# SITE VISIT MANUAL

# FOR PROGRAM

# ADMINISTRATORS

2023 Edition

Planning Accreditation Board
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# Site Visit Manual for Program Administrators

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## PREFACE

The purpose of this manual is to introduce you to the role of the Site Visitors and the responsibilities of the Program Administrator before, during and after the Site Visit.  This manual should be used in conjunction with the following documents, all of which are available on the PAB website:

- *Accreditation Standards*
  This document contains preconditions to PAB accreditation and the accreditation standards and criteria. All accredited programs and those applying for accreditation must demonstrate substantial compliance with the standards.

- *Policies and Procedures Manual*
  This document describes the policies and procedures used by the PAB in the accreditation of planning programs. It provides guidance on the review process and expectations of the PAB.

- *Self-Study Report Manual and Template*
  This document details the process and procedures for writing and distributing a Self-Study Report (SSR). It contains guidance for demonstrating compliance with the standards.

- *Site Visit Manual for Site Visitors*
  This document contains the processes and procedures used for conducting a Site Visit. It includes guidance for Site Visitors in preparing for an accreditation review and the Site Visit. This document contains the Self-Study Report Manual as an exhibit.

- *Fee Schedule*
  The fee schedule posted on the PAB website contains the current fees associated with accreditation.

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Questions about the accreditation process as administered by the Planning Accreditation Board should be directed to:

Planning Accreditation Board, 2334 W. Lawrence Avenue, Suite 209, Chicago, IL 60625
T: (773) 334-7200/10; www.planningaccreditationboard.org

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# ACCREDITATION AND THE PROCESS

Accreditation is about quality assurance and improvement. *Accreditation* applies to institutions or programs; *certification* or *licensure* applies to individuals. Accreditation from the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) is recognition that a bachelor's or master's degree in planning meets established qualifications and educational standards through initial and periodic evaluations.

To the **public,** the value of accreditation includes:
- an assurance of external evaluation of the Program and a finding that there is conformity to general expectations of the profession;
- identification of programs that have successfully undertaken activities directed at improving the quality of the institution and the education delivered; and
- an improvement in the professional services available to the public as accredited programs modify their requirements to reflect changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes, abilities, and practice.

To **students and prospective students**, accreditation provides:
- an assurance that the educational activities of an accredited program have been found to be satisfactory and, therefore, meet the needs of the students; and
- enhanced eligibility relative to the exam qualifications for individual certification from the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP).

**Institutions** benefit from accreditation through:
- self-evaluation and self-directed program improvement;
- the strengthening of program self-evaluation and through a subsequent review by the Site Visit Team;
- the enhancement of the reputation of the Program because of public regard for accreditation; and
- the use of accreditation in decision-making for the investment of public and private funds.

And finally, accreditation serves the **planning profession** by:
- providing a voice in identifying knowledge, skills, and values of the profession in the professional degree; and
- assuring that future practitioners will be adequately prepared.

## Accreditation Standards
Accreditation standards are statements that define and set expectations about the foundation for quality education. The standards serve as the basis for each program evaluation:
- They address educational and operational issues associated with generating results while maintaining academic protocol.
- They reflect the consensus of professionals in the field and experts in higher education.
- To earn accreditation, programs must demonstrate substantial compliance with the standards regardless of locations or modalities of delivery.

## The Accreditation Process



## Self-Study Report (SSR)

The Self-Study Report (SSR) is a critical component of the accreditation process. It is the first step in the accreditation process, which begins roughly one year prior to a Site Visit. The SSR is a written document submitted by the Program, wherein compliance with accreditation standards is documented and evidenced. The Program provides quantitative and qualitative information, abbreviated faculty CVs, course syllabi, and other materials, to demonstrate compliance with the PAB accreditation standards and criteria. The burden of proof for documenting compliance rests with the Program. The process of describing and analyzing the Program, appraising strengths and weaknesses, and outlining steps necessary for improvement serves, in effect, as a planning document for the Program. PAB's Self-Study Report Manual assists programs in preparing a well-written and comprehensive document.

## Site Visit Team (SVT)

Accreditation is based upon peer review with representation from both the academy and the profession of planning. The SVT is comprised of 3 individuals: 2 planning educators, one of whom serves as the SVT Chair, and 1 professional planner. SVT Chairs are experienced Site Visitors with additional training.

Individuals in PAB's pool of volunteers are nominated by the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) and the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP). SVT members must attend a PAB training session prior to being assigned to a SVT. Each SVT member participates in the evaluation process, and in the verbal and written presentation of findings on the Site Visit.

SVTs are representatives of PAB and are, in effect, ambassadors of accreditation. Even though SVTs often develop strong relationships with program representatives over the course of a Site Visit, SVT members report to PAB and are bound by its policies, procedures, and accreditation standards.

SVTs serve as the reporting and evaluating arm of PAB. They are PAB's on-site eyes and ears whose charge is to evaluate a Program on compliance with PAB accreditation standards relative to the Program's own mission, goals and objectives. SVTs are not charged with providing advice or consultation to the Programs they evaluate. While some consultation between the SVT and the Program may occur during the Site Visit, it is not the primary purpose of the Site Visit.

