



AMERICA'S SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

NATIONAL ACCREDITATION POLICIES & PROCEDURES

I. Accreditation Committee

A. Membership

America's Small Business Development Centers (America's SBDC) Accreditation Committee (Committee) is a standing committee appointed by America's SBDC Board of Directors (Board). The Committee is composed of a maximum of twenty-five (25) voting members plus one alternate voting member appointed by the Committee Chair with the confirmation of America's SBDC Board. Members will serve a three (3) year term and must be from an accredited Small Business Development Center Network (SBDC) that is in good standing with the America's SBDC. A Network is in good standing with the America's SBDC if the Network is current with its annual dues and is accredited by the Accreditation Committee or has participated in its regular four or five year accreditation review and is awaiting action on the report by the Accreditation Committee. In addition, the President and CEO of the America's SBDC and the Associate Administrator and Deputy Associate Administrator of the Office of Small Business Development Centers (OSBDC), U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), serve on the Committee as non-voting members representing the America's SBDC and SBA. All committee members must read, understand and sign "The America's SBDC Accreditation Committee Code of Ethics" statement annually. Any actual or perceived violations of this Code of Ethics must be reported to the America's SBDC Accreditation Committee Chair as quickly as possible.

B. Authority

The Accreditation Process was established based on requirements of Federal law and is funded and sponsored by the SBA. SBA contracts with the America's SBDC to manage the accreditation process. The Accreditation Committee, a standing committee of the America's SBDC Board, is responsible for planning, organizing and implementing the accreditation process. The Committee has the authority to review and make recommendations to the OSBDC as to the accreditation status of Small Business Development Center Networks nationally.

C. Annual Appointments

Each year any vacancies on the Committee will be filled by members appointed by the Chair of the Accreditation Committee and confirmed by the Association Board of Directors. Nominations for membership to the Committee will be provided by the

Chair of the Accreditation Committee to the America's SBDC Board. Nominations to the Committee should follow the selection process policy which can be found in Addendum A of this document.

D. Accreditation Committee Leadership

The leadership of the Committee shall be composed of the Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. The Chair of the Accreditation Committee shall be chosen bi-annually by the Committee and will be elected to a two year term by majority vote of the members of the Accreditation Committee. The Chair's term shall commence on January 1st. The Chair may succeed him/herself with majority vote of the members of the Committee. The appointment must be approved by the America's SBDC Board of Directors. The Vice Chair and Secretary are selected by the Committee for a two year term which may be extended for additional periods with the approval of the Committee. In the event of a vacancy of any of the three leadership positions, the Committee may hold a special meeting to fill the position(s) for the remaining term. Any or all of the Committee Leadership Team may be removed at any time with a 2/3 vote of the Committee and confirmation by the America's SBDC Board of Directors.

E. Vacancies

The Committee Chair will nominate eligible members for the Committee and present them to the America's SBDC Board for approval. If vacancies occur with unexpired terms, the Chair of the Accreditation Committee will nominate replacements to fill the unexpired term, which must then be approved by the America's SBDC Board of Directors. On occasion, Committee members with extenuating circumstances may request a leave of absence from the Committee. When this occurs, the Chair may recommend a temporary replacement to the America's SBDC Board for approval. The temporary member will serve for the duration of the original member's leave of absence.

F. Process for Removal of Committee Members

1. Members may be removed or given a leave of absence for the following reasons:
 - a. Failure to prepare adequately for a review, or
 - b. Failure to deliver timely reports, or
 - c. Unprofessional conduct or conduct damaging to the integrity of the Accreditation Committee or the accreditation process, or
 - d. Unwilling or unable to conduct at least one accreditation review each year if asked,
 - e. Unwilling to attend in person meetings.
2. Recommendation for removal shall be presented by the Chair to the Committee for review and decision. To remove a Committee member or requires approval by a 2/3 vote of the Accreditation Committee members with confirmation from the America's SBDC Board of Directors.

G. Process for leave of absence

Temporary leaves of absence may be approved when requested by a Committee member experiencing unusual circumstances that would interfere with them meeting the expectations of a Committee member. The Chair will be responsible for evaluating the circumstances and making a recommendation to the Accreditation Committee for discussion and vote.

If the Chair of the America's SBDC Board is also an Accreditation Committee member, he/she may be given a leave of absence from the Committee but may continue to participate in the calls and meetings but abstain from voting.

II. Accreditation Team

A. Selection

Accreditation Teams will generally be composed of not less than two members; however, under exceptional circumstances and with the state/region approval, field visits may be accomplished with one member. Accreditation Teams may include up to a maximum of six Accreditation Committee members, depending upon the size and complexity of the SBDC network being reviewed. The Team Leader and Team will be selected by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Accreditation Committee, and approved by the OSBDC. A business explanation must be submitted to OSBDC when recommending more than two members for a Team. The contract with SBA requires that at least one member of the Team be a state/regional director. Generally, committee members will not review the same Network within consecutive cycles; however, justifiable exceptions may occur. Members will not be assigned to review a Network which has a committee member reviewing the first Network within the same annual cycle. (For example, a member from State A will not review State B when State B has a member reviewing State A.)

