

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DECENNIAL VISITING COMMITTEE

Each year, member vocational technical superintendents, principals and directors are asked to nominate competent staff members for service on visiting committees. Invitations to serve on visiting committees are mailed directly from the Commission office to the superintendent/principal/director where the staff member is employed with the request that the invitation be forwarded to the selected staff member.

Accompanying the invitation to serve is a questionnaire that is to be completed and forwarded to the Commission office. This questionnaire is very important to the proper organization of the accreditation visit since the chair cannot put together the schedule for the visit and the various committee assignments until he/she receives your information. This questionnaire should be returned as soon as possible.

The purpose of an on-site visit is to evaluate the school as an institution in terms of the **Standards of Membership** established by the Commission on Technical and Career Institutions of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The visiting committee has a responsibility to ensure that the school receives the kind of educational audit which will

1. Identify areas requiring strengthening or improvement as the institution, through the constructive action of its staff and faculty, engages in the process of continuous self-improvement during the next decennial period.
2. Serve as a sound basis for a recommendation to the Commission or to the Association Board of Trustees for either initial or continued accreditation.
3. Provide further validity for the evaluation and accreditation process.

If an on-site visit serves the above purposes, the school should benefit from a clarification of its objectives, a realistic self-examination of its success in attaining them, and a stimulation to continue to explore ways by which it might increase its effectiveness.

BEFORE THE VISIT

In addition to an invitation to serve on the visiting committee, each committee member receives from the Commission office a second communication identifying the evaluator's responsibilities, as well as letters from the visiting committee chair and the host school's superintendent/principal/director outlining details of the 3½-day visit. The host school will provide information concerning travel directions, lodging, and meal arrangements and will include within the packet of information a copy of the **School Philosophy and Goals** report and a summary of the **School and Community Relations** report. The visiting committee chair will forward to each committee member a schedule for the visit and a listing of tentative committee assignments. The Commission office provides these **Instructions for Decennial Visiting Committee** and a letter outlining specific duties. When the membership of the visiting committee has been established, it is the responsibility of the superintendent/principal/director to contact the chair of the visiting committee to discuss arrangements for the visit (housing, meals, plans and the particulars of the initial meeting with school personnel, schedules, etc.). Arrangements for the housekeeping

aspects of the on-site visit are the responsibility of the host school, but the details depend upon the receipt of appropriate information and direction from the visiting committee chair.

Experience has shown that it is preferable to have the committee housed in one place and in private rooms. The host school will have arranged for a suitable work/meeting room for the committee in the same place that it is housed. The accommodations for committee meetings should be private, for the visiting committee only, and should contain materials previously identified by the visiting committee chair. The institution will also have available on campus a work/meeting room with copies of current class schedules, staff directories, bulletins, and other institutional publications that may be of interest to the visiting committee members.

THE SELF-STUDY

The staff and administration will have been involved in a self-study for approximately one academic year prior to the arrival of the on-site visiting committee. The Commission has requested that the staff and administration evaluate the host school on the basis of the Commission's **Standards of Membership** and the school's stated Philosophy and Goals. As noted previously, each committee member will be forwarded a copy of the **School's Philosophy and Goals** and a summary of its **School and Community Relations** report. All other data related to the self-study will be kept on campus for use upon arrival. Each visiting committee member should read, analyze and begin to think about the institution's Philosophy and the summary of the **School and Community Relations** report before the visit. The following questions may be of help in an analysis of materials received:

- Does the institution's Philosophy relate to the **School and Community Relations** report summary?
- Are the Goals specific and are they measurable?
- Are vocational, technical offerings based on the business and economic needs of the area?
- Are the vocational, technical offerings commensurate with the needs of the students enrolled?
- If a postsecondary program is offered, are completion and placement rates acceptable and are appropriate student support services provided?

DURING THE VISIT

Throughout the visit, each committee member must keep in mind that the role of the visiting committee member is that of a colleague and friendly consultant. It is important to identify problems if they are found. It is equally important that the specific method which must be used to solve identified problems be left to the institution to develop and implement. Please remember that what has worked in your school may not work in this institution. Leave it to the creativity and genius of the local school to find solutions to identified problems.

