



*Setting the Standards for  
Information and Referral Services*

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# Accreditation Application September 2017

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**ALLIANCE OF INFORMATION  
AND REFERRAL SYSTEMS, INC.**

National Headquarters

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Information & Referral  
*connecting people to  
community services*

# AIRS ACCREDITATION OVERVIEW

The purpose of the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) Accreditation process is to determine the extent to which applicant Information and Referral (I&R) organizations comply with expected practices within the field as defined by the AIRS *Standards for Professional Information and Referral*.

Accreditation is a cooperative effort between the I&R agency and AIRS to establish a strong foundation on which the agency can build and grow. An agency considering accreditation should assess where it is in its development, its goals and whether it is ready for accreditation. Agencies must meet minimum requirements outlined in the 2017 *Accreditation Criteria* to become accredited.

## Process Overview

Accreditation is a process that includes: a **Remote Database Review** to ensure that the resource database meets minimum requirements, a **Consultation Component** during which the I&R service completes and submits required documentation in consultation with a liaison assigned by AIRS; and the **On-Site Review** during which a review team is able to see the agency in operation and verify that its practices are consistent with the accreditation criteria. Prior to the site visit, the call handling component of the agency's service is evaluated through a **Secret Shopper** process.

All transactions between AIRS (including members of the site visit team and Accreditation contractors) and the applicant agency, and all materials submitted by the agency, are confidential. The only information that will be shared with other organizations and government agencies making an inquiry is information for which the applicant agency has provided written authorization for AIRS to share. The process for re-accreditation is the same as outlined above.

## Timeline Overview

1. Within 10 months of receiving the Accreditation Packet from AIRS, the applicant agency will submit its Consultation Component materials. The goal is to have the database review completed before the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> month period, to allow for both components to be on the same timeline. Prior to this due date, an extension of 6-months can be requested; however, if the materials are not submitted by the extended date, termination of the process/revocation of Accreditation will occur.
2. Within 3 months of receipt of submitted materials, AIRS will review materials and send a Consultation report.
3. Within 3 months of receiving the Consultation report, the applicant agency shall make the necessary corrections and send a response to AIRS.
4. If multiple reports need to be submitted, an additional 3 month extension can be approved.
5. Once the applicant agency has passed all steps in the process, the agency has up to 3 months to schedule a site visit.
6. The maximum length of time an applicant agency can be in the Accreditation process is 25 months.

## Accreditation Outcome & Responsibilities

Accreditation awards are made for a period of five years. Following an accreditation award, the agency is required to respond to an annual questionnaire reporting on the status of the organization and its activities. Failure to submit the annual questionnaire, following two emails and a reminder letter, may result in reduction of your accreditation award from five years to three. If you continue to be out of

compliance in year two, your award of accreditation will be either suspended or revoked. You are also required to notify AIRS of any changes that negatively affect your compliance with the Accreditation Criteria.

Approximately one year prior to the expiration of your accreditation award, AIRS will notify you of the need for another review.

### **Causes for Termination/Revocation**

There may be situations in which termination of the accreditation process or revocation of the accreditation award is necessary to ensure the integrity of the process. Those situations are outlined below.

Termination of the Accreditation process will occur if:

- An applicant agency does not comply with deadlines. (see timelines above)
- An applicant agency is unable to comply with the Accreditation Criteria.

Revocation of Accreditation will occur if:

- AIRS is notified and verifies, using multiple methods (other community agencies, newspapers, Better Business Bureau) that an illegal act had been committed by an agency with AIRS accreditation.
- Once accredited, the organization does not apply for renewal of their accreditation by the expiration date.
- An Annual Report (agency questionnaire) is not submitted.
- The renewal process is not completed in a timely manner (see timeline above)
- An applicant agency is unable to comply with the Accreditation Criteria during their renewal.

### **I&R Systems Applying for Accreditation**

- System 1: All agencies in the system are identical and it can be demonstrated that all of the pieces in the systems would meet the criteria in the same way.
- System 2: If there is a lead agency that can demonstrate that some components of the accreditation criteria (such as the database, training and phone reports) are being implemented centrally for the system as a whole, the other applicants in the system do not have to individually demonstrate that they meet this/these components. All agencies in the system must apply for accreditation and submit materials, excluding those identified by the lead agency. The components approved for the lead agency are in effect for 5 years. This allows agencies that are renewing or a new participant applying at a separate time from the lead agency, to have the benefit of the prior approval.
- System 3: Systems with varying components across multiple agencies (e.g., different databases, training programs, phone reports), **cannot be accredited by AIRS as a system**. The agencies in this system configuration will need to apply for accreditation individually.