## Selection and Composition

PAB staff assembles SVTs during the summer (for fall visits) and early fall (for spring visits). SVT members are selected in part based on information submitted by the Program: institution type and location; focus of the Program; full-time/part-time student mix, etc. PAB staff shall propose the prospective SVT for the Program Administrator to review, accompanied by CVs and/or resumes. The Program may reject one proposed Site Visitor, for conflict of interest only. If a Site Visitor is rejected, reasons shall be stated; these will be held in confidence by the PAB staff. If PAB determines a conflict of interest exists, a replacement Site Visitor will be found.

No person can review a Program where they have already participated on a Site Visit, nor can any person review a Program housed in an institution where they received a degree and/or taught. Other **potential conflicts of interest** include:
- serving with the head of the Program on a previous SVT;
- teaching currently at an institution at which the head of the Program used to teach;
- serving as head of a program visited by a SVT chaired by the Program Administrator; or
- residing in the same region or competing within the same market as the Program.

If a conflict of interest between a Program and Site Visitor is discovered before or during a Site Visit, the Site Visitor with the conflict will be immediately replaced, or removed from the SVT, and will also be removed from the Site Visitor Pool. The failure by either a Site Visitor or a Program Administrator to disclose a conflict of interest will be considered cause for disqualification of the SVR and for the removal of the Site Visitor from the pool.

## Standards of Conduct

**Confidentiality:** SVT members are expected to maintain strict confidentiality regarding accreditation reviews. The entire Site Visit process, including information shared by interviewees, is confidential. SVTs may discuss the Site Visit with PAB members and PAB staff only.

**Professionalism:** SVT members are invited guests of the University and the Program, who serve as representatives of PAB. Unprofessional conduct before, during, or after the visit will result in removal from the Site Visitor Pool.

**Harassment**: PAB is committed to providing a harassment-free environment for all participants in the accreditation process, including Site Visitors, Program personnel, PAB members, and staff. PAB does not tolerate any form of harassment or discrimination. Any form of harassment or discrimination related to an individual's race, color, religion, pregnancy, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, or any other status or condition protected by applicable state and federal laws, is a violation of this policy and will be treated as a disciplinary matter. For the complete policy details, visit the PAB *Policies and Procedures Manual*.

The term "harassment" includes, but is not limited to, slurs, jokes, and other verbal, graphic, or physical conduct relating to an individual's race, color, sex (including same-sex), religion, national origin, citizenship, age, or disability. "Harassment" also includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, unwelcome or offensive touching and other verbal, graphic, or physical conduct, or electronic communications (including e-mail) of a sexual nature involving either members of the same sex or opposite sex. Prohibited harassment includes

conduct that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's work performance or experience or creating an environment that is hostile, intimidating or offensive.

**Site Visitors as Independent Consultants**
Outside of the PAB accreditation process, Site Visitors may accept compensated consulting assignments to accredited programs or those seeking accreditation; however, Site Visitors may not accept a compensated or non-compensated consulting assignment if they previously evaluated the program as part of a PAB Site Visit for a minimum of three years after the PAB accreditation action. PAB does not recommend, nor sponsor or direct any consulting arrangements. For the complete policy governing the consulting arrangement visit section 3.15 in PAB's *Policies and Procedure Manual*.

## Site Visit

The Site Visit is another critical component of the accreditation process. The Site Visit follows a pre-determined and highly structured schedule that includes interviews with the Program Administrator, Dean, faculty, university administrators, students, alumni, employers, and local APA Chapter members, in addition to reviewing student work and touring the facilities. At the conclusion of the Site Visit, the SVT orally presents its findings in exit interviews with the Program Administrator, Dean, Provost, and President/Chancellor (optional). If the Provost is unavailable to meet with the SVT, they may designate an associate provost to meet with the SVT. These findings serve as a framework for the written report that is subsequently provided to the institution.

There are 4 principal objectives to a Site Visit:
1. **Verify** information in the SSR.
2. **Gather** new information through observation and interviews.
3. **Assess** the degree to which the Program meets PAB accreditation standards.
4. **Identify** strengths and areas in which the Program can seek improvement and move towards excellence.

**Site Visit Date**
Fall Site Visits typically occur mid-September through mid-November; spring Site Visits typically occur mid-January through mid-March. The Program and PAB staff arrange the Site Visit date approximately a year and half in advance of the Program's accreditation expiration. The main factor impacting a program's selection of the date is the availability of the institution's senior administration who must be interviewed during the Site Visit.

Site Visits are scheduled for 2.5 working days on campus. Visits are typically scheduled to begin on Monday morning and end at noon on Wednesday (or Wednesday to Friday afternoon, alternatively). The Site Visit Team (SVT) will arrive on site the evening before the start of the visit for a private team working dinner. At least one pre-visit SVT meeting among SVT members will already have taken place. While the SVT is in meetings during the day, the evenings are dedicated to SVT working sessions during and/or after dinner.

**Dual Program Review**
Institutions with both an accredited bachelor's and master's program (known as a Dual Program Review) will have one SVT review both programs over a three-day visit, which could begin Sunday afternoon or end Wednesday evening, depending on the Program's preference and travel needs of the SVT. The additional half day allows for two separate student meetings, expanded faculty meetings, and additional time to analyze and assess both programs in adequate detail.

