



GUIDANCE FOR CCAC ASSESSMENT PANELS

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This document describes the work of Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) assessment panels. It includes the mechanisms for selecting panel members, as well as information on the relationship between panels, institutions, the CCAC Assessment and Certification Committee, and the CCAC Board of Directors. This document will direct panel members in undertaking assessments of institutional animal ethics and care programs, including the site visit. It has also been prepared with a view to provide information to institutions participating in the assessment process.

The expertise of peers in developing CCAC standards and in conducting assessments is the foundation of the CCAC program. The purpose of the Assessment and Certification Program is to: review all aspects of the ethics and care of animals in research, teaching, and testing in an institution, including the functioning of the animal care committee; assess animal-based procedures and facilities; note and comment on any matters that may not be in accord with the CCAC's guidelines and policies; and report observations and recommendations to the CCAC Assessment and Certification Committee and to the institution. Assessment visits are the quality assurance system of the CCAC Assessment and Certification Program, and panel members should be supportive of the accomplishments of local animal care committee members who work to implement CCAC standards on a day-to-day basis.

Assessment panels represent the CCAC as a whole, and all reports produced by assessment panels are approved by the Assessment and Certification Committee and the board, through the executive director. Therefore, all questions and comments related to the assessment, or the assessment report, of any institution must be directed to the CCAC Secretariat, and not to individual panel members. In the event that a panel member is contacted regarding a specific assessment visit, they should refer the matter to the CCAC Secretariat.

Panel members are subject to the [CCAC policy: Confidentiality of assessment information](#) (CCAC, 2019).

A. THE PANEL

PANEL MEMBER SELECTION

The assessment of institutional programs by the CCAC is conducted by panels of peers. Panels may include researchers, instructors, veterinarians, facility managers and technicians, who are familiar with the species and type of work undertaken in the institution to be assessed, and at least one community representative, all selected by the CCAC Secretariat. The community representative should ideally be chosen from the community of the institution to be visited, to provide a local, public perspective on the panel. All panel members must be chosen in a manner which will promote a fair and objective assessment of each institution's animal ethics and care

program, according to the guidelines and policies of the CCAC. Institutions may object to the selection of an assessment panel member. The objection must be based on a reasonable apprehension that the member will not be able to carry out their duties in accordance with CCAC guidelines and policies.

All information is to be kept confidential; panel members must sign a confidentiality agreement and a conflict of interest declaration before participating in an assessment and receiving any information from the institution or the CCAC.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTORS OF ASSESSMENT

As full-time employees of the CCAC, the associate directors of assessment provide a measure of consistency between panels for the Assessment and Certification Program, and assist panel members in assuming their duties, clarifying issues, and formulating recommendations.

B. DUTIES OF PANEL MEMBERS

It is important to note that panel members should not act as inspectors, but rather as unbiased, informed advisors to the local institutional animal care committee, directors of animal care, investigators, and administration. Panel members should strive to implement the highest standards of animal ethics and care as outlined in CCAC guidelines and policies.

PANEL CHAIR

- Is normally an individual with previous experience in the work of an animal care committee in their institution, and in conducting CCAC assessment visits.
- Should be prepared to lead discussions with the active participation of other members of the panel, at initial and summary meetings.
- Should work towards achieving a consensus by panel members on all issues related to the assessment, in collaboration with the associate director of assessment.

ALL PANEL MEMBERS

- Should be familiar with CCAC's guidelines and policies.
- Should understand the reason and basis for the CCAC Assessment and Certification Program.
- Should carefully read and become familiar with the pre-assessment documentation supplied by the institution and the CCAC, with particular focus on the Program Review Form (PRF).
- Should be respectful and collegial in discussions with members of the institution.
- Should be as calm and quiet as possible when near animals, recognizing that any unfamiliar intrusion into animal rooms can disturb the animals, and thus should respect any reasonable institutional concerns regarding intrusions into animal rooms or procedures.
- Should be prepared to discuss with the institutional animal care committee and individual investigators the procedures used on animals, as well as the use of standard operating procedures.
- Should be prepared to take sufficient notes to review the assessment report drafted by the associate director of assessment after the visit.

