

Accreditation Guidance for Investigators

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AAALAC International Accreditation Guidance for Investigators

Investigators may be familiar with many responsibilities and regulatory requirements associated with the humane and responsible use of animals in science and education. Because animal care and use programs are subject to multiple oversight mechanisms, there may be questions about the role of AAALAC International's voluntary accreditation process and how it complements existing regulatory and internal programmatic requirements.

AAALAC accreditation of programs is attainable in all settings, encompassing a wide range of environments—from traditional laboratory animals to farm and wildlife animals, from research labs to the farm and in the field. Accreditation recognizes programs that demonstrate an organizational commitment to animal care, engaged oversight bodies, comprehensive occupational health programs, and collaborative working relationships. Importantly, accreditation also acknowledges the dedication and hard work of programs who establish and uphold high standards of animal care and welfare. AAALAC International improves the welfare of animals in science and education through the accreditation of organizations meeting high standards of humane and responsible animal care and use. Any questions about AAALAC accreditation within animal care and use programs can be answered by emailing accredit@aaalac.org.

Why AAALAC International is Different

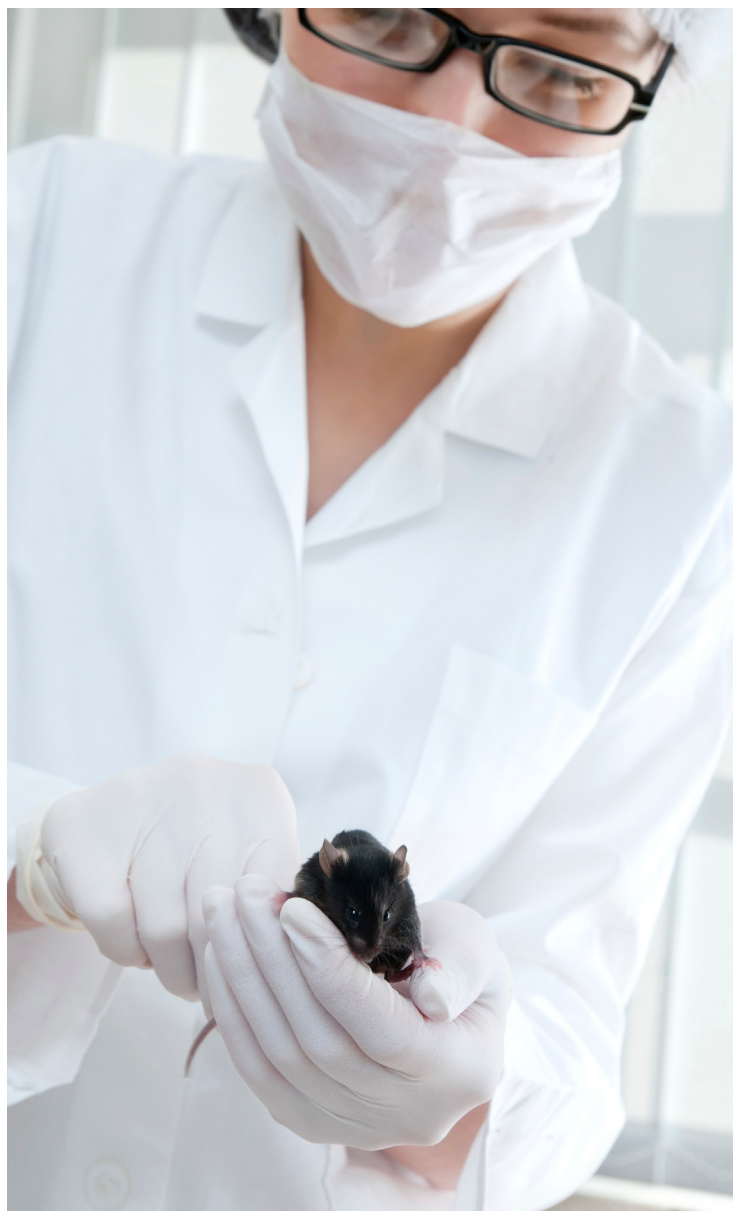
AAALAC International is an independent, voluntary accreditation organization and is not a regulatory agency. The accreditation process is based on peer review with experienced professionals serving as site visitors to evaluate institutional animal care and use programs using AAALAC International standards. The site visit is intended to be a collegial and constructive assessment that recognizes program strengths and identifies opportunities for continuous improvement.

