



HANDBOOK FOR INSTITUTIONS

SEEKING REAFFIRMATION

ON-SITE HOSTING SECTION ONLY

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
Commission on Colleges

1866 Southern Lane
Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097
404-679-4501 ♦ www.sacscoc.org

August 2011 edition

Hosting the On-Site Review

Because the Chair of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee is responsible for organizing and managing the work of the Committee, the institution needs to begin establishing a working relationship with the Chair several months prior to the visit. The institution's CEO and/or Accreditation Liaison should not hesitate to initiate contact with the Chair after they have been notified of the Chair's acceptance of the appointment. The Chair may choose to conduct a preliminary visit to the institution to get acquainted with the campus, culture, and preparation for the visit, but many chairs rely on conference calls and e-mails to establish a relationship with the campus Leadership Team and to make arrangements for the site visit. Often, the Chair arrives on site the day before or morning of the start of the on-site review.

Since a key responsibility of the Accreditation Liaison is to coordinate reaffirmation visits, the Accreditation Liaison serves as the institution's contact person for the Chair. To anticipate meeting the Chair's expectations for the visit, the Accreditation Liaison should begin working with the Leadership Team months in advance of the visit to consider addressing the Committee's transportation, accommodation, and dining needs. The Accreditation Liaison should also work with the institution's business office to arrange payment for expenses, such as hotel accommodations and meals, incurred by Committee members during their time on site.

Transportation. Institutions are expected to provide safe, reliable transportation to and from the airport, to and from off-campus locations, between the main campus and the hotel, and between the hotel and restaurants. Meeting expectations for safe drivers includes a proper license and a safe driving record. Meeting expectations for reliable transportation may entail securing cell phone numbers for Committee members so that they can be contacted if their pick-up at the airport is unavoidably delayed. Providing a step-up stool is very helpful.

Hotel Accommodations. The Commission expects that hotel rooms will contain desks and lighting appropriate for working in private. Efforts by the institution to secure rooms in the quieter sections of the hotel are generally appreciated. Many institutions make a positive impression on Committee members by checking them into the hotel prior to their arrival and handing them the key as they enter the lobby. Some institutions house institutional staff (Accreditation Liaison, computer support technician, or local arrangements coordinator) at the hotel to address the Committee's needs during the evening and early morning hours.

The hotel conference room must be of sufficient size to enable the committee to conduct extended meetings and to provide ample additional tabletop space for documents, computers, snacks, and other materials and equipment. Generally, the display of the documents provided in the conference room at the hotel is a duplicate of the display provided in the workroom on campus. Institutions should poll Committee members to determine how

many laptop computers must be provided for use at the hotel. Institutions also generally poll Committee members several weeks prior to the visit to determine their preferences for snacks and beverages. The conference room should also contain a heavy duty paper shredder, a photocopier machine, and at least two printers, along with a variety of general office supplies, such as staplers, pens, thumb drives, ink cartridges, and a generous supply of paper for the printers and photocopier machines. Committee members also expect an Internet connection, at the very least in the conference room and preferably also in their hotel room. A restaurant on premises or within walking distance is desirable.

Campus accommodations. The Commission expects the institution to provide private, dedicated space on campus for the Committee's work. Like the conference room at the hotel, this room needs to be large enough to conduct extended meetings and should be spacious enough for documents, computers, snacks, beverages, a photocopier machine, a paper shredder, and a variety of general office supplies. Resource materials on display should include a complete copy of the institution's Compliance Certification and supporting documentation, copies of the Focused Report and supporting documentation, additional materials requested by Committee members prior to the visit, and other materials that the institution believes are appropriate. Whatever the configuration, this dedicated space needs to be viewed as off-limits to institutional staff during the visit. Many institutions staff an assistance station not far from the entrance to the Committee's work room to ensure that someone is always readily available to secure materials or make appointments for Committee members.

