Higher Education Accreditation Handbook

**Contents**

[I. Background 3](#_Toc162871177)

[II. Terms 4](#_Toc162871178)

[III. Purpose of Accreditation 5](#_Toc162871179)

[IV. Scope and Organizational Structure 6](#_Toc162871180)

[V. Applying for AER Accreditation 6](#_Toc162871181)

[VI. The Self-Study Process 9](#_Toc162871182)

[VII. Annual Higher Education Program Reports 13](#_Toc162871183)

[VIII. Panel Reviewers 14](#_Toc162871184)

[IX. Access to Information 15](#_Toc162871185)

[Frequently Asked Questions 16](#_Toc162871186)

[APPENDIX 18](#_Toc162871187)

Note: Throughout this self-assessment guide, the term “program” refers to the discrete academic program under review. The term “institution” refers to the college or university of which the program is a part. “Student” is used to refer to those persons receiving an education through the institution’s program.

# I. Background

**1. AER Accreditation Program Mission**

To advance excellence in the field of blindness and low vision services by ensuring that:

* organizations and specialized schools that provide direct services to individuals who have a visual impairment deliver high quality direct services, and
* institutions of higher education prepare professionals to provide services of the highest quality to individuals who have a visual impairment.

**2. Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC) Mission**

 As a Commission we are dedicated to ensuring that institutions of higher education prepare professionals for successful employment where they provide services of the highest quality to individuals who are blind and those who have low vision.

**3. HEAC Vision**

The interests of consumers and the public will be served by high quality personnel preparation programs and administrative practices, and by graduates who meet the rigorous standards for certification by ACVREP.

As professionals we are dedicated to ensuring that the services being provided to individuals who are blind and those who have low vision are of the highest quality. The providers of these services must utilize specialized knowledge and skills to benefit those receiving such services.

In addition, consumers who are blind or low vision, and prospective and current students must have access to information regarding:

1. The performance of AER Accreditation Program in the U.S. in terms of fairness, transparency, support for innovation and improvement, communication on standards and acceptable documentation, quality of reviewers and reviews, timeliness and responsiveness, and in promoting academic quality.
2. The performance of AER Accreditation Program in Canada and other international entities in terms of fairness, transparency, support for innovation and improvement, communication on standards and acceptable documentation, quality of reviewers and reviews, timeliness, and responsiveness, and in promoting academic quality.
3. The performance of accredited institutions or programs as measured by transparent reporting of accreditation status of higher education programs, and performance regarding academic quality, completion, graduation, retention, success with academic transfer, success with entry to graduate school, and success in moving into the world of work.

To meet the needs of both professionals and consumers, the Association of Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) Accreditation Program is designed to ensure that O&M, VRT, LVT, AT, and TVI higher education personnel preparation programs meet high quality standards (see definition of terms below). Personnel preparation programs are reviewed on Core (administrative, faculty, clinical, assessment and program evaluation) and Curricular Standards set forth by experts in the field. Higher education programs with the “AER Accredited” distinction have demonstrated through performance, systems, processes, faculty and procedures that they offer excellent learning experiences, and high-quality preparation for jobs, related certifications and licensure.

# II. Terms

*Association for Education and Rehabilitation for the Blind and Visually Impaired Accreditation Council (AERAC, or the Council):* a body that has chief responsibility for setting and enforcing standards set forth in the accreditation program.

*AER Accreditation Manager:* the individual employed by AER to facilitate the conduct of the business of the AER accreditation program through the Accreditation Council, Higher Education Accreditation Commission, and Organizations and Schools Accreditation Commission. The manager coordinates reviewer training, review panels, annual monitoring of continued compliance by accredited entities through the annual reports, and communication about the program to AER members and allied organizations.

*Assistive Technology (AT):* the specialty related to teaching individuals who are blind or visually impaired to use various technologies to meet personal and vocational goals.

*Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC):* the body that has chief responsibility for creating and revising higher education program standards, establishing policies and procedures; and submitting both to the Council for approval. HEAC also reviews and ratifies review panels and accreditation reports.

*Institution*: the college or university of which the program is a part. Usually, the institution approves the program’s submission.

