

Alberta Culture and Tourism  
**Visitor Information Centre Accreditation Program**


*REQUIREMENTS AND APPLICATION*

*Alberta* 

## Background

The Visitor Information Centre Accreditation and Tourism Highway Signage Program was developed by the government of Alberta to support a provincial network of Visitor Information Centre (VICs) recognizable for their high standard in visitor servicing. By meeting specific criteria, VICs are committed to exceeding visitor expectations with a high standard of visitor servicing and VIC operation to create memorable experiences, extend visitor stay and encourage return visits, benefiting the community and Alberta's tourism industry.

## Benefits of Accreditation

- Eligibility to use the accreditation symbol.  **AVIP** This symbol represents quality in visitor servicing and signifies an Accredited Visitor Information Centre.
- Accredited VICs will receive new tourism “trailblazer” signs at no cost. The new signs will help visitors identify accredited community VICs when travelling and that your VIC provides a high level of tourism information services and promotes all areas of Alberta.
- The trailblazer sign will be featured in:
  - ✓ the Official Alberta Road Map;
  - ✓ the Alberta Travel Planner, Lodging and Campground Guides; and
  - ✓ on the TravelAlberta.com website
- Visitors' expectations will be better managed when your VIC offers a consistent level of service and professionalism from well-trained staff.
- Access to up-to-date resources, training and best practices.
- Local economic benefits resulting from increased promotion to travelers through the VIC.
- Participation in exit surveys of visitors or mystery-shopper style evaluations to ensure consistent, quality services are being delivered.



## Eligibility

All active Alberta Visitor Information Providers (AVIP) are eligible to apply for accreditation. Visitor Information Providers are facilities that provide tourism information and travel counselling to visitors and community members in a visible, consistent and high quality manner.

## Accreditation Application Process

Applications should be submitted by **December 1** for both budgeting purposes and to arrange for site visits.

1. Review the accreditation criteria and your VIC's ability to meet the criteria.
2. E-mail or fax in a copy of the attached application and the completed criteria checklist signed by designated signing authority to:  
*Cecilia Goncalves-Neath*  
**Fax:** 780-427-0778  
**Email:** [cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca](mailto:cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca)
3. A representative of Alberta Culture and Tourism will contact you to acknowledge receipt of your application and to verify your ability to meet all criteria.
4. Upon verification of your VIC's ability to meet all criteria, a site visit will be scheduled for an Alberta Culture and Tourism representative to conduct a confirmation of all criteria.
5. Following the site visit, a letter of approval or deferral will be mailed to you depending on whether your VIC has qualified for accreditation or not.
6. When your VIC is granted accreditation, you will qualify for trailblazer signage. Alberta Culture and Tourism will work with Alberta Traffic Supply (the provincial tourism highway signage contractor) to determine the number of signs and sign locations. Alberta Culture and Tourism will make arrangements for installation of the signs, and will pay installation costs (if applicable) and maintenance costs for **five** years.
7. An Accreditation Plaque will be presented at the Annual AVIP Fall Conference. Your VIC will receive year plates for the plaque for each subsequent year that your VIC continues to meet all accreditation criteria.

## Accreditation Criteria Compliance

All accreditation criteria need to be met on an **annual basis** in order to maintain accredited status.

Alberta Culture and Tourism may conduct periodic inspections of your VIC to determine adherence to the criteria. A consultant may also be contracted to evaluate VIC operations and visitor satisfaction through surveys and mystery-shopper style evaluations. These evaluations are intended to encourage and maintain a consistent level of service across the province.

In cases where a VIC has not been able to meet all of the annual criteria, consultation will be done with the operating organization to facilitate continued eligibility.

**The following is the consultation process that will take place to maintain eligibility:**

1. The operating organization will be contacted by Alberta Culture and Tourism to discuss the criteria in question.
2. Alberta Culture and Tourism will work with the organization to determine the best solution for enabling the centre to meet the criteria in question.
3. The centre will be given a mutually agreed upon improvement period (up to one year) to comply with the criteria.
4. The organization will update Alberta Culture and Tourism, during the improvement period, with any actions that have been taken to meet the criteria.
5. In cases where a centre is approaching their improvement period deadline and the criteria have not been met due to extenuating circumstances, a one month extension may be requested.
6. Should the operating organization fail to meet the criteria within the one year improvement period and extension, immediate decisions to address the criteria would need to be implemented in order to avoid the loss of accreditation status and the potential removal of the centre's highway signage.
7. If no immediate action is taken by the organization within the one month extension, the centre's accreditation status, listing on the Alberta Road Map and listing for publications on the Travel Alberta Industry website will be removed. The process for the removal of the centre's highway signage will also be implemented.
8. The centre can re-apply for accreditation the following season after all criteria have been met and addressed.

