

# GUIDANCE TO PROGRAMS: HOSTING A GAC ONSITE VISIT EVALUATION

## Objective

The purpose of the GAC Onsite Visit Evaluation is to determine if the program is achieving its mission and is aligned with the GAC accreditation standards as set forth in the *Handbook of Accreditation, (4.0)*. Through the peer review process, the Onsite Visit Evaluation Team substantiates and evidences information presented in the Self-Assessment Report

## Preparation

It is incumbent on the host program to be well prepared for the Onsite Visit Team’s visit and to make readily available information the Team needs, and provide access to the people they wish to speak to. One of the best ways to host a successful visit is to plan and prepare effectively!

### Estimated Timeline

<p><b>60 to 90 days before the Onsite Visit</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The potential onsite visit team, comprising a Team Lead and two Team Members is selected by GAC Staff. .The proposed Team Members’ CVs are sent to the Applicant Program for approval.</li> <li>○ Once approved, the Team Lead participates in the review of the Self-Assessment Report submission with the GAC Directors.</li> <li>○ Upon acceptance of the Self-Assessment Report by the GAC Directors, the planning process for the onsite visit begins.</li> </ul>
<p><b>30 to 60 days before the Onsite Visit</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Team Lead, the primary point of contact between the Onsite Visit Team and the program, plans the visit with the program’s designated representative. This includes preparation of the Onsite Visit Agenda and logistics, such as flights, lodging and meals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3-4 weeks before the Onsite Visit</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Five (5) copies of all related paper documentation of the Self-Assessment Report &amp; supplemental information have been sent to the GAC Offices.</li> </ul>

<b>The Onsite Visit</b>	
<b>Up to 30 days after the Onsite Visit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Within two weeks of the completion of the onsite visit, the Team Lead sends the draft Onsite Visit Report to the Program, which is allowed a 2 week period to correct any factual errors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>The Onsite Visit Report does NOT include the onsite visit team's accreditation recommendation. The recommendation is confidential and is only communicated to the GAC.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>○ The Onsite Visit Team's final report and its accreditation recommendation are required to be submitted to the GAC no later than 30 days after the completion of the onsite visit.</li> </ul>
<b>30 to 60 days after the Onsite Visit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Onsite Visit final report is reviewed and sent by GAC Staff to the applicant program for its records. The applicant program is allowed 10 days from receipt of the Onsite Visit final report to submit a response regarding the report.</li> <li>○ The GAC Directors evaluate the Onsite Visit Report and recommendation as well as any response from the applicant program 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 and the Onsite Visit Evaluation Report and Recommendation.</li> <li>○ The applicant program is notified of the GAC Directors' accreditation decision.</li> </ul>

### **Onsite Visit Evaluation Checklist**

___ 1. The Onsite Visit Review Fee has been submitted to the GAC Offices.
___ 2. All of the logistical requirements (flights/lodging/transportation arrangements, etc.) for each member of the Onsite Team have been arranged and confirmed.
___ 3. All on-campus logistics for the Onsite Team (transporting team to and from campus, lockable conference room, equipment, etc.) have been arranged.
___ 4. All required personnel are available for interviews, as scheduled in the Onsite Visit Agenda.

### **The Onsite Visit Team**

In coordination with the applicant program, the GAC selects a team to conduct the onsite visit evaluation. The Onsite Team consists of the Team Lead and two Team Members. This team is composed of both academics and practitioners. Each team will have at least one academic project management faculty member or Program Director, and at least one practitioner with a PMP or other project management certification. As with all other GAC volunteers, evaluators serve without compensation.

Onsite Visit Teams are selected from a pool of peer evaluators maintained by the GAC. Team Members must not have any conflict of interest with the applicant program. A conflict of interest might include any relationship the Team Member has with the applicant program, either as a former student, or a current or previous role as a faculty member or lecturer within the program. Additionally, GAC requires that each Team Member review, sign and return confidentiality documents prior to participating in any visit. This

ensures the Team Member is aware and accepts responsibility regarding confidentiality, non-disclosure and other ethical considerations during the onsite visit.

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.

➤ **Onsite Visit Team Lead**

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

The Lead possesses relevant experience to understand team objectives, coordinate team effort, and represent the GAC effectively. A Team Lead has participated in previous onsite visits and has been recommended for the role.

The Team Lead provides leadership for the onsite evaluation process and team during the visit preparation process, while onsite at the applicant program's campus, and after the completion of the visit. He or she also possesses an in-depth understanding of the GAC Eligibility Requirements and Accreditation Standards.