*Low Vision Therapy (LVT):* The specialty related to helping individuals who are visually impaired to optimize their remaining vision through the use of low vision and optical devices.

*Orientation & Mobility (O&M):* the specialty related to teaching individuals who are blind or visually impaired critical skills to remain oriented in their environment as well as specific mobility skills in order to travel safely, efficiently and as independently as possible within the home, at school, at work and in the community.

*Program:* the discrete academic program under review. The program is responsible for the submission of the self-study.

*Review Panel:* the 4 member panel of independent content experts who are responsible for reviewing the program’s self-study packet, conducting the site visit, and affirming or denying that the program meets each standard.

*Self-Study Committee:* the group of individuals within the institution that has the primary responsibility for conducting the program’s self-study assessment

*Student:* those persons receiving an education through the institution’s program.

*Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI):* the specialty related to providing direct and/or consultative special education services to children and youths with vision loss.

*Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT):* The specialty related to teaching individuals who are blind or visually impaired daily life activities including communication skills, personal care, and home management skills.

# III. Purpose of Accreditation

Accreditation is used to describe both a status and a process.

As a status, it denotes a third-party’s validation of an organization’s conformity with specific standards as set forth by an accrediting authority. The scope of an accreditation is determined by the specific services being assessed. Accreditation communicates to the public that programs at minimum meet educational standards, thereby offering protection and assurance of high quality.

As a process, accreditation symbolizes an organization’s sustained commitment to self-monitoring and continuous quality improvement. The process begins when an organization or higher education program applies, pays the fee, and undertakes an internal self-study to assess its conformity with specific standards and other normative attributes that are described for accreditation. This self-study consists of a thorough and systematic process that documents the organization’s adherence to recognized standards for service infrastructure, administration, and performance.  The process continues with independent verification by reviewers using a systematic, documented approach to evaluate the organization or program’s requirements for accreditation.

The overarching goal of the accreditation process is to provide the valuable experience of self-review  to the higher education program, and to support the program’s pursuit of academic excellence and innovative responses to the needs of professionals and individuals who are blind or visually impaired in a constantly changing world.

Achieving accreditation demonstrates that an organization has met relevant standards and confers on the organization the obligation to document its self-monitoring and continuous quality improvement.  The AER Annual Higher Education Program Report is a requirement for maintaining accreditation status through the entire term.

# IV. Scope and Organizational Structure

**1. Scope**

AERAC accredits baccalaureate and graduate preparation programs in the United States of America, its territories and Canada that prepare teachers and practitioners to work with children and adults who are blind and those with low vision. These programs address the following disciplines: 1) Orientation and Mobility; 2) Vision Rehabilitation Therapy; 3) Low Vision Therapy; 4) Assistive Technology; and 5) Teachers of Students with Visual Impairment.

**2. AERAC (or The Council)**

The AERAC has chief responsibility for setting and enforcing the HEAC Standards. The AER Executive Director serves as the Council Chair. The Council consists of 10 members who are appointed by the Council Chair. In order to be eligible to sit on the Council, members must have skills and experience with program administration, educational and rehabilitation protocols and service delivery. The Council acts as the overseeing body that ensures that the HEAC standards are current, relevant, and advance excellence in service delivery and that those entities seeking accreditation meet the standards.

The primary responsibilities of AERAC can be found in the *AERAC Policies and Procedures Manual*.

**3. Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC)**

The Council established the Higher Education Accreditation Commission in furtherance of meeting its responsibilities of creating and revising HEAC Standards and establishing policies and procedures. HEAC submits its recommendations to the Council for approval. In addition, HEAC approves each review panel that is selected to conduct a program review; and HEAC examines and ratifies the review report and accreditation recommendation submitted by the panel. HEAC completes a written Accreditation Decision report and submits to the Chair of the Council for final consideration and vote. The final decision is then communicated to the institution.

Higher Education Accreditation is a process under which academic programs are evaluated by an external team (i.e. Review Panel) to determine if standards that are deemed indicators of quality performance and measures of sound practices are met. The process entails self-study, and continuous improvement resulting in a course of study that generates growth in applicable skills and competencies. Institutions of higher education may seek accreditation for O&M, TVI, VRT, LVT, and AT academic programs.

