Chapter Seven:
Preparation for an Accreditation Site Visit

Introduction

This chapter describes the steps an institution will take to prepare for an accreditation site visit. The size and composition of the accreditation team are briefly described. The chapter provides detailed information on the procedures, activities, and decisions that precede the actual accreditation site visit which is intended as a guide for those who are charged with the administrative tasks of an accreditation site visit. The responsibilities of the state consultant provided by the Commission to the institution are listed and the consultant support and Two Month-Out Pre-Visits are also described. For more information about the accreditation team, see Chapter 10.

I. Scheduling an Accreditation Visit

Accreditation visits occur during the sixth year of the accreditation cycle. The Committee on Accreditation (COA) also retains the right to schedule more frequent site visits as a stipulation of institutional accreditation or based on reviews of annual data submissions, preconditions, or Program Review.

The institution will want to consider the following criteria in order to determine a date for the site visit:

- Select a time period when students are on campus, student teachers are in classrooms, and all stakeholder groups (e.g. candidates, completers, mentors/coaches, and partners) will be available. Be certain to avoid local school holidays, testing schedules when possible, major academic conferences and other times that will draw faculty away from campus or otherwise impede collection of information from program completers, employers of program completers, cooperating schools, or community members.

- The visit, if it is a merged accreditation visit, must be coordinated with the national accrediting body. If the visit will involve a national or professional accrediting body for one or more credential programs, early planning must be initiated.

- For IHEs, the most common schedule has the team members arriving around noon on Sunday and beginning their work mid-afternoon; for TK-12 institutions, the schedule most often selected has the team arriving on Monday. Exceptions are permitted to this rule, but they should be requested early in the process by the institution. Institutions with multiple sites, unusual class schedules, or other issues should also make these circumstances known early in the planning process.

The institution should identify the most appropriate dates from a series of dates proposed by Commission staff. The COA and the Commission must schedule the year's accreditation visits in a manner that does not adversely impact the staff. The Administrator of Accreditation will confirm the dates for the site visit and the assignment of a Commission consultant at least 8 months prior to the site visit.

II. Support Prior to the Visit

Once the institution has scheduled the accreditation visit, the Administrator of Accreditation will assign a consultant to assist the institution in preparing for the site visit. Additionally, the Commission will provide technical assistance, generally in the form of a webcast, to acquaint the administration and faculty of the institution/program sponsor with the *Accreditation Process*, to provide assistance to the institution as it prepares for its site visit and to address specific issues for different types of reviews. About this same time, the CTC's assigned state consultant will contact the institution for an introduction and to schedule a follow-up phone conference for a date after the institution has participated in the technical assistance or viewed the webcast. The purpose of this phone conference is to review the webcast and answer other questions that may arise. The institution may invite anyone it chooses to view the webcast, although it is expected that the Superintendent or Dean will participate.

Logistical and Budgeting Arrangements

The Commission is responsible for all direct expenses of the state accreditation team, including lodging, per diem, and travel expenses. The Commission is also responsible for (a) the direct expenses incurred by the Team Lead and the consultant in working with the institution on arrangements for the visit, and, (b) the substitute expenses for team members who are classroom teachers, if requested. The Commission will enter into a contract with the institution through which the lodging and meal expenses of the team members will be paid.

If the institution/program sponsor is planning a merged accreditation visit, the institution is responsible for the costs associated with the national accrediting body. This is also true if the institution elects to have one or more of its credential programs accredited by a national professional association.

The institution is responsible for covering the costs of assigned time to its faculty and staff for the development of reports or documents and collection of required data. If the institution elects to have a reception for the team or to provide snacks to the team during the visit, the institution bears the cost of these items.

The institution is responsible for the preparation of all necessary documents needed for the site visit, the establishment of an accreditation website accessible by team members, all necessary back-up documents and files to support the site visit, required data, and any other materials deemed useful to the team by the institution or as requested by the team. All materials sent to the Commission and to team members should be considered the property of the Commission. Any materials of value should be kept on campus and made available to the site visit team during the visit.

