



# NURSING EXCEL ACCREDITATION HANDBOOK

ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
POST-ACUTE CARE EXCELLENCE

**2021**

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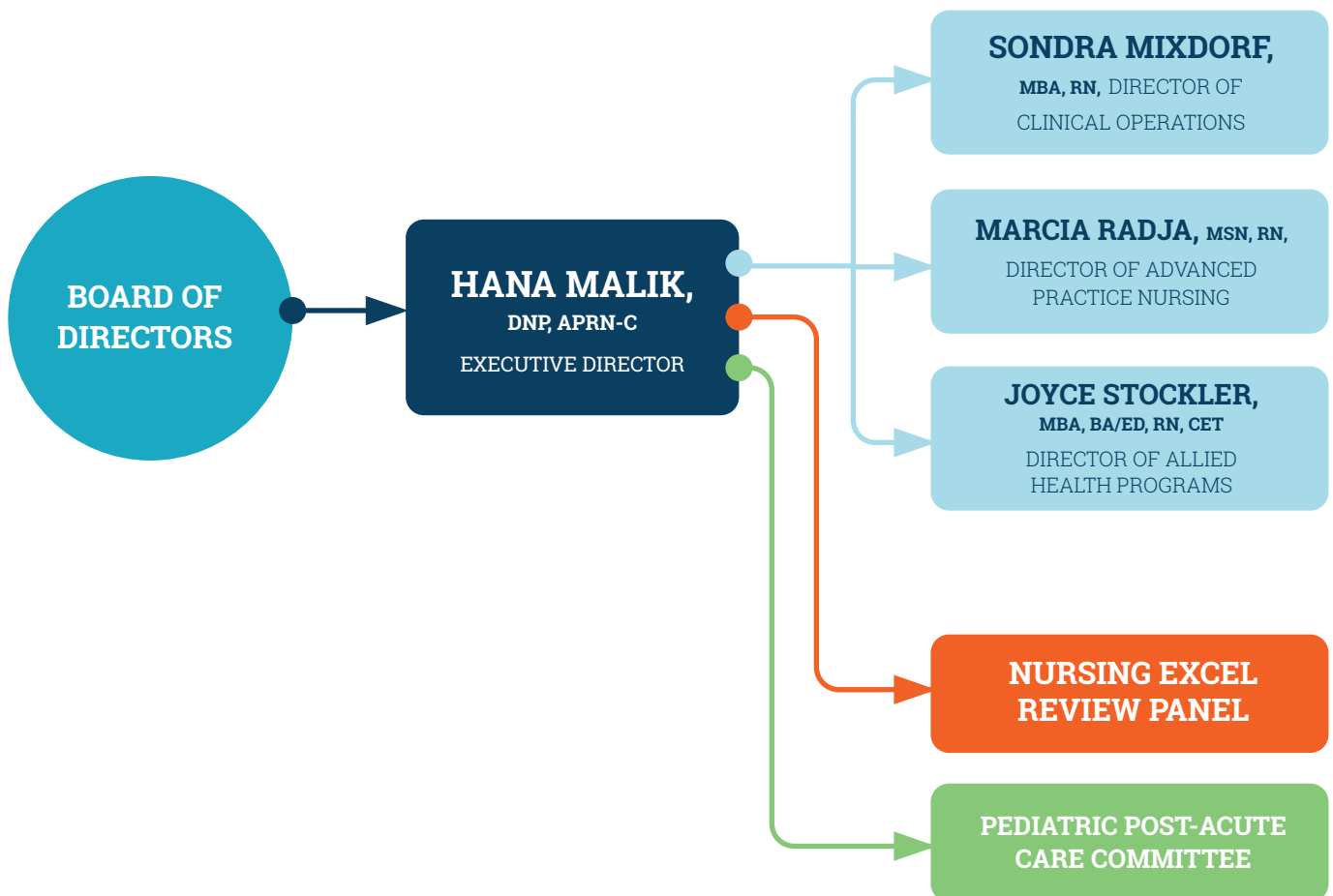
# ABOUT AAPACE

The Association for the Advancement of Post-Acute Care Excellence (AAPACE) is a professional organization dedicated to improving patient, facility, and healthcare outcomes within post-acute care.

