

### Accreditation Commission for Programs

*In Hospitality Administration*

**MANUAL FOR TEAM MEMBERS CONDUCTING A SITE VISIT**

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ACPHA

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**INTRODUCTION**

In the evaluation process, the interaction between the Commission on Accreditation and a hospitality administration/management program can be summarized as follows.

1. The Program looks at itself and speaks to the Commission through its Self-Study Report.
2. A team of experienced peers, appointed by the Commission, appraises and advises the Program through an evaluation site visit team report.
3. The Program replies to the Site Visit Team report in a written response addressed to the Commission.
4. The Commission, after considering the information derived from the preceding three steps, determines accreditation status. The Commission alone makes accreditation decisions.
5. The Program, as part of its ongoing evaluation and planning process, continues to consider and act on the results of its own Self-Study Report and the advice it has received.

Through this process, the Commission on Accreditation places primary emphasis on improving the quality of hospitality administration/management programs and emphasizes evaluation in terms of the objectives of each program considered.

In seeking accredited status, then, the Program accepts the obligation of engaging in a rigorous self-study process to clarify its specific objectives, to assess realistically its success in attaining them, and to develop means of increasing its educational effectiveness. A team of experienced colleagues visits the Program for an on-site evaluation based on the Self-Study Report. The Chair is a member of the team.

The team visit to the Program is important for two reasons.

1. It provides an opportunity to verify the information submitted in the Self-Study Report. The team members can derive additional data clarifying the written report, which enables them to probe more deeply on some issues and inquire about areas in programmatic life not adequately covered in the Self-Study Report.
2. It aims to stimulate growth and development in the Program. The awareness that a team of peers is going to be on-site to verify the Self-Study Report often induces a more critical self-examination. Further, the interchange of information and viewpoints and the raising of important questions and issues in interviews should inspire insights and encouragement in reassessing what has been done and in consideration of ideas that may enhance the Program.

Accreditation is measuring all programs by a uniform set of standards by making responsible judgments about the effectiveness of how educational programs meet these uniform set of standards. Your service as a team member will contribute significantly to this important work.

**BEFORE THE VISIT**

1. **Arrangements for the Site Team**
2. The Commission Executive Director writes a letter to the Program Administration about the composition of the team. The Program Administrator must approve the composition of the site visitation team.
3. Once the team is approved, you will receive information such as the team roster, the final dates of the visit, the Self-Study Report, and any supporting documentation.
4. The Team Chair will begin working with the Program Administrator on travel and lodging arrangements as well as site visit logistics and communicate the details with each team member. The Program should work with their travel agency to coordinate the travel of the visiting team.

The cost of travel should be paid for directly by the Program. It is important to coordinate a plan that would have the least financial impact on the Program. Standard coach travel applies except when travel is over eight (8) hours in duration, then the program will be required to fly team members in business class. In addition, airport transportation and transportation between the hotel and the campus needs to be coordinated. It is most helpful if all team members can be at the host hotel by 3:00 pm on Sunday. Please note that these arrangements can fluctuate for international visits.

Arrangements for housing and meals are the responsibility of the Host Program. Each team member’s room and tax should be directly billed to the Program. In addition, the Team Chair should work with the Program to minimize out-of-pocket expenses to team members for meals. For example, if the hotel has a restaurant, team members should eat there so the charges can be directly billed to the Program.

