The Care and Feeding of a Visiting Committee: Planning and Hosting a Successful On-Site Visit

Things to note before and during the visit:

* Always use the SACSCOC website resources. There are guidelines for On-Site Visits: http://www.sacscoc.org/inst\_forms\_and\_info1.asp
* Include your SACSCOC VP on all correspondence with every committee member, no matter how small you think the detail.

# Timeline

Please note that this list does not include deadlines for submitting the QEP, the Compliance Certification, or the Focused Report to SACSCOC.

## Before the Visit:

### Two years

* Read the SACSCOC resources about on-site visits. The Handbook for Institutions Seeking Reaffirmation has a lot of information about on-site visits: <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Handbook%20for%20Institutions%20seeking%20reaffirmation.pdf>
* Start discussion with hotel, visit potential choices, and block off approximate guest rooms needed and conference room.
* Reserve rooms on campus for interviews.
* Start discussion with groups on campus:
  + Transportation
  + Technology (computers, internet connection, laptops, network access)
  + Dining/Catering
  + Student Ambassadors
  + Events and Conferences (room set up, building coordination)
  + Campus Security
  + Alert appropriate faculty, staff, senior leadership about dates for visit. (They should plan to be available during the visit if they are called for interviews.)
  + Alert (and ask them to hold the approximate dates of the visit) your governing board – the committee chair and SACSCOC VP will want to have a meeting with your governing board.

### One Year

* Invite your SACSCOC VP for Advisory Visit
  + Show him the hotel and campus rooms you are considering using for the On-Site visit

### Six Months

* Reserve copiers, printers, shredders, technology (laptops) for committee on campus workroom and hotel workroom (these two workrooms should be identical)
* Order office supplies for both committee workrooms
* Order institutional paraphernalia that you intend to give to the committee (e.g. USB drives imprinted with your logo, laptop bags, water bottles, pens and notepads, items of local flavor)
* Start discussion with local restaurants to reserve private committee dinner off campus
* Prep campus constituencies:
  + Offices that may be visited
  + Student Ambassadors (guides for committee members)
  + All potential interviewees
  + Senior leadership and governing board
  + Transportation chauffeurs
* Identify the point person(s) who will be responsible for sending logistical information on the visit to the SACSCOC VP, committee chair, and committee members. Note this may be a different person than the one who will be responding to any content, additional documentation, clarification or technical issues with the Focused Report
* Send reminder to all appropriate faculty, staff, and senior leadership about dates for visit. Dates should be set by now, and these constituents should plan to be available during the visit if they are called for interviews.
* Follow up with groups on campus:
  + Transportation
  + Technology
  + Dining/Catering
  + Student Ambassadors
  + Events and Conferences (room set up, building coordination)
  + Campus Security
* Establish and maintain open communication with the committee chair as soon as you know who it is.
  + Contact your committee chair to arrange an orientation (or pre-visit) if desired.
  + Develop tentative agenda with the committee chair’s input.
  + Send restaurant choices for off-campus dinners and let committee chair choose.
* Reserve hotel guest and conference rooms.
* Verify reservations of on campus space.

### Three Months

* Send the committee member information request form
* Research the bios of your committee members, find out more about their professional interests. Where possible let them be escorted by or meet with members of your institution with similar interests.
* Verify all reservations, finalize details on campus and off campus arrangements
* Make arrangements to get temporary cell phones for all Logistics group (so they don’t use their personal phone)
* Provide briefing sessions for all campus constituencies that will come into contact with the committee
* Meet with administrators from each area (Resources, Academics, Student Life, etc.) to make sure they know what may be requested from their area. Prep them on areas of the Compliance Certification that were questioned and addressed in the Focused Report.
* Make sure anyone who will be in interviews with the committee has read and has access to the Compliance Certification, off-site review comments, QEP, and Focused Report. You may want to highlight the standards that are directly affected by their area.

