



VERIFICATION VISITS

Information for Institutions and Peer Reviewers

In response to restrictions and concerns related to the coronavirus pandemic, HLC will conduct some spring 2020 on-ground evaluations virtually. The U.S. Department of Education permits accrediting agencies the flexibility to conduct virtual evaluations for some types of reviews. As part of this process, the U.S. Department of Education requires that virtual evaluations be interactive and that an on-site verification visit occur within a reasonable period of time following the virtual evaluation.

The purpose of the verification visit is to verify on-site the findings of the virtual evaluation. Depending on the type and complexity of an evaluative activity, verification visits will be conducted by one to two peer reviewers, when possible peer reviewers who were members of the virtual evaluation peer review team. The visiting team members will verify the findings from the virtual evaluation regarding each Core Component and make a final recommendation based on the virtual evaluation team report, a brief update provided by the institution and outcomes of the verification visit. The recommendation of the verification visit team will go to HLC's Institutional Actions Council (IAC) for action.

POLICY

Policy Title: [Temporary Emergency Policy Related to COVID-19](#)

Number: INST.COVID19.10.010

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

U.S. Department of Education memo titled [Information for Accrediting Agencies Regarding Temporary Flexibilities Provided to Coronavirus Impacted Institutions or Accrediting Agencies](#)

PROCESS

Virtual evaluations prior to the verification visits make use of technology to provide for synchronous interaction between the peer review team members and representatives of the institution in an engaged, interactive format. The evaluation agenda, expectations for discussion, opportunities for follow-up and documentation requirements for the virtual evaluation are identical to the originally scheduled visit.

The virtual peer review team will evaluate the institution's compliance with HLC requirements and will document its findings and recommendations in its team report. Consistent with due process, the institution will have an opportunity to review the draft report for correction of errors of fact, and to submit an institutional response after the report is finalized.

The on-site verification visits will be scheduled starting in early fall 2020 or as soon as practicable. HLC will work with the institution and peer reviewers to set dates for the visits.

The verification visit will verify the findings of the virtual peer review team, for example, validating areas that customarily require on-site inspection. If a multi-campus visit would have been required as part of the original visit, it will take place at the time of the on-site verification visit and documentation expectations for both the institution and the team will be conducted following the [Multi-Campus Visit Procedure](#).

The verification visit peer reviewers will prepare a verification form and the institution will review for correction of errors of fact and submit an institutional response after the report is finalized.

Please Note: There is no base fee associated with a verification visit, however institutions will be invoiced for the travel and honoraria expenses of the verification visit team. Institutions will be invoiced for the multi-campus peer reviewer expenses in accordance with HLC's Dues and Fees Schedule, if applicable. In nearly all cases, the overall cost to institutions will be lower than if the entire team would have traveled to the institution.

INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

In preparation for the verification visit, institutions must submit an update report of no more than 20 pages to affirm that the institution's compliance with HLC requirements has not changed since the virtual visit and, if necessary, to address any concerns raised by a virtual evaluation. The format and contents of the report are determined by the institution; institutions are reminded that they need not make their arguments regarding the Criteria for Accreditation anew, but rather, should focus on confirming that items found "met" have not changed, and offering additional clarifications, as needed for areas found "met with concerns" or "not met."

When completed, the institution uploads its update report on the Addendum tab in the Assurance System, unless otherwise instructed by HLC. The institution must upload the report no later than two weeks before the visit.

If a multi-campus visit was required as part of an institution's original visit, it takes place at the time of the on-site Verification Visit and institutions can upload their documentation to the "forms" tab in the Assurance System. The institution must upload the documentation no later than two weeks before the visit.

PEER REVIEW

All verification visits are conducted by peer reviewers with appropriate expertise. As far as possible, the verification visit is conducted by one or more members of the team that conducted the institution's virtual evaluation. The designated team member(s) conducts an electronic review of the institution's update report, as well as the on-site visit(s). During the electronic review and on-site visit, the reviewer(s) will verify the findings of the electronic review and if applicable, conduct the multi-campus visits.

If applicable, peer reviewers conducting the verification visit have access to the Assurance Argument, Evidence File, and Virtual Evaluation Team Report in the Assurance System, although those reviewers will not be able to alter work that has already been done in the Assurance System. Peer reviewers have the ability to request additional documents before, during, and after the verification visit. The institution should upload the requested documents into the Addendum tab within the Assurance System or provide such information as otherwise instructed by HLC.



Verification visits for virtual Focused Visits will NOT use the Assurance System. Focused Visit materials will be transmitted directly among the institution, HLC and reviewers.

After conducting the electronic review and the verification visit(s), the assigned peer reviewer(s) complete a verification form. The team chair should send a draft of the verification form to the institution's HLC staff liaison for review by no later than five business days following the verification visit. When the recommendation is final, the team chair should submit the verification form to hlcommission.org/upload. Select "Final Reports" from the list of submission options to ensure the forms are sent to the correct HLC staff member.

If a multi-campus visit is required as part of the Verification Visit, the team chair can upload that documentation along with the verification form.

DECISION MAKING

The final team report, the update report, verification form and institutional responses are then sent to the Institutional Actions Council for review and action. These documents become part of the institution's permanent file and are shared as appropriate with future evaluation teams.

Questions? Contact your HLC staff liaison.