



international debate education association

NGO Accreditation Process and Standards

I. The Accreditation Process For NGO's

A. The Importance of Accreditation

The accreditation process is encouraged, although not required, for all voting members of IDEA. Accredited status is an acknowledgement that a member embodies and employs the principles of IDEA, and has fulfilled its duties as a speech and debate organization.

1. The accreditation process is designed to achieve three goals:
 - to stimulate the ongoing process of self-improvement and growth
 - to establish standards that maintain the vitality of speech and debate organizations through changes in participants, leadership, and conditions
 - to clarify strengths and weaknesses through evaluation (both self-administered and external)
2. The aim of accreditation is not to penalize or reject organizations, but to offer members certain benefits, such as the following:
 - Accredited members have the authority to accredit local clubs, resource centers, trainers, teachers, coaches, and judges.
 - Accreditation ensures that speech and debate organizations maintain a level of quality and transparency that is visible to partners and funders, both domestic and international.
 - Accreditation highlights the intangible elements of a strong program, thereby increasing public exposure, admiration, and support for IDEA members.
 - In applying for accreditation, an organization must necessarily organize, strengthen, and make transparent their operations. This, in turn, will make the organization more accessible and appealing to potential members.
 - Accreditation facilitates collaboration between IDEA and speech/debate organizations for the purposes of grant writing, project financing, and new program development.
 - Accredited members may display the "IDEA Accredited Member" logo.

B. The Accreditation Process

1. The Accreditation Committee

The Board of IDEA-NL will appoint an Accreditation Committee, to be composed of IDEA and Open Society Institute (OSI) staff, members of IDEA, and outside affiliates. The Accreditation Committee should possess expertise in regional debate cultures and in the functioning of diverse and varied speech and debate organizations.

The Committee will oversee the accreditation process, soliciting applicants and selecting IDEA Accreditation Consultants. The Committee will seek Accreditation Consultants who have professional expertise in the different functional areas of a speech and debate organization, including, but not limited to, NGO management, speech and debate knowledge, training and curricular development, finance, public relations, fundraising, and event planning. Accreditation Consultants will be chosen on the basis of individual merit, and for the extent to which they will contribute to a diverse and geographically balanced community of consultants. Additionally, the Committee will coordinate Accreditation Consultant site visits. The Committee will also set standards for consultant conduct, and train them prior to site visits.

After gathering information from an applicant's submitted self-reporting documents and the Accreditation Consultant's reports, the Committee will make a determination on accreditation status. Although the Committee will engage in ongoing discussions with consultants and applicants, accreditation decisions will be made at only one meeting during the year.

2. The Provisional Accreditation Period

All voting members of IDEA will be provisionally accredited for a two-year period. The provisional accreditation period can be extended for up to two years at the discretion of the Accreditation Committee. During the provisional period:

- a. NGO's seeking accreditation will prepare for the formal process.

Since the information requested in the accreditation application is designed to assess the organization over time, the two-year provisional period allows organizations time to compile and organize the documents that will be required in the formal accreditation process. During this period the NGO also prepare to meet the accreditation standards.

- b. NGO's may submit a plan to IDEA for the accreditation of affiliate clubs, resource centers, teachers, coaches and judges.

The plan should outline how local accreditation committees are to be established, the criteria used for determining accreditation, and a grievance procedure for appeals. For more detailed information see [Affiliate Accreditation Process](#).

The plan should also stipulate that the rights, responsibilities, and rules for clubs, resource centers, coaches, judges, and students be publicly displayed. Any locally-accredited affiliate must agree to, sign and publicly display the appropriate mission agreement. IDEA has provided mission statements that establish minimum standards. All of the

mission statements provided do not have to be used. However, those that apply must be signed in order for the affiliate to be accredited. Local accreditation committees can add clauses to these documents reflecting the ethical code of the NGO. Local accreditation committees can also translate these documents as long as the spirit of the principles is retained.