INITIAL MEETING WITH HOST SCHOOL PERSONNEL

The initial meeting with the key school personnel is arranged through earlier discussions between the chair and the superintendent/principal/director. It should occur no later than Monday evening (this session is typically a dinner meeting). At that time the committee should receive whatever additional orientation, of either a general or specific nature, the school deems appropriate to the evaluation. For example, the staff might wish to use this occasion to elaborate on its objectives and how it seeks to complete them. Above all, the first meeting with school personnel should be informal; and all members of the visiting committee should attempt to allay tensions and fears, if any, and set an atmosphere of quiet professionalism. The main presentation of the evening by the superintendent/principal/director or a designee will be the **School Philosophy and Goals** report and the **School and Community Relations** report. You should make every effort to meet those faculty or staff who are involved in the subcommittee areas to which you are assigned.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND CONFERENCES

In the course of the visit, the members of the visiting committee should seek opportunities to talk with representatives of the faculty, students, and administration, to visit classes and the library, and become familiar with all aspects of the physical plant. It is important that subcommittees established by the visiting committee chair take the opportunity to meet with the self-study subcommittees responsible for the development of those parts of the self-study, including each individual program. Each subcommittee chair and members of his or her committee will be responsible for developing a report to be submitted to the committee as a whole. Each subcommittee report should include an introduction directed to observations and a brief description of the program or facilities. The introduction should be followed by commendations and recommendations. Most committees work informally and reach decisions by consensus. Each subcommittee report must be approved by a majority vote of the committee as a whole.

It is important that you make time to write clear and concise reports and that you consult with the chair or assistant chair if you are falling behind in your writing responsibilities. It is also important to give your chair a "heads up" if you identify an unanticipated problem in the area assigned to you.

At or near the end of the visit, a "wrap-up" conference of the committee should occur. By the end of this session, a committee point of view in the form of a consensus on major issues should emerge. It is most important that committee members be in general agreement as to the subject matter of the report and be aware of what has been presented to the committee as a whole for acceptance. Each member of the committee should have a clear understanding of individual member responsibilities with respect to both the preparation of the evaluation report, providing information for the chair making assessments in terms of standards, and the vote of the visiting committee concerning a recommendation for accreditation.

It should be noted that the recommendation of the visiting committee to the Commission is confidential; it must not be divulged to staff members of the host institution and is to be submitted separately by the chair for Commission review.

WRAP-UP SESSION: HOST STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION

Before leaving the school, the visiting committee chair will give the staff and administration and board of governance an oral preview of the committee's findings. This meeting is traditionally the most difficult and requires great tact and diplomacy, yet it is one of the most important aspects of the on-site evaluation.

This session cannot be a courtesy call; it truly must be a meeting with an agenda that identifies overall school strengths and areas of concern as identified by the visiting committee. Visiting committee members may attend. Only the visiting committee chair speaks during the wrap-up session.

No indication should be given to the host staff and administration as to the visiting committee recommendation concerning accreditation. The Commission requests that this procedure be followed because it may modify a recommendation by a visiting committee, which could cause considerable embarrassment if this custom of privacy is not strictly observed.

THE REPORT

The visiting committee chair will outline in detail the organization of the evaluation report from the Index to the Conclusion. It is helpful to the Commission members and to the public, when studying the report, to know the nature of the academic and vocational technical offerings, sequences, the number of instructors, the number of students, dropout rates, the required or elective courses, whether the program is competency based, the state of the shop/lab, the condition and sufficiency of equipment, placement of graduates and whether or not there is a department chair. It should be stressed that every effort is made to develop a report that is both scrupulously fair and factually accurate in describing the school and its operations as the visiting committee observed them. In an era of heightened public interest and growing concern for the education of students, it is likely that the Evaluation Report will be read and referenced by lay persons as well as professional educators unknown to the committee or the Commission. The report should be a professional document in every respect and should never refer to individuals by name.

The final draft of the evaluation report with its commendations and recommendations will be shared with the school evaluated prior to Commission deliberations.

The visiting committee chair will share with the superintendent/principal/director of the host institution a draft of the evaluation report and request that it be reviewed for factual accuracy. Upon receipt of a letter confirming factual accuracy or, if the chair agrees to some changes offered by the superintendent/principal/director of the host school, the report will be printed and eighteen (18) copies will be forwarded to the Commission office. The visiting committee chair will forward a separate single communication to the Director of the Commission with the visiting committee recommendation for accreditation (ballot count) on the basis of the options available. The visiting committee chair will ensure that the contents of this communication are kept absolutely confidential and for the eyes of the Commission and its Director.

REPORTS DEVELOPED AS ADDENDA TO THE EVALUATION REPORT

The visiting committee chair and the various subcommittee chairs are responsible for providing the information requested for the **Standards of Membership Checklist**. The checklist should be forwarded to the Commission office accompanying the evaluation report. Subcommittee chairs and the visiting committee chair are requested to rate the school on each standard. The Director of the Commission will forward a final copy of the evaluation report and the Standards of Membership Checklist to the superintendent/principal/director prior to Commission deliberations on the status of the school's accreditation and indicate the various options for public release of information.

MISCELLANEOUS

The Association's Board of Trustees reimburses at a set rate the use of a personal automobile in connection with an on-site accreditation visit.

Out-of-pocket expenditures should be entered on the expense voucher provided and given to the visiting committee chair prior to leaving the host school. The visiting committee chair will review with the committee reimbursement procedures to include the recording of individual expenses - transportation, meals and lodging.