The Chair will notify the SBDC Network Director of the composition and names of the Team and Team leader. Within one week of receiving the official notification by the Chair, the SBDC Network Director must indicate in writing if the Network is electing to renew a "T" designation or apply for a new "T" designation. If the state/regional program being accredited is requesting technology accreditation, at least one member of the Team must be from a state/regional program with an accredited technology program.

The SBDC Network Director may make a written request to the Chair to replace one member of the Review Team. If personnel are available, the Chair will substitute a new Team member for the one being replaced. This option is also available for re-reviews, revisits, special reviews (out of normal rotation) or self-funded Network requested reviews for either special purposes or for a "T" review out of cycle. In the event of incapacity, resignation or removal of a Team member, the Chair of the Accreditation Committee may make additional appointments as appropriate.

B. Team Leader

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Accreditation Committee will select the Team Leader and Team Members for the reviews subject to confirmation by the OSBDC. Whenever possible, a Network requesting initial or renewal of a “T” designation will have at least one committee member from an accredited “T” Network on the Team. Except as otherwise provided in these procedures, all official communications related to the accreditation visit shall be between the SBDC network Director or a designee and the Team Leader. The Team Leader is responsible for coordinating and planning the accreditation visit with input and communication with the other Team members.

III. Process

A. Cycle of Reviews

The Accreditation Process is currently transitioning to a five year review cycle. By 2016, every SBDC Network shall be on a five-year review cycle in keeping with the terms of the Accreditation Contract between America’s SBDC and the OSBDC. This review cycle must be published and distributed by the Chair on an annual basis to the SBDCs scheduled for reviews. The current contract calls for thirteen reviews each year, and the SBDC Networks selected for review will be approved in advance by the OSBDC.

B. Accreditation Eligibility Requirements

1. All Small Business Development Centers seeking accreditation must have been in existence for at least three years, although this requirement may be waived by the OSBDC.
2. The SBDC Network scheduled for review shall provide evidence in a current self-study which includes both detailed narrative and supporting documentation that it has made the commitment necessary to meet the requirements of the currently approved America’s SBDC Accreditation Standards. SBDCs that do not provide such evidence as required either by failure to prepare adequate self-study materials for review or to make adequate arrangements for the review will be found to be non-responsive and non-compliant with the SBDC Requirement for Accreditation. In such an event, the Team Leader should make a recommendation to the Accreditation Committee that the SBDC be declared ineligible for accreditation. Failure to participate in the accreditation process will result in the expiration of the existing accreditation status and eligibility to receive federal funds or continue as a Small Business Development Center program, absent action by the OSBDC.
3. States/ Regions wishing to be accredited as a technology program must notify the Chair of the Committee of their intent within one week after receiving their notification of their upcoming review from the Chair of the Committee. The State/ Regional Director should acknowledge that they are aware of the current technology accreditation standards. The Chair will accommodate the request by assigning at least one member of the Team from a technology accredited Network

as required by Committee policy. If the technology accreditation is part of a regularly scheduled review the Network will not be charged additional expenses for the review.

4. States/ Regions may request an off cycle regular or technology accreditation review by notifying the Chair of the Committee. Subject to availability of committee personnel, and approval by the OSBDC, this request for an out of cycle accreditation review will be scheduled at the expense of the requesting Network.

C. Deviation from Cycle of Review

The Accreditation Committee may, in very rare circumstances, and with approval from OSBDC, alter the review cycle to accommodate special circumstances that may arise related to the SBDC scheduled for review. Requests to reschedule a review must be submitted in writing to both the Chair and Team Leader if one has been designated and approved by the OSBDC. The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will submit the request to the OSBDC for approval. The absence or replacement of the SBDC Network Director or other key personnel is not sufficient grounds for delaying a scheduled review.

D. Review Team Responsibilities

The Accreditation Team has responsibility to evaluate the programmatic information provided in the self-study and to verify and clarify that information by a site visit to the SBDC network. The Team will document observations in light of the current accreditation standards and develop a detailed written report.

The Accreditation Team will review the SBDC network, not only as an organization partially funded by the SBA to deliver SBA specific services, but also as an organization which is part of a complex, far-ranging network having hosts from the private sector, universities and colleges, and state governments interacting in the business and economic development environments of the State or Region. In this context, inter-institutional relationships, the qualities of leadership, the capability to assemble and utilize resources, and the capability of the SBDC to design and implement programs become important dimensions for evaluation. A well written report developed from the information gathered will be presented to the Accreditation Committee for discussion and recommendation of accreditation status.

E. Planning the Accreditation Review Visit

In order to evaluate the SBDC network from the broadest perspective, the Accreditation Team Leader will advise the SBDC Network Director of any specific dimensions of the program where the Review Team would like to focus additional attention. Additionally, the SBDC Network Director may request specific attention be given to key issues where he/she would like recommendations, or identify concerns which the accreditation process might help resolve. Any additional areas of focus shall be identified in discussions between the Team Leader and the SBDC

Network Director or by the OSBDC based upon evaluation of the self-study. The areas shall be identified either prior to the visit or early in the visit.

The Review Team will select which centers it wants to visit with input from the SBDC State/Regional Director. The Review Team will expect to meet with all SBDC personnel with managerial and/or programmatic responsibilities. Business Counselors and Support Staff may also be requested to participate in these meetings. Meetings with the immediate supervisor of the SBDC State/Regional Director and with the SBA District Director should be included in the Accreditation Review Schedule.