Dining. Generally, institutions should plan on providing meal service beginning with lunch on Day One and ending with breakfast on Day Three. These parameters need to be expanded, of course, when visits to off-campus locations require that extra days or early starts for Day One be added to the visit. To ensure that meals provided by the institution meet the dietary needs of the Committee, institutions should survey the Committee members to determine if any dietary restrictions need to be met.

Day One:

Lunch – Since On-Site Reaffirmation Committees convene at the hotel for their Organizational Meeting on the morning of Day One, they typically have lunch at the hotel, often in the conference room during the meeting. If the hotel does not offer food service and lunch must be brought in, some institutions solicit orders from Committee members during the week prior to the visit.

Dinner – Dinner on Day One is taken at a local restaurant selected by the Chair. Since some Committee members may have begun their day with an early departure from home, a nearby restaurant with good food and efficient service is desirable. Many institutions reserve a private dining room for this meal and have the drivers eat elsewhere in the restaurant so that transportation back to the hotel is available as soon as the Committee is finished dining.

Day Two:

Breakfast – Breakfast on Day Two is often a breakfast meeting with the campus leadership, at which time the institution makes a presentation on the Quality Enhancement Plan. Generally, this meeting takes place on campus, although some institutions choose to hold it at the hotel or in a local restaurant.

Lunch – Lunch on Day Two is eaten on campus, either in the workroom or in a private dining room.

Dinner – The location for dinner on Day Two depends, to a large extent, on the Committee’s progress thus far in developing its report and its preference for completing the task. Transportation to a nearby restaurant may be the choice of some or all of the Committee, or they may choose to work at their own pace and dine individually or in small groups in the hotel or at a restaurant within walking distance whenever they finish or desire a break. Oftentimes, the dining plan for this evening does not emerge until late in the day, so the institution needs to remain flexible in scheduling transportation and making reservations for this meal.

Day Three:

Breakfast – Breakfast on Day Three is taken at the hotel, sometimes during an Executive Session in the conference room.

Billing Procedures. Committee members generally cover their transportation costs and are reimbursed by the Commission for mileage, parking, meals en-route, and airfare after the on-site review is completed. Due to the cost of international airfares, however, institutions are encouraged to purchase these tickets for the Committee when visits to international locations are required. Committee members may fly business class to international sites if the institution approves. Institutions are also encouraged to arrange for hotel accommodations and hotel food service to be billed directly to the institution. Most institutions also arrange payment for evening meals at restaurants.

During the reaffirmation process, institutions receive two invoices from the Commission. The first, which covers the cost of the off-site review, is sent shortly before the group meeting of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee. The second, which covers the cost of the on-site review, is sent after all of the reimbursements for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee have been processed by the Commission’s business office.

Daily Schedule for the On-Site Review

The length of time that an On-Site Reaffirmation Committees typically spends on site extends from late morning of Day One through mid-morning of Day Three. Each of these three days has a distinctive character. On Day One, the Committee focuses on completing its review of all of the compliance issues stemming from standards marked **Non-Compliance** or **Did Not Review** by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee and its confirmation of compliance with the USDE standards and requirements. At this time, the Committee also addresses third-party comments, if applicable. On Day Two, the Committee focuses on

reviewing the institution's Quality Enhancement Plan. Lastly, on Day Three, the Committee presents its findings to the institution's leadership in the Exit Conference.

Day One. Scheduling appropriate interviews and assembling additional documentation when requested to do so are the two primary responsibilities of institutions in supporting the work of the Committee during Day One. As noted earlier in this section of the handbook, On-Site Reaffirmation Committees typically create an initial list of persons to interview approximately two to three weeks prior to the visit. For this reason, most of the scheduling of meetings for the afternoon of Day One can be completed prior to the Committee's arrival on campus. Institutions should anticipate, however, that changes will be made to this schedule after the Committee completes its Organizational Meeting at the hotel because additional materials requested by individual members and either mailed to them the week before or left for review in the hotel conference room sometimes eliminate the need for a scheduled conversation. However, because review of the Committee's draft report during the Organizational Meeting occasionally raises a question, follow-up on campus may be required. A flexible approach to making last-minute adjustments to the schedule is an important attribute for institutions to cultivate as they build a working relationship with the Committee. The afternoon of Day One is also the time when Committees frequently identify the need to review materials that have not previously been made available to them. For this reason, institutions want to ensure that sufficient staff are available to secure these materials quickly so that they can be considered by the Committee before the focus shifts to the Quality Enhancement Plan on Day Two.