AAALAC International maintains the confidentiality of all accreditation-related information throughout the accreditation process. As a private, nonprofit accrediting organization, AAALAC International is not subject to freedom of information requests in the United States. Through voluntary accreditation, AAALAC works collaboratively with the scientific community to promote humane and responsible animal care and use, support high-quality science and education programs, and encourage continuous enhancement of animal care and use programs.

Benefits of AAALAC Accreditation

Supports high-quality research.

Reliable research depends on minimizing unnecessary sources of variation, including those that may affect animal health and well-being. AAALAC accreditation encourages programs to maintain high standards for humane and responsible animal care and use through an independent, peer-review evaluation of the animal care and use program.



“AAALAC accreditation has served as a cornerstone of our commitment to ethical conduct, continuous program enhancement, and the generation of high-quality, globally acceptable scientific evidence, while fostering a culture of excellence in animal care and use across all program areas.”

— Manish Rachchh, Accuprec Research Labs Private Limited

This collaborative assessment involves scientists, veterinarians, animal care personnel, and programmatic leadership helping to promote consistent practices that support animal well-being and the integrity and reproducibility of research.

Recognizes performance standards.

AAALAC's accreditation process emphasizes performance standards, which focus on achieving appropriate outcomes while allowing programs flexibility in how those outcomes are attained. During the evaluation, site visitors consider scientific rationale, professional judgment, and program oversight that support programmatic practices. This approach recognizes that there may be multiple acceptable methods for achieving the same objective and encourages thoughtful, evidence-based decisions that meet the needs of both animals and research.

Demonstrates a commitment to excellence.

AAALAC accreditation is widely recognized as an indication of a program's commitment to high-quality animal care and use. Many funding organizations, collaborators, and research partners view accreditation as evidence of a strong culture that values animal welfare, scientific integrity, and continuous program improvement. While accreditation is not a requirement for most funding opportunities, it can provide additional confidence in commitment to meeting internationally accepted standards for humane and responsible animal care and use.

The AAALAC Accreditation Process

AAALAC International's accreditation process is a collaborative, peer-review evaluation designed to assess animal care and use programs against internationally accepted standards and to support continuous program improvement. The process includes activities before, during, and after the site visit.

Before the Site Visit

The accreditation process begins with a comprehensive internal program self-assessment. As part of this process, the program prepares a Program Description, which provides detailed information about all aspects of the animal care and use program, including organizational oversight, policies, procedures, facilities, veterinary care, and animal husbandry. The Program Description is submitted to AAALAC International in advance of the site visit and serves as the foundation for the peer-review evaluation.

During the Site Visit

A team of experienced peer reviewers (known as the Site Visit Team), consisting of one or more members of AAALAC's Council on Accreditation and one or more Ad Hoc Visitor, conducts an on-site evaluation of the program. The team includes professionals with expertise in animal science, veterinary medicine, research, and other relevant disciplines, many of whom are active investigators. Site Visit Teams are comprised of individuals relative to the needs of the program being evaluated. Through document review, facility walk-through, and discussions with institutional personnel, the Site Visit Team evaluates how the program meets the rules of accreditation, applicable regulations, AAALAC Position and Guidance Statements, and appropriate Reference Resources while recognizing the use of both engineering and performance standards.

After the Site Visit

Following the site visit, the Site Visit Team prepares a report summarizing the program's strengths and identifying any opportunities for improvement. The report is reviewed by the Council on Accreditation, which determines the program's accreditation status. If additional information or program enhancements are needed, the program is provided with recommendations and an opportunity to respond or implement corrective actions, as appropriate. Throughout the process, AAALAC works collaboratively with animal care and use programs to support continuous improvement.

