

ACGME Rural Track Program (RTP) Designation Frequently Asked Questions

Consistent with Section II of the ACGME framework for medically underserved areas and populations and GME (“MUA/P and GME”), the ACGME has developed processes addressing ACGME-accredited programs that seek to create “rural tracks” as defined in rules and regulations of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This guide is intended to answer common questions pertaining to the ACGME RTP designation that is available within an existing program, as well as when applying for a new program. Additional information and resources can be found on the [Rural Track Program designation web page on the ACGME website](#). Click the desired question to navigate to the corresponding answer.

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Email questions about ACGME RTP designation that are not answered in these FAQs to muap@acgme.org.

ACGME RTP Background and Terms

Question:	What is an ACGME Rural Track Program?
Answer:	An ACGME Rural Track Program is defined as “An ACGME-accredited program in which all or some residents/fellows gain both urban and rural experience with greater than half of the education and training for the applicable resident(s)/fellow(s) taking place in a rural area (any area outside of an urban Core-Based Statistical Area (CBSA)).” Visit the ACGME Rural Track Program designation web page to learn more.
Question:	What is ACGME Rural Track Program designation?
Answer:	ACGME Rural Track Program designation is defined as “A classification provided by the ACGME that identifies Rural Track Programs with the approval of a permanent complement increase request and the addition of at least one new rural participating site or at the time of application for accreditation.” Visit the ACGME Rural Track Program designation web page to learn more.
Question:	To which specialties and subspecialties does the ACGME Rural Track Program designation apply?
Answer:	The ACGME Rural Track Program designation is not limited to specific specialties or subspecialties. Programs are encouraged to communicate with staff members of the relevant specialty Review Committee when planning to pursue ACGME Rural Track Program designation to learn about specialty-specific considerations. Their contact information may be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	How does the ACGME Rural Track Program designation relate to CMS rural track policy?
Answer:	The ACGME RTP designation aligns with rules and regulations of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that address “rural tracks” in 42 CFR §413.79(k) . The ACGME RTP designation is independent of any rural track designation by CMS and does not guarantee that a program will meet CMS eligibility requirements for GME or other financial support. If you have questions about the CMS rural track policy, contact your GME finance staff and/or the Prospective Payment System (PPS) hospital’s Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC).

ACGME RTP Designation Request Process and Criteria

Question:	Which ACGME RTP designation process should a program choose?
Answer:	If an ACGME-accredited program within the Sponsoring Institution already exists, and there is a desire to create an RTP within that same specialty, there are two options: either pursue designation as a rural track within the existing program, or pursue designation as a new program via application. Programs must have a status of Continued Accreditation to pursue a designation within an existing ACGME-accredited program, consistent with ACGME policies and procedures. If the Sponsoring Institution does not yet have an ACGME-accredited program, RTP designation can be requested

