

NAEYC Accreditation Site Visit Protocol

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Accreditation of Early Learning Programs
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Introduction to this Protocol Revision

This protocol has been developed in response to the COVID-19 coronavirus global health pandemic. On March 16, 2020, as COVID-19 infections started spreading throughout the United States, NAEYC halted all Early Learning Program (ELP) Accreditation site visits.

As of June 1, 2020 mitigation efforts have succeeded in lowering new coronavirus infection rates in many areas, and states have begun easing restrictions on businesses including child care facilities. NAEYC has created plans to restart site visits where state and local regulations permit visitors in programs. Where permitted, accreditation site visits will officially resume on September 1, 2020.

NAEYC recognizes that while ELP Accreditation site visits will be possible in many places by that date, programs will be operating under new public health mandates for an indefinite period of time. These changes in turn require adaptations in how NAEYC conducts program accreditation site visits. This protocol incorporates those adaptations into our existing site visit protocol. **COVID-19 related protocol changes appear in bold blue text.**

Summary of Protocol Changes

1. Pre-Visit practices
 - NAEYC staff will now conduct a screening step with each program before it is assigned to an assessor, to verify the program meets the public-health regulatory requirements as well as NAEYC's conditions required for a valid site visit assessment.
 - Additional information-gathering by assessors during pre-visit communications with programs will confirm that the program can receive a visit, and will determine what protective measures will be required of visitors in the program.
 - Assessors will screen their own health before visits, and report to NAEYC if they experience symptoms that may cause a change in scheduling.
 - Programs will be required to report immediately to NAEYC if any person was in their center who tested positive for or exhibits symptoms of COVID-19, as this may affect visit status.
2. Visit Practices
 - Visits will almost always be conducted by single assessors, and therefore large program visits may take place over 3 days.
 - Assessors will wear face masks while in the program, and other personal protective equipment as prescribed by public health regulations and/or by the program.
 - Portfolios may be evaluated off-site or remotely.
 - Assessors will not leave the program facility during the day to get lunch.
 - Orientation and Closing meetings with administrators will be conducted while maintaining social distancing.
 - Assessors may halt a program visit if program staff are not following the health-risk mitigation practices required by their public health regulatory authority.

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Introduction

In order that all programs to receive a fair and equitable site visit assessment, NAEYC assessors must plan and execute site visits consistently. Protocols have been established to ensure that the site visit process is conducted consistently by all assessors. **This protocol applies to NAEYC's COVID-19 pandemic-related revised accreditation assessment for programs that are prepared to move forward with their accreditation site visit. This protocol is in effect for all program visits taking place after July 1, 2020.**

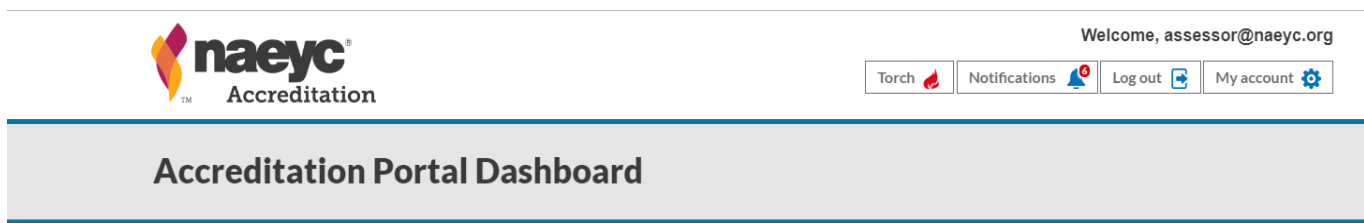
This document describes procedures relevant to all types of site visits NAEYC currently conducts –

- Accreditation Visits (AVs, the most common type of site visit)
- Reliability Visits (a subtype of AVs)
- Verification Visits (VVs)
- Random Visits (RVs)

Accreditation Visit (AV) protocols are described in detail. Later sections describe how protocols for other visit types diverge from the standard AV protocol.

Files used in NAEYC Site Visits

Programs can and should access site visit rating tools and other resources to understand how they will be assessed during a site visit. These can be found on NAEYC's Accreditation Portal; click on TORCH from the program's Dashboard screen:



Before the Assessor begins (or resumes) Pre-visit Procedures

Operations staff will contact all programs whose visit process has been halted, and collect baseline information about the program's ability and willingness to receive a visit (see box inset below for definition of ability). Operations will notify assessors when specific programs have been identified for a site visit, and will provide additional information about the revised site visit window.

Operations will also determine:

- the program's payment status
- Renewal programs' valid-until date (which may have been updated, or may need to be updated/extended)
- Programs' 6-month visit window (which may have been updated, or may need to be updated/extended)

NAEYC Operations staff have also contacted our assessors to determine their willingness and ability to conduct visit assignments at this time. Based upon their responses, some program visits that were assigned to assessors before the site visit hiatus may be reassigned to a different assessor.

Pre-Visit Protocol and Procedures

An assessor will contact each assigned program before their site visit, to collect additional information relevant to scheduling the visit. There are four steps in the assessor's pre-visit scheduling process for Accreditation Visits:

1. Receive and accept the assignment.
2. Make initial contact with the program and gather information needed to begin the scheduling process.
3. Set a 15-day window when the visit will occur and refine their scheduling preparations.
4. Make a Prior Day Notice contact with the program to confirm the visit date(s).

Assessor Receives and Accepts the Visit Assignment

When assessors receive notification from NAEYC of a potential site visit assignment, their first task is to accept or refuse the assignment after considering whether there is a potential conflict of interest or scheduling conflict.

Conflict of Interest. An assessor may have a conflict of interest that prevents them from accepting a particular visit assignment if they:

- Conducted a visit at the program within the past year;
- previously worked for or consulted with the program, or with a parent organization of the program;
- have any financial or oversight connection to the program;
- have a direct personal relationship with the program administrator or with other principals of the program or the program's parent organization;
- know the program and have concerns about their ability to conduct an impartial assessment.

