



External Visitation Guidebook

for Host ESUs & External Team Leaders

I. Introduction & Purpose	2
II. Host ESU Responsibilities	3
External Visitation Date Selection	3
Team Leader Selection	3
External Team Selection	3
Initial Conference with the Team Leader	3
ESU Profile	4
Follow-up Conference with the Team Leader	4
Hosting the External Visit	5
Opening Presentation	5
Cognia Accreditation	6
III. External Team Leader Responsibilities	7
Initial Conference with the Host ESU	7
Contact and Confirm the External Team Members	7
Follow-up Conference with the Host ESU	8
Conduct External Team Member Orientation and Work Sessions	8
During the External Visitation	10
Prepare & Submit the External Team Report	10
IV. External Visitation Timeline Checklist	11
Spring Prior to the Year of the External Visitation	11
Three to Six Months Prior to the External Visitation	11
Four to Six Weeks Prior to the External Visitation	11
Two to Four Weeks Prior to the External Visitation	12
Onsite Orientation Session (if the evening before)	13

During the External Visitation	13
Four Weeks Following the External Visitation	13
Fall Following the External Visitation	14
V. Appendices	15
ESUCC & NDE Resources	15
Host ESU Resources	15
Team Leader Resources	15

I. Introduction & Purpose

Welcome! You are embarking on an important part of the continuous improvement journey. Whether you are the organizer for the host Educational Service Unit or the External Team Leader for the visit, this will be an opportunity to showcase the efforts made during the 5-year cycle and to meet the requirements stipulated in **NAC Title 92 Rule 84: Accreditation of Educational Service Units**.

The guiding principle behind an external visit is to provide an outside, objective perspective regarding ESU's efforts to exemplify the qualities and expectations of the **ESU Standards of Performance and Practice**.

The external team, composed of peer professionals, is charged with conducting the external visit, including a review of the ESU's continuous improvement process and evidence of practice toward meeting the ESU Standards. The external team also interviews internal and external stakeholders, visits facilities and engages in team deliberations. An exit presentation concludes the external visit in which commendations and recommendations for improvement are highlighted. A written External Team Report is submitted within four weeks.

Equally important, the ESU has multiple opportunities to grow: through self-reflection using the **Standards Implementation Rubric**, through the development and sharing of an ESU Profile to "tell its story," and from high quality feedback shared by an external visitation team. In all, the external visit is an exceptional opportunity in which all participants can learn and grow.

Note: Items in **bold font** are linked in the Appendices.

II. Host ESU Responsibilities

External Visitation Date Selection

A representative from the NDE Office of Accreditation will contact the host ESU administrator during the spring preceding the year of the scheduled external visit in order to submit the **NDE Framework External Visitation Scheduling Form** that identifies preferred dates and a potential team leader. A minimum of two days is recommended in order to conduct a quality external visit.

Team Leader Selection

The NDE Office of Accreditation will contact the team leader nominee to confirm that individual's willingness to serve and to finalize the dates for the ESU's external visit. An **NDE External Visitation Confirmation** will follow to specify the logistics of the visit.

External Team Selection

In addition to the team leader, at least four additional team members are nominated by the ESU in collaboration with the team leader. The team should include at least five individuals reflecting a cross section of the ESU organization, e.g., student services, professional development, technology and leadership. Other specialists may also be considered for the team who possess insights in priority areas or current initiatives that the host ESU is striving to improve.

It is imperative for members of the external team to have no conflict of interest, e.g., staff from a member district, current or previous employment connection, spousal relationships, etc. Team members can be informally contacted to participate by the ESU, but official acceptance of participation is confirmed by the team leader through submission of the **NDE External Team Roster** to the NDE Office of Accreditation.

Initial Conference with the Team Leader

Following confirmation of the team leader and the dates of the external visit, the

host ESU will prepare to discuss the following information:

1. A list of potential external team members for the team leader to contact
2. The purpose of the external visit (what the host ESU hopes to gain from the external visit)
3. A proposed **External Visitation Agenda** or, at minimum, a list of activities to be included during the external visit, e.g., presentations, stakeholder interviews, meals, work sessions, exit presentation
4. A plan for sharing the **ESU Profile** (evidence)

ESU Profile

The primary source of evidence provided by the host ESU for the external visit is the ESU Profile. It includes the following components:

1. Mission and Vision Statement
2. Data Profile, including information and analysis about
 - a. Student Performance
 - b. ESU Programs, Core Services and Other Services
 - c. Demographics
 - d. Perceptual Surveys indicating School District Satisfaction;
*two surveys have been developed for this purpose, an **ESU Standards School District Survey** to be completed by school district teams (1 per district) and an **ESU Standards Staff Survey** to be complete by individual ESU staff members*
3. Improvement Goals developed from the Data Profile
4. Action Plan that includes procedures, strategies, or actions to achieve goals
5. Evaluation of progress toward improvement goals
6. ESU Standards narrative and documentary evidence

Additionally, the previous external report should be shared in order to provide context regarding the continuous improvement process.

