INTERNATIONAL FIRE SERVICE ACCREDITATION CONGRESS

Certificate Assembly

Accreditation Policy and Procedure

Prepared by the
IFSAC Certificate Assembly
Accreditation Task Group and Planning Coordination Committee

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IFSAC Certificate Assembly Accreditation Policy

Purpose

The purpose of the IFSAC Certificate Assembly Accreditation Policy and Procedure is to outline the accreditation and reaccreditation processes of entities within the International Fire Service Accreditation Congress (IFSAC).

Initial Accreditation and Reaccreditation

Five (5) years from the date of election to membership, each voting entity must have at least one level of certification accredited. The Certificate Assembly Board of Governors (CABOG) shall evaluate the entity's status at that time and report to the Assembly.

Reaccreditation is required on a five (5) year basis. The five (5) year period begins at the time of the initial accreditation received by the entity.

Submission of Non-NFPA Standards

Entities wishing to have a standard other than NFPA accredited, must submit the standard to the Standards Task Group through IFSAC Administration per the Guide for Accrediting to Standards Other than NFPA.

IFSAC Certificate Assembly Accreditation Procedures

12 Months Prior to When Site Visit is Due

IFSAC Administration will send notification to entities twelve (12) months prior to when a site visit is due.

6 Months Prior to When Site Visit is Due

Entities will be required to provide tentative site visit dates no less than six (6) months prior to when the site visit is due to IFSAC Administration. Once tentative site visit dates are received, IFSAC Administration will schedule and facilitate the site visit, in consultation with the selected site team leader and entity host.

120 Days Prior to Scheduled Site Visit

An application for accreditation/reaccreditation and all required documentation must be completed and submitted by the entity to IFSAC Administration no less than 120 days prior to the scheduled site visit. The documentation submitted by the entity shall include:

- Evidence of empowerment
- Documentation showing financial support (source(s) of funding) for the continuous operation of the certification process.
- Documentation that indicates staffing levels adequate to implement and sustain the certification process described
- A completed application package in accordance with the list provided:

- Application for Accreditation
  - Completed *Criteria for Certificate Accreditation*
  - Test item correlation sheets in the IFSAC format
  - Performance skill evaluation sheets or other methodologies used
  - Certification policies and procedures manual
- Any culturally sensitive information that the entity feels the site team should know.
- An application fee of $1000 (US) for accreditation or reaccreditation (may be invoiced)

Administration will review the application package to ensure that all documents have been submitted and are complete, that there is evidence of empowerment, and the entity is in good standing with the organization.

Technical Review

Administration forwards the documents to the site team leader for technical review. The technical review should include ensuring that all correlation sheets for the levels applied for are correct and completed as required, criteria worksheets are completed and properly referenced, and that the entity's policies and/or procedures addresses the criteria. At least 60 days prior to the site visit, the site team leader shall complete the review and notify IFSAC Administration of whether the site visit should proceed as scheduled.

60 Days Prior to Scheduled Site Visit

After the site team leader has completed his/her review of the entity's documents, the entity and site team members will be notified by IFSAC Administration about whether the site visit will proceed as scheduled. This should occur no less than sixty (60) days prior to the scheduled site visit so travel arrangements can be finalized as soon as possible.

Copies of all supplied materials will be forwarded from the entity seeking accreditation or reaccreditation to the site team members. The site team leader will develop and supply team members with a site visit agenda. The entity will supply the travel agenda, directions to the facility, and program information.

Any items in the Criteria that can be answered in advance should be completed prior to arrival at the entity. A pre-visit list of questions should be started prior to the site team's pre-visit meeting.

Site Visit

Site visits may vary in length, depending upon the size and complexity of the program. An agenda for the site visit should be arranged between the site visit team leader and the entity seeking accreditation (See Model Site Visit Agenda, Appendix A).

The site visit team leader should then furnish a copy of the agenda to each member of the site visit team and the host entity prior to arrival.

Arrival

Upon arrival, the site visit team leader will contact the entity representative for any final modifications to the schedule. After arrival and check-in, site visit team members should have a private meeting to discuss any strategies or assignments for the visit. The schedule should be reviewed at this time as well.

