Guest Blogger Onboarding Packet Table of Contents

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Introduction to VisitPITTSBURGH's #LovePGH Blog: Background and Overview

Thank you for considering blogging for VisitPITTSBURGH. We are seeking talented writers to develop content for tourism and visitor-focused blogs for publication on VisitPITTSBURGH.com. This volunteer position will research and write periodic Pittsburgh-based articles in a conversational engaging style, while sharing what they love about Pittsburgh through their own voice and persona.

Digital content marketing is the new normal, but creating strong new content is time consuming and expensive. Many businesses are feeling the burn, with “limited budget” being the number one challenge for content marketers in 2015. As it stands, the #LovePGH Blog on Visitpittsburgh.com is currently mostly utilizing staff bloggers and interns to produce weekly content. While this has been important in order to begin to amass a variety of evergreen content on #LovePGH, it is now time to expand this project to include a guest bloggers.

Opening the #LovePGH Blog to guest bloggers has many benefits. VisitPITTSBURGH is inherently a sales and marketing organization and our mission is to promote Pittsburgh. However, this does not mean that only VisitPITTSBURGH employees should be promoting the city as a first-rate destination. An overall goal in 2017 is for the #LovePGH Blog is to instead use the blog as a platform for a group of diverse, local Pittsburghers to share their stories of why they love their city. We believe that by asking guest bloggers to write about their experiences in Pittsburgh, this authentic content will play a strong role in influencing travel decisions of a whole new audience of readers.

Facilitating the strong message of Pittsburgh’s grassroots advocates is a strategy that will not only provide a new perspective on our usual blog content and bring us a whole new audience, we also believe that our guest bloggers will cultivate a following that will keep readers coming back for more. In addition to these cost and time saving benefits, the content that guest bloggers provide will allow for a more consistent and frequent publishing schedule, which equates to driving increased traffic to our website, giving us stronger advertising numbers as well as site visits.

Instituting guest blogger programs is a strategy that is being used by digitally-savvy businesses across the board. In fact, a Curata business blogging study indicated that the best content marketers source 24% of their blog posts from external contributors, and 56% of these externally sourced blog posts are from non-paid, guest bloggers. This program will give us access to content creation from a diverse group of bloggers who we expect to galvanize grassroots community support of VisitPITTSBURGH and grant us access to a new audience of travel influencers.

Thank you for being a part of our guest blogger community! We are looking forward to working with you and sharing our joint love of Pittsburgh with the rest of the world!

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1 Curata Business Blogging Study: http://www.curata.com/blog/6-steps-to-launch-a-guest-blogging-program/
VisitPITTSBURGH #LovePGH Blog Style and Standards Guide

This guide is for use on the VisitPITTSBURGH.com website, specifically the #LovePGH Blog. It contains the necessary information to properly format text, tables and images within content pages, advertisements and other supplementary materials.

Text Elements

Headings
Heading structure is important not only to present a clear structure to the web page but also in consideration of those using text readers and for search engine optimization. Heading tags should be used in descending order to denote proper prioritization of page content.

- **H1 Headings**: H1 headings are comparable to a book title. On the site H1 headings are used exclusively for page titles, use within the page is discouraged.
- **H2 Headings**: H2 headings are comparable to chapter titles. On the site, H2 headings are used to denote sections within a page or blog.
- **H3 Headings**: H3 headings are comparable to subsections within a chapter. On the site, H3 headings are used mainly to denote listing or thematic shifts.

Page Layout
The body is where bulk of the page content is contained. The body content can be made up of paragraphs, lists, links, images, tables and more. The body runs about 800 pixels wide.

Links
Links are very important to our blogging format. Link wherever possible!

External Links are hyperlinks that point to any domain other than the domain the link exists within. In other words, hyperlinks linking to another site are considered external links. Internal Links are hyperlinks that point to the same domain as the domain in which the link exists, simply put, an internal link is one that points to another page within the same website.

On VisitPITTSBURGH.com external links should be formatted with the following information:
- **Link URL**: always include the "http://" prefix
- **Target**: always select "Open in new window (_blank)"
- **Title**: always title the link with "Link to XYZ website" Exceptions are made when linking to specific information within a website, in which case use "link to ABC information"

Anytime you mention a proper noun, provide a link if one exists. This includes restaurants, attractions, sources for quotes or stats (e.g. The City Paper said such-and-such). 99% of everything has a legitimate place to be linked to, somewhere, on the Web. Links can be provided in parenthesis following the proper noun to be linked.
Never use the construction click here as a hyperlink. Always make your links semantic and explain their relevance in context. For example, instead of ‘For more information about the Flying Squirrel Troupe, click here’, it is more meaningful to write ‘Find out more about the Flying Squirrel Troupe’. Writing links in this way is important because search engines compare link text to the content that it links to, and use this relationship as one factor in determining the relevance of links. It also has the added benefit of keeping your copy shorter and more readable.

