



## Seeking Help from Your Colleagues for CAAHEP Accreditation *It's One of the Simplest Ways to Make the Accreditation Process Easier*

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One of the most important actions a Program Director can take in preparing for CAAHEP accreditation (through the CoAEMSP) is to seek help from as many internal and external sources as possible. Some of the best individuals to talk to are other program directors who have already been through the process. These can include other EMS education program directors or accredited health care education programs at your institution. Other health care education programs in the CAAHEP family that you can seek out include anesthesia technology, cardiovascular technology, cytotechnology, diagnostic medical sonography, kinesiotherapy, surgical technology, among many others. Since the CAAHEP family shares common Standards and Guidelines concepts, the experience of colleagues in these areas will likely be beneficial in making the accreditation process easier, more efficient and less time consuming.

### **Finding the Right Advice**

If your program is not affiliated with a community college, then consider asking experienced program directors of similar programs and institutions. If you are part of a community college, however, you have the resources you need right in your own back yard. Another option is to look for advice from other local or regional EMS programs. You do not need to locate a program of similar size or composition, as this has no reflection on the process. This is because regardless of the size or type of program, the requirements must still be met. The value of accreditation is that the CAAHEP *Standards and Guidelines* can be met in a multitude of ways, allowing each program to maintain its own character, individuality and uniqueness.

In the technological age in which we live, you are not geographically limited in whom you interview. While face-to-face discussions are ideal, phone conversations can also work. Follow-up questions can always be handled via email or through subsequent phone calls. Also consider talking to more than just one colleague for advice. Because each program achieves accreditation in its own separate way, you will gain more insight and ideas for successfully completing the accreditation process.

Here are some questions to ask:

- How did you go about planning for the process?
- What steps did you take?
- How did you divide up the responsibilities?

- What is a realistic estimate of how long the process will take?
- What was the most challenging part of the process?
- What barriers did you face?
- How did you overcome these barriers?
- How did you budget your time while working on the self study?
- What strategies did you use for planning the process?
- If you could have known anything/something before you started working on accreditation, what would it have been?
- How did you get ready for the site visit?
- How did you organize documents/items for the site visit?
- What surprised you the most about the process?
- What benefits have you seen both during and after the process?
- What was the most rewarding part of the process?

Plan to spend about one to two hours on your initial interview session. It is not necessary to ask all of the suggested questions, so the actual amount of time you spend in your fact gathering may vary.

### **What to Do With the Information You've Gathered**

After you have completed your interviews, you will no doubt have plenty of information to sort through. Once the information is organized you should formulate a solid plan of how to best use what you have learned and then share this information with your faculty, staff, and the department head, dean or other administrative representative. You can then set up a reverse timeline for carrying out these tasks. Also remember that CoAEMSP staff members are available and willing to assist you by helping you process the advice and information you have gathered. While the bulk of the responsibility of the accreditation process will rest on you as the program director, you will benefit by delegating a number of these tasks to the appropriate faculty and staff members.

While the accreditation process can sometimes appear daunting, you will have a better experience if you keep in mind the multiple benefits of leading an accredited EMS educational program. In addition to fostering accountability, transparency, and validation of having a quality program, accreditation means:

- an unrivaled level of credibility and prestige to your program
- recruitment of a better caliber of students
- students who are better prepared to take the NREMT National Certification examination and
- students will have an easier time transferring their credits to a four-year university or other higher education institution.

Gathering information from individuals who have been through the accreditation process is an invaluable tool for program directors seeking national programmatic accreditation status. It is important to know that you are not alone and that there are many people willing to help. Moreover, seeking advice from colleagues will make the accreditation experience easier, more efficient and much less formidable.