The institution is responsible for providing sufficient space on campus for a secure room for exclusive use by the team, space for all team members to conduct their interviews, access to telephones/technology for team members required to conduct virtual interviews, and if needed, computers to facilitate team writing. Access to a printer should also be made available.

The institution is also responsible for identifying, in consultation with the Commission consultant, an acceptable hotel in close proximity to the campus, arranging for meals for the team, and arranging parking permits or other forms of transportation during the visit for team members.

The institution is responsible for working with the Commission consultant to make all necessary arrangements regarding the interview schedules. The institution is responsible for scheduling the interviews, ensuring that an adequate number of interviews are scheduled for the institution and all its programs, providing parking for interviewees, assigning campus guides to direct individuals to their interview locations, and arranging for back-up interviews as needed. When necessary, institutions are encouraged to propose innovative arrangements for handling interviews (e.g., interactive audio and video connections or dispersed interview sites) and required to ensure that sufficient numbers of interviews are scheduled across all key groups.

In the case of a re-visit or the visit of a focused site team, the institution is responsible for making the same type of arrangements as noted above for an original visit, and is responsible for the cost recovery of extraordinary fees.

The institution is responsible for all expenses involved in attending the COA meeting in which decisions about the institution are being made. In the event of an appeal, the institution must bear the cost of making the appeal and attending any appeal hearings or meetings. If all standards are deemed met and accreditation recommendation is being made by the accreditation team, all efforts will be made to allow the institution to participate in the COA meeting via technology, when possible. If a re-visit is required as a result of the appeal, the institution assumes the costs under the extraordinary fee policies of the Commission and the institution assumes the cost for attending the COA meeting in which the revisit decision is being made

III. Preparation for a Site Visit

The COA relies on a comprehensive process of evidence collection and evaluation for the site visit. The *Preconditions Report, due during years one and four of the accreditation cycle,* provides current information about its responses to the preconditions, and provides information about the context in which the institution/program sponsor operates. Annual data submission constitutes the second element and provides updated information regarding the institution, including the number of current candidates per program, per delivery model, per location and the number of completers in the past school year. The *Program Review submission and feedback, along with the addendum* constitutes the third element, the documentation of how the program meets Common and Program Standards, and participates in on-going program improvement. The fourth element in the collection and evaluation of evidence is the team's review and analysis of supporting documentation. The fifth element is the array of interviews conducted with a broad spectrum of individuals involved in the program the faculty/instructional personnel, candidates, program completers, cooperating educators, advisory committee members, and employers of program completers.

1. Preconditions Report

Program sponsors will prepare a Preconditions Report to be submitted to the Commission during Year One and Year Four of the accreditation cycle. The institution must respond to Commission adopted General Preconditions and preconditions for all credential programs offered by the institution. The Preconditions may be found on the Precondition web page.

2. Annual Data Submission

In addition to required candidate competency and program effectiveness data, this includes information about the institution's demographics, special emphasis programs, and other unique features of the institution/program sponsor. The specifics about what data must be submitted and the definitions for the data to be submitted will be provided by the Commission. All Commission approved institutions must comply with all required data submissions for ongoing accreditation.

3. Program Review Submission

The *Program Review submission* must be provided by the institution in the year prior to the site visit. The *Program review* instructions are located on the Program Review web page and should include:

a. Letter of Transmittal by Dean or Director including verification by President/Provost or Superintendent
b. Program Review Exhibits (see full instructions for details about required documentation and evidence)
    - Program Description
    - Organizational Structure
    - Qualifications of Instructional Personnel
    - Course/Program Sequence
    - Course Matrix (initial/preliminary programs only)
    - Fieldwork and Clinical Practice

Educator preparation institutions have the capacity to produce electronic documents, spreadsheets, and documents with hyperlinks. The Commission encourages institutions and agencies preparing for site visits to utilize their electronic capacity and create a Program Review submission that is electronic. This can be done by creating websites with links to all documentation and evidence required within each exhibit. The website created for Program Review can be extended for use for the site visit.