Ability to Receive a Site Visit

The program must be

1. currently open and serving children;
2. serving no more than 1 fewer age category of children than they served in 2019.

Example 1: Program served infants, toddler/twos, preschoolers and kindergartners in 2019 (4 age categories), but is now serving only preschoolers and Ks (2 age categories). They are NOT eligible for a site visit.

Example 2: Program served infants, toddler/twos and preschoolers in 2019 (3 age categories), but is now serving only Toddler/twos and preschoolers (2 age categories). They ARE eligible for a site visit.

Mixed-age classes are eligible, as always, so more than one age category could be served in a single class.

If the assessor determines that he or she has a conflict of interest, the visit is reassigned to another assessor. Visits may also be reassigned if assessors are overscheduled, or find the logistics are difficult for scheduling a particular visit.

Overview of Revised, COVID-19 related Site Visit Options

NAEYC has developed several visit options to allow as many programs as possible to move forward with their accreditation or renewal assessment.

- **Option 1:** The program is operating in a state or locality in which there are no restrictions to program operations, including allowing visitors to the program. A site visit may be scheduled to include on-site portfolio and observational assessments. The assessor will nevertheless be required to wear a mask while inside the program. A single assessor will be assigned to complete all aspects of the site visit, even for visits that would have previously called for 2 assessors.
- **Option 2:** The program is operating in a state or locality in which there are some restrictions regarding visitors in program spaces. With program approval, portfolios may be assessed off-site, to limit assessor time in the program. Observational assessments take place onsite with PPE required. One assessor is assigned to complete observational assessments and another assessor *may* be assigned to complete portfolio assessments remotely -- either remotely with digital portfolios, or off-site such as the assessor's hotel room with physical portfolios.
- **Possible Option 3:** The program is operating, but travel to the program is not feasible, or visitors are not allowed at all, for the foreseeable future. NAEYC is currently evaluating its capacity to pilot alternative site visit protocols to meet the needs of accredited programs experiencing these constraints.

Length of Visit

Site visits are **typically** completed within one day or two consecutive weekdays. The size of the program, and therefore the number of observations required, generally determines the number of days and assessors needed for a site visit. However, visit length can also be influenced by the program's hours of operation, the schedules of individual classes, and the possibility that assessors are conducting reliability checks or collecting research data in addition to basic visit tasks.

Site visits requiring 8 to 10 observations may now be scheduled for up to 3 days in order to allow a single assessor to complete all aspects of the site visit, thereby limiting the number of visitors the program is receiving. If the logistics of conducting a series of visits in one area make it necessary, NAEYC may authorize an assessor to remain in the area through a weekend.

Site visits are typically conducted on Mondays through Fridays. If an assessor is conducting a series of visits in one area and it is most efficient to assess portfolios on a Saturday or Sunday (on site at the program if they will accommodate, or off-site at the assessor's home or hotel), the assessor may schedule a weekend work day.

There are **other** times when exceptions may be made so site visits can take 3 days, or span an exclusion day or a weekend (i.e., visit begins on a Friday and is completed on a Monday). These exceptions must be pre-approved by NAEYC staff.

There may be times when an accreditation visit is shortened from a **longer three-day or** two-day visit to a **two-day or** one-day visit midway through the visit. This may occur for a variety of reasons, such as shared Class Portfolios or an unexpected decrease in the number of observations needed.

Initial Phone Call and Follow-up Email

When a program has received notification from NAEYC that they were approved as a candidate, or that their renewal materials were approved, they should expect to be contacted by an assessor. **The program (or its corporate management staff) should also have confirmed with NAEYC staff that they are ready and able to receive a site visit**

under one of the pandemic-related options described above. Before making initial contact with the program, assessors review the program's information in the Accreditation Portal. Programs are required to review their profile information (such as contact persons, number and types of classes, staff) as part of the application and candidacy/renewal steps, and update if needed. **This is an especially important step that programs should take as class schedules and staffing patterns may be impacted by changing local or state recommendations.**

The Initial Phone Call

The assessor first contacts the program to introduce themselves, and to confirm the program information in the portal. This initial contact includes a phone call followed promptly by an email including an *Administrator Information Packet*. The email will also include a *Visit Scheduling Form* to allow the program to select or revise closure or exclusion dates that may have initially been provided in their accreditation portal. If the assessor cannot reach the program's primary or secondary contacts by phone after two separate attempts, and their voicemails were not returned, the assessor may send an email before making voice contact with the program.

Program information confirmed by the assessor. It is very important for the assessor to understand the structure of the program before scheduling their visit. Therefore, the assessor makes an initial phone call that includes a review of the following information about the program:

- Program contact information, operating hours, possible satellite locations
- **Program's selected visit option**
 - On-site assessment entirely
 - Off-site portfolio assessment with on-site observation assessment
- **Expectation for assessor's COVID-19-related safety (personal protective equipment, PPE)**
- Program's 6-month visit window
- Program's primary language for operations
- Program closure and exclusion dates entered in the Accreditation Portal (if any)
- Which assessment version (2018 or 2019) the program has prepared to be assessed on
- Number and organization of Class Portfolios and Program Portfolio
 - Whether digitized portfolios may be assessed off-site
 - Whether multiple class portfolios will be reviewed to assess newly formed mixed-age classes
- Whether there is alignment with a large system user that has a system-wide Program Portfolio
- Classes information from the "class profile" in the Accreditation Portal:
 - number of classes (Has a new class been added? Has one been discontinued or not operating seasonally?)
 - names of the classes
 - age categories included in each class

Assessor Safety

NAEYC requires assessors to wear a face mask while in all programs except when consuming food or beverages when alone.

Assessors will ask about and follow all program policies in place regarding the wearing of masks, face shields, gloves, and/or gowns.

Assessors will limit the belongings they bring into programs and will bring whatever food or beverages are needed to eliminate the need to leave the premises for lunch.

Assessors will ask about the current guidelines and required practices the program is subject to at the time of the site visit.

In the event that the program is observed to not be following the recommended practices set forth by state or local health authorities, the assessor will request that these practices take place and may terminate the site visit if they perceive their own health and safety to be at risk. In this event, the full cost of the site visit will be incurred and any subsequent visits would happen at the expense of the program.