3. The Formal Accreditation Process

The formal accreditation process takes place over a one-year period, and begins when an entity submits its application. Accreditation is an interactive process between IDEA and a speech/debate organization, and IDEA will provide feedback and support vis-a-vis accreditation to these organizations throughout the year. Speech and debate programs that do not initially meet the pre-established accreditation standards will be encouraged to develop those standards as the accreditation process proceeds.

Towards the end of the one-year accreditation period, an Accreditation Consultant will arrange an on-site visit to observe tournaments and clubs, conduct interviews, and lead a seminar. This visit will represent the culmination of previous conversations between the organization, the consultant, and IDEA staff and board members. The cost of on-site evaluation and oversight may require the assessment of an accreditation fee. However, IDEA believes that no organization should be denied access to accreditation simply due to a lack of funds. To that end, offsetting grants may be awarded, if necessary.

The Accreditation Consultant will summarize their evaluation in a report. The IDEA Accreditation Committee will make the final approval based upon this report.

To receive accreditation, an NGO must meet the four standards delineated in section II.A. (below). If an NGO meets a standard on a provisional basis, OSI/IDEA will provide training (upon request) to assist the NGO in securing a satisfactory rating for that standard. Once that standard has been met, the NGO will receive accreditation without repeating the entire accreditation process. However, if an NGO receives two or more provisional ratings, or has not met any evaluations, it must reapply for accreditation.

4. The Affiliate Accreditation Process (For more detailed information on this process see [Affiliate Accreditation Process](#))

Once an NGO's local accreditation plan is approved by IDEA, local accreditation committees can, at their discretion, accredit local clubs, resource centers, educators (trainers, teachers, coaches), and judges whom they believe meet IDEA standards and qualifications. Specific guidelines for the local accreditation of clubs, resource centers, trainers, teachers, coaches, and judges are provided to NGO's. Accredited trainers of affiliates who wish to become *internationally* accredited will have one year to submit their portfolios and fulfill the other accreditation requirements. Please see [International Trainer Accreditation Process](#) for more information.

If a club, resourcecenters, teacher, trainer, coach or judge seeks local accreditation but is not affiliated with an accredited voting member of IDEA, the individual or entity should apply directly to IDEA-NL and submit an application indicating that they have met the appropriate standards for accreditation.

In the event that an accredited voting member of IDEA loses its accreditation, the affiliates it has accredited will retain their accredited status as long as they continue to adhere to IDEA standards. The NGO, however, will no longer accrue activity points for those entities.

Local accreditation committees have the right to revoke accreditation status from a club, resource center, educator, or judge, if, in the opinion of the local committee, the individual or organization has failed to uphold the standards and principles upon which accreditation is based. Clubs, resource centers, educators, and judges may appeal this decision directly to the IDEA Accreditation Committee. The decision of the IDEA committee is final. Once accreditation has been revoked, the entity or individual may reapply directly to the local accreditation committee one year from the date of the original revocation.

In extraordinary circumstances, the IDEA Accreditation Committee may unilaterally revoke the accreditation of a club, resource center, educator, or judge if, in the opinion of the Accreditation Committee, that individual or entity has acted in a manner unbecoming of the standards provided herein. This decision is not subject to appeal. However, after one year, the institution or individual may reapply directly to the IDEA Accreditation Committee.

5. Duration of Accreditation

Once an NGO has successfully completed the formal accreditation process, accreditation lasts for three years, and may be renewed. Thus, for example, a program that successfully completes accreditation in the 2004-2005 academic year is considered accredited from 2005-2008. During the 2007-2008 year, the program would apply for re-accreditation. At the discretion of the Accreditation Committee, the re-accreditation process may or may not require another site visit. In order to update and reaffirm the original accreditation, information would be gathered on-line and through conversations. Changes made to the program during the previous three years will be noted and assessed.

6. Privacy and Transparency

In order to facilitate grant writing and the expansion of programs, IDEA may request from member organizations certain essential details. Basic information would be used to publicly identify and recognize IDEA members around the globe. Some quantitative data would be aggregated to present a more detailed picture of speech and debate in general, and its role in developing civil culture.

IDEA recognizes that member organizations need to maintain zones of privacy amidst their open exchange of knowledge and information. Accordingly, sensitive financial and human resources information is held in strict confidence, and is shared only with potential funders when such disclosure is required for a grant application or disbursement.

