



GUIDE TO THE INITIAL CME PROVIDER ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Overview of Initial Accreditation

Accredited CME is an essential component of continuing physician professional development. Being an accredited provider of CME is a mark of quality continuing medical education (CME) activities that are planned, implemented, and evaluated in accordance with the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education's (ACCME) Accreditation Criteria, Standards for Integrity and Independence, and policies ([accreditation requirements](#)).

The ACCME is the organization that sets educational standards for CME activities. The CCMEA (Committee on Continuing Medical Education and Accreditation) is the accrediting body of the Maine Medical Association that accredits organizations in Maine and monitors its accredited providers' adherence to the standards set by the ACCME.

If your organization is considering applying for Initial Accreditation through the CCMEA, there are several factors to consider in determining whether becoming an accredited provider is right for your organization.

The ACCME and CCMEA have several expectations of those who apply for accreditation:

- Eligible organizations that decide to apply for accreditation should be prepared to both describe and furnish evidence that demonstrates compliance with the accreditation requirements. For this reason, organizations applying for accreditation must plan, implement, and evaluate at least two CME activities within approximately two years prior to the submission of materials for initial accreditation.
- The CCMEA expects its accredited providers to monitor their overall CME program for compliance with the accreditation requirements and to fulfill annual reporting requirements.
- Payment of certain fees is required to obtain and maintain CCMEA accreditation. See a [schedule of current CCMEA fees](#).

The Initial Accreditation Process involves determining eligibility, completing a Pre-Application, and Completing the Initial Application. The CCMEA, the accrediting body of the Maine Medical Association, will review the materials submitted by the prospective organization. Three sources are reviewed to determine accreditation: (1) Self-Study Report, (2) Performance-in-Practice Structured Abstracts (activity file review), and (3) the Accreditation Interview. This process is repeated at the end of every accreditation term, (2-, 4-, 6-years) for accredited providers. An organization's accreditation is effective upon the decision date of the CCMEA and extends until the next decision date.

Eligibility

The CCMEA and ACCME have specific criteria for determining an organization's eligibility to receive accreditation. Only eligible companies may be accredited to provide continuing education. Consider the following eligibility requirements to determine if your organization is eligible to become a provider:

To be eligible to be accredited by the CCMEA as an Accredited CME Provider, the organization must:

- Be located in Maine;
- Be developing and presenting a program of CME for physicians on a regular basis;
- Serve a target audience of no more than 30% of physician learners from outside Maine and its contiguous states. Organizations with a national audience should apply for accreditation from the ACCME (www.accme.org);
- Be an organization whose mission is to 1) provide clinical services directly to patients or 2) the education of healthcare professionals or 3) serve as fiduciary to patients, the public, or population health;
- Not be developing and/or presenting a program of CME that is devoted to advocacy on unscientific modalities of diagnosis or therapy or treatments that are known to have risks or dangers that outweigh the benefits or are known to be ineffective;
- Present activities that have "valid" content:
 - o Activities promote recommendations, treatment, or manners of practicing medicine that serve to maintain, develop, or increase the knowledge, skills, and professional performance and relationships that a physician uses to provide services for patients, the public, or the profession.

Timeline

For initial applicants, the accreditation process can take 12 to 18 months. Applicants should refer to the [Timeline for Initial Accreditation](#) for the details on the amount of time allotted for each step in the accreditation process.

Initial Accreditation Process

The initial accreditation process is conducted in accordance with the following procedures:

1. PRE-APPLICATION

The Pre-Application is designed to establish eligibility and help organizations assess their program to determine if they are ready to begin the process. When the organization feels that its program sufficiently meets the [ACCME Core Accreditation Criteria and Standards for Integrity and Independence](#), the Pre-Application should be completed and submitted to the MMA Continuing Medical Education Department. **Contact the CME Coordinator for the MMA at (207) 480-4186 or ecicarelli@mainemed.com to request a current version of the Pre-Application or download the application from the [MMA Website](#).** The [pre-application fee](#) must be submitted along with the pre-application.

2. PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF PRE-APPLICATION

When the Pre-Application is received, it is reviewed to determine eligibility and if the organization appears to have the basic structures in place to begin the formal Accreditation process. Upon review of the Pre-Application, a recommendation will be made either for the organization to begin the Initial Accreditation process or that certain aspects of the program be refined or more fully developed prior to completing the Initial Accreditation process. The applicant will receive this notification in writing, usually within four weeks of receipt of a pre-application.

3. ACCREDITATION PROCESS

The formal Accreditation Process involves three sources of data: the Self-Study Report, Performance-in-Practice Review, and an Accreditation Interview. The Self-Study Report and Performance-in-Practice Review must be completed within 9 months after being determined eligible to apply for initial accreditation. The Accreditation Interview is conducted within 3 months of receipt of the Self-Study Report and Performance-in-Practice Review.

a. SELF-STUDY REPORT

The Self-Study Report provides an opportunity for the initial applicant to tell the “story” of their CME Program and provide background information on how the organization accomplishes its CME mission. Initial applicants are asked to provide descriptions, attachments, and examples to give the reader an understanding of their CME practices related to the ACCME Accreditation Criteria and Standards for Integrity and Independence. This process provides an opportunity for the initial applicant to assess its commitment to and role in providing continuing medical education as well as analyze its current practices and success in meeting its educational mission.

