

Policies and Procedures for  
**SENIOR CENTER CERTIFICATION**  
[July 2009]

**WHY APPLY?**

1. Certification enhances a center's professionalism, provides accountability, assures quality, improves credibility, markets the organization, identifies excellence, provides a snapshot of the organization, and promotes consistency/uniform standards.
2. The Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) links funding to the level of certification.
3. Centers will receive a certificate of recognition from the Division of Aging and Adult Services identifying them as viable, fundable, and qualified providers of services within the community.
4. Centers gain the right to describe themselves as state-certified Centers of Merit or Centers of Excellence in their literature, grant applications, and marketing materials.
5. Certification eliminates the need for Home and Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG) Standards monitoring for Senior Center Operations funding.
6. Certified centers are recognized on the Division's website, which is often consulted by people in other states when researching places to move in North Carolina.

**OTHER CERTIFICATION AND ACCREDITATION**

Centers with a current National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) accreditation will automatically qualify as Centers of Excellence. They can apply for their certification by supplying proof of accreditation to the Division. The NISC National Accreditation is for 5 years and will be recognized by the Division for this period of time.

**APPLICATION PROCESS**

1. DAAS and the UNC-CH School of Social Work's Center for Aging Research and Educational Services (CARES) provide annual certification workshops to acquaint centers with the certification process. The center director (preferably) or at least one member of the team completing the tool **must** attend this training prior to submitting the SCOPE tool for initial certification. The center must submit the SCOPE tool for initial certification within three years of the training. If the person who received training leaves employment before the center submits the SCOPE, an alternate plan must be discussed with the Division.
2. Copies of the 2-page initial Application for Senior Center Certification, SCOPE self-assessment tool, and other important documents can be downloaded from the Division's website or requested directly from the Division.
3. The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is an important partner in the certification process, both to the senior center and DAAS. The AAA can assist with problem

areas and offer other help to the senior center. An AAA representative's signature is required on the cover sheet of the SCOPE tool before it is submitted to DAAS. This signature verifies that the representative is familiar with the senior center's completed SCOPE tool and documentation and feels that the center has no outstanding issues to be resolved. The Division will not accept the SCOPE tool or proceed with the site visit without this signature. For these reasons, senior centers should work closely with the AAA representative during the certification process. Specific steps include:

- (a) notifying the AAA when the center makes the decision to apply for certification
  - (b) including a representative from the AAA on the certification planning team
  - (c) keeping the AAA apprised of progress on a regular basis
  - (d) at least 30 days before the SCOPE is due to DAAS, submitting the completed SCOPE to the AAA representative and having documentation completed and ready for review.
4. Centers should develop a self-evaluation/certification work team that includes board members, consumers, and community members, especially members of the advisory group for the senior center, along with paid and volunteer senior center staff members and the AAA representative.
  5. The *Timeframe Covered by the SCOPE* listed on the cover sheet of the SCOPE tool determines what constitutes the previous year or five years for questions where the number of activities within a certain timeframe is counted. This timeframe will be provided to you in your "application received" letter. If this is an initial certification, the time frame will end with the date the completed SCOPE tool is due at the Division and begin 1 year earlier. If this is a recertification, the beginning date of your timeframe will be the first day of the month following the certification site review visit and the ending date will be five years after that beginning date. This timeframe should match the dates on your certificate.
  6. Centers must submit the 2-page Application for Senior Center Certification to the Division one year before you want your site visit to take place. On the application you must specify a two-week period during which you would like to have the site team visit. Submitting an application for certification does not obligate you to having a site visit. You may cancel your application and resubmit it at any future time (e.g., you do not have to submit it a year in advance). However, you may not cancel and reschedule more than once in a fiscal year.
  7. Upon receipt of the Application, the Division will: a) contact the center director to verify its receipt; b) schedule a date for a site visit; and c) schedule a date for the submission of the SCOPE tool. Division staff members will try to schedule your site visit during the two-week period you specify and will negotiate another date if necessary. To avoid a lapse or overlap in your 5-year certification period, centers are encouraged to choose a two week timeframe before your certification's expiration date.

For centers being recertified, please note that if for administrative reasons, the Division cannot schedule your site visit until after your certification period has ended, you will not be penalized. In such cases, your certification period will be extended

until the site visit, and programming that occurs between the ending certification date and the site visit may be counted.

In planning your work on the SCOPE tool, you should keep in mind two important deadlines:

- (1) Your completed SCOPE tool is due at the Division *one month* before the site visit. DAAS will verify this due date in writing when the site visit is scheduled. This will be the *Date Tool Submitted* on the SCOPE cover page.
- (2) Your completed SCOPE tool and documentation should be ready for review by the AAA representative *two months* before the site visit.

Here is a sample time line:

Senior center's plan for certification

October 15, 2009	Submit Application for Senior Center Certification. Requested site visit dates, October 15-31, 2010. (Site visit scheduled for October 17 by the Division.)
August 17, 2010	SCOPE to AAA and documentation ready for AAA review
September 17, 2010	SCOPE to Division of Aging and Adult Services
October 17, 2010	Site visit by the certification team.

