



## Accreditation Policies & Procedures

### Accreditation History, Philosophy, and Advantages

The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) has been accrediting crisis service organizations in the United States and internationally since 1976. The accreditation process strives to recognize exemplary crisis service organizations, and to support other related programs to refine their services according to these standards. These include but are not limited to: crisis services provided through telephone, texting, web-based application (online emotional support), mobile crisis services, and other 24/7 services supporting individuals in crisis.

#### Advantages to Accreditation

AAS accreditation validates service delivery programs that are performing according to our internationally recognized standards.

- AAS staff and accreditation examiners offer support tailored to the needs of an individual organization, its volunteers, staff, board, and community it serves.
- The increased visibility and credibility of an AAS-accredited program provides opportunities for modeling program excellence to other agencies and professionals.
- AAS accreditation provides a morale boost for its volunteers, staff, and board working in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.
- AAS-accredited programs have additional credibility with funding agencies and insurance providers.
- Programs seeking AAS accreditation have access to criteria for systematic, ongoing self-evaluation.
- People in life-threatening and other crises who obtain service from AAS-accredited programs are assured that volunteers and/or staff have seriously examined their commitment to providing the highest quality of care through this process.
- AAS accreditation is recognized and accepted by the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, the National Problem Gambling Network, and several state and federal accreditation requirements.

Achievement of Accreditation is issued for three (3) years.

#### Eligibility Criteria

- Organization is a current organizational member of the American Association of Suicidology
- Organization must provide the most recent copy of their filed 990 or annual audit and IRS determination letter to confirm the organization's status
- Organization has been in operation for at least six contiguous calendar months prior to applying for accreditation
- Crisis service(s) provided operate 24/7/365
- Organization accreditation stakeholders have reviewed the [Accreditation Informational Packet](#), including completion of the Accreditation Readiness Checklist (page 8)
- Completed [application for accreditation](#)
- Receipt of payment within 30 days of invoice date

## Application & Fees

- A complete application for accreditation includes the four (4) page [application](#) with all fields completed and signed, the organization's most recent copy of their 990 and IRS Determination Letter for Nonprofits or 1120 with supporting details for For Profit organizations. If an organization is not an AAS member, they must also [join as an organizational member](#) prior to submitting the completed application.
- Completed applications are emailed to AAS staff for review at [accreditation@suicidology.org](mailto:accreditation@suicidology.org) and processed in one (1) to two (2) weeks for eligibility approval and invoicing.
- Organizations can expect to be invoiced between \$3,700 and \$4,750 which includes preparation work, a virtual site examination, and consultation for up to six months. If an organization requires time beyond the six-month deadline to complete accreditation, additional fees will be applicable. If organization requires an in-person site examination, costs associated for travel and lodging will be their financial responsibility in addition to the accreditation fee.
  - Consultation for accreditation is defined as email and virtual meetings to discuss what is needed to comply with accreditation standards, clarification on areas needing improvement for documentation review, and managing the documentation upload process.
- Payment for accreditation fees are due within 30 days of dated electronic invoice. An organization is considered in-process from the date AAS has both a completed application and payment. The Organizational Standards Manual is provided to the organization **after** application and payment of services are provided.
- A \$500 fee will be invoiced to organization for rescheduling and/or cancelling a site visit in less than 30 days from date confirmed by AAS and Site Examiner.
  - This includes a need to reschedule a site visit due to late documentation submission and/or the need for further documentation review after the submission deadline.

