

**To: NACC Board members**  
**From: Matt Hale, NACC President-Elect**  
**Re: NACC Accreditation Next Steps**  
**Date: November 6, 2015**

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### **NACC Accreditation Next Steps**

**Overview:** This memo is designed to move the NACC accreditation ball forward by outlining some goals that can frame the NACC accreditation process. The memo will also attempt to outline key steps in the development process over the next two years. We use the term “accreditation” as a placeholder, as we may decide on a quality approval process that doesn’t fit traditional definitions of accreditation.

**Why NACC Accreditation Big Reason #1:** In many ways it seems that NACC’s interest in accreditation is a reaction to the existing accreditation/certification processes and institutions available to nonprofit management programs (*e.g.*, NASPAA, AACSB, and CSWE). In the broadest terms, all of these organizations/processes were created for “someone else,” and not specifically the nonprofit/philanthropic sectors. It also appears that there is a feeling among the NACC membership that the specific processes for accreditation created by these organizations are structured in a way that fails to reflect the diversity of the nonprofit/philanthropy enterprise. This leads to the following three important goals for a NACC directed accreditation process.

**Flexibility:** Any NACC sponsored accreditation process must be flexible enough to incorporate the wide variety of “academic spaces” that nonprofit/philanthropy education occupies. Examples of this include but are not limited to the following:

- Nonprofit/Philanthropy concentrations within MPA Programs
- Nonprofit/Philanthropy concentrations within MBA/ Business Schools
- Nonprofit /Philanthropy concentrations within MSW/Social Work Schools
- Nonprofit/Philanthropy concentrations within other academic fields whether they currently exist (*i.e.* Human Resources, Economics) or are emerging (Social Entrepreneurship)
- Stand-alone Nonprofit/Philanthropy degree programs at the baccalaureate degree level
- Stand-alone Nonprofit/Philanthropy degree programs at the masters level
- Stand-alone Nonprofit/Philanthropy degree programs at the doctoral level
- Graduate level stand-alone for-credit certificate programs
- Undergraduate level stand-alone for-credit certificate programs
- Continuing Education programs (perhaps)

For the concentrations listed above, transferability to PA/Business/Social Work/Other accreditation procedures is of interest to many of us, and we hope to work with existing accreditation bodies in this regard.

Flexibility is also an important goal as the nonprofit/philanthropy field undergoes rapid transformation. Whatever accreditation standards or guidelines we create must include an open and transparent process for capturing and recognizing innovation as it happens.

**Nonprofit/Philanthropy “First”<sup>1</sup>:** While transferability and flexibility seem central to a NACC accreditation, it also seems that because the current accreditation programs started with an “other” that the NACC accreditation program should start with “us” or, namely, have nonprofit/philanthropy be central and “first.” This means we are committed to focusing on the nonprofit/philanthropy aspects of the programs we would certify or accredit.

**Curriculum Focused:** The sense that other accreditation processes are designed to keep people out seems real among NACC discussions. Part of this stems from the perception that these processes require documenting levels of support from host institutions (Deans, Provosts, and infrastructure) that many nonprofit programs simply don’t have. For example, NASPAA requires a nucleus of five full-time faculty members for a program to even be considered for accreditation. This is a barrier preventing many outstanding programs from even applying. As a result, a NACC-directed accreditation process should be focus exclusively and directly on the nonprofit/philanthropy curriculum evident in candidate programs.

**Why NACC Accreditation Big Reason #2:** In a rush to capture a growing student demand for nonprofit curriculum, some universities and colleges have launched “in name only” nonprofit/philanthropy programs, with insufficient nonprofit curriculum and no faculty expertise in nonprofit/philanthropy research or teaching. Accreditation is needed to provide a signal to prospective students that a university program has sufficient academic expertise to host a nonprofit/philanthropy-centered curriculum. Also, when a nonprofit program is a portion within a parent program (MPA, etc.) it is more difficult for prospective students to verify the quality of the nonprofit curriculum.