**Multi-Campus Review**

Institutions with multiple campuses will also require a longer Site Visit, as the SVT must visit all locations. The length of the visit will vary, depending on the number of, and distance between, locations. Autonomous and/or independent campuses, with their own faculty, students, alumni, employers, etc., will require the most time as the SVT will, in effect, conduct a mini-visit at each location. Given the complexities involved in scheduling multi-campus reviews, the Program should prepare its draft schedule earlier than the typical 6 weeks before the visit.

## Site Visit Report (SVR)

The SVT writes a formal report for the benefit of the Program and PAB wherein it documents strengths of the Program, assessments of compliance with PAB standards and criteria, and recommendations for areas in which the Program can seek improvement. The Program has the opportunity to comment on the draft and final versions of the SVR. The report does not contain a recommendation regarding accreditation; this decision is made by the PAB at the accreditation review.

## PAB Accreditation Review

PAB meets in-person twice annually: in the spring during the APA national conference; in the fall during the ACSP national conference. Programs that host fall Site Visits are reviewed by PAB for accreditation at the spring meeting; programs hosting spring visits are reviewed in the fall. The Program Administrator and the SVT Chair are each scheduled to meet individually with PAB. All accreditation decisions are effective January 1, unless otherwise noted by PAB.

# PREPARING FOR THE SITE VISIT

## SVT Confirmation

The SVT is confirmed at least 10 weeks prior to the scheduled Site Visit date. Once the SVT has been confirmed, the Program should make hotel reservations for the three members for three nights (typically Sunday – Tuesday). Depending on SVT member travel limitations, an additional night of accommodation may be necessary. The Program shall share the hotel confirmation with the SVT members and verify whether the hotel costs will be direct-billed to the Program, or if the SVT members should pay at check-out.

## SSR Submission

The Program's draft SSR should be submitted electronically to PAB by **June 15** (for Program's hosting a fall Site Visit) or **September 15** (for Programs hosting a spring Site Visit). PAB staff reviews the electronic first draft for completeness and provides comments. The final SSR should be submitted approximately two weeks after receipt of PAB staff comments.

PAB staff will provide the SVT members access to the SSR, along with the following historical information: Prior SVR, Progress Report (if applicable), and any significant correspondence since the prior SV.

Programs must share their SSRs with their students, faculty, staff and university administrators, and should share their SSRs with their alumni and local professional community; these disclosures should occur as early as possible in the development and writing of the report. Programs may publish any portion of their SSR at any time in any format.

## Written Comments from APA Chapter and Student Association

Written comments from the local APA Chapter and the Student Association are solicited to supplement the SVT's in-person meeting with these groups. The written comments allow the participation of a broader audience in the accreditation process.

Eight weeks before the Site Visit, PAB staff will contact the local APA Chapter and Student Association with instructions and a sample survey. The Program Administrator should not execute any surveys on behalf of either group but should encourage these groups to submit comments by the deadline. It is the responsibility of the APA Chapter and the Student Association to submit comments directly to PAB staff two weeks before the Site Visit. PAB staff will distribute those comments to the SVT, the Program Administrator and PAB.

## Travel, Lodging and Site Visit Fee

**Travel arrangements**
SVT members are responsible for making their own travel arrangements to and from the institution.

The Program is responsible for informing the SVT members about ground transportation arrangements within the locale, and to and from carrier terminals. A rental car for the SVT is usually not needed during the Site Visit; the Program is normally able to accommodate specific transportation requests of the SVT. When the institution location mandates a rental car, the SVT is expected to coordinate travel arrangements such that only one rental is required.

**Lodging**
The Program is responsible for making the SVT lodging arrangements and for promptly informing the SVT members about them. The lodging for SVT Members should be reasonably accessible to the campus.

The Program may choose to have the SVT members pay for their own lodging on the front end, or the Program may arrange for direct billing. Whichever the case, the Program should let the SVT members know what to expect regarding billing.

**Reimbursement**
SVT members are representing PAB and are, therefore, subject to PAB's policies and procedures, including reimbursement policies. The Program should not reimburse SVT members directly.
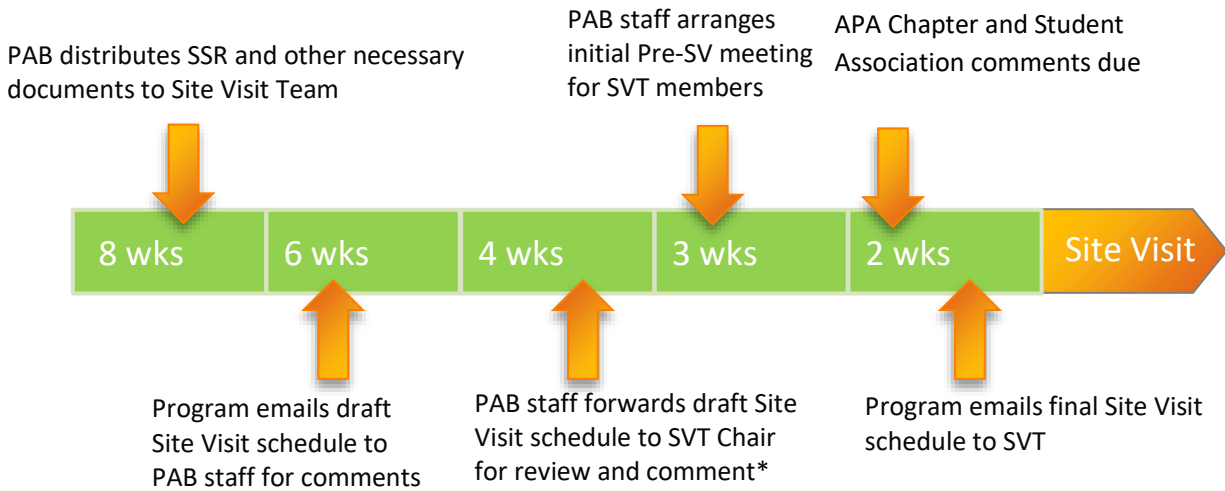
**Site Visit Fee**
At the conclusion of the visit, PAB will invoice the Program for the Site Visit Fee. Programs have 60 days from the date of the invoice to submit payment to PAB.

