

Accreditation Update 1: September 2016

When we first started planning the NACC Accreditation Summit about a year ago we had four rather limited goals. First, we would get at least 25 people to attend. Second, we would not lose any of NACC's money putting it on. Third, we would get a variety of different perspectives on the prospects for a nonprofit/philanthropy accreditation process on the table. Fourth, the diverse ideas generated at the Summit would spark an important conversation in the field.

We are very happy to report that the Summit exceeded all four goals. Over all we had a total of 45 attendees, and thanks to the great work of the Texas A&M event staff and the NACC staff, the logistics, transportation, meals, and lodging were all top rate.

It is clear that the conference was also a financial success, as NACC made a small profit on the event. This was made possible by the generous contributions of the following member organizations:

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The Summit also succeeded on both substantive goals. Overall it seems quite clear that the topic of accrediting nonprofit and philanthropy programs generates a significant amount of energy and enthusiasm. However, it was also clear that our diverse panels brought up a number of vital questions. While far from an exhaustive list, here are few of them:

- Is "accreditation" the right term to use? Could "certification" "recognition" "stamp of approval" or "endorsement" be just as effective?

- How will issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity be made a central part of any accreditation process?
- What hard evidence exists that there are so-called “fly-by-night” nonprofit/philanthropy programs that are effectively competing with more traditional academic nonprofit/philanthropy programs?
- How do we balance the need for “accreditation” to mean something real, without forcing programs to undergo an invasive, time consuming, and costly process?
- How would a NACC accreditation process work with existing accrediting bodies? Would NACC work with existing accrediting bodies?
- Who (exactly) would NACC be accrediting? Traditional degree programs; Undergraduate? Graduate? Certificate programs?
- What (exactly) would (should, could?) an accreditation process look at? Inputs? Outputs? Outcomes? Curriculum? Scholarship? Service?
- What is NACC’s administrative capacity for doing any of this?
- What is the process moving forward?

All of these questions (and probably more) made it to the table at the NACC Summit and answering them over the next year will be NACC’s primary job for the foreseeable future. Along those lines a number of exciting things are already starting to happen. These are listed below.

- Several of the NACC Summit panels and panelists have submitted versions of their Summit conversations to a new conference track at the October, 2016 NASPAA Conference in Columbus, Ohio. This new track was added to the conference program in early August, so we don’t know yet if the panel will be accepted. However, we are hopeful that this will be an additional venue for discussing these important questions.
- The NACC board of directors has formed a task-forced (co-chaired by Matt Hale and Renee Irvin) to develop a white paper on NACC accreditation prior to the 2016 ARNOVA conference.
- The members present at the NACC member meeting (which took place immediately following the Summit) indicated that any decision to move forward with an accreditation process should be voted on by the NACC Membership.
- In partnership with the Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership (JNE&L), we will be working with Summit authors to prepare a special journal edition based on the Summit opinion papers.

While clearly, all of these bullet points show that the Summit has already succeeded in sparking an important conversation in the field. But to make sure of this we would like to put out a call for those of you who attended the Summit to send in your reactions to the Summit. We will publish these reaction pieces in coming editions of the NACC news.

Finally, the Summit made it clear that there is a great deal of work to be done in the coming months and years as NACC moves forward on this process. Please know that if you are interested in helping on the process there is plenty of room and everyone is welcome. This only works if it is an inclusive process and we hope you will be a part of it.

Sincerely,

Matt Hale

NACC President