



Program Directors: Five Keys to a Successful Site Visit

By John (JC) Cook, EdD, MBA, NRP

Program Directors drive AEMT and paramedic education forward every day. Accreditation site visits are a vital part of that process, ensuring quality and promoting continuous improvement. What you do – and how you do it – matters.

The most effective Program Directors embrace five keys to a successful site visit:

1. Communicate (the biggest one)

Clear, early communication sets the tone for a smooth visit and avoids unnecessary anxiety. Ideally, the Team Captain reaches out promptly to confirm the schedule, answer questions, and guide preparation. From that first exchange, Program Directors can establish an open, engaged tone that keeps everyone aligned. If you're anxious to get started, feel free to reach out to the Team Captain first! They welcome the early conversation.

Keep the dialogue going throughout the process – confirm details, ask questions, and share updates. Remember: Site Visitors are there to help and can be a great resource as you prepare.

2. Use Your Resources

Program Directors have a wealth of tools to make the process easier and the results stronger.

- **Executive Analysis (EA):** Often the first document reviewers read, the EA provides a clear roadmap for your site visit. Use it to organize your efforts, focus on key issues, and make “in-flight” corrections.
- **Site Visits webpage:** The Orientation to Site Visits for Program Directors (video, slide deck) and Best Practices for Hosting a Site Visit (PDF) are invaluable tools. They include “Talking Points & Conversation Starters” that the site visit team uses for interviews, which can help Program Directors prepare those that will be participating in the interviews. Prepping the participants helps to reduce their anxiety and makes for a smoother visit.
- **Site Visit Team:** Each team brings years of collective experience – if you have a question, ask. Chances are someone's been there before. If you have a problem that seems insurmountable, the team will be able to offer options to address the issue. The Site Visit Team will **never** force their program's practices on your program.
- **Fellow Program Directors:** Your peers are a tremendous resource. Connect with them through CoAEMSP workshops and conferences to share lessons learned and practical tips.

- **CoAEMSP Staff:** Many of us are former Program Directors ourselves and are often an untapped resource. We understand what matters most to you, and we are always here to help.

3. Don't Procrastinate

Let's be real: many of us are procrastinators, and this can create added and unnecessary stress. Stay ahead by tackling tasks early and methodically.

Start by reviewing your Executive Analysis and preparing responses for every area highlighted in red. Upload requested materials and those identified in the "Documents for the Site Visit" to the CoAEMSP designated fileshare at least two weeks before the visit. The sooner you are able to upload, the sooner the team will be able to review and clear up any questions.

Prepare your students **early** by explaining the purpose of accreditation and what to expect from the Site Visit team. Begin scheduling meetings with stakeholders as soon as the visit is confirmed. Small steps early on make a big difference later.

4. Have Backup Plans

Flexibility is your friend. People get busy, and schedules shift, so plan for contingencies:

- **Over-schedule participants.** Someone will inevitably drop out, and this ensures you still have good representation.
- **Be ready for virtual meetings.** In-person is ideal, but web conferencing is a solid backup.
- **Cast a wide net.** Include graduates from the past three years, the full current student cohort, advisory board members, employers (non-program employees), capstone preceptors, and clinical liaisons. And do not forget your Medical Director!

5. Stay Organized

Follow CoAEMSP's instructions for file organization; it sounds simple, but it's a huge time-saver for everyone. Avoid shortcuts. Don't create things on the fly. If documentation is missing, acknowledge it, then work with your Site Visitors to develop a plan moving forward.

Remember: a site visit isn't a "gotcha" moment. It's an opportunity to learn, strengthen your program, and celebrate what's working well. The process is designed to support you, not trip you up.

When you communicate clearly, use your resources, plan ahead, stay flexible, and stay organized, your site visit becomes more than a requirement – it becomes a meaningful step toward excellence in paramedic education.

And as always, if you have questions, the CoAEMSP team is here to help!