**Site Visit Team Headquarters**
**At the Hotel:** The SVT requires a work room, available throughout the visit, to prepare for the next day's meetings and compile materials for the draft SVR. Options for SVT meetings include: hotel business center, a suite-type room for the SVT Chair, or a separate conference room.  A regular hotel room is not acceptable for this purpose.

**On-Campus:** The Program should provide a room on campus for the SVT's use throughout the Site Visit. For the on-campus headquarters, a conference room or unused classroom is sufficient. This is where the SVT will interview faculty, conduct working meetings and prepare the draft SVR. The Program should stock the headquarters with the equipment and supplies the SVT needs to accomplish its work during the Site Visit.

**Site Visit Timeline: Before the Visit**

PAB distributes SSR and other necessary documents to Site Visit Team

PAB staff arranges initial Pre-SV meeting for SVT members

APA Chapter and Student Association comments due

| 8 wks | 6 wks | 4 wks | 3 wks | 2 wks | Site Visit |

Program emails draft Site Visit schedule to PAB staff for comments

PAB staff forwards draft Site Visit schedule to SVT Chair for review and comment*

Program emails final Site Visit schedule to SVT

*PAB staff works directly with the Program to prepare the schedule. SVT members have no formal communication with the Program regarding the schedule.

# SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

The Program Administrator must submit the draft Site Visit Schedule to PAB staff no less than 6 weeks prior to the Site Visit. A Site Visit Schedule template is attached as Appendix A.

Because there are so many required components of the Site Visit, the schedule template allows the Program a very limited window for scheduling discretionary meetings or events. While some required components can be scheduled at any time throughout the Site Visit (e.g., faculty interviews), others must take place in the particular order and at the approximate time they are noted on the template (e.g. initial and exit meetings with university administrators).

The Program Administrator is responsible for making all the SVT's appointments and must be available during the entire Site Visit. The Dean must be available at the beginning and the end of the Site Visit. The Provost (and, if possible, the President/Chancellor) must be available at the end of the Site Visit.

## During the Site Visit

Coming into contact with those who bring the institution to life is one of the most important dimensions of the Site Visit. While the meetings with the faculty and students will be in group settings, any individual is invited to meet with the SVT or a member of the SVT (under conditions of confidentiality) to discuss specific issues of concern.

**Initial Interview with the Program Administrator**

The Site Visit schedule begins with a 1-hour introductory interview with the Program Administrator, followed by interviews with the Department Chair (if the Program is located within a Department), and Dean. Initial meetings with the Provost and President/Chancellor are optional.

The objectives of this introductory meeting are threefold: clarify any special needs or concerns with regard to the Site Visit schedule and/or anyone with whom the SVT is scheduled to meet; resolve any ambiguities or uncertainties based on the SSR and/or request additional materials that may be missing from it; be advised of any changes the Program has undergone since the SSR was submitted (e.g., faculty hires, etc.). This meeting may also serve as the interview of the Program Administrator in their role as a faculty member.

The Program Administrator should also check in with the SVT from time to time during the Site Visit, to address any outstanding issues and/or questions that arise from any of the SVT's scheduled meetings.

### Initial Interview with the Dean

After the initial introductory meeting with the Program Administrator (and Department Chair, if the Program is located within a Department), the SVT has an introductory meeting with the Dean. The length and range of topics discussed will vary from program to program, depending on how closely involved the Dean is with the Program. Many Deans appreciate the insights a Site Visit provides into their planning programs and the field of planning more generally. The Site Visit often presents an opportunity for Deans to gain a broader perspective on planning education.

Topics typically discussed with Deans include the functioning of the Program within the institution and the Dean's perception of opportunities and/or constraints regarding the Program's future. The SVT may ask Deans if there are any particular items they would like the SVT to specifically examine or address during the visit.

### Initial Interview with the Provost and President/Chancellor (optional)

Initial contact with one or both of these administrators is optional and brief. The initial meeting introduces the SVT members and their activities during the visit. The SVT often uses the initial interview to provide the administrators with a general overview of the accreditation process and PAB standards, as well as any other matters that will help the administrators understand the purpose and benefits of the Site Visit.

### Interview with Office of Information Technology

The SVT shall meet with the relevant institutional, collegiate, and/or departmental office to assess institutional support for only programs delivered via hybrid or distance education.

