ACCET Document 7 – Guidelines for Evaluation Teams

Purpose for the Evaluation

An evaluation team visit to an institution seeking initial accreditation or reaccreditation occurs only after the institution has completed its own internal review and has prepared and submitted electronically an Analytical Self-Evaluation Report (ASER) and, if applicable, Branch Analytical Self-Evaluation (BASER) through the Accreditation Management System (AMS). The evaluation team visit is an essential element of the peer review evaluation, which adds significant validity and credibility to the accreditation process.

A significant benefit of the accreditation evaluation process is its purposeful focus on the broad spectrum of operational issues. Accreditation encourages the institution to analyze and evaluate its functions qualitatively in terms of its own mission, objectives, and efforts to improve the quality of its performance. The report of the evaluation team, the institution's response to the team report, and other factors affecting the accredited status of the institution are used by the Accrediting Commission in making its decision on accreditation.

Requirements for the Number and Composition of the Team Members

The number and composition of team members required for evaluation visits is determined by ACCET with the provision that professional judgment be utilized to ensure the appropriate size and composition based upon the pertinent circumstances. Some of the factors considered in determining the number and composition of the team include the size of the institution, the number of students, the type(s) of programs offered, and the need for translators. Typically, evaluation teams to institutions seeking initial accreditation or reaccreditation will be composed, at a minimum, of the following:

Team Composition	Type of Visit, Institution, and Site
Three-Person Team: Management Specialist, Curriculum Content Specialist, and Commission Representative.	• Initial accreditation visit to a main or branch campus of a vocational or avocational institution • Reaccreditation visit to a main campus or branch campus of a vocational institution
Two-Person Team: Management Specialist/Commission Representative and Curriculum Content Specialist.	• Reaccreditation visit to a main campus or branch campus of an avocational institution • Reaccreditation visit to an auxiliary classroom of a vocational or avocational institution

Additional team members may be required, such as additional curriculum content specialist(s), for the review of programs in different fields and/or programs delivered in whole or part by interactive distance learning (IDL). For vocational institutions, additional team members may also be required to assist with the verification of completion and placement at campuses with large enrollments to ensure an adequate review by the team.

Note: Other types of evaluation visits are typically conducted by a one-person team (a Commission Representative), including visits relative to changes of ownership, Readiness Visits (RVs), and Quality Assurance Visits (QAVs). The main exception is a new program visit that may

be conducted by a two-person team comprised of a Curriculum Content Specialist and a Commission Representative.

Virtual Visits

Visits may be conducted virtually for the evaluation of changes of ownership, readiness visits, new program visits for review of Interactive Distance Learning (IDL), and reaccreditation for avocational institutions approved to offer only IDL. There is no change to the team size or visit fee for such visits.

Additionally, reaccreditation evaluation visits for international institutions may be conducted virtually, with a corresponding on-site verification visit (typically a one-person, one-day visit) to be completed within 12 months of the virtual visit.

Team Members

Commission Representative. The Commission Representative is employed by ACCET and is assigned the responsibility of monitoring and facilitating the integrity and comprehensiveness of the evaluation process. This person is well versed with ACCET's standards, policies, and procedures and serves as an overall resource for the team in reviewing various operational elements. The Commission Representative will work closely with the Team chair to ensure that all of the areas of examination are covered, and that consistency, thoroughness, and fairness are maintained both during the visit and in the preparation of the evaluation team report. The Commission Representative serves as a member of the team.

The Commission Representative carefully screens potential team members, utilizing the ACCET membership as its initial pool of volunteers, to verify that conflicts of interest, such as competing institutions in the same market area or prior/current professional affiliation, do not exist. Upon selection of the team, the Commission Representative notifies the institution of the team's composition by name and affiliation to provide the institution an opportunity to reject a team member for cause, relevant to a potential conflict of interest or bias. Specific responsibilities of the Commission Representative include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) coordinating the logistics of the evaluation visit (hotel accommodations, travel arrangements, visit schedule, team roster); (2) conducting the pre-visit orientation of the evaluation team; (3) facilitating the interpretation and implementation of ACCET policies and procedures; and (4) submitting the team report to ACCET within 14 days after the conclusion of the evaluation visit. During the visit, the Commission Representative generally will be assigned responsibility for Standard VII. Admissions and Student Services, Standard IX.B. Employer Sponsor Satisfaction, and Standard IX.D. Completion and Placement, including verification of the completion and, if applicable, the placement statistics reported on ACCET Document 28.1 – Completion and Placement Statistics. Additionally, the Commission Representative will guide the collaborative review of Standard III.A. Financial Stability.

