

Guidance to Teams: Conducting a GAC Accreditation Visit

This guide provides essential information for Team Leads and Team Members on Conducting a GAC Accreditation Visit.

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Visit Objective

The objective of the visit is to substantiate the evidence and information presented in the Self-Assessment Report through the peer review process and in accordance with the GAC accreditation standards.

Preparation

It is incumbent on the team to be well prepared for the visit, including reviewing program accreditation documentation thoroughly in advance of the visit. This requires effective preparation.

See the *GAC Handbook of Accreditation 5.0* and the GAC Online Training Modules on the GAC website for further details.

Timeline

Pre-Visit	
60 to 90 days before the Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The potential visit team, comprised of a Team Lead and two Team Members is selected by the GAC Accreditation Specialist. The proposed Team Members' CVs are sent to the program for approval. Once approved, the Team Lead participates in the review of the Self-Assessment Report with a GAC Director. Upon acceptance of the Self-Assessment Report by the GAC Directors, the planning process for the visit begins.
30 to 60 days before the Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Team Lead, the primary point of contact between the visit team and the program, plans the visit with the program's designated representative including coordination of the visit dates and preparation of the visit agenda and logistics, such as travel, lodging, and meals. See the <i>Visit Agenda Template</i> on the GAC website
2 weeks before the Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two weeks before the visit, the program makes available to the team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to information for every required and elective course and/or subject containing relevant management of projects content included in the evaluation of the program (for example, syllabi, Microsoft PowerPoint slides, samples of student work, including capstone projects, textbooks, readings, evaluations, etc.). any additional requested materials in advance of the visit. virtual meeting links for any virtual team members (hybrid or virtual visits only).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ a confirmed visit schedule including appropriate and knowledgeable participants for all meetings. Names should be included. • The program contact also provides an overview of the curriculum documents & student work repository to the Visit Team, to ensure they understand the design and where to access needed documentation. • Team Lead holds Pre-Visit Planning Meeting with Visit Team Members. See the <i>Pre-Visit Planning Meeting Template</i> and the <i>Team Lead Communication to Programs and Team Members</i> documents on the GAC website
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Visit	
During the Visit	<p><i>See the Visit Agenda Template for full details</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the visit, team members verify and explore the information represented in the Self-Assessment Report. This is done through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ interviews individually and/or in groups with institutional leaders, program leaders, administrative personnel, faculty members, students, alumni, advisory board members, and industry representatives, if relevant; ○ review of institutional and program policies, processes, and procedures; ○ review of the program’s curriculum and examples of student work, if not completed before the visit; and ○ examination of physical, financial, and/or digital resources supporting the program. • GAC visits typically require 2 to 3 days to complete. Additional visit days may be required to visit a branch campus. Additional locations or instructional sites do not require a visit.
Second Full Day of Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Team holds a meeting to determine the contents of the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation • The Team drafts the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation
Morning of Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Team Lead reads the Visit Report during the final visit meeting <p>NOTE: No presentation (i.e. PowerPoint) should be given during the exit meeting with the program</p>

Post-Visit	
Up to 30 days after the Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within two weeks of the completion of the visit, the Team Lead sends only the draft Visit Report to the program, which is allowed a 2-week period to correct any factual errors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>The Visit Report does NOT include the visit team’s Visit Recommendation or any other documentation. The Recommendation is confidential and is only communicated to the GAC.</i> • The factually corrected Visit Report and Visit Recommendation are required to be submitted to the GAC no later than 30 days after the completion of the visit.
30 to 60 days after the Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Visit Report is reviewed and sent by the GAC Accreditation Specialist to the program for its records. The program is allowed 10 days from receipt of the Visit Report to submit an optional Program Response. • The GAC Directors evaluate the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation and any Program Response at the next available meeting. The GAC Directors’ accreditation decision is based on the collective evidence provided by the Letter of Intent, the Self-Assessment Report, the Visit Report, the Visit Recommendation, and the optional Program Response. • The program is notified of the GAC Directors’ accreditation decision.