*Preparing a Great Site Visit Schedule*

1. *Provide a headquarters for the team both on-campus and at the hotel.*
2. *Schedule breaks in the morning and afternoon each day. If the schedule allows, build in some on-campus team work sessions.*
3. *Provide water and coffee/tea to the SVT at break time.*
4. *Build in extra time between meetings if the SVT needs time to travel from one location to another.*
5. *Add extra time into the SVT breaks, if meetings are scheduled during lunch.*
6. *Avoid adding in social events, formal presentations, and other unnecessary activities.*
7. *Consider serving refreshments at the student meetings in order to encourage broader participation.*
8. *Consider enlisting the help of a faculty member who is a member of the PAB Site Visitor Pool to assist with logistics and schedule preparation.*
9. *Schedule meetings with students, alumni and/or the APA Chapter early in the visit, so that if any concerns are raised the SVT will have the opportunity to discuss with faculty and administration during the interviews.*

### Faculty Interviews

During the Site Visit, SVT members will meet with the Program faculty in four groups: full-time in planning unit tenured/contract faculty; full-time in planning unit tenure track faculty; part-time in planning unit tenured/tenure track/contract faculty; and adjunct faculty. The SVT should meet separately with tenure track faculty. However, programs have some flexibility in the composition of group meetings. For example, a Professor of Practice may be scheduled with the full-time tenured/contract faculty, if appropriate. Contract faculty may be full-time in the Program for multiple years and/or with a continuing appointment that is a status similar to

tenured faculty. Programs delivered via hybrid or distance education shall arrange to have all full-time and part-time faculty present to meet with the SVT in person or via video-conferencing.

The objectives of these meetings include the verification of statements and impressions presented in written materials (SSR, supplemental information) or in general group sessions during the Site Visit. Faculty members will also have an opportunity to address issues and questions raised so that perceptions can be compared.

Faculty members may request to meet with SVT members individually and/or the SVT may request to meet with a faculty member or staff outside of the group meetings. The SVT will have a three-hour working session on the second day when any individual faculty/staff meeting can be scheduled.

### Meeting with Students
Sessions with students provide an opportunity for students to present their perspectives and concerns regarding the Program. Students are to be self-selected for participation in these sessions. Typically, about a dozen students should attend the meeting with the team. Programs should provide the student names to the SVT in advance of the Site Visit, if possible.

Programs seeking accreditation of two degrees (bachelor's and master's) should arrange a separate meeting for students from each of the degree programs. Programs delivered via hybrid or distance education shall arrange to have a meaningful number of students available to meet with the SVT in person, and/or via videoconferencing.

### Meeting with Alumni, Local APA Chapter and Employers
One group/joint meeting can be held with alumni, representatives of the local APA Chapter, and employers. Each stakeholder has different experience and perspectives about the Program, so it is important that the Program ensures there is sufficient representation from each group. The joint meeting should contain both Chapter members who are not employers or alums, and employers who are not APA members or alums. For institutions with two accredited degrees, the joint meeting should include equal representation of alumni from both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

Alumni provide an opportunity for former students to present their perspectives on the value of their educational experience, quality of learning, and their preparedness to enter the workforce and contribute to the profession. A minimum of six alumni, who graduated within 5 years, should attend this meeting and they should not be employees of the Program's institution or its research institutes. The Program may recruit alumni from anywhere around the country to participate in this meeting.

The local APA chapter and employers provide the profession with a formal voice to the accreditation review. The Program is expected to have a relationship with the profession, the local planning community (at the programmatic, faculty and student levels), and the local APA chapter. Employers provide added insight as they can contribute evidence and judgements regarding the qualification of the Program's interns and graduates.

This meeting may be conducted in-person, virtually or in a hybrid format. If the meeting is conducted virtually or in a hybrid format, it may be necessary to have two meetings to accommodate the number of attendees. In advance of the meeting, the Program should provide the team with the attendees' names, representative group (i.e. alumni, APA Chapter, or employer), title, employer, and year of graduation (where applicable).

## Tour of Facilities

The SVT should visit classrooms, studios, student work areas, and computer facilities. Depending on time constraints, the SVT Chair may assign one SVT member to tour one or more of the facilities.

The Site Visit schedule for programs delivered via hybrid or distance education shall include a meeting with the people responsible for maintaining the technology used for the educational delivery, training and supporting the faculty and students on its use, as well as a tour of the facilities housing the equipment itself.

## Review of Student Work

An important part of every accreditation visit is the SVT's review of student work, including theses, studio and research projects, term papers, and a few in-class exams, if possible. The specific student work provided is at the Program's discretion. The aim should be twofold: 1) Showcase or highlight what students are capable of doing; and, 2) show how students progress in meeting the learning objectives set forth by the program. Ideally, this progression should include work during a single semester or quarter (e.g., improvements from a first draft to a final product) and progress through the years (e.g., student work from the first semester or quarter to their final semester or quarter). The aim is not to find fault with student work. The aim is to learn more about the competencies that students graduate with, in light of the program's strategic plans and learning objectives.

Examples shared with the SVT will range from the time of the prior Site Visit through the most recent semester or quarter. The Program is expected to present the work of at least 10 to 12 students. It is always the SVT's prerogative to request to see additional student assignments and projects while on campus.

