

Chapter Twelve

Team Lead Responsibilities

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the skills the team lead will use during the visit and describes the team lead's activities.

I. Establishing a Professional Team

The team lead is responsible for ensuring all team members can participate equally and effectively. Because accreditation site visits occur in a variety of settings, including public and private higher education institutions, PK-12 agencies, and charter schools, 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, which extends beyond the normal workday, is spent in close proximity to fellow team members working on complex issues. During these activities, the team lead has the responsibility to set a positive, professional, and productive tone to make sure 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. Consequently, 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 aligned with the Common Standards and program standards. The team lead must ensure that the review process occurs in an objective, evidence-based manner.

II. Communicating with the Team and the Institution

The team lead ensures that effective communication occurs within the team and between the team and the institution. All communication is routed through the team lead and the Commission staff consultant. 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 lead establishes a plan to communicate what the team needs from the institution in order to do its job effectively and determine alignment with standards. 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 Commission staff consultant, plays this critically important role.

Prior to the site visit, the team lead and Commission staff consultant work together to thoroughly prepare the site visit team. This is often accomplished through emails to team members welcoming them to the team and assigning each member specific work to be completed in preparation for the visit. A subsequent team meeting allows the team lead to describe his or her leadership style and to establish expectations for the team's decorum and use of evidence. Frequent communication to ensure the team members understand how to prepare for the site visit and accomplish pre-visit tasks is critical.

In addition, the team lead confirms the logistics for the visit affords a successful visit. Among the most critical of these is ensuring the team will have an interview schedule that allows them to gather the information needed. Reviewing these schedules and providing input and changes to the institution is important, as is reviewing the materials on the accreditation website in advance for navigability and ease of use. Finally, working with the institution to resolve any issues or complications in advance of the visit will help minimize any issues that arise during the visit.

III. Decisions on the Standards

While much of a team lead's time is spent assisting the team as it completes its assigned tasks while following COA procedures, the team lead'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 this work involves some degree of 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. Standards findings must be substantiated by the evidence used in making the judgment. It is important that any standard which 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 additional evidence the team may need in determining whether a standard is met.

Team leads must be fully conversant with the common standards and the program standards being used for the review. As the team deliberates, the lead makes certain they have adequately reviewed and weighed all the evidence.

Team leads need to blend patience with leadership to bring the team to a consensus decision about whether standards have been met. A preponderance of the evidence regarding a standard is sufficient for making a decision. During team discussions, team leads may be called on to refocus the debate, mediate differences within the team, help the team reach a group consensus, find solutions to apparent stalemates on issues, or call a break in the action.

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. The focus of this decision should be on matters of quality and effectiveness of the institution and all its credential programs. Team leads guide their entire team through joint discussions about the overall weight of the accumulated evidence, balancing strengths and concerns.

IV. Report Writing

The team lead is responsible for drafting portions of the team report and reviewing and editing the full report. The team lead ensures 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 as well as the final accreditation recommendation. Focusing the team's statements on the combined evidence collected during the visit, while avoiding hyperbole and generalities, helps all readers understand the rationale for the decisions on standards, makes clear the basis of the institutional recommendation, and helps the institution make any needed changes.

Once the draft document is completed, the team lead reviews and suggests any necessary edits for clarity and consistency.

V. Final Team Report Meeting

The team lead chairs the summary site visit report presentation with assistance from the Commission consultant. The time and place of the meeting are set by the institution, the team lead, and the state consultant.

At the exit report with the institution the team lead will:

- 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 the site visit team review welcome and productive.
- D. Review for the institution the steps the site visit team took to arrive at its determination. The team lead should note the number and types of interviews conducted and documents/evidence examined.

- E. Review the findings for all Common Standards and program standards. Communicate the overall accreditation recommendation, which will be presented to the Committee on Accreditation (COA), and identify any proposed stipulations.

- F. Team Leads may provide a generalized/summary statement about the relative strengths and weaknesses of the institution's implementation of its programs. These should be carefully phrased so as not to contradict any statements in the report or send mixed messages to the institution.

The state consultant will end the team report meeting 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 argue with the team's assessment. In the event this should happen, the team lead and the consultant should intervene, kindly remind the group about the purpose of the meeting. They can remind the institution they had an opportunity to respond to preliminary concerns during the Mid-Visit Status Report by providing additional or new evidence, if available.