	with the application for program accreditation. There may be many reasons for a program to choose one ACGME RTP designation process over the other, including the program mission and aims, development timeline, costs, resource requirements (including personnel), oversight and authority, and outcomes tracking.
Question:	What is included in the ACGME RTP designation request?
Answer:	An RTP designation request within an existing program is initiated in concert with a permanent complement increase request, using a sidebar option within the “Program” tab of a program’s ADS profile. To complete this request, programs update the program information (if applicable); add/identify the new rural participating site(s) ; update faculty information (if applicable); submit a permanent complement increase request; and upload the ACGME RTP Rotation Information Form and Specialty-Specific Rural Track Program Questionnaire (if applicable). A new program RTP designation request is initiated in advance of a program accreditation application and requires program director information, program information (program details and participating site information), a block diagram upload, the ACGME RTP Rotation Information Form upload, and the Specialty-Specific Rural Track Program Questionnaire (if applicable). Review the ACGME RTP Designation Instructions document on the ACGME Rural Track Program designation web page or email muap@acgme.org to learn more.
Question:	How is a request for ACGME RTP designation related to a program’s accreditation application?
Answer:	A new program RTP designation request precedes a program accreditation application. When initiating a program accreditation application, the designated institutional official (DIO) is asked whether the program is seeking ACGME Rural Track Program designation. An affirmative DIO response prompts the program director to complete the ACGME RTP request prior to submitting the accreditation application. The ACGME’s MUA/P and GME staff review the designation information to determine whether the request meets designation criteria. The program director may complete sections of the program’s accreditation application while awaiting a response to an ACGME RTP designation request. ACGME RTP designation is contingent on the program’s achievement of Initial Accreditation, following the accreditation process as set forth in the <i>ACGME Manual of Policies and Procedures</i> and in accordance with published specialty- or subspecialty-specific Program Requirements. Refer to the ACGME RTP Designation Request Instructions document on the ACGME Rural Track Program designation web page for more information.
Question:	How can an existing ACGME-accredited program request ACGME RTP designation?
Answer:	An existing ACGME-accredited program seeking to expand with a new rural track can request ACGME Rural Track Program designation using a sidebar option within the “Program” tab of a program’s Accreditation Data System (ADS) profile. The request will include adding a rural participating site and submitting a permanent complement increase request. Refer to the ACGME RTP Designation Request Instructions document on the ACGME Rural Track Program designation web page for more information.
Question:	What are the ACGME RTP designation criteria?
Answer:	The criteria for ACGME RTP designation within an existing program are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater than 50 percent of aggregated rotation months occur at participating site(s) that are rural PPS hospitals or non-provider site(s) • New rural site(s) (do not currently have required rotations for program residents/fellows)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty members at rural site(s) are not supported by a current rural participating site • Rural participating site(s) located in a rural county (outside of an urban Core-Based Statistical Area (CBSA)) • Required rotations include some GME at an urban PPS hospital or urban non-provider site <p>The criteria for ACGME RTP designation as a new program are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater than 50 percent of aggregated rotation months occur at participating site(s) that are rural PPS hospitals or non-provider site(s) • Rural participating site(s) located in a rural county (outside of an urban CBSA) • Program includes required rotations at a non-rural PPS hospital or non-provider site
Question:	How is it determined that a participating site is in a rural area for the purpose of an ACGME RTP designation request?
Answer:	A participating site is considered rural if its street address is in a county that is outside of any urban CBSA. This is verified using information from the County to CBSA Crosswalk File and Urban CBSAs and Constituent Counties for Acute Care Hospitals File on the most recent IPPS Final Rule Home Page that is current at submission of the ACGME RTP designation request. Email muap@acgme.org for more information.
Question:	How is a new site defined to meet ACGME RTP designation criteria within an existing program?
Answer:	A participating site is considered new for ACGME RTP designation within an existing program if it is not currently used as a required participating site for the program's residents/fellows and if its faculty members are supported by a rural PPS hospital that is not a current participating site. Programs seeking designation will be asked, in the ACGME RTP Rotation Information Form, to confirm this information. A review of the program's participating sites and block diagram will confirm if the site(s) are currently required. Note that CMS may have different considerations for financial eligibility. Direct questions about the CMS rural track policy to the local GME finance staff and/or the PPS hospital's Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC).
Question:	How will this designation be identified in the ACGME's ADS?
Answer:	Programs that meet designation criteria within an existing program and receive approval of the permanent complement increase request and site changes (if applicable) from the relevant Review Committee will see the ACGME Rural Track Program designation on the letter notifying the program of permanent complement increase approval. Programs that meet designation criteria as a new program and achieve a status of Initial Accreditation will see the ACGME Rural Track Program designation on the letter notifying the program of Initial Accreditation. The designation likewise appears on the program's public profile in ADS and on a publicly available report of ACGME-accredited programs with this designation.
Question:	What sites should be listed on the RTP Rotation Information Form for ACGME RTP designation within an existing program?
Answer:	For existing ACGME-accredited programs seeking ACGME RTP designation, the Rotation Information Form should only reflect the experiences of the rural track residents/fellows.
Question:	What are the deadlines and timeframe for submitting a request for ACGME RTP designation?
Answer:	If the designation request is not missing any information, the MUA/P and GME staff review process can take less than two weeks. Programs should reference the Review

	Committee agenda closing dates for new program applications found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website (contact a Review Committee staff member if program application deadlines are not listed). See the ACGME’s general Program Application Information web page for more information. Questions regarding Review Committee process timeframes for designation within an existing program should be directed to a staff member of the relevant specialty Review Committee, whose contact information may be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	If the ACGME RTP designation request is declined, can a program still apply for accreditation or request a complement increase?
Answer:	Programs seeking ACGME RTP designation as a new program that do not meet designation criteria can proceed with the program application without designation. Programs seeking ACGME RTP designation within an existing program that do not meet designation criteria can submit a complement increase request without an accompanying designation request. Information previously entered in the complement section during the designation request will still be accessible.

