ACGME Accreditation Process FAQ’s

This document offers information about aspects of the accreditation site visit after July 1, 2013, including preparation and data collection, the on-site portion, and how aspects of the accreditation site visit are affected by the transition to the Next Accreditation System (NAS). The responses below offer answers to general questions. Specific questions should be addressed to the Department of Field Activities or the Residency Review Committee (RRC) team.

**Site Visits in the NAS  
What types of site visits will be conducted in the Next Accreditation System?**  
After July 1, 2013, all ACGME site visits will be either **Full** or **Focused** site visits. The ACGME will use **Focused** visits (1) to conduct a timely, in-depth exploration of a potential problem arising out of the RRC’s review of the annual accreditation data; (2) to assess the merits of a complaint against a program, and (3) for other circumstances as deemed appropriate by the RRC.

The ACGME will use **Full** visits to (1) ensure that a program on initial accreditation has successfully established compliance with the accreditation standards; (2) address broad concerns identified during the RRC’s review of the annual data; and (3) assess in the coming years overall program compliance and ongoing improvement during a scheduled 10-year self-study. The ACGME also will use **Full** visits to address RRC concerns arising out of performance in the accreditation system prior to July 2013, such as when a prior review resulted in a short accreditation cycle.

**How will my program know if it is having another site visit in the current system?  
Phase I Programs** (Emergency Medicine, Internal Medicine, Neurological Surgery, Orthopaedic Surgery, Pediatrics, Diagnostic Radiology, and Urology)**:**The majority of core and subspecialty programs in Phase I have received a notice indicating their first self-study date in the NAS. Programs on initial accreditation and a few others scheduled for a visit soon after July 1, 2013, will undergo a site visit before transitioning to the NAS.

Programs on short accreditation cycles will undergo a Full or a Focused site visit at the discretion of the RRC. These site visits will use the information collected via the Accreditation Data System (ADS), and **will not require completion of a Program Information Form (PIF).** Programs should ensure currency of all data in ADS prior to the site visit (see below). Programs with an “Initial Accreditation” status will undergo a Full site visit and will need to provide an update their application document for this site visit.

**Phase II Programs:** The ACGME will convert the next site visit for the majority of programs in Phase II to their first self-study visit in the NAS. Programs may expect the date of the visit to be moved out by some period. The ACGME sent letters announcing the dates of these self-study visits in June/July 2013.

Newly accredited programs and programs on short accreditation cycles in the accreditation system prior to July 1, 2013, may be scheduled for one added site visit before transitioning to the NAS.

These site visits will use the information collected via ADS, and **not require completion of a PIF.** Programs with initial accreditation status need to provide an updated copy of the specialty portion of their application document for this site visit. Programs should ensure currency of all data in ADS prior to the site visit.

**When do I update ADS information prior to a site visit?**  
Preparing the PIF was an important aspect of preparing for site visits prior to July 1, 2013. With the discontinuation of the PIF, it is important that programs ensure the currency of the information in ADS, particularly the responses to citations and the information on major changes in the program. Programs should update their response to citations and the section on major changes to ensure the documentation reflects the current status of improvements in these areas.

**How will we be notified of our site visit?**  
Programs scheduled for a Focused site visit will be given a minimum of 30 days of advance notice, and programs scheduled for a Full site visit will receive a minimum of 60 days of advance notice of the date, with the option of one postponement if the request meets ACGME justification criteria. Because these visits will no longer use a PIF, a shorter announcement period is feasible.

The ACGME expects that there will be a 12- to 15-month advance notice of the approximate month of the self-study, followed by a 90- to 110-day advance notice that gives the specific date and detailed information about the self-study visit. The format and other aspects of the self-study visit are currently under development.

For all site visits, the ACGME will send an e-mail notice, and simultaneously, will post a detailed site visit announcement letter in the program’s folder in ADS. Programs should review the letter carefully.

**What is the role of the ACGME field representatives?**  
Accreditation site visits for programs and sponsoring institutions are conducted by members of the ACGME field staff. These field representatives are professional site visitors employed by the ACGME. [Biographical sketches](http://www.acgme.org/acgmeweb/tabid/224/GraduateMedicalEducation/SiteVisitandFieldStaff/FieldStaff.aspx) outlining their professional background and tenure with the ACGME can be found on the ACGME website.

**What happens during the site visit?**  
During the site visit, the field representative will use the ADS data and other information as indicated for the specialty. The site visitor also will review documentation the program has made available on site. A list of these documents will be provided with the letter announcing the accreditation site visit.