Day Two. Making a presentation on the Quality Enhancement Plan and assembling the groups for the QEP interviews are the two primary responsibilities of institutions in supporting the work of the Committee during Day Two. As a kick-off to the day when the Committee will focus intently on the QEP, Leadership Teams are invited to make a formal presentation of approximately twenty minutes on their plans for improving student learning, with an equivalent amount of time for questions from the Committee. Of course, having read the document sent to them, Committee members will already be acquainted with the QEP; this formal presentation, therefore, is not only an opportunity for institutions to convey their excitement about the project and show their commitment to following through, but also an opportunity to update the Committee on progress made since the drafting of the document that was mailed and to provide details that may have been eliminated from that draft. As noted earlier in this section of the handbook, On-Site Reaffirmation Committees typically create the groupings for the QEP interviews approximately two to three weeks prior to the visit. For this reason, the schedule of QEP interviews can be completed prior to the Committee's arrival on campus, and unlike the interview requests for the afternoon of Day One, this schedule is unlikely to change.

Day Three. Getting its leadership assembled for the Exit Conference, which may be scheduled either on campus or at the hotel, is the primary responsibility of institutions in supporting the work of the Committee during Day Three. The institution's chief executive officer determines which representatives from the institution will be invited to the exit conference.

As should be evident from the above description of the Committee’s activities on Days One through Three, on-site reviews are rigorous and do not allow time for campus tours (except to verify information regarding a requirement or standard) or for large or lengthy social gatherings. Since a great deal of work must be completed in a short amount of time, Committees appreciate the time and effort required to provide the timely transportation, quick turnaround on requests for documents, ready accommodation of schedule changes, and reliable equipment and appropriate supplies necessary to enable completion of the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee.

Report of the Reaffirmation Committee

Because the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee builds its report from the draft prepared by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, much of the wording of the final Report of the Reaffirmation Committee is familiar to institutions. For example, few, if any, changes are made to narratives for those standards that were marked **Compliance** during the off-site review. In addition, even portions of the narratives for standards marked **Non-Compliance**, specifically those portions that describe compliance with some of the requirements in the standard, may be retained.

Typically, the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, however, makes three major changes to the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee.

1. Labels signifying **Compliance** and **Non-Compliance** are removed. In the final report, a narrative with a positive tone and no recommendations signals compliance. A narrative that highlights a shortcoming and follows with a recommendation signals non-compliance. Appendix V-1 provides sample narratives.
2. Narratives for standards previously marked **Non-Compliance** are expanded to reference additional documentation provided in the optional Focused Report or made available on-site. If the additional materials fail to document compliance, the narrative, as illustrated in Appendix V-1, identifies the shortcoming and includes a recommendation. Institutions then have the opportunity to provide additional documentation of compliance in a subsequent report, the Response to the Visiting Committee Report, which is due five months after the Exit Conference. For further details on developing this response to the Committee’s recommendations, see Section VI of this handbook.
3. A detailed analysis of the Quality Enhancement Plan is written for Part III (Assessment of the Quality Enhancement Plan) and a notation regarding the acceptability of the QEP is provided in the narrative for 2.12. On-Site Reaffirmation Committees provide two types of feedback on the QEP: (1) recommendations, which are indicative of non-compliance with CR 2.12 or CS 3.3.2 and must be addressed in the Response to the Visiting Committee Report and (2) consultative advice, which reflects the Committee’s observations for strengthening the QEP but requires no further reporting to the Commission.