Accreditation standards should be clearly stated for both IDEA applicants and IDEA Accreditation Consultants. A transparent process ensures ease of use and an objective applicant evaluation. Familiarity with the standards and assessment process allows for flexibility in meeting requirements. Because situations and circumstances differ from organization to organization, it is left to the member group to choose the evidence that best represents their program. Applicants are free to submit evidence selectively, with the goal of demonstrating that their program meets the standards.

7. Revocation of Accreditation

NGO's can lose accreditation due to inactivity. Inactivity will be determined on the basis of data entered into [DebateTracker](#), the IDEA on-line database. Although member NGO's vary in size and scope of activities, an NGO must have at least four active clubs. Refer to the [Club Accreditation Process and Standards](#) for an explanation on the requirements for clubs.

At the discretion of the IDEA Accreditation Committee, revocation of accredited status, or the imposition of a probationary period, may be enacted as a result of complaints (submitted in writing) from interested parties. Members will lose accreditation only in the event that an egregious and clearly documented violation of the principles and standards established in this document has occurred; this will be determined through an investigation of the complaint by the Committee.

Voting members who lose their accreditation (for whatever reason) can reapply for accreditation after one year.

II. The Standards of Accreditation

IDEA seeks to promote and recognize speech and debate organizations that satisfy four guiding principles: (1) the organization has a stable and credible infrastructure, (2) the organization offers high-quality speech and debate education programs, (3) the organization provides regular opportunities for participation, and (4) the organization is committed to fostering inclusiveness. These four principles represent the underlying requirements for accreditation and are manifested in the standards of accreditation listed below.

IDEA will not accredit debate organizations that are not recognized by their local government as legal entities, or that fail to present transparent financial statements, or that concentrate authority in a single figure rather than dispersing the privileges and responsibilities of governance. IDEA will not accredit organizations that offer little access to training and education. Moreover, IDEA will not accredit organizations that promote speech and debate in name only and fail to provide regular opportunities for participation within their target communities. Finally, IDEA will not accredit organizations that exclude minorities or that undermine the values of an open society.

Please refer to the [Questions Asked and Documents Requested During the NGO Accreditation Process](#) for questions used in assessing an applicant's fulfillment of the standards.

A. The member demonstrates a credible, stable infrastructure.

IDEA believes that stability and credibility are directly connected, and accordingly seeks to accredit stable organizations that are capable of fostering on-going speech and debate education for their targeted community. In practical terms, an organization that follows generally accepted principles of accounting and subscribes to broadly recognized best practices for management is better able to secure partnerships and support (both local and external). A program's eligibility for IDEA funding is not contingent upon accreditation; however, meeting the standards of accreditation enhances an organization's appeal to other sources of funding, as well as potential joint-venture partners.

In order to make internal operations transparent to observers, an organization must keep its management and succession process simple. Accreditation provides guidance and incentives towards these goals.

1. The member is legally registered.

While specifics vary between nations, legally registered entities tend to operate with certain advantages over less formal organizations. Benefits may include preferential tax status, insulation from certain liabilities, and the ability for the registered entity to survive beyond the direct involvement and governance of its founders.

Legal registration usually requires that the organization adhere to certain limitations on its activities. Assuming that these limitations are respected, legal registration minimizes government interference in an organization's programs and activities.

In most cases, IDEA presupposes that speech and debate organizations will organize themselves and register as non-profit NGO's. If another organizational form is used, the reasons behind this choice should be clearly explained. Incorporated entities (such as English language schools) are acceptable forms, provided that they are operating for the public benefit, and do not seek compensation for IDEA created or sanctioned materials and services. In situations where a sovereign government restricts the registration of NGO's, IDEA's presupposition will be relaxed in favor of another organizational form.

2. The member has an independent board of directors.

While legal registration requirements vary, each member will be expected to have an independent board of directors (or any other group of individuals with authority to oversee the NGO). The board should be in a position to review the work of the NGO staff, and to replace staff members if necessary. Procedures should be in place to ensure that board membership rotates in an orderly fashion. The board should have sufficient power to ensure that the member entity is governed in an open and transparent manner, and in accordance with the standards set forth in this document.

