



## UNITED STATES ACCREDITATION BOARD

### USAB AFFILIATIONS

There are a growing number of international 'Associations' and United States Accreditation Board (USAB) are especially cautious about aligning with too many of them. To do so would impact upon USAB in two significant ways

- (i) cost of membership and support
- (ii) loss of freedom.

Moreover in some cases, membership is not available because of 'closed shop' practices that allow only one accreditation body from each country.

USAB view is that commercial and technical freedoms provide significant benefit to clients and that membership of associations should be entered into only with great care.

Regarding freedom; the standards and guides produced by committees are, at their very best, a consensus and an average view of subject matter. In some ways international associations constrain progress. Their strong point however that is there is a degree of safety and caution that is reassuring to the general public.

A significant aspect of membership of some international associations is their exclusive nature. For example; IAF rules do not permit more than one accreditation body offering the same scope of accreditation from each country. Competition between accreditation bodies with different commercial models but similar technical ones is therefore prevented. This is considered a restrictive practice.

To date, USAB has been prevented from applying for memberships because of these rules and although some benefits of membership are perceived it remains a closed shop. It is regrettable in view of the contribution that USAB can make to the accreditation process that may be welcomed by others.

Many international organizations, such as IAF are private organizations that are established with no other remit or authority than to operate as commercial organizations. They have no legally assigned status (such as that which is assigned to United Nations Organizations or the International Monetary Fund nor is there any legal requirement for their members to be members. Nonetheless, USAB recognise that membership does have benefits in particular the credibility and prestige that such organizations may have built up in the marketplace even though these benefits may be subjective and are commercially driven factors.

The establishment of many international organizations is not enshrined in any particular law or item of legislation. However, practices have erroneously developed within some purchasing bodies including those of departments of state, in the mistaken belief that membership is a 'requirement'. In most cases this is not so and although any purchasing authority has the right to prescribe preferences and policies for procurement, a custom often develops that has no foundation in any technical requirement.

In order to redress the shortfalls of restrictive and misleading practice USAB is sponsoring Global Accreditation which is an organization with similar aims to IAF (in that it wishes standards of quality and technical excellence to be upheld) but with an open and proactive approach. Membership of Global Accreditation is not restricted to a select few (There is no franchise restricting membership to one geographic location), and its focus is upon the needs of the general public rather than the desires of its own members.

#### **In summary:**

USAB are not currently members of IAF, EA or IATCA for closed shop and for historical reasons. There is no technical requirement for membership of these trade associations that typically are commercial organizations although they are presented as non-profit making.

END