### Two Weeks

Committee Members and Committee Chair

* Send personalized confirmation packets
* Request the interview list from the committee chair
  + Schedule interviews with rooms and interviewees
  + Be prepared for last minute changes and additions

Scheduling

* Make arrangements for delivery and pick up of copiers/printers and supplies for committee workrooms
* Provide personalized schedules and logistics team contact listing:
  + Transportation Office and Chauffeurs
  + Catering
  + Building Coordinator
  + Interview Coordinator
  + Technology Support on campus and at the hotel
  + Logistics Group (comprehensive schedule for each member and one for command center)
* Confirm meeting time/date for governing board with committee

Logistics

* Confirm all point people (contacts) for logistics, get immediate contact information (cell phone and office phone)
  + Technology on campus
  + Technology at hotel
  + Catering
  + Transportation
  + Logistics of visit (Working Group)
  + Hotel
  + Building coordinator
  + Student Ambassador
* Identify students and faculty involved in QEP for meeting/lunch with committee
* Collect requested documentation for committee workrooms
* Make plans for crises (e.g. committee chair is delayed, committee member forgets medication, printer not working at the hotel)

## During the Visit:

### Early Arrivals (The day before the visit)

* Make sure everyone has eaten or has the option to
* Hand them their welcome binder (with hotel room key) and escort them to the elevator or their room
* Make sure they know to come down to pick up their laptop and internet connection device (if you are using these)
* Give them prepared gift bags that they can use during the visit and then take home with them. We gave them laptop bags with the institution’s logo. Inside the bags we placed useful marketing items from various offices on campus, such as water bottles, notepads with pens, and luggage tag holders. Make sure items you give are something they can use later!!

### The Visit

* Make sure all late arrivals receive welcome packet, hotel room key, laptop and internet connection device (if using these), gift bags
* Verify daily with catering on and off campus, transportation, student ambassadors’ schedule
* Be prepared for the committee to call new interviewees or cancel interviews or any other schedule changes
* Be prepared to have student ambassadors or other guides give a walking tour of campus or to the bookstore
* On the last day of the visit, most committee members will want to leave right after the final meeting. It is nice to have their transportation waiting for them at the door.

# Things to Consider

Don’t ever forget that your visiting committee is here to help you. They are not being paid, and in most cases they are taking time out of their busy schedules to travel to your institution and spend three days researching, interviewing, meeting, and writing. Treat your committee members as honored guests! Anything you can do for them to make their travel easier, their work faster, and make them feel comfortable is always very much appreciated. Try to imagine yourself in their position. What would make you feel more at ease from the time you arrive at the airport to the time you catch your flight home?

## Confirmation Packet

A confirmation packet sent a few weeks before the visit can help to put your committee members’ minds at ease about traveling, arriving to the correct destination on time, and the entire trip in general.

* Send committee members Information Request Form: This should go to all committee members, the committee chair, any observers, and your SACSCOC VP as soon as you know the final line up for your committee. The request can be sent by online survey to expedite the response time, but should have the option of printing and faxing, emailing, or mailing back. The committee member information request form should include:
  + Name, Title, Institution
  + Preferred Contact Information
  + Technology Needed for the Visit (e.g. a laptop, Mac or PC)
  + Dietary Restrictions and Preferences (Pay strict attention to allergies or intolerances, but if you can also provide favorite snacks or meal items this is a nice touch)
  + Accessibility Requirements (e.g. accessible for someone who uses a wheelchair, limited mobility, weak knees)
  + Travel Arrangements (e.g. flying or driving, flight numbers arrival and return, if driving would you like us to provide directions)
  + Other needs (e.g. special sleeping arrangements such as allergic to down)
* Send personalized confirmation packets to each visiting committee member about two weeks prior to their visit. Include:
  + Welcome letter
  + Map of airport where traveler will arrive or driving map and directions
  + Photo, name, cell phone for chauffeur picking up traveler (if flying) and a picture of the vehicle the chauffeur will be driving
  + Confirmation of traveler’s flight number (if flying) and arrival time
  + Information on the hotel where they will be staying (amenities, website), approximate check-in time and confirmation number of reservation
  + Pictures and cell phones of logistics team member(s) who will meet them at the hotel to assist with check-in/arrival (note: you should prepare to have already checked-in visiting committee members before their arrival at the hotel so that when they arrive they can just walk to their room - see more on this in the Welcome Packet)
  + Information on what to expect when they arrive at the hotel including how/when they will receive their laptop (if they are borrowing one) and internet access
  + List what will be provided during their visit (e.g. transportation, laptop/internet access, food, name badge, etc.)
  + Tentative committee visit schedule (mention that all times are tentative depending upon the committee’s needs)
  + Other committee members’ contact information including institution, title, email (NOTE: you should check with your committee chair to make sure it is okay to give this information to the other members (the committee chair may want to do this him/herself)

