

CONTACT USA Accreditation: Information and Support

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This session will cover the requirements and process for seeking accreditation (or renewing existing accreditation) through CONTACT USA (CUSA). We will discuss the entire process from start to finish, and share ways to make it a helpful and educational experience for your staff and volunteers.

CUSA accreditation involves a thorough examination of a crisis center's policies and procedures. This examination is meant to ensure that CUSA member centers are meeting or exceeding the organization's national standards or practice. It is also meant to help an agency take a close and careful look at their own practices in a way that involves all members of the staff, Board and volunteers. Accreditation should be an educational and enlightening experience for all involved, and our accreditation site visitors strive to help agency personnel feel supported throughout the process.

All CUSA accreditation materials can be found on the website at www.contact-usa.org. Incorporated in the accreditation manual are all forms, questionnaires and step by step directions for applying and preparing for a site visit. After filling out the initial application, pre-screening questionnaire and statement of values, they are mailed in with a check for the \$500 application fee. Once a Center has submitted a list of tentative dates for a site visit, they are assigned two site visitors who will help them through the entire process.

Once site visit dates are set, the Center Director and staff begin preparing the accreditation documents which are outlined in the accreditation manual (pp 9-34). These documents are placed into a binder which is then mailed to both visitors. If agreed upon by all parties, the documents may be sent in electronic form. This must be completed by six weeks prior to the scheduled visit. During this time the site visitors will arrange travel and lodging in consultation with the Center Director. CUSA visitors will always attempt to procure the least expensive travel and lodging arrangements in order to keep these costs as low as possible. Travel, lodging and per diem charges generally run under \$1500 for both visitors.

At the site visit, the CUSA accreditation team will conduct interviews (pre-arranged by the Director) with staff, volunteers, Board members and community supporters. They will tour the Crisis Center and look over files, documents and the phone room set up. Meals are arranged by the Center Director and usually include at least one with the Board President. At the completion of the site visit, the team will conduct an exit interview with the Director and any other members of the Center administration. In this interview general feedback will be given regarding the Center's scoring and whether or not they can expect to receive accreditation. If there are any areas of concern, the team will consult with the Director regarding how they might improve scores in that area.

Within two weeks of the site visit, the Center should receive an invoice for site visit expenses and once payment is received, they can expect to receive a letter and report detailing their accreditation status, findings of the CUSA team and a certificate awarding accreditation for a period of five years.