

Virtual Site Visit Policy for Initial Accreditation Voluntary Emergency Contingency Plan

The Virtual Site Visit (VSV) Policy for Initial Applicants is effective upon passage as an emergency contingency plan. The ARC/STSA reserves the right and has the authority to determine if a VSV is feasible and will extend the option to participate to eligible programs. The ARC/STSA's determination is not appealable.

Program participation in a Virtual Site Visit is voluntary; eligible programs may request to postpone a site visit until the ARC/STSA has determined that it is safe to conduct an on-ground visit following the emergency period. Such an extension may not exceed a one-year period.

A Virtual Site Visit incorporates web-based multi-media technology to review electronic/digital documentation and facilitate synchronous face-to-face interactions between site visitors and institutional administration, program directors, faculty, students, Program Advisory Committee members, and other constituencies, as appropriate. While the VSV is conducted remotely using additional technologies, the rigor, quality, and evaluation process will be consistent with that of an on-ground site visit.

In limited situations, a hybrid VSV format may be utilized during which one or more ARC/STSA site visitors conduct their review of the program using synchronous web-based conferencing tools, while one or more additional ARC/STSA site visitors conduct their review of the program on ground at the institution.

The purpose of this policy is to:

1. Protect the health and safety of ARC/STSA site visitors and staff, sponsoring institution/program representatives, students, the public, and other constituencies.
2. Continue to advance quality surgical technology and surgical assisting education through the function of accreditation.

A Virtual Site Visit may be scheduled by the ARC/STSA in the following circumstances:

- ✦ Occurrence of a manmade or natural disaster, or other public health emergency, that prohibits or calls into question the feasibility of an onsite evaluation.
- ✦ Concern regarding the health or safety of a site visitor.
- ✦ Site visitor's inability to travel to or access a program location.
- ✦ Special cases as approved by the ARC/STSA Board of Directors.

Eligibility for an Initial Virtual Site Visit

- * Meet existing requirements for an on-ground site visit, including the submission of a complete Self-Study Report and at least one student cohort's completion of more than 50% of the clinical component of the program.
- * Technical capability, including reliable internet connection that extends into the laboratory, computers with webcams and audio capability or other campus teleconferencing hardware. Capability must be demonstrated during a pre-visit technology test.
- * Program's accessibility to facilities and required records.
- * All required visit documentation must be in electronic/digital format, clearly organized and labeled following the format specified by the ARC/STSA and uploaded to the institution's document-sharing platform for easy accessibility. *See the ARC/STSA Materials Checklists for Virtual Site Visits available on the ARC/STSA website.*
- * Access provided to Learning Management System (instructor/student access) and Clinical Tracking Platform, if utilized by the program.
- * Program Director attendance at an Accreditation Fundamentals for Educators (AFE) in the past year (preferred).
- * Signed Consent Agreement for virtual format.
- * Visit fees submitted.

Requirements – Procedural

- * Virtual access to all interviewees (simultaneously as needed with individuals and groups) that is comparable to the access required during an on-ground site visit.
- * Use of the private chat function, by either the institutional participants or the site team members, is prohibited.
- * The video or audio recording of the site visit sessions, by either the institutional participants or the site team members, is prohibited.
- * Screen shots of confidential documentation will not be allowed.
- * Listening in on meetings or interviews without the site visitors' knowledge and approval is prohibited.
- * Student/faculty files must be void of confidential information or redacted.
- * Virtual Site Evaluation Schedule & Contact Information Sheet due 2 weeks prior to visit.
- * Provide pre-recorded tour of facilities – library, classrooms, computer labs, lab, breakrooms (only those used by ST or SA students), PD and faculty offices.
- * Conduct detailed live tour of laboratory resources during the Virtual Site Visit as instructed by the site visitor team.
- * Institutional IT staff must be available for pre-visit technology check and VSV.

ARC/STSA Rights and VSV Applicability to Current Policies

1. The Virtual Site Visit Policy for Initial Applicants does not alter the reserved rights and authority of the ARC/STSA Board of Directors.
2. All ARC/STSA policies, processes, procedures, practices, and protocols apply and remain in force, unless specifically stated otherwise in this policy.
3. The ARC/STSA will conduct an on-site (on-ground) evaluation within a reasonable timeframe following the emergency period for all initial site visits completed virtually. Additionally, the ARC/STSA reserves the right to conduct an on-site evaluation of any program prior to the conclusion of the grant cycle in the event of compliance concerns.
4. Fee structure for the VSV will remain consistent with existing Initial Accreditation On-site Evaluation Fees and will include an on-ground visit to be scheduled within a reasonable timeframe following the emergency period.
5. ARC/STSA reserves the right to cancel a Virtual Site Visit at any time prior to or during the scheduled visit and schedule a full on-ground site visit, within a reasonable time frame, instead.
6. If there is a technology failure that significantly impairs the site visitor team's ability to have an engaged, synchronous interactive review, then the team chair shall terminate the VSV immediately, and an on-ground site visit will be scheduled within a reasonable time frame following the terminated Virtual Site Visit.
7. If the site visit team determines that the program's required documentation and supporting evidence available virtually are inadequate, not sufficiently accessible, or if there is perceived evidence of document falsification; and, the inadequacy significantly impairs their ability to conduct a review comparable to an on-ground site visit, then the team chair, in consultation with ARC/STSA staff (before or during the Virtual Site Visit), shall terminate the Virtual Site Visit, and an on-ground site visit will be scheduled within a reasonable time frame following the terminated Virtual Site Visit.
8. The sponsoring institution/program shall not record (audio, video, or photographic) any portion of the Virtual Site Visit. Based on the ARC/STSA Surveillance Policy, the ARC/STSA reserves the right to take disciplinary action against sponsoring institutions/programs whose representatives knowingly violate this policy, including:
 - ✳ cancellation of a site visit scheduled or in progress,
 - ✳ recommendation of Probationary Accreditation, or
 - ✳ recommendation of Withdrawal of Accreditation.

At a minimum, if evidence of recording is discovered, the team chair shall terminate the Virtual Site Visit immediately, and an on-ground site visit will be scheduled within a reasonable time frame following the terminated Virtual Site Visit.