For more information about the accreditation process, refer to the Accreditation page on the AIRS website at [www.airs.org](http://www.airs.org), contact Charlene Hipes at [charlenehipes@airs.org](mailto:charlenehipes@airs.org) or call: (503) 257-3537; or the Accreditation Support Community on the AIRS Networker <http://airsnetworker.airs.org> website.

This Accreditation Support Community is for organizations considering applying for AIRS Accreditation, for those considering renewing their Accreditation and those currently in the process. This is a place to post questions to the group and AIRS staff.

# AIRS ACCREDITATION PROCESS DESCRIPTION

## COMPONENT ONE: REMOTE DATABASE REVIEW

Information and referral agencies seeking AIRS Accreditation are required to develop, maintain, use and disseminate an accurate, up-to-date resource database that contains information about available community resources including details about the services they provide and the conditions under which services are available. The database must include resources that support the inquirer's right to accurate, comprehensive and unbiased information and the ability of the I&R service to be a non-partisan, non-ideological and impartial information source for available nonprofit, government and for-profit services that meet the organization's inclusion/exclusion criteria.

In order to verify that your I&R agency's database meets the AIRS criteria, an AIRS database reviewer will interview your resource database manager and conduct a remote review of your resource database.

The following topics are covered during the Remote Database Review:

- Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria
- Data Elements
- Taxonomy
- Applying Style Guide Rules and Indexing
- Disaster Resources
- Searching the Database
- Maintaining the Database

### Review steps:

1. In order to prepare for the review, the following documents will need to be sent to the AIRS database reviewer:
  - Inclusion/Exclusion Policy
  - Style Guide
  - Customized list of Taxonomy terms
  - Database maintenance procedures
  - List of towns in the service area
  - Report showing formal updates (unless this can be viewed within the software during the review)
  - List of agency names and their legal status type/agency type for comparison with inclusion/exclusion policy.
  - Database review questionnaire
2. The review will be conducted via GoToMeeting software that enables the reviewer to see the applicant's database online.
3. The length of the review varies, but on average is about 6 hours total, which will be divided into separate GoToMeeting sessions.
4. When the review is complete, the database reviewer will prepare a report and send it to AIRS for distribution.

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## COMPONENT TWO: CONSULTATION

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1. The Accreditation Manual includes the following:
  - a. Overview of AIRS Accreditation
  - b. A description of the Accreditation Appeals Process
  - c. The Accreditation Criteria.
  - d. Information on the Secret Shopper component
  - e. Information on the Remote Database Review component
  - f. Guidelines for Electronic Submission
  - g. Information on Submission of the Annual Report
  - h. **NOTE:** A preformatted Thumb Drive to use for submitting your documents is also included with the Manual.
  
2. Within 10 months of receiving the Accreditation Packet, you must:
  - a. Review the Accreditation Criteria and contact the liaison with questions as needed.
  - b. Compile and label documentation for Accreditation Criteria.
  - c. Complete and have the Board President or other Chief Volunteer Officer and the executive director/I&R program manager sign the "Certification of Accreditation Documentation" form and submit it with your documentation.
  - d. Submit an electronic copy of the consultation materials, including the Certification of Documentation Agreement form, via the provided flash drive.
  - e. All materials must be current at the time of submission.
  
3. Within six months of receipt of submitted documentation, AIRS will do the following:
  - a. Analyze the submitted materials and write a consultation assessment report identifying agency or program strengths, changes necessary to continue the accreditation process, and suggestions for improvement. AIRS will make every effort to respond as quickly as possible.
  - b. Send a copy of the consultation assessment report to the applying agency.  
  
**NOTE:** Most agencies will need to submit additional documentation during the Consultation Component. Please allow for this contingency in your plans. If additional documentation is requested, please submit two copies.
  
4. Please review the consultation assessment report and contact your AIRS liaison with any questions. The liaison is available to discuss any additional documentation that may be needed and to assist you in making the changes stipulated in the report. You need to respond to the consultation report and provide supporting documentation and evidence of implementation within six months.

To achieve AIRS accreditation, you must complete Component Two of the process before the

On-Site Review. You may choose to stop the accreditation process after the consultation component, but if you do so, you will not be considered accredited. If you decided to reinstate the accreditation process after stopping, you must file another application, pay another fee and submit updated documentation.