8. The Division will assemble a site review team made up of a DAAS representative, an AAA representative, a CARES representative, two center directors from outside of the applicant's region (with an effort to have a one of them be from a certified center), and the Senior Tar Heel Legislature delegate from the applicant's county. The certification process is an "open-book test." Do not submit your SCOPE tool until you feel reasonably sure (and your AAA representative agrees) that you meet all of the criteria for at least Center of Merit. All standards in each section of the SCOPE tool must be met at the level of either the Center of Merit or Center of Excellence to gain certification or recertification.
9. Once the senior center submits the SCOPE tool, a representative from the Division and one from CARES will make a preliminary desk review. If the two of them need clarification to any questions or agree that the Center does not seem to meet the minimum standard for certification, the representative from DAAS will contact the center at least 10 days before the scheduled site visit and try to resolve the issue(s) by telephone or e-mail. If the problem cannot be quickly resolved, the Division may postpone the site visit until it becomes clear that the center can likely meet the requirements of Merit.
10. If a center does not apply for recertification and allows its certification to expire, any publication of certification status must include the dates of the certification period and the certification status will be removed from the DAAS Senior Center Directory. Moreover, the center's funding may be affected for the next fiscal year.

Once a center allows its certification to expire, the center may reapply for recertification at any time. However, the certification will be treated as a recertification visit and not an initial certification visit.

11. At the end of the site review visit, which is usually a one-day visit, the team will give the senior center its recommendation for certification. Following the visit, the recommendation will be given to the Division which will make the final determination. Within four weeks of the site visit the Division will send the center a certificate of Merit or Excellence along with a letter outlining the findings of the site visit. If the site visit is held and the center is not certified, it must wait one year to reapply.

### **CENTERS APPLYING FOR RECERTIFICATION**

Centers applying for recertification should follow all the guidelines about the application procedure. Because the five-year certification period is a long time, here are some additional suggestions:

- (1) Consultation with the AAAs may be particularly important in helping centers continue to meet the certification standards. We encourage centers to invite their AAA representative to conduct at least one mid-term review halfway through the certification period to assure that centers are continuing to meet the standards and are keeping sufficient documentation. The division has available a review tool that can be used by the center or AAA for this purpose.

- (2) Centers of Merit may wish to be considered for Excellence at the end of three years. At any time after two years from the original certification date, these centers may make an application for a site visit the following year, and if they meet the standards for Excellence, a new certificate will be issued for the following 5 years. Centers may make only one such request during the 5-year certification period.

If the site visit is held and the center does not meet the standard for Excellence, the center will continue to be certified as a Center of Merit until the end of the original 5-year certification period.

- (3) Because of the current economic climate, centers may risk falling below the minimum requirements during the 5-year certification period, particularly in the areas of services and activities provided, hours the center is open, full-time employment of the director, and training for staff members. If this happens, the center should contact DAAS immediately.

### **CERTIFICATION DATES**

A center's certification date begins on the first day of the month following the certification site review visit. However, if the site visit occurs in June, the certification will be dated June 30 rather than July 1. This would assure that the center would receive funding for the next fiscal year, which would begin on July 1st.

## **THE CRITERIA**

1. The SCOPE tool questions and the scoring instructions in the gray-shaded areas of the same document, give all of the requirements for certification.
2. Centers must pass [meet] **ALL** sections at the level of Merit to receive certification.
3. Centers are certified for a period of five years. A center that is certified as a Center of Merit may not be considered for Center of Excellence until the end of a three year period.

## **APPEALS PROCESS**

1. A senior center wishing to appeal an award decision must submit a written request for a hearing to the Division Section Chief, Service Operations Section, within ten (10) days of the award decision [date of report]. The hearing will be held at the Division of Aging and Adult Services office in Raleigh.
2. Within ten (10) days of receiving the request for an appeal, the Division will notify the senior center director/manager via certified mail of the following:
  - a. the location, date, and time of hearing
  - b. procedural issues to be heard
  - c. process by which the appeal will be heard and a decision rendered.
3. The senior center director/manager may bring up to two other people to the appeals hearing. One of these people may be the Area Agency Administrator for the region in which the center is located.
4. The Division reserves the right to have present at the hearing at least two representatives of the site review team and the Division attorney, if necessary.
5. Within ten (10) days of the hearing, the Division shall make a decision and inform the senior center via certified mail of the decision. This decision is binding.

## **SATELLITES**

1. When a center applying for certification includes their satellite(s)' space and programs as a part of the application packet, only the 'main' center will receive extra funding. The satellite(s) listed in the Division's directory (see definition of Satellite Senior Center below) will continue to receive the funding amount awarded to noncertified centers. In order for a satellite to receive the additional funding it must first be upgraded to meet the criteria as a full-time, multipurpose senior center and apply for certification as a separate entity. Satellites may not be certified independently of their main center during the 5-year certification period if they provide activities, square footage, or some other resource that the main center must have to be certified. However, if after three years both the satellite and main center have developed in such a way that both can be certified independently (the main center no longer needs the satellite's resources), the satellite can apply for certification. Consult with DAAS about such changes.