The scheduling of the reviews is a joint decision between the SBDC Network leadership and the Accreditation Review Team. Reviews shall be conducted during such times of the year so as not to overburden either the SBDC or the Review Team. The review shall be conducted within the scheduled calendar year. An SBDC failing to accommodate the review shall be deemed non-responsive and the accreditation status will expire subject to approval by the OSBDC. The situation will be reported to the President of America's SBDC and directed to the SBA for final disposition.

The length of any SBDC review will be dependent upon the size of the SBDC, location of its centers and the complexity of its programs. It is expected that reviews will be scheduled from a minimum of three days to a maximum of six days.

F. Standards

The standards for accreditation are those approved by the America's SBDC membership and the OSBDC at the time of the State /Regional review. Current standards can be found on the Accreditation Section of the America's SBDC website. New standards may be recommended and adopted from time to time by a majority vote of the America's SBDC membership and approval by the OSBDC. The Association membership must approve any revisions to accreditation standards. The Accreditation Committee will review standards periodically and review guidelines for completing the required accreditation self-study. Revisions to the self-study documents do not require approval of the America's SBDC membership but do require 2/3 favorable vote of the Accreditation Committee.

G. Self-Study

The Network Small Business Development Center will prepare a self-study in electronic format in accordance with the Accreditation Self-Study Guide (Self Study guidelines can be found on the Accreditation Page of the America's SBDC website) and provide copies to each member of the Accreditation Review Team, the observer(s), if present, and the America's SBDC Program Manager (brett@asbdc-us.org) at least 60 days prior to the start of the scheduled accreditation review. A SBDC network seeking technology accreditation must respond to each area of the self-study portion of the accreditation standards with an asterisk (*) clearly referencing the technology commercialization program/initiative in the self-study. The Review Team leader shall notify the America's SBDC Accreditation Committee

Chair ASAP if the SBDC network fails to provide a Self-Study report or prepares an extremely inadequate or incomplete report.

H. Accreditation Review

The Accreditation Team has responsibility to conduct the review in accordance with approved America's SBDC accreditation procedures. The review will encompass all programs managed by the SBDC regardless of the funding sources for those activities. Preparation for the site visit includes reading and discussing the self-study to identify areas for further inquiry. Areas of concern will require clarification and strengths should be verified across the network. The review team is expected to go into the SBDC Network with a common and well understood plan.

It is the responsibility of the Review Team to set initial expectations as to how they prefer to manage the interview process. The Network Director (or the Network Director's designee) may be present during interviews, as an important aim of this process is to provide learning opportunities; however, the Review Team has the discretion to ask the Network Director (or designee) not to join an interview or to leave at any time during an interview, if they sense that the interview process is being hindered in any way.

At the conclusion of the visit, there will be an exit interview to present summary observations and recommendations of the Team. The accreditation exit interview will include the Accreditation Team, the observer(s), if applicable and appropriate, the SBDC Network Director, and invited guest of the SBDC Network Director, if applicable. The SBDC Network Director has an option to invite other individuals they deem appropriate to attend the exit interview. The State /Regional Director should notify the Team Leader in advance of the exit interview if others will be invited to attend the exit interview.

I. Reapplication

If an SBDC prepares an incomplete self-study or fails to make adequate arrangements for its review, it runs the risk of its accreditation lapsing. The SBDC would then be put under the guidance of OSBDC, who would request reconsideration for review in a new cycle. Once an accreditation expires, the SBDC is ineligible for supplemental funds from SBA.

J. Preparation of the Team Observations and Recommendations

The Accreditation Team is responsible for developing a specific and detailed set of general observations and recommendations based on observations and information clarified and verified during the visit. The Team will look specifically at how the SBDC Network applies each of the seven standards to systematic approaches and deployment, learning, and alignment, and it will document its findings and recommendations for each specific accreditation standard.

Note: For detailed information on the Accreditation Standards and/or Self Study, Network leadership can visit the Accreditation Page on the America's SBDC website

and participate in accreditation membership training held at both the Annual Conference and the Spring Meeting.

The Teams' observations and resulting narrative should provide sufficient information such that an informed reader could determine if each standard was met or not met. The Team report will consider all the accreditation standards and determine if there is sufficient evidence to conclude systematic approach, deployment, learning, and alignment for each standard based on documentation and the Team visit.

When the field work is completed by the Accreditation Team the evidence will be evaluated, and the Team will reach one of two possible conclusions for each accreditation standard:

- Either the standard is met (explaining all the elements that support approach, deployment, learning, and alignment) or
- The standard is not met, and sufficient information is provided in the report that sets out the critical elements that are missing and will be necessary to meet the standard. If a technology accreditation review has been requested, any conditions for the technology portion of the program will be listed separately.

If the Team concludes that a standard is not met, the Team must provide specific information to the state/region which describes the critical element(s) that are missing and the nature of the evidence that must be provided to the Team in order to meet the expectations of the standard. When a standard is not met, it is called a "condition." Conditions are not to be written as prescriptive; that is, the written condition should help the SBDC understand *what* needs to be accomplished without detailing *how* it is to be done.