ACGME RTP Structure

Question:	Do rotations have to be in a specific sequence or order (e.g., urban first, then rural)?
Answer:	The order or sequence of participating sites to which residents/fellows rotate is not a criterion of ACGME RTP designation. There may be program accreditation considerations pertaining to the order or sequence of resident/fellow rotations. Questions regarding accreditation should be directed to staff members of the relevant specialty Review Committee, whose contact information may be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	Is the percentage of aggregated rotation months at rural participating sites calculated for the duration of the program or per year? Can a program with ACGME RTP designation schedule exactly 50 percent of resident/fellow rotations at rural participating sites?
Answer:	In programs with ACGME RTP designation, Greater than 50 percent of aggregated rotation months over the duration of the program (e.g., greater than 18 months for three-year programs) occur at rural participating sites. Programs with 50 percent or less than 50 percent of rotations at rural participating sites will not receive ACGME RTP designation.
Question:	Does the “greater than 50 percent of rural education and training” have to be in the new participating site(s), or can some take place at the new participating site(s) and some at an existing rural participating site?
Answer:	For ACGME RTP designation within an existing program, the “greater than 50 percent” duration threshold in a rural area must be comprised of rotations at new rural participating site(s). The new site(s) cannot be new non-provider sites associated with an existing participating site that is a rural PPS hospital. See above regarding the “new site” definition for ACGME RTP designation within an existing program. Note that CMS may have different considerations for financial eligibility. Direct questions about the CMS rural track policy to the local GME finance staff and/or the PPS hospital’s MAC.
Question:	What types of participating sites can provide rural rotations in an ACGME RTP?
Answer:	Rural rotations can occur at participating sites that are rural Medicare-eligible acute care hospitals under the PPS and/or rural non-provider sites (previously referred to as non-hospital sites). See above for ACGME RTP designation participating site considerations

	for existing ACGME-accredited programs. A rural participating site has a street address in a county that is outside any urban CBSA. The federal regulations that establish the PPS can be found in 42 CFR § 412 . Federal regulations define non-provider sites or settings in 42 CFR § 413.75(b) ; examples include freestanding clinics, nursing homes, and physicians' offices [see 42 CFR § 413.78(g)]. The status of critical access hospitals (CAHs) as non-provider sites is clarified in pages 42411-42416 of the FY 2020 IPPS Final Rule .
Question:	Are there restrictions on the number or distance of participating sites in an ACGME RTP?
Answer:	The number and relative distance of participating sites are not reviewed in the ACGME RTP designation request process. There may be program accreditation considerations related to the number and distance of sites. Programs are encouraged to review the specialty- or subspecialty-specific Program Requirements and FAQs found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website . Questions regarding accreditation should be directed to staff members of the relevant specialty Review Committee, whose contact information may also be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	Is an ACGME new program RTP required to have a separate program director than an ACGME Rural Track Related Program?
Answer:	While program directors and other personnel are not reviewed in the ACGME RTP designation request process, there may be accreditation considerations. Questions regarding accreditation should be directed to staff members of the relevant specialty Review Committee, whose contact information may be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	Could a new Sponsoring Institution submit an ACGME RTP designation request for their first program application? Could a Sponsoring Institution sponsor multiple programs with ACGME RTP designation?
Answer:	There are no restrictions on ACGME RTP designation within a Sponsoring Institution. Questions regarding program accreditation should be directed to staff members of the relevant specialty Review Committee, whose contact information may be found on the relevant specialty section of the ACGME website .
Question:	Is the identification of an ACGME Rural Track Related Program a factor in designation as a new program?
Answer:	The identification of a related ACGME-accredited program is optional and provides an opportunity to inform the ACGME that resources or experiences (e.g., overlapping rotations) may be shared by residents/fellows in a program with ACGME RTP designation and those in another ACGME-accredited program in the same specialty/subspecialty and Sponsoring Institution. Identification of an ACGME Rural Track Related Program is not needed to receive the ACGME RTP designation.