Site Visit Team Work Area

The site visit team shall be provided a private work area (e.g., conference room) where they can discuss issues without interruption. The site visit team should have access to an internet connection and, if possible, the ability to print documents.

Opening Meeting with Entity Staff

The site visit team shall have an opening meeting with the entity and program officials to state the purpose of the visit and team expectations.

Review of Policies and Procedures

All policies and procedures referenced within the criteria shall be in written format. The team members should ensure that what the entity representatives are explaining is in written form.

Reviewing the Testing Mechanism

The site visit team shall witness the administration of knowledge and skills tests in accordance with their written procedures. The site visit team shall review correlation sheets to verify that the entity is capable of testing 100% of the standard (see Appendix B).

Interviews

During a site visit, site visit team members should interview agency personnel such as the program director, certification staff and/or faculty, members of the governing board, commission or advisory committee, and clientele (students). See Appendix C – Conducting Interviews.

The Pre-Exit Meeting

The site visit team should have a meeting before the exit meeting to reach consensus on findings, to continue preparation of the final report, to designate team member roles for the final meeting, and to brief the entity representative of the findings.

The Exit Meeting

An exit meeting takes place between the site visit team and the entity as well as any program officials. The following will occur:

- The team leader starts with gratitude and outlines the purpose of the visit, discussing program strengths and weaknesses to provide a balanced report.
- Discuss specific weak areas in line with accreditation criteria and how to improve.
- Encourage questions and comments during the meeting without debating findings, ensuring the host entity understands any deficiencies cited.
- Clarify the team's role as factfinders, leaving the final decision on accreditation to the CABOG.

- Explain the next steps in the accreditation process and any remaining corrective actions.

Review of Report Forms

The site visit team shall complete and submit a draft of the report to the entity before leaving the visit. After this, the team leader can return home and organize the report to its final form. The report should then be provided to the remaining team members for concurrence. Each team member must approve and sign the report form.

30 Days Following Site Visit

Within thirty (30) days of the site visit, the site team leader shall prepare and submit to the Administration Office, the completed IFSAC Site Visit Report that includes at least:

(A) Evaluation documentation as provided for in the Criteria for Certificate Accreditation.

(B) A narrative report of findings.

(C) A recommendation to:

(1) Accredit to all certification levels applied for.

(2) Accredit to only certain levels.

(3) Accredit conditionally upon further action .

(4) Deny accreditation.

If the site visit team leader has not already provided the entity with a copy, IFSAC Administration then sends this report to the entity seeking accreditation/reaccreditation for review and comment.

Decision and Notification

Administration will distribute the site visit report to all members of the CABOG. Administration shall place consideration of the report on the agenda of the next meeting of the Board.

Administration will send notice of the Board's decision within thirty (30) days after the meeting.

Adding Levels to Accreditation Status Between Site Visits

Accredited members may add certification levels to their accreditation between site visits through administrative review. Administrative reviews will be carried out according to the IFSAC Certificate Assembly Administrative Review Policy and Procedure.

Appeals Process

Entities have the right to appeal the decision of the Board in accordance with the IFSAC Appeals Policy.

Site Team

The site team for initial accreditation or reaccreditation shall consist of a minimum of three (3) personnel. The only exception would be for reaccreditation site visits that have five (5) or fewer levels of accreditation - the site team shall consist of a minimum of two (2) personnel.

The site team will be selected by IFSAC Administration from a list of qualified members.

Qualifications

Site visit team members and leaders must meet the following requirements in order to be qualified to serve on site visit teams.

Site Visit Team Members

(A) Be directly affiliated with or employed by an IFSAC member entity, be a member of IFSAC Administration, a public member, or have emeritus status.

(B) Attend, at least once, the following prerequisite sessions held at a regularly scheduled conference:

- IFSAC Orientation
- Accreditation Process Training

(C) Attend, at least once, every three years the Site Visit Team Member Training.

(D) Be familiar with IFSAC Bylaws and all other documents related to IFSAC accreditation of certifying entities.

Site Visit Team Leaders

In addition to the site visit team member requirements listed above, individuals must:

(A) Have served on at least three site visits as a site visit team member then at least one site visit shadowing a site visit team leader.

(B) Attend Site Visit Team Leader Training at least once every three years.

(C) Involvement as a host entity member during a site visit.

(D) A recommendation by a site visit team leader with whom you have shadowed.

