



ACPE Guide and Policies for Virtual Site Visits

Approved by the ACPE Board July 2020

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated that many activities that were formerly accomplished in a face-to-face manner now be completed virtually. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) has made the determination that all site visits for spring 2022 will be conducted virtually to respect the shelter-in-place orders and travel bans that many of our colleges' and schools' administration and faculty are facing. It should be noted that while the US Department of Education (USDE) is allowing virtual site visits on a temporary basis based on predetermined parameters (e.g., the school is in good standing) during the pandemic because of travel restrictions, they require that a face-to-face site visit be completed within a reasonable time after the virtual site visit in order to meet the statutory and regulatory requirements for regular on-site inspections. Thus, virtual site visits necessitate that the ACPE complete two visits (one virtual, one in person) for each program.

Virtual Site Visits

ACPE is temporarily and selectively offering to eligible programs a virtual site visit (VSV) in lieu of a live, in-person visit with the understanding that an on-site visit will need to be scheduled at a later time per USDE regulations. A VSV will follow all of the procedures as outlined in the ACPE Policies and Procedures, January 2022, section 11.3. VSV fees will be adjusted from the cost of a live, in-person visit and will include the fees for the verification visit.

ACPE reserves the right to update or change these policies and processes at any time as circumstances dictate.

Minimum Eligibility Requirements

ACPE maintains sole authority in determining which programs are candidates for virtual site visits (VSVs). Selection eligibility criteria include but are not limited to: the nature of the accreditation review, process outcomes thus far (identified areas of concern, type of visit, etc.), and the complexity of the site visit (number of campuses, delivery methods, and delivery sites). After spring 2022, site visits for schools submitting new applications must be conducted in person and will be not be eligible for a VSV.

To be approved for a VSV, a program, at a minimum, must be able to demonstrate the ability to provide interaction for the site visit team with an acceptable number of representatives of the institution and the standard constituent groups that participate in ACPE accreditation site visits, to afford a full review of the program.

Technology: Videoconferencing

ACPE utilizes Zoom as the platform for VSVs. This platform will be used to provide a private meeting space for the site team and to provide space for team members to meet with institutional and program representatives and representatives of other groups including, but not limited to, current students and preceptors.

Guidelines for Videoconferencing

- All participants must have their own meeting space and the ability to log in separately for the meetings. There should not be multiple participants in any single screen or room.
- Each participant should have a quiet space without distractions available for participation in the meeting(s).
- ACPE will utilize a waiting room for approved access to all meetings with individuals outside of the site team. Only the participants listed on the schedule will be admitted to the session.
- All participants must have their video on and be on screen throughout the duration of the meeting. ACPE will not accept picture placeholders or blank screens with names on them for participation in the meeting. Anyone using picture placeholders or blank screens with names on them will be removed from the meeting.

- ACPE will not record any of the meetings. ACPE prohibits the recording of the meetings by the institution or program and/or any of the meeting participants.
- Earphones/buds are recommended during the meeting to limit background noise and ensure privacy for the meeting.
- The Chat feature will be disabled. Private conversations will not be allowed.
- It is strongly recommended that all meeting participants download and utilize the Zoom Client for Meetings app available at the Zoom Download Center to access meetings.
- It is strongly recommended that all participants sign in approximately 10 minutes before the scheduled time to allow for zoom updates or other issues that may require a few minutes to resolve.
- As a back-up, it is recommended that the Zoom app be installed on the participant's cell phone in the event that a connection cannot be made on a computer or tablet.
- Be present. It is tempting to multitask during an online meeting - but please be sure your attention is focused on the conversations. Treat those on the screen the same as you would in person.

Backup/Contingency Plan

There are multiple avenues for accessing Zoom videoconferencing, including via PCs, laptops, tablets, and cell phones. If for some reason a meeting participant has trouble accessing the videoconferencing for a meeting, after trying multiple avenues, he or she should notify the ACPE Site Team Leader or his or her designee as soon as possible. If the situation cannot be resolved quickly, the participant should use his or her cell phone to dial in to the meeting. Cell phones should only be used in situations where efforts to resolve the access to the videoconference were unsuccessful. All participants should participate in the videoconference, if possible, with video/audio and must have video/audio capability before being selected to participate.

Should a power failure or act of nature interfere with the conduct of the visit, the use of cell phones will be the immediate backup plan. All participants should be advised to have hard copies of the dial-in numbers available.