The Team may also identify any strengths or weaknesses and provide comments and make recommendations for improvements to the program. Suggestions for improvement will flow out of the Teams' review of the approaches, deployment, learning, and alignment of activities which support the accreditation standards.

Recommendations are provided to encourage the programs to work toward continuous improvement. Recommendations are provided as suggestions for improvement and implementation is strongly encouraged. Team recommendations generally provide directions to SBDC network to move forward to a higher level of performance and include next steps for achieving improved learning and alignment.

The final comments, observations and recommendations will be the result of the Teams' evaluation of the entire SBDC network. If a comment, observation and/or recommendation applies only to the technology program, it will be identified as such.

The Accreditation Team should also document programs, approaches, or characteristics of the Network, which may prove valuable to share with other SBDC

Networks. Commendations for specific activities or efforts can be listed as well as best practices that may be applicable for other SBDCs to evaluate.

The Team should brief the Network leadership on key observations each day of the visit. The summary observations and recommendations presented by the Team at the exit interview should reflect the observations and findings from each day's briefing.

If the Team concludes that when the report is presented to the full Committee, that the potential outcome could rise to the level of Suspended Accreditation with Conditions, then the Team should specifically discuss that potential outcome with the Network leadership and ask that the host be informed. In addition, the Team should notify the Committee Chair immediately following the review, if not sooner.

In the process of preparing for a review, during the review, or subsequent to the review, the Team may become aware of facts and circumstances which, in the judgment of the Team, rise to the level of criticality and importance, such that the Team immediately communicates any such facts and circumstances to the Chair of the Committee. For example, violation of law, fraud, or conflict of interest, among other items, would clearly rise to this level of importance. The Chair, after evaluating and confirming the facts and circumstances and discussing such matters with the Team and Network, will report any such matters to the Chair of America's SBDC Board of Directors and President/CEO of the America's SBDC. The Board Chair or President/CEO will promptly notify the Associate Administrator of OSBDC of any such occurrences.

IV. Team Reports

A. Preliminary Team Report Issued by Accreditation Team

A preliminary report will be completed by the Team within four weeks after the exit interview is completed and provided to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee who will submit the report to America's SBDC for transmittal to the OSBDC. The report is to be based on information obtained through the self-study and verified during the site review. The report should summarize the observations for each standard based on the approach, deployment, learning and integration demonstrated by the SBDC Network. *The exact timeline thereafter shall be worked out by the Team lead and state/region under review. Additionally, updates or changes to the timeline should be communicated amongst these parties.*

A completed draft report will be forwarded to an editor designated by the Chair of the Accreditation Committee for review and edits. The editor should return the report to the Team Leader within seven (7) days. Once the draft is completed and reviewed, it is sent to the SBDC Network Director to review the report for accuracy and correct any errors of fact. The SBDC Network Director will have 21 days to complete his/her review. The SBDC Network Director will return the draft to the Team Leader for final corrections. After the report is finalized, a copy will be forwarded to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee. The Chair has responsibility to distribute the

edited draft report to the Accreditation Committee members at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled Committee meeting, at which the Team will present the report to the full Committee.

Timeline after Exit Interview

Week 2	Committee Chair sends survey to SBDC State/Regional Director and survey link for other participants
Week 4	30-Day Draft Report sent to OSBDC
Week 5	Draft Report sent to Editor
Week 6	Editor returns Draft Report to Team Lead to make noted edits
Week 7	Team Lead sends Edited Draft Report to SBDC Network Director
Week 10	SBDC Network Director sends Edited Draft Report Back to Team Lead noting any errors of fact
Week 11	Team Lead corrects any errors of fact and sends Edited Draft Report to Committee Chair
-----	Committee Chair Sends Edited Draft Report to Committee 2 weeks prior to meeting

Timeline after Committee Meeting

Week 1	Team Lead informs SBDC Network Director of Committee’s decision
Week 2	Team Lead Sends Approved Final Report that has been updated with the Committee’s input to Committee Chair
Week 4	Committee Chair sends Approved Final Report and Cover Letter to SBDC Network Director and Host Organization. Copies of the Approved Final Reports are archived by America’s SBDC and OSBDC.
Week 6	Committee Chair sends follow-up survey to State/Regional SBDC Director; Best Practices from most recent Committee Meeting will be aggregated and shared throughout National Network.

B. Consensus of Team

Only one report from the Accreditation Team is allowed, and it must represent the overall consensus of the Team. In the event that the Accreditation Team cannot reach an agreement on specific accreditation standards, then an interim report outlining the specific points of disagreement should be submitted to the Accreditation Committee Chair. The Chair will name a mediation Team of two or more Committee members. The mediation Team and the Chair in consultation with the Accreditation Review Team and the SBDC Network Director will review the facts and determine if the specific standards have been met and reach a consensus. This final consensus report will be presented by the Team Leader to the Accreditation Committee for final discussion and vote.

