



MEMBERSHIP, GROWTH & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Accreditation and Credentialing: The Conflict Most Self-Regulated Bodies Miss

Where suppliers fund education and accreditation, conflicts arise that a board-focused conflicts policy may not cover

For a self-regulated profession, one not covered by the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme through AHPRA, the professional association is not simply one voice among several setting standards. It is often the main standard-setter. For a profession without a statutory registration scheme, the association's accreditation, credentialing and continuing education decisions often carry particular weight with employers, insurers and the public, even though other laws, such as consumer law and any state or territory code of conduct for unregistered health practitioners, still apply.

Which rules apply to your association?

The law depends on how your association is set up. A **company limited by guarantee** follows the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) and its constitution. An **incorporated association** follows its state or territory associations Act and its rules. A **registered charity** also follows the ACNC Act and the ACNC Governance Standards, and some Corporations Act rules are replaced for charities that are companies. Check your own governing documents, and get advice before decisions with legal consequences.

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A Real Conflict Of Interest In Education And Accreditation

Accreditation and continuing education activities carry a conflict of interest risk of their own. Where an association's conferences, continuing education courses, and professional guidelines are funded by commercial interests, such as product manufacturers, service providers, or suppliers whose offerings are relevant to members, real and perceived conflicts of interest arise. Check whether your conflicts policy covers these activities, not only board decisions. This connects directly to the conflicts of interest discipline this series established earlier, applied specifically to the accreditation and education function rather than board-level decision-making generally. An accreditation or continuing education decision influenced, even unintentionally, by a commercial funding relationship is not simply a minor governance lapse for a self-regulated profession. It is a direct threat to the credibility of the body setting standards for that profession.

The Best-Practice Benchmark Worth Knowing

Universities Australia and Professions Australia, the peak body for Australian professional associations, signed a Joint Statement of Principles for professional accreditation of higher-education courses in March 2016. It is a useful reference for associations that accredit university courses, but it is not a standard for credentialing individual practitioners or approving continuing education. For those functions, the board still needs to set its own expectations of transparency, independence and fair process, and treat conflicts of interest and dispute resolution as core accreditation governance concerns rather than peripheral administrative details.

Why The Accreditation Function Needs Its Own Conflict Discipline

The practical governance response is to treat commercial funding relationships and actual accreditation or standard-setting decisions as separate tracks, with the same disclosure and recusal discipline this series established for board-level conflicts applied specifically to accreditation committees, continuing education approval processes, and anyone involved in setting the professional standards members are required to meet. A sponsor funding a conference is a legitimate commercial relationship. A sponsor's product receiving favourable treatment in the accredited continuing education content delivered at that same conference is a conflict requiring the full discipline this series has already established, not an unfortunate but acceptable side effect of sponsorship funding.

- Recognise that, without a statutory registration scheme, your association's standard-setting decisions often carry particular weight, and govern its accreditation function accordingly.
- Apply the full conflict of interest discipline established earlier in this series specifically to accreditation committees and continuing education approval processes, not just board-level decisions generally.
- Separate commercial sponsorship and funding relationships explicitly from the content and standards of any accredited education those funds support, ensuring the two decisions are never made by the same conflicted parties.
- Benchmark your accreditation processes against clear principles of transparency, accountability, and fairness, using the 2016 Joint Statement of Principles where you accredit higher-education courses, rather than assuming existing informal practice is sufficient.
- Document accreditation and credentialing decisions with the same rigour this series has recommended for other high-stakes governance decisions, since these decisions are precisely the kind most likely to face external scrutiny. Give applicants reasons for adverse decisions and a documented internal review or appeal, heard by people who were not involved in the original decision.

An association's accreditation and credentialing function is, for many self-regulated professions, the single most consequential thing it does. Protecting the independence of that function from the commercial relationships that often help fund it is not bureaucratic caution. It is the difference between standards members and the public can trust, and standards that merely look like they can be trusted.

This is one of the practical governance topics built into our Association CEO course, alongside the papers, tools and frameworks that turn the principle into your board's actual practice. [Explore the course](#)

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BOARDROOM ACTION WORKSHEET

Accreditation and Credentialing: The Conflict Most Self-Regulated Bodies Miss

Turn the resource into evidence, a decision and an accountable next step. Keep the completed record in your association's approved board records system.

1 What is the issue or decision?

State the governance question in one clear sentence.

2 What evidence do we already have?

Record the facts, source documents and stakeholder evidence available now.

3 What evidence is still needed?

Identify the legal, regulatory, financial, member or operational information still required.

4 What is the agreed next action?

Capture the owner, timeframe and how the matter will return to the board.

Action owner	Review date	Board decision or resolution

General education, not legal, financial, tax, clinical or governance advice. Confirm specifics at the relevant primary source or with your own qualified adviser. Nexus Leadership is operated by Lipstick Consulting Pty Ltd · ABN 15 619 120 482.

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