# V. Applying for AER Accreditation

**1. Accreditation Eligibility Requirements**

There are certain baseline criteria that must be met in order to be eligible to apply for accreditation. These objective requirements affirm that the institution that houses the program is in good standing and that the program meets a threshold that indicates the program has been active for at least a 1 year period of time.

1. The institution offering the certificate or degree program(s), if located in a U.S. state, district, or territory or Canada, must be currently accredited by a regional institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the U.S. Department of Education or other applicable authority in Canada. If outside of the U.S., it must meet applicable required recognitions and accreditations.
2. The program must have been in existence for at least one year and have at least 1 enrolled student.
3. The TVI program must be in good standing and not be designated as “low-performing” as outlined by Title II of the Higher Education Act.
4. Any program that is not housed in a College of Education must be in good standing and not be designated as “low performing” as outlined by the supervising administrative unit.
5. The program must offer a certificate or degree in the discipline to which they are applying for accreditation that includes at least 15 credit hours of concentration coursework; and in addition, offers field experiences.

**2. Application Process**

Applications are accepted at any time throughout the year. The application includes a Higher Education Application Form, and payment of the application fee (Form is located under Documents, at ([https://aerbvi.org/higher-education-colleges-and-universities-](https://aerbvi.org/the-national-accreditation-council/higher-education/)).

The Application form can be used whether the institution is seeking accreditation for one program or multiple programs. There is a $1750 application fee for the first program. Discounted fees apply when submitting multiple programs for accreditation simultaneously. See chart below.

|  |
| --- |
| **Application Fees** |
| Program 1 | $1,750  |
| Program 2 | $1,500  |
| Program 3 | $1,250  |
| Program 4 | $1,000  |

The Application Form should be sent via email to accreditationinfo@aerbvi.org. Payment should be in the form of a check and should be mailed to AER at 5680 King Centre Drive, Suite 600 Alexandria, VA 22315. (If paying by credit card, please call 703-671-5875 to make arrangements. A 3% processing fee will be added to payments by credit card.)

Once the Application Form and payment have been received by AER and processed, the AER Accreditation Manager will contact the organization/school to reach mutual agreement on the target date to submit its self-study forms for each Standard.

The target date should fall within the next 6 (six) Months.

(All forms are here: <https://www.aerbvi.org/higher-education-colleges-and-universities->):

* The Core Standards self-study form, that includes a written explanation of how each standard is met, with links to supporting documentation that substantiates the program’s explanation, and
* The Curricular Standards self-study form that includes a written explanation of how and where each required standard is met within the curriculum, including appropriate documentation through course syllabi and other supporting documentation. A sample curriculum map for each program may be used to organize the explanation of how and where each standard is met within the curriculum. Samples can be downloaded for [O&M](https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HEAC-OM-curriculum-map-2019-2.xlsx), [VRT](https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HEAC-VRT-curriculum-map-2020-1.xlsx), [TVI](https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/TVSI-Curriculum-Map_AER-Accreditation-Spreadsheet-Final.xlsx), [LVT](https://aerbvi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/HEAC-LVT-curriculum-map-1.xlsx) and a sample of a completed form is also available. Use of these maps is not required but may be helpful.

For both sets of standards the program should insert links to all files and supporting documents. These links will be shown in the column entitled “Documents Submitted.” The actual linked files do not need to be sent to AER. Only the Core Standards Self-Study form and the Curricular Standards Self-Study form need to be emailed to accreditationinfo@aerbvi.org. Each form will show both the links and the ratings decided by the university program’s Self-Study Committee. Among the materials to be provided as links are:

1. Program Narrative
2. Budget
3. Faculty Credentials, Certification and Faculty Vitae
4. Clinical Experience
5. Clinical Supervisors
6. Sample Letters to Sites
7. Sample Logs
8. Course Syllabi.

If necessary, additional files may be submitted to further explain elements of the program.