C. SBDC Network Director Review of Preliminary Team Report

The SBDC Network Director will review the report for accuracy and possible clarification. The SBDC Network Director must respond to the Team Leader within 21 days of the receipt of the preliminary Team report either accepting the report or setting out suggested revisions. Only the Accreditation Review Team and the SBDC

Network Director of the SBDC being reviewed shall discuss and negotiate possible findings and recommendations prior to the Team submission of the final report to the Accreditation Committee Chair. Accreditation Committee members not on the Review Team must not be involved in such negotiation, unless the Accreditation Committee Chair has subsequently assigned them to the Team. A reassignment, which must be approved by the OSBDC, by the chair of the Accreditation Committee may be required due to, but not limited to, a Team member dropping off the Team or for some other reason that may impact the quality of the accreditation review process. If a Team and a SBDC Network Director cannot agree on the substance of the report, then the Chair will appoint one or more Accreditation Committee members to work with the Team and the SBDC Network Director to reconcile differences. The Preliminary Team Report should NOT be distributed, other than to the OSBDC, prior to action by the Accreditation Committee, as it is not the final, official report.

D. Final Report of the Accreditation Team

The final Team report, which includes general comments, observations, recommendations, and conclusions, is to be transmitted from the Accreditation Team Leader to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee.

The Team report will specifically address each approved accreditation standard and will, for each standard, conclude that the standard is met or not met. The Team report may conclude: accreditation without conditions, accreditation with conditions, accreditation with technology conditions or suspended accreditation with conditions. If the conclusion is accreditation with conditions, accreditation with technology conditions or suspended accreditation with conditions, specific directions must be provided in the report to the SBDC Network Director as to what evidence is required to be presented to the Team and full Committee to meet the condition(s). A maximum of 12 months from the date of final approval for accreditation with conditions and a maximum of 18 months for suspended accreditation with conditions from the date of final approval of the report is allowed to present evidence to the Team that all standards have been met. The Committee may only consider denial of accreditation in the event that a Network has not presented evidence that supported all accreditation standards being met and all conditions satisfied within the twelve or eighteen month periods respectively. The Committee may only consider denial of technology accreditation in the event that a Network has not presented evidence that supported all technology standards being met and all technology conditions satisfied within the twelve or eighteen month periods respectively. The Team Leader will request that the SBDC Network Director send a quarterly or more frequent report to the Accreditation Team Leader outlining the progress and actions being taken to meet the accreditation standards and satisfy conditions identified in the Network report, including those identified as technology conditions.

Only reports following the prescribed guidelines set forth in the Accreditation Committee policy and procedures document will be considered by the full Accreditation Committee. A record of communication between the Accreditation Team and the SBDC being reviewed should be maintained by the SBDC Network

Director and the Team Leader. The Team Leader has responsibility to keep the other Team members involved in the communications with and progress of the Network and be prepared to update the full Committee during future calls or meetings.

E. Review of Draft Team Report by Accreditation Committee

The Accreditation Committee will generally review the Draft Team Reports and any other attached documentation at its regularly scheduled meetings, typically at the fall conference in September, or the spring meeting in Washington. Special meetings or conference calls may be scheduled to respond to urgent Accreditation Committee business including the consideration of Network reports.

The Accreditation Committee will also consider report updates at regular or special meetings from States/Regions who have presented evidence to their respective Teams for meeting one or more conditions.

The respective Team leader will report committee action directly to the SBDC Network Director within five working days of the Committee action.

Special Provision: If an SBDC has participated in the normal cycle of accreditation, but the Committee has not yet acted on the report, the accreditation status of the SBDC is automatically extended beyond its normal expiration date until such time that the Accreditation Committee has acted on the review and report.

V. Accreditation Committee Decision

A. Committee Action

The Committee will discuss and vote on the accreditation status of a Team's draft report only when there is a quorum of members present, which is 51 percent of the accreditation committee voting members. After the review of the Team's draft report and discussion by the full Committee, the Committee will vote and determine its overall assessment of accreditation status to the OSBDC by a two-thirds majority vote of the Accreditation Committee members present. Prior to the Committee vote, the Committee may ask the Team or recommend that the Team delete, add, or modify sections of the draft report or specific language within the draft report, including the possible reversal of a conclusion when the full committee determines sufficient evidence has been presented or not presented to support the stated conclusion.

B. Report Revisions

Any Committee suggestion to revise a final accreditation report should only be considered if the Accreditation Committee has credible, compelling and sufficient evidence that a change in the report is supported by the evidence. It is recognized that the Accreditation Review Team has primacy of experience since they are the ones who conducted the site visit and failing this standard of evidence, the Accreditation Committee should not impose changes to the final report. In the event the Accreditation Committee meets this standard of evidence without agreement by the Team, then the Committee may defer acceptance of the Accreditation Review

Team Report until modified by the Team. Should the Team fail to modify the report within the time frame requested by the Committee, the Committee may change and accept the report as revised.

C. Tabled Vote

If after the review team provides a complete presentation of the report, the committee and team agree upon substantial revisions to the report, the following timeline starts:

- Team has no more than 30 days to complete re-write of report including review by an editor and incorporation of recommended adjustments.
- Team sends revised report to State Director and to the Chair, who will forward copies to America's SBDC and SBA.
- State Director has 2 weeks to provide factual input to substantially revised report.
- A final vote will be held at the next conference call or in-person meeting.

This occurrence should be truly exceptional in order to maintain the values of the Accreditation process.

D. Final Outcomes

In making the overall assessment of accreditation status, the Committee will review the report by the Accreditation Team and any written response submitted by the SBDC under review.