3. The member is financially secure.

Financial resources for speech and debate organizations are frequently scarce, and means often fall short of ambitions. Accordingly, careful management of available monies will help to extend the life of a member entity. The demonstration of sound financial practices can reassure potential donors that their grants will be used effectively and appropriately.

Four principles of financial management will guide IDEA's review: (1) clarity of financial data, (2) diversity of funding sources, (3) follow-through on commitments and accurate budgeting, and (4) separation of interests.

- a. Clarity of Financial Data

Perhaps the single most important element of IDEA's financial assessment is an insistence on clear, straightforward financial reporting.

As often as possible, financial data should be supported by receipts and documentation; moreover, the highest governing body or officer in the organization should be required to receive and approve, in writing, reports on the finances and operations of the organization.

If the accreditation applicant is a membership organization, its constituent members should have the right, individually or through a specially-appointed body or organ of the organization, to examine and audit the finances of the organization.

Transparency should be employed in both principle and practice. As a principle, transparency implies that all activities of IDEA members are presented fully and frankly to interested parties.

b. Diversity of Funding Sources

Like IDEA itself, many IDEA member organizations attribute their creation to the financial support of a single donor. As organizations grow and mature, however, it is important that they not seek simply to replace one dominant funding source with another. Through accreditation, IDEA encourages organizations to seek funding from multiple donors and activities.

Some examples of funding sources may include: domestic governmental support on the national level, assistance from local and regional government bodies, international governmental support provided via embassies or aid programs, grants and donations from international foundations and NGO's, philanthropy from the domestic civil sector, contributions from affluent individuals, membership fees and revenues from activities, corporate sponsorship agreements, cash or in-kind donations from domestic businesses, and/or cash or in-kind contributions from multinational enterprises.

The guidelines for determining the sources of funding vary according to the length of the member organization's existence. During the first five years, there is no strict percentage of operating funds that must come from the aforementioned categories. During the 5-10th year, no more than 75% of funding should come from a single source. By the 10th year and beyond, no more than 65% of funding should come from a single source.

c. Follow-through on Commitments and Accurate Budgeting

IDEA believes that budget projections and commitments should correspond directly to actual activities. The stronger an organization's track record in accurately anticipating costs and expenditures, the more credible its proposals become to donors and partners. The organization demonstrates follow-through on commitments and budgeting by:

- (1) putting grants and revenues towards their announced purposes

Charging the same event to multiple donors, using money earmarked for a specific purpose towards another end, and manipulating reports submitted to granting entities are all practices which can disqualify an organization for accreditation. It is appropriate to count some percentage of overhead and fixed costs against a dedicated grant, but such charges should accurately reflect the percentage of manhours or organizational resources dedicated to the project.

- (2) accurately predicting and controlling its costs

The organization should, to the best of its ability, accurately predict and control its costs. Budgets should be established in advance, and should anticipate both cyclical and one-time expenditures. Debts and liabilities incurred should be dispatched quickly and fairly. A pattern of non-payment to service providers, international conferences, or other members represents grounds for disqualification of accreditation.

As a membership organization, IDEA-NL encourages and facilitates bilateral partnerships between its members. Such collaboration is markedly easier between accredited members.

d. Separation of Interests

Officers and board members of a speech and debate organization have a duty to exercise loyalty to their organization, and should maintain their fiduciary responsibility with care and diligence. A legally-registered entity should reserve the right to sue officers or board members as a means of protecting its interests or of seeking redress for violations.

Full-time officers and employees of a speech and debate organization should receive reasonable and regular compensation. Terms of employment should be in writing and included with financial statements. Employees who incur reasonable expenses should be reimbursed quickly; these reimbursements should be tracked and documented accordingly.

