

Accreditation: What it is and Why It Matters

Introduction

The Executive Summary of Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention (www.ecap.net)

The Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention was created in 2019 to help leaders protect the vulnerable in ministry settings through the application of standards, accreditation services, and the creation of resources to help prevent abuse. While there are a number of providers doing good work in this space, our community must press forward to excel still more in this biblical stewardship. We believe that every person is created in the image of God for the purpose of worship. The people in our care must be protected from abuse so that they can hear the gospel and grow in discipleship for the purpose of accomplishing the Great Commission.

ECAP seeks to assist leaders in developing best practices to protect individuals in their care and how to respond when an allegation of abuse is reported. Our accreditation program will assist by providing standards that can equip ministry leaders to take proper steps towards abuse prevention, resulting in peace of mind for leaders and parents. Our services will also encourage sustainability to ensure that safety programs will continue as designed.

There is an important role for other services to support this mission, including training providers, background check companies, response and investigation teams, as well as care and counseling for victims of abuse.

ECAP plays a unique role as a membership-based accreditation organization committed to supporting ministries in creating safe environments for children and youth. The ECAP Council consists of several committees that monitor and assess standards and the accreditation program. It also includes board members, abuse survivors, subject matter experts, and eventually accredited members. The Council operates under the authority of The ECAP Board of Directors.

Why Accreditation?

Accreditation is defined as a compliance verification process by which organizations endeavor to meet a set of established standards. Organizations that strive to meet standards of excellence in areas of child safety instill trust in members and constituents.

Accreditation is utilized extensively in the education industry from EE-12 levels through higher education, as well as in law enforcement, healthcare, and other disciplines. The accepted standards form the basis of the accreditation process.

The Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention (ECAP) will provide accreditation to ministries to aid in their desire to protect children from abuse and to help these ministries respond to allegations of abuse. Accreditation by ECAP will provide the process by which a ministry organization verifies and certifies they have met the standards set by ECAP for child abuse prevention.

Defining Accreditation

Accreditation is a formal, independent process of review and verification which determines if an organization (ministry, education, healthcare, science, law, etc.) meets well-defined standards of quality and carries out precise conformity assessments including but not limited to collaborative review, observation and examination, and certification. Accreditation is not granted permanently but is renewed regularly to ensure quality, safety, and security are maintained. Accreditation is a voluntary process, and it is not a ranking system, but rather provides quality assurance through a series of policies, criteria, and procedures, beginning with a request for review and ending in an external quality review. For more than fifty years, the accreditation process has been used to ensure ongoing standards across industries, as well as improvements, competence, and reliability for the accredited organization.

Standards of Accreditation

The Evangelical Council for Abuse Prevention Child Safety Standards of Accreditation were developed for the purpose of protecting minors in Christian organizations (churches, schools, etc.). The standards are intended to help leaders in ministry protect children in their care and respond appropriately should allegations of abuse arise. The standards were developed by a committee of professional experts in abuse prevention and risk management alongside frontline practitioners who serve children, and they were reviewed by a team of attorneys with related expertise.

The ECAP Child Safety Standards have been approved by the ECAP Board of Directors and were presented for Public Review and Comment, in the period of March 1 – April 30, 2021.

Once finalized, these standards will be the basis for the ECAP accreditation program currently being tested in ministries throughout the United States.

Examples of ECAP Standards under review and testing include but are not limited to:

1. Governance i.e., records, policies, procedures
2. Child Safety Operations i.e., visibility, monitoring, parent/guardian communication, visitor protocols
3. Screening i.e., process, interviews, background checks
4. Training i.e., child abuse prevention, child safety reporting
5. Response i.e., incident reporting, insurance reporting, organization investigation panel

Understanding Accreditation

What is Accreditation?

Accreditation helps organizations build trust among employees, institutions, and individuals. The standards of accreditation are quality benchmarks set by an authority in the field, and includes an element of validated self-study, as well as external examination. The process adds value and reliability for the accredited entity. Accreditation also provides peace of mind for those availing themselves of the organization's services, ensuring safety, security, excellence, and confidence. Accreditation is used in a variety of fields and industries at global, national, and regional levels, adding legitimacy to organizations.

ECAP will provide an accreditation process to help churches, schools, and other organizations verify compliance to child protection and abuse prevention standards. This outside review, or audit, will provide helpful feedback to ministry leaders to know how they measure up in protecting children and the vulnerable.

Why is Accreditation Important?

Accreditation is necessary to meet the demand for reliable, safe, and secure products and services, and it provides a number of benefits to the accredited organization and those using its products or services. Accreditation assures confidence in the accredited entity, particularly for those that have a direct impact on public health, safety, or welfare.

Organizations such as the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) are examples of organizations that regularly use accreditation services in order to ensure excellence in the products they offer.