PAB encourages programs to use digital course management platforms commonly adopted in universities (e.g., Canvas, Blackboard, etc.) to archive student work over time to facilitate this process.

During the Site Visit, the Program should allocate two separate one-hour time slots for the SVT's review of a variety of student products. The first hour will include a presentation by the Program Administrator (and other representative, if necessary) on the Program's approach to the assessment of student learning and achievement.

## SVT Work Sessions

The Site Visit Schedule includes three evening work sessions for the SVT. At the first and second work session, the SVT will initially assess the Program in as many of the PAB standards and criteria as possible and also determine what additional information is needed.

At the last work session, the SVT will finish its assessment of the Program, developing a list of the Program's strengths, recommendations and scripts for the exit interviews. The SVT will spend a majority of the time drafting the SVR.
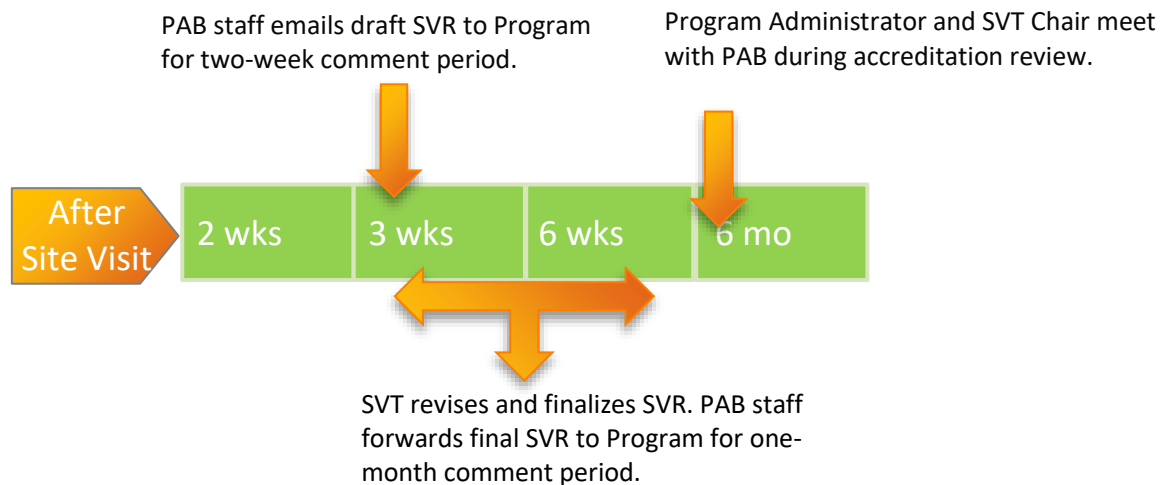
### Providing Student Work

1. Provide a general sampling of the Program's curricula for multiple years since the prior Site Visit through the most recent semester or quarter.
2. Provide examples of student work for the team's consideration, including: analytic/quantitative work, quality, and inclusion of a comprehensive approach.
3. Consider devoting a room to student work that is available to the team at their leisure. This room could double as the SVT headquarters.
4. Consider providing student work electronically in advance of the Site Visit.
5. Provide examples that show an integration of planning knowledge and application.
6. Be prepared to provide the inputs corresponding to each project (e.g., rubrics, assignment instructions, limitations on student access to necessary information, etc.).
7. Consider providing testimony from clients on how the student work is being used in practice.

## End of the Site Visit: Exit Interviews

At the conclusion of the Site Visit, there are **four exit interviews: the Program Administrator** (followed by the Department Chair, if relevant), **the Dean, the Provost, and the President/Chancellor (optional)**. If the Provost is unavailable to meet with the team, they may designate an associate/vice provost to attend the exit interview on their behalf. Each of the exit interviews should take place independently and none of the individuals involved should be present at any interview other than their own. The SVT meets with the Program Administrator first as they can correct any possible misinterpretations prior to the other interviews.

Exit interviews include a summary of the SVT's preliminary findings and tentative conclusions. These are informational observations to give the Program some sense of the SVT's impressions, but these are neither final nor comprehensive. The SVT will not provide a listing of partially-met and unmet criteria during the exit interviews. The findings by the SVT are not final until the written report itself is finalized after a review and comment period. PAB has the final decision about compliance with standards and accreditation, not the SVT. The written report is but one piece of information the PAB will review as part of its decision.

**Site Visit Timeline: After the Visit**

PAB staff emails draft SVR to Program for two-week comment period.

Program Administrator and SVT Chair meet with PAB during accreditation review.

After Site Visit | 2 wks | 3 wks | 6 wks | 6 mo

SVT revises and finalizes SVR. PAB staff forwards final SVR to Program for one-month comment period.

# SITE VISIT REPORT

The SVR is but one discrete, albeit important, evaluative step in the accreditation process. The SVR details areas of strength and non-compliance with the standards, as the SVT assessed them. In the report, the SVT also provides recommendations for improvement for both the standards and overall academic excellence. The Program can respond to both the draft and final versions of the report prior to PAB's decision. PAB, in its review, will make use of all the available information: the SSR, the SVR, the Program's final comments to the SVR (if applicable), Post-Site Visit Report (if applicable), any interim Progress Report, and any interim communication.