1. A workroom will be available for the team's use on the campus. Experience has shown that it is preferable to have the workroom in a secured location within the academic building where the Program being evaluated is housed. The workroom should be private, with adequate security for confidential documents of the team, and should have office supplies such as pads, pens, a stapler, paper clips, post it notes etc. for use by the team members. All supporting documents as stated in the Self-Study Report should also be located in this workroom unless the team agrees that some or all of the hardcopies are not necessary. It is best to have these supporting documents organized by each section of the Self-Study Report. Provisions should also be made for technical support including laptop computers with internet connectivity, though team members are welcome to bring their own device. At least one of the laptop computers should have access to a printer located in the workroom. Team members should also have access to a nearby copier.
2. **Preparation for the Site Visit**
3. Review the materials sent to you from the Commission office as well as those provided by the Program.
4. The Commission Executive Director will send you any information relevant to the Program's current status with the Commission. You should be familiar with these background materials. They require thoughtful study because they provide the context for your work as a team member. It is especially critical to be familiar with the ACPHA Policy and Procedure Manual as well as the Self-Study and ACPHA Standards and how they apply to the Program beingevaluated.
5. The team roster represents colleagues who have been carefully selected in response to the specific nature, needs, and size of the Program.
6. Complete the [ACPHA Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form](https://drive.google.com/open?id=12fFnjUmafGc2JSRx1o3FAQjCjvECFnO9). The form should be signed, scanned and sent to the ACPHA office at [info@acphacommission.org](mailto:info@acphacommission.org).
7. **Studying the Materials for the Site Visit**
8. The Program completes an intensive Self-Study Report that documents its compliance with the ACPHA accreditation standards. This is your most important source of information about the Program and is used as the focal point of team discussions during the site visit.
9. Approximately four weeks before the site visit, you will receive a hard copy of the completed Self-Study Report submitted by the Program. In addition, you will also receive an electronic copy of completed Self-Study Report which may include hyperlinks to supporting documentation. You may also be directed to an electronic repository that will contain the supporting documentation for the Program and the Institution.
10. The Self-Study Report should provide a comprehensive description and a thorough in-depth assessment of all aspects of the Program. As you study it, prepare a checklist for your use during the visit. Here are some guiding questions:
11. What else do you need to know about the Program?
12. At what points does the completed Self-Study Report need further clarification or interpretation?
13. Are there inconsistencies within the completed Self-Study Report that will need to be explored?
14. What are the apparent strengths and weaknesses of the Program? Is evidence about "outcomes" solid enough to support a judgment concerning the effectiveness of the Program in achieving its objectives?
15. Who are the people you will wish to interview?

* Please refer to the [ACPHA Itinerary For Accreditation Visit Template](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1UkPMOpkmCRdrAWAVNj7MSzjv2jcG9tNu) and the [List of Potential Questions](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Jbxnw676KmeJK-f2KURKn0ToAVPoG4mC/view?usp=sharing) that will give you some topics to discuss with constituents in the Program to obtain information for each of the nine standard areas.
* Remember there are nine standard areas that have criteria that must be evaluated to determine compliance.

1. The Team Chair will assign you the responsibility for specific standard areas/sections within the Self-Study Report, and while it is critical that you read the entire report, you will need to be particularly well acquainted with your assigned sections.
2. If your review suggests the need for additional or clarifying information that would be helpful to you, you should communicate this to the Team Chair. It is the Team Chair's responsibility to convey this request to the Program or to the Commission office as soon as possible so that the material can be available for the team's use prior to the accreditation site visit.
3. It is extremely helpful if each team member drafts their responses to the standards in their assigned sections prior to the actual site visit. This should be based on the information available in the Self-Study Report and other supporting documentation. Of course, you will need to collect additional information during the site visit. The Team Chair will provide you with the [Team Report Template](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_FQ8iUo9Fo8p9krKZ3Ce_Vn2OYdXogt2/view?usp=sharing).

**DURING THE VISIT**

1. **Activities during the Site Visit**
2. Initial on-site team meeting
3. The site team usually arrives on a Sunday afternoon as most visits begin on a Monday morning. The initial team meeting is pre-determined by the Team Chair and is typically held over dinner somewhere in close proximity to the accommodations of the site team.

2. This meeting allows for the site team to discuss their preliminary thoughts on the Program’s Self-Study Report and devise the strategy of their visit over the following three days. This meeting is solely for the team members and should not include members of the Program being visited.

1. Program Meet and Greet
2. In the morning of the first day of the site visit, the team will have the opportunity to meet all of the key constituents involved with the Program.
3. Interviews with College/University Administration
4. The entire site team will typically meet with either the President/Chancellor and/or Academic Provost regarding the program and the accreditation process.

