



OUTSIDE AGENCY OBSERVING ON HLC VISIT

In an effort to lessen the burden of visits on member institutions, HLC policy allows the possibility of having an outside agency representative observe all types of HLC visits.

RELATED POLICIES

Cooperative Review of Institutions Operating Across Regions—COMM.C.10.010

Relation With Other Recognized Accrediting Agencies—COMM.C.10.020

Relations With State Higher Education Agencies and Other State Offices—COMM.C.10.040

If an institution would like to have an outside agency representative observe an HLC visit, HLC requests that the institution initiates and administers the request. Institutions are not required by HLC to have an outside agency representative observe a visit. The institution hosting the visit will coordinate the logistics for all three organizations for the visit. Most HLC visits are scheduled more than six months in advance with input from the institution and peer reviewers. Other agencies will need to accommodate pre-set HLC visit dates. If dates are not pre-set, HLC will ask the institution to work with the outside agency and propose dates.

Note: Any request to HLC from an outside agency to attend a visit will be sent to the member institution Accreditation Liaison Officer (ALO). If the institution agrees, the ALO or CEO at the institution should send an email to liaisons@hlcommission.org.

COORDINATING VISIT PROCESS

Visits (comprehensive, focused, change of control, advisory)

When an institution requests the presence of an outside agency representative on an HLC visit, HLC notifies the team chair of the request. The team will consider if the presence of an outside agency is appropriate given the nature of the visit. The team has the option to decline the presence of an outside agency. HLC will notify the institution of the decision by the team, and if they decline, the visit will proceed as previously planned.

If the team allows the presence of the outside agency, HLC will notify the institution and send the institution the Guidelines for Outside Agencies Observing Visits. HLC expects the institution to share the Guidelines with the representatives from the outside agencies.

The visit will proceed as scheduled. The outside agency representatives will be considered observers. Should any issues arise the team chair will notify the ALO and the HLC staff liaison.

Institutional Change Visits

The most common visit to be combined with an outside agency is a substantive change visit. Typically,

these visits require coordination and advance notice from the institution to HLC that they would like an agency to observe the visit.

Application

Institutions conducting a substantive change, seek approval from the outside agency before applying to HLC regarding the change. If the agency notifies the institution that a visit by the outside agency is required for approval, the institution needs to indicate that on the HLC substantive change application. If HLC also needs to do a visit, HLC may try to combine the visit. The institution has the option to request a visit even if HLC would not normally conduct a visit.

If the outside agency wants to observe the HLC change visit, the agency should notify the institution and the institution should indicate this request on its HLC substantive change application initiating the process.

On the change application, the institution should include the agency name, agency contact person's name, title and email address.

Review

Once HLC receives the application, it will conduct a staff assessment to determine the level of review necessary. If the type of change being requested does not need an HLC change visit, then the institution can request HLC conduct a visit. See HLC's dues and fees for information on the costs associated with a visit.

[Hlcommission.org/dues](https://www.hlcommission.org/dues)

If HLC determines another type of review such as a panel or desk review is needed and the institution does not request a visit, then HLC will return the application for the institution to resubmit after state agency approval is received.

When a visit is required, HLC's Associate Director, Institutional Change will send an email to the institution requesting three dates that work for both the institution and the agency. The dates are at least three months from the date of the email and must begin on a Sunday and end on a Tuesday, the days when HLC change visits take place. HLC will try to accommodate one of the dates when setting the team.

HLC will select the date that works for HLC's peer review team and notify the institution about the date with additional visit information. At this time the institution must notify the outside agency that the date is set.

HLC will follow that communication with an email to the institution and outside agency when the peer review team members have been set.

The HLC team conducts the visit and follows HLC policies and procedures to make a recommendation to HLC's decision making body, the Institutional Actions Council (IAC).

The recommendation is not available until the outside agency notifies HLC of their decision regarding the institution's requested substantive change. The outside agency should send its decisions to changerequests@hlcommission.org. HLC requires outside agency's approvals prior to final consideration of substantive change.

Decision Making

Once the outside agency's approval is received, HLC will send the institution a copy of the final report and the recommendation. The institution has two weeks to respond to the recommendation. The application, team report and institutional response is then reviewed by IAC for final decision.

GUIDELINES FOR OUTSIDE AGENCIES OBSERVING HLC VISITS

HLC offers institutions the opportunity for higher education authorities to observe a peer review team's work during various types of evaluations. The guidelines that follow help HLC preserve the integrity of the review process, ensuring that the visit unfolds as it would regardless of the presence of observers.

Requirements for Observation:

- Agency observers arrive on the first day of the visit (Monday morning, generally at 7:45 a.m. for 8:00 a.m. start) and depart before the team begins

its deliberations (Tuesday at noon). Observers are responsible for arranging their own travel to and from the site and should plan to arrive at the designated location at least 15 minutes before the first meeting. Observers do not participate in the post-visit deliberations with the team.

- Observers should wear some type of agency issued badge or ID that identifies them and distinguishes them from the HLC peer review team members. Team chairs and/or institutional representatives will inform institutional stakeholders about the observers to the visit.
- Observers follow the lead of the team chair throughout the visit. At the chair's discretion, the observers may be asked to remove themselves from certain meetings.

- Observers remain silent during the visit, simply observing the visit.
- Observers refer all questions regarding policy, process, or procedure back to the appropriate people at HLC, typically the staff liaison or Manager for Governmental Affairs.
- Observers should maintain confidentiality and objectivity and take all necessary measures to safeguard HLC's and the institution's materials, data, records, and proprietary information that they may have access to during the observation.

Questions? Contact your HLC staff liaison.