There are three possible decisions:

1. The Committee may vote full accreditation (all standards met),
2. The Committee may vote accreditation with conditions (up to 12 months from the date of the final committee decision to meet all standards),
3. The Committee may vote accreditation with technology only conditions (up to 12 months from the date of the final committee decision to meet all standards), or
4. The Committee may vote suspended accreditation with conditions (up to 18 months from the date of the final committee decision to rectify conditions) and requiring a new review with a new Team and self-study.

Suspended accreditation occurs when the Team and committee conclude that the Network cannot meet all standards within a one year period. In the event of suspended accreditation by the Committee, the SBDC network will be provided with a report which will include general comments, observations, recommendations, and conclusions. Once suspended accreditation with conditions status has been approved, the SBDC network is not accredited, nor is it eligible for any supplemental SBA funds (Portability Grants, etc.)

After the Committee has made a final assessment on accreditation status, the OSBDC will either concur or not concur with the Committees' assessment on the accreditation review and report. If the OSBDC concurs, the Chair will send the SBDC Network Director a letter from the Committee confirming Committee action and including the final accreditation report with any changes or revisions. The Network Host is also sent a copy of this letter. Certificates from America's SBDC are sent to all SBDC

Networks when accreditation is achieved outlining the duration of the accreditation.

E. Denial of Accreditation

The Accreditation Committee will generally only consider a decision to deny accreditation status to a SBDC network if:

It has an initial assessment of accreditation with condition(s) and fails to submit evidence within the prescribed period describing how the SBDC network has met the condition(s) and relevant accreditation standard(s).

The Accreditation Committee will generally only consider a decision to deny technology accreditation status to a SBDC network if:

It has an initial assessment of accreditation with technology condition(s) and fails to submit evidence within the prescribed period describing how the SBDC network has met the technology condition(s) and relevant accreditation standard(s).

The Accreditation Team will notify the Chair of the Accreditation Committee when the SBDC network is not making a timely and effective effort to meet any and all conditions and denial of accreditation looks to be the likely recommendation of the Accreditation Team. The Accreditation Committee Chair will then discuss the potential for denial with the host institution.

If the Committee votes to deny accreditation, the Team leader will provide notification of the Committee decisions to the SBDC Network Director of the SBDC within five (5) working days of the Committee action. The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will confirm the decision in writing to the SBDC Network Director and copy to the immediate supervisor within 30 days of the Committee action.

If the Committee votes to deny technology accreditation, the Team leader will provide notification of the Committee decisions to the SBDC Network Director of the SBDC within five (5) working days of the Committee action. The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will confirm the decision in writing to the SBDC Network Director and copy to the immediate supervisor within 30 days of the Committee action.

VI. Initial Appeal

A. Appeal of Committee Decision

If the SBDC Director of the network being reviewed disagrees with a decision of the Accreditation Committee resulting from a regularly scheduled or special accreditation review, then within thirty (30) days of notification of the Committee action by the Team leader, he or she may provide additional information to the Accreditation Committee and/or make a written request to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee

for a hearing at which additional information may be presented. The hearing should be held within ninety (90) days of receipt of the request by the Chair, and may be in person, or through electronic means including telephone conference call. The hearing shall be before at least a majority of those members of the Accreditation Committee that did not serve on the Team, and shall be chaired by the Accreditation Committee Chair. If the Chair is unable to chair the hearing, the Vice Chair or the Chair's designee will assume the responsibility. Conclusions from the hearing shall be based on 2/3 majority vote of those Committee members serving on the hearing committee and subject to final approval by the OSBDC. Legal representation at the hearing is not permitted.

B. Notification of Appeal Decision

Within fifteen (15) days of the hearing and further review by the Accreditation Committee, the Committee will issue its final assessment to the OSBDC which will concur or not. The Chair will communicate the final decision to the SBDC Network Director and his/her immediate supervisor.

C. Final Appeal

Upon receipt of the final decision of an initial appeal by the Committee Chair, the SBDC Director of the network being reviewed may appeal that final decision. If such appeal is to be made, the following applies:

1. Such appeal must be made in writing to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee within sixty days (60) of notification of the final decision. The appeal should specifically identify the issues upon which the appeal is based.
2. Upon receipt of the written appeal, the Chair of the Accreditation Committee shall notify the President of the America's SBDC that an appeal has been made.
3. A hearing will be scheduled within 120 days and will be before a group of not less than three and no more than six SBDC Network Directors and/or associate/assistant directors of SBDCs that are currently accredited, but who were not members of the Accreditation Committee at the time the final decision was made. The Directors and Associate/Assistant/Deputy Directors to hear the appeal will be appointed by the America's SBDC president and will elect one member from the group to chair the hearing.
4. The hearing will provide an opportunity to hear and consider both written and oral evidence that may be presented by the SBDC Director of the network under review and a representative of the Accreditation Committee to be appointed by the Chair of the Accreditation Committee. Legal representation at the hearing is not permitted.
5. The hearing shall consider only information relevant to the issues identified in the letter of appeal. The elected Chair has authority to determine relevance of information to be presented.