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### **COMPONENT THREE: ON-SITE REVIEW**

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1. Upon receipt of the final Consultation report, the organization should contact AIRS to schedule an on-site review. The review must take place within three months of the date the final consultation assessment report was completed.
2. All expenses related to travel (air fare, hotel, food, incidentals) by the review team are included in the application fee.
3. AIRS staff will schedule the review and identify volunteers for the review team. If there were any outstanding documentation issues, updated materials will need to be compiled for the team to review.
4. To ensure quality I&R is being delivered, a “secret shopper” process to assess call handling will be conducted prior to the site visit. Site Reviewers will complete a minimum of two calls per reviewer to the agency they will be visiting.
5. The review team will conduct the on-site review. At a minimum, the site visit includes:
  - ✓ A tour of the facility
  - ✓ A meeting with the agency’s volunteer leadership
  - ✓ Interviews with key I&R staff
  - ✓ Examination of documents per AIRS request
  - ✓ Debriefing with the agency’s administrative staff
6. At the end of the visit, the review team will debrief with the administrative team including the executive director, senior staff and board members in attendance.
7. The review team will complete the on-site assessment report with recommendations and send it to AIRS.
8. AIRS will send a copy of the on-site assessment report to the Accreditation Commission chair, who will review the report and finalize the accreditation decision.
9. AIRS will send you a letter indicating the outcome of the accreditation process:
  - a. Granting full accreditation for five years;
  - b. Granting conditional accreditation when an organization is in substantial compliance, but needs to take further action to comply with some criteria;
  - c. Denying accreditation.

NOTE: Applicant agencies who are being reaccredited are eligible for a modified site visit contingent on all Consultation materials submitted being approved.

# AIRS ACCREDITATION APPLICATION

The application fee is non-refundable. The fee is **\$6,000** for AIRS members or **\$9,000** for nonmembers, which may be paid in two installments.

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Application \_\_\_\_\_

**NEW APPLICANT** for AIRS Accreditation YES \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Agency Name:</b>		
<b>Program Name:</b>		
<b>Mailing Address:</b>		
<b>Phone Number:</b>		
<b>Fax Number:</b>		
<b>Website:</b>		
<b>TDD Number:</b>		
<b>Contact Person:</b>		
<b>Contact Person Email:</b>		
<b>Population in Geographic Area Served:</b>		
<b>Geographic Area Served:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> City	<input type="checkbox"/> State/Province
	<input type="checkbox"/> County	<input type="checkbox"/> Multi-county
<b>Agency/Program is primarily:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> I&R	<input type="checkbox"/> Crisis Intervention
	<input type="checkbox"/> I&R/Aging	<input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify:
<b>Walk-in services:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
<b>What I&amp;R software do you use for your database?</b>		
<b>Number of records in database</b>		
<b>Is this the number of organizations or programs?</b>		
<b>Total annual I&amp;R inquiries/contacts for the most recent year:</b>		



**Parent Organization:** If you are part of a larger organization, e.g., United Way, Area Agency on Aging, Community Council, etc., provide an explanation of your relationship to that organization, e.g., employees of, funded by, provides governance, etc.

**Services Provided: On an attached sheet** please state clearly and concisely the services provided by your agency/program and identify with a “yes” or “no” the ones for which you are applying for accreditation. **(Application will not be processed without this information.)**

Date agency/program established: \_\_\_\_\_ AIRS membership number: \_\_\_\_\_

Non-profit: \_\_\_\_\_ For profit: \_\_\_\_\_ Government: \_\_\_\_\_

**Hours of Operation:**

Days of week: \_\_\_\_\_

Hours: \_\_\_\_\_

Provisions for after hour services?  Yes  No  
If yes, explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

**I&R Program Staff:** (a staff list may be attached)

Position:	# Full-time	# Part-time	# Volunteers
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

**Total FTEs:** \_\_\_\_\_

How many people do the FTE's equal? \_\_\_\_\_

**Board/Advisory Committee:**

Do you have a:  Board of Directors **or**  Advisory Committee?

How many members? \_\_\_\_\_ On average how many attend meetings? \_\_\_\_\_

**Budget:**

Annual I&R operating budget: \_\_\_\_\_

Annual agency budget (If different from above): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of last audit: \_\_\_\_\_

**Community Partnerships and/or Projects: On an attached sheet, describe the community partnerships and/or projects that the agency is involved in. Include the names of the organizations involved, purpose and the type of service provided. (Application will not be processed without this information.)**

**Please return the completed Agency Application Form, Consultation Agreement and fee to:**

AIRS National Headquarters  
11240 Waples Mill Road, Suite 200  
Fairfax, VA 22030

For more information about the accreditation process, refer to the Accreditation page on the AIRS website at [www.airs.org](http://www.airs.org) or contact Charlene Hipes at [charlenehipes@airs.org](mailto:charlenehipes@airs.org) or call: (503) 257-3537.

