accreditation process to maintain their accredited status. This ensures that agencies continue demonstrating ongoing commitment to quality and improvement in public works.
- What does the panel recommend: should agencies apply for accreditation initially to start the three-year timeline, or wait until the Accreditation Manager has completed an initial self-assessment?
 - The panel recommends that agencies apply for accreditation earlier rather than later. By doing so, agency staff gain access to valuable resources and support available to applicant agencies, which can greatly assist in navigating the accreditation process. This proactive step demonstrates a commitment to achieving accreditation. If your agency chooses to conduct an initial self-assessment, it can provide useful insights and build confidence in the application process. Please note that the initial self-assessment should take approximately two-three months to complete.

- What are the benefits of accreditation?
 - While we feel each agency will benefit in various ways, some of the benefits accredited agencies have shared with us:
 - ✓ Improved Organizational Efficiency: Accreditation encourages agencies to evaluate and streamline their processes, leading to more efficient operations.
 - ✓ Continuous Improvement: The accreditation process promotes a culture of continuous improvement by identifying areas for growth and development.
 - ✓ Enhanced Public Confidence: Being accredited demonstrates a commitment to excellence and adherence to industry standards, which can increase public trust and confidence in the agency's capabilities.
 - ✓ Standardization of Documents: Accreditation provides a framework for standardizing practices across the agency, ensuring consistency.
 - ✓ Professional Development: Accreditation offers opportunities for staff to enhance their skills and knowledge through training and professional development programs.
 - ✓ Succession Planning: Accreditation often includes guidelines for succession planning, helping to ensure that the agency has a strategic approach to developing and retaining future leaders.
 - ✓ Potential for Lower Insurance Premiums: While not guaranteed, achieving accreditation may lead to reduced insurance premiums by demonstrating a commitment to best practices and risk management.