



Graduate and Employer Surveys: When, Why, and Challenges

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Accredited programs are required to complete satisfaction surveys of graduates and employers, but what purpose do these questionnaires serve? Is it just one more requirement? Historically, it is difficult to find some graduates, and hence their employers, once they leave the program, so does it really matter, and is it worth the effort? The answer to both questions is yes.

Paramedic programs are outcomes-based, and the most important outcome is the graduate's ability to function as a competent provider of advanced-level care. Students are assessed in a summative format at program exit for their ability to function competently at the entry level. However, the only way to adequately assess the individual's ability as an independent practitioner is to gather assessment information from the graduate and the employer following a period of practical application of the knowledge, skills, and abilities as a practicing, certified, or licensed paramedic. The graduate who feels confident upon completing the education program may find they have a significant knowledge gap in a particular area, or the employer may determine that the employee lacks certain skills or abilities in one of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, or affective. A formal feedback mechanism is essential to allow the program to continue improving and to monitor the education process.

The graduate and employer survey process is structured to capture this data for all graduates employed as AEMTs or paramedics in the 6 to 12-month period following program completion. These surveys are not exit surveys from the program: including them at program completion does not serve the program's purpose or provide the appropriate outcome information.

The challenges in obtaining this documented feedback are well known:

- The program cannot contact the graduate and lacks information on the individual's employment status. The contact information on file may not be current, i.e., email and cell number.
- Student contact information is available, but the individual does not respond to requests to complete the survey or provide information about the current employer.
- The employer is not known.
- The employer does not return the survey. In some cases, employers have anecdotal concerns that survey information may be viewed as part of the employer's evaluation of the employee, leading employees to be reluctant to participate.
- The survey goes to the appropriate employer, but not to the individual responsible for observing and evaluating the graduate.

- Graduates complete at different times, and there is no consistent program end date, nor is there a subsequent six-month trigger to send the surveys.
- It is easy for the program to overlook the 'send' due date.
- The graduate is not employed as an AEMT or paramedic immediately after program completion, so when does the six-month period start, and how are dates tracked across graduates?

Graduate and employer satisfaction are required outcome threshold metrics. Historically, the survey return threshold was set at 70% and subsequently reduced to 50%. Due to the challenges enumerated regarding obtaining survey returns, the CoAEMSP Board of Directors later changed the requirement threshold that 100% of surveys were sent. This has also proved to be a challenging metric. For example:

- How can I send a survey if I cannot locate the graduate or employer?
- Some graduates are not employed in an AEMT or paramedic role immediately upon program completion for various reasons. Perhaps no position is available in the area. The individual may have to wait for an opportunity to 'promote' to that role in the organization. The individual who is continuing their education or is in the military is counted as 'placed' for purposes of the job placement threshold but is not functioning as an independent practitioner in the EMS field. In these examples, completing graduate and employer surveys does not yield the intended information.
- Some graduates may continue in an EMT role at an EMS agency or healthcare facility and, therefore, are not in a professional role as an AEMT or paramedic. As stated in the CoAEMSP Interpretations of the CAAHEP *Standards*: 'A related field is one in which the individual is using cognitive, psychomotor, and affective competencies acquired in the educational program'; in this case, an AEMT or paramedic program.

To improve the survey return rate, the CoAEMSP streamlined the queries in the surveys to three basic questions: is the graduate competent in each of the three domains: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective? Rather than a Likert-type scale, the response options are successful/competent, marginal, unsuccessful, or NA. For each of the three domains, if the individual is rated as marginal or unsuccessful, additional prompts/topics are provided: safety; patient assessment and history; wellness; documentation; pharmacology; medical emergencies; trauma; operations; special considerations (pediatrics, geriatrics, etc.); introductory (medical legal, pathophysiology, airway, etc.); other (list). Programs can add additional and more in-depth questions to their survey but must use at least the items required by CoAEMSP.

The change in the items and rating scale has increased the response rate, but returns are still a challenge. Suggestions for obtaining the data include:

- Electronic survey tools are available through CoAEMSP developed electronic forms.
- Paper copies or fillable PDF forms are acceptable and are easy to distribute to employers at an Advisory Committee meeting.
- Employers can rate more than one graduate on the survey, if the ratings are the same and the number of graduates being evaluated is stipulated.

- A program staff member can contact graduates and employers by phone to review and document the questions.

Additional recommendations include:

- Obtain employment information from each student before they leave the program. Ask them to keep the program updated on employment changes and contact information. The Graduate Survey should not be the primary means of determining placement.
- Send follow-up email or text reminders that the survey is coming.
- Let graduates know that emails from an electronic provider may upend to in the spam folder.
- Set calendar reminders for faculty and administrative staff when surveys are due to be sent.
- Surveys can be anonymous but attempt a mechanism to determine who has returned the survey and who needs reminders.
- Use any social media groups that the students and graduates organized to let everyone know to expect the survey and make the case for them to respond.
- If possible, in your organizational structure and budget, offer inducements for completing the survey, such as a small gift card for coffee or food, or enter respondents into a drawing. However, this approach may undermine the perception of anonymity.

Beginning in the fall of 2026, a section of the CoAEMSP Annual Report will be used to verify if the surveys are being sent. More detailed results will be entered into a new form, **Graduate and Employer Survey Report**, available in the CoAEMSP Resource Library, Instruments and Forms section. These reports are to be completed annually and will be submitted as part of the accreditation self-study process. Graduate and Employer surveys provide important data for programs in evaluating effectiveness and perceptions of competency.