6. With respect to any issues raised related to compliance with specific standards, only evidence relative to compliance with the standards at the time the Accreditation Review was conducted is to be considered relevant.
7. If an imposed condition of accreditation is an issue being appealed, then evidence may be presented relative to potential impact of that condition on the SBDC program. The appeal board will evaluate the evidence and either confirm the Accreditation Committee's decision or set aside the Accreditation Committee's decision subject to approval by the OSBDC who shall make final disposition of the status of the review.

VII. Criteria for Accreditation

A. Meeting Standards

Accreditation is met when the OSBDC concurs with the Accreditation Committee's acceptance of the Review Team's recommendation that the SBDC Network's activities conform with and meet the expectations of the standards of accreditation as evidenced by documentation and on-site interviews.

B. Removal of Conditions

A committee assessment of accreditation with condition(s) requires that, within the time frame allowed, the SBDC Network Director must provide the Team Leader with sufficient evidence that clearly demonstrates that all specifics of the condition(s) have been met. Upon providing evidence that the condition(s) has been met and receipt of a recommendation from the Team Leader to the Accreditation Committee, the Committee will make a recommendation to the OSBDC regarding the Team's recommendation that Network program's conditions will be removed by 2/3 vote of the Accreditation Committee. The Team leader will provide notification to the SBDC Network Director of the Committee's recommendation and approval by the OSBDC. The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will confirm the action of the Committee in writing to the SBDC Network Director, the President/CEO of the America's SBDC, and the Associate Administrator of OSBDC, U.S. Small Business Administration.

C. Period of Accreditation

Accreditation will be valid through December 31st of the fifth year following the year the accreditation Team performed a normal cycle review.

D. Re-consideration of Accreditation Status

Re-consideration of a Network's accreditation status may occur when the Accreditation Committee becomes aware of significant changes and/or event(s) in an accredited SBDC.

Significant changes/events will include one or more of the following:

1. A written request for reconsideration from the largest funding partner or any funding partner contributing a minimum of 25 percent of the total SBDC network budget
2. A written request from the SBDC Network Director or the host
3. A request from SBA based on financial and/or programmatic review findings
4. Petition by two-thirds of the accredited members of the Association.

A decision by the Accreditation Committee to reconsider a SBDC Network's Accreditation status requires approval by the OSBDC and will be communicated to the SBDC Network Director in writing within ten business days of said decision. The Chair of the Committee will appoint a Team who will contact the Network to schedule the review. Any and all expenses of said review will be reimbursed to the Committee by the respective Network.

E. Reconsideration Process

If the Committee determines an out of cycle accreditation review is necessary, such review shall be conducted in accordance with the regular procedures previously set forth in this policy document. In no instance shall the SBDC's accreditation be withdrawn prior to conducting such a review.

F. Change In SBDC Network Host

The change of the host institution of any SBDC network will result in the withdrawal of the current accreditation status until such time that the SBDC network is visited and reviewed by the Accreditation Committee under the approved accreditation review cycle and procedures. The new host institution and SBDC network will be considered for accreditation under the normal accreditation process or special request from the OSBDC.

G. Cost

Costs to conduct the accreditation reviews under the normal cycle of reviews of SBDC network networks, by the Accreditation Committee, shall be paid through a contract providing financial support with the U.S. SBA under the Public Law. The SBDC network being reviewed shall bear all costs associated with their preparation and participation in the accreditation review, and will be responsible for providing suitable vehicle transportation and driver to transport the Team around the state/region. The Review Teams' expenses will be reimbursed by the America's SBDC according to the accreditation contract and federal reimbursement guidelines.

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ADDENDUM A.
AMERICA'S SBDC
Accreditation Committee
Selection Process for Committee Members

Introduction

This new member policy of the America's SBDC Accreditation Committee creates a transparent and open selection process for choosing new members of the Committee. New Committee members are expected to have a basic understanding of the accreditation standards and process and be dedicated to continuously increasing their accreditation knowledge. Additionally, new members will:

1. Have the ability and temperament to use the accreditation process in such a way as to create a learning environment within the SBDC network undergoing an accreditation review.
2. Strive to be accurate, responsible, and judicious in their findings without favoritism or prejudice or the appearance of either.
3. Honor the Committee's desire to reflect the diversity of the SBDC membership and strive for balance on the Committee.
4. Work amicably with Accreditation Committee members, the America's SBDC, SBDC network personnel and their host institution representatives, and SBA district directors to implement a creditable accreditation process.
5. Have significant experience, including participation in at least one accreditation review with the SBDC program in their home state.

Selection Process

When vacancies occur on the Committee, the process is initiated with the Accreditation Committee Chair nominating one or more individuals to the America's SBDC Board of Directors for their approval. Nominees will be selected from individuals indicating an interest in serving on the Committee or by recruitment of individuals by the Chair.

Currently, the board has authorized 25 members plus one alternate for the Accreditation Committee. No more than one individual from a Network may serve on the Committee at any given time. Members are appointed for 3 year terms beginning on January 1 each year. The Committee experiences turnover due mainly to retirements or those leaving the program. Current members may be reappointed to subsequent terms in order to retain a level of experience on the Committee. Currently there is no limitation on the number of terms for an individual, but re-appointments will be at the discretion of the Chair and America's SBDC Board. The Committee's intent is to balance experienced members with a steady influx of new members. Therefore, in some years new member vacancies may vary.