# VI. The Self-Study Process

**1. Preparing the Self-Study**

Self-Study is the process undertaken internally by an educational institution or program to assess, describe and subsequently improve the quality of its educational programming relative to its mission.  As an accreditation tool, the Self-Study document is used by the institution’s Self-Study Committee members to record their judgment of how well they meet the standards. The Self-Study document is also used by for independent verification by peers external to the institution who serve on the review panel to evaluate the program’s conformity to the specific standards. The standards are designed to allow the institution to conduct a meticulous self-assessment, wherein the faculty can evaluate and report the program’s compliance with the core and curricular standards against a structured and transparent manner.

AER accreditation requires the institution to complete and submit the Self-Study documents provided by AERAC for both Core Standards and Curricular Standards.

* Core Standards are administrative in nature. All core standards must be fully met for an institution to be accredited.
* Curricular Standards pertain to the specific course of study: O&M, VRT, LVT, AT, or TVI. All curricular standards must be fully met for an institution to be fully accredited.

This self-assessment reflected on the Self-Study forms is optimally effective when it is conducted by faculty within the program who are knowledgeable about the program as it pertains to the standards under consideration. For transparency purposes, all members of the Self-Study Committee who participated in the preparation of each section are identified in the summary table provided at the end of the guide.

**2. The Review Process**

Upon receipt of the institution’s complete packet—its Self-Study with links to supporting documents— several actions will occur. AER and the program will post on their respective websites a 30-day open comment period, which includes a process whereby individuals may submit feedback relative to the program under review. Additionally, the AER Accreditation Manager will form a review panel of 4 members. The institution has the opportunity to review the membership of the review panel and to affirm there are no conflicts of interest. The institution has the right to challenge the appointment or inclusion of any member for a justifiable cause within five (5) business days of the date of receipt of the individuals assigned to the review. If conflicts of interest are identified, the AER Accreditation Manager will reassign the reviewer. The AER Accreditation Manager will revise the review panel roster until there are no known conflicts of interest.

Each review panel is composed of independent content experts with recognized knowledge and experience in the field of blind and low vision education and rehabilitation. Review panels consist of one university faculty member, two members who are practitioners in the discipline, and one member who is from a related discipline within the field of visual impairment. One of the review panel members will be identified as the review panel chair. Typically, the review panel chair will be the individual with the most accreditation experience. The review panel chair will be responsible for distributing the review workload and communicating with the program and AER Accreditation Manager, as needed. All four review panel members review the materials provided by the institution individually and then meet to determine if each Core Standard has been met. The review panel members divide into two teams to review the Curricular Standards and determine if each standard has been met.

The review panel uses the self-study forms to indicate their assessment to the extent to which the program meets each of the standards, using all of the data available to them. Once the review panel has sufficient time to review the program’s submission individually, the review panel will meet as a group via video conferences to evaluate the Self-Study and supporting documents that make up the body of evidence.

Using all of the data available to them, the review panel will evaluate the program’s compliance with each standard. The following classifications are used by the review panel when evaluating the extent to which the program meets each of the standards:

 1. The standard is met;

 2. The standard is not met.

Note: If there is disagreement about the determination, the review team will look at the information provided again and to assess if consensus can be reached. If there is a split decision between the two reviewers assigned to a Curricular Standard, a reviewer from the second team of panelists is asked to review the material and cast the deciding vote. If there is disagreement about the determination of a Core Standard, it is discussed and evaluated by all team members. If there is a split decision between the four team members, the Chairperson of HEAC makes the decision.

If the review panel determines that a standard has not been met, the review panel must provide the university program with specific feedback to explain their determination, including requests for additional documents to make an assessment of the program’s compliance with the standards. These requests will be communicated to the program via the AER Accreditation Manager. The review panel will be as specific as possible as to what is needed to the clarify the issue the panel has identified. The program is required to respond to the review panel within 45 days.

Once the electronic review has been completed and all additional documentation has been submitted, the program will hold a virtual site visit/tour and a set of interviews. The virtual tour will provide the University an opportunity to show its facilities for the general awareness of the panel as well as to specifically address the following standards:

CORE I.g. All curricular materials and the physical location of all face-to-face course meetings will meet the requirements of federal law and university policy for accessibility. Programs located in countries without federal mandates for accessibility must make reasonable accommodations for accessibility.