Site Visit Team Observers

Selected by their own entity, observers are eligible to participate in site visits at their own expense. Observers shall be approved by IFSAC Administration, site visit team leader, and the host entity representative. Observers may participate in the site visit at the discretion of the site visit team leader. The host entity shall not bear any costs for observers.

Disqualification or Removal of Site Visit Team Member or Leader

Administration may remove site visit team members or leaders for the following, but not limited to:

(A) Failure to respond to solicitations from Administration on three or more occasions.

(B) Disciplinary actions*.

(C) Violation of IFSAC Code of Conduct*.

(D) Documented non-affiliation with member entity.

If a site visit team member/leader has been removed or has allowed their qualification to lapse, they are required to requalify. Requalification involves meeting all the requirements of site visit team member/site visit team leader.

**Requalification requires Board approval.*

Selection

The site visit team consists of a minimum of three personnel (1 team leader, 2 members). The only exception would be for site visits that have five (5) or fewer levels of accreditation - the site visit team shall consist of a minimum of two (2) personnel (1 team leader, 1 member). For site visits that have 30 or more levels, IFSAC Administration, the site visit team leader, and the host entity representative will determine the exact number of site visit team members and/or the requirement of additional days. Factors for consideration include, but are not limited to:

(A) Travel distance to host entity (e.g., rest day).

(B) Travel distance to testing sites.

(C) Number of levels to be reviewed.

(D) Host entity requirements (e.g. cultural differences, host agenda requirements).

The site visit team will be selected by IFSAC Administration. Selections, where possible, are made to keep travel costs to a minimum, but are also based upon availability of individuals who have been approved and trained to participate in site visits. Site visit team members should have no direct relationship, past or present, with the entity visited that might be construed as a conflict of interest.

Site Visit Team Leader Responsibilities

The site visit team leader has responsibilities besides those of the other team members. These responsibilities primarily lie in the coordination and reporting of the visit. Communication is the key when working with both the entity and the other team members.

(A) Scheduling the Site Visit

Although IFSAC Administration will schedule the visit, the team leader will be contacted for availability. Courtesy would dictate that any adjustments in the scheduled dates be concurred with other team members.

(B) Working Out the Schedule

Once the dates of the visit are established, it will be necessary for the team leader to contact the entity and plan an agenda or schedule. A model agenda is contained in Appendix A.

(C) Contacting and Communicating with Team Members

Constant communication between the team leader and team members is needed throughout the process on items such as schedules, reports, and additional information. Site visits are an ongoing process, as should be communication. Administration should be copied on correspondence between the team leader and team members.

(D) Contacting and Communicating with the Entity

Constant communication between the team leader and the entity is needed throughout the process on items such as schedules, reports, and additional information. Site visits are an ongoing process, as should be communication. The team leader becomes the point of contact for the entity once the site visit process has begun, until CABOG action. The team leader must communicate completely and effectively with the entity on all items. Administration should be copied on correspondence between the team leader and entity.

(E) Communication with IFSAC Administration and CABOG

The site visit team leader is the voice of the team when presenting reports and information to Administration and the CABOG. Individual team members should communicate comments or concerns to the site visit team leader, who will then forward them to IFSAC Administration.

(F) Approval and Submission of the Report

Once the report has been approved by the team members, the site visit team leader will forward a report to IFSAC Administration within 30 days of the conclusion of the site visit. Each requirement in the criteria not met will be addressed in the report.

(G) Presentation of the Report

The site visit team leader or their designee will make a report and recommendation to the CABOG. The report must conform to the requirements outlined.

Appendix A – Model Site Visit Agenda

NOTE: This agenda is based on the entity seeking one level of accreditation. It may be necessary to adjust the agenda if more than one level of accreditation is sought.

EVENING PRIOR TO VISIT

Initial Meeting of Site Visit Team (site visit team members only)

> ***Purpose:*** *To allow team members to get acquainted, review the site visit schedule and agenda, discuss their perspectives of the program on the basis of the information provided in the application and support materials provided by the entity seeking accreditation, and identify those areas the team believes merit more thorough review. In addition, the team determines if and how specific activities will be pursued by each member.*

FIRST DAY

8:00 a.m. Welcome and Introductions

A meeting with institution officers, the program director, and others as appropriate.

