

A Step-by-Step Guide to Program Letters of Agreement

What are Program Letters of Agreement?

Program Letters of Agreement (PLAs) are written documents that address GME responsibilities between an individual accredited program and a site other than the sponsoring institution at which residents receive a required part of their education. Per ACGME, all programs at LSU School of Medicine are required to have a PLA for each clinical site at which residents and fellows rotate.

So, if your program rotates at University Medical Center (UMC), East Jefferson general Hospital (EJGH), and Children's Hospital (CHNOLA), you should have three active PLAs on file for your program.

When Do We Complete a PLA?

In general, PLAs can last up to ten years. But, there are some circumstances that require a new PLA to be initiated such as a new site director.

You should initiate a new or updated PLA under the following circumstances:

- Change in site director
- A new rotation or clinical site is added
- The previous PLA has expired

Before You Start

- Make sure you have access to Adobe Sign. The GME office does not have the ability to individually grant access to Adobe Sign. You will need to request access from IT through this link <https://myaccess.microsoft.com/@LSUHSC.onmicrosoft.com#/access-packages/f6045cb3-6472-4155-94cb-0fe5a55b3fce>
- Work with your program director to determine the site director for this rotation. The site director could be the Program Director (if they have privileges at this clinical site), a different LSU faculty member, or a non-LSU provider.
- Work with your program director to specify the goals and objectives of this rotation. These do not need to be intensely detailed, but they should be specific to the site and program specialty (*see notes at the end of this document*).

Initiating a Program Letter of Agreement

1. Start by locating the template for your clinical site from the listing [HERE](#). If your site is not listed on this page, use the Generic ACGME Letter of Agreement.
2. Download the template you need and begin adding in the information for your program. Read through the entire agreement carefully, paying close attention to the spots where you need to fill in information such as the program, program director, site direct, dates, etc. (Tip: Most templates use **red text** to note where you need to add information. You should revert all text color to black before sending to signatories.)
3. Add the Goals & Objectives to your PLA (either where noted or as an addendum after the signatures page).

4. Save the PLA (and addendum) as one PDF document. Name the file with your program name and the name of the affiliated site. For example: "Internal Medicine – EJGH"
5. Go to your [Adobe Sign Homepage](#)
6. Click "Request e-signatures"
7. Following the [PLA Signatories](#) from the Knowledge Base, begin entering the emails in the order needed for signing. (Tip: Make sure you are following the correct order for your affiliated site). By clicking the pen icon next to the emails, you can change a recipient from a "Signer" to an "Approver". Here you can also add anyone to the CC list that you may want to keep in the loop on the signing process (APDs, other coordinators, business managers, etc. – This will vary by program).

There is a general order of execution listed at the top of this webpage. It's important to note that all PLAs should go to a GME Approver before being sent to any external signers or approvers. This ensures that we can catch any potential issues early in the process.

If you are completing a PLA for LCMC, please note the [specific guidelines](#) for that signatory process. Since LCMC Corporate will not use Adobe Sign, we must take a few extra steps to complete these.

8. In the "Message" Section, enter the Agreement Name using the following format:
LSU (Program Name) - (Affiliated Site) PLA (year)-(year)
Example: LSU Internal Medicine - Touro PLA 2023-2033
9. Then, add a short message to the recipients such as
"Please review and sign the new PLA for Touro. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to me at myemail@lsuhsc.edu. – Program Coordinator"
This step is important to help recipients realize that it's a genuine email and not spam.
10. Attach your file.
11. In the Options on the right, you may find it helpful to click the checkbox for "Set Reminder". This will have the system send automatic reminders to the recipients until the document is complete. Most coordinators like to use "every third day" or "every fifth day" as their frequency. That way it is often enough that it's hard for them to forget about it, but not so often that the recipient tunes out the reminders.
12. Click the checkbox next to "Preview & Add Signature Fields."
13. Click "Next."
14. On the next page, click the drop-down menu in the top right corner and select the first Signer. Then drag and drop a signature field from the right panel on to the corresponding signature field on the document. You can adjust the size of the signature field by clicking and dragging the blue corner in the bottom right corner of the field. You Can double-click on the signature field to confirm that it is assigned to the correct person and is marked as "Required". Repeat this step until all signature fields are added.
15. Once everything is added, click "Send" at the bottom of the page.

Common Concerns and How to Address Them

Below are some common questions, concerns, issues, and mistakes that we see in the GME Office and how you can handle them.

GME Declined to Approve the PLA

If the GME Approver declined to approve your PLA, you will receive a notification from Adobe Sign that your document has been cancelled, and it will include a message from the GME Approver that discusses why they declined to approve the document. Anyone else that has signed the PLA will also be notified of the cancellation. From there, you should make the suggested changes to the document and restart the Adobe Sign process with the updated document. You can always reach out directly to the GME Approver to work with them and make sure the PLA is appropriate.

Goals and Objectives

One of the most common reasons for GME to not approve a PLA is because of issues with the Goals and Objectives. Although these Goals and Objectives do not need to be overly detailed, they must meet certain requirements for the GME Office to approve them.

- Site-specific: The goals and objectives should be specific for the clinical site. If the rotation is at Children's Hospital, your goals should not include information about rotations at Touro.
- Program-specific: Your goals and objectives should be directly related to the program. If the rotation is for pediatrics, the goals and objectives should reflect items specific to the care of pediatric patients.

Required Signers Not Signing in a Timely Fashion

It is not uncommon for some of the required signers to delay signing the document. Most often, this happens simply because they forgot about it or it got buried in their email inbox. This is where those automatic notifications come in handy. But, if it has been an unreasonably long time, and the automatic reminders are not helping, you should reach out directly to the signer to ensure that they received the email and don't have any questions about it. If you are continuing to have issues at this point, please reach out to the GME Approver.

How Do I Know if a PLA is Expiring?

If you want to check your current PLAs, you can do so on [New Innovations](#):

1. Log in to New Innovations.
2. On the top of the webpage, click "Administration".
3. Under "Agreements", click "Program".
4. From there, you can scroll to your program and see all the current PLAs and their expiration dates.
5. By clicking "Edit" next to a PLA, you can access the Uploads for it and view the actual document that is currently in effect.

Also, The GME Office will contact the Program Coordinator a few months before the PLA expires as a reminder to start the process.

Resources

Here is a collection of links that were mentioned throughout this document:

- Adobe Sign Access
<https://myaccess.microsoft.com/@LSUHSC.onmicrosoft.com#/access-packages/f6045cb3-6472-4155-94cb-0fe5a55b3fce>
- PLA Instructions and Templates (Knowledge Base)
<https://lsugme.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/ACGME/pages/26525780/Program+Letters+of+Agreement+PLAs>
- Adobe Sign Homepage
<https://na3.documents.adobe.com/account/homeJS>
- New Innovations
https://www.medschool.lsuhschool.edu/medical_education/new-innov/

For questions regarding PLAs, please contact:

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