As nurses make up at least 70% of the post-acute care workforce and nursing care is the greatest indicator of

patient outcomes, we believe our mission can be achieved by strengthening and stabilizing the nursing workforce and advancing the nursing profession. AAPACE strives to achieve this by providing nurses with the necessary guidance, training and support, as well as standardizing healthcare practices and policies.

## AAPACE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



# NURSING EXCEL AT A GLANCE



# ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To be considered for Nursing ExCEL Accreditation, the applicant must:

- Be a post-acute care facility (skilled nursing facility, long-term care facility, nursing home, assisted living, rehabilitation facility) whose primary service is to provide nursing care to the geriatric and/or pediatric population
- Meet all regulatory requirements as set forth by the state for which they are located in
- If at any time the facility has regulatory active or pending sanctions the facility must notify AAPACE for ongoing consideration of accreditation. (Sanctions defined as any survey resulting in a substandard federal/state citation or with a scope & severity of G or higher, or a conditional license)
- Have sufficient resources to meet or exceed Standards of Excellence without negatively impacting current patient, facility or organizational needs

## PROCEDURES FOR INITIAL DESIGNATION

1. Submit a Letter of Intent to Pursue Designation (LOI) plus applicable fees. The LOI will help determine the facilities eligibility and identify any major regulatory concerns that may negatively affect the facilities ability to pursue designation at the time of application. Once approved, the application will be assigned to a reviewer who will be the facilities point-person to provide clarification, guidance and support through the accreditation process. Within 90 days of being assigned a reviewer, a Systematic Review and Reporting (SRR) that details the

ways in which the facility meets all of the Standards of Excellence must be submitted to the reviewer. The reviewer will thoroughly review the submission and provide feedback on strengths and areas of improvement if needed

2. Upon receiving feedback from your reviewer, submit a revised SRR addressing any gaps or concerns that were noted in initial submission. This submission and review process may be required to be repeated several times. Facilities will have one year from the submission of their initial SRR to address all deficiencies so they can be scheduled for a site-visit.
3. Once the SRR is formally accepted by the reviewer as having met all standards sufficiently, the facility will be assigned an evaluator who will work with facility to set a date for a site-visit. Normally the evaluator assigned to a facility or application will also be the reviewer that was previously assigned to the facility or application. This is done to enhance the relationship that was developed during the SRR process, however, another evaluator may be assigned if their area of expertise would greater benefit the facility being visited. Site visit will usually be conducted within 3 months of final SRR submission.
4. If during the site visit a facility is found to meet all Nursing ExCEL Standards of Excellence, they will be placed on the next monthly board meeting where the evaluator will present findings.

### Remediation Plan

- a. If during the site visit, the facility was not able to demonstrate meeting all of the Standards of Excellence, the facility will be provided a summary of findings within 5-7 business days that would need to be addressed. The facility would then have to submit a plan of correction in 30 days and then achieve compliance within 6 months. Once the facility has submitted a plan of correction that demonstrates meeting

all Standards of Excellence, the evaluator will determine if another site visit is warranted.

- b.** If another site-visit is required, and during that second site-visit the facility is found to meet all Nursing ExCEL Standards of Excellence, the facility will be placed on the next monthly board meeting where reviewer will present the findings to the board for accreditation designation.
- c.** If another site-visit was required and during that second site-visit the facility was not able to demonstrate meeting all of the Standards of Excellence, the facility will then again be provided a summary of findings that would need to be addressed. The facility would again have to submit a plan of correction with 30 days, and then achieve compliance in 90 days. Once the facility has submitted a plan of correction that demonstrates meeting all Standards of Excellence, another site visit will be scheduled by the reviewer.
- d.** The facility will only have two attempts of submitting a plan or correction and will only be allotted three site visits in total before the application will be annulled.

## Annulment

For any facilities that are consistently unable to demonstrate the Standards of Excellence in the first, second or third site-visit, their application will be annulled. Facilities will then have to go through the process of steps 1-5 as mentioned in Procedures for Initial Designation all over again.