Purpose: a) To allow the site visit team to briefly review the purpose of the site visit, the accreditation process, and the roles and functions of the site visit team, the CABOG, IFSAC Administration, and the Assembly.

b)To review the schedule as planned by the program, making adjustments as necessary.

8:30 a.m. Entity Program Presentation

Purpose: a) To provide the entity with the opportunity to present their program to the site visit team.

b) To provide the members of the site visit team with an opportunity to obtain a more complete understanding of the curriculum and the program objectives, philosophies, course objectives, operational procedures, student selection criteria (if used), student evaluation protocols, enrollment, student attrition rates, processes for monitoring progress in development of student knowledge and skills, etc.

9:00 a.m. Tour of Facilities

Purpose: To familiarize site visitors with classrooms, drill field, and other facilities used by students during didactic and/or supervised practice components of the program.

9:30 a.m. Visits to Support Services (if applicable)

Purpose: To review library facilities, equipment, audio-visual resources, administrative facilities (offices and records), and other support services.

10:00 a.m. Review of Entity Materials

1. Policies and Procedures
2. Written Test Banks
3. Skills sheets
4. Alternative evaluation methodologies (computers, etc.)

12:00 p.m. Working Lunch (Site Visit Team Members Only)

1:00 p.m. Interviews (Sequence and time allotments may vary as desired)

***Faculty/Staff*:** To discuss various aspects of certification procedures, such as logistics, record keeping, testing, etc.

***Students*:** To obtain reactions to all phases of the program through a group meeting or private interviews, without faculty or others being present.

***Representatives of governing board or advisory committee*:** To get perspectives and comments from entities served by the program and/or to determine the extent to which mechanisms exist for user input into program policies and direction.

***Program Director*:** To obtain additional information, to clarify points of information acquired during the day, and to review the schedule for the second day of the visit.

2:30 p.m. Continue Reviewing Entity Materials

4:30 p.m. Site Visit Team Meeting

Purpose: To allow team members to review and discuss their observations and perspectives of the program on the basis of the information gathered during the first day.

EVENING OF FIRST DAY

The entity hosting the site visit should not schedule activities for the evening. The site visitors use dinner and evening hours to discuss information acquired throughout the day, to identify areas requiring further inquiry the following day, and to draft as much of the site visit report as possible.

SECOND DAY

8:00 a.m. Preliminary Conference

Purpose: a) To allow the entity and site visit team to confirm the day’s activities.

b) To provide the site visit team the opportunity to address questions raised from the previous day’s activities.

9:00 a.m. Observation of Testing Procedures

Purpose: The site visit team is to observe and evaluate at least two representative certification tests actually being administered by the entity seeking accreditation. At least one of these tests must include a psychomotor skill evaluation component.

These tests are not required to be given at the entity's headquarters site, but may be regularly scheduled tests at an off-site location. If this is the case, the host entity is responsible for logistical arrangements regarding travel, etc., and the site visit schedule must be planned accordingly.

12:00 p.m. Working Lunch

1:00 p.m. Pre-Exit Conference Site visit team Meeting (Site Visit Team Members Only)

Purpose: To provide a private site visit team meeting before the exit conference to reach consensus on findings, to prepare the final report, and to designate team member roles for the exit conference.

4:00 p.m. Exit Conference

Purpose: To present findings, accompanied by reference to specific IFSAC accreditation criteria if noncompliance is identified, during a conference with the chief executive officer, program administrator or director, and others as deemed appropriate by the institution.

To provide entity officials with an opportunity to respond to the findings and to correct misconceptions or inaccuracies.

5:00 p.m. Conclusion of Site Visit

Appendix B – Correlation Sheets

Correlations sheets can be accessed and downloaded from the member portal on the IFSAC website at https://ifsac.org. Access is only provided to IFSAC Certificate Assembly member representatives and others authorized by a member representative to have access.

For completion, see full instructions contained in each correlation sheet.

Correlation Sheet Sample

Requisite Knowledge Section

Requisite Skill Section

This column used to document evaluating methods other than questions and/or Skill Sheets.

NFPA JPR Objective followed by required knowledge and skills that need to be evaluated for certification.

Non-shaded area indicates sections the entity is required to document how they evaluate.

