# Virtual Site Visits: COVID-19 Emergency Conditions

**Approved June 4, 2020**

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CAA will conduct virtual site visits to complete reviews of the current applications for accreditation status, including candidacy, if an on-campus, in-person visit cannot be conducted. The virtual site visit may be conducted when all or some of site visit team members are not on the physical campus of the university. Further, this policy also allows for a virtual site visit to be conducted when the presence of faculty, students and other university representatives on the campus may be restricted or limited during the emergency.

CAA's temporary policy is in accordance with the guidance issued on March 17, 2020 by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), allowing accrediting agencies to conduct virtual site visits as a result of the restrictions put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Under this guidance, the USDE requires agencies to have policies and procedures in place before engaging in virtual site visits. Further, the CAA must conduct a follow-up, in-person visit to the campus within a reasonable period of time following the virtual site visit; however, the follow-up visit does not need to be a full-team site visit. The CAA will render its decision on the program's accreditation status based on the report of the virtual site visit. If no site visitors were on campus for the virtual site visit, the CAA expects to conduct the follow-up visit within one year of the CAA's decision to address the USDE expectations; however this time line may be adjusted for the type of review and/or as conditions evolve. The CAA will not assess fees for follow-up site visits conducted as a result of a full-team virtual visit.

Based on the preferred dates of the program and the availability of site visitors, Accreditation Staff will assign teams to each program to conduct a site visit. The site visit team will confer with the program director to determine, based on the university's open status, whether an on-campus visit is feasible. The Accreditation Office must be notified as soon as possible as to how the site visit will be conducted, as all decisions to conduct a virtual visit must be documented.

- If the campus is not open to visitors, the program and team will proceed with planning a full-team virtual site visit.
- If the campus is open to visitors, the site visit chair will confer with the team to consider the site visitors' safety and ability to travel to the university. A full-team or a partial-team virtual site visit may be conducted if the entire team is unable to travel to campus for the visit.

*Full-Team virtual site visit* – when all members of the site visit team are remote/not on campus. Virtual site visits would be conducted in an engaged, interactive format (e.g.,

telephonic meetings, video conference calls, and the like). The team may not have access to the program's physical facilities. The program is required to provide access to documentation in accordance with appropriate regulations. Although the virtual site visit would allow for the CAA to render a decision on the program's accreditation status, a follow-up visit would be required to meet USDE criteria within a period of time determined by the CAA.

*Partial-Team virtual site visit* – when at least one member, but not all members, of the site visit team, is remote/not on campus. The on-site team has access to the program's physical facilities. Virtual site visits would be conducted in an engaged, interactive format (e.g., telephonic meetings, video conference calls, and the like) to allow full participation by the remote team member(s). The partial-team virtual site visit would meet expectations set forth by USDE and CAA to conduct an "in person" visit to the campus and render a decision on the program's accreditation status.

All aspects of the site visit are expected to be completed as described in Chapter XIX: Site Visit Planning and Conduct of the *Accreditation Handbook* for an on-campus site visit and to be adapted as needed to the virtual platform. The program director should confer with the chair of the site visit team when considering final formats for the following aspects of the site visit:

- Documentation: The program is expected to provide documentation in advance of the visit, as per current policy, and to ensure access by the site visitors to files and other documents under appropriate protocols. Programs unable to provide all required documentation during a virtual site visit may be asked to provide additional information prior to a final decision about the program's accreditation status.
- Interviews/Meetings: The site visitors will plan to interview academic and clinical faculty, central administrators, alumni, external clinical supervisors, students, etc. The program also must plan a public meeting as part of the virtual site visit. For full-team virtual site visits, a follow-up on-campus visit must include a public meeting.
- Tour: If site visitors are not on campus, the program must execute an alternative method to support this aspect of the visit, such as a live tour with a program representative connected via the meeting platform or a pre-recorded video of the areas to be toured (e.g., classrooms, program offices, student labs, clinical space, etc.), etc. For full-team virtual site visits, a follow-up on-campus visit must include a campus tour.

The CAA will provide the meeting platform to conduct the virtual site visit. No recordings will be permitted by either the site visitors, program, or any individuals participating in the visit.