- 5.** Once the evaluator presents site visit results the board will vote on granting the facility Nursing ExCEL accreditation. If approved, the facility will be notified and granted a certificate of designation approval.
- 6.** Facilities that are granted Nursing ExCEL must agree and sign a Terms of Use outlining how the facility may utilize the designation in their advertisements and marketing.



## EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

Each facility must demonstrate proficiency in each of the Standards of Excellence. Each Systematic Review and Reporting submission will be thoroughly reviewed and each standard will be rated according to the extent to which it meets the requirement.

The following rating tool will be used to guide reviewers in their determinations:

- 0** Does not demonstrate evidence of meeting standard
- 1** Limited demonstration of standard, inconsistencies present
- 2** Limited demonstration of standard but consistent throughout organizational processes
- 3** Sufficient evidence of meeting standard but inconsistent throughout organizational processes
- 4** Standards met consistently throughout organizational processes

Facilities should be noted by reviewer to be at a 3 or 4 level in the Standards in order for a site visit to be scheduled

At each monthly board meeting, the review panel will discuss the findings of both application submissions and onsite reviews. For applications, once approved, the reviewer will contact the facility for a site visit. For onsite visits, once the reviewer determines all standards have been met, the findings will be presented to the board for final designation approval.

# TIMELINE

01	<b>Letter of Intent to Pursue Designation (LOI)</b> Accepted on a rolling basis. Once eligibility is determined, the facility will be notified that their application has been assigned to a reviewer. A reviewer will usually be assigned within 30 days from LOI submission.	
02	<b>Systematic Review and Reporting (SRR)</b> Initial SRR must be submitted within 90 days of being assigned to a reviewer. Once received by the reviewer, the reviewer will review the submission and provide feedback. The facility may be required to make adjustments to their processes or provide additional information or evidence of meeting specific standards. This submission and review process may be required to be repeated several times. Facilities will have one year from the submission of their initial SRR to address all deficiencies so they can be scheduled for a site-visit.	
03	<b>Site visit</b> Will be scheduled once the SRR is deemed to sufficiently meet all Standards of Excellence. Site visit will usually be conducted within 3 months of final SRR submission.	
04	<b>Remediation</b> If any deficiencies are noted during site-visit, facilities will have 30 days to submit a plan of correction and 6 months to remedy any deficiencies found. Another site-visit may be required. If additional deficiencies are noted, again the facility will have 30 days to submit a plan of correction and 3 months to achieve compliance.	
05	<b>Board Review</b> Upon successfully meeting SRR and site-visit guidelines, facility will be placed on agenda for review approval by board for the following month	
06	<b>Accreditation</b> Once approved by the board, the facility will receive a certificate of Accreditation within 30 days	



## FEES

Letter of Intent to Pursue Designation Fee	<b>\$250</b>
Systematic Review and Reporting	<b>\$2,500</b>
Site-visit Fee	<b>\$2,000/each</b> scheduled site-visit
Renewal Fee (every 2 years)	<b>\$1,500</b>
Annual AAPACE Membership Fee	<b>\$400</b>
Re-instatement Fee	<b>\$800</b>

## ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE REVIEWER

### SETTING UP THE VISIT

Review the application and ensure the SRR has met all Standards of Excellence

Contact the applicant and arrange the date(s) and time for the site visit. Is usually completed in 1 day but must plan for 2 day visit. Be flexible when arranging for the visit by providing several scheduling options.

Review with applicant what is to be expected at time of visit and provide any additional preparation instructions if needed

Notify applicant of which members from their organization will need to be present for the site visit (administrator, director of nursing, etc)

Review and be familiar with the applicants SRR prior to the visit

### THE VISIT

Introduce yourself and include a brief overview of your professional background and brief history of AAPACE and Nursing ExCEL

Review the ethics contract with the facility Administrator or designee and have the contract signed

Encourage applicant to also share their background through brief introductions

Review the SRR with applicant, section by section, highlighting how the applicant meets each element.