## Welcome Binder

Prepare a personalized welcome packet for each committee member. You should prepare to have each committee member checked-in before they arrive at the hotel so that you can hand them their welcome binder when they walk in the door. The committee member should not have to go through the hotel check-in process, but instead can be greeted by you then escorted to the elevator or room. If the committee workroom is in the same vicinity, show them where the workroom is on the way to their guest room. Once they have gone to their room to drop off their luggage, the committee members should come back to see the workroom and to meet the IT person at the hotel and set up their laptops and internet (and pick up their laptops and internet connection devices if using these.) Include in the binder:

* Hotel Key Cards (labeled with room number)
* Instructions for getting a laptop if they are borrowing one and internet access
* UBS flash drive for use during their visit (and to take home with them)
* Name badge
* Committee Schedule
* Personal Schedule
* Interview Schedule
* Photos, names, roles, and contact information for all assisting with on-site visit (especially chauffeurs, logistics team, technology coordinators)
* Photos, names, titles for all Senior Leadership
* Description and menu of restaurant for private off campus dinners
* Dinner options for the date of arrival (if committee members are arriving the night before)
* Map of hotel
* Map of campus
* Map of building where interviews will be held

## Transportation

* Coordinate all transportation for committee members from the time they touch down at the airport to the time they return to the airport for departure, or from the time they arrive at the hotel if they are driving.
* Personal chauffeur (preferably the same driver during their entire stay) available any time, on call.
* Make sure you cover: pick up at the airport, travel from hotel to campus, travel to dinner off campus, from the campus exit conference to the airport.
* Be prepared for travel for emergencies (to pharmacy, to shopping center, or back to hotel.)
* Prior to the visit, meet with and prep individuals who will be providing transportation for the committee. Go over the entire schedule to anticipate any problems or conflicts. Map out routes from the airport to hotel to campus and any other destinations.
* Take pictures of your chauffeurs and the vehicles that will be used to pick up committee members at the airport. Collect cell phone numbers of the chauffeurs to give to committee members.
* Make sure chauffeurs know something about the QEP.
* Make sure all vehicles are accessible for committee members. Ask about any special accessibility/mobility needs in your information request to the committee members. Even if no committee member specifies accessibility needs, consideration should be taken to provide a vehicle that is easy to get into and out of.
* Consider providing alternate walking transportation for committee members with limited or difficult mobility, such as a golf cart to get to other areas of campus.
* Opt for larger vehicles with more space (i.e. don’t use a 15 passenger van to transport 10 people.) The committee will most likely be carrying laptops and documentation with them and a smaller vehicle will be uncomfortable.
* It’s best to have designated chauffeurs who will always be driving the committee and who have no other obligations. The visit schedule will change frequently.
* Assume the committee will always travel as a group, but make sure you have transportation standing by if one or a few need to split from the group.
* Have a plan to have the chauffeur take the committee on a driving tour if they ask for it. The committee will most likely not have time to take a walking tour (such as you give to prospective students and families) but may want to see the layout of the campus. A drive through campus on the way to the interview rooms is a nice way to accomplish this.
* Make sure drop-off points on campus are accessible during busy traffic periods on campus. Try to have the committee members dropped off at the door of the building they will be in.
* On the last day of the visit, most committee members will want to leave right after the final meeting. Plan to transport Committee members back to the airport immediately following the exit conference. It is nice to have their transportation waiting for them at the door. Arrange to have the vehicles of committee members who drove on campus waiting for them.