Red bar indicates beginning of new NFPA JPR section.

Shaded area indicates sections the entity is not required to document how they evaluate (optional).

NFPA OBJECTIVE	TEST QUESTION #	SKILL SHEET #	OTHER EVALUATIVE METHOD
4.2.4 *			
Perform an ai[…] assignment, a[…] airport policies[…] conditions are detected […] reduced in accordance with the airport policies and procedure.			
(A) Requisite Knowledge.			
Airport and aircraft policies and procedures for hazardous conditions.			
(B) Requisite Skills.			
Recognize hazardous conditions			
Initiate corrective action.			
4.3 Fire Suppression.			
This duty involves the attack, control, and extinguishment of fires involving aircraft, aircraft cargo, airport facilities, and other equipment related to airport operations and property conservation. The primary purpose of this duty is to protect lives and property.			
4.3.1 *			
Extinguish an aircraft fuel spill fire, given approved PPE, an assignment, agent application procedures, a fire-fighting vehicle hand line flowing a minimum of 95 gpm (359 L/min) of approved foam extinguishing agent, and a fire sized to the flow rate used, so that the agent is applied using the prescribed techniques and the fire is extinguished as required by the AHJ.			
(A) Requisite Knowledge.			
The fire behavior of aircraft fuels in pools			
Physical properties and characteristics of aircraft fuel			
Agent application rates and densities			

Appendix C – Conducting Interviews

To gain the maximum utilization of time during the visit, each team member should have a strong familiarization with interview tactics. This will help ensure an efficient interview and information-gathering session, as well as present a positive image of IFSAC to the staff and professionals of the entity. Following are some tips for conducting successful interviews:

- *Punctual* - Be on time. If individuals have been scheduled to appear before the site visit team, they may be nervous. Keeping them waiting is both discourteous and may increase their nervous tension. Professionalism is increased by being on time.
- *Adaptable* - Be flexible in manner, adjusting to different personalities of the people being interviewed. Be prepared to change the scheduled or planned questions based on new areas that may present themselves in the interview. Expand on areas that appear to be strong in the individual.
- *Courteous* **-** These people are not on trial. Treat them with professional courtesy, and remember that they are helping you and may be doing this voluntarily.
- *Personable* **-** Be well-groomed, neat, and friendly. Don't look like a police investigator after a criminal. Allow the environment to be relaxed.
- *Poised* **-** Regardless of what information comes out in the interview, remain poised and direct. Don't act surprised by information, and don't allow or force the individual to feel that he or she has disclosed some unknown secret.
- *Persistent* **-** Be persistent without being aggravating. Continue on a point, short of becoming overbearing, to make sure you have obtained complete information.
- *Notes* **-** Take good notes, and take them continuously. Don't jump to your pad on a particular issue, making them feel they just "spilled the beans." Good notes allow for a good report, and make documentation for the report much easier.
- *Attitude* **-** Be positive. You're not there to convince the people that you know more than they do. Remain positive about their program, even in light of negative information.
- *A good listener* **-** Listen. Don't lead the individual. Remember that they are providing you with information, not vise-versa.
- *Unbiased* **-** Remain unbiased on issues with which you don't agree. Consider before a site visit begins that there may be some items about a program you do not like. Keep your opinions to yourself and judge things on the merit of the accreditation criteria.
- *Concerned* **-** Present the impression that you are concerned and appreciative of the information being provided, that you have a deep desire to help improve the program, and that you care about it.
- *Discerning* **-** You have to evaluate the reliability of what is being told. Mentally compare the information being voiced to you in comparison to written procedures. Be alert to BS.
- *Knowledgeable* **-** Allow the individual being interviewed to recognize that you know the subject as well. This will build a bond and encourage honesty.

- *Impressive* **-** Make a good first impression, as well as a good closing impression. In closing, thank each individual for his or her time.
- *Fair* **-** Be fair in your questions, recognizing that some questions are fair to ask certain individuals, and others are not. Allow the individual to express items without a question, such as closing remarks. This will allow the individual to feel as if he or she has contributed without request, allowing for some surprise information.
- *Be yourself* **-** More than likely, you perform a similar job in your state or entity. Don't present the impression that you feel high and mighty. Someone may be interviewing you for the same reason someday.