AAALAC International conducts the accreditation process confidentially, fostering open communication and constructive dialogue between the program and the Site Visit Team. (A detailed description of the AAALAC process is posted here: [https://www.aalac.org/accreditation/what-is-aalac-accreditation/1/steps-to-earning-accreditation/.](https://www.aalac.org/accreditation/what-is-aalac-accreditation/1/steps-to-earning-accreditation/))

The Animal Care and Use Program

An animal care and use program encompasses far more than animal housing facilities or veterinary services, and AAALAC evaluates the entire animal care and use program. It includes programmatic policies, oversight, personnel, facilities, and practices that work together to ensure the humane and responsible care and use of animals while supporting high-quality science and education. AAALAC International evaluates the animal care and use program as a whole, recognizing that each component contributes to the overall quality and effectiveness of the program. The key elements of a comprehensive animal care and use program include:

Humane and Responsible Use of Animals

A high-quality program demonstrates a commitment to the humane and responsible care and use of animals by considering the principles of the Three Rs—Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement—in balance with scientific and educational objectives. The program should also promote animal welfare by meeting each species' nutritional, behavioral, environmental, physical, and psychological needs, including opportunities for welfare enhancement.

Compliance with Applicable Regulations

Institutions are expected to comply with all applicable international, national, regional, and local laws, regulations, and standards governing the care and use of animals in science and education. AAALAC accreditation complements, but does not replace, regulatory oversight.

Institutional Oversight

Effective oversight begins with institutional leadership. The Institutional Official provides authority and resources to support the animal care and use program and empowers an internal Oversight Body to review, approve, and monitor animal activities. This multidisciplinary committee includes veterinarians, scientists, non-scientists, and community (non-affiliated) members who work together to promote humane and responsible animal care and use, ensure regulatory compliance, and address program concerns.

Veterinary Care

The program includes a qualified Attending Veterinarian with authority and responsibility for the health and welfare of the animals. Veterinary oversight extends beyond clinical care and includes participation in animal care practices, research planning, protocol review, disease prevention, pain and distress management, surgery, and euthanasia, helping to ensure appropriate animal care throughout the program.



Personnel Competence and Training

Individuals involved in the animal care and use program receive education and training appropriate to their responsibilities. Ongoing professional development helps ensure personnel maintain the knowledge and skills needed to provide humane animal care and conduct research responsibly.

Occupational Health and Safety

A comprehensive occupational health and safety program helps protect the health and well-being of personnel working with animals by identifying and managing workplace hazards and promoting safe work practices.

Physical Plant and Environment

Facilities, equipment, and environmental conditions should be appropriate for the species housed and the activities being conducted. The physical environment should support animal welfare, personnel safety, and the generation of high-quality, reproducible scientific data.

Continuous Improvement

A hallmark of an effective animal care and use program is an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. Regular program evaluations, training, performance assessment, and feedback help institutions identify opportunities to strengthen their programs and advance animal welfare, scientific quality, and operational excellence over time.

Get involved—Become an AAALAC Ad Hoc Visitor

You can assist AAALAC International in evaluating animal care and use programs by becoming an AAALAC Ad Hoc Visitor. **Click below to apply:**
www.aaalac.org/about-us/join-us/apply-to-become-an-ad-hoc-visitor1/

General Resources for Investigators

AAALAC International standards and requirements are used during accreditation in accordance with the Rules of Accreditation. These standards are reviewed and adopted through a defined process to ensure they remain current, scientifically sound, and reflective of evolving best practices. When evaluating an animal care and use program, Council applies the standards in the following general hierarchy: 1. Rules of Accreditation 2. Applicable Local, Regional, and National Regulations 3. AAALAC Position Statements 4. AAALAC Guidance Statements 5. AAALAC Reference Resources (including such documents as the *Guide*, the *Ag Guide*, and ETS 123). Each component serves a distinct purpose while collectively providing a comprehensive framework for accreditation. Council considers all applicable standards as part of the site review process and no single document is used in isolation. Evaluation of programs reflects the full standards portfolio relevant to the program.

Examples of scientific organizations that have resources or committees on animals in research are listed below. (Note: These organizations are also "Member Organizations" of AAALAC International.)

The American Physiological Society

Animal Care and Experimentation Committee
<http://www.the-aps.org/mm/hp/Audiences/APS-Committees/ACE>

Society for Neuroscience

Committee on Animals in Research
<http://www.sfn.org/About/Volunteer-Leadership/Committees/Committee-on-Animals-in-Research>

Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) Animal Research

<https://www.the-aps.org/career/policy-advocacy/animal-research?SSO=Y>

Society of Toxicology

Animals in Research
<http://www.toxicology.org/>