CORE I.j. The physical plant of the university or the online platform used for distance or support education must be adequate to meet the needs of the program.

CORE I. k. Equipment, assistive technology, and materials are available to guarantee necessary access and hands-on experiences to support candidates learning to use and teach devices, technology, and other materials.

CORE I. m. For both face-to-face courses and distance/online courses, faculty will only use teaching methods that are accessible to and usable (i.e., teaching methods can easily be used by adult learners with reasonable skills) by students.

During the tour, the panel will ask for a demonstration of the features of sample course modules and the ratings shown by the platform (Canvas, Blackboard, etc). Access for the review team as a “guest” may be necessary.

If University is already endorsed for its accessibility conformance, please provide evidence. (This endorsement is not required, but if it is available, please include it as evidence.)

The interviews will be scheduled with at least the following stakeholders, either in groups or individual meetings:

1. the chair of the department;
2. program faculty;
3. administrative institutional leadership (e.g., dean or provost);
4. students.

Upon completion of the virtual site visit and interviews, the review panel will meet to review their findings. The review panel will prepare their findings in the Self-Study Review Panel Report Form. In this report, the review panel is also able to provide the following optional feedback:

* *Collegial Advice:* non-binding suggestions for improvement related to compliance with the standards;
* *Commendations or Recognition of Exemplary Practices:* recognition of exemplary or innovative accomplishments relative to the standards.

The review panel presents the draft report, via the AER Accreditation Manager, to the program for a factual review. Within two weeks of receipt of the draft report, the program will notify the review panel of any factual inaccuracies. This is not an opportunity for the program to alter the contents of the report, influence the review panel’s findings, or supply additional evidence for consideration. The review panel chair will review the program’s corrections of facts, finalize the report, and submit it to the AER Accreditation Manager.

**3. Commission Review and Accreditation Determination**

The AER Accreditation Manager submits the review panel report along with the aggregate reviews of all self-study forms to the Chair of HEAC within 5 working days of receipt of the report from the review panel chair. HEAC reviews the materials at its next scheduled monthly meeting, prepares its recommendation and forwards this package to AERAC for a final decision at its next scheduled meeting (usually later in the same month as the HEAC meeting).

The AER accreditation manager communicates the decision in a letter emailed to the program.

The program will receive a determination of accreditation status within 120 days of the receipt of the electronic files, pending no delays in the process.

**4. Accreditation Classifications**

Accreditation decisions are of 4 types:

1. **Full accreditation:** conferred for 5 years for both initial and reaccreditation. In order for full accreditation to be granted, all Core and Curricular standards (100%) must be met.
2. **Provisional accreditation:** granted to candidates for initial accreditation, for a period of one year. 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.
3. **Probationary accreditation:** 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.
4. **Accreditation denial:** utilized if the outcome of the review process determines that the program is not in substantial compliance with the standards.

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

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 will be in the form of a response to the decision letter, in writing, to the chairperson of AERAC.

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 of the program’s actions should also be included in the Follow-up report. 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 whether 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 the AERAC for a final decision.

Programs with probationary or provisional accreditation 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 probationary status, and who successfully complete the degree, are considered to have completed an accredited program. 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.

Programs with extenuating circumstances may request an additional year to come into compliance (adding the additional year to the initial one year for curing a probationary or provisional status, for a total of 2 years). This request must be in writing and approved by HEAC. If the institution disagrees with the decision, they are able to appeal. This process is explained in the AERAC Policies and Procedures Manual: [https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/](https://aerbvi.org/the-national-accreditation-council/).

If a program is denied accreditation or has their accreditation withdrawn, this action will be communicated in writing to the university, and to the relevant state and institutional accrediting bodies.

The graphic below illustrates the roles, duties and relationships between the review panel, the Higher Education Accreditation Commission and AER Accreditation Council.

