



*Setting the Standards for
Information and Referral Services*

**AIRS Accreditation
v.
CARF Accreditation:
*A Comparison***

AIRS is the international association of the Information and Referral (I&R) sector. AIRS has published Standards and provides an accreditation program that assesses an I&R program against those Standards.

CARF offers dozens of accreditation programs for the nonprofit sector. They have a common organizational review, in addition to requiring additional details for many specialties.

CARF is better known by funders and stakeholders, and there have been situations where I&R programs have been asked to provide CARF accreditation. Should that be the case, this document shows the differences and similarities between AIRS and CARF accreditation in the context of I&R.

For a funder seeking the security of identifying a quality I&R program, AIRS accreditation is clearly a better option.

If a funder is unsure, the AIRS Executive Director (at info@airs.org) is very willing to engage in a conversation/presentation to fully explain the situation.

AIRS

OVERVIEW

The purpose of the AIRS Accreditation Program is to determine the extent to which Information and Referral (I&R) organizations comply with accepted practices within the field as defined by the [AIRS Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral](#).

CARF

OVERVIEW

CARF (technically the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) “provides accreditation services worldwide at the request of health and human service providers. Whether you are seeking rehabilitation for a disability, treatment for addiction and substance abuse, home and community services, retirement living, or other health and human services, you can have confidence in your choice. Providers that meet our standards have demonstrated their commitment to being among the best available.”

AIRS	CARF
<p>LENGTH</p> <p>5 years</p>	<p>LENGTH</p> <p>3 years</p>
<p>COST</p> <p>\$6,000</p>	<p>COST</p> <p>“CARF accreditation is an investment in your company's future. A CARF survey is competitively priced against other accreditors. We will be glad to walk you through our survey fees and demonstrate how our accreditation will benefit your staff, persons served, and other stakeholders” – Average \$4,600</p>
<p>REQUIREMENT</p> <p>Applicants must have an accreditation manual. This is free.</p>	<p>REQUIREMENT</p> <p>Applicants must have a Standards Manual. This, with a Survey Workbook, costs approximately \$500</p>
<p>ACCREDITED AGENCY RECEIVES</p> <p>Plaque (prime walnut, blue plate gold laser inscribed), digital accreditation badge, ability to print multiple online accreditation certificates.</p>	<p>ACCREDITED AGENCY RECEIVES</p> <p>Framed plaque (additional plaque costs \$50)</p>
<p>MUST PROGRAM MEET ALL STANDARDS TO BE ACCREDITED?</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>MUST PROGRAM MEET ALL STANDARDS TO BE ACCREDITED?</p> <p>No</p>

AIRS	CARF
<p>CORE ELEMENTS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Consultative Review of overall policies, processes and procedures 2. An online Community Survey of organizations within resource database 3. An online Resource Database Review 4. A Secret Shopper testing of direct service 5. An Onsite Review 	<p>CORE ELEMENTS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Consultative Review of your overall policies, processes and procedures 2. An Onsite Review
<p>TIME LIMIT</p> <p>The accreditation process must be completed within 12 months for existing holders of AIRS Accreditation. First time applicants have 18 months to complete the process</p>	<p>TIME LIMIT</p> <p>“A service provider seeking accreditation for the first time generally needs nine to twelve months to prepare for a survey. If a provider already has accredited services and is preparing for a resurvey, six to eight months of preparation time may be sufficient.”</p>
<p>SERVICE DELIVERY (Summary)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call Handling focus on the extent to which community resource specialists meet the following service delivery quality indicators (where applicable): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Identify themselves and program per guidelines ○ Establish rapport and use active listening skills and empathy to discern presenting problem ○ Respond in a professional, nonjudgmental, culturally-appropriate and timely manner ○ Use clear language and appropriate tone of voice and inflection to convey empathy and engagement 	<p>SERVICE DELIVERY</p> <p>Within the Employment and Community Services section (one of several sections), there are 22 further service categories (such as Mentor Services, and Community Housing). One of these categories is Personal Supports Services.</p> <p>This category, in turn, lists a wide range of services including “personal care attendants ... translation services ... music therapy ... recreation services ... <i>and</i> information and referral.</p> <p>The I&R component (sub-section 7 of Personal Supports Services) runs: “If information and</p>

- Make accurate assessment of the inquirer's problems and needs asking relevant questions to discover the information necessary for an accurate referral
- Explore when appropriate, to see if there is a more serious underlying or unstated problem.
- Confirm whether there are specific preferences or requirements such as language needs, evening or weekend hours, proximity to public transportation, access for persons with disabilities
- Clarify and confirm need(s) using techniques such as paraphrasing before providing referrals
- Provide various approaches to addressing situation that give a range of options
- Explore the inquirer's own resources (e.g., friends, family, faith-based community)
- Effectively use the I&R's resource information system to identify resources to meet needs
- Where possible and practical, provide at least three referrals to give inquirer a choice while being careful not to overwhelm the inquirer with too many options
- Suggest ways inquirer can advocate for oneself when appropriate (empowerment)
- If demographic information is being collected that is not directly relevant to the assessment, e.g., if required by contract or to enhance community reports, provide an explanation to the inquirer about why the information is needed. The

referral services are required, the program demonstrates: (a) knowledge of available services/resources, (b) knowledge of support systems that are relevant to the persons served, (c) facilitation of access to available services/resources, (d) availability of times and locations convenient to the persons served”

primary goal of data collection is to gather enough information about the inquirers to help them address and/or resolve the problem