## Frequently Asked Questions

***What happens if we miss the December 1 deadline?***

If your application is not submitted by the above deadline, please contact Cecilia Goncalves-Neath directly to express your interest in the Accreditation Program and to discuss your application. The deadline is established for budget planning purposes, however, the program is intended to be ongoing.

***If our VIC does not currently meet all criteria, can we apply in the future?***

Yes. The program is ongoing. If your VIC is not able to meet all criteria at this time, you can apply in the future once all the criteria have been met.

***What happens if my accreditation application is deferred?***

Applications are deferred if it has been determined by Alberta Culture and Tourism that the VIC does not currently meet all criteria. In such a case, Alberta Culture and Tourism will provide advice on those criteria items that have not been met. It is our goal to work with you to achieve accreditation.

***What qualifies as an “equivalent training program”?***

A formalized training program that emphasizes hospitality, customer service and tourism product knowledge (e.g., through the Alberta Tourism Education Council) would be considered equivalent to Alberta Culture and Tourism’s training programs. Proof of program completion or prior review of an equivalent training program agenda may be required.

***What is required for the collection of visitor statistics?***

A summary of your VIC’s total visitation for the season is all that is required. You can submit this in any format, including reports generated from Alberta Culture and Tourism’s tourism database.

***What training opportunities are provided by Alberta Culture and Tourism?***

Each May, Spring Training and Showcase is put on by Alberta Culture and Tourism. At this event, VIC staff partakes in intensive training that highlights the skills and knowledge required to become exceptional travel counsellors. AVIP representatives are encouraged to participate in the VIC staff training and learn how to make a strong impact in their local VICs. Regional training sessions are also offered where practical at various locations around the province.

Alberta Culture and Tourism also offers a valuable workshop/networking conference for AVIP representatives, with topics pertinent to VIC operations and management. Attendance at this annual AVIP Conference is strongly encouraged.

***Questions?***

For additional questions or more information regarding the Accreditation Program, please contact Cecilia Goncalves-Neath at 780-415-6264 or email [cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca](mailto:cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca).



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*Please send completed application form and checklist to Cecilia Goncalves-Neath by:  
fax 780-427-0778 or e-mail [cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca](mailto:cecilia.goncalves@gov.ab.ca).*

We are an Alberta Visitor Information Provider that meets all listed criteria and are applying to receive accredited status and no-cost tourism trailblazer signage.

### **Applicant Information**

Name of VIC: \_\_\_\_\_

Operating Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact or Toll-Free Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Contact Information**

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Accreditation Criteria Checklist

Our Visitor Information Centre meets and agrees to the following criteria (please check):

The VIC has a primary purpose of providing tourism information and travel counselling to visitors in a visible, consistent and high quality manner.

The VIC is endorsed by the municipality as an official community VIC.

The VIC's operating organization is a not-for-profit legal entity.

The VIC is open a minimum of 40 hours a week, including Saturdays in July and August.

The VIC agrees to collect visitor statistics and send the total number of walk-in visitors for July and August to Alberta Culture and Tourism by December 1 each year.

The VIC displays current-year versions of all of the following:

- The official Travel Alberta publications (including the Travel Planner, Lodging Guide, and Campground Guide)
- A minimum of one official publication/guide from each region of the Province (South, Central, North, Edmonton and Area, Calgary and Area, and Canadian Rockies)
- The Official Alberta Road Map available for purchase

At least 25 additional tourism brochures promoting all areas of the Province

The VIC has access to sufficient parking to accommodate anticipated visitor numbers.

The VIC has a pay telephone or a phone accessible for use by the public.

The VIC has well-maintained public washrooms.

The VIC has wheelchair accessibility (parking, entrance and washrooms).

The VIC has internet access on site for travel counselling purposes.

The VIC's operating organization agrees that all staff, including volunteers, require training on an annual basis. This may be completed by participating in training programs provided by Alberta Culture and Tourism or equivalent training programs.

The VIC staff members are appropriately attired.

The VIC's operating organization understands that Alberta Culture and Tourism (or a designate) may conduct site inspections to ensure compliance with the above noted criteria.

The VIC's operating organization understands that a consultant may undertake an evaluation of their operation from time to time, through exit surveys of visitors and/or mystery-shopper style evaluations.

***As a designated signing authority for our Visitor Information Centre (VIC), I agree that our VIC meets or agrees to all the above criteria and qualifies for tourism highway signage.***

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of signing authority (Print Name)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*