



Conducting and Writing a Feasibility Study

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A Resource for Developing Programs

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CONDUCTING AND WRITING A FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) expects the institutions contemplating offering a PA program to conduct a feasibility study that carefully considers its ability to sponsor a PA program in light of the institution's mission and goals and the resources needed for success.

A feasibility study should examine the institution's ability to deliver effective PA education based on (1) institutional strengths (2) ability to conduct careful and thoughtful planning (3) the need for a program at the sponsoring institution and (4) the institutional structure that assures a commitment to its responsibilities as defined in the accreditation *Standards*.

The study should address fiscal, human, academic, physical, and other institutional resources listed in the *Standards*. This includes the availability of faculty, preceptors, and clinical sites.

The study should include detailed information about the activities that occurred prior to the decision to pursue the development of a PA program, who was involved in the process, how the process was conducted, a summary of the outcomes/results, and a description of how these were analyzed and communicated to stakeholders.

The ARC-PA does not require a feasibility study to be submitted with the accreditation application. However, the ARC-PA contends that the completion of a feasibility study is vital to developing a program with sufficient resources to support its success. In addition, excerpts from the feasibility study may be useful in completing the program's accreditation application.

BENEFITS OF A FEASIBILITY STUDY

A properly executed feasibility study can identify the benefits and challenges that an institution will face in developing a PA program. It provides the institution with a cost-benefit analysis allowing them to make an informed decision about the readiness to start and sustain a PA program. Furthermore, a feasibility study may identify potential challenges the institution may face allowing them the opportunity to decide if proceeding with the development of the program is in their best interest.

WHEN SHOULD IT BE CONDUCTED?

Ideally, a feasibility study should be conducted several years before an institution approaches the ARC-PA to request placement on an accreditation agenda. The study should be used to verify that the institution is capable of offering the program of study and meeting the accreditation requirements. Waiting to determine feasibility of success until well into program planning is too late.

WHO WANTS TO SEE THE DOCUMENT?

A feasibility study is written to help an institution decide if it should offer a course of study. It is written for institutional study and decision making. It validates ideas discussed and presents challenges for institutional administration to consider before it enters into the accreditation process.

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS?

A variety of participants from within the institution and externally should be included in the feasibility study process and report preparation. Although the institution should decide who will be most appropriate to participate in the process, individuals from the following categories may be considered:

From within the institution:

- Board of Trustees members
- Representatives from institution administration and support service offices (e.g., registrar, admissions, library, instructional technology, financial aid, and student services)
- Representatives from other academic programs
- Curriculum committee members
- Graduate school faculty /administration
- Finance office representatives
- Faculty and staff
- Representatives from the office of institutional research

From outside the institution:

- Practicing PAs from the area
- Officers of area health systems and physician practice groups
- Representatives of local, state or national health care organizations and hospital systems
- Consumers of health care

WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN THE WRITTEN REPORT OF THE PROCESS?

The required components of a feasibility study will vary according to institution guidelines. The listing below includes items typically required:

- Rationale for proposed program; considering the institution's mission and goals
- Relationship between the program and ongoing institutional planning and direction
- Market demand for the program, keeping in mind other PA and health professional

- education programs in proximity to the proposed program
- Availability of sites for supervised clinical practice experiences
- Issues specific to the design of this program, such as curriculum nuances, types of students, impact of health disparity issues, etc.
- Resources available for all areas related to the fiscal, human, academic, physical, and institutional resources listed in the *Standards*
- Need vs. availability of resources in the planning of the program
- Cost analysis for the program, including cost of planning and delivery vs. income generated; expense, revenue, and resource projections
- Limiting factors related to establishing the program
- Foreseeable and possible challenges to starting and sustaining the program, as well as strategies to address these challenges
- Key project milestones, time tables, benchmarks and deadlines

The written document should end with

- Summary of outcomes/results
- Description of how outcome/results were communicated to stakeholders.

DOCUMENT FORMAT

There is no specific format for the organization of a feasibility study report. Typically, the report includes a table of contents addressing the areas of the study, with appendices supporting the body of the report. Often an executive summary precedes the actual body of the report as an introduction.

A classic feasibility study document often includes the following components:

1. *Title Page*: List the name and location of the program, planned start date, date of report submission, primary author.
2. *Table of Contents*: Include the page location of all major headings and subheadings.
3. *Executive Summary*: Summarize in two or three pages the process, key points, and salient features detailed in the complete document.
4. *Introduction*: Include the following:
 - Mission and goals of the institution
 - Period of time devoted to the process
 - How the process was conducted
 - Who was involved in the study process
 - Who was involved in the development of the document
 - Information about the institution's prior successes and experiences in similar educational initiatives, if any
5. *Participants*: Include a list of who participated in the study process and development of the document.

6. *Body of the Feasibility Study*: Address the topical areas of the study. This is often done by using the subheadings as identified in the bulleted list included in this document under “WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED.” The report should include a thorough and detailed narrative for each topic separately.
7. *Appendices*: Appendices are used to provide detailed supporting information on the narrative. Information included in the body of the study should not be repeated in appendices and vice versa. The most common appendices include:
8. List of potential program and instructional faculty by name with their areas of instructional specialty
9. List of clinical sites and potential preceptors for supervised clinical
 - practice experiences, with their specialty
 - medical discipline listed
10. Documentation of institutional financial support for the development and delivery of the program
11. *Summary*: End with a summary of outcomes and results, including a description of how these were communicated to stakeholders.

HOW LONG SHOULD THE DOCUMENT BE?

A feasibility study is not a lengthy discourse on the profession, nor is it an outline summary of titles without substantive content. If written concisely, the document without its appendices can often be completed in fewer than 50 pages.

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