## Hotel

* Visit the hotel before booking any rooms. The SACSCOC VP may want to see these rooms during his/her advisory visit. This may need to be done up to two years in advance. Look at the conference rooms and make sure they will be sufficient for the committee workroom. The committee will need internet access in the workroom. (See Technology for some suggestions on internet access.)
* Give hotel information on guests (number of guests, arrival date/time, any special needs). Discuss with them your needs and committee workroom set up.
* The committee workroom will need to be secured (locked) at all times, especially when the committee is not using it. Committee will need to be able to access this room 24/7. Make sure the hotel can accommodate this. Arrange for hotel members to enter the workroom only when committee is present.
* The committee should have 24/7 tech support available. You may want to consider housing your technology assistant and a logistics person at the hotel.
* The committee will eat at least one lunch at the hotel in the workroom (orientation/opening meeting). If possible, have refreshments available for the committee while they are working at the hotel.
* If the hotel does not provide breakfast, arrangements should be made to bring breakfast in to the committee members or to transport them to breakfast elsewhere.
* Set up billing ahead of time so all charges (that your institution can legally pay) are billed to you.
* If possible, check with the hotel to see if other groups will be there at the same time. Try to get your committee housed in a quiet section of the hotel.
* Your committee members should have access to the workroom at all hours during their visit.
* If you can get two workrooms, it is nice to have the workroom and a break room that can serve as a lounge. You can use this break room when committee members arrive as the IT meeting room.
* Test all technology (laptops, printers, internet connections).
* Guest rooms should include a desk or a small work area with internet access.
* One member of the logistics team (point person) and an IT staff should spend the night at the hotel so they can be available if the committee needs them. Provide cell phone numbers and room numbers for these two contacts to each committee member in the welcome binder.

## On-site Locations

If you can, reserve a building to house interview rooms, committee lunches, committee workroom, and logistics staff workroom. It is nice to try to have all interviewees come to the same building so the committee members do not have to waste time traveling around campus to interview. If the committee wants to see the campus, they will ask for a tour. Be prepared to give one if asked, but don’t plan one into the schedule unless asked prior to the visit. If possible, plan to give each committee member a room to conduct interviews. That way they won’t have to get up and move around the building (again saving time for them.)

* Assign rooms for specific purposes (i.e. interview rooms, committee workroom, command center.) Keep a list of all rooms being used in the command post. Make sure each room is set to be most conducive to that room’s purpose. For interview rooms, consider using more casual furniture such as several chairs and sofa around a central coffee table. For the committee workroom, a boardroom style may be best suited to help the committee work. Interviews should not take place in the committee workroom, but should have designated rooms used only for interviews.
* Don’t forget to consider any accessibility needs (for the committee and your interviewees) when planning room set ups and assigning rooms.
* Plan to have snacks and refreshments available in the committee workroom at all times.
* Schedule who will set up each room and when.
* Interviews should not take place in the committee workroom, you’ll need to provide separate rooms for this.
* Test all technology (laptops, printers, internet connections) at all locations you know the committee members will be visiting on campus.
* The committee workroom will need to be secured (locked) at all times, especially when the committee is not using it. Committee will need to be able to access this room while on campus. No one should enter the workroom except when committee is present.
* Make sure that each room the committee will meet in is supplied (tissues, notepads, pens, phones, snacks, etc.) Make sure it is technology friendly (plug in for laptops, internet access.)