1. The site team will typically meet with the Dean/Associate Dean of the School or College where the Program is housed regarding the Program and the accreditation process.
2. These meetings give the opportunity for collegial exchange regarding the Institution’s philosophy for the Program and the ACPHA accreditation process. This also allows administration to find out more about ACPHA and its processes..
3. Interviews with all constituency groups that impact the Program. These individuals are clearly outlined in the [ACPHA Itinerary For Accreditation Visit Template](https://drive.google.com/open?id=1UkPMOpkmCRdrAWAVNj7MSzjv2jcG9tNu).
   1. Normally, every staff member associated with the Program should be interviewed and as many students as time permits. Group interviews may, under some circumstances, be both productive and timesaving. Conferences with graduates, employers, and other constituencies will be on a small sample basis. Further follow-up to larger numbers may be used to supplement findings from small samples, should the team members find this essential.
   2. The substance and form of interviews are, of course, matters of choice. One of the strengths of the evaluation process is the variety of approaches, backgrounds, and experience brought to it by team members. The Commission, however, expects that you will conduct your inquiries in the spirit of a professional peer rather than as an inquisitor. The visit should be an educational experience for both the Program staff and the visiting team. Even though all aspects of the Program are examined, the visit is not an investigation or a censorious inspection. No team member should start with an assumption that something must be found wrong with the Program. Instead, because the process is not only designed to ascertain whether the Program meets the standards of the Commission but also to help enhance the quality of the educational program, both the team and the staff should be interested in finding better solutions to problems the Program may have or alternatives that may improve the Program.
   3. Keep in mind as you talk with Program personnel that the Commission evaluates programs in terms of a reasonable measure of demonstrated achievement of their own stated objectives. Thus, the central question you must seek to answer is "Does it work?" That is, does a given procedure, curriculum, etc., function effectively to achieve the Program's objectives. Resist the natural tendency to compare the situation you are observing with one at your own institution or with what you have assumed to be "proper" because the norm is more familiar. This is particularly true with international programs as their educational system may vary in comparison to the United States Higher Education model. While your hosts may be interested in hearing about other patterns that are working well at your institution or others, their concern and yours is to concentrate on the local context and what is "working" there.
   4. It is important also not to let yourselves be drawn into debates on the relative merits of specific approaches to certain problems. As a representative of the Commission, you should be ready to make it clear that the Commission takes no position on such issues as class size, teaching load, etc., but is concerned about the central issue, the impact on the quality and effectiveness of a program's educational work with whatever arrangements or patterns have been adopted. This allows the team to take a more holistic versus prescriptive approach.
   5. Remember, in the course of your work, that a fair evaluation assesses strengths as well as weaknesses. Do not hesitate to praise noteworthy achievements and/or special potential you may see. In fact, if you should inadvertently give the impression that your only purpose is to uncover weaknesses, you can do more harm than good. The Program expects and deserves the assistance of honest constructive criticism, but to neglect the positive side of an evaluation can diminish both the usefulness and the validity of negative observations.
   6. As you pursue your responsibilities, leave time in your schedule to follow leads, collect impressions widely, check and recheck information adequately, and compare perceptions and patterns from and with all concerned. Keep careful notes, since before leaving the Institution the team will be required to develop their written evaluation report to present to the Program.
4. Data Collection and Evidence Review
   1. The primary purpose of the site visit is to verify and confirm what is documented in the written Self-Study Report.
   2. Team members will actively engage in data collection and evidence review throughout the visit via the interview and meetings, classroom visits, and review of workroom material.
5. Team Conferencing
   1. To whatever extent possible, team discussions during the visit can play a key role. In these discussions, you can pool your resources, stimulate and question each other, share impressions, and search and debate until the issues become clear and a team point of view emerges. By this method, rather than by voting, a team reaches consensus on major issues. Consensus does not, of course, preclude the possibility of significant differences of opinion on some points. Such differences will have to be included in an accurate report of the team's point of view. However, the Team Chair will make the final determination of all comments in the report.
   2. At the end of days one and two the site team should conference to assure that all aspects of the Program have been covered in relationship to the ACPHA Standards and to clarify the substance of the written evaluation report. At this meeting the Team Chair will review his/her summary of the team's major findings and suggestions to make sure that these are clearly and accurately stated. It is at this session that the team members agree on the major strengths and weaknesses of the Program. Your comments at this meeting will be of critical assistance in the development of the evaluation report.
6. The [Site Visit Report](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_FQ8iUo9Fo8p9krKZ3Ce_Vn2OYdXogt2/view?usp=sharing)
7. Each site team member will be responsible for writing the response to the standards in their assigned section.
8. It is important that each team member write in clear and non-prescriptive manner. The Team Chair will give each team member instructions on flow and use of consistent verbiage, voice, and terminology. Responses must be thorough and clearly demonstrate the evidence of how the Program is or is not meeting each standard.
9. The team must have a rough draft of the Site Visit Report for review at the conclusion of day two of the site visit. The full report is regarded as the product of the entire team and not any particular team member.
10. Throughout your visit you will be noting strengths and weaknesses of the Program you are evaluating. At the final site team meeting, a consensus should be reached concerning the strengths and weaknesses that will be communicated to the Program and to the Commission.
11. Avoid rhetorical questions, e.g., “The organization of the school requires the Program head to make all of the decisions. Is this really satisfactory?” Either raise direct concerns about the Program that seem troubling, e.g., “The organizational plan of the Program does not appear to provide for day-by-day decisions to be made by those who have this responsibility," or make a clear suggestion for change, e.g., “We suggest that the Program review its plan of organization to ensure that areas of responsibility and lines of authority are ordered in manageable and effective ways.”
12. Avoid comments or suggestions related to personalities within the Program or Institution, e.g., 'The administrative style of the Program head is interesting and unconventional.” Avoid such comments even if they incorporate praise, e.g., "Professor X is doing an excellent job." The short period of the site visit does not allow for the team member(s) to arrive at any full knowledge of the activities of individuals within the Program or the institution, and assessment of individuals is in any event a difficult task. Comments and suggestions are best related to organizational elements, e.g., “There is good rapport between students and the school's administrative staff.”
13. Avoid prescribing (as opposed to suggesting) specific solutions to problems, e.g., “The Program head is overworked and an associate should be appointed.” It is quite appropriate to identify problems, but the specific solution must be left to the Program or the Institution itself. Further, such specific prescriptions are the elements of advice most often confused with official recommendations and mistakenly interpreted by program or institutional personnel to be accreditation requirements.
14. Do not forget that the identification of strengths is fully as important as pointing out things that have caused the team to have concerns. Unless both are taken into account in the Site Visit Report, it is easy for a program to make a change to meet a concern of the team and Commission only to find that the change has eroded an area of strength.
15. Remember that the evaluation report is addressed to the Program, not to the Commission, so speak to and write for the Program. In doing so, remember also that you are writing for a large audience. Not only will faculty and administrative staff of the Program be reading it, but other members of the faculty and administration within the Institution will be reading it as well.
16. Further, in an era of heightened public interest and growing concern for consumer protection through transparency, it is likely that your report will be read and referred to by lay as well as professional parties unknown to the team or the Commission. The report should be scrupulously fair and factually accurate in describing the Program and its operations as they were observed by the team during its visit. Do not name individuals either in praise or in blame; if necessary, comment on the office, not the officeholder.
17. The team’s response to each standard in the Site Visit Report should always use the following terms:

* **Strengths** – A program should be commended for those aspects of its life that are considered by the team to be especially valuable and that need to be emphasized both to commend and to make clear that these are things that should not be permitted to weaken as changes occur. ***A strength may be used only when a standard has been met.***
* **Suggestions** – A suggestion is one that offers, for consideration by the Program, a course of action the team believes would contribute to the improvement of educational quality, even though such action is not necessary to comply with the commission’s standards. It must be understood that these suggestions are advisory only. ***A suggestion may be used only when a standard has been met.***
* **Concerns** – Concerns are aspects of a program life that the team believes requires major attention. Some of these may currently be affecting adversely the quality of the educational program. Others may have the potential for adverse effects. ***A concern must be used when a standard has not been met.***
* **Recommendations** – Recommendations are developed from the team’s concerns. A recommendation indicates that in the team’s professional judgment that certain conditions so affect the Program’s ability to meet the standards that these conditions must be changed. Recommendations to alter such conditions are not just advice because they bear substantively on the issue of accredited status. ***A recommendation must be used when a standard has not been met***

1. It is important to note that when the team believes there is no evidence to support a standard, the team must clearly use the term “Concerns” followed by a clearly worded response as to why the Program is not meeting the standard. Next, the team must also use the term “Recommendations” followed by a clearly, non-prescriptive response as to how the Program can meet the standard.
2. The terms “***Strengths***” and “***Suggestions***” can be used in the team’s response throughout the report as needed and appropriate where standards are met. The same applies: state the term and then the team’s response.
3. The format and order for the response MUST be as follows:

* **Standard is stated.**
  + Team response to how the Program is or is not meeting the standard is stated. Make sure to state the evidence you found to support your response.
  + **Strengths**: State the strength(s) that the team found for the Program within the particular standard if needed.
  + **Suggestions**: State the suggestion(s) that the team is giving the Program within the particular standard if needed.
  + **Concerns**: If a standard is not met, state why the Program is not meeting the standard.
  + **Recommendations**: When a standard is not met, offer non-prescriptive options on how the Program could meet the standard.
  + Team **MUST** state either:
  + **Standard met**
  + **Standard not met**

1. Check your report to make sure that it:

* Responds to the Self-Study Report. Your report may touch upon matters not included in the Self-Study Report, but under no circumstances should a program be able to say that the evaluation team paid little or no attention to the Self-Study Report.
* Concentrates on fundamentals. The Site Visit Report needs not touch on every aspect of the Program. Use your report for discussion of significant achievements and critical problems; do not nitpick.
* Gives full recognition to the fact that a program knows its own problems and has solutions on the way. It is unfair to the Program not to recognize actions already taken to strengthen itself.

1. Check your report also to be sure that you have not:

* Written in a highly prescriptive tone. Team recommendations are suggestions offered by colleagues, not directives or prescriptive solutions to problems.
* Named individuals, either in praise or in blame.
* Cited the formulas or requirements of other accrediting agencies, either in praise or in criticism.
* Advanced as solutions to problems based on your own educational theories or those of other team members.

1. The Exit Briefing
2. It is imperative that the tone and content of the oral version of the team’s Site Visit Report be consistent with the written version that will be later sent to the Program. The oral report should leave no doubt about what standards were met and not met. It may be beneficial to provide a list of the standards by section for those attending the briefing as it will save time and will allow those attending to focus on what is being said. It also allows those in attendance to take notes and for clarification purposes.
3. The oral Site Visit Report may be interactive in nature. You may draw attention to the strengths of the Program and be specific on the standards that were not met and why they were not met. The Program may ask questions as to how to go about meeting the standards, and the team can choose to offer collegial recommendations. The Program needs to understand what they need to do in order to be in compliance with ACPHA standards. They will have full opportunity later to respond to the Site Visit Report before it is considered by the Commission.

**AFTER THE VISIT**

1. **Preparation of the Team’s Final Site Visit Report**
2. The Team Chair typically writes the introductory and concluding sections of the report in addition to any areas of the Site Visit Report for which he/she has assumed specific responsibility. The Team Chair will email you the draft Site Visit Report so that you can make any grammatical edits immediately following the exit briefing. You must make those changes in red and return to the Team Chair within three days. The Team Chair then edits the drafts of other team members so that the final Site Visit Report is a coherent presentation of the program. The final Site Visit Report will be prepared by the Team Chair using the [Site Visit Report Template](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_FQ8iUo9Fo8p9krKZ3Ce_Vn2OYdXogt2/view?usp=sharing).
3. The program is informed that the Site Visit Report is to be used only within the Program or Institution of which it is a part. The Site Visit Report is furnished to the Program with the understanding that there is to be no publication whatsoever of it or any excerpt from it quoted in any marketing, recruiting material or in any other public forum.

**VI. The Review of the Team's Site Visit Report by the Commission**

1. The team’s Site Visit Report and the Program’s Response Report are all studied by the members of the Commission and the Commission staff. The Commission will then, in executive session, make its decision on accreditation status.

**VII. Disposition of Materials**

1. Team members are reminded that the Site Visit Report and the Self-Study Report as well as any documents or working papers generated by the team are confidential. All copies not required by Commission policy for document retention should be destroyed.
2. It is imperative that the site team members not discuss this report with anyone outside of the Commission as it would jeopardize the confidentiality of the accreditation process.
3. Once you have submitted your final Site Visit Report edits to your Team Chair, your responsibilities to both the Program and the Commission for this assignment will have ended. If you should be contacted at any time by a representative of the host Institution or Program with questions or comments, simply refer the inquirer to the Commission office without further involvement.

**VIII. Expenses**

1. Expenses for meals and lodging, and travel are borne by the Program, so please be mindful of your choices.
2. Out-of-pocket expenses should be entered on expense vouchers or on forms required by the Institution visited and forwarded to the Program Administrator.