Program Review Addendum

Program Review submissions are read one time. The BIR will provide feedback to programs regarding the preliminary alignment of standards once the Program Review is complete. Programs should provide a Program Review Addendum in response to the feedback, 60 days prior to the site visit. See the Program Review web page for details regarding the submission of Program Review Addendums.

Among its tasks, site team members will review evidence that substantiates, confirms, or contradicts the preliminary findings of the Program Review and Common Standards Review. Using information from the Program Review Preliminary Report of Findings, Common Standards Review, and the size and variety of programs at the institution, the Administrator of Accreditation will determine the size of the site visit team. If the Preliminary Report of Findings identifies concerns with one or more of the programs that cannot be adequately addressed in the Program Review Addendum, the site team may be expanded to include team members with specific expertise in that program to allow for a focused review of the identified program(s).

3. Campus Exhibits

Material and artifacts that cannot be posted electronically, should be placed in the document room on campus. Institutions planning to use multi-media presentations should confer with the Commission consultant early in the planning process. No less than 60 days before the visit, the institution should post all materials on the accreditation web page and provide access to the site visit team.

4. Scheduling Interviews

It is the institution's responsibility to set up the interview schedule for both the Common Standards reviewers and the Program Sampling reviewers. Programs should develop interview schedules in consultation with the Commission consultant. Since the time available to the team is limited and COA policy dictates that sufficient numbers of individuals from all constituent groups be interviewed, **creating a workable interview schedule is a critical task for the institution and should receive as much attention as document preparation for the Site Visit.** A matrix identifying interviewees can be found in Appendix B.

It is very important that the interviews occur in a room that is secure and private. Interviewees who believe their comments might be overheard by others may be less willing to identify concerns or problems they are experiencing in the program. The same consideration needs to be made for interviews using technology or phones; team members need to feel that their responses and questions are not being overheard by anyone associated with the program, institution, or agency.

Who Should be Scheduled for Interviews by the Team

Site visit team members interview persons involved in the development and coordination of the programs, the preparation of the candidates, and those who employ program completers. These interviewees come from the credential program and partner school districts. Institutions should provide information to the team about how interviewees were selected from each constituency group.

A list of persons who are typically scheduled for interviews is noted below:

Candidates
Beginning candidates (very small number)
Middle of program candidates (larger number than beginning candidates)
Candidates who are nearing completion, especially those in student teaching and/or field experiences (majority of candidates interviewed)
Candidates enrolled in the various pathways to each credential that the program offers

Master Teachers/Clinical Supervisors/Support Providers
Currently working with candidates or have worked with a candidate in the past year. If the professional development school model is used, then the bulk of the interviews should be with the cooperating faculty from participating schools.

Administrators
From schools where candidates and student teachers are placed, and/or who assist with field work placements. These should be school sites where placements are routinely made or program participants are working. If the program works with multiple school districts, representation from a broad spectrum of districts is required.

Program Completers
Completers from the two previous years. In cases where most program completers leave the area, it may be necessary to go back one more year to ensure that a sufficient number of interviews are conducted. If necessary, technology can be used to interview completers who have left the area to ensure that the interviews adequately represent individuals who have completed the credential program.