- **Mixed-age classes formed in response to local or state recommendations**
 - weekdays and hours each class is open; nap times if applicable
 - physical address of each class (if program has satellite locations)
- Required Item documentation reminder for Program Portfolio
- Withdrawal information
- Next steps in visit scheduling process:
 - Administrator Information Packet (AIP) email with optional *Visit Scheduling Form* following initial call
 - 15-Day window notification from the Accreditation Portal
 - Prior Day Notice call

Class and Staff Changes

If there have been class or staff changes since completing the candidacy or renewal processes in the Accreditation Portal, [log in](#) now to update the information. Let the assessor know you have done so!

Information shared by the assessor during the phone call:

- Pre-visit and site visit processes
- How to seek additional assistance from NAEYC
- Assessor's contact information
- Number of assessors and visit days for the site visit

Class and Staff Changes. Because many programs may be operating at altered capacity or under reduced class size and staff ratios, information in the portal (especially about classes and staff) may be quite inaccurate. Assessors will carefully confirm the program's current class information, and ask the program if staff information is up to date. If there have been unreported class or staff changes of any type, programs will be asked to update this information in the Accreditation Portal. Programs should be especially aware of this during their 15-day window.

Security: Sometimes security procedures can add considerable time to an assessor's arrival. **This may include additional health screenings (temperature checks, questions about symptoms).** The assessor will ask about these security procedures so they can plan accordingly.

Directions to Satellite Locations: If the program has satellite locations, the assessor will ask about travel time between the primary location and the satellite locations. **Assessors will anticipate the need for additional PPE and carefully schedule travel between locations to limit exposure. If portfolios are being assessed on-site,** Class Portfolios and the Program Portfolio should all be in one single location on the day of the visit.

Prior Day Notice Call. The assessor will inform the administrator that the next contact will be a telephone call on the business day prior to the visit date. *See page 7 for details.*

Program Primary Language: Programs may indicate whether a bilingual English/Spanish assessor is needed in the Accreditation Portal by selecting the "Bilingual Assessor Needed" box on the site visit Exclusion Date page under Program Dashboard. If it appears that the program is conducted in a language in which the assessor is not proficient, the assessor will contact NAEYC staff immediately. The program may be re-assigned to a different assessor.

Site Visit Disruptions: Generally, site visit planning will continue as long as the program is open and serving children in such a way that the site visit protocol can be executed. The assessor must be able to observe all eligible age categories. If a program has more than one site, the assessor must be able to observe and at least one class at each location. If a program has experienced a [site visit disruption](#) and is not sure whether the site visit scheduling process should continue, the administrator should contact NAEYC Early Learning Program staff at 800-424-2460, Option 3 so that a determination can be made.

Withdrawal: If the program wishes to withdraw from the accreditation process, the assessor will direct them to NAEYC withdrawal procedures found on NAEYC's website at:

<https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation/early-learning/forms>

Positive case of Coronavirus: If a positive case of coronavirus is experienced at the program during the pre-visit planning period NAEYC must be notified immediately. This may result in a short closure that interferes with the planned site visit date. It may also cause the program to stop accepting visitors into the program for a more extended period of time.

Follow-up Email

Within two business days of the initial phone call, assessors send an email to the program's primary contact person confirming the call and attaching a document called the *Administrator Information Packet* (AIP). The AIP contains forms that the assessor will use during the site visit, as well as other information to help the program administrator understand the visit and post-visit process.

The follow-up email will also include an attached *Visit Scheduling Form* (see *Appendix A*). Programs use this form to indicate their availability for a visit during their six-month visit window. This information makes it possible for the assessor to schedule each program visit, and to coordinate the scheduling of their other visits. On the *Visit Scheduling Form* the program indicates the following:

- Dates the program is not serving children, or not serving an entire age category of children.
- "Exclusion dates": These are one additional date per month when the program is serving children, but does not wish to have a visit.
- "Inconvenient dates": These are days when the program is serving children, but they would rather not receive a visit for other reasons, such as staff vacations. The assessor will try to avoid visiting on these dates, but will not guarantee not to come then.

If the program has already entered exclusion dates and non-operational dates in the Accreditation Portal, the assessor will add these dates to the *Visit Scheduling Form* before sending it to the program. The program may then confirm or revise the selected dates before returning it to the assessor. Dates provided in the completed *Visit Scheduling Form* supersede those provided in AIS, if different.

The program has up to five business days to return the *Visit Scheduling Form* to the assessor. If the form is not received by the deadline, it is assumed there are no program closures or exclusion dates you wish to provide and visit scheduling will proceed. **See Appendix A for an example of a completed *Visit Scheduling Form*.**

The CDC makes this recommendation to childcare programs regarding COVID-infected persons in the program environment

(source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/guidance-for-childcare.html>):

If COVID-19 is confirmed in a child or staff member:

- Close off areas used by the person who is sick.
- Open outside doors and windows to increase air circulation in the areas.
- Wait up to 24 hours or as long as possible before you clean or disinfect to allow respiratory droplets to settle before cleaning and disinfecting.
- Clean and disinfect all areas used by the person who is sick, such as offices, bathrooms, and common areas.
- If more than 7 days have passed since the person who is sick visited or used the facility, additional cleaning and disinfection is not necessary.
 - Continue routine cleaning and disinfection.

CDC also says this programs should immediately notify local health officials. These officials will help administrators determine a course of action for their childcare programs or schools.

(Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/FAQ-schools-child-care.pdf>)

You will likely dismiss students and most staff for 2-5 days. This initial short-term dismissal allows time for the local health officials to gain a better understanding of the COVID-19 situation impacting the school and for custodial staff to clean and disinfect the affected facilities. Work with the local health officials to determine appropriate next steps, including whether an extended dismissal duration is needed to stop or slow further spread of COVID-19.

