

Frequently Asked Questions

Recognized Service Organizations (RSOs)

1. What is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO)?

A tax-exempt service organization that is independent of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) but whose operations foster the mission and ministry of the church, whose program activities are in harmony with the programs of the Synod, and who agrees to respect and not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod, may apply for RSO status with the LCMS. Such organizations that meet these criteria, have applied for, and subsequently have been granted recognized status are RSOs.

2. Why does the LCMS have RSOs?

The LCMS seeks relationships with service organizations in order to extend the reach of the Synod. Together, the Synod and the RSO are able to address human, social, economic, educational, and spiritual needs that would otherwise be beyond the resources of one organization alone.

3. What is the history of the LCMS RSO program?

The Synod began recognizing service organizations in 1979. Since that time, the process for granting and maintaining RSO status has continued to develop. In May 2005, the LCMS Board of Directors authorized a comprehensive review of the Synod's RSO granting and monitoring process. An RSO process review committee was formed later that year to clarify and standardize the application process, improve documentation policies and procedures, and develop a uniform monitoring and review process. The new process was presented to and approved by the LCMS Board of Directors at its February 2008 meeting.

4. What are the recent changes to the process of granting and maintaining RSO status?

Based on the results of the review authorized in 2005, there have been significant changes made to the process by which an organization applies for RSO status, how RSO determinations are made, and how RSO status is monitored. Most of these changes impact the internal processes used by the Synod; however, some changes directly impact organizations applying for and maintaining RSO status:

- All organizations applying for RSO status are required to meet with the president of the geographically-based LCMS district in which the main office (headquarters) of the applying organization is located. The purpose of the meeting is to apprise the district president of the applying organization's work and to secure his support.
- When RSO status is granted by the Synod, every applying organization will be asked to sign a formal agreement document. RSO status is not in effect until the agreement has been signed by appropriate representatives of both the applying organization and the LCMS.
- RSO status will be effective for a period of five years from the signature date of the agreement. If the RSO would like to continue holding recognized status beyond the five-year period, the organization must reapply by completing a new application, resubmitting all required information, and re-qualifying for RSO status.
- The LCMS Board of Directors approved the establishment of an RSO Standing Committee that will review all RSO applications, assign the applying organization to the appropriate granting office or agency of the Synod for processing and status determination, and monitor the reapplication for recognized status every five years. The RSO Standing Committee will meet at least four times annually to conduct its business.

5. Who are the members of the RSO Standing Committee?

The Secretary, the Chief Administrative Officer, and the Director of Business Services of the Synod are *ex officio* members. An additional member is appointed to the committee annually from each of the three LCMS agencies or departments with the greatest number of RSOs.

6. Where can I find information about the eligibility requirements for RSO status?

Complete information regarding the criteria for RSO status is found in LCMS Bylaw section 6.2, LCMS Board of Directors Policy 5.9, and the sample agreement document that is included with all requests for an RSO application. Some of the key criteria for RSO status are:

- RSOs foster the mission and ministry of the church and respect and do not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod.
- RSOs provide for appropriate LCMS representation on their governing boards.
- RSOs include provisions in their governing documents to clarify that recognition by the Synod is not an endorsement of the fiscal solvency of the organization.

7. Does the parent organization's RSO status apply to subsidiaries?

No. If a parent corporation with incorporated subsidiaries, affiliates, or other separate entities as part of its organizational structure has RSO status, the parent corporation's recognized status does not apply to its separately affiliated organizations. If these organizations would like to benefit from RSO status, each must apply for and qualify for its own recognized status.

8. How does the LCMS monitor its relationships with RSOs?

It is the Synod's intention to develop and nurture close-working relationships with its RSOs. At the time of initial application and with every reapplication, all criteria as outlined in the application materials are evaluated to determine whether the organization is eligible for RSO status. During an initial application or as part of the reapplication process, granting offices or agencies of the Synod may conduct on-site visits of RSOs. In addition, the LCMS granting office or agency to which an RSO relates may have additional, unique requirements for its RSOs, which will be clearly communicated.

9. When did the new process of granting and maintaining RSO status take effect?

The new process took effect June 1, 2008. All new organizations applying for RSO status after that date were required to follow the new procedures. Existing RSOs are being required to reapply for recognized status; however, the schedule for reapplications will be staggered over the next several years. They will be given ample notice of the deadline for reapplication.

10. My organization currently has RSO status. Does that now end?

No. Current RSO status remains in effect until and while an organization reapplies for recognized status under the new process. As stated above, current RSOs will be given ample notice of the deadline for reapplication.

11. Are there fees associated with acquiring RSO status?

While there has been discussion of fees from time to time, there is currently no fee for acquiring RSO status.

12. Where do I get an application for RSO status?

Application materials are available [online](#), or you may request that the application packet be mailed to you by contacting the LCMS Office of the Secretary, whose contact information follows:

Office of the Secretary
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63122
800-248-1930, ext. 1415

13. Where do I send my application?

Please mail completed application materials to:

Office of the Secretary
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63122

14. What happens after I send in my application?

After your completed application materials have been received, your information will be submitted to the RSO Standing Committee for consideration and assignment to the applicable department or agency of the Synod. You will be notified when that assignment has been made. From that point forward, a representative from the department or agency to which your application has been assigned will be your point of contact.

15. If I have questions, whom should I contact?

If you are a current RSO, please contact the LCMS department or agency to which you are related. Otherwise, please contact:

Office of the Secretary
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63122
800-248-1930, ext. 1415