What Is Accreditation?

By Allison Steely

Accreditation validates a chamber not only meeting the demands of its business community, but also establishing best practices and staying current on industry benchmarks and standards. The United States Chamber of Commerce established the Accreditation program in 1964 at the request of progressive chambers of commerce across the country who desired a way to stand out from the crowd. Since that time, the program has changed in many ways, conforming to the ever-changing legal system as well as strengthening the standards needed to achieve accreditation.

Chambers accredited by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce have demonstrated competency in the following nine core areas: governance, finance, human resources, government affairs, program development, technology, communication, facilities, and benchmarking. Meeting the minimum requirements of the application guarantees a chamber accreditation; however, exceeding the minimum qualifications can earn a chamber a ranking of Accredited with three, four, or five stars. State chambers are also encouraged to apply for accreditation and may receive a ranking of Accredited or Accredited with Distinction. Upon receiving accreditation, which is valid for five years, chambers are given recommendations to use as a guideline for reaching five-star status. The process is helpful not only in strengthening the chambers’ existing policies and procedures, but also in communicating weaknesses that the chamber may have and how to improve in these areas.

Accredited chambers take their mission seriously. In June 2010, the Rogers-Lowell (AR) Area Chamber of Commerce received Accreditation with five stars for its commitment to representing the interests of its community. Noting that the Chamber received the highest award bestowed by the Accreditation program, Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe stated, “This honor, conferred by the United States Chamber of Commerce, recognizes the tremendous success these leaders have achieved acting as the voice of business, promoting responsible economic growth, and addressing community challenges.” Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber President and CEO Raymond Burns, CCE, echoed the governor’s comments and affirmed, “The five-star designation has helped us earn the respect of our members and the respect of government as demonstrated by our Governor. We are a better and stronger organization for going through the process. At the end of the day, this matters to our members and helps us serve them in a better and more proactive way.”

Accreditation by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a prestigious honor; accredited chambers represent the top four percent of chambers in the United States. In addition to ensuring that the chamber is continually reviewing, improving and promoting strong business practices, Accreditation is a way to recognize strong chamber leadership and significant contributions to the community, setting benchmarks and establishing best practices, and supporting free enterprise and economic growth policies at the federal, state and local levels.

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