Follow-up Conference with the Team Leader

A follow-up conference with the team leader is helpful to address logistical details of the external visit, make adjustments to the agenda, and follow-up on

any missing/additional evidence needed in order for the external team to fulfill its responsibilities, including:

1. Lodging needs of the external team
2. A detailed agenda including events, times, locations, personnel involved, format (onsite, virtual, hybrid); team work session the night before or the day of the external review
3. A home base for the external team to meet and conduct private discussions throughout the duration of the visit; WiFi access must be provided
4. Expense reimbursement procedures and forms (The host ESU is responsible for reimbursing, at rates established by the local ESU board, meals and mileage of external team members. Receipts for meals must be presented in order to receive reimbursement.)
5. Procedures to follow in the event weather or other circumstances that may force a postponement of the visit (e.g., calling list, radio stations, etc.)

Hosting the External Visit

The following list includes logistical details that the host ESU should address:

1. Hotel accommodations for those team members requesting lodging
2. External team meeting arrangements (if taking place the evening before)
3. Name tags/lanyards for external team members
4. Keys to buildings and rooms that members will need to access
5. A home base furnished with beverages and snacks for the team to conduct private deliberations
6. Internet access and WiFi passwords
7. Catered meals or menus
8. Interim transportation during the day
9. Tokens of appreciation (optional)
10. Stakeholder interview participants and formats
 - a. Internal (staff groups, e.g., board, professional development, student services)
 - b. External (superintendents, principals, teachers)

Opening Presentation

A representative group from the host ESU (e.g., leadership team, steering committee) will open the external visit with a **Host ESU Opening Presentation PPT** to orally present information about the ESU's continuous improvement process to the external team. This presentation should be scheduled early in the agenda and should include the following information:

1. A brief history of the improvement process and a description of the ESU committee structure
2. A description of the ESU profile, including how it was developed, along with the decisions that grew from collected data
3. An explanation of how goals and initiatives are related to profile data and how ESU staff members measure improvement
4. An overview of the action plan including explanation of how and why strategies were selected as well as how success is to be measured
5. Staff development activities and plans connected with the continuous improvement process

Some of this information may be shared with the external team in advance, but it must also be presented orally so the external team can gain a deeper understanding and have an opportunity to ask questions.

Cognia Accreditation

For ESUs participating in regional accreditation through Cognia, a copy of the Engagement Review Report should be submitted by the host ESU to the NDE Office of Accreditation. nde.accreditation@nebraska.gov

III. External Team Leader Responsibilities

It is important for the external team leader to possess the following skills:

1. oral and written communication
2. team building and facilitation
3. organization and adaptability
4. analysis and consensus building
5. relationship building
6. positivity

Initial Conference with the Host ESU

Once the external team leader has been confirmed, an initial conversation should be scheduled with the host ESU in which to address the following points:

1. A list of potential external team members for the team leader to contact (the team should be comprised of at least five individuals, including the team leader, reflecting a cross section of the ESU organization, e.g., student services, professional development, technology and leadership; other specialists may also be considered to provide insights in priority areas or current initiatives)
2. The purpose of the external visit (what the host ESU hopes to gain from the external visit)
3. A proposed **External Visitation Agenda** or, at minimum, a list of activities to be included during the external visit, e.g., presentations, stakeholder interviews, meals, work sessions, exit presentation
4. A plan for sharing the **ESU Profile** (evidence)

Contact and Confirm the External Team Members

The host ESU will compile and share a list of potential external team members (including contact information) with the team leader, who may also make additional suggestions. The NDE Office of Accreditation also maintains an **External Team Volunteer List** that is available upon request.

The team leader will contact each nominee to confirm:

1. availability
2. willingness to serve
3. no conflict of interest

Once a team of at least five members has been secured, the team leader will notify the host ESU and submit the external **NDE External Team Roster** to the NDE Office of Accreditation.