The following actions or scenarios undermine a policy of separation of interests, and should be avoided:

- (1) an inability to meet contractual obligations to employees
- (2) a failure to purchase services at market prices

Paid services contracted out by the IDEA member should be purchased at or below market rates. A competitive bidding process is encouraged but not required (particularly when a situation requires quick action). Under no circumstances should an individual with a direct leadership role in IDEA purchase services through a personal contact at rates in excess of fair market value. Financial transfers to such persons for goods or services will merit special scrutiny.

- (3) conflicts of interests with respect to commercial transactions within the organization
- (4) non-profit organizations serving as a vehicle for the accumulation of funds or benefits

Profits, if earned, should not be distributed. This prohibition should apply both to the direct and indirect distribution of profits (for example, using the organization to accumulate profits that are then distributed upon the dissolution or restructuring of the entity).

- (5) restructuring which transfers assets to board members, employees or volunteers

In the event of dissolution or restructuring, assets should never be transferred to board members, employees, or volunteers, but instead gifted to another educational, debate, or civil society-focused non-profit organization. To this end, Accreditation Consultants will examine frequent or cyclical restructuring or reconstitution of the legal entity that occurs for reasons other than the entity's stated public service goal.

- (6) a persistent record of "self-dealing"

Self-dealing is the use of influence within an IDEA member organization to conduct a transaction to the detriment of the organization or to the unreasonable benefit of the associated person.

- 4. The member communicates effectively and regularly with participants. (site visit)

IDEA believes that open and regular communication between a member and its internal constituency is the best way to attract and retain a broad base of participants.

Indeed, the very speech and debate activities championed by IDEA are based upon dialogue and upon the superiority of reason over settled authorities. Communication within the applicant organization should be predicated on these same principles. Plans and commitments should be arrived at through open dialogue. Priorities should be open to

discussion. The reasoning behind decisions should be explained. Procedures should be open to amendment and questioning.

5. The member has a sustainable, long-term plan (optional)

Long-range planning is a necessary tool in assisting a member organization to prepare thoroughly for future challenges. IDEA recommends that member organizations establish a long-range planning system that is formally documented on paper. This can assist the organization in several key ways:

- (a) Long-range planning creates a record of discussions and decisions.

Long-range planning allows for knowledge to be accumulated and a strategic vision to be refined. IDEA's evaluation of the strategic plan will be based on its clarity and adherence to professional standards.

- (b) By assessing where an organization is presently and where it wishes to be in the future, an organization can determine what actions should be taken in the short- and mid-term.

- (c) A formal strategic plan allows an organization's activists and visionaries to share their ideas with a broader audience.

Sharing a common purpose and acting in concert harnesses the efforts of participants and multiplies their efficacy. External partners and internal participants should embrace a common dream. Evaluation of the strategic plan in this regard will be based on the extent to which it effectively disseminates a common vision to partners and participants, and the degree to which there is "buy in" to the enumerated goals.

The strategic plan should be situation-specific and should specify an organization's goals. Such goals might include increasing the ranks of trainers, debaters, and judges; maintaining associations in the wake of funding cutbacks; introducing new events, formats or educational projects; bidding and preparing for a major international event (such as the IDEA Youth Forum); building an endowment fund; forging partnerships with other NGO's, and changing public perceptions about debate.

During the early stages of development, certain metrics of a speech and debate association (participating schools, numbers of debaters, etc.) can experience high levels of growth. These rates are not sustainable (nor always desirable) on an on-going basis. When assessing an organization's strategic plan, IDEA looks for targets that are realistic in terms of both logistics and funding. Accordingly, IDEA will look for an organization's goals to be matched with possible revenue-generating avenues.

B. The member offers fundamental speech and debate education.

- 1. The member offers trainings for educators and judges.

2. The member provides educational resources for teachers, coaches, students and judges. (optional, site visit)
3. The member integrates speech and debate into the academic curriculum. (optional, site visit)

IDEA considers speech and debate to be *educational* activities. To that end, members seeking accreditation are expected, via trainings, to provide speech and debate education to teachers, trainers, coaches, judges, and students. These trainings, moreover, should meet the distinct needs of these diverse groups. Some sample training topics include basic debate education, running a club, coaching a club, topic analysis, and judging.