Major Program Changes

During the initial call the assessor may become aware of major changes to the program that affect eligibility, fees, or visit logistics. Major changes include:

- **Change in program's ability to receive a site visit due to:**
 - **Change in the community's public health status with respect to coronavirus prevalence;**
 - **A positive coronavirus case occurrence within the program environment, or some other program-specific issue related to COVID-19 (see box information above);**
 - **Decline in the number of age categories served, such that the program becomes ineligible for a visit because they are serving 2 fewer age categories of children than they served in 2019. NOTE: it is OK if children of different age categories are served in mixed-age classes rather than age-by-age classes.**
- Change in program's ownership
- Change in the primary contact for the program
- Change of program's physical location
- Change to the physical facility or ground (due to damage, renovations, etc.)
- Addition or deletion of a satellite location

In this case the assessor will direct the program to update this information directly in the Accreditation Portal. The assessor may also inform NAEYC staff, so that additional support can be provided if necessary.

Assessor sets the 15-Day Visit Window and Refines Visit Planning

After the assessor receives the program's completed *Visit Scheduling Form*, he or she creates a 15-day visit window within which the visit date(s) are set. Dates are based on the program's available dates and the assessor's need to coordinate with other visits in the area. The exact visit date is not communicated to the program until one business day before the visit occurs. However, the program is notified of the 15-business-day (Monday through Friday) "window" from the Accreditation Portal. As programs adjust to receiving notifications in the Accreditation Portal, assessors have also been instructed to send programs a 15-day window confirmation letter directly through email. Programs are asked to confirm receipt of this e-mail.

The 15 day visit window does not include weekend days; therefore it may span a three or four week period. The 15 days include all weekdays from the first date through the last date of the window. There may be federal holidays, non-operational dates or exclusion dates within the window. These dates do not lengthen the 15-day visit window; it is understood that the visit will not occur on federal holidays, non-operational days, or exclusion dates.

Prior Day Notice Call

The assessor will call the program's director or other primary contact person on the business day prior to the scheduled visit.

"Business day prior" means:

- If the visit is to start on a Wednesday, then call on Tuesday.
- If the visit is to start on a Monday, then call on Friday.
- If the program is not open on Fridays and the visit is to start on Monday, then call on Thursday.
- If the visit is to start on the day after a federal holiday, or an exclusion date, then call on the last fully operational day before your visit.

The primary and secondary contact persons must be available at, or checking messages at, their telephone numbers and email addresses at least daily starting on the business day prior to the start of the 15-day visit window. If the assessor is unable to reach the primary or secondary contact by telephone, he or she will leave visit information on voicemails or

with a staff person who answered the phone. In rare instances, the assessor may have to send an email to the program. Assessors generally make the prior day notice call early in the day; however, they have until the program's close of business to contact the program.

If during the Prior-Day-Notice call with the program, or at any point in the pre-visit process, the program administrator informs the assessor of an unplanned or emergency closure (i.e., weather, building problems, etc.), the assessor will notify NAEYC and will attempt to reschedule the visit within the existing 15-day window. If it is not possible to reschedule the visit within the existing 15-day window, NAEYC will contact the program to discuss next steps.

If at the time of the Prior-Day-Notice call program is experiencing a [site visit operational disruption, including pandemic-related changes in program accessibility](#), or is not sure whether the site visit scheduling process should continue, the administrator should contact NAEYC Early Learning Program staff at 800-424-2460, Option 3 as soon as possible.

Assessors will monitor their own health in the two weeks prior to any site visit as well as during a visit. Assessors will take their temperature daily to monitor for signs of viral infection and notify NAEYC Operations staff immediately if their temperature rises above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit to discuss postponing a visit.

Site Visit Protocol and Procedures

NAEYC Digital Visit Documents

NAEYC visit documents are of three types: *forms*, *worksheets* and *tools*.

- *Forms* capture important processes showing how the visit was conducted. They are shared with the program as blank versions before the visit, and as completed versions after the visit.
- *Worksheets* are used by the assessor to compile data used to rate items on tools. Worksheets are proprietary to NAEYC and are not shared with program administrators or staff during the visit.
- *Tools* are the documents on which assessors rate specific assessment items. Blank copies of the tools are available to programs on the Portal, in TORCH. However, assessors never share any part of completed tools with the program. During an Accreditation Visit (AV), programs are evaluated on 4 sources of evidence, each with a corresponding rating tool. During Verification Visits or Random Visits, the only program documentary evidence assessed is 2 required items; for these visits there is a Required Item Rating tool.

Source of Evidence	Rating Tool
Observed Class Practices	Class Observation (CO)
Observed Program Practices	Program Observation (PO)
Class Documentary Evidence	Class Portfolio (CP)
Program Documentary Evidence	Program Portfolio (PP)
Verification Visits & Random Visits ONLY:	Required Item Rating tool

Procedural Details of the Site Visit

Random Selection of Classes

A random selection of classes for observation is necessary to maintaining the validity of the NAEYC Accreditation system. Random selection is a research-based practice that allows for confidence in the assessment system by assuring that no human bias factors contribute to the decision as to which classes are observed.

Assessors follow these guidelines to determine which classes and how many classes are observed during an accreditation visit:

- Observe at least 50% of the total number of classes in the program, to a maximum of 10 observations in all. For randomization and assessment purposes, part-day and part-week classes that have the same lead teacher and the same classroom space are considered to be a single class.
- Observe at least one class from each eligible age category (infant, toddler/two, preschool, kindergarten, and school age) present in the program.
- In multi-site programs, observe at least one class at each site.
- Use a random number process to select specific classes to observe within each age category.

Accreditation Visit Schedule. Assessors create a custom *Visit Schedule* for each visit. A visit schedule always includes certain standard elements, but must be customized to reflect unique elements of each program and visit. Some visit tasks must be done in a specified sequence, or at a specific time with respect to the beginning or end of the visit. Other tasks may be ordered in whatever way best suits the assessor's appraisal of the program's schedule and the assessor's needs.

Assessors will typically begin site visits within 15 minutes of the opening time but no earlier than 7 AM. If portfolios are being reviewed off-site, assessors will arrive no earlier than 8 AM. In some instances, assessors may schedule two different site visits in a single day. In this circumstance the assessor will coordinate a specific arrival time later in the afternoon as part of the pre-visit planning.