Reviews program

Submits recommendation & report to HEAC

Review Panel

Reviews report

Submits recommendation & justification to Council

HEAC

Approves or Denies Accredition

AER Accreditation Council

# VII. Annual Higher Education Program Reports

Achieving accreditation demonstrates that an institution has met relevant standards and confers on the institution the obligation to document its self-monitoring and continuous quality improvement by submitting the AER Annual Higher Education Program Report by March 31. The Annual Higher Education Program Report allows programs to gather aggregate information for the previous year (January 1-December 31) that demonstrates ongoing compliance with accreditation standards. Annual Higher Education Program Reports include, at minimum, the following information:

1. general program information
2. university resources
3. faculty resources
4. student enrollment
5. outcomes
6. access to information

This report is a requirement for maintaining accreditation status through the entire term approved by AERAC. In lieu of their 4th Annual Higher Education Program Report, programs must submit an application for re-accreditation. Program’s accreditation status, expiration date and AERAC Decision Summary will be posted on AER’s Accreditation Website.

In extenuating circumstances, programs may request an extension for the submission of their Annual Higher Education Program Report. Extension requests should be submitted to the AER Program Manager and are reviewed by HEAC. Requests for extensions must be made in writing and include an explanation for the reason for the request. For programs that have not submitted an Annual Higher Education Program Report by the due date and have not received an extension, the AER Program Manager will notify the institution’s president and the program director that the program has been placed on probation. If the Annual Higher Education Program Report is not received within 30 days of this notification, the program’s accreditation status will be withdrawn.

Annual Higher Education Program Reports are initially reviewed by the AER Program Manager for completeness. The AER Program Manager may contact the program for any missing or incorrect information. Annual Higher Education Program Reports are subsequently reviewed by HEAC, which forwards its recommendations to the AERAC. Possible outcomes are:

1. acceptance of the report with no further action required;
2. acceptance of the report with no further action required, however, notification that one or more areas will be monitored in future reports;
3. deferral of action on the report due to limited information. Programs will be required to resubmit the Annual Higher Education Program Report within 30 days of notification by the AER Program Manager. Upon receipt of the revised report, HEAC will review and make a recommendation to AERAC;
4. acceptance of the report with a request for a Plan of Action if the program is found to be non-compliant with one or more of the standards.

Plans of Action must be submitted to HEAC within 30 days of receipt of notification of deferral of action. Plans of Action should not span longer than 12 months. Plans of Action should include the following:

1. a description of the plan for bringing the program into compliance with the standard(s);
2. a timeline for the plan;
3. a list of documentation that will be provided as evidence that the program has met the standard(s).

Plans of Action will be reviewed by HEAC, who will make a recommendation to AERAC regarding the adequacy of the plan; AERAC, in turn, will make a final decision. Programs remain accredited if their Plan of Action is approved and if they are making adequate progress towards program improvement. Programs who do not submit a Plan of Action, or whose Plan of Action is not approved, may have their accreditation withdrawn. Programs will provide an update relative to progress on their Plan of Action within 6 months of submission of said plan.

# VIII. Panel Reviewers

The AER Accreditation Program is made possible by a volunteer-based review process system. The success of the program depends on having experienced and skilled professionals to carry out the task of evaluating an applicant’s compliance to identified standards. These professionals, known as Reviewers, provide each organization with an objective, professional and quality review of their services and operations. Review teams consist of 4 individuals: one university faculty member, two members who are practitioners in the discipline, and one member who is from a related discipline in visual impairment.

**1. Reviewer Requirements**

AER seeks individuals with strong core competencies to review higher education programs. Reviewers will be responsible for evaluating service delivery systems and operations against a set of accreditation standards. Reviewers shall meet the following requirements:

* Three or more years of recent (i.e., within the last 5 years) related field and/or administrative experience or at least 10 years of prior related experiences.
* No conflict of interest with the organization or higher education institution seeking accreditation.
* Completion of the reviewer training and exam with a “passing” score of 80 or better.
* Excellent oral and written communication skills.