Assist applicant in identifying unique or innovative ways in which they feel they have met the Standards

Provide feedback and examples of how certain

Standards can be met and promote dialogue with applicant on how they may utilize that process or something similar to tailor a personalized program or tool for their facility

Encourage an open creative thinking process and dialogue

Tour the facility. During the tour you must seek and request supporting documentation or request to observe procedures that confirm the processes listed in the applicants SRR are consistently performed and demonstrated.

Upon conclusion of the first visit day, notify applicant if you will need to return the next day for an additional visit. If so, provide them with the time and expectations for the visit.

If no additional dates are required, notify applicant that this concludes the visit and that all the notes will be reviewed and they will receive a summary of findings with 5-7 business days. If the evidence presented during the site visit is seemed to be sufficiently in accordance to the applicants SRR, applicant will be scheduled for board review for the following month. If not, they will be provided guidance on how to proceed through the remediation process.

Never make suggestions as to whether or not an applicant should receive accreditation or make a suggestion on the outcome of the application.

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

During the visit, you may ask to speak with staff nurses but it should never disrupt an active process, procedure or event such as patient care and should always respect the confidentiality, privacy and the safety of a patient.

You must demonstrate professional behavior at all times- avoid sharing personal opinions, personal stories, personal attitudes about the facility, its members, other organizations, other accreditation programs etc.

Always maintain strict confidentiality regarding

sensitive matters (conversations, site visit results, position etc.) of any other facility, AAPACE or other programs.

Be sure to act in a way that is consistent with the mission, goals and values of AAPACE

The reviewer will not serve on the review panel or provide accreditation recommendations for which the application they reviewed is being considered for Nursing ExCEL. The reviewer only serves as a presenter to the review board in these circumstances.

The reviewer is not to accept an honorarium or any other gifts from the applicant

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE APPLICANT**

### **SETTING UP THE VISIT**

Coordinate with the reviewer to confirm dates for the site visit

Coordinate with the reviewer to make travel, hotel, ground transportation and meal arrangements

Ensure all travel, hotel, ground transportation and meal expenses are paid in a timely manner

Discuss with reviewer on details and expectations of site visit

### **THE VISIT**

Ensure key team members are present and available for site visit

Ensure all documentation are well organized for easy referencing by reviewer

Ensure business and routine processes are conducted as usual

Arrange for the reviewer to meet with individual staff

members or groups that may be relevant to the facilities application

Encourage staff members to talk openly with the reviewer about their employment experience, daily work routine, suggestions they may have for the facility, etc. and any questions they may have for the reviewer regarding the accreditation process

Provide a tour of the facility introducing them to key members of the organization, allowing them to interview staff members and observe meetings or processes that may normally be conducted during the day of the visit

Provide the reviewer with supplemental documentation related to the application if requested by the reviewer  
Provide the reviewer with supporting materials, explanations, or observational experiences in order to help the reviewer gain a full understanding of the facilities processes

It is the responsibility of the facility to represent itself in a manner that is consistent with their routine practices with full transparency and honesty (As noted by the signing of the ethics contract)

## **FOLLOWING THE VISIT**

Provide feedback to reviewer about the applicants experience with the accreditation process including site visit

Expect a summary of site visit findings from reviewer within 5-7 business days

You cannot submit any supporting documentation that was not available during the site visit when requested.

An application may be amended and/or supporting documentation may be submitted after a site-visit during the remediation process only

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER**

The applicant or any of its representatives may not give the reviewer any honorarium or gifts

The applicant may not provide luxury accommodations or travel arrangements for the reviewer

The applicant should not expose the reviewer to any hazardous material or experiences that may jeopardize the reviewer's health or safety

The applicant should take all measures to protect their patient's privacy and safety

Business within nursing units must be conducted as usual

No staff should be taken away from patient care to provide preferential accommodations or treatment for the reviewer

## **EXPECTATIONS OF NURSING EXCEL DESIGNEES**

Applicants that are granted the Nursing ExCEL accreditation designation are expected to:

- Be listed as an accredited facility in AAPACE- Nursing ExCEL web and marketing material
- Participate in interviews and surveys as a performance improvement measure to ensure Nursing ExCEL is meeting community and facility needs
- Continue designation by continually meeting Standards of Excellence and submitting renewal application and fees in a timely fashion
- Continue to be members of AAPACE
- Provide AAPACE- Nursing ExCEL with feedback and recommendations as facility, community and health care needs and trends change

- Notify APPACE If at any time the facility has regulatory active or pending sanctions (Sanctions defined as any survey resulting in a substandard federal/state citation or with a scope & severity of G or higher, or a conditional license)
- Conduct business in a manner of high professional and ethical standards
- Represent AAPACE -Nursing ExCEL in a positive light

## CONTINUING DESIGNATION PROCESS

The designation of Nursing ExCEL accreditation, once it has been granted, does not renew automatically. To maintain active accreditation, the facility must remain an active member of AAPACE and submit all correlating membership and Nursing ExCEL fees. In addition, each applicant must meet the requirements listed below:

- The regulatory requirements under the Standard and notify AAPACE should they receive the sanctions identified in the standard for review regarding ongoing accreditation
- Submit a Renewal Request no later than 90 days prior to the renewal process (Disclaimer: You may or may not get a reminder notice. It is the facility's responsibility to track and submit renewal timely)
- Complete all necessary renewal application processes and provide supporting documentation as required/requested
- Provide for a site visit if required. This must occur initially then is up to renewal reviewer to determine the need at time of renewal submission. Note: No facility will go longer than 6 years without a site visit (every 3rd submission of application for accreditation)

## PROCEDURE FOR CONTINUING DESIGNATION

1. Submit Nursing ExCEL Designation Renewal form with application fee and all supporting documents by deadline assigned to the facility. Renewal deadline will be 2 years from the time initial designation was granted. It is recommended that you submit for renewal 60-90 days prior to expiration to prevent a lapse in accreditation. It is facility responsibility to submit timely as AAPACE may not send a renewal notification.
2. Renewal of designation will not always require a site-visit. However, a facility will not go more than 6 years without a site-visit. Normally a site-visit will occur with the first and every 3rd accreditation designation but may occur earlier or more often if facility presents with concerns.
3. Nursing ExCEL Designation Renewal form plus supporting documents will be submitted to review panel for approval.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## 1. Why do facilities seek Nursing ExCEL Accreditation?

Facilities often seek accreditation as systematic road map on how to enhance and maintain quality standards. Facilities that are dedicated to improving health care outcomes often seek accreditation to receive guidance and support to improve patient and employee satisfaction, reduce litigation, reduce cost and improve patient outcomes. These facilities seek recognition to be recognized for their hard work and commitment to nursing excellence.

## 2. How long does Nursing ExCEL Accreditation designation last?

Initial designation as well as subsequent designations will last for 2 years each, given that each facility maintains accreditation standards, keeps AAPACE membership active and pays annual fees on –time.

## 3. What kind of recognition will my organization receive if designated as Nursing ExCEL accredited?

Nursing ExCEL designees all receive a plaque to showcase at their facility so they may be acknowledged for their commitment to nursing excellence. The organization will be provided with the opportunity to purchase additional marketing material (displays, banners, flags etc.) to showcase if they please. The accredited facility will also be authorized to utilize the Nursing ExCEL logo to showcase on their own facilities website as well as being listed on the AAPACE website. The recipients are also announced in AAPACE publications and at AAPACE events.

## 4. When is Nursing ExCEL designation awarded?

A facility is designated as Nursing ExCEL accredited after they have submitted a completed application and fees, a site visit was performed, and the board reviewed the application and voted that the facility application provides evidence of meeting all Standards of Excellence.

## 5. What happens if a facility forgets to renew their application?

Nursing ExCEL designation does not renew automatically and requires each applicant to keep their designation status active by complying with all

## 6. Does our organization/facility have to be a member of AAPACE in order to pursue Nursing ExCEL accreditation?

Yes, the applicant is required to be a member of the Association for the Advancement of Post-Acute Care Excellence to seek or obtain accreditation. Once awarded Nursing ExCEL accreditation, the facility must maintain membership during the designation period.