The SVR is written for several audiences: PAB, the faculty in the Program, university administrators, and those with whom the Program may share the report after PAB's decision. Although accreditation is a threshold test, its aspirational objective is the quest for academic excellence. While the SVT's recommendations for improvement

may at times go beyond the standards, PAB's accreditation decisions are closely based on the accreditation standards.

## SVR Sections

The SVR is composed of the following sections:

**Program Overview and Progress**

The introduction sets the tone of the SVR, gives the reader a sense of the Program's institutional and regional context, and includes a brief summary of the SVT's findings. The assessment will include a statement about the focus of the Program, its unique characteristics, and its strengths and challenges.

In this section, the SVT will also cite specific criteria from the prior Site Visit that were partially-met or unmet and share the SVT's assessment of whether the issues have been addressed. If any of these items are still of concern, they should be addressed in the appropriate section of the report.

**Assessment and Recommendations**

The SVT will assess each criterion as met, partially-met, or unmet. The SVT will provide a brief explanation of how the Program meets, partially-meets, or does not meet each criterion. The SVT must provide an explicit rationale for each of its assessments.

- **Met:** Evidence shows that overall program performance in this area meets PAB minimum standards. The SVT's rationale may appropriately cite areas of strength as well as concern.

- **Partially-met:** Deficiencies exist in an area directly bearing on accreditation. The problem or problems have observable effects on compliance with the specific criterion. A finding of "partially-met" must be supported by evidence the SVT considered, the deficiencies found, and why, in the SVT's view, the deficiencies have an impact on overall program quality.

- **Unmet:** The cited deficiency is so severe that the overall quality of the Program is compromised and its ability to deliver adequate planning education is impaired. A finding of "unmet" must be supported by evidence that the deficiency(ies) in the area are so severe that overall program quality is unacceptably compromised.

Recommendations affecting the quality of the Program are derived from the identified areas of weakness as they relate to a specific accreditation criterion. Although the report contains recommendations, it is the Program's responsibility to determine appropriate action based on its unique mission and its context within the larger university environment.

**Program Strengths**

In this section, the SVT may commend the Program on outstanding efforts and accomplishments. Within the framework of peer review and accreditation (and without compromising the judgment to be made by PAB), it is appropriate for the SVT to identify items that are well done or that are innovative in the field. This recognition of attainment and success can build upon items covered in the assessment of compliance.

**Furthering Excellence**

This section consists of suggestions for improvement that go beyond the scope of PAB's accreditation standards.

Suggestions for improvement include areas where the Program can build on its strengths or address an area of concern or opportunity that does not directly affect accreditation. Some recommendations may derive from the SVT's view that if left unattended these concerns could lead to a future determination of "partially-met." Other suggestions may derive from items that, in the SVT's opinion, can become a greater strength or provide improvement to the Program.

**Appendix**
At a minimum, the Site Visit schedule is included as an appendix to the report. Any relevant information provided directly to the SVT that was not included in the SSR should also be attached as an appendix.

## Program Comments to SVR

The Program is given the opportunity to respond to draft and final versions of the report prior to any decision rendered by PAB. The SVT shall submit a written SVR to PAB staff no later than two weeks from the conclusion of the Site Visit. PAB staff will review the draft SVR to determine that it is complete and in good order; PAB staff comments will be transmitted to the SVT. A revised draft report will then be provided to PAB staff, who will forward it to the Program Administrator.

The Program Administrator is invited to submit comments within two weeks of receipt of the SVR. Comments to the draft SVR are for the SVT's benefit only, to correct any misconceptions, errors, or omissions prior to finalization of the report. Comments will be forwarded by PAB staff to the SVT, who will revise the report as appropriate, for the final SVR. The Program's comments on the preliminary version will be considered by the SVT only.

Once the SVR is final, the Program will have a one-month comment period. At that point, the Program should share the final report with stakeholders (senior administration, student reps, etc.) for their input. This review period is for the purpose of addressing substantive matters discussed in the report. Comments to the final SVR will be shared with the SVT and PAB prior to making the accreditation decision.

PAB maintains confidentiality with regard to a SVR, which is considered to be the property of the University or College/School. Once the PAB has completed its review, a program may make its SVR public, but only in its entirety.

## Post-Site Visit Report

Prior to the PAB meeting, the Program will have the opportunity to submit a Post-Site Visit Report. This optional report provides the opportunity for programs to submit additional, updated evidence of compliance with PAB standards that was not part of the previous SSR. The Program's response must thoroughly document the actions taken for PAB to determine compliance with the standards. This report becomes part of the official record and is reviewed by the SVT and PAB. This report should not be a repetition of the Program's comments to the final SVR. PAB staff will notify programs of the report deadline prior to the accreditation review.

# PAB ACCREDITATION REVIEW

PAB meets in-person twice annually to make accreditation decisions: in conjunction with the APA conference in the spring and the ACSP conference in the fall. PAB will assess all the materials the SVT has reviewed, as well as

the final SSR, any comments to the final report, and Post-Site Visit Report (if applicable). During the bi-annual meetings, PAB will meet with both the Program Administrator and the SVT Chair individually. PAB deliberates once the Program Administrator and SVT Chair meetings are complete and makes its accreditation decision. Accreditation decisions are based on the Program's entire record. PAB's decision is formally communicated to the university President/Chancellor (with copies to the Provost, Dean, Program Administrator and/or Department Chair) within 30 days of the meeting.