The onsite Team Lead responsibilities are as follows:

- Plan the onsite visit in conjunction with the program's designated representative.
- Develop onsite visit agenda ensuring that each GAC Accreditation Standard described in the *GAC Accreditation Handbook (4.0)* is addressed.
- In coordination with the applicant program, plan logistics including travel arrangements and hotel accommodations for team.
- Communicate team's status on a regular basis to GAC staff.
- Review Self-Assessment Report and identify areas to be addressed for onsite visit evaluation.
- Prepare Team Members for the onsite visit evaluation
- Participate in the onsite visit evaluation.
- Facilitate the onsite exit debrief with the program.
- Ensure submission of the final onsite visit evaluation report and recommendation to the GAC within 30 days of the visit.

➤ **Onsite Visit Team Members**

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

The Onsite Team Member responsibilities are as follows:

- Review the Self-Assessment Report, utilizing the GAC Accreditation Standards described in the *GAC Accreditation Handbook (4.0)*.
- Participate in team preparation session(s) conducted prior to the onsite visit.
- Identify areas to be addressed during the onsite visit evaluation.
- Participate in the onsite visit, through interviewing key stakeholders and verifying information in the Self-Assessment Report.
- Provide feedback for the onsite visit evaluation exit debrief with the program.

- Support the preparation of the final Onsite Visit Report by making content suggestions and providing opinion on accreditation recommendation.

## Logistics

### ➤ Expenses

The applicant program is responsible for the expenses of the Onsite Visit Team associated with the onsite visit evaluation. Specifically the program shall pay for the following:

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

In most cases, the program will pay expense 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, necessary documentation according to the policies of the Applicant Program.
- Information will be provided prior to the onsite visit evaluation so that the team can maintain and submit the proper documentation in a timely manner.

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

### ➤ Agenda/Schedule

The onsite visit is typically 2 to 3 days. .

The Onsite Team Lead will develop the agenda for the visit in coordination in agreement with the main point of contact for the applicant program. The agenda should be organized to give the team the opportunity to meet and talk to people at all levels of the organization/program, including current and former students, faculty, administrators, and support staff. Time should be set aside daily for the team to look through course materials and organize their notes. It can also be used to explore any area needing further inquiry. They may choose to sit in on selected classes or lectures.

View sample agenda:



**GAC Onsite Visit  
Agenda Template 31**

➤ **Workroom/Materials**

- Each program must dedicate a lockable conference/workroom for the use of the team for the duration of the visit. The room should be stocked with a complete set of information for each course.
- Below please find a listing of materials that must be made available to the Team during the Onsite Visit:

<p><b>Current Course Syllabi and Materials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ All courses/subjects within the program</li> <li>○ Text books</li> <li>○ Lecture notes</li> <li>○ Handouts</li> <li>○ Examinations</li> <li>○ Etc.</li> </ul> <p>Online materials should be downloaded and provided in hard copy – DO NOT RELY on links to course web sites to demonstrate course materials.</p>	<p><b>Student Work Evidencing Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assignments,</li> <li>○ Presentations,</li> <li>○ Case study analyses,</li> <li>○ Online forums/discussions/blogs,</li> <li>○ Theses,</li> <li>○ Research papers/projects,</li> <li>○ Capstone projects</li> <li>○ And other items which provide evidence of alignment with achievement of the program’s learning outcomes.</li> </ul> <p>Additionally, student work should show a range of achievement. For example, the Team would expect to see student work demonstrating what constitutes a grade of “A” versus a grade of “C.”</p>
<p><b>Documentation Referenced in Self-Assessment Report:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Full copies of all documentation noted in the Supplements submitted with the Self-Assessment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Other Items:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evidence that assessment data is being used for program improvement</li> <li>○ Externally available program information via website or other material</li> <li>○ Internship-related materials, if applicable</li> <li>○ Faculty CVs</li> </ul>

**The Actual Review**

The onsite visit team spends approximately three days at the program’s campus. The primary task of the team is to validate the contents of the program’s Self-Assessment Report and to determine the program’s alignment with the GAC Accreditation Standards.