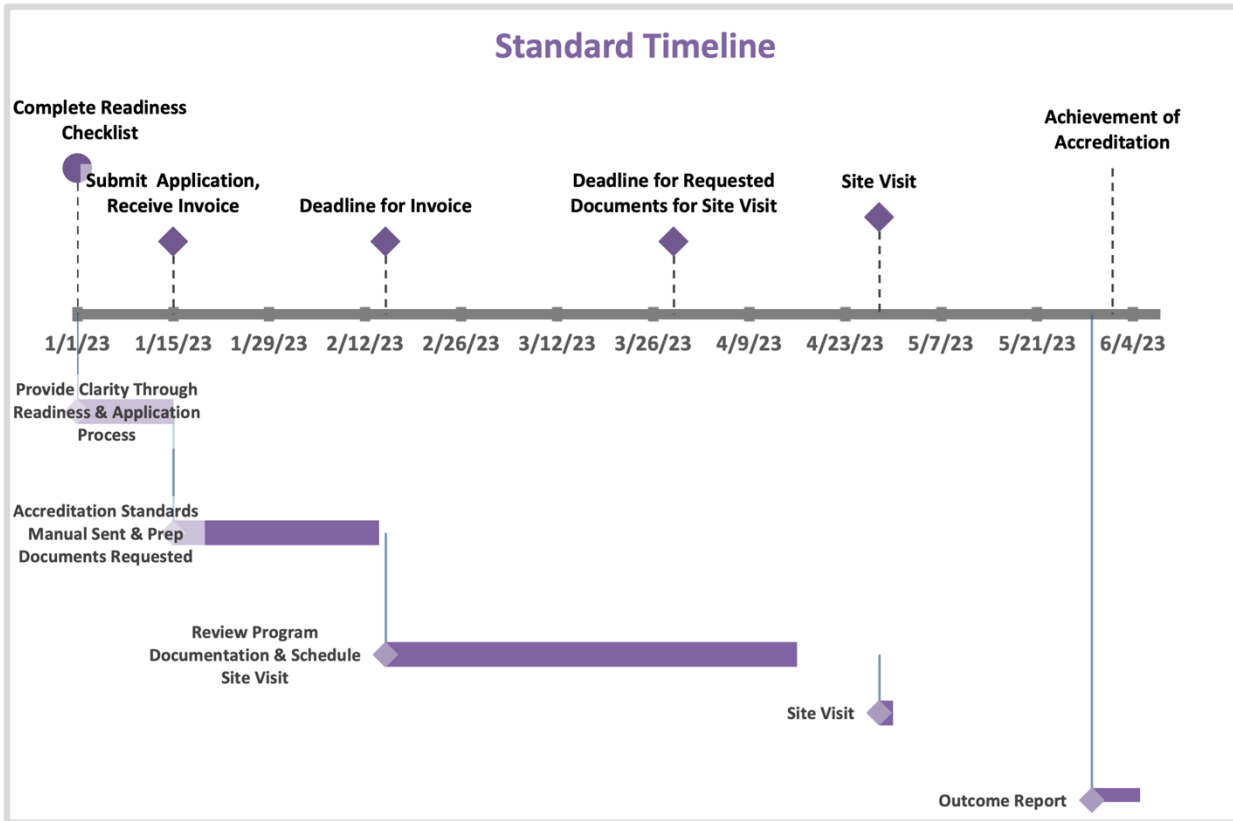
### Accreditation Fee Table

	<b>New Accreditation(s)</b>	<b>Re-Accreditation(s)</b>
Application Fee	\$250	\$100
Accreditation Fee	\$4,500	\$3,600
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$4,750</b>	<b>\$3,700</b>

If multiple services or sites need to be accredited, a fee of \$750 for each additional service will be assessed.

# Accreditation Process

## Timeline



An organization is considered in-process from the date AAS has both a completed application and payment. If no progress is made on an in-process application within 6 months, any fees paid will be forfeited and the application will be closed.

AAS considers progress to be actively engaging in the accreditation process, which includes starting the documentation upload process, responding to email communications from AAS and Site Examiner, and meeting required deadlines.

### Documentation Upload & Review

Prior to a site visit, crisis centers complete a documentation upload process where AAS reviews the content for four (4) weeks to ensure a comprehensive and efficient evaluation process. These documents serve as valuable resources that provide the AAS staff and Site Examiner with a deeper understanding of the center's operations, policies, procedures, and overall compliance with accreditation standards.