- Encourage inquirer to call back
- Policy and procedures for handling transactions via IM/chat, text/SMS messaging or other forms of social media
- Confidentiality policies that address confidentiality of client records or use of Caller ID or other applicable technology
- Sample of the form that is signed by I&R staff agreeing to the confidentiality policy
- Nondisclosure form signed by others with access to confidential information
- Advocacy policy and procedures
- Proof of AAS certification or CONTACT USA accreditation (if skipping the Crisis Intervention section)
- Signed, written agreement with the crisis intervention center with which I&R service has an arrangement
- Crisis intervention policies and procedures which must address:
Lethality risk assessment procedures; Call handling procedures for specific types of emergencies; A staff debriefing protocol; Rescue services
- Mandatory reporting requirements for child abuse and elder/dependent adult abuse
- Crisis protocol per agreement with the local crisis center
- Follow-up results report
- A complete and current, finished and formatted report of I&R activities including:
 - Total number of inquiries
 - Total number and type of problem/needs presented by inquirers
 - The number and/or percentage of

- inquiries involving Information only, Assessment and referral, Assessment without referral, Crisis intervention and Advocacy
 - Geographic and other demographic information about inquirers in aggregate form to protect the confidentiality of inquirers
 - Met/unmet needs
- An explanation or a user guide to the reports provided for those on distribution list
- A list of agencies/organizations to which the reports were provided
- Provide definitions of Terminology used to categorize contacts (Typically, this is a list of definitions of the types of calls received and documented for reporting purposes, including information calls, advocacy calls, crisis intervention calls, information and assessment, or information and referral calls, etc.)

RESOURCE DATABASE SECTION (Summary – details span several pages)

- Inclusion/Exclusion Policy
- Style Guide
- Customized List of Taxonomy terms used
- Database maintenance procedures
- Description of service area (including counties, towns, or regions)
- Report showing formal update dates
- List of agency names and their legal status type/agency type in order to compare types with Inclusion/Exclusion policy
- Target Term Use policy

RESOURCE DATABASE SECTION

In the Behavioral Health section, there is a single page devoted to operating an “Information Call Center”. Here is the resource database section in its *entirety*:

“In an information call center program written procedures identify the process for: Determining eligibility for inclusion of resources in the community resource database; Regularly updating the database; Tracking requests to identify the community services that are: Most needed and Not available.

“Implements a policy defining expectations regarding: Nonendorsement of specific referrals and Fair and equitable caller-driven referrals.

AIRS	CARF
<p>DISASTER PREPARATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Operations and Business Contingency Plans. • A disaster-related service request report • Details on providing direct <i>service before, during and after</i> a disaster 	<p>DISASTER PREPARATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency Operations and Business Contingency Plans.
<p>ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roster for Board of Directors/Advisory Committee • Governance and Administrative policies and procedures manual(s) • Most recent audit or review for the organization • An organization chart that reflects all of the positions within agency. If part of a larger organization, submit a functional organization chart for the I&R service. The organization chart must be aligned with the job descriptions requested below • Job descriptions for all of the positions within the I&R service • Standardized form and screening procedure used to evaluate each candidate's application or resume against the I&R staff position requirements • Employment interview questions for each of the positions within I&R service and the rating form used to evaluate responses • Succession plan for key staff • Policies and procedures relating to the use of off-site I&R staff • Backup policies and procedures. • Training manual that shows a detailed list of all topics covered in community resource specialist training program • Training manual that shows a detailed list of 	<p>ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS</p> <p>The CARF Accreditation has a generic section that covers the following areas under the (trademarked) label of 'ASPIRE to Excellence':</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Governance • Strategic Planning • Input from Persons Served and Stakeholders • Legal Requirements • Financial Planning and Management • Risk Management • Health and Safety • Workplace Development and Management • Technology • Rights of Persons Served • Accessibility <p><i>(Note the majority of these are parallel to the Organization Effectiveness section of the AIRS standards – although others are included within the AIRS Service Delivery area)</i></p>

all topics covered in database curator training program

- Detailed, day-by-day training agenda for both community resource specialists and database curators that outlines objectives, training methods (how material is presented) and materials, timeframes and outcomes for each section.
- Examples of subjective and/or objective evaluation tools used for measuring an I&R trainee's level of competency
- I&R training and trainer evaluation form
- Outreach report for the I&R service describing the plan, the outputs and outcomes (what was accomplished)
- Sample written supervision plan for I&R staff
- Observation forms that are used for I&R staff
- Performance appraisal forms that are used for I&R staff
- Sample individualized performance improvement plan for I&R staff
- Summary report from call management system/ACD documenting call volume, number of abandoned calls, average speed of answer and average call length
- Rating sheet for I&R call monitoring
- Most recent customer satisfaction/quality assurance report for the I&R service
- Written goals, objectives and I&R service work plan for the current year
- Most recent evaluation report for the I&R service

ANNUAL CHECK-IN

Once an agency is AIRS Accredited, they must complete an annual update. This is in the form of an online survey.

Accredited agencies are required to notify AIRS of any changes that negatively affect compliance

ANNUAL CHECK-IN

To demonstrate its ongoing conformance to the CARF standards, an accredited provider completes a Quality Improvement Plan after receiving the accreditation report and submits an Annual Conformance to Quality Report each year throughout the accreditation term.

with the Accreditation Criteria; and to assure that the I&R Service continues to be in compliance with the Accreditation requirements, program is required to respond to an annual questionnaire reporting on the status of organization and its activities.

The required information covers:

- Have hours of service changed over the past year?
- Has program funding changed by more than 10% over the past year?
- Have there been any changes in senior management over the past year?
- Were there any problems identified in last financial audit?
- Is organization involved in any civil or criminal litigation?
- Provide details about 1-2 community initiatives that I&R program has been involved in over the past 12 months.
- Attach an annual report or similar program report