The assessor will provide the *Visit Schedule* to the program at the Orientation Meeting, immediately upon arrival. He or she will then annotate their copy of the *Visit Schedule* throughout the visit, showing the actual time each scheduled task was performed. This annotated schedule becomes part of the accreditation visit record and is shared with the program administrator at the Closing Meeting.

Pandemic-Related Practices. Assessors will observe these practices:

- Wash or sanitize hands upon entering a classroom AND immediately after exiting a classroom;
- Avoid touching their face;
- Maintain 6 ft distancing from staff and children as much as possible;
- Follow all program policies in place regarding the wearing of PPE (masks, face shields, gloves, booties, and/or gowns) while in the program facility. If the program requires no PPE, NAEYC requires the assessor to wear a mask. Assessors may wear additional PPE at their own discretion.

Accepting program resources. Assessors are generally prepared to carry food, drinks and office supplies to the site, or to find available resources nearby before the start of the visit. They may accept program resources under the following conditions:

- Food and beverages: Assessors may accept water at all times. Coffee or tea may be accepted if the program normally provides these beverages on site. Assessors may NOT accept food or beverages purchased by program staff off-site. They may accept other light refreshments offered on site if failing to do so would offend the cultural norms of the program.
- Seating: Assessors may request that seating be provided during class observations.

Orientation Meeting with the Program Administrator

(About 30 minutes)

The accreditation visit begins with an orientation meeting between the assessor(s) and the program administrator. Assessors use the *Process Verification Form* to assure all of the required elements of the meeting are addressed.

It is important to maintain appropriate 6 ft distancing during the orientation meeting. Assessors will ensure that their device settings (brightness, page size) are optimized to allow the administrator to see the forms they are reviewing, but administrators may choose to follow along on their own copy of the forms provided to them in the Administrator

Information Packet. Administrators may also request a copy of the schedule be emailed to them to limit the passing of paper documents during the visit.

Schedule. The assessor provides a copy of the visit schedule to the program administrator, pointing out the scheduled times for each task, and the column for recording the actual times tasks were done. The assessor reviews and confirms details of the classes that have been selected for assessment, and verifies that the scheduled times for class observations are times when those classes are in session and not napping. For programs with infant classes, assessors verify that all infants are not anticipated to be asleep during the scheduled observation time.

Schedule problems. Any time a class is in session with one or more awake children is a valid time to observe. Class observation times will not usually be moved or rescheduled around ‘specials’ such as art, music, or walks. Observation times may be moved or changed if a class is going on a field trip, will be transported off-site, or is not in session for some other reason. If there are no children present in a class, assessors will alter the visit schedule to observe that class later in the day, or on the second day **or third day** of the visit. If solutions to schedule problems are unclear, assessors will call NAEYC for assistance.

Infant Safe Sleep Exceptions. Assessors will ask if there are currently any infants younger than 12 months old that have a physician’s note permitting them to be placed to sleep in positions other than their back and/or with sleep positioners. If this is the case, program administrators will be asked to show the assessor these notes along with the child’s name and their class. This information is relevant to assessing required item 5A.10 on the Class Observation tool.

Portfolios. **If portfolios are being reviewed on-site,** the assessor will do a final check of the Program Portfolio and Class Portfolio(s) to confirm the assessment version that will be used during the orientation meeting. Only the Class Portfolios for the selected classes will be reviewed. If the program has created electronic class or program portfolios, staff will be asked to orient the assessor to the portfolio software, computer and logistics. This may include the password(s) and login information necessary to complete the review, location of the portfolio on the computer, and other such information. All passwords and login information will remain confidential.

If the portfolios are being reviewed off-site, the assessor may request assistance from the program to transport the portfolios if the assessor cannot physically manage the transport task. The review dates and times will be added to the site visit schedule and sent to the program as part of the visit completion packet following the site visit.

Review of accreditation visit process forms. These forms are available to the Program Administrator in the *Administrator Information Packet*, emailed to the administrator prior to the visit. The assessor will briefly review each form, and answer any questions the administrator may have.

Access to materials. The assessor may need to look through books, CDs and other materials in the classrooms during observations. They will ask for permission to open closets, cabinets and drawers while in classrooms in order to best make ratings of which items are met.

Assessors will use caution when accessing these materials and will wash or sanitize their hands prior to the observation beginning and again when the observation is over. If the program declines this permission, the assessor will only assess those materials visible to them at the time of the observation.

Tamper-resistant outlets. Assessors will ask the program administrator if the program has any tamper resistant outlets in the center. These are not always self-evident.

Data collection physical tools. Assessors will show the program administrator the physical tools used during the site visit:

- *Assessor tablet* containing the rating tools, forms and worksheets.
- *Choke tube* for assistance in determining if toys are too small for infants and toddler/twos.

Facility Orientation. The assessor will request a short, guided walk through the facility. Assessors need to know the location where their review of the program documentation can be completed in private; identify bathrooms they may use; and learn how to access outdoor learning environments. If the program occupies part of a larger facility, assessors need to understand where the program's space begins and ends. They will ask to see if there is an area set aside for nursing mothers (only rated for programs serving infants), and where staff store their belongings. **Bring to the assessor's attention any areas in which the program is taking additional precautions to limit contact with others such as one-way foot-traffic in hallways, entrances, and exits.**

Accreditation Visit Tools

This section describes the rating tools used during the site visit.

Program Portfolio (PP)

(Two hours scheduled for most; one hour for programs using a system-wide PP; may be conducted off-site by a co-assessor)

Organization of Evidence. PP evidence may be organized and presented in a variety of ways -- crates, manila folders, binders of information, or an e-portfolio on a computer. Evidence may be arranged by standards, topics and items, or by some other organizational scheme (such as indexing). Programs are asked to clearly highlight and/or label each piece of evidence with the item(s) they believe it meets. Programs are not rated on how well their evidence is organized and/or highlighted, however poorly organized evidence may be difficult for assessors to review and rate in the allotted time.