AAS staff will provide the organization's accreditation point of contact and the assigned Site Examiner access to a secure cloud-based folder to upload the documentation required for review. A packet on how to access the folder, upload documents, and a list of required documents is also provided. Centers are required to upload the documentation at **least four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled site examination** and the contents will be accessible to and reviewed by the assigned Site Examiner and AAS staff. AAS staff will identify a deadline for documentation to be uploaded, six (6) to eight (8) weeks from the time of providing the cloud-based folder.

AAS staff and Site Examiner will spend two (2) to three (3) weeks reviewing the uploaded documentation to validate that the uploaded documents align effectively support the center's compliance with accreditation standards. AAS staff and/or Site Examiner may seek input from relevant stakeholders, such as senior leadership or quality assurance personnel, to verify the completeness and accuracy of the submitted documents.

**An organization cannot submit any documentation for review after the deadline provided by AAS, unless directed by AAS or the Site Examiner. Additional uploads after the deadline will result in rescheduling the site visit and incurring rescheduling fees.**

## Required Documents to Upload

Due four (4) weeks before site visit.

- Charter and bylaws incorporating the organization (if you are a non-profit)
- Current incorporation materials from state (certificate in good standing)
- If completing re-accreditation, a copy of prior AAS Accreditation Examination Report(s)
- A board roster with identified role and profession
- Most recent Board report or minutes
- Current strategic plan
- Quality improvement plan/document or work done to monitor quality of service
- Organizational chart with staff names & titles
- Copy of your most recent financial audit
- Names of key funding sources—total and crisis program only
- Copy of current fiscal year budget
- Agency-wide and crisis line specific policies and procedures
  - *Emphasis on imminent risk and active rescue procedures*
- Job descriptions for key personnel (relevant managers, front-line staff, trainers)
- Sample of call report form(s) for services provided (phone/chat/text)
- Listing of in-service trainings provided in the past year
- Typical staffing schedule for crisis line coverage (and location of crisis specialists on coverage)
- Evidence from personnel files that includes annual performance reviews
- Training syllabus, guide, and slides
- Sample of role play scenarios
- List of the identified knowledge, skills, and attitude objectives for training modules
- Training bibliography
- Pre and post training quiz(s)
- Copy of the safety assessment tool completed by staff/volunteers
- Copy of your code of ethics
- Copy of latest annual report, if not already on your organization's website
- Sample research/evaluation reports or data (if relevant)
- Anything else that is supporting evidence of compliance with standards

## Site Examination

- A virtual (held over Zoom, Teams, or other similar application) site examination is conducted with a Site Examiner and scheduled by the AAS staff four (4) weeks after an organization completes their uploading all required documentation.
- If the organization requires an in-person site examination, costs associated for travel and lodging will be their financial responsibility in addition to the accreditation fees.

- The AAS staff will provide a draft agenda to the organization's point of contact to assist in identifying relevant stakeholders for the interview
- Centers can expect to involve the following individuals for the site visit:
  - Organization Leadership
  - Crisis Center Program Director and Assistant Program Director
  - Experienced and New Crisis Specialists (one of each)
  - Community Outreach Coordinator
  - Team Lead for Suicide Prevention Programs
  - Training Manager or Lead
  - Board Representative
  - Community Partner (someone who can speak to organizations reputation and collaboration)
  - Team Lead for Text and Chat Services (if offering)
  - Team Lead for Language Services (if offering)
- A site visit will be rescheduled and/or cancelled by AAS if the organization demonstrates not meeting minimum standards during the documentation review, resulting in a \$500 rescheduling fee if this occurs within 30 days of the site visit.

### Site Examiner Roles & Responsibilities

Site Examiners are highly qualified professionals in the crisis field who have been vetted and trained in this process and are familiar with crisis service operations. Examiners are assigned to organizations based on familiarity/experience with the type of program seeking accreditation, availability, and confirming there is not an existing relation/conflict of interest with the applicant. Centers can expect the following from Site Examiners:

- Reviews all required documentation submitted by center within two (2) weeks prior to scheduled site visit, ensuring all requested documentation is uploaded, and summarizes initial findings in the examination report. Communicates with AAS staff and center's designated contact person to request additional information or seek clarification on documentation.
- Conduct virtual site visit with the organization's identified stakeholders during one (1) to two (2) consecutive interview days.
- Submits site examination report with accreditation recommendation to AAS staff within two weeks after the accreditation visit. Ensures that all components of the report provide meaningful and reliable feedback, offering clear and actionable recommendations to the applicant center.
- Attends the accreditation outcome meeting scheduled by AAS staff to provide any context to things noted in evaluation.
- Receives annual training to stay compliant with evidence-supported practices in crisis services and procedural changes in the accreditation program.