Employers of Program Completers
School District Personnel Office Administrators
School Site Principals

Administration and Faculty of the Institution
President/Superintendent (optional unless merged CAEP/COA visit)
Academic Vice-President/Deputy Superintendent
Chief Financial Officer of Institution
Dean of the College or School of Education/Director
Chairs of the involved Departments
Program Coordinators of each credential program
Field Supervisors in each credential program
Professors and Instructors from each credential program (Full-time and Part-time)
Credential Analyst

Advisory Committee for credential programs

Partner Organizations
Any TK-12 district, school, or Institution of Higher Education partners that provide advice and/or oversight of the programs
Any community organizations that play an important role in the program
Relevant vendors or contractors that provide instructional or other educational services for the program

Institutions that have satellite campuses must ensure that a representative sample of each category of stakeholder at each satellite campus is scheduled for interviews. If the satellite locations cannot be readily accessed by car and are a short distance, it might be necessary to establish a telephone or electronic connection to permit the interviews to occur. Review teams cannot, with confidence, develop program findings or accreditation recommendations if they have not interviewed enough candidates, faculty, completers, and administrators from satellite areas. The responsibility rests with the institution to anticipate the need to for adequate interviews with off-campus constituencies. If the dean or director of an institution has concerns about off-campus interviews, that person must talk with the institution's assigned consultant. Review teams will not be traveling to other locations to conduct interviews.

NOTE: The number of individuals to be interviewed will vary by category and program, and will depend upon program size, relative "importance" to the credential preparation program, availability, and location of the interviewees. For a small credential program, generally everyone associated with the program will be interviewed. Specific problems with interview sample size must be discussed well in advance of the visit with the Team Lead and the Commission consultant.

Selection of Interviewees
The institution should begin assembling lists of potential interviewees 4-6 months before the visit. The names of current candidates and completers should be assembled as soon as practicable in the months prior to the visit. Faculty who teach or provide services in the program should be alerted to the visit dates to ensure their availability. Special arrangements may be necessary for part-time faculty or faculty on early retirement or sabbatical leave.

Candidates and program completers may be interviewed in small groups (8-20 individuals). Faculty and field supervisors may be interviewed in small groups (3-10 individuals) and administrators should be interviewed individually. <u>Telephone interviews, videoconferencing, and other means of conducting the interviews are useful when travel is difficult or where program completers work at significant distances from the campus.</u>

It is essential that representation from all stakeholder groups (faculty, staff, candidates, program completers, employers, and district-employed supervisors) for each approved credential program be available for interview. In addition, if the program is provided at satellite locations or through distance learning, stakeholders from these locations must be included. A matrix of interviewees by Common Standards is shown in Appendix B.

Review of Interview Schedules by Team Lead

A rough draft of the interview schedule must be available at the Two-Month Out Pre-Visit and the interview schedule should be finalized approximately three weeks before a site visit. When the schedule is complete, it is sent to the Commission consultant and the Team Lead for their final review. Not having the interview schedule well in advance of the site visit is likely to cause significant issues and may result in the team not being able to gather all the relevant information they need to make a decision. Institutions are urged to avoid this problem. Once any changes are made by the Team Lead, the schedule will be followed as amended. Late additions to the schedule, if needed, should be clearly noted.

Additional Notes on Creating an Interview Schedule

The interview schedule should be thought of as a table with one column for each team member. A time frame on the left margin gives the number of allowable slots for the interviews. Whenever possible, the scheduler should be cognizant of teaching and travel schedules. Generally, all faculty who teach full-time in the program should be on campus for interviews during the visit. Programs with heavy afternoon and evening classes will need to work with the Commission consultant to balance the time commitments of the team. Scheduling interviews during the late afternoon of the first full day will be critical for campuses with evening classes. If getting to the institution is a challenge, interviews may take place via technology. Institutions selecting this option should discuss the specific needs with the commission consultant well in advance of the visit.

The most frequent concerns expressed by Team Leads/members relate to lengthy introductions which delay the onset of the interviews, gaps in the interview schedule, significant imbalances in the numbers of interviews scheduled, and insufficient privacy for sensitive interviews. Institutions are urged to attend to these concerns. Interview schedules should also include adequate breaks for team members to examine documents and other evidence.