Team Chair. Each evaluation visit team will have a team chair who is designated by the Commission Representative and who may be any one of the team members other than the Commission Representative. The team chair will provide direction during the evaluation process, will generally lead the team during the opening session and during the exit briefing, and will designate appropriate opportunities for the team to caucus. The team chair will work closely with the Commission Representative to ensure the integrity, comprehensiveness, and objectivity of the

evaluation process. Additionally, the team chair will collaboratively review Standard III.A. Financial Stability. The person assigned the role of team chair must be an experienced ACCET evaluation visit team member. There is no team chair in the case of one-person teams.

Management Specialist. This person serves on the evaluation visit team as a peer evaluator and is one who possesses demonstrated experience and expertise as a manager or administrator of an institution, business, agency, or association closely aligned with higher education. This person is generally a current or former administrator/manager, owner, or director of an accredited institution. This team member will generally be assigned primary responsibility for evaluating the following standards for accreditation: Standard I. Mission, Core Values, Ethics, and Planning; Standard II. Governance and Management; and Standard III. Financial Capability and Responsibility.

Curriculum Content Specialist. This person serves on the evaluation visit team as a peer evaluator and possesses demonstrated experience and expertise as (1) an educator/trainer in relevant fields, most commonly in a private career school, college or university, business/industry training program, or other continuing education institution and/or (2) a practitioner working in relevant fields, with education or training experience. This team member will generally be assigned primary responsibility for evaluating the following standards for accreditation: Standard IV. Curriculum Design and Development; Standard V. Instructional Delivery and Resources; Standard VI. Qualifications and Supervision of Instructional Personnel; Standard VIII. Student Assessment and Achievement; and Standard IX. Institutional Effectiveness (IX.A. Student Satisfaction and IX.C. Certification and Licensure).

For institutions offering programs delivered by IDL and/or Structured Asynchronous Learning (SAL), person(s) with experience and expertise in IDL and/or SAL will be selected to participate on the visit, in addition to the Curriculum Content Specialist.

As applicable, team members also will evaluate specific criteria for specific types of educational modalities, degrees, and/or programs (e.g., IDL, occupational associate degrees, nursing and allied health, English for Speakers of Other Languages).

Selection and Training of Team Evaluators

To be eligible to serve as a team evaluator, a person must have the necessary relevant experience and expertise, as well as the appropriate training in evaluating institutions and programs to effectively serve as an objective team evaluator. ACCET will assess the subject matter expertise of candidates based on a review of their resumes, professional recommendations, and/or previous team evaluator experience. Prior to participating on an evaluation visit, a new team evaluator must have (1) attended a Team Evaluator Workshop, or (2) completed ACCET's online evaluator training. Team evaluators are expected to complete the online training at least every three years to ensure they are up-to-date on changes to the agency or USDE requirements. Further, to ensure the objectivity of evaluators, the Commission Representative organizing the evaluation visit will verify that all potential team evaluators have no conflicts of interest with the institution to be visited, including providing the institution the opportunity to reject team evaluators based on conflict of interest, as previously described.

Procedures for the Evaluation Team

After studying the ASER/BASER, the evaluation team will:

1. Verify the accuracy and substance of the data in the ASER/BASER by inquiry, observation, and sampling techniques, seeking additional information and clarification, whenever necessary
2. Seek answers to questions stimulated by the ASER/BASER and make a penetrating inquiry of the objectives, management, staff, clientele served, methodologies, educational programs, and outcomes of the programs
3. Determine the extent to which the ACCET standards, policies, and procedures are being met
4. Assess objectively the merits of the educational programs in terms of the institution's mission, objectives, clientele, and other relevant issues
5. Sign and abide by the Affirmation of Professionalism and Ethics as attested in Document 7.1

Visit Overview

The evaluation visit is the focal point of the accreditation process. Over the period of two days, the team works to validate the written ASER/BASER to provide the Commission with an objective "snapshot" of the institution represented in a written report from which a verbal overview will be given as an exit briefing.