**2. Reviewer Training & Onboarding**

The Council is committed to ensuring that each reviewer has the skills needed to successfully complete an accreditation review. Each reviewer is required to:

* Review Accreditation Handbook, AERAC Policy and Procedures manual, and Instructional Modules I, II and III;
* Complete a pass/fail based-exam with a score of 80 or higher;
* Complete the Accreditation Reviewer Information Form.

# IX. Access to Information

AER accreditation program is committed to providing public access to information regarding:

1. The performance of AER Accreditation Program in the U.S. in terms of fairness, transparency, support for innovation and improvement, communication on standards and acceptable documentation, quality of reviewers and reviews, timeliness and responsiveness, and in promoting academic quality.
2. The performance of AER Accreditation Program in Canada and other international entities in terms of fairness, transparency, support for innovation and improvement, communication on standards and acceptable documentation, quality of reviewers and reviews, timeliness and responsiveness, and in promoting academic quality.
3. The performance of accredited institutions or programs as measured by transparent reporting of accreditation status of higher education programs, and performance regarding completion, retention, success with academic transfer, certification/licensure examination pass rates and success in moving into the world of work.

In conformity with national standards of Council for Higher Education Accreditation ([www.CHEA.org](http://www.chea.org)), AER reports to the public the following information on its website ([aerbvi.org/accreditation](http://www.aerbvi.org/accreditation)):

* Accreditations currently under consideration (institutions who have applied);
* Decision Summaries on all accreditation reviews completed indicating accreditation status.

In addition, AER provides on [https://aerbvi.org/higher-education-colleges-and-universities-](https://aerbvi.org/the-national-accreditation-council/higher-education/)):

* A link to a detailed directory of all institutions providing higher education preparation programs for O&M, VRT, TVI, LVT, AT;
* A map showing which states and Canadian provinces have AER accredited programs and which states have programs that are not AER accredited.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**What is the AER Accreditation Council?**

The Council is the governing body responsible for the standards and has final authority to award or deny accreditation. It awards accreditation to degree programs that demonstrate evidence of high quality by meeting administrative and professional preparation standards.

**What is the higher education program accreditation?**

It is an in-depth review of an academic program that provides validation and that helps to facilitate a high quality learning experience for students.

**Is accreditation important?**

The Higher Education Accreditation communicates an institution’s commitment to quality and provides an opportunity to raise the visibility of the program. Accreditation encourages intentional, insightful, and innovative program design and facilitates an alignment between the institution and the programs’ missions and goals.

**How long is the accreditation process?**

The accreditation process includes submitting an Application Form/fee, a self-study, and a review by a 4-member panel, HEAC and AERAC. The entire process can take up to 6 months depending on the completeness of all components of the application.

**How do I obtain an application for accreditation?**

Applications and related information can be obtained on the website: [https://aerbvi.org/higher-education-colleges-and-universities-](https://aerbvi.org/the-national-accreditation-council/higher-education/) or by sending an email to accreditationinfo@aerbvi.org.

**How can I become a reviewer?**

All information for becoming a reviewer is available on the website: [https://aerbvi.org/become-a-reviewer](https://aerbvi.org/the-national-accreditation-council/become-a-reviewer/) or you can send an email to accreditationinfo@aerbvi.org for more information.

**What is the period of Higher Education Accreditation?**

An accreditation is valid for 5 years and requires that the institution submit an annual update report.

**Can an institution’s accreditation be revoked?**

Yes, the accreditation can be revoked at the discretion of the Council if the institution does not submit an annual update report and/or fails to demonstrate a continuous adherence to the standards.

I**s there an application fee to seek accreditation?**

There is a fee for each program: $1750 for the 1st program, $1500 for the second, $1250 for the third, and $1000 for each additional.

**Contact Information:**

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call (703-671-4500) or send an email to accreditationinfo@aerbvi.org. In addition, an introductory zoom meeting with staff preparing for accreditation can be arranged with the accreditation manager to discuss the process and any organizational tips that may be helpful.

#

#

# APPENDIX

Higher Education Accreditation Application Form and Annual Program Report Form can be downloaded here:

 [https://aerbvi.org/higher-education-colleges-and-universities-](https://aerbvi.org/accreditation/higher-education/)