## Command Post

* Decide on location (close to committee workroom so they have easy access to assistance if they need you) and who will be in the command post.
* Assign point person(s) for:
  + Document and evidence requests
  + Interview changes
  + Any other committee needs
* Make sure your command post has contact information for all working group, assisting departments/offices, committee members, logistics, all interviewees.
* Post a visit schedule somewhere in the room. A white board is perfect for this so the schedule can be updated as things change (and they will.) Immediately alert those who are affected when the schedule changes.
* Keep a list of all rooms and buildings being used during the visit.
* The command post should have room to prep interviewees and to do a post-interview debriefing. The debriefing allows the interviewees an option to let the point person(s) know what most of their interview discussion was about and to give a “heads up” on any issues that may have come up during the interview. For example, if the committee member asked the interviewees about Student Complaint Logs but none of the interviewees could answer sufficiently, the point person can then make arrangements for the committee member to see the complaint logs and the people who review them. Debriefing also allows the point person(s) to identify any themes or areas of lacking evidence. If your institution can provide answers to the committee members while they are there on their visit, it lessens the chance of you receiving recommendations. Being proactive to the committee’s questions can help you do this.
* If affordable, it is also nice to have refreshments for your interviewees, point person(s) and logistics group. Most of these people will be in interviews and meetings all day and refreshments are a nice way to say thank you for your support of the reaffirmation process.
* Your logistics people, technology assistants, and point person(s) will need to plan to stay in or near the command center during all times the committee is on campus.
* The command post should be close enough to the committee workroom that the committee members can easily find someone if they need assistance.
* Have a first aid kit available and emergency contacts for rescue, fire, and police.
* Keep the logistics binder (or copies of information needed) in the command center. The logistics binder should be organized so that anyone can look up information. Include information on all visit schedules, interviews, contact information, committee member information from request (including food preferences and allergies), technical assistance, meeting room set up, hotel conference room, hotel contacts, hotel catering, transportation, exit conference invitees.

## Preparing Instutition Contacts

* Meet with and prep individuals who provide transportation to the committee and go over the entire schedule to anticipate any problems. Map out routes from the airport to hotel to campus to any other locations.
* Prep executive team and president’s office for meeting committee.
* Meet with administrators to outline what will be needed from their unit.
* Students are often good campus guides to take Committee members from the campus workroom to interviews and other appointments on campus, and Committee members thoroughly enjoy meeting your students. Make sure these students know your QEP! Give students a room in the building with the command center and committee workroom and have several students available at all times to walk committee members to an interview or wherever they need to go.
* Meet with all front line staff. Emphasize the impression that they will make. Explain that if they are asked for documentation, how they should respond (write the details of the request and who/where it should be delivered, then get the requested documentation to the accreditation liaison ASAP.)

## Committee Workrooms

Both committee workrooms (on campus and at the hotel) should be identical as far as the supplies and documentation. If you have the option to set up the rooms in a similar fashion this will help the committee members locate items they need in both rooms. This room should be large enough for the Committee to work as well as conduct meetings.

* The workrooms should be big enough to allow the committee to work as well as conduct meetings.
* Make sure shredders are heavy duty.
* Collect requested documentation for committee workrooms:
  + Catalogs
  + QEP
  + Compliance Certification and Focused Report
  + Institutional marketing and recruiting brochures
  + Specific documentation requested by the committee
  + Student complaint logs
  + Written responses to third parties (if your institution has any)
* Ask the committee chair if he/she will want projection equipment in the workrooms.
* Printer (copier, scanner) – consider all possible ways a committee member may want to print and plan for them. For example, a committee member who brings his/her own Mac laptop may want to print from their laptop, while someone else may want to print.
* 24/7 tech support.
* Count and make sure there are enough power outlets, and if not make sure you have enough surge protectors and extension cords. Don’t forget safety: If you use surge protectors and extension cords, you should also tape down or use a cord concealer to cover all loose cords and wires.
* The committee workroom will need to be secured (locked) at all times, especially when the committee is not using it. The committee chair and SACSCOC VP should be provided a key if permissible by institution policies. Committee will need to be able to access this room at all times while on campus. Never enter the committee work areas unless asked or authorized.