See Appendix I for more examples of organizations who use accreditation services in order to promote the highest quality in their product offering.

Accreditation and Transparency

At the beginning of the accreditation process, the organization is required to complete a self-study. This involves organizing its staff and other stakeholders into self-study groups to complete the process. Each of the Standards is carefully reviewed using the Indicators to guide the preparation of an accurate, complete, and well-written report. It must rate itself on each of the Indicators, write a concluding narrative in regard to the Standard, and compile a list of evidence that the organization used to rate the Indicator. Writing the self-study is the critical ingredient in maximizing the value of the accreditation process, as it provides an accurate description of the day-to-day operations and experiences of staff, volunteers, and children as it relates to child safety.

Later in the process, a verification team will visit the organization in order to ensure that the written report is a truthful account of how the organization runs on a daily basis. The verification team will also come alongside the organization to help make recommendations on how they can better adhere to the standards. However, the best improvement solutions are likely to come from within the organization. Self-assessment gives the personnel of the organization the opportunity to look for the weak areas and develop policies that best fit the unique circumstances of that organization's workers, location, mission, and values.

Advantages of Accreditation

- Accreditation can help organizations achieve organizational compliance and improve operations and processes.
- Accreditation easily accommodates churches with theological convictions or distinctives regarding church autonomy and independence.
- Accreditation can instill trust and confidence in volunteers, supporters, and recipients of organizational services.
- Accreditation in religious organizations is a proactive solution to an ongoing crisis of sexual abuse in ministries and provides an added level of transparency which may prevent state overreach in this area.

- Accreditation can help organizations garner local, national, and international recognitions for excellence, thus improving brand image and marketability.
- Accreditation processes can help organizations assimilate best practices, thus improving product and service offerings as well as align with higher standards national and globally. As members work collectively to improve prevention and response, they will also share collectively in technological, legal, and operational improvements designed to keep children safe.

Accreditation is NOT...

Accreditation is NOT a ranking system. It does not mean passing a survey. Awarding organizations are not an enforcement agency. The accrediting authority has no binding legal authority to force a member organization into compliance.

An organization is either accredited or not accredited. While accredited, they may be working on recommendations as a part of their growth plan. The ultimate authority remains with the governing board or leadership of the organization, not with the accrediting entity.

Conclusion

Accreditation offers significant advantages to organizations, including the assurance of trust, recognition, and quality of an organization's products and/or services. ECAP Accreditation can be a solution to help create safe environments for a ministry seeking to prevent abuse, and it promotes excellence in serving children. Accreditation through ECAP is a great way for churches and Christian ministries to maintain their independence while ensuring parents that their kids are in safe hands.

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Appendix 1: Examples

Education

*Association of Christian Schools Intl. (ASCI)*¹

- Standard 1: Philosophy and Foundations
- Standard 2: Governance and Executive Leadership
- Standard 3: Home and Community Relations and Student Services
- Standard 4: Personnel
- Standard 5: Instructional Program and Resources
- Standard 6: Student Care
- Standard 7: Character, Values, and Spiritual Formation of Students
- Standard 8: Continuous School Improvement Plan

*Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA)*²

- Standard 1 – Doctrinal Issues
- Standard 2 – Governance
- Standard 3 – Financial Oversight
- Standard 4 – Use of Resources and Compliance with Laws
- Standard 5 – Transparency
- Standard 6 – Compensation-Setting and Related-Party Transactions
- Standard 7 – Stewardship of Charitable Gifts

The Medical Community

*The Joint Commission*³

The Joint Commission Standards encompass these areas:

- Advanced DSC - Acute Stroke Ready Hospital
- Advanced DSC - Comprehensive Stroke
- Advanced DSC - Inpatient Diabetes
- Advanced DSC - Primary Stroke Center
- Ambulatory
- Assisted Living Community
- Behavioral Health
- Critical Access Hospital
- Disease Specific Care
- Health Care Staffing Services
- Home Care
- Hospital and Hospital Clinics
- Laboratory

¹ https://www.acsi.org/docs/default-source/website-publishing/school-services/accreditation/application-and-manuals/acsi-standards-manual-final.pdf?sfvrsn=fba22639_14

² <https://www.ecfa.org/Standards.aspx>

³ [https://www.jointcommission.org/standards/standard-faqs/#f: FacetManual=\[Advanced%20DSC%20-%20Acute%20Stroke%20Ready%20Hospital\]](https://www.jointcommission.org/standards/standard-faqs/#f: FacetManual=[Advanced%20DSC%20-%20Acute%20Stroke%20Ready%20Hospital])

Nursing Care Center
Office Based Surgery

Law Enforcement

The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA)⁴

CALEA provides standards for law enforcement procedures including life, health, and safety, addressing high-risk situations in today's environments, as well as community service and the management of critical events.

⁴ <https://www.calea.org/node/11406>