

Virtual Site Visit Policy for Initial Accreditation

Purpose

The ARC/STSA Virtual Site Visit Policy protects the health and safety of ARC/STSA site visitors and staff, sponsoring institution/program representatives, students, the public, and other constituencies, and continues to advance quality surgical technology and surgical assisting education through the programmatic accreditation process.

The Virtual Site Visit Policy for Initial Accreditation Applicant programs provides for a virtual visit option when an on-ground site visit may not be feasible due to an unanticipated event. 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 an on-ground site visit may be conducted. The ARC/STSA reserves the right and has the authority to determine if a Virtual Site Visit is feasible and will extend the option to participate to eligible programs. The ARC/STSA's determination is not appealable.

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 Virtual Site Visit is conducted remotely using additional technologies, the rigor, quality, and evaluation process will be consistent with that of an on-ground site visit.

A hybrid Virtual Site Visit format may be utilized during which one or more ARC/STSA site evaluators conduct their review of the program using synchronous web-based conferencing tools, while one or more additional ARC/STSA site evaluators conduct their review of the program on ground at the institution.

Circumstances Permitting a Virtual Site Visit

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 on-ground evaluation.
- Concern regarding the health or safety of a site evaluator.
- Site evaluator'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 connectivity that extends into the program laboratory, computers with webcams, and audio capability or other campus teleconferencing hardware. Capability must be demonstrated during a pre-visit technology test.
- Accessibility to facilities and required records.
- All required site visit documentation must be in electronic/digital format, clearly organized and labeled

following the format specified by the ARC/STSA, and uploaded to a document-sharing platform by the due date provided in the program notification. *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) Workshop 12 months prior to the scheduled site visit.
- Signed Consent Agreement for virtual format.
- Signed Surveillance Agreement
- Initial application and site 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 visit 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.
- Screenshots of confidential documentation are prohibited.
- Surveillance of meetings or interviews without the site evaluators' knowledge and approval is prohibited.
- Student/faculty files must be void of confidential information or redacted.
- Provide pre-recorded tour of facilities – library, classrooms, computer labs, lab, breakrooms (only those used by surgical technology or surgical assisting students), and program director 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 a pre-visit technology check and for the duration of the site visit.

ARC/STSA Rights and Virtual Site Visit Applicability to Current Policies

- All ARC/STSA policies, processes, procedures, practices, and protocols apply and remain in force unless specifically stated otherwise in this policy.
- The ARC/STSA may conduct an on-site (on-ground) confirmation of the evaluation within a reasonable timeframe following the initial site visit completed virtually at the discretion of the ARC/STSA Board of Directors. 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.

- Fee structure for the Virtual Site Visit will remain consistent with existing Initial Accreditation On-Site Evaluation Fees.
- 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 timeframe.
- 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 site visit immediately, and an on-ground site visit will be scheduled within a reasonable time frame following the terminated Virtual Site Visit.
- If the site visit team determines that the program’s required documentation and supporting evidence available virtually are inadequate or not sufficiently accessible, 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.
- 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 timeframe following the terminated Virtual Site Visit.