In the event the Site Visit Team is not able to complete its review, including the review of documents or to conduct meetings with required participants due to problems with technology or for any other reason, ACPE, in its sole discretion, may schedule another VSV or an in-person visit. In the event this occurs, an additional fee may be assessed.

During the Visit

The Site Visit Team Leader will:

- Act in a support capacity for the team and program regarding the use of technology and logistical considerations.
- Indicate in the Evaluation Team Report if the program was not able to provide to the team a virtual/video tour of the program's facilities, including the clinical and didactic instruction environment. Video tours of facilities may be recorded and provided to the team prior to the visit but the team may request a supplemental tour in real-time using technology such as FaceTime.
- Ensure that all participants understand and agree that, with the exception of the above option of pre-recorded video, no part of the site visit may be audio and/or video recorded.
- Provide or assign a designee to provide in all virtual meetings a brief introduction of the team and participants or participant groups.

Procedures and Structure of Virtual Meetings

Each Virtual Meeting will follow the same general procedures and structure as a standard in-person site visit meeting, with the following exceptions:

- The program must provide ACPE with a list of all approved attendees with corresponding email addresses for all meetings no later than one (1) week prior to the start of the visit as part of the final schedule. The specific schedule and those interviewed will be finalized between the ACPE site team leader and the program Dean or designee.
- All participants entering the meeting will enter a waiting room.
- The site team or staff member, working off the approved attendee list provided by the program will allow entry into the meeting room from the waiting room.
- A unique ACPE Zoom link will be established for the visit with ACPE being the host. Only those individuals listed on the schedule will be admitted into the session.

Additional Policies

- In no way does this Virtual Site Visit Policy alter the reserved rights and authority of the ACPE Board of Directors.
- Unless specifically stated in this document, all ACPE policies, processes, procedures, practices, and protocols apply and remain in force.
- All applicable policies, processes, procedures, practices, and protocols shall be the same as for a full in- person site visit.
- ACPE reserves the right to cancel a full or partial virtual site visit at any time prior to or during the scheduled visit and schedule a full in-person site visit instead. An in-person site visit will be scheduled within a reasonable period of time following the canceled virtual site visit and as permitted by federal, state and local laws.
- All site team leaders and team members will participate in a training session for virtual site visits prior to participating in a visit.
- The ACPE Board of Directors will review the Virtual Site Visit Evaluation Team Report and take action on the Accreditation Actions and Recommendations at the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting.

Verification Visit

The required on-site verification visit will take place at a time that is practical after the virtual evaluation and with mutual agreement between ACPE and the program Dean. The purpose of the verification visit is to confirm the findings of the virtual site visit team. The on-site verification visit will be a minimum of a one-day on-site evaluation conducted by a minimum of a two-member team comprised of one ACPE staff or staff consultant and a trained site team evaluator(s).* Where possible, the verification visits will be conducted by the same ACPE representative as the virtual visit team. Evaluation team members on the verification visit will have access to the information provided to the virtual site visit team along with the evaluation team report and Boards' Accreditation Action and Recommendations (AR). The verification visit must include a discussion with the program Dean and a review of the physical facilities. Other discussions will be determined by the ACPE representative leading the on-site verification visit who will be guided by the findings of the Evaluation Team Report (ETR) and AR documenting the virtual visit to be verified. The verification team is not expected to review and validate every accreditation principle, but rather to verify and substantiate the information provided during the virtual site visit. A Verification ETR will be generated by the team conducting the verification on-site evaluation, and will be reviewed by the ACPE Board of Directors at its next meeting. The Board will take any necessary actions at the next regularly scheduled Board Meeting following their review of the Verification ETR.

*At the June 2022 Board meeting, the ACPE Board of Directors simplified the policy to allow only an ACPE staff or staff consultant to complete the verification visit.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FORMAT

Program Considerations in Planning:

- Meeting start times should be adjusted in consideration of the location of team members and program.
- ACPE staff will provide the zoom link to the program for distribution to those participating in the virtual evaluation.
- Participants should ensure they have access to resources to be able to answer team's questions including a copy of the self-study or interim report.
- The schedule should provide a list of all attendees participating in each meeting. The attendee list should include the names, degrees (MD, PhD, EdD, etc.), position titles and emails of each person with whom the team will be meeting. The names must match the individual Zoom profile names.
- A virtual site visit schedule will be created from the agreed upon schedule. The virtual site visit schedule will include breaks for the team between meetings and sufficient time for the next group of individuals to log into Zoom.