Institutions are encouraged to not just “invite” interviewees, but to take steps to ensure they will actually attend. Confirmation calls in the days just prior to the visit are advisable. Schedulers are urged to think about over-booking slightly to account for individuals that may not make the interview, to avoid, if possible, scheduling one constituency (e.g., program completers) into only one afternoon, and to entice off-campus constituents with additional reasons to make the journey to campus. The institution may also wish to combine an alumni event, professional development offering, or some special activity with group interviews to encourage candidates, program completers, master teachers, and district-employed supervisors to come to the campus. A final option is to have someone available to make stand-by calls or to provide the names and telephone numbers of individuals who could be interviewed by telephone.

Given the importance of the interview process to the final team recommendation and the complexities of bringing large numbers of people on and off campus, institutional planning teams should begin early to develop plans for handling this element of the program evaluation.

IV. The Accreditation Site Team Daily Schedule

The length of each accreditation site visit will depend a number of factors including the number and size of the programs, enrollment, and the results of the Common Standards and program standards reviews processes. Generally, the length of a visit for a larger institutions with many programs will be 4 days, while smaller institutions with one or two programs will likely be 3 days in length. Again, however, the specific facts surrounding the particulars related to the institution and its programs will determine the length of time of the visit. The information presented below is provided as general guidelines as to the length and structure of a typical accreditation visit. The Commission consultant will work with the institution and the Team Lead to ensure the appropriate number of days and structure for the visit that will allow the team to accomplish its objectives.

Day One:
The team arrives at its hotel site sometime before noon. Some examples of Day 1 activities include:

- Orientation
- Team meeting
- Document/Evidence review
- Interviews
- Presentation and Overview of Institution and Its Programs by Institutional Leadership

Day Two
The first full day of the accreditation visit is devoted to document review and interviews with samples of all major interest groups -- faculty, administration, candidates, program completers, employers of program completers, district-employed supervisors, program providers, advisory boards, cooperating school personnel, and community members. The team schedule created by the institution must allow sufficient time during the day for document review and team meetings. Interviews should not be scheduled after 6:00 p.m. without agreement by both the Team Lead and the Commission consultant.

Day Three
The second full day of the accreditation visit can duplicate the first full day. The team schedule created by the institution must include time for a mid-visit meeting early in the morning to permit the Team Lead to share with representatives of the institution (a) areas where the standards appear not to be fully satisfied, and (b) requests for additional information pertaining to those standards. Interviews should conclude by 4:00 p.m., if at all possible, to ensure the team will have sufficient time to conclude its activities.

Day Three evening
The evening of the second full day is set aside for report writing by the team and no other activities can be scheduled. During this time, individual members will report their findings about each program and the team will deliberate about its accreditation recommendation. Once the team agrees on the program findings and recommendation, the program reviewers, Team Lead, and state consultant will write their various portions of the report. If possible, a complete draft of the report will be completed this evening.

Day Four
The morning of the third day, the team meets at the hotel so that all members have an opportunity to read and comment on the draft report. As soon as all edits are completed, the team and state consultant will prepare to present a summary of the team's findings and accreditation recommendation to the institution.

Exit Report
By mid-morning or early afternoon, the team presents a summary of its findings and the recommendation to the institution. The institution may invite anyone to attend this presentation of the report. Usually, the Team Lead and state consultant hold a private briefing meeting with the dean or director to provide a review of the report and answer any questions.

Report to the COA
Within one to two months following the site visit, the Team Lead will make a presentation of the team's findings during a regularly noticed public meeting of the COA. The institution may invite anyone to attend this public presentation of the accreditation team's report. The COA will make an accreditation determination after hearing the report from the Team Lead and a response from the institution.

V. Special Circumstances

According to the *Accreditation Framework*, the COA makes a single decision about the continuing accreditation of educator preparation at each institution (college, university, school district, county office of education or other entity), including a decision about the specific credentials for which an institution may recommend candidates. Because of that, the following special circumstances need attention:

1. **Off-Campus Programs, Distance Learning Programs, Extended Education Programs, Consortiums, and Professional Development Centers** - Information about all sites where programs are offered must be a part of the planning for the accreditation visit. Interviews must be scheduled to represent participants at all sites. If necessary, members of the accreditation team may be asked to conduct interviews via technology. In some cases, the team size may be increased to facilitate the gathering of data from multi-site institutions. It is expected that the Commission's standards are upheld at all sites where the programs of the institution are offered. Information from the various sites will be a part of the accreditation decision made about the institution.