➤ **Interview Group Composition**

- **Students**
  - Recommended group size 6 – 12 students
  - Participants must be currently enrolled in program
  - Participants must represent

- Each related degree program being proposed for accreditation
    - Each method that the degree program is delivered (i.e. on campus, on line, or hybrid)
  - If unrelated degree programs are being reviewed, separate student groups must be interviewed for each program
  - Exclude faculty, adjuncts, administrators and staff
  - Meeting can be held face-to-face or via teleconference
  - Optional – team observes class and randomly interviews students
- **Alumni**
  - Recommended group size of 6 – 12 alumni
  - Majority of participants should have graduated within the last three years
  - Participants must represent
    - Each related degree program being proposed for accreditation
    - Each method that the degree program is delivered (i.e. on campus, on line, or hybrid)
  - If unrelated degree programs are being reviewed, a separate alumni group must be interviewed for each program
  - Exclude faculty, adjuncts, administrators and staff
  - Meeting can be held face-to-face or via teleconference
- **Industry Representatives**
  - Recommended group size 6 – 8 participants
  - Suggestions for individuals to be invited
    - Industry/external advisory group members
    - Representatives of firms who have employ graduates/students
    - Project management professional association local chapter representatives
  - Exclude faculty, adjuncts, administrators and staff
  - Participants may be alumni who did not participate in the alumni session
  - Meeting can be held face-to-face or via teleconference
- **Faculty**
  - Recommended group size:
    - Adequate full time faculty – depending on size of program
    - Adequate adjunct or part time faculty – depending on size of program
  - Invite all faculty members to participate with a specific emphasis on those who teach core courses
  - Ensure that faculty from all sites and delivery models are represented
  - If unrelated degree programs are being reviewed, a separate faculty group may be interviewed for each program
  - Exclude administrators and staff
  - Meeting can be held face-to-face or via teleconference
- **Support staff (admin/technical)**
  - Based on program
  - No minimum group size

## ➤ **Inspection**

The team inspects documents and records indicating the current status of statements made in the Self-Assessment Report. This includes:

- Examination of current course syllabi

- Review of course materials such as text books, lecture notes, handouts, and examinations
- Inspection of sample student work such as assignments, thesis, research papers, and projects
- Review of program’s continuous improvement process and evidence of its use

The team observes the existence of specific items described in the Self-Assessment Report. This includes physical facilities, library materials, and learning environment.

### ➤ **Oral Report**

The Oral Report summarizes the team’s findings.

The team’s visit concludes with:

- a debrief of the Oral Report with the Provost/Department Chair,
- then presenting the Oral Report with the representatives selected by the program.

**The team’s final accreditation recommendation is not discussed during the Oral Report with the program’s representatives. The accreditation recommendation is confidential and is only provided to the GAC Directors and staff.**

## **Post Onsite Visit Processes**

### ➤ **Onsite Visit Evaluation Report**

- The Team Lead prepares the draft of the report.
- The lead sends it to the Team Members for review and comment.
- Once the team agrees the report is complete, then the lead forwards it to the applicant program which is allowed a 2 week timeframe to correct any factual errors.
- The report provided to the program for comment does not include the team’s accreditation recommendation. The accreditation recommendation is confidential and is only communicated to the GAC.
- Once the applicant program returns the corrected draft to the team lead, the report is finalized by the Team Lead and sent to the GAC with the Team’s accreditation recommendation. The onsite visit evaluation team’s final report and its accreditation recommendation must be submitted to the GAC no later than 30 days after the completion of the onsite visit evaluation.
- When the report is received in the GAC offices, it is reviewed, and the final report is sent to the applicant program for its records.
- The applicant program may choose to provide a “Program Response to the Onsite Visit Report” to GAC within 10 working days of receiving the final team report from GAC Staff. The program response is in the form of a letter addressed to the Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) in care of the GAC Accreditation Administrator. The program emails an electronic copy of the letter to [gac@pmi.org](mailto:gac@pmi.org). The program response should be brief, 4 pages or less, with a focus on major specific issues or significant differences with perceptions and/or interpretations within the Onsite 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 Onsite Visit Evaluation Report and Recommendation, as well as any Program Response to the report are evaluated at the GAC Directors' next earliest possible regularly scheduled meeting. Giving consideration to all information provided about the program, the GAC Directors make an accreditation decision regarding the applicant program(s).

Please refer to the *GAC Accreditation Handbook* (4.0) for more details regarding the accreditation process ([http://www.pmi.org/global-accreditation-center/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/gac/handbook-2016.pdf?sc\\_lang=temp=en](http://www.pmi.org/global-accreditation-center/-/media/pmi/documents/public/pdf/gac/handbook-2016.pdf?sc_lang=temp=en)).

**Contact GAC Staff with any questions or concerns:**

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