Off-site Reviewing: Issues and Thoughts on Being an Off-site External Review Panelist

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a) *Remoteness*
Because you are not on site, you may feel you are not really a part of the team.

Solution: Work harder to connect-show you are working and care about the other team member's sections by commenting on their written or oral observations. Get organized with your email. Set up folders immediately and move all the email into them for quick referral and retrieval. Volunteer to do a survey. Do it fast, do it right, and then share the results in a timely manner to be of assistance to the visiting team.
Are you helping? By getting involved in the process you will be considered to be an integral part of the on-site team.

b) *Lack* of *Clarity* of *the School's Report*
It is easier to see the school and then to understand their report, but you won't see it. So your report may be out of sync or be largely inaccurate in places. If the on-site team cannot understand why you wrote what you did, then you may look unprepared.

Solution: Attend every conference call; send the visiting team in depth queries and to whom to address the questions in the areas that you have brought up as a concern. Back off on your opinions if those who read your section, attend to your query on site, and then disagree with what you have written. Since the on-site team will need to revise your section (because they are there), be gracious --give it up. Also, respond in depth to other team member's sections.

c) *You Must be Self Motivated*
On-site team may feel more culpable or involved because they are there on the firing line and talking to the school reps.

Solution: Absolutely meet all the deadlines. Absolutely show yourself knowledgeable by reading and being familiar with the whole report, not just your part. You may have to work harder at the beginning of the process, and do more reading and trying to find out about the school and the words it uses to describe itself. Be attentive to your colleague's email-- respond on time and in time to be of help. Meet every deadline and do not make excuses for not getting to the email. You accepted voluntarily and acceded to the timetable now just get to it.

d) *The Depth and Type* of *Role is Totally Dependent on the Chair*
To be involved, your Chair has to take the time to create the opportunities for you to participate and to canvas the team for best times to set up the conference calls when they are on site. They have to take the time, and time is precious to many.

Solution: Express to your chair your flexibility to meet over conference calls while they are on site. Suggest you could meet every day and you will make yourself free to meet the timing of the on-site team. Be specific that you know the limitations of not being on site and how that affects your first draft and that you respect the responses of the on-site team to your queries, as they are your eyes and ears.

Some Steps for the First-timer to Consider

- ❑ Read the Standards entirely and thoroughly when accepting the position.
- ❑ When the chair appoints you to your section(s), immediately read the applicable Standards and accept the appointment or amend it. Be fast.
- ❑ Print the timetable/deadlines and staple into a file for quick glance.
- ❑ Months later when you get the Program Presentation in the mail, hold off opening it until you are ready to actually read and write. Look for a sustained time of the equivalent of 3 days from this point on to do all the steps up to the date of the actual visit.
- ❑ Now read the Standards again before you even begin reading the Program Presentation.
- ❑ Read the Standards for the sections you are responsible for.
- ❑ If you feel comfortable with the technique, create a checklist for the Standards you are responsible for. This technique helps to focus on what evidence to find and what needs further investigation.
- ❑ Read the Program Presentation in its entirety. Answers to various Standards may be scattered throughout.
- ❑ Read the sections you are responsible for general overall impression—no note taking.
- ❑ Now reread the report and start taking tiny or general notes. To jog your memory, add page numbers with each note. This will save a lot of time.
- ❑ Begin writing by going in the order of the paragraphs of the Standards.
- ❑ Keep checking those notes you take and delete them as you go.
- ❑ Keep you team appraised of what you are finding, but either be very general in tone or very specific when you are looking for a piece of evidence. Let your team know if there is an area of concern in the standard you are responsible for.
- ❑ As the report develops, add comments beside certain sentences or statements like “check on this” or note a page number with the evidence or a note to look for evidence. You can even write “?? Evidence of this in the [document]?” and then make a note to yourself or for the on-site team to confirm that it is in the “[document].”
- ❑ Your section draft at this stage may be about 3 pages long. Print it.
- ❑ Review what your team has been saying by email about what they are finding. Check that against what you are writing. Maybe you have an answer to their query, or they have a concern that matches yours. The big picture should now be emerging.
- ❑ Read the entire Program Presentation again-- as a whole.
- ❑ Review your notes beside your sentences looking for those “??” or “check on” comments.
- ❑ Send your first draft on time to the team. Emphasize the word “draft.”
- ❑ If you can, let a bit of time go by.
- ❑ Open and read all the team's draft copies. Print them for easier comparison.