

The "AAALAC International i-brief" (short for "Issue Brief"), is designed to help clarify specific elements of the accreditation process and is published as a service to accredited institutions. Feel free to distribute this i-brief to others at your organization.

# The AAALAC International Exit Briefing: Purpose, Process, and Institutional Response

## Overview

AAALAC International accreditation is a multi-step process designed to promote high standards in animal care and use. Following a comprehensive self-assessment and an in-depth on-site evaluation, a critical step occurs at the end of the site visit: the Exit Briefing.

Conducted by the Site Visit Team, the Exit Briefing provides institutions with preliminary feedback on the findings observed during the visit. While not a final decision, this briefing is an essential communication tool that sets the stage for the next steps in the accreditation process.

## Purpose of the Exit Briefing

The Exit Briefing serves several important functions:

- **Communicates preliminary observations** of the Site Visit Team.
- **Highlights programmatic strengths**, known as Commendations.
- Identifies areas needing attention, including:
  - **Suggestions for Improvement (SFIs)** – Recommendations to enhance the program.
  - **Mandatory Items** – Issues that must be corrected for Full Accreditation to be granted or continued.
- Provides an opportunity for institutional representatives to **clarify misunderstandings** or provide context.
- Explains the **Post Site Visit Communication (PSVC)** process, through which institutions can formally respond to findings.

## Understanding the Feedback Categories

### Commendations

Commendations recognize practices that demonstrate a strong commitment to animal care and welfare and are shared during the Exit Briefing.

### Suggestions for Improvement (SFIs)

SFIs are recommendations to enhance the animal care and use program. Implementation is optional but encouraged. These suggestions do not affect accreditation status.

### Mandatory Items for Correction

Mandatory Items represent significant concerns that must be addressed before Full Accreditation can be granted or continued.

In some cases, the Site Visit Team may not classify a finding, especially when the issue is complex. These items are deferred to the Council on Accreditation for further review and final classification.

## Important Notes About the Exit Briefing

- The Exit Briefing reflects the **collective preliminary opinion** of the Site Visit Team.
- These opinions may be revised or removed during the **Council's peer review** of the full site visit report.
- **Final accreditation decisions** are made solely by the **Council on Accreditation** after review of all materials, including the institution's response.

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### Post Site Visit Communication (PSVC)

The PSVC is a formal written response submitted by the institution within **10 business days** of the Exit Briefing. The Site Visit Team will provide the unit with a template and additional instructions. It allows the institution to:

- Clarify any **misunderstandings or inaccuracies** in the Site Visit Team's observations.
- Provide documentation of **corrective actions** planned or implemented.
- Offer additional context that may inform the Council's decision.

#### Submission Requirements:

- The PSVC must be signed by the **Institutional Official (IO)** or designated **Unit Contact**.
- It must be sent to: **accredit@aaalac.org**

Note: AAALAC takes the commitments made in the PSVC seriously. The institution is expected to follow through on any corrective actions described. The next Site Visit Team will confirm that these items have been resolved.

### How the PSVC Affects Council Deliberations

The PSVC can significantly influence the outcome of the accreditation review. For example:

- If a Site Visit Team identifies a **Mandatory Item** or a **SFI** that is fully resolved through a PSVC, the item will not be included in the final letter sent to the institution.
- The Council may decide that an issue presented as an **SFI** should be elevated by the Council to a **Mandatory Item**. If this happens, and the SFI has not been fully addressed in the PSVC, the institution must correct it before Full Accreditation can be awarded or granted.

In rare cases, the Council may identify concerns that were not discussed during the Exit Briefing, particularly if new information emerged during the review process.

### The Impact of the Exit Briefing and PSVC

Since the formal adoption of the Exit Briefing in 1990, institutions have experienced **improved accreditation outcomes**. Prior to the implementation of the Exit Briefing, only 35–40% of institutions achieved **Continued Full Accreditation** immediately following a site visit. Today, that number has increased to approximately **85%**.

This improvement is largely attributed to the enhanced communication and early corrective action made possible through the Exit Briefing and PSVC process.

### Conclusion

The Exit Briefing is a valuable and strategic part of the AAALAC International site visit. It provides institutions with an early opportunity to:

- Understand the Site Visit Team's initial impressions,
- Showcase excellence in animal care and use,
- Respond to concerns in a timely and meaningful way.

While preliminary, the feedback offered during the Exit Briefing—combined with an effective PSVC—can help shape the final accreditation outcome and support continuous improvement in laboratory animal care and use programs.

