PREPARING FOR THE SITE VISIT
Observing Programs to Provide Feedback

The overall success of STARTALK depends on the success of each STARTALK program. Our goal is to provide the best programs possible and to do so with attention to continuous improvement. As frontline representatives of STARTALK, team leaders and site visitors play critical roles in supporting the success of each program through site visits, which are an integral part of the STARTALK program.

Site Visit Purpose

The primary purpose of the site visit is to provide STARTALK programs with formative feedback and recommendations for growth. The site visit team reviews program documentation, interviews program participants and staff, and observes teaching and learning experiences throughout the day of the site visit. Through this process, the site visit team will be able to highlight program strengths, identify short-term and long-term areas for improvement, and provide formative feedback and strategies for continuous improvement.

The site visit provides an opportunity for STARTALK to observe, evaluate, and support individual programs as they work to meet their stated goals. Data from site visits document the best practices of individual programs and share those practices with all who are involved in STARTALK, allowing other programs to replicate practices that have proven to be successful. Site visit data also reveal areas where programs need more support. The site visit should be viewed as a mechanism for ensuring continuous program improvement.

The site visit provides an opportunity for a program to:
- showcase innovative features and demonstrate STARTALK-endorsed best practices for effective learning;
- reflect about particular strengths and challenges;
- engage in a forum for discussion with those who are familiar with the goals of the program;
- implement short-term recommendations for improvement and consider longer-term recommendations;
- take advantage of just-in-time support.

There are several elements involved in a successful site visit: a well-planned site visit schedule; a clear understanding of what to expect on the part of the program director and the site visit team; and good logistical coordination for the day.

Site Visit Schedule

Team leaders should collaborate with the program director to plan the site visit schedule. The program director will upload a site visit schedule to SOPHIE at least three weeks prior to the program start date. The team leader will review the schedule and make suggestions, if necessary, to ensure it is complete and appropriate.

Critical components of a site visit include:
1. Initial meeting and interview with the program director
2. Site visit team observation of each group of language learners in a variety of learning experiences
3. Time and dedicated location for interviews with the lead instructor, instructional staff, and program participants (teacher trainees and/or students middle-school age and above)
4. Time and dedicated location for site visit team meeting
5. Time and dedicated location for site visit debriefing with the program director
Communicating with the Program Director

Clarifying expectations with the program director about the goals of the site visit is key to a successful site visit. Therefore it is important to remind the program director of the site visit purpose as well the necessary elements of a site visit schedule through an email or phone conversation in advance of the site visit day. As the leaders of the site visit team and the main points of contact, team leaders should also inquire about site visit day contact information, parking, meeting location and arrival time, plans for a working lunch, etc.

Site Visit Team

Generally, a site visit team is composed of at least two site visitors, selected to ensure linguistic and pedagogical expertise.

Site visit teams include the following members:

- **Team leader:** Individual who works most closely with the program and leads the site visit team
- **Site visitors:** Individuals who offer their linguistic and/or pedagogical expertise to the site visit team
- **Observers:** STARTALK stakeholders who want to learn more about the program but do not contribute to the site visit debriefing with the program director or to drafting the site visit report. This category includes STARTALK staff members and government representatives.

Communicating with Site Visitors

A successful site visit starts with effective communication between the team leader and the site visitors to build a collaborative relationship.

In preparation for the site visit, the team leader:

- books travel and lodging promptly so that site visitors can then coordinate their flights and lodging;
- contacts site visitors as soon as travel arrangements are made and shares reliable contact information (cell phone, email);
- advises site visitors on travel and lodging arrangements and coordinates local travel arrangements at the site once travel plans have been finalized;
- provides background information on the program, including the status of its current curriculum;
- requests that site visitors review relevant site visit documents in SOPHIE: proposal, budget, site visit schedule, curriculum, past site visit reports, etc.;
- establishes a time to meet and discuss the site visit prior to the start time, either at breakfast on the day of the site visit or at some point the day before the visit, as convenient for all.