### Accreditation Examination Outcomes

**Accredited:** The status granted to a crisis center that has successfully met all accreditation standards and demonstrated a commitment to providing high-quality services. Awarded for a three (3) year term. Organization receives Achievement of Accreditation toolkit, which includes:

- Letter of congratulations from AAS President & CEO (Chief Executive Officer)
- Certificate of Accreditation

- Accreditation feedback form
- Press release template
- Guidance on how to publicly share organization's accreditation status and seal

**Provisional Accreditation with QI (Quality Improvement) Plan:** The status granted to a center that shows capability to meet accreditation standards within 90 days but requires further improvement. The center is given a Quality Improvement (QI) Plan outlining specific areas for improvement, expected deliverables to show evidence of improvement, and a deadline. All deliverables must be met, reviewed, and approved by AAS by 90-day mark. If unable to meet the expected deadline with deliverables, the center will not be granted accreditation. If they were previously accredited, the center will need to reapply as a new center.

**Accreditation Not Granted/Revoked:** The status given to a center that does not meet the necessary accreditation standards and, as a result, is not granted accreditation. Centers can reapply for accreditation (fees apply) again after six (6) months. If the center was previously accredited, they will need to reapply as a new center. A center can be failed at any point during the process of the documentation review or site visit.

## Maintaining Accreditation

1. AAS organizational membership must remain in good standing with the annual dues renewal based on the organization's anniversary date. All AAS members are billed 30 days prior to their expiration.
2. Email communication on significant leadership and/or service delivery changes within 5 business days of change occurring or being planned
3. Complete the annual accreditation self-report (for years where you are not applying for reaccreditation). Self-report will request information on:
  - a. Annual volume and service delivery metrics
  - b. Compliance on various AAS accreditation standards from manual editions 9-13th
  - c. Quality assurance procedures
  - d. Significant leadership and/or service delivery changes

## Basis of Evaluation

The Accreditation process of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) draws inspiration from the Program Analysis of Service Systems (PASS) developed by Wolf Wolfensberger. The Accreditation Standards offer a flexible range of compliance levels, and Site Examiners use various methods to document the level of compliance. This evaluation involves a comprehensive examination, including a review of written documents, interviews with personnel, assessment of records, and a test call. Although the goal is to render an accreditation decision after a Site Examiner has reviewed documents and conducted a site visit, a center can fail the evaluation at any point in this process.

Site Examiners seek three or more independent indicators to assess how the crisis center addresses each standard. For instance, when evaluating the governing body, Site Examiners verify the existence of recorded minutes, assess whether these minutes accurately reflect decisions made, determine staff awareness of these decisions, and ensure the implementation of those decisions within the organization.

Recognizing the diversity in crisis services, which can differ in style of delivery, target community needs, and overall focus, the AAS Accreditation Standards embrace and appreciate this variety. Accreditation Site Examiners undergo specialized training to recognize and account for this heterogeneity while applying the Standards as a comprehensive assessment tool.

## Appeal Process

On occasion and by the recommendation of a Site Examiner (in consultation with AAS staff), an organization may experience their accreditation being delayed or suspended until specific recommendations are implemented or improved. You have the right to request an appeal through the following steps:

1. Submitting written documentation to clarify a possible misunderstanding to [Accreditation@suicidology.org](mailto:Accreditation@suicidology.org)
2. Requesting a virtual consultation with AAS leadership to present grievances
3. Based on the appeal, a second opinion may be sought, and a new Site Examiner assigned to reevaluate the organization.

