

# ON-SITE VISITS

HLC's procedure for on-site visits identifies the expectations for institutions undergoing evaluation and HLC Peer Reviewers serving on teams conducting HLC on-site visits. The peer review team has the discretion to depart from this procedure if circumstances of the visit warrant such departure.

## Institutional Communication about the Team Visit

The campus community should be informed about the visit. The institution should:

- Announce the dates of the visit to all constituent groups.
- Announce the dates in the publications it traditionally uses to reach its various publics.
- Publicize the schedule of the team's open meetings.
- Contact students, employees, and other constituents who may be invited to participate in the visit, and arrange tentative time frames for access.
- Be receptive to times for team members to interact informally with members of the institution.
- Consult with the team chair regarding requests from any special groups to meet with the team; the chair will make the final decision about whether to accommodate such requests.

The institution may share the names of team members, their titles, and their institutional affiliations. The institution should not share contact information for the team members (street addresses, email addresses, phone numbers) and it should not identify the team's place of lodging during the

visit. See HLC's [Third-Party Comment: Policy and Procedures](#) for more information.

## Team Expenses

HLC bills the institution for the evaluation visit and team expenses. The institution has no other direct financial responsibility for the team's transportation, housing, and meals, unless it chooses to host a limited social event. The institution is not obligated to transport the team during the visit; if it does provide a car or livery service, it absorbs those costs directly.

Team members are expected to pay for their own expenses associated with the visit, including travel, lodging, and food, and to seek reimbursement from HLC. The institution should not establish a master bill for the team or pay bills that clearly belong to the team. (Any exceptions to this procedure should receive prior approval from HLC staff.)

Team members are expected to act with appropriate fiscal moderation while conducting an institutional evaluation. The basic assumption is that arrangements should be professional and comfortable to allow the team to conduct its work without distraction. Arrangements should neither be lavish and extravagant nor overly modest.

## Gifts for the Team

Team members are not permitted to accept gifts, incentives, or other compensation from any institution under review unless those gifts are nominal in nature (less than \$50 fair market value per individual gift, such as an imprinted mug).

## Hotel Accommodations

The institution, in consultation with the team chair, makes hotel reservations for the team; this should be done early to

ensure availability. Teams often meet late into the evening and therefore, if possible, hotel arrangements may include a room in which the team can meet. Wireless Internet access must be available to the team for them to do their work. The team chair will notify the institution of any special needs of team members.

## On-Campus Meeting Space and Support

The team chair will advise the institution about the team's needs on campus. The institution should provide the team with secure space on the campus that is adequate to serve as a meeting room, workroom, and resource room. The space reserved for the team should accommodate the institution's resource materials; work space with furniture; technology support; Internet access, including easy online connection to virtual resources; and ready access to a printer, photocopier, telephone, and fax machine.

Once on campus, the team will need the assistance of a person who can help with the scheduling of interviews and with accessing any needed materials.

## Team Activities on Campus

Team chairs take the lead in establishing the basic visit agenda, usually a month or two before the visit, with the understanding that late modifications to the agenda are to be expected. Some team chairs will request scheduled appointments with key people. These may include members of the governing board, representatives of the state coordinating board or other related agency, faculty representatives, student representatives, or alumni and community leaders. Most team chairs ask for a special meeting with the governing board and publicized open meetings with faculty and staff.

Typically, team members arrive at the institution's main location the day before the visit officially begins, and the team chair convenes an initial team meeting. Through earlier communication, the team chair and the CEO have decided whether a get-acquainted gathering will be held on the day the team members arrive. If such an event is scheduled, it is held early in the evening and is relatively brief.

The institution may provide a meal or social function for the team provided that the function is not elaborate or costly and that it allows the team to accomplish some of its work, such as meeting with a key stakeholder group or an open forum.

## Observers

Occasionally, the institution or HLC may request that an observer be present for all or a portion of the visit. Observers do not participate in the team's deliberations or decision-making. If the observer is from a state agency, the visit is governed by HLC's policy [Relations with State Higher Education Agencies, and Other State Offices](#). The HLC staff liaison reviews all requests for observers. In most situations, the team chair, the institution, and HLC must agree that the observer may be present during the visit.\*

\*Note: In certain situations, HLC expects that the HLC staff liaison or other HLC staff member will accompany the evaluation team. The role of staff on such visits is defined in HLC Policy [Staff Role and Responsibility](#).

## The Role of the Team

The team evaluates the institution to determine the extent to which it fulfills the Criteria for Accreditation, provides consultation relative to the ongoing improvement of the institution, and recommends the affiliation status that the institution should have with HLC.

During the visit, team members consult on and evaluate many topics, not all of which have bearing on the decision about accredited status. Some are part of the team's general observations and consultation. A team cannot solve an institution's problems or resolve its internal disputes, but through professional interaction with members of the host institution, it may learn about factors that may be causing tensions and offer ideas about ways to improve systems and processes.

## Communications with the Institution's CEO

The evaluation team typically starts the first full day of the visit by meeting the CEO and anyone else he or she invites. This meeting establishes the tenor of the visit and clarifies for the team any unique contexts in which the visit might be conducted. The team is prepared to pose questions, and the CEO is expected to answer them. The team may also use this meeting to confirm appointments with members of the administration, faculty, staff, and governing board.

The team chair may meet with the CEO at other times during the visit to summarize the progress of the team and to learn if some constituencies of the institution still expect to talk to the team. The CEO should feel free to ask for time

with the chair at any point in the visit, particularly if there are any concerns emerging about the conduct of the visit.

## The Exit Session

The team may conduct an exit session at the conclusion of the visit. Holding an exit session is optional and at the team's sole discretion. If held, an exit session is an opportunity for the team to thank the institution for its efforts and to share with the institution the team's initial observations about strengths, concerns, or other topics. See [Exit Session Protocol for Commission Visits](#) for more information.

## Next Steps

The team will prepare a report and the institution will have an opportunity to respond to the draft and final report. The process continues through decision-making and HLC action.

## Beyond the Visit

Peer Reviewers may not review an institution for which they have engaged in consulting activities during the 10 years prior to the visit and for three years following a visit may not engage in consulting activities for an institution they have reviewed. The role of Peer Reviewers in consulting relationships is defined in HLC's [Statement on Peer Reviewers Serving as Independent Consultants or on Mock Teams to Institutions that are Accredited by or Seeking Accreditation with the Commission](#).

## Questions?

Contact the institution's HLC staff liaison with any questions about this process. 🌱