2. **Programs Not Assigned to the School of Education** - Even though a particular credential program may reside outside of the school of education at an institution, it is considered to be a part of the Education Unit, and will be included in the accreditation visit and will be affected by the single accreditation decision that is made about the institution. The education unit is considered, by the Commission, to be responsible for assuring program quality for all credential preparation programs.

3. **Cooperative Programs Between Institutions** - Since the accreditation decision is made about the institution and all of its related programs, cooperative programs between institutions must be included in the accreditation visit and treated as a part of each institution's accreditation visit. An accreditation decision made at one institution that co-sponsors a cooperative program may be different than the decision made at another institution that co-sponsors the same program.

4. **Other Special Circumstances** - As other special circumstances arise, the COA will develop policies and procedures to address them.

VI. Accreditation Findings, Accreditation Recommendations and Team Report

The accreditation team report includes a statement about the team's accreditation recommendation, summary information about the standards findings of the team, and summary information about the institution and its programs. The report includes a table that identifies for each program, how many standards apply to the program, and, separately, how many of those standards were met, met with concerns, and not met.

Accreditation Team Recommendations

Once the team reaches consensus about program and Common Standards findings, the team must deliberate on its accreditation recommendation. For a thorough discussion of the accreditation recommendations and their operational implications, see Chapter 8. The Team Lead and Commission consultant will support the team as it determines whether the findings of the institution and its programs support a recommendation for Accreditation or whether the findings are substantive enough to warrant a recommendation of Accreditation with Stipulations, or Denial of Accreditation. There are three levels of Accreditation with Stipulations:

Accreditation with Stipulations
Accreditation with Major Stipulations
Accreditation with Probationary Stipulations

In the event an institution fails to address stipulations assigned by the COA within the time period determined by the COA, a subsequent review team may recommend Denial of Accreditation (See Chapter 8).

Should there be situations that are so serious where Denial of Accreditation would be the most responsible course of action for an agency responsible for oversight of educator preparation programs, the review team may recommend Denial of Accreditation.

VII. Activities after the Site Visit

Committee on Accreditation Actions

Following the site visit, the Commission consultant will assist the Team Lead in preparing the team recommendation for submission to the COA. At the COA meeting, the Team Lead and Commission consultant will present the site report and the accreditation recommendation. The institutional representatives will be present and will have an opportunity to make a statement, although it is not the time to dispute the findings. The COA will deliberate about the report and act upon the recommendation, deciding whether to accept or modify the recommendation. The COA will include in its accreditation action any stipulations placed on the institution, the due date by which the institution must remedy any stipulations, and whether a seventh year report or a revisit should occur. For a thorough discussion of the seventh year report, see Chapter Nine.

Appeal Procedures

In the event the institution believes the site review team demonstrated bias or acted arbitrarily or capriciously or contrary to the policies of the *Framework* or procedural guidelines, it may appeal the team recommendation to the COA within 30 days of its decision (see *Accreditation Framework, page 20)*.

The institution may also file a dissent with the Commission regarding the action of the COA. In that case, the Commission consultant will help the Team Lead prepare for and present the review team perspective.

Committee on Accreditation Actions

Every member of the COA receives a copy of the accreditation team report ten days prior to the scheduled meeting where the institution's report will be discussed. Members study the materials in advance of the meeting and are prepared to ask for clarification and to discuss their perspectives of the report and the findings. The COA may not refute the findings of the site review team. The COA's task is to review the standards findings and to discuss the accreditation recommendation in light of the findings. Following deliberations, the COA will vote on an accreditation status and will specifically identify any stipulations to be placed on the institution and the means by which the stipulations may be removed.