Follow-up Conference with the Host ESU

A follow-up conference with the host ESU may be helpful to address logistical details of the external visit, make adjustments to the agenda, and follow-up on any missing/additional evidence needed in order for the external team to effectively fulfill its responsibilities, including:

1. Lodging needs of the external team
2. A detailed agenda including events, times, locations, personnel involved, format (onsite, virtual, hybrid); team work session the night before or the day of the external review
3. A home base for the external team to meet and conduct private discussions throughout the duration of the visit. WiFi access must be provided.
4. Expense reimbursement procedures and forms (The host ESU is responsible for reimbursing, at rates established by the local ESU board, meals and mileage of external team members. Receipts for meals must be presented in order to receive reimbursement.)
5. Procedures to follow in the event weather or other circumstances that may force a postponement of the visit (e.g., calling list, radio stations, etc.)

Conduct External Team Member Orientation and Work Sessions

An **Orientation for External Team Members PPT** is available for team leaders to facilitate sharing of the following information:

1. Relationships & Teambuilding
 - a. Team member introductions
 - b. What's one thing that would be helpful for our team to know/understand about you before we start our work together?

2. Purpose of the visit
 - a. Specific requests of the ESU
 - b. ESU improvement goals
 - c. Findings, themes, commendations, recommendations
 - d. Evidence provided by the ESU (ESU Profile)
 - e. Roles & responsibilities of the team
 - i. lead roles on ESU domains
 - ii. review evidence
 - iii. initial findings
 - iv. generate questions based on evidence review
 1. *Is there evidence that you want to confirm?*
 2. *What else do you want to know?*
3. External Visit Logistics
 - a. Dates
 - b. Agenda
 - c. Lodging
 - d. Attire
 - e. Dietary considerations
 - f. Travel (expense reimbursement, transportation during visit)
4. External Team Tools
 - a. Team folder
 - i. **External Team Landing Page**
 - ii. **Standards Implementation Rubric Stakeholder Interview Question Generator**
 - iii. Stakeholder interviews facilitation
 - iv. **Exit Presentation PPT**
 - v. **External Team Report**
 - vi. Links to ESU evidence
 - b. Materials (bring laptop, printed information as desired)
5. Work Session 1 (immediately preceding the external visit)
 - a. Initial Findings
 - b. Stakeholder Interviews
 - i. Finalize question selection and in which stakeholder interviews those questions will be asked
 - ii. Determine roles and responsibilities for stakeholder interviews
 1. moderator to facilitate and ask questions
 2. notetaker to capture stakeholder interview responses
 3. timekeeper to keep external visit on schedule

During the External Visitation

The external team leader orients, guides and supports the team throughout the duration of the external visit. It is important to be cognizant of and honor the schedule. Stakeholder interviews should be cordial and efficient in gaining the information needed to arrive at data-informed findings. The focus for each external team work session is outlined below.

1. Work Session 2 (the afternoon of Day 1)
 - a. debrief stakeholder interview feedback
 - b. identify potential themes

2. Work Session 3 (the evening of Day 1)
 - a. continue discussion on stakeholder interview feedback
 - b. narrow findings, themes; possible areas of commendations and recommendations
 - c. determine and communicate if the team needs additional documentation and/or additional interviews

3. Work Session 4 (the morning of Day 2)
 - a. consider information clarified from new documentation
 - b. consider feedback learned from additional/follow-up interviews
 - c. finalize findings; consider the preponderance of the evidence, especially when arriving at commendations and recommendations
 - d. prepare the exit presentation slides (with the team)
 - e. draft findings for the external team report
 - f. complete and submit expense reimbursement requests

Prepare & Submit the External Team Report

The external team leader is responsible for editing and preparing the final copy of the external team report and for forwarding one copy to the host ESU and one copy to the Office of Accreditation, Nebraska Department of Education within four weeks of the conclusion of the visit.

Email a copy of the external team report to nde.accreditation@nebraska.gov.

IV. External Visitation Timeline Checklist

The following checklist provides recommended intervals in which to accomplish the purpose of the external visit. Regular communication between the host ESU, the team leader and the external team promotes a collaborative environment that is essential to achieving high quality findings.

