

# Chapter Twelve

## Team Leadership

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the skills the team lead will utilize during the visit and describes the team lead's activities. The audience for this chapter is anyone who has been or would like to become a team lead and it provides information for team members as well.

### I. Building a Professional Team

The team lead is responsible for ensuring that all team members can participate equally and effectively. Accreditation site visits occur in a variety of settings, including public and private higher education institutions, K-12 agencies, and charter schools; and it is likely that at least one team member will be unfamiliar with either the setting or type of institution. For this reason, an important part of the team lead's role is to describe contextual issues of the particular visit (e.g., institutional cultures and structures, recent changes in leadership, budget or enrollment issues), explain relevant terminology (e.g. "reflective practitioner," "critical theory," "highly qualified teachers"), and shape group discussions so that all members have opportunities to participate fully in making team decisions.

Much of the team lead's time is spent in close proximity with fellow team members, working on complex issues, and extends beyond the normal work day. During these activities, the team lead has the responsibility to set a positive, professional, and productive tone to ensure that the team works harmoniously and effectively within the COA framework for institutional accreditation.

The site visit is the culmination of much planning and effort by the institution and its faculty, administration, and staff. As a consequence, the team must accord the faculty, administration, and staff careful attention and professional consideration throughout the visit. Although a team's recommendation may have positive or negative implications for an institution and its members, the team lead cannot allow team members to be influenced by such considerations. The role of the accreditation site review team is to gather information about the institution and to determine whether the institution is satisfying the Common and Program Standards; the team lead must ensure that the review process occurs in an objective, evidence-based manner. The state-adopted standards of program quality allow and encourage institutions to create programs with diverse structures and curricula that reflect each institution's particular mission and vision for educator preparation. Team members must not impose their personal views or biases as they make determinations about the institution's success in meeting educator preparation standards. Instead they must allow the evidence as it is related to standards to lead the decision-making.

## **II. Communicating with the Team and the Institution**

The team lead's role in ensuring sufficient and effective communication within the team and between the team and the institution cannot be overstated. The team needs to clearly understand its roles and responsibilities throughout the entire process. In addition, the team needs a means to communicate what it needs from the institution in order to do its job effectively. Likewise, the institution should be kept apprised of the team's inclination with respect to its evidence-based findings, and given the opportunity to provide information and materials that are needed by the team. The team lead, in conjunction with the state consultant, plays this critically important role.

Prior to the site visit, the team lead collaborates to build an effective and efficient review team before the start of the site visit. This is often accomplished through e-mails to team members, welcoming them to the team and assigning each member specific work to be completed in preparation for the visit. A team conference call allows the lead to describe his or her leadership style and to establish expectations for the team's decorum and use of evidence. Team members become aware of preliminary questions or concerns identified by other team members and can keep those concerns in mind as they conduct interviews and document reviews in the event they identify information that might be helpful to their colleague. It also helps the team develop a sense of shared responsibility for reviewing the institution's programs fairly and objectively.

## **III. Decisions on the Standards**

While much of a team lead's time is spent ensuring that the team completes its assigned tasks while following COA regulations, the position's key role is helping the team members arrive at a defensible decision regarding each of the Common Standards, Program Standards and the overall accreditation recommendation. Since these involve holistic professional judgment, the team lead must conduct team meetings in a manner that fosters open discussion, attention to the evidence, adherence to the language of the standards, and a balance between the realities of human organizations and the need for maintaining standards. It is important to have sufficient information from enough different sources that the team can utilize a triangulation process for determining whether standards are being met. For example, if dissimilar responses about a standard are received from two or more sources or two or more team members, extra care should be taken to gather more information about the standard during the remaining time available in the visit. Standards judged as met must be substantiated by the evidence used in making the judgment. Similarly, it is important that any standard that initially lacks evidence of being fully met receives careful attention to ensure that adequate evidence is collected to guide the team's decision. In addition, the institution needs to be apprised throughout the visit of any evidence the team may need, but cannot find, in determining whether a standard is met.