*Note: ACPE staff will provide a full sample schedule based on the type of visit that needs to be accomplished (e.g., comprehensive versus focused) **and the various time zones of those participating.***





VIRTUAL SITE VISIT AGREEMENT

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACPE is temporarily and selectively offering the option for accreditation review via a Virtual Site Visit (VSV) in lieu of an In-Person Site Visit (IPV). The VSV option is being offered as a short-term solution where it is currently impractical or impossible to conduct an in-person on-site evaluation due to complications caused by the pandemic.

Programs must meet selection eligibility criteria, the minimum requirements for hosting a VSV and agree to the terms and conditions outlined in this *Agreement*. The decision concerning whether to proceed with a VSV is in ACPE's sole discretion.

All programs offered the option may opt to move forward with planning for a VSV or may opt to defer the visit until an in-person visit (IPV) can be (re)scheduled. It is not known at this time when in-person site visits (IPVs) will resume or the timeline in which a program may be scheduled once IPVs resume.

Agreement

This Agreement is entered into this day by _____ (Program) and the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), collectively the Parties, and sets forth the understandings and obligations of the Parties relating to a Virtual Site Visit (VSV) of the Doctor of Pharmacy program as part of ACPE's review of the Program's accreditation status.

Whereas the Parties have determined that it is impractical or impossible for the Program to host an IPV on its campus due to complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and

Whereas the Program acknowledges that it prefers to proceed with a VSV rather than reschedule an IPV for a later time; and

Whereas ACPE has determined that the Program has met the eligibility criteria and logistical and other requirements set forth in the *ACPE Virtual Site Visits Policies and Procedures* qualifying the Program to host a VSV; and

The Parties therefore agree to the following terms and conditions:

Terms and Conditions

The Program agrees that it has capacity and will comply with the guidelines set forth in the *ACPE Virtual Site Visits Policies and Procedures* in preparing for and participating in the VSV.

Technology:

- The Program has the technological capacity to host a VSV and to use ACPE's platform, *Zoom*, to facilitate secure communication between and among VSV team members, and Program administrators, faculty and students; and
- The Program will ensure that all potential participants are trained to use the technology selected by ACPE for audio/video communication and that they understand the videoconferencing guidelines.

Preparation and Logistics

- The Program accepts and will follow the VSV planning process outlined in the ACPE *Virtual Site Visits Policies and Procedures*; and
- The Program will provide the final schedule and lists of meeting attendees, including but not limited to Program administrators, site supervisors, faculty, students and preceptors for all meetings to the site team leader a minimum of one (1) week prior to the start of the meeting; and
- In the event the Site Visit Team is not able to complete its review, including the review of documents or to conduct meetings with required participants due to problems with technology or for any other reason, ACPE, in its sole discretion, may schedule another VSV or an IPV. In the event this occurs, an additional fee may be assessed.

Other Terms and Conditions

- The Program bears the responsibility to assure the confidentiality of interviews with the Virtual Site Visit Team in the same manner as if the visit were to take place in person.
- In order to foster collegiality and open communication, the Parties agree that legal counsel shall not be present at any stage of the virtual site visit, including the site team’s exit presentation.
- The Parties agree that no meetings will be recorded.
- The Program agrees to accept the report of the VSVT and acknowledges that it cannot, at a later date, request a new site visit with a different format, or appeal the resulting accreditation decision solely on the basis of the virtual format of the site visit.

Acknowledgement

As the Dean of the Doctor of Pharmacy Program at _____, I have read and agree to the foregoing requirements for the Program to participate in a virtual site visit by ACPE. I understand that the virtual site visit will be part of the accreditation review process and that the results will become part of the record to be reviewed by the ACPE Board in making its accreditation decision of the Program. A subsequent onsite visit will be scheduled as soon as reasonable to complete the review process per the requirements of the US Department of Education.

As the Dean of the Program, I agree that the program will not challenge the results of the visit or ACPE’s decision relative to the accreditation of the Program solely on the basis that the visit was conducted virtually.

Program Virtual Visit Dates

Dean Printed Name

Dean Signature

Date signed: _____