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**Manual Updated September 2017  
Accreditation Criteria September 2017  
Standards for Professional Information and Referral, 8.0 Edition, January 2016**

# AIRES ACCREDITATION CONSULTATION AGREEMENT

The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS) Accreditation is a multi-phase process: (1) Consultation, (2) Database Review and (3) On-Site Review. For the consultation phase, AIRS provides the following: consultation materials, a liaison to answer any questions, and a consultation assessment report. **All transactions between AIRS (including members of the review team) and the applicant agency, and all materials submitted by the agency, are confidential.**

The nonrefundable consultation/database review fee of \$6,000 for members or \$9,000 for nonmembers is remitted with the initial application. **(Fees may be split into two payments, half at the time the application is submitted and the remainder prior to or at the time of the site visit.)**

In submitting the application to the Alliance of Information and Referral Systems, Inc. (AIRS), the applying agency hereby agrees to the following conditions:

1. The agency has been in operation at least one year.
2. The agency agrees to prepare and provide all requested documentation.
3. The agency agrees to notify the AIRS accreditation liaison of any changes in its program that may affect the accreditation of the agency.
4. The agency agrees that AIRS, its officers, or other persons involved in the consultation phase shall not be held liable for any applicant's failure to achieve accreditation.
5. The agency agrees that it has in place a statement approved by the organization's governing body prohibiting discrimination in all forms and documenting its intention to comply with all laws, orders and regulations addressing this issue and has a process for registering and resolving discrimination complaints from inquirers, staff members and the community.
6. The agency understands that participation in the AIRS Accreditation process is not a guarantee of accreditation.

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**Agency/Program Name**

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**Board President/Advisory Committee Chair**

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**Date**

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**Executive Director**

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**Date**

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**I&R Program Manager/Coordinator**

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**Date**

# SUMMARY OF ACCREDITATION DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

The following are the documents that you will be required to produce by the end of the 10-month submission period for both the Consultation and Remote Database Review phases.

In addition, you will be asked to write narrative descriptions and complete check lists which describe some of your practices. All of these practices are referenced in the current version of the AIRS Standards (which remains the best guide for accreditation preparation).

In situations where you are not asked to submit documentation, you will be asked to attest to the accuracy of your submission via the Certification of Documentation Agreement which must be signed by your Board President/Advisory Committee Chair and the I&R Program Manager and submitted with your materials.

## Service Delivery Documentation Requirements:

- Policy/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.
- A sample of the form that is signed by I&R staff agreeing to the confidentiality policy. Do NOT send all of the forms your staff have signed!
- The nondisclosure form signed by others with access to confidential information.
- Your advocacy procedures.
- Proof of your AAS certification (if you are skipping the Crisis Intervention section).
- The signed, written agreement you have with the crisis intervention center with which your I&R service has an arrangement.
- Your 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.
- The form your I&R specialists use to complete a lethality (risk) assessment. If your lethality assessments are in electronic format, submit a screen shot.
- Your follow-up policy and procedures
- Screen shots of your inquirer data collection form
- Your procedures regarding the information you collect about inquirers and how you use the information

- A report that shows the number and/or percentage of:
  - Information only, Assessment and referral, Assessment without referral inquiries
  - Inquiries involving Crisis intervention
  - Inquiries involving Advocacy
  - Follow-ups conducted
- Follow-up results report
- Current reports (including met/unmet needs, sample cross-tabulations, trends). Reports should be finished and formatted.
- An explanation or a user guide to the reports you provide for those on your distribution list
- A list of agencies/organizations to which the reports were provided
- Provide a definition of Terminology used to categorize contacts

### **Cooperative Relationships Documentation Requirements:**

- Copies of agreements with other I&R programs in your community, if applicable

### **Disaster Preparedness Documentation Requirements:**

- Your Emergency Operations and Business Contingency Plan.
- A disaster-related service request report, if you have had occasion to produce one.

### **Organizational Effectiveness Documentation Requirements:**

- The roster for your Board of Directors/Advisory Committee.
- Administrative policies and procedures manual(s).
- Most recent audit or review for the organization.
- An organization chart that reflects all of the positions within your agency. If you are 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.
- The standardized form and screening procedure you use to evaluate each candidate's application or resume against the I&R staff position requirements.
- Your employment interview questions for each of the positions within your I&R service and the rating form you use to evaluate responses.
- Your succession plan for key staff.
- Policies and procedures relating to the use of off-site I&R staff.
- Backup policies and procedures.

- A detailed, day-by-day agenda for both your I&R specialist and resource specialist training that shows topics covered, materials used, training methods (how material is presented), timeframes and objectives/outcomes for each section.
- Examples of subjective and/or objective evaluation tools used for measuring an I&R trainee's level of competency.
- Your I&R training evaluation form.
- Your I&R trainer evaluation form.
- Proof of professional certification for I&R staff.
- An 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 your call management system/ACD or the annual report you receive from your telephone company 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.
- The most recent evaluation report for the I&R service.

### **Remote Resource Database Review Documentation Requirements:**

The Remote Database Review Team will require the following documents prior to the review:

- Inclusion/Exclusion Policy
- Style Guide
- Customized List of Taxonomy terms
- Database maintenance procedures
- List of towns in the service area
- Report showing formal updates
- List of agency names and their legal status type/agency type for comparison with inclusion/exclusion policy