Responsibilities of Team Members

1. Prior to the Visit
    a. Demonstrate appropriate preparation to serve as an evaluator in the accreditation peer-review process by (a) attending the ACCET Team Evaluator Workshop, (b) completing ACCET's online evaluator training, and/or (c) previously serving as an ACCET evaluator on at least two accreditation visits.
    b. Review the policy and procedure documents provided by ACCET.
    c. Study the ASER/BASER to gain a general understanding of the institution.
    d. Identify points in the ASER/BASER requiring clarification and formulate questions and review tasks for addressing these topics.
    e. Participate in a team orientation prior to the onset of the visit to discuss issues identified during the review of the ASER/BASER.

2. During the Visit
    a. Verify the representations in the ASER/BASER.
    b. Collect data by interviewing, observing, and reviewing documentation as appropriate.
    c. Meet with the team periodically to discuss preliminary findings.
    d. During the visit, confer with the institution to allow it to provide additional information or clarification regarding issues and concerns identified by the team. In such unusual circumstances where the team has evidence to indicate potential fraud or abuse, the team shall first contact and confer with the ACCET Executive Director for guidance on how to proceed.
    e. Draft the pertinent facts, including, as applicable, strengths and weaknesses in assigned areas.
    f. Meet with the team to achieve consensus on findings and ratings pertinent to the standards of accreditation.
    g. Conduct the Exit Briefing.

3. Exit Briefing. Give a brief summary relative to the strengths and weaknesses under each of the standards of accreditation. The team is reminded that rating will not be given. The team will advise the institution that:
   a. The institution will receive the team report through AMS within 30 days of the visit.
   b. The institution will have 14 calendar days from receipt of the team report to respond to all weaknesses cited in the report, regardless of the rating received in the standard. If no weaknesses are cited in the team report, the institution should provide a response to the Commission, acknowledging receipt and acceptance of the report, including any instructive observations. All responses should be transmitted electronically through AMS to the ACCET office.
   c. The institution will be contacted and asked to complete and submit, within 10 days of receipt, a Post-Evaluation Questionnaire, which will be used by ACCET as part of its ongoing self-analysis to improve its standards, policies, and procedures, but will have no bearing on the final accreditation decision the Commission makes with respect to the institution.

4. After the Visit
   a. Team members will return all materials related to the visit, including the ASER/BASER, to the ACCET staff representative.
   b. Within one week, team members will submit the Post-Evaluation form and, as applicable, the expense voucher to the ACCET office.

Team Report

The Team Report is a consensus report drafted at the institution during the visit. It follows the format of ACCET Document 9.3 – On-Site Evaluation Team Report Form. Team members discuss their observations of the institution until a consensus is reached regarding each specific element of the standards.

In addition to the report of "Pertinent Facts" (always required), "Strengths" and "Weaknesses" (noted only as appropriate), each subsection of the standard is scored on the rating scale provided below. Note that a standard with a rating of 4 must have a strength identified in the report, and a rating of 2 or 1 must have a weakness identified. A rating of 3 may have a strength and/or a weakness; however, if there is a weakness, this means that the institution substantially meets the standard, except for the narrow area of non-compliance identified in the weakness.

Team Report Rating Scale

4	Exceeds the standard	Significant strength(s) specified
3	Meets the standard	Strength(s), if any, specified
3 with weakness	Substantially meets the standard, except for the narrow area of non-compliance identified in the weakness(es)	Narrow area of weakness(es) specified
2	Does not fully meet standard; some change(s) needed to meet the standard	Weakness(es) specified
1	Does not meet standard; significant changes needed to meet the standard	Significant weakness(es) specified