

## Is ICAC an ISO Accredited Registrar?

From time-to-time we are asked if ICAC is an ISO Accredited Registrar. To this question, the answer must be “no.” But then again, neither is anybody else.

### **ISO Does Not Register Accreditation Bodies:**

In reality, ISO simply does not accredit bodies that seek to accredit certification programs (already the terms make the entire discussion a bit confusing). Suffice it to say – the ISO simply establishes the standards. It leaves it to others to determine if those standards are being met.

Their website states (under Choosing a Certification Body): *“ask whether the body is accredited. Accreditation is not an obligation and if an organization is not accredited it does not necessarily mean it is not reputable. Nonetheless, accreditation remains an independent confirmation of competence. Accredited certification bodies can be identified by contacting the national accreditation body in your country.”*

### **Some Nations Do Appoint Accreditation Bodies:**

In some nations the government has stepped in to determine who may or may not accredit certification programs. In the United Kingdom, for example, an organization known as United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). Most European nations have similar organizations established to provide accreditation services within their respective nations.

There is no such “approved” accreditation body within the United States, however. As a result, over the years multiple accreditation bodies have become established (of which ICAC is one) to address the accreditation needs of specific industries or market segments. Some of these accreditation services are for profit entities, however the majority are not-for-profit bodies that provide accreditation services as part of their mission.

### **So What is an Accredited Registrar?**

Perhaps some of the confusion comes from the marketing of those companies out in the marketplace who audit and accredit businesses to the ISO 9001 Quality Management Systems. These companies generally refer to themselves as ISO Registrars. If they have been accredited to do so (by the UKAS in the United Kingdom, for example), they may refer to themselves as ISO Accredited Registrars.

Once again, in the United States there is no sole authority empowered to accredit these Registrars. The Independent Association of Accredited Registrars (IAAR) was established to “facilitate consistency” between and among the various Registrars operating in the US. The IAAR is a membership organization and does not accredit the various Registrars. The IAAR also provides a North American perspective into the activities of the **International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF)**.

### **Alright, So What do the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) Do?**

The IAF is the international association of organizations such as ICAC that accredit certification programs. Established twenty years ago, the IAF states: “Its primary function is to develop a single worldwide program of conformity assessment which reduces risk for business and its customers by

assuring them that accredited certificates may be relied upon. “

As part of the application process to join the IAF, prospective member organizations must state (and provide evidence) that they comply with the provisions of ISO/IEC 17011 (the guiding document under which ICAC operates). The IAF, however, does not certify compliance with the 17011 standard.

**So, What's the Bottom Line:**

In the United States, anyone (for profit, not-for-profit, or even an individual) can establish a certification program. Hopefully that certification program will utilize some industry standard for guidance, but that is not a requirement. The marketplace will judge if the certification program is viable or not.

If that certification program wishes to become accredited (for enhanced credibility, quality assurance, or customer requirement), there are a number of accrediting bodies that can evaluate the certification program. Like the ICAC, many may rely on ISO/IEC 17024 for guidance during the accreditation process, however this is not required.

There is, however, no single body that accredits the accreditor. So it is simply a matter of due diligence on the part of the customer to determine if the accreditation body meets their needs and will deliver a quality product.