Administrator Information Packet (AIP) contains these files:

Covid-19 Related Information and Resources (Assessment item guidance doc and public health guidance doc)

Process Verification Form Cover Page

Process Verification Form

Assessment of Required Best Practices

Safety Concerns Report

Visit Signature Form

License Exempt Acknowledgment Form

Class Selection Form

First Aid & CPR Staffing Pattern

Next Steps Flyer

Class Portfolios (CP)

(30 to 45 minutes scheduled for each; may be conducted off-site by a co-assessor)

Class portfolios are rated only for the classes randomly selected for observation. CP evidence is rated independently of what was directly observed in the classrooms; evidence from each source must stand on its own. **If portfolios are being assessed on-site**, assessors may schedule the review of a class's CP either before or after the time of the class's observation.

Programs are permitted to submit a single CP to represent more than one class. Typically this is done when the age categories of the classes are the same; when teaching staff work together in planning and implementing the curriculum; and when the experiences of the children in each class are very similar. Assessors rate a shared CP only once, completing a single CP tool which counts towards the score of each class for which the CP is shared.

As programs are adapting and responding to fluctuations in enrollment and changing public health guidelines, programs may have more mixed-age classes than usual. In the instance that a program has had to condense their normally separate classes into a mixed-age class they may present more than one CP to represent the class as it is currently functioning. In this scenario, assessors review all the CPs that represent the ages in the mixed-age class as it is currently functioning and complete one mixed-age CP tool.

Program Observation (PO)

(15 minutes scheduled; may be longer for large programs)

The *Program Observation (PO)* tool contains a set of items that require overall review of the program facility, both inside and outside. All items related to the physical characteristics of outdoor learning environments are included on the PO tool. The PO also assesses the adult spaces of the program. If the program has satellite locations, assessors conduct only one PO assessment, at the site with the largest number of classes.

The PO is not the same as the facility orientation done as part of the orientation meeting. Assessors complete the PO tool later, unaccompanied by program staff **and will attempt to maintain 6 ft distancing from others at all times.**

Class Observation (CO)

EXACTLY one hour for direct observation of children and teachers.

Guidelines for Conducting Class Observations. The following guidelines help ensure that the class observation process is conducted as unobtrusively as possible.

- **Observe all additional pandemic-related practices detailed above.**
- Assessors may begin a class observation if the class includes at least one awake child and one teaching staff member. They should not begin an observation if no children have arrived, if all children have departed for the day, or if there are children present but they are all asleep.
- While conducting the observation, assessors must stay with children and staff for one hour, wherever they are. If the class moves outside, they follow along. If a class breaks into subgroups, assessors will choose one or the other subgroup to stay with.
- Assessors do not interfere with the class activities in any way. They move if in the way of teachers or children.
- Assessors have been directed to silence their cell phone and/or tablet, and not receive or make phone calls or text messages during observations.
- Assessors may acknowledge and respond to children if they approach them, but they will not initiate conversations or otherwise take part in classroom activity. If children ask questions, assessors will briefly answer.

- Assessors bring a choke tube into infant/toddler/two observations. They follow program policy regarding shoes in infant rooms. They are expected to bring outdoor wear into the classroom if there is a chance the class will go outside during the hour.
- If an infant is observed being placed to sleep in a position other than his/her back (required item 5A.10), at the end of the observation the assessor may confirm the name and age of the child. If the assessor was not told in the opening meeting that the child has a doctor's note permitting them to be placed to sleep in a different position or on a sleep positioner, then required item 5A.10 will be rated NO.

Time Exceptions to the one-hour norm for class observations. Sometimes the length of an observation may be extended in order to complete all ratings. Time exceptions to the 1-hour CO protocol may be taken for one of these 2 reasons:

1. To complete ratings of physical environment elements in the primary classroom environment. This may be needed if most or all of the one-hour observation occurs when the class is outside or in a secondary inside learning space (such as indoor gross motor room or library). Children do not have to be present during the time exception.
2. For infant classes, if no children are awake for at least 30 minutes of the standard 1-hour observation period. The minutes of "awake" time do not need to be consecutive. If 30 minutes of awake time has not been observed by the end of the 60 minute observation, the assessor will observe the class for additional time until a total of 30 minutes of awake time is observed:
 - If at least one child is awake at the end of the regular period, they continue the observation.
 - If no child is awake at the end of the regular 1-hour period, the assessor will speak with the staff to arrange an appropriate time to return to the class when the children will most likely be awake.

Required Items

Required items are those that are considered essential to program quality. Failure to meet any one of these items during the site visit will trigger a specific write-up by the assessor and will result in the program receiving an adverse accreditation decision.

These are the required items, in brief:

Required item	Source of Evidence	Item Description
1B.4	Class Observation	Guidance/discipline practices observed
3C.3	Class Observation	Infant/toddler/two supervision practices observed
3C.2	Class Observation	Infant/toddler/two supervision practices observed
3C.7	Class Observation	Preschool supervision practices observed
3C.6	Class Observation	Preschool supervision practices observed
3C.8	Class Observation	Kindergarten/ school age supervision practices observed
5A.10	Class Observation	Infants placed on backs to sleep -- observed
1B.10	Program Portfolio	Guidance/discipline policy
10B.16	Program Portfolio	Program is licensed or regulated, and in good standing

If at any time during a visit the assessor reviews documentary evidence or directly observes evidence of failure to comply with any of the listed items, this protocol is followed:

- Assessor completes a written report form to be sent to NAEYC's Quality Assurance team.
- Assessor also calls NAEYC Quality Assurance staff to alert them that a required item has been failed.

- NAEYC Quality Assurance staff contact the program within 3 business days to let them know of the failure.

Complete the Visit? If a child is in *immediate risk for harm or abuse*, assessors must halt the observation or other site visit procedures and intervene. NAEYC's *Code of Ethical Conduct* calls for active response in such cases. The assessor will call NAEYC staff during the site visit to report if an incident has occurred that caused them to halt an observation, or that may need to be reported to state licensing authorities.