## Technology

* Computers – be prepared to provide laptops (or computers for every location) to any committee member who does not want to bring their own.
* Coordinate technology with the hotel tech liaison. Make sure the committee will be able to access everything from the hotel that they can access on campus.
* Internet connection: Ensure the committee members have internet access everywhere they may be working (i.e. the hotel conference room, the hotel guest rooms, private dinner off campus, everywhere on campus). An easy way to do this may be to use a portable wireless device. We gave each committee member a MiFi when they arrived at the hotel for check-in. They were able to use this device anywhere and have internet access. When the committee members picked up the MiFi device, our Technology Assistant was present, hooked it up for them, set up the passwords and made sure it worked with their own personal laptop. If they were borrowing a laptop, our Technology Assistant already had the MiFi set up for them and when they arrived, showed them how to log into the laptop and MiFi device.
* USB drives – Provide something the committee members can use to store and transport information from one workroom to another, or take with them when they are in interviews. USB drives serve nicely for this purpose.
* The committee should have 24/7 tech support available. You may want to consider housing your technology assistant and a logistics person at the hotel.
* If using the hotel technology (internet access, printing, etc.) make sure you know the support process if something is not working. For example, does the hotel have tech support on premises 24/7 who can fix it immediately?
* Make sure you test all laptops, printers, internet connections at all locations you know the committee members will be visiting on campus and at the hotel.

## Catering On Campus

* Provide catering with a spreadsheet of all events needing catering, date, time, number of guests, location, special requirements, dietary restrictions.
* Work with catering on suggestions for each event – should it be upscale or casual? (All food for visiting committee should be upscale) If affordable, it is also nice to provide snacks and refreshments for interviewees, the Compliance Certification and QEP teams that will need to be present for most of the visit, and other helpers (such as student guides, transportation.)
* Plan for the committee to split into three groups for lunch on one day so committee members can meet with the governing board, a group of faculty familiar with the QEP and a group of students familiar with the QEP.
* Institutions should plan to provide a variety of snacks (including fresh fruit), hot (coffee and tea) and cold drinks, and bottled water in both the hotel and campus workrooms.
* Be sure to consider dietary restrictions when planning meals and selecting restaurants.

## Off Campus Dinners

* Some Committee members may need to arrive the evening before the visit; in the case of those visits which begin early in the morning of the first day, all Committee members will be asked to arrive the evening before; the institution should offer those Committee members who are on site by dinner time (6:00 pm) an opportunity to eat together at a local restaurant, even though the rest of the Committee has yet to arrive.
* The committee will need to meet at least once for dinner off campus, but you should plan for two nights. Find a restaurant with a private room or one that can arrange tables for privacy. The dinners may be more social in nature but the committee should have the option to hold a working dinner should they need to, and the committee will be discussing your institution. They (and you) do not want any details of their conversation being overheard.
* The committee has the option to eat dinner at the hotel while working, so make back-up plans for this. This may be a last-minute decision by the committee chair.
* Pre-scan all restaurants where the committee will be eating. Local restaurants are nice, but make sure the menu includes something that all committee members can eat (considering dietary restrictions.)

## Off-Site Visits

* Off-site visits will be determined prior to the on-site visit. If an off-site visit is necessary, you will need to work with the committee chair and your SACSCOC staff member to coordinate the visit.

## Exit Conference

* Consult with the committee chair as to the time and desired configuration of the room.
* Have your campus president/CEO designate and communicate ahead of time who will attend.
* Keep the logistics of this important meeting simple as committee members typically depart for home immediately following the exit interview.
* Provide light refreshments for all guests.