Members are expected to commit to:

1. Serving on one or two Review Teams per year at the expense of the Accreditation Committee,

2. Participating in periodic meetings, some of which may be conference calls,
3. Attending all face to face meetings (typically 2 to 3 per year),
4. Participating in all committee sponsored professional development training
5. Committing time to review reports and being prepared for all meetings or conference calls,
6. Serving from time to time on subcommittees as requested.

If a member demonstrates an inability to meet these expectations, the chair of the Accreditation Committee will address the concerns with the individual. If the member cannot commit to fulfilling his or her responsibilities, temporary leave of duty or grounds for dismissal from the Committee may be sought. After a review, the chair will make a recommendation to the America's SBDC board based on the findings. If a temporary or permanent replacement is required, the chair will recommend a replacement to the America's SBDC Board for approval.

Accreditation review visits to SBDCs normally are for five (5) days, typically beginning on Monday morning and ending Friday afternoon. Each review requires preparation time as well as planned time for writing an accreditation report. The Team is also expected to commit additional time to monitor the Network's progress in satisfying conditions. From time to time, additional meetings may be held for the purposes of training Committee members related to the Accreditation Standards and the accreditation process.

Publication of Openings on the Accreditation Committee

SBDC Network Directors will be informed of openings for new members as they occur. While notification may be achieved in different ways, most commonly it will be through the *Member Connection* and/or *Network Connection*, or an announcement at the fall or spring meetings. SBDC Network Directors or associate/assistant SBDC Network Directors desiring to serve on the Committee should make their interest known to the Chair of the Accreditation Committee.

Eligibility

All SBDC Network Directors and associate/assistant SBDC Network Directors are eligible to serve on the Accreditation Committee. However, there can be no more than one person on the Committee from the same Network.

Preparation for Membership on the Committee

The following are pre-requisites for appointment to the Accreditation Committee. The two steps will provide interested SBDC Network Directors or associate state directors a good foundation for membership on the Accreditation Committee:

- **Be a key participant in an Accreditation Review of one's own Network.** To be selected for membership to the Committee, a SBDC Network Director or associate director should have first served in a key capacity during an accreditation review of their state.

- **Attend and Participate in Accreditation Committee Training Event.** The Accreditation Committee provides basic accreditation training for America’s SBDC membership at full day workshops at the America’s SBDC Fall and spring meetings. In conjunction with the Mentoring Program, the Committee schedules other training events at the request of a state or region. For more information on training under the Mentoring Program, see the Mentoring Program description on the SBDC Network Director page on the America’s SBDC website under Accreditation (see <http://www.asbdc-us.org/>) or by contacting the Chair of the Accreditation Committee.

Additionally training and experience may be gained through the following:

- **An observer for an Accreditation Review.** The Accreditation Committee encourages SBDC Network Directors and associate/assistant directors to accompany a Review Team on an accreditation review at their own expense. Further information about observing can be obtained by checking out the Mentoring Program description on the SBDC Network Director page of the AMERICA’S SBDC website under Accreditation (see <http://www.asbdc-us.org/>) or by contacting the Chair of the Accreditation Committee.
- **Gain knowledge of the Baldrige Criteria.** While there are many ways to become knowledgeable about the Baldrige Criteria, having worked as an examiner or judge provides excellent preparation for serving on the Committee. Two Baldrige Award programs provide opportunities.

☞ **Active participation in a state/city program affiliated with the Baldrige National Quality Award Program.** For more information about these programs, see: <http://www.baldrigepe.org/alliance>

☞ **Participation in the Baldrige National Quality Award Program.** For more information, see: <http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/>

Criteria for the Selection of SBDC Committee Members

The Chair of the Accreditation Committee will make nominations to the Board of Directors by providing the selected names of those individuals who have expressed interest in serving or have been recruited by the chair of the Committee, and who meet the diversity and experience needs of the Committee. Recruitment is utilized to seek out those who most clearly fit the needs of the Committee at the time of the vacancy. The needs of the Committee can be summarized under the following categories:

- **Knowledge of the Standards and Process -** Committee members need to be knowledgeable of the Accreditation Standards and Process. It is helpful if they also understand the underlying Baldrige Criteria. While the Committee provides some training to its members, that training assumes that new members are knowledgeable about the accreditation standards and process when they come onto the Committee. At a minimum, involvement in an accreditation review in one’s own state, and attendance at training

offered at the America's SBDC fall meeting are considered prerequisites.

- **Diversity and Balance.** The Accreditation Committee desires to reflect the diversity of the America's SBDC membership in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity as well as the peculiarities of the SBDC programs when possible, including big or small programs; differing geographic areas of the country; college-based programs; or programs with subcontracted centers and those without subcontracted centers. Technology accreditation requires that technology-designated states be represented on the Committee. SBDC experience is an important consideration in trying to balance the Committee and represent the membership.
- **Ability to Work Effectively with the Committee.** The Accreditation Committee needs to have members who can work well together towards the mission and goals of the Committee. Additionally, members must be committed to continuously learning, capable of creating a learning environment within the states being reviewed, and must be willing to strive to be accurate, responsible, and judicious in their review findings without exhibiting favoritism or prejudice or the appearance of either.

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