The organization bears the cost of this reevaluation. In all cases, the decision of AAS leadership is final.

## General Criteria & Manual Format

The evaluation focuses on five (5) areas\*, each with its separate standards. The areas are:

- Area I: Administrative & Organizational Structure
- Area II: Screening, Training, & Monitoring Crisis Specialists
- Area III: Crisis Intervention Services & Delivery
- Area IV: Community Integration
- Area V: Program Evaluation

\*Five (5) areas listed are based on the upcoming release of the 14th edition standards in November 2023.

The Accreditation Standards Manual considers each area separately. An explanatory statement is followed by discussion of the standards used to evaluate that area. The structure of each area is:

1. Area
  - a. Explanatory Statement
  - b. Standards
    - i. Component 1
      1. Description
      2. Rating Scale
    - ii. Component 2 (etc.)

## Rating Scale

To receive accreditation, the crisis center must demonstrate compliance with the appropriate standards for each component. The rating scale consists of three levels: Level I, Level II, and Level III.

- Level I indicates that the crisis center has met the minimum standards for the respective component. Achieving Level I is essential to qualify for accreditation.
- Level II reflects a higher level of performance, indicating that the crisis center has not only met all Level I standards but has also successfully implemented additional practices and procedures, showing a commitment to continuous improvement and best practices.

- Level III represents the highest level of achievement. A crisis center that attains Level III has met all Level I and Level II standards and has implemented advanced measures, indicating a comprehensive and exemplary approach to crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

It is important to note that the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) understands that each organization operates with varying resources, and not all may be able to achieve Level II or Level III in all areas. The AAS values the effort and dedication of crisis centers to continuously improve their services while considering their unique circumstances.

**Note:** Area III Component 4 (Suicide Safety Assessment) and Component 5 (Emergency Service Interventions) have a single level required for compliance. This means that crisis centers must meet all standards in these two components to qualify for accreditation.

## Public Recognition

Upon successful completion of the accreditation process, the crisis center is provided a Certificate of Accreditation, a press release template, the AAS Accredited Crisis Center Seal, and instructions on authorized ways to use the Crisis Center Seal.

Accredited Crisis Centers are highlighted on the AAS website, at the Annual Conference, and can be showcased on AAS social media accounts.

## Confidentiality

Information received by AAS during the accreditation process is treated confidentially. The following are exceptions:

1. AAS will confirm receipt of an application for accreditation.
2. AAS will confirm that a site examination is pending or has been conducted.
3. AAS will confirm the current and historical accreditation status of an organization or program.
4. AAS reserves the right to publish aggregate data based on accreditation examinations and applications.
5. Serious situations uncovered during the accreditation process that will potentially affect public health and safety will be reported to the organization's executive leadership immediately.

## Procedures for Handling Feedback About AAS Accredited Centers

The American Association of Suicidology (AAS) is committed to maintaining the highest standards of care and ethical practices within its accredited crisis centers. In case of feedback related to an AAS accredited center's services or operations, the following procedures outline the steps for AAS staff handling and resolving submissions.

1. Feedback may be submitted in writing via email to [accreditation.feedback@suicidology.org](mailto:accreditation.feedback@suicidology.org). The submitter should include specific details about the nature of the concern and any supporting documentation, if available.
2. Upon receipt of feedback, AAS will acknowledge its receipt to the submitter within five business days and be notified that it has been reviewed.
3. AAS will redact identifying information from the submission given and forward feedback to the organization's highest level executive leadership.



4. Documentation of the feedback received and providing organization's executive leadership with genesis of feedback will be saved in organization's file.

## Reaccreditation

Organizations seeking reaccreditation must apply by completing the application 90 days prior to the accreditation expiration date to ensure accreditation continuity. Failure to apply to reaccredit within 90 days of current accreditation period will result in a late fee of \$500. Application for reaccreditation received after the expiration of the current accreditation term will be processed as a new applicant. Requests for an extension in the organization's accreditation period will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and must be made to AAS before the accreditation period has ended.