Members seeking accreditation should conduct training sessions at IDEA-sanctioned trainings (please see [Trainings](#) as well as [Sanctioning Tournaments and Trainings](#)). These trainings should be provided for educators and judges, and should approach speech and debate as educational activities. Participants in these trainings should acquire and display knowledge about the fundamentals of speech and debate, including a grasp of its formats and rules. Training should acquaint judges with the means to provide educational feedback to students, the best written and oral methods of explaining decisions, how to evaluate individual speakers, and the best means of pointing out both strengths and areas that require improvement.

Training should stress open-mindedness with regard to style and resolutions, should be culturally sensitive, and should engage all participants. Trainings represent IDEA and at all times and in all circumstances should demonstrate regard for the principles of fairness and equality espoused herein.

The integration of debate education into a broader school curriculum is important for the advancement of any speech and debate organization's mission. Accordingly, members seeking accreditation should maintain contacts within their countries' educational institutions (ministries of education, teacher training and curriculum development institutes, etc.) and promote debate education through a variety of educational venues, such as conferences, roundtables, publications, and trainings.

Educational resources such as Internet access, newspaper and magazine articles, and books and materials on debate topics should be made available to students. While financial situations will often determine the amount of educational resources, the collection and distribution of these resources should be a priority. Moreover, any available educational resources should be accessible to all. Although not a requirement for accreditation, resource centers are effective for centralizing educational resources.

- C. The member provides regular opportunities for participation.
1. The member offers opportunities for judged events.
 2. The member organizes public events.
 3. The member provides a debate camp. (optional)

Members should offer frequent opportunities for participation. This is accomplished through offering judged, non-judged, and public events, all of which are open to high school and university students, as well as to the public.

A member should ensure that students have regular opportunities to practice their skills, and to this end should oversee the organization of events in their own locality.

Judged events should be hosted in geographically diverse locations, thus allowing access and participation to the widest possible range of individuals. Judged events should be available on the local, regional, national, and international levels, and be accessible to students of all academic levels. Judged events should also provide the opportunity for students to participate in a variety of events, in various formats, and at different levels of student experience.

Notwithstanding the competitive nature of judged events, the temptation to favor or to focus particular energies on highly-achieving students should be avoided. To this end, IDEA reaffirms that judged events should be accessible to *all* students wishing to participate. In furtherance of these principles, IDEA will, upon request, sanction tournaments that meet its standards (see [Sanctioning Tournaments and Trainings](#)).

Having gained essential skills and knowledge through speech and debate, association members have a moral obligation to “give back” to their communities. Accordingly, an emphasis on service should be an important element of an association. Associations should not only provide their members with volunteer opportunities, but should actively encourage participation in volunteer efforts. Participants in public events are asked to agree to and sign a [Public Event Participants Mission Statement](#).

- D. The member is inclusive.
1. The member engages in outreach activities.
 2. The member accommodates the needs of diverse populations.
 3. The member provides geographically accessible and diverse events.
 4. The member has a harassment policy.
 5. The member has a grievance committee for student and adult populations.

Members seeking accreditation understand that the teaching of speech and debate plays an important role in civil society. As such, they should seek to integrate speech and debate at all levels, and via curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular means. Members should seek opportunities to involve participants from diverse regions and locales, and should accommodate potential language differences. They should acknowledge and promote diversity by recruiting new members and by involving parents and the local community.

Members should encourage the equal participation of all students, regardless of background, ability, or likelihood of success. Coaches in particular should remain committed to fairness and equality in all their activities (including the recruitment of students, and in the coach’s capacity as administrator). As a means of ensuring maximum student participation, coaches should be willing to serve as judges at tournaments attended by their club.

For related information on IDEA’s commitment to fairness and equality, please see IDEA’s [Harassment Policy](#).

Members should also provide students and educators with a forum for the filing of grievances. Students should know that they have the ability to challenge the opinions of adults and that they have a mechanism for having their voices heard within the member organization. For related information see [Student Bill of Rights](#) and [Student Bill of Rights-Grievance Procedure](#). The grievance committee, however, should not be empowered to reverse the decisions of judges in debates.

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