Accreditation may be granted up to seven (7) years or for as little as two (2) years; a 2-year term is accompanied by a Probationary Accreditation designation. Any timeframe between these two endpoints is possible. A program receiving accreditation may be required to submit an interim "Progress Report" with a possible extension of accreditation if sufficient progress towards compliance is documented.

Decisions on accreditation terms of less than seven years may not be appealed. The PAB can also revoke accreditation, deny accreditation or-defer the accreditation decision pending additional information. The *Policies and Procedures Manual* contains detailed information on the accreditation decision categories.



### ***Preparing for the Board Review***

1. *Be thoroughly familiar with the SSR and the final SVR.*
2. *Be prepared to discuss accreditation criteria evaluated as Unmet or Partially-met and the extent to which the situation has changed since the Site Visit.*
3. *If material changes have occurred since the Site Visit, submit a Post-Site Visit Report approximately 3 weeks before the scheduled review. PAB staff will notify Programs of the report deadline.*

# Appendix A: Site Visit Schedule

**NAME OF PROGRAM AT NAME OF UNIVERSITY**

**Site Visit Schedule**

*Effective Fall 2023*

<u>**SUNDAY DATE**</u>
*Provide flight/arrival info for all team members.  If possible, please arrange transportation to the hotel.*
Chair
2nd Educator
Practitioner

Hotel Name, Address, and Phone
*Share this information with the team members **as soon as reservations have been made**, including whether the cost will be direct-billed to the program or if they will need to pay with an individual credit card.*

*Arrangements should provide for a private working room in the hotel for the team at night.  Options for SVT meetings include: hotel business center, a suite-type room for the SVT Chair, or a separate conference room.  A regular hotel room is not acceptable for this purpose.*

*Reminder:  Note locations of all meetings, or state that "all meetings will be in LOCATION unless noted otherwise."  The team generally works out of one room and interviewees come to it for their meetings. The exceptions are meetings with Senior Administration and group meetings if the work room isn't large enough.  For meetings with the students, alumni, APA and local employers, provide the team in advance with names, titles, employer name, and/or year of graduation as relevant.*

| 6:00 | Team dinner and meeting |
|------|--------------------------|

<u>**MONDAY DATE**</u>  *\* indicates the schedule must take place in the order presented. Allow for travel time between meetings if necessary.*

| 1 hour | * Program Administrator |
|--------|--------------------------|
| 30 min | * Department Head *If applicable* |
| 30 minutes | * Team meeting with Dean |
| 15 minutes | * Team meeting with Provost *optional* |
| 15 minutes | * Team meeting with President or Chancellor *optional* |
| ≥ 15 minutes | *Mid-morning* Break  *Please ensure refreshments are available to the team* |
| 1 hour | Group interview with – Part-time in Planning Unit tenured/tenure track/contract faculty <br> *Include names and titles throughout schedule* |
| 1 – 1.5 hours | Meeting with students |
| 1 hour | Lunch  *If the team has a group lunch allow 1.5 hours* |
| 1 hour | Group interview with – Full-time in Planning Unit tenure track faculty |

| 30 – 45 minutes | Tour of program facilities  *Includes GIS lab and studio space; exclude library* |
| ≥ 15 minutes | *Mid-afternoon* Break |
| 1.5 hours | Meeting with area employers, APA Chapter, and alumni |
| *5:00* | *Monday agenda ends - Program Administrator should check in with team before they leave campus* |
| 6:30 | Team dinner and work session |

**TUESDAY DATE** *Team must have a minimum of 3 hours set-aside at the end of Tuesday to work on the Site Visit Report.*

| 2 hours | Review of student work, 1st hour with Program Administrator (and other representative, if necessary) to discuss student and programmatic outcomes |
| ≥ 15 minutes | *Mid-morning* Break |
| 1 hour | Group interview with – Adjunct faculty |
| 1 hour | Lunch  *If the team has a group lunch allow 1.5 hours* |
| 1 hour | Group interview with – Full-time in Planning Unit tenured/contract faculty |
| ≥ 3hours | Team work time, *includes an hour set-aside for individual faculty interviews if requested.* |
| *5:00* | *Tuesday agenda ends -  Program Administrator should check in with team before they leave campus* |
| 6:30 | Team dinner and work session |

**WEDNESDAY DATE** *\* indicates the schedule must take place in the order presented.  Allow for travel time between meetings if necessary.*

| 1st meeting (1 hour) | * Exit meeting with Program Administrator |
| 45 minutes  - 1 hour | *  Exit meeting with Department Chair *if separate* |
| 30 - 45 minutes | *  Team meeting with Dean |
| ≥ 15 minutes | *Mid-morning* Break |
| 30 minutes | * Team meeting with Provost or designee |
| 30 minutes | * Team meeting with President or Chancellor *optional, but desirable* |
| *12:00* | *Wednesday agenda ends* Team leaves campus for airport |

*Provide flight/departure info for all team members*
Chair
2nd Educator
Practitioner