Spring Prior to the Year of the External Visitation

NDE Office of Accreditation

- Request dates for the external visit
- Request nominee for the team leader
- Notify host ESU to confirm team leader and dates of the external visit

Three to Six Months Prior to the External Visitation

Host ESU

- Establish the purpose of the external visit
- Identify potential external team members
- Draft an external visit agenda
- Compile and/or update the ESU Profile

Team Leader

- Meet with the **host ESU** to address
 - external visit dates (confirmation)
 - potential external team members
 - purpose of the external visit
 - agenda ideas
 - a plan for evidence sharing
- Contact potential **external team members** regarding availability and willingness to serve; confirm that no conflicts of interest exist
 - Confirm external team members with the host ESU
 - Submit External Team Roster to the NDE Office of Accreditation

Four to Six Weeks Prior to the External Visitation

Host ESU

- Meet with the **team leader** to address logistics and information
 - ESU Profile, previous External Team Report, Action Plans from the previous 5 years
 - Finalized agenda for the visit (dates, times, locations, personnel involved, format)
 - Home base with WiFi access for the external team to conduct private discussions
 - Lodging arrangement plans
 - Inclement weather plans

Team Leader

- Conduct initial **External Team Orientation**
 - Introductions
 - Dates and purpose of external visit
 - Team member roles and responsibilities
 - Determine preferences for lead assignments to review ESU Profile (evidence) once available
 - Confirm lodging needs and share with the host ESU

Two to Four Weeks Prior to the External Visitation

Host ESU

- Confirm lodging arrangements with hotel and communicate arrangements to team leader
- Contact stakeholders (internal and external) to participate in the interview process and share the facilitation arrangements that will be followed (onsite, virtual, hybrid)
- Finalize arrangements for meals, transportation
- Prepare tangible items, e.g., name tags/lanyards and team member information packets, expense reimbursement forms, restaurant menus, tokens of appreciation

Team Leader

- Conduct follow up **External Team Orientation**
 - Review agenda and logistics
 - Finalize team member assignments
 - Complete Standards Implementation Rubric

- question generation document
- Communicate the arrangements for the Onsite Orientation Session that will take place prior to the external visitation

Onsite Orientation Session (if the evening before)

- Host ESU**
- Greet team members upon arrival (optional)
 - Provide a meeting space for the external team, either onsite or at the hotel
 - Make arrangements for an evening meal
 - Be available to the external team as needed
- Team Leader**
- Review the agenda and logistical arrangements
 - Finalize the stakeholder interview questions and the process that will be used to facilitate stakeholder interviews (e.g., moderator, recorder, timekeeper)

During the External Visitation

- Host ESU**
- Provide name tags/lanyards, keys for room/building access, internet access, home base for the external team
 - Follow the agenda schedule, i.e., presentations, interviews, team discussions, exit presentation
 - Arrange for follow-up interviews and consultations as requested
 - Provide snacks, meals and transportation as needed/scheduled
- Team Leader**
- Follow the agenda schedule, i.e., presentations, interviews, team discussions, exit presentation
 - Request follow-up and additional interviews as needed

Four Weeks Following the External Visitation

Team Leader

- Submit External Written Report to the NDE Office of Accreditation and to the ESU Administrator

Fall Following the External Visitation

NDE Office of Accreditation

- Submits recommendation for approval to the State Board of Education
- Notifies the host ESU on the action taken by the State Board of Education

V. Appendices

(linked below or included on following pages)

ESUCC & NDE Resources

- A. [Accreditation of Educational Service Units](#) NAC Title 92 Rule 84
- B. [ESU Standards of Performance & Practice](#)
- C. [Standards Implementation Rubric](#)
- D. [NDE External Team Volunteer List](#)

Host ESU Resources

- E. [NDE Framework External Visitation Scheduling Form Template](#)
 - a. [NDE Framework External Visitation Schedule Form Example](#)
- F. [NDE External Visitation Notification](#)
- G. [External Visitation Agenda](#)
- H. [ESU Profile](#)
- I. [Host ESU Opening Presentation PPT](#)
- J. [ESU Standards School District Survey](#)
 - a. [ESU Standards School District Survey Worksheet](#)
- K. [ESU Standards Staff Survey](#)
 - a. [ESU Standards Staff Survey Worksheet](#)
- L. [Action Plan Template](#)

Team Leader Resources

- N. [NDE External Team Roster](#)
- O. [External Team Landing Page](#)
- P. [Orientation for External Team Members PPT](#)
- Q. [Standards Implementation Rubric Stakeholder Interview Question Generator](#)
- R. [Stakeholder Interview Questions opt. 1](#) (sample questions included)
- S. [Stakeholder Interview Questions opt. 2](#)
- T. [Exit Presentation PPT](#)
- U. [External Team Report Template](#)