Visit Checklist
<p>___ 1. Review all program documentation in advance of the pre-visit planning meeting and prepare questions.</p>

___ 2. Ensure virtual team member has been provided with meeting links.
___ 3. All travel logistical requirements (flights/lodging/transportation arrangements, etc.) for each member of the team have been arranged and confirmed.
___ 4. Team and program director have exchanged contact information if needed during travel emergencies.
___ 5. Team has maintained the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation in MS Teams or a shared folder.
___ 6. Each team member has participated in the final confirmation of details for the Visit Report and Recommendation post-visit.
___ 5. Submit any expenses to the program for reimbursement.

Visit Team Roles and Responsibilities

GAC maintains a list of qualified evaluators constituting the visit teams. These evaluators have been recommended by institution and program heads, colleagues who have participated in an evaluation process, GAC directors, and GAC team members. GAC relies on the personal and professional integrity of individuals to refuse any assignment where even the slightest potential for a conflict of interest exists. A conflict of interest might include any relationship the Team Member has with the program, either as a former student, or a current or previous role as a faculty member or lecturer within the program. All team members sign and submit a Confidentiality Agreement and a Conflict of Interest and Ethics Agreement.

The team typically consists of the Team Lead and one or two Team Members. Additional team members are added for programs with multiple awards, degrees, or locations. At least one member of the team will be from the project management academic community and one will be a project management practitioner. The final composition of the team is determined by GAC. Additionally, GAC may invite a representative from the governmental or nongovernmental quality assurance entity to observe the visit as a courtesy.

When assigning Team Members, GAC considers the experience of the prospective Team Member to ensure that the team has appropriate background in the discipline of the applicant program. Other factors considered during team development are the modality of the program, whether face-to-face or online, and the physical location of the program regarding the proximity of the Team Members. In all cases the GAC matches the degree being reviewed with Team Members who have appropriate experience and/or knowledge.

Team Leads and Team Members are ambassadors of the GAC. Lack of professionalism, objectivity, or adherence to deadlines may result in discontinuation as a GAC volunteer.

- **Visit Team Lead**

The GAC appoints a Team Lead for each visit. The Team Lead is the primary liaison with the program, and all questions regarding planning the visit should be directed to him or her.

The Team Lead possesses relevant experience to understand team objectives, coordinate team efforts, and represent the GAC professionally and effectively. The Team Lead has participated in previous visits and has been recommended for the role. They are timely in responding to communication and adhere to deadlines.

The Team Lead provides leadership for the evaluation process and team during the visit preparation, during the visit, and after the completion of the visit. They possess an in-depth understanding of the GAC Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards.

The Team Lead responsibilities are as follows:

- Coordinate the visit dates in conjunction with the program's designated representatives and the team members
- Plan the visit in conjunction with the program's designated representative.

- Coordinate attendance of representatives from all program locations and degrees
- Develop the visit agenda ensuring that each GAC Accreditation Standard described in the *GAC Accreditation Handbook (5.0)* is addressed
- In coordination with the program, plan logistics including travel arrangements and hotel accommodations for team.
- Communicate team's status on a regular basis to the GAC Accreditation Specialist.
- Review Self-Assessment Report and identify areas to be addressed during the visit.
- Prepare Team Members for the visit.
- Participate in the visit.
- Lead the team in drafting the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation on the evening of the last day of the visit.
- Facilitate the verbal exit meeting with the program, reading the Visit Report.
- Maintain the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation in a shared folder (MS Teams or other) accessible to the Team Members for access in case of an emergency.
- Submit the final Visit Report and Visit Recommendation to the GAC as soon as possible so that it can be reviewed at the next GAC Director's Meeting and no more than 30 days after the visit.

- **Visit Team Members**

Each Team Member possesses sufficient relevant experience to understand team objectives and to represent the GAC effectively. They also possess a detailed understanding of the GAC Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards.

The Team Member responsibilities are as follows:

- Review the Self-Assessment Report, utilizing the GAC Accreditation Standards described in the *GAC Accreditation Handbook (5.0)*.
- Participate in team preparation session(s) conducted prior to the visit.
- Identify areas to be addressed during the visit evaluation.
- Participate in the visit, through interviewing key stakeholders and verifying information in the Self-Assessment Report.
- Assist in drafting the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation on the last evening of the visit.

