

Acceptance of Exceptions to *Guide* or other AAALAC Standards

AAALAC International promotes humane treatment of animals in science through voluntary accreditation and assessment programs. Its evaluations are based on widely accepted standards—principally, the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (*Guide*), alongside other recognized references such as the *Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animal in Research and Teaching* (*Ag Guide*) and the European Convention ETS 123 (these three documents are the Primary Standards), AAALAC Position and Guidance Statements, as well as applicable legislation.

However, AAALAC International recognizes that rigid adherence to prescriptive guidelines may not always be the most effective or scientifically appropriate approach. Sometimes, thanks to the advent of new scientific information and new technology, there are situations where new methods or procedures not described in the *Guide* or other AAALAC standards may be available and result in equal or greater operational efficiency and welfare for the animals involved. In most cases, these exceptions involve a specific project or are limited in scope within an animal care and use program. Occasionally, exceptions are wider in scope and may involve the entire animal care and use program or even apply globally in the case of organizations with facilities in multiple countries; these are often referred to as program wide and global exceptions, respectively. As such, both types of exceptions to the *Guide* or other standards can be acceptable when justified and well-supported.

1. Performance-Based Approach

AAALAC endorses the performance-based approach to animal care and use. More information can be found in the Application of Performance Standards Guidance Statement: <https://www.aaalac.org/accreditation-standards/guidance-statements/>

2. Flexibility Across Geographies and Models

AAALAC accredits animal care and use programs worldwide, spanning diverse regulatory, cultural, and scientific environments. As such:

- The *Guide* is interpreted in a global context, and deviations may reflect national regulations or established practices that differ from U.S. practices.
- In agricultural, wildlife, and field settings, alternative standards or guidelines may apply, and practices may deviate from the *Guide* while still being ethical, effective, and contextually appropriate.

3. Institutional Oversight and Documentation

Acceptable exceptions are not arbitrary. To be considered valid by AAALAC:

- The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee or other appropriate oversight body must document the rationale, review, and approval.
- There should be ongoing monitoring and outcome assessment to ensure that the deviation is effective and does not compromise animal welfare or scientific integrity.
- Institutions should be able to clearly articulate and support their position during the AAALAC site visit and evaluation process.