Team leads must be fully conversant with the standards that are being used for the review, especially the Common Standards, including the definitions and operational implications of findings on standards. As the team deliberates, the lead should ensure that they have adequately reviewed and weighed all the evidence. Factual information about

elements of intentionality (is the absence of an item deliberate or accidental?), institutionalization of activity (was this done just for the COA visit or is it a long-standing practice?), recency (how long has this been in place?), and institutional politics (is the program affected by larger institutional policies or problems?) are important when arriving at these decisions. Information gained from single sources or that is significantly different from what other sources are providing should be viewed with great caution. One benefit of the Day Two team meeting is that it provides early feedback about the institution and its programs. That meeting provides a critical opportunity to identify discrepant information about a particular standard, or set of standards, and can alert the team lead to the need for additional information that must be requested on Day Three at the mid visit briefing so that the team can develop a finding that is supported by sufficient and consistent data. Team leads must use their expertise to resolve differences among individual team members during the deliberation process and to help teams reach decisions clearly based on standards. The most difficult decisions will be those where there is evidence, both, that the standard is being met and that it is not being fully met. Sometimes it may be useful to shift responsibilities among team members to ensure an adequate exploration, and elimination, of possible bias. Team leads need to blend patience with leadership to bring the team to a consensus decision. A preponderance of the evidence regarding a standard is sufficient for making a decision. Individual pieces of contradictory or inconsistent data are commonly found in accreditation visits, but their importance needs to be weighed against the entire body of evidence.

After decisions have been made on all program standards and common standards, the team needs to develop a consensus recommendation regarding institutional accreditation. This process is similar to the process used for determining findings on standards, but it requires the team lead and the team to operate at a higher level of generality and to account for larger amounts of information. Here, too, the focus should be on matters of quality and effectiveness of the institution and all of its credential programs. Team leads should seek to guide their entire teams through joint discussions about the overall weight of the accumulated evidence, balancing strengths and concerns. The team leads' understanding of the options open to a team under the *Accreditation Framework* is vital, as is their clarity that the team must arrive at a consensus recommendation for the COA that reflects the teams' collective judgment regarding the overall quality and effectiveness of the institution and all of its credential programs, when viewed as a whole.

#### **IV. Report Writing**

The team lead's role in the writing of the team report should be that of editor more than author. That is, the team lead needs to ensure that the report is a defensible document that fairly addresses the standards and provides the COA and the institution with clear evidence for all findings on standards the final accreditation recommendation. Focusing the team's statements on the combined evidence collected during the visit, while avoiding charged language, helps all readers understand the basis for the decisions on standards, makes clear the basis of the institutional recommendation, and helps institutions in making any needed changes.

The CTC staff provides a standardized template for reports. Team leads should familiarize themselves with this template and can help their teams make the best use of time by establishing clear expectations for the depth of information that should be provided when discussing a standard finding and by encouraging plain writing rather than artful prose. The COA appreciates clear and straightforward language to help inform their decisions. Use of action verbs, simple sentences, and focused commentary will help the composition process. Team leads may need to step in during discussions to refocus the debate, mediate differences within the team, help the occasional team member who stands alone on an issue accept the consensus of the group, find solutions to apparent stalemates on issues, or call a break in the action. Once the draft document is completed, the team lead may wish to do a light edit to gain clarity and consistency, but not make substantive changes in the language without team approval.

## **V. Final Team Report Meeting**

The team lead chairs the team report presentation with assistance from the CTC consultant. The time and place of the meeting will have been set by the institution, the team lead and the state consultant. Sufficient copies of the team's report should be available for all team members and institutional representatives. Attendance at this meeting is determined by the Dean or Director of the institution. While the exact format for the team report meeting may vary a bit, generally the state consultant begins by thanking the institution and discussing the site review process. The consultant explains that the institution has one week to clarify any factual information in the draft report but also reminds the institution that the team report meeting is not the time to argue with the team's findings. He or she will then turn it over to the team lead to discuss the findings of the team and the accreditation recommendation.

To help the meeting go well, team leads should remember to:

- A. Set a positive tone for the meeting and orient it toward improving the quality of educator preparation.
- B. Remind the institutional representatives that the purpose of the meeting is to present a summary of the findings and that no discussion about the findings will take place.
- C. Thank the institution's faculty and staff who have made your stay welcome and productive.
- D. Review for the institution the steps the team took to arrive at its determination. Note the number and types of interviews conducted and documents examined.
- E. Give a generalized statement about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the institution's implementation of its programs and then focus on the institutional recommendation.
- F. If time permits, the team lead may wish to discuss the program standards that were not met, or met with concerns.

The state consultant should end the report by discussing next steps, including making the report final and the presentation at the COA meeting.

Institutions generally understand the purpose of the meeting and are unlikely to try and argue with the team's assessment at the meeting. In the event this should happen, the team lead and the consultant should intervene, kindly remind the group about the purpose of the meeting, and help the team leave the room. Remember that the institution had an opportunity to respond to preliminary concerns during the Mid-Visit Status Report by providing additional or new evidence if available.