The site visitor verifies and confirms information used in the accreditation process, including ADS data, the resident survey, the faculty survey (for 2013 this includes Phase I specialties only), and other information as relevant. The site visitor also interviews the program director, faculty, residents, and the designated institutional official (DIO) and/or other administrative representatives, reviews documentation, and, for some programs, tours the physical facilities. Using information obtained from this process, the site visitor writes a detailed narrative report that the RRC uses together with the information provided by the program to make its accreditation decision.

Beginning in July 2013, the clarification interview at the end of the site visit will include preliminary feedback from the site visitor. This will take the form of a succinct summary that highlights two to three key strengths and offers preliminary advice in two to three areas in need of improvement, based on the site visitors understanding of the accreditation standards and familiarity with relevant best practices. The site visitor **cannot** offer any predictions about the accreditation outcomes; these decisions are the purview of the Review Committee.

**How will new program applications be reviewed in the NAS?**  
All core specialty programs and most surgical subspecialty programs require a site visit to verify the application document through interviews and review of data. Most nonsurgical subspecialty programs will be reviewed by the RRCs using the written application prepared by the program.

Applications found in substantial compliance are given initial accreditation. All programs on initial accreditation are scheduled for a site visit within two years of the initial accreditation decision. The site visit will use an updated version of the initial application document; interviews with residents/fellows, faculty, and institutional leadership; review of documents; and tours of facilities, as needed.

. **How will institutional reviews be conducted in the NAS?**  
Institutional reviews are being transitioned to the NAS in Phase II, with the details still under development. The Institutional Review Committee (IRC) does not plan to conduct institutional site visits between July 1, 2013, and June 30, 2014, with the possible exception for sponsoring institutions currently on a short accreditation cycle. These institutions will receive communication from the IRC, including details on the information the IRC will require through a Focused site visit or a progress report during this transition.

**How do we set up the schedule for the day of the site visit**  
Site visits for larger programs will be conducted by a team. Site visits for smaller programs may entail a team visit at the discretion of the RRC or the Department of Field Activities. The site visit announcement letter will indicate the type of visit and who the site visitor(s) will be.

On the day of the visit, the site visitor(s) will meet with residents, faculty, the program director, and the DIO (or a representative).

**How should residents be selected to meet with the site visitor?**  
The resident interview is crucial to the site visit. If the program has 15 or fewer residents, the site visitor will interview 12 to 15 residents on duty the day of the visit.

If the program has more than 15 residents, the site visitor(s) will interview 15 to 20 peer-selected residents representing all required years of the program. Chief residents **beyond** the required years of residency (e.g., fourth-year internal medicine chief residents) may not participate in the resident interview (they may be included in the faculty interview). For programs with a combined program track, such as internal medicine-psychiatry, representatives from the combined program must be included in the interview.

Residents may be interviewed in smaller groups by training year or individually. The field representative will indicate this during the planning process for the site visit day. Residents should be made available for the entire interview period, with their pagers and cell phones turned off.

**What happens after the site visit?**  
The site visitor submits a written report to the ACGME that is forwarded to the RRC and sent for review. The site visitor does not participate in the accreditation decision.

All RRCs meet at least two times per year, and the ACGME strives to review each program in a timely fashion after the site visit (the schedule of meetings is available from the ACGME website). You may contact the RRC team if you want to find out if your program will be reviewed at a given meeting.

A few days after the meeting at which the program is reviewed, the RRC sends an electronic notice indicating the accreditation status and tentative date of the next site visit. The detailed accreditation decision will be posted in ADS approximately 60 to 90 days after the date of the meeting.

**Can the date of the site visit be changed?**  
Due to the logistics involved in conducting a large number of site visits, once the date of the site visit is set it generally cannot be changed. Exceptions may be made in certain circumstances. All requests to change the site visit date must be made by telephone to Jane Shapiro, Associate Director (312-755-5015) or Penny Iverson-Lawrence, Senior Survey Administrator (312-755-5014) in the Department of Field Activities. Requests must be made within 14 calendar days of receipt of the site visit announcement letter.

Requests for changes or postponements made more than 14 days after the date of the site visit announcement must be accompanied by a letter from the institution's DIO or Chief Executive Officer. The letter must indicate the institution agrees with the request for a change in the site visit date and understands it may be charged a fee for the late notice of their intent to postpone the visit.

**Under what circumstance can our program request an early site visit?**  
A number of RRCs require a site visit and review prior to allowing a program to increase its complement. Another reason for an early visit is after an adverse action, once program leadership feels the program can demonstrate substantial compliance with the standards.

To request an early visit, check with your RRC Executive Director or staff. Based on his or her recommendation, you may request an early review (contact Ingrid Philibert (312-755-5003) or Jane Shapiro (312-755-5015) and provide the reason(s)).