- Should understand that much of the information received by members during an assessment is privileged and its confidentiality should be respected, as discussed above.
- Should understand that any difficulties pertaining to any aspect of the assessment and the report should normally be resolved through discussions within the panel, but difficulties which cannot be resolved through the panel chair or associate director of assessment should be directed to the chair of the CCAC Assessment and Certification Committee. If difficulties are still unresolved, the matter can be brought to the attention of the CCAC executive director.

C. ASSESSMENT

PRE-ASSESSMENT MEETING

All panel members are required to meet at a convenient time prior to the visit to review the goals of the assessment, the institution's pre-assessment documentation, the results of the previous assessment, and any other issues related to the visit.

INITIAL MEETING

- The time of the initial meeting is usually stated in the information package provided prior to the site visit and, therefore, the panel should be present at the appointed time and place.
- The initial meeting is usually held with the animal care committee and other senior institutional representatives, as well as senior animal care personnel (the names and titles of these individuals are recorded by the associate director of assessment). Panel members introduce themselves, including their institutional affiliations.
- The chair should ask the associate director of assessment to give a brief presentation/update on the CCAC. The presentation will outline the CCAC's mandate and the purpose of the visit, and explain the nature of a peer review.
- The chair and panel conduct an overall assessment of the institutional animal ethics and care program by reviewing institutional responses contained in the PRF, and asking for any clarifications.

SITE VISIT

- During the site visit, panel members should not hesitate to ask any question concerning any aspect of animal ethics and care. Discussion with animal care staff, investigators, instructors, and teachers is highly encouraged.
- Panel members should be particularly attentive to the elements described in the [site visit checklist](#).

SUMMARY MEETINGS

Summary Meetings

In the case of multi-day assessments, the panel will meet following each day of assessment to discuss its findings and possible recommendations, and prepare for the following day.

Following all site visits and meetings with the institutional animal care committee and key representatives, the panel will meet *in camera* to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the

program and to finalize the verbal presentation of commendations and recommendations to the institutional representatives. The chair should ensure consensus amongst panel members on the recommendations and commendations for the institution.

[Possible recommendations made during an assessment visit](#) are outlined on the CCAC website.

Closing Meeting

Commendations and preliminary recommendations are read at this time by the panel chair. Any questions or comments the institution may have regarding the assessment and observations of the assessment panel may be discussed at this time. The final meeting should not only include the panel's observations, but also detail any problems that should receive immediate attention. The institution is advised that the final report containing commendations and formal recommendations will be sent to the institution normally within 10 weeks.

D. ASSESSMENT REPORT

A draft written report is prepared by the CCAC Secretariat. The draft report is circulated to panel members then to the CCAC Assessment and Certification Committee for their comments and approval. The CCAC executive director reviews and signs the final report on behalf of the board. The report is then forwarded to the institution, normally within 10 weeks.

The senior administrative designate of the institution is requested to provide an implementation report in writing to the CCAC within the timelines identified in the report. The implementation report will be circulated to assessment panel members and to the Assessment and Certification Committee for comment. The CCAC, through its Assessment and Certification Committee, will then assign a CCAC Certificate of GAP – Good Animal Practice® based on the implementation report. More information on the [certification process](#) is available on the CCAC website.

Where advisable, a panel may decide to submit a focused assessment report to the senior administrative designate concerned, drawing attention to matters which are considered to require timely attention, and which have resulted in a Major or Serious recommendation, prior to the submission of the full, formal report.

E. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The integrity of the CCAC Assessment and Certification Program is dependent upon the performance of its assessment panels. The CCAC is deeply appreciative of its panels' contributions of time and effort in helping to fulfill its mandate.