Visit Process Forms

Visit process forms create structure for certain tasks during the site visit process. They serve to document that the site visit process was completely and accurately conducted, providing crucial evidence that may be called upon in the event that a program appeals its accreditation decision.

Some of the visit forms are completed and reviewed with the program during the Orientation Meeting and the Closing Meeting. These forms, along with additional information about these forms, are provided in the Administrator Information Packet (AIP) sent to the program during the pre-visit communications.

Process Verification Form

This form is included in the *Administrator Information Packet* and the *Forms Document*. The *Process Verification Form* is a pair of checklists that guide the tasks that must occur during meetings with the program administrator at the beginning and end of the visit. The Orientation Meeting Checklist serves as a reminder for all necessary information-giving and information-gathering steps to be completed during this meeting. The Closing Meeting Checklist is the last task of the visit. The checklist reminds the assessor to review or report the information on various completed visit forms. The assessor(s) and the program administrator verify on the *Visit Signature Form* that the *Process Verification Form* was completed properly.

Safety Concerns Report Form (SCRF)

The *Safety Concerns Report Form* communicates to the program about any observed safety concerns related to physical environment factors (building, grounds, equipment) both indoors and outdoors. The SCRF includes categories of safety issues that create a risk of harm to children's health or safety, and that may be corrected by the program within a short time frame. The kinds of safety concerns included on this form do NOT refer to NAEYC required items. Safety concerns caused by the *actions* of staff, children, or other present adults are also not reported on this form.

Assessors may notice safety concerns at any time during the visit, whether or not they are conducting a formal class or program observation at the time. If safety concerns are noted during an observation they may also be used to rate items as "not met" on the observation tools (CO, PO).

At the Closing Meeting, assessors review the contents of the report with the administrator. No further documentation or follow-up by the program is expected, nor will it be accepted to alter formal visit ratings that have already been made. The ratings are done; this form is advisory only. By signing the *Visit Signature Form*, the program administrator agrees to take immediate corrective action to address the safety concerns noted, or to communicate the safety concerns to others who have the authority to take action.

License-Exempt Acknowledgment Form

The *License-Exempt Acknowledgment Form* is a form that provides evidence addressing required item 10B.16, which relates to a program's licensing status. If a program is license-exempt, this form may be submitted in the Program Portfolio instead of a current valid license to operate or evidence of other regulatory status. Assessors collect a copy of this form if it has been submitted.

Visit Signature Form

Visit Signature Form is included in the *Forms Document*. This form allows both the assessor(s) and the program administrator to affirm that crucial elements of the visit protocol were conducted properly. A program administrator and all assessors present must sign this form. Signatures are executed digitally. Each element being endorsed has its own checkbox. If any signer does not agree that a specific element of protocol was followed, the checkbox should be left unchecked. If a box is unchecked, a comment note must be added to the form describing the nature of the disagreement.

Closing Meeting with the Program Administrator

(Scheduled for 20 minutes)

Assessors are not able to discuss any of the results of the assessment at the Closing Meeting. The Closing Meeting is an opportunity for the assessors and program administrator to verify that the assessment was conducted as outlined in this protocol. The completed *Visit Schedule* (annotated during the visit to reflect any changes in the schedule as actually executed) is reviewed, and a photocopy is given to the program. Assessor(s) and program administrators also review several other forms (*Safety Concerns Report Form*, *Process Verification Form*, *Next Steps*) in the closing meeting, then execute the *Visit Signature Form* acknowledging the review and affirming that procedures were followed.

It is important to maintain appropriate 6 ft distancing during the closing meeting. Assessors will ensure that their device settings (brightness, page size) are optimized to allow the administrator to see the forms they are reviewing. The assessor will sanitize their device before it is passed to the administrator to execute the *Visit Signature* form. Administrators may review the entire completed document more thoroughly at that time. Assessors will send a copy of all completed forms to the administrator following the site visit in the Visit Completion Packet e-mail.

Post-Visit Protocol and Procedures

The Administrator Evaluation of the Site Visit becomes available on the "site visit checklist" in the Accreditation Portal after the visit is completed. NAEYC requests that administrators complete the evaluation within 5 business days after the site visit. It is important that NAEYC receive this feedback in order to be informed of assessor performance and overall quality assurance. Administrator evaluations are always reviewed by NAEYC's Quality Assurance division. They may be consulted again if a program appeals an adverse accreditation decision and cites procedural irregularities as a basis for their appeal.

The assessor has the following tasks after a site visit:

1. Immediately notify NAEYC of any failed required assessment items.
2. Send a *Visit Completion Packet* e-mail to the program administrator
3. Transmit all visit documents to NAEYC staff for scoring
4. Complete an *Assessor Evaluation of the Visit*

Visit Completion Packet (VCP) e-mail. The program administrator is entitled to receive copies of all digital forms reviewed in the Closing Meeting. The assessor will send these documents as attachments to an email that includes additional information about the post-visit process.

Assessor Evaluation of the Visit. Assessor Evaluations must be completed by all assessors who take part in a visit within 5 business days of the completion of the visit. This feedback informs Quality Assurance staff of any irregularities that occurred in the conduct of the site visit. Assessor evaluations are always reviewed by the NAEYC's Quality Assurance division. Like administrator evaluations, assessor evaluations are reviewed again if a program appeals an adverse accreditation decision.

Protocol Variations for Other Visit Types

Random Visits (RVs)

All NAEYC-accredited programs are eligible to receive Random Visits; this is a condition of accepting accreditation. Each year a subset of accredited programs are randomly selected to receive a RV. Assessors may conduct a RV any time during the calendar year in which it was assigned.

Variations to Pre-Visit Protocol and Procedures for Random Visits

Programs receive notification that they have been selected for an RV through the Accreditation Portal, after the assigned assessor has set a 15-day window in the portal. Programs receiving a random visit also receive prior day notification from the assessor.

Variations to the Site Visit Protocol and Procedures for Random Visits

Sources of Evidence. Class Observation tools and a *Required Item Tool* (used only for Random and Verification Visits) are the only Sources of Evidence assessed on RVs. The Required Item Tool is used to rate document evidence for required items 1B.10 and 10B.16. Program and Class Portfolio reviews are not conducted during RVs. No Program Observation is conducted.