The best way to accomplish this style of embedded linking is to write your copy first, without giving linking any consideration. Then, simply convert existing words and phrases into links where necessary. When writing URLs in the body of a piece of copy, do not include the ‘http://’ prefix.

Anytime you mention a proper noun, provide a link if one exists. This includes restaurants, attractions, sources for quotes or stats (e.g. The City Paper said such-and-such). 99% of everything has a legitimate place to be linked to, somewhere, on the Web. Links can be provided in parenthesis following the proper noun to be linked.

Lists

- **Ordered Lists**
  Ordered lists are simply numbered lists. These should be used only when the listed members possess some intrinsic ordering of their own, for example, instructions for turning on a computer, or steps to bake a cake.

- **Unordered Lists**
  Unordered lists are bulleted rather than numbered, and should be used when the listed members possess no intrinsic ordering, or in which such ordering is irrelevant, such as a list of cities.

Special Characters

The use of special characters should be limited to those found in the basic ASCII set. Characters outside of this set require explicit encoding in order to ensure proper display on multiple platforms, and cannot simply be copied from supplied text. Additionally, when encoded characters are printed, or copied back to a word processing environment, the character can be lost, replaced with the encoding making it harder to decipher the original text. “Smart quotes” should be avoided on the web as these too are special characters. All smart quotes should be replaced with "straight quotes."

**Example:**

Do not use ‘é’ in the word ‘cafe’ unless it is officially part of a business’s title. Often these characters appear in copy because of a preference in Microsoft Word that adds these accented characters automatically. However, for this character to properly appear on the web, the character must be replaced with the specific HTML code ‘&eacute;’
Miscellaneous Text Formatting

- Phone Number Format: xxx-xxx-xxxx
- Day Abbreviation Format: M, Tu, W, Th, F, Sa, Su
- Month abbreviation Format: Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, May, Jun, Jul, Aug, Sep, Oct, Nov, Dec
- Time Format: Use ‘am’ and ‘pm’, lowercase and without punctuation. Do not include a space between the numerical time and the meridian designation
- Example: 8am
- Day and Hour Format: When writing combinations of days and hours, use the following format:
  - Day-Day [or Day+Day]: hour(am or pm)-hour(am or pm).
- If more than one grouping of days and hours is used, separate the groups with a semicolon.
- Example: Tu-F: 8am-9pm; M+Sa: 12pm-6pm.
- Typography: Basic web-accessible fonts such as Arial and Times New Roman are permitted.
- Color is not utilized in our current blogging format, allowing for a cleaner look and feel.

The Single Most Important Rule of Web Writing:

Writing for the Web is a difficult and exacting process. It is a form of technical writing, with much more stringent rules than standard print copywriting. It requires a calculated approach: brevity, efficiency and careful attention to structure. Web users are always in a rush. They DO NOT read; they scan copy looking for keywords until they find what is relevant to them. So if you only follow one rule, follow this one:

"After you have written a first draft, ruthlessly eliminate half of the words. It will result in copy that is twice as effective."

Image/Video Use

Images that are submitted by guest bloggers must be as high resolution as possible. Images must be either a 950 x 633 rectangle or 950 x 950 square. If you are able to pre-format these images that is preferred. If not, with enough time VisitPITTSBURGH staff can assist with this. Images need to be properly attributed and any images submitted by guest bloggers must be permitted for public use. Please submit images via Dropbox as high resolution images might not come through via email.

Videos are also able to be embedded into blogs. The video must be posted on Youtube of Vimeo in order to be able to be added to a blog via iframe. The video must be screened by VisitPITTSBURGH staff as appropriate to the content and for the audience.

Accessibility

Although most of the accessibility requirements for a good website are met behind the scene when VisitPITTSBURGH codes and posts your blog, it’s always a good reminder to make sure you’re doing everything you can to be sure your content is accessible to all different groups of people. A good guide to follow is the post 7 Things Every Designer Needs to Know about Accessibility.
Formatting Your Blog Content

1. **Do not worry about the visual style or formatting of your copy;** in fact, excessive formatting of source documents can make it that much more difficult to transition the text to HTML. Focus instead on giving your document an appropriate *logical structure*. Be sure that the copy can be easily broken down into the basic units of HTML: headings, paragraphs, quotes, numbered and unnumbered lists, and tables.