Logistics

- **Expenses**

The program is responsible for the travel expenses of the Visit Team in accordance with PMI's Volunteer Travel and Expense Policy. Specifically, the program shall pay for the following:

- Airfare
- Hotel accommodations
- Meals
- Ground transportation during the visit, and to and from the Visit Team Member's office or home to airport, including tolls and airport parking fees

In most cases, the program will pay expenses at the time they are incurred. In an instance where the expense is not pre-paid, the following guidelines would be followed:

- The program provides clear instructions to the Team Lead regarding submission of reimbursable expenses.
- The instructions should include forms, procedures, and necessary documentation according to the policies of the program.
- Information will be provided prior to the visit evaluation so that the team can maintain and submit the proper documentation in a timely manner.

- **NOTE:** visitors should be regarded as guests of the program and are not vendors or contractors. No forms, contracts, or paperwork that imply a relationship other than as a guest visitor can be required.

Expenses not covered by the program include discretionary spending, such as personal phone calls and entertainment.

- **Agenda/Schedule**

The visit is typically 2 to 3 days.

The Team Lead will determine the dates for the visit in coordination with the program's contact and the team members. The Team Lead will develop the agenda for the visit in coordination with the program's primary contact. The agenda should be organized to give the team the opportunity to interview people at all levels of the organization/program individually and/or in groups including institutional leaders, program leaders, administrative personnel, faculty members, students, alumni, advisory board members, and industry representatives, if relevant. Representatives from all program locations and modalities must be included. Time should be set aside daily for the team to review institutional and program policies, processes, and procedures; the program's curriculum and examples of student work, and the physical, financial, and/or digital resources supporting the program. It can also be used to explore any area needing further inquiry. They may choose to sit in on selected classes or lectures.

See the GAC website for the following resources for use before and during the visit:

- Pre-Visit Planning Meeting Template
- Team Lead Communication to Programs and Team Members
- Visit Agenda Template
- Tools and Techniques for Conducting Effective Accreditation Visits

- **Verbal Report**

The verbal report summarizes the team's findings.

The team's visit concludes with:

- a verbal reading of the Visit Report with the program leadership and program primary contact followed by:
- a verbal reading of the Visit Report to the representatives selected by the program.
- **NOTE: No visual presentation (i.e. PowerPoint or other) should be given during the final meeting**

The team's Visit Recommendation is not discussed during the final meeting with the program's representatives. The Visit Recommendation is confidential and is only provided to the GAC Directors and Accreditation Specialist.

Post Visit Processes

- **Visit Report**

- The Team Lead makes any final edits to the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation.
- The Team Lead maintains the Visit Report and Visit Recommendation in a shared folder accessible to the Team Members *in the instance of any emergency on the part of the Team Lead*.
- The Team Lead sends the Visit Report to the program for factual verification within two weeks of the conclusion of the visit.
- The program returns the corrected draft to the Team Lead.

- The factually corrected Visit Report and the Visit Recommendation are submitted by the Team Lead to the GAC Accreditation Specialist **no later than** 30 days after the completion of the visit evaluation.
 - When the report is received by the GAC Accreditation Specialist, it is reviewed, and the final report is sent to the program.
 - The program may submit an optional Program Response to GAC within 10 working days of receiving the final team report from the GAC Accreditation Specialist. The Program Response is in the form of a letter addressed to the Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) Manager. The program emails the letter to gac@pmi.org. The Program Response should be brief (four pages or less) with a focus on major specific issues or significant differences with perceptions and/or interpretations within the Visit Report, rather than minor points of disagreement. Additional information, or analyses that differ from those of the team, may be helpful to the GAC Directors. If the GAC does not receive the program's response when it is due, the GAC may choose to make its decision without the program's response.
- **GAC Accreditation Decision**

The GAC Directors evaluate the collective information included in the Letter of Intent, the Self-Assessment Report, the Visit Report and Recommendation, and the Program Response at the next available directors' meeting. The accreditation decision regarding the program is made based upon review of all information presented.

Please refer to the *GAC Accreditation Handbook (5.0)* for more details regarding the accreditation process.

Contact GAC Accreditation Specialist with any questions:

- Email: gac@pmi.org