**Why NACC Accreditation Big Reason #3:** Compared to other accrediting organizations, NACC is very small. As a result, NACC has significant organizational constraints in how we might organize an accreditation process. Although it is a smaller organization, NACC is clearly the only player with an existing set of nonprofit curriculum guidelines and is known as a leading organization in developing the nonprofit/philanthropy field. As a result of these two reasons, we might articulate the following additional goals:

**Curriculum Focused:** NACC’s organizational capacity issues mean that it is unlikely that we will be able to conduct many elements of a traditional accreditation review like site visits, extensive document review and interviews with University administrators. This, coupled with our expertise in curriculum guidelines, is another reason to focus our accreditation process on detailed examination of curriculum, compared to other factors.

**Field Building for Faculty:** Part of NACC’s mission is to build the nonprofit/philanthropy field. One way of doing that through an accreditation process is by attempting to measure or record the qualifications of faculty members to teach a nonprofit/philanthropy curriculum. This might simply include a review of CVs. It could be more extensive to include interviews with references provided for faculty members. The underlying principle here is that part of the reason why a NACC accreditation is needed is to help grow the field by encouraging colleges and universities to hire faculty members with a nonprofit research and teaching focus.

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<sup>1</sup> Mendel,S. (2014). A Field of its Own. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 12(1), 61-62

**Field Building with Partners:** It is clear that the NACC accrediting process should be developed and run by NACC. However, because of our size and because there are a number of existing accrediting organizations that already exist, it seems prudent to attempt to form partnerships with existing accrediting organizations. For example, perhaps NACC accreditation could initially “count” in a NASPAA or AACSB process of accrediting a nonprofit organization.

**Non-Invasive and Cost Effective:** All of the “Big Reasons” articulated above lead to a process that is (comparatively) non-invasive and (comparatively) inexpensive for programs to attempt. We can’t and shouldn’t attempt to replicate the process of NASPAA, for example, which requires at least 2 or 3 years of consistent attention and at a minimum costs of about \$4,000, in addition to yearly NASPAA dues of \$2,500. The NACC process needs to focus on limiting the documentation requirements for accreditation to the extent possible, while still maintaining a high standard for accreditation.

## NACC Process next steps

- 1) **November 2015 ARNOVA/Member meeting:** Present members with overview of current board discussions and solicit input and ideas from NACC members attending.
- 2) **January 2016: Board Strategic Planning in Phoenix:** This strategic planning meeting will focus specific attention on the development of more detailed timetables, deliverables, needs etc. In addition, this retreat will provide an opportunity to plan the summer accreditation summit in detail.
- 3) **July 2016: Accreditation Summit at Texas A&M:** The Summit planning committee (Mendel, Brown and Hale) have developed an basic plan for the summit. The idea is to bring outside voices and speakers on a variety of different accreditation related topics. These include:
  - a. What weight should be given to pedagogy in accreditation for critical thinking and alternative perspectives in nonprofit education topics?
  - b. How do you go about quantifying and measuring curriculum content across institutions? Are there standard mechanism for doing that effectively and efficiently? HEATHER
  - c. How do existing accreditation entities treat their nonprofit programs as elements of their accreditation programs?
    - i. Public Administration
    - ii. Business Administration
    - iii. Social Work
  - d. How are non-credit training/adult education, credit bearing certificate programs and practitioner oriented programs accredited and to what intensity?
  - e. Accreditation of programs outside the U.S.
  - f. Would a minimally invasive accreditation process be wise, possible and credible?
  - g. Practical implications of an accreditation program and what capacity would NACC need to carry out the work?
  - h. Would a minimally invasive accreditation process be wise, possible and credible?
  - i. Nonprofit First pedagogy that accounts for the transactional skills necessary for nonprofit management with the soft skills such as emotional intelligence, experience based learning and other behaviors necessary to transform, advance a career and organization.
- 4) **November 2016 ARNOVA/Member meeting:** This would be a great opportunity to present both to our members and to others a working outline of the NACC accreditation plan and request feedback.
- 5) **January 2017:** Board presents final proposal for accreditation to NACC members.
- 6) **January to July 2017:** Test cases of accreditation process conducted on volunteer NACC member schools
- 7) **July 2017:** NACC conference NACC accreditation guidelines released. World peace reigns and life is great.