Satellite space and programs may not account for more than 25% of the total required for certification.

2. The definition of a Satellite Senior Center for the certification process is contained in DOA Administrative Letter No. 06-18, November 28, 2006: "Updated Policy-Senior Center Certification; Senior Center Definitions . . .")

A satellite senior center is an extension of a multi-purpose senior center (MPSC) and must be opened at least three days per week for a minimum of 24 hours and must be linked administratively to a multi-purpose senior center. Satellites must make use of appropriate facilities for its programs. Such facilities must be designed, located, constructed or renovated and equipped so as to promote effective access to and operation of its program and to provide for the health, safety and comfort of participants, staff and public. Facilities may be free standing or located in a larger facility with an area designated for senior center programming during specified hours.

It must be staffed by a trained and paid senior center manager who is capable of implementing programs during the hours that the satellite center is in operation. The manager must be available during the hours of operation of the satellite center and must be under the supervision of the MPSC Director. This position may not be made up of several part-time positions. The manager must have a written job description. Each employee must attend a minimum of eight hours of training on an annual basis, and must have received training in **at least one** of the following topics each year: first aid; emergency response; CPR; death and dying; Alzheimer's disease or dementia; blood-borne pathogens; HIV/AIDS; aging-related topics; management and supervision; or training specific to job responsibility (e.g., new computer software).

The center must offer at least two ongoing outreach activities, two annual events and five programs and/or activities on a weekly basis, not to include nutrition (if a nutrition program is offered, it is not to be included as one of the five programs and/or activities). There must be a written plan for transportation of participants. A list of activities and the hours they are offered must be posted within the facility. A minimum of two volunteers over the age of 60 must be utilized, with a written plan in place describing the duties of the volunteer. A representative from the satellite center over 60 years of age must be on the board or advisory committee of the MPSC in an ex-officio position. At least 80 percent of the facility space must be used for satellite center activities, and the remaining 20 percent may be used for office space.

The Area Agency on Aging makes the determination of whether the senior center qualifies as a satellite center.

## **SPACE REQUIREMENTS FOR CENTERS**

Senior centers must be a minimum of 4,000 square feet, of which 3,200 must be used for center programming. In determining square footage for programs and activities:

- Auxiliary facilities such as bathrooms and storage that are used primarily by center participants count in the square footage, while such facilities that are used only or primarily by staff do not.
- Kitchens and nutrition facilities may be included if they are also used for center activities.

Exception may be made to the 4,000 square foot requirement in the SCOPE Tool scoring section on a case-by-case basis. A center below 3,000 square feet is not eligible for certification. Centers between 3,000-4,000 square feet may request a waiver, but a total of 80% of the total square footage must be used for programming. The following circumstances may qualify the center for a waiver to the 4,000 square foot minimum:

- The building is a historic site and not permitted to have additional space attached.
- The program is very strong otherwise and space is the only criterion not met.
- The main building is more than 3,000 but less than 4,000 square feet, and programming is regularly scheduled at other locations. Up to 1,000 square feet from satellites or off-site programming may be used to make up the difference. In these cases, if a satellite is used to make up the square footage requirement, the satellite cannot become a certified center during the period for which the main center has been certified or recertified.
- A minimum of 80% of the space used at a satellite must be used for center programming as opposed to office space. For example, if the 900 square foot satellite is being used to makeup for a lack of required space at the main center, then 720 square feet (80%) of the satellite's 900 square feet must be used for programming.

In order to count space from other off-site programming locations such as a YMCA or recreation center, the following is required: (a) activity(ies) must be regularly scheduled and advertised; (b) there must be a formal Memorandum of Understanding between the senior center and the other facility; and (c) the senior center's staff or volunteers must have an active role in developing and/or implementing the programming. The amount of regularly scheduled off-site programming and average number of attendants will also be considered in making a determination. A written request for a waiver must be submitted to the Division with your application for certification. A waiver request will be looked upon more favorably for centers bringing their square footage as close to 4,000 square feet as possible.

**Note:** As of July 1, 2008, **all certified centers that requested and received a waiver** because they did not meet the minimum space requirements are grandfathered in and remain eligible for recertification.

## **FUNDING**

Whenever possible, certified centers will receive extra shares of funding from the Senior Center General Purpose allocation. The amount of each share will be determined annually by the Division based on the amount of funding available and number of certified centers. This means that the amount of funding will most likely change from year to year.

## **EXPECTATIONS FOR CERTIFIED CENTER DIRECTOR/MANAGERS**

Directors/managers of certified centers are expected to provide mentorship to other centers that are attempting certification, if asked. They are also expected to share documentation with other centers and should be willing to volunteer to serve on site review teams.

*7/1/09*