Number of Observations. No more than 8 observations are conducted during a RV, regardless of program size.

Length of Visit and Number of Assessors. Because only class observations are rated, the length of visit guidelines are different for RVs:

Length of Visit Guidelines ¹ for Random Visits and Verification Visits		
This many observation(s) in the visit...	... will require ...	
1, 2, 3, or 4 observations	1 Assessor for	1 Visit Day
5, 6, 7, or 8 (max) observations	2 Assessors for	1 Visit Day
¹ These are guidelines; there may be exceptions made by the NAEYC on a case-by-case basis.		

Orientation Meeting. Assessors use the *Process Verification Form* to conduct the Orientation Meeting, referencing the section of the form that applies to Random Visits.

The *Process Verification Form* prompts assessors to ask the Program Administrator for their Guidance/Discipline Policy and Licensing documentation related to Required Items 1B.10 and 10B.16. The Program Administrator may provide this documentation anytime throughout the course of the visit, up to 30 minutes prior to the scheduled Closing Meeting. Assessors record their ratings of these required assessment items on the *Required Item Tool*.

Variations to the Post Visit Protocol and Procedures

There are no variations to the post visit protocol and procedures for Random Visits.

Verification Visits

Programs are identified for a Verification Visit on the basis of factors such as:

- a complaint received about the program; and/or
- concerns about the program's compliance with one or more required items.

Before an assessor is assigned, programs requiring a VV will be notified by NAEYC and provided a six-month window during which the visit will occur. Assessors begin pre-visit communication with the program by conducting the initial call. In the Accreditation Portal, the assessor sets a 15-day window within which the visit will occur. Programs receiving a Verification Visit also receive prior day notification from the assessor.

Variations to the Site Visit Protocol and Procedures

Rating Tools. Class Observations, up to a maximum of eight, and the rating of relevant evidence for required items 1B.10 and 10B.16 on the *Required Item Tool* are the only Sources of Evidence assessed on these visits. Program and Class Portfolio reviews are not conducted during Verification Visits. There is no Program Observation conducted.

Orientation Meeting. Assessors use the *Process Verification Form* to conduct the Orientation Meeting, referencing the section of the form that applies to Verification Visits.

The *Process Verification Form* prompts assessors to ask the Program Administrator for their Guidance/Discipline Policy and Licensing documentation related to Required Items 1B.10 and 10B.16. The Program Administrator may provide this documentation anytime throughout the course of the visit, up to 30 minutes prior to the scheduled Closing Meeting. Assessors record their ratings of these required assessment items on the *Required Item Tool*.

Variations to the Post Visit Protocol and Procedures

There are no variations to the post visit protocol and procedures for Verification Visits.

Reliability Visits

It is critical to the integrity of the accreditation system to periodically compare assessors' ratings to each other, to assure all assessors are reliable raters. A reliability visit is a type of accreditation site visit performed by 2 assessors in order to conduct inter-rater reliability ratings for some of the visit tools. There are no differences in the pre-visit protocol, or the post-visit protocol.

The site visit protocol for reliability visits is mostly the same as for other accreditation site visits, with a few key differences:


- There are always at least 2 assessors conducting the visit, regardless of the size of the program.
- 2 assessors will jointly conduct one or more class observations and will also conduct reliability on the program observation tool.
- 2 assessors will both independently rate the program portfolio and may also conduct reliability on one class portfolio.
- Assessors will allow time in the schedule to compare their ratings, discuss and reconcile rating differences, and calculate inter-rater reliability.

School-Age Accreditation

School-age accreditation is optional. Generally NAEYC accreditation applies to classes including infants through kindergarten-aged children. Some programs serving these age groups also serve school-age children, and wish to have their accreditation extended to their school age component. Programs may add school-age classes to their accreditation portal at any time. The school-age classes will then be included in the assessment at the time of the next accreditation site visit.

Appendix A

Example: Visit Scheduling Form



naeyc
Accreditation
Early Learning Programs

Visit Scheduling Form

For help completing this form, click on these "i" information icons. If additional assistance is needed, please contact the NAEYC Program Support Center at 800-424-2460.

Today's Date: 7/2/18 Due Date: 7/9/18 Program ID: 123456 May 2018 Cohort i

Purpose: This form is used to assist assessors in scheduling your site visit. If you do not return this form to your assessor by the due date listed above, it will be assumed that you are able to receive a site visit on any weekday dates within your visit window. i

Visit Scheduling Information: NAEYC cannot conduct a visit on non-operational dates; these include dates that your program is closed, or dates when 1 or more of the age categories included in your accreditation are not present (e.g., no infants served on Mondays). In addition to non-operational dates, NAEYC does not conduct site visits on Saturdays, Sundays, or federal government holidays.

Complete steps 1 through 3 below to better assist your assessor in establishing a 15-day window.

Step 1 – Non-operational Dates: In the column labeled '1. Non-operational Dates' below, list and provide a brief description of any dates in each month when 1 or more age categories within your program are not present (e.g., on a field trip, state holiday, professional development day).

Step 2 – Exclusion Dates: In each month you may choose one additional non-visit date in the column labeled '2. Exclusion Dates' below.

Month in Site Visit Window	i Federal Holidays	i 1. Non-operational Dates and Description	i 2. Exclusion Dates
June		N/A	N/A
July	07/04/2018		
August		8/31/2018-professional development day	8/6/2018
September	09/03/2018		9/12/2018
October	10/08/2018		10/26/2018
November	11/12/2018 11/22/2018		11/21/2018

Step 3 – Inconvenient Dates: If there are any dates other than those already provided above that may not be convenient for you please note them below and briefly describe why. Your assessor may be able to schedule around these dates, but the NAEYC Accreditation of Early Learning Programs cannot guarantee that a visit will not occur on these dates.

August 6th-August 10th: Our Executive Director will be out
 September 12th-September 14th: Our Program Director will be out