## 7. If my organization has multiple facilities, do we have to seek accreditation for each facility?

Yes. Many facilities within the same company may still function with a different set of rules, standards and policies. It is critical that each facility go through the systematic process of evaluating themselves and make sure they operate in line with the Standards of Excellence. Once a facility is granted Nursing ExCEL accreditation, only that facility within their company's organization can advertise that they are Nursing ExCEL accredited. For organizations with multiple facilities, they must clearly distinguish which facilities are Nursing ExCEL accredited and which are not.

**8. Can an organization that has more than one facility seek Nursing ExCEL accreditation for all of their facilities, or several of their facilities, at the same time?**

Absolutely, and we greatly encourage this! Creating a culture of systematic growth and evolution, empowering each facility to coordinate and support one another and promoting an environment that encourages each facility to share best practices is how we will create lasting success in healthcare.

**9. Do we have to meet all of the Standards of Excellence, or just some of them?**

All standards need to be met with the identified elements designated as required under each standard.

**10. If we are granted Nursing ExCEL accreditation , which logo can we use to advertise our designation?**

The facility may use the Nursing ExCEL logo to showcase on their own facility's website.

**11. Can we use the Nursing ExCEL designation to market our organization?**

Yes, as long as a facility is in good standing with current accreditation status you may market this for your specific facility.

**12. Under what circumstance would we lose our Nursing ExCEL accreditation designation?**

A facility may lose their accreditation for a variety of violations including misuse of the logo, mis-representing the facility or accreditation status, false marketing, and facility regulatory issues/sanctions. .

**13. What happens if we lose our Nursing ExCEL accreditation designation?**

The facility will need to pay a reinstatement fee of \$800 in order to become accredited once again. In addition, a facility may be asked to present proof of correction for whatever action caused them to lose accreditation

**14. What happens if we have received Nursing ExCEL accreditation but no longer meet our states regulatory requirements, or have an active or pending action against the facility?**

The facility must report this to AAPACE for consideration by the review panel. Upon review, the panel will make a determination on continuing accreditation.

**15. What happens if our facility is being sold and will now be under new management?**

The facility should notify AAPACE & submit "Proof of Operating Authority" as was required on the initial letter of intent.

**17. Are any organizations turned down after initial application?**

A facility will be denied accreditation if after two visits & remediation to correct areas of deficiencies are unsuccessful.

**18. If we are unsuccessful with our application, can we reapply?**

Yes, the facility will begin the initial process completely over again.

**19. If we re-apply, do we have to pay our fees all over again?**

All the fees will pertain as outlined in the initial process.

## 20. How much does it cost to pursue Nursing ExCEL accreditation?

Below is a table to show the costs initially and ongoing:

Year Intervals	Letter of Intent Fee	Initial SRR Application or Annual Renewal Fee	Site Visit Fee	Annual Membership Fee	Comments
Initial	\$250	\$2,500	\$2,000	-----	Additional charges will be applied for a second site visit should this be required
Year 2	-----	-----	-----	\$400	
Year 3	-----	\$1,500	-----	\$400	Additional charges will be applied if a site visit is determined to be required
Year 4	-----	-----	-----	\$400	
Year 5	-----	\$1,500	-----	\$400	Additional charges will be applied if a site visit is determined to be required
Year 6	-----	-----	-----	\$400	
End of Year 6	-----	\$1,500	\$2,000	-----	After 6 years of accreditation it is a requirement to have a site.
Beginning of Year 7	As Above	As Above	As Above	As Above	

## 21. If our organization begins the application process but fails to complete the process within the designated amount of time, will our fees be refunded?

The facility may receive a partial refund depending where they are in the process.

- a) If the facility submits the letter of intent and the \$250 LOI fee but does not continue the process and submit the required SRR accreditation application and its associated fees, there will be no refund of the \$250 Letter of Intent fee as this is considered an administrative fee.
- b) If the facility has paid the SRR accreditation application fee but then decides not to proceed with the accreditation process and has not yet submitted their SRR application, a full refund will be given.
- c) If the facility submits the SRR application and it is under review by the reviewer, a partial refund may be given if the agency is notified of the decision to withdraw the SRR within 30 days of original submission, but no refund will be given if the agency is notified after 30 days of the SRR application submission date.
- d) If the facility has paid for a site visit and is requesting to cancel the site visit, the site-visit fee will be refunded if no lodging or flight reservations were booked yet by the reviewer.