In the Self-Study Report, initial applicants must demonstrate compliance with the Core Accreditation Criteria and the Standards for Integrity and Independence to receive an outcome of **Provisional Accreditation with a two-year accreditation term**. If **any** of the requirements are found to be in Noncompliance, the accreditation outcome will be Nonaccreditation.

CME TRACK RECORD

It is impossible for an organization to demonstrate compliance with the accreditation requirements and policies if it has not produced CME activities prior to applying for accreditation. While it is not mandatory that these activities be granted credit, they must demonstrate compliance with the accreditation requirements and policies and be planned and implemented in accordance with procedures to be utilized by the organization as an accredited provider.

At least two CME activities should be implemented **within the 24 months prior to submission of the materials** for initial accreditation.

There are four additional crucial elements that should be in place **before** the formal Self-Study Report is submitted:

1. A CME Committee providing leadership
2. Administrative support assigned to the CME effort
3. Interested physician attendees
4. A CME track record

The Self-Study Report should be submitted to the MMA within 9 months of an approved Pre-Application.

b. PERFORMANCE-IN-PRACTICE STRUCTURED ABSTRACTS (ACTIVITY FILE REVIEW)

Initial applicants are expected to provide performance-in-practice evidence that demonstrates compliance with the Core Accreditation Criteria, Standards for Integrity and Independence, and all applicable accreditation policies. The applicant is required to provide specific materials documenting how these activities fulfilled accreditation requirements.

The initial applicant will select at least two CME activities completed within the last twenty-four months and complete a Performance-in-Practice Structured Abstract for each of the activities. The activities selected for performance-in-practice review may be conducted in joint providership with a CCMEA- or ACCME- accredited provider, or they may be offered by initial applicants without CME credit. In all cases, the evidence of performance-in-practice presented from these activities will be an important data source upon which the initial accreditation findings and decision will be based.

The Performance-in-Practice Review should be submitted to MMA within 9 months of an approved Pre-Application.

c. ACCREDITATION INTERVIEW

When the Self-Study Report and Performance-in-Practice Review are received, they are evaluated by a CCMEA survey team. Initial applicants are then presented with the opportunity to further describe the practices presented in the Self-Study Report and activity files, and provide clarification as needed, in a conversation with a team of surveyors. The purpose of the interview is for the provider to explain how the CME program fulfills accreditation requirements and to discuss its strengths, accomplishments, and challenges. Once all required information have been received, the CCMEA will schedule your accreditation interview.

4. COMMITTEE ACTION

Following the interview, the survey team will submit a report to the CCMEA at its next regularly scheduled meeting. The CCMEA will determine the compliance and noncompliance status for each required criterion and standard and make a decision on the accreditation status of the organization. Action by the committee may result in **Provisional Accreditation** of two years or **Nonaccreditation**. A decision is typically made within 3 months of completion of the Accreditation Interview.

5. ACCREDITATION TYPES

While only Provisional Accreditation or Nonaccreditation can be awarded to an initial applicant, the following describes each type of Accreditation Status.

a. PROVISIONAL ACCREDITATION

Provisional Accreditation is a **two-year term** awarded to **initial applicants** that demonstrate compliance with Core Accreditation Criteria and Standards for Integrity and Independence.

b. ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is the standard, **four-year term** awarded to accredited providers. Providers that demonstrate one or more noncompliance findings in the Core Accreditation Criteria, Standards for Integrity and Independence, or policies receive Accreditation but are required to submit progress reports.

c. ACCREDITATION WITH COMMENDATION

Accreditation with Commendation confers a **six-year term** of accreditation and is available only to providers seeking reaccreditation, not to initial applicants. Providers must demonstrate compliance with the Core Accreditation Criteria, Standards for Integrity and Independence, policies, and 8 Criteria from the Menu of Criteria for Accreditation with Commendation.

d. PROBATION

Probation is given to accredited providers that have serious problems meeting ACCME requirements. Providers on probation are required to submit progress reports. Providers with Accreditation may have their status changed to Probation if their progress reports do not demonstrate correction of noncompliance issues. Most providers on Probation implement improvements quickly, return to a status of Accreditation and sustain compliance. Providers cannot remain on Probation for longer than two years.

e. NONACCREDITATION

Nonaccreditation may be determined in the following circumstances:

- An initial applicant is not in compliance with one or more of the criteria required to achieve Provisional Accreditation.
- A provisionally accredited provider has serious noncompliance issues.
- A provider on Probation fails to demonstrate in one or more progress reports that it has achieved compliance in all Accreditation Criteria within two years.
- In rare circumstances where there are compelling reasons, an accredited provider may have its status changed to Nonaccreditation. Examples of such circumstances include an accredited provider that has demonstrated recurrent noncompliance in the Standards for Integrity and Independence and/or has received previous decisions of Probation, and/or has engaged in joint providerships while on Probation in violation of [joint providership policy](#).

For assistance in any stage in the accreditation process, contact:

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