## 22. How long does it take to complete the accreditation process from the beginning to the end?

The process could take anywhere from 9 to 18 months depending on the facility's need for an additional site visit and the time they take for remediation of any deficiencies noted on the site visit(s).

## 23. Which parts of the application process are kept confidential?

All parts of the application process and findings are kept confidential.

## 24. How do we start the accreditation process?

The accreditation process is started by the facility completing and submitting the Letter of Intent along with the associated fee and supporting documentation.

## 25. What kind of feedback can we expect if we fail to meet standards or receive Nursing ExCEL designation?

The assigned facility reviewer will respond with a feedback tool upon review of your application which will let you know if any required elements under a standard have not been met. A site visit tool will be completed post site visit which will also describe any required elements not met that will require correction. If a facility will not receive accreditation they will be clearly informed of the reasons their accreditation was denied and what steps will need to be taken if they chose to continue to pursue accreditation.

## 26. Who decides whether or not an application receives Nursing ExCEL designation?

There is a panel of industry professionals that will review the final facility visit tool and application to ensure all areas required have been met and then make the final determination. This panel is appointed through a selection process of professionals who meet a set criteria established by AAPACE.

## 27. How will we be notified of the final decision about our application?

You will receive a phone notification followed by the official notification of accreditation packet in the mail containing all the information on your accreditation.



### 28. Are any extensions granted during the accreditation process?

If a facility requests a extension the AAPACE ExCEL team will review the circumstances and make a determination.

### 29. How are individuals selected to be on the Nursing ExCEL review panel?

The individuals on the panel will either request to be considered or invited to complete the application process. The AAPACE Director team will then review and select the members.

### 30. Do members of the review panel get paid or receive an honorarium?

The members of the review team will receive annual membership to AAPACE as long as they remain active members of the review panel.

### 31. What happens if I think there is a conflict of interest between the reviewer or evaluator assigned to the facility?

If a facility feels there is a conflict at any point of the process, the Director of Clinical Operations should be contacted and the concerns will be reviewed and managed in the best interest of all parties with a final determination by the AAPACE Executive Director.

### 32. How long do we expect the evaluator to be at our facility during a site-visit?

Site visits will generally be completed on a one day site visit. Larger facilities, or those with a large amount of documents to review may require an additional day making the site visit 2 days.

### 33. For continuing designation, does the review panel have access to my initial or previous applications for reference?

Initial and subsequent reviews will all be available to the review panel upon request.

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Accreditation**-The action or process of officially recognizing a facility as having achieved the status of and meeting standards which gives them a professional designation.

**Applicant**- facility/organization applying for Nursing ExCEL designation

**Reviewer**- The AAPACE ExCEL team member assigned to a facility to guide and review the facility during the initial accreditation process

**Designee**- facility/organization applying for Nursing ExCEL accreditation or designation  
**Designation**- the granting of Nursing ExCEL accreditation

**Evaluator**- AAPACE/Nursing ExCEL representative that is assigned to perform the site visit and evaluate the facility seeking accreditation

**Facility**- post-acute care facility

**LOI**- Letter of Intent to Pursue Designation

**Nursing ExCEL**- Nursing ExCEL is a program that provides a systematic process for post-acute care facilities to evaluate their current practices and identify areas for improvement.

**Post-acute care facility**- A skilled nursing facility that participates in the delivery of skilled post acute care and rehabilitation

**Reviewer**- AAPACE/Nursing ExCEL representative that is assigned to review a facilities application

**SRR**- Systematic Review and Reporting

**Standards of Excellence**- A set of elements which when followed by a facility takes the facility nursing practice to a level of quality or attainment in delivering care to post-acute patients.

**Standard(s)**- A set of elements (criteria) used as a measurement of excellence in comparative evaluations to determine a facility's accreditation.