2. **Be consistent.** Always format the same types of information the same way everywhere it appears in your copy. Web users do not tolerate unnecessary variation and will simply ignore all subsequent content.

3. When supplying lists, **do not formally format them as bulleted or numbered lists using Microsoft Word’s settings**. Doing so adds invisible formatting markup that makes it more difficult to extract the text from the document. Simply begin new lines with numbers, or a dash to signify a bullet.

Style Tips

1. **Avoid passive voice and dependent clauses unless there is a specific stylistic reason to do otherwise.** Not only do these devices require extra words and punctuation, they use indirect phrasings that make rapid comprehension on the Web difficult.

2. **NEVER USE ALL CAPS.** ON THE WEB, IT IS CONSIDERED YELLING, AND IT IS IMPOLITE!

3. **Avoid excessive and unnecessary punctuation!!** Exclamation points are almost never necessary except in the context of a quotation. If you need an exclamation point to make someone excited about your subject, then you haven’t written effective copy!

4. Resist the urge to try to be unique and original. **Use the most obvious terms you can think of for your titles.** If you’re writing something about museums, call it ‘Museums’, not ‘Kids’n’Family-Education-a-Rama Spectacular’. If something seems cute or inventive, chances are very good that it is confusing your users.

Tips for Creating Search Engine Optimized Content

Great content is the key to search engine rankings. Every search performed at the search engines comes with an intent - to find, learn, research, understand or buy. Search engines rank web pages in their results by order of relevance, popularity and utility to satisfy the searcher’s desire. Creating the most fulfilling, thorough content that addresses a searcher’s needs provides an excellent chance to earn top rankings within search engines.
Content:

Write for the human audience, not the crawlers. Page ranking algorithms are increasingly preferring natural content to obvious optimized content. Focus on creating valuable content for the visitor, then edit for the search engine. Content should be on-topic and centered on the subject matter of the targeted keyword or keyword phrase. Don't forget to speak the language of the audience!

Page Length:

Generally short content pages are is harder to rank for. Target content length should be at least 300 words. On the opposite end of the spectrum, lengthy content that does not get to the point, or relate to the search query can result in negative ratings. Make sure the content remains informative and relevant.

Headings and Subheadings:

It's generally accepted that web crawlers rank keywords found in headings above the keywords found in content. Make sure your page headings include your targeted keyword or keyword phrase. Be sure the keyword or keyword phrase you are using are relevant to the content on the page.

Keyword and Keyword Phrase:

Keywords are single words, or more commonly strings of words, that represent the content of a web page. Since these are words relevant to the page, they should easily be incorporated into the content and headings. Strategically selected keywords can help improve search engine ranking for that page.

The most valuable keywords are those a user is most likely to type into their search engine queries. Keep in mind that industry-specific terms are not always the same terms the customer may be using.

Keyword Frequency and Density:

Keyword frequency is the number of times a keyword, or keyword phrase appears on the page. Keyword Density is the ratio of those keywords to the rest of the words on the page.

While frequent use of the keyword or keyword phrase will lead to high-ranking pages, a keyword density above 5% tends to have a negative impact as it can be viewed as keyword stuffing. Needless repetition in not necessary, use relevant keywords naturally in the copy. Also consider using synonyms, related keywords and grammatical variations to maintain natural flow to the copy.
#LovePGH Blog Voice and Tone Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th>Don’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Friendly/ Welcoming**  
Provide information and resources to help the reader take advantage of what you know.  
Write in a personal way that the reader feels comfortable. | Don’t force help that isn’t asked for, or over explain.  
Don’t point your finger at someone literally or figuratively.  
Don’t be intimate or talk about specific people. |
| **Sincere/Honest**  
It is acceptable to respectfully share your opinion when asked. Be Pittsburgh, know Pittsburgh’s strengths and weaknesses. Be factual. | Never go negative. Don’t pretend that you like something or fabricate. Don’t tell stories that are not garnered from first-hand experience. Don’t try to be “Los Angeles or San Francisco”. Be authentic. |
| **Passionate**  
Communicate what you love and why. Share personal stories, without becoming intimate. Explain why your perception is different (if it is actually different). | Be fanatical. Don’t push your opinion on others or try to make them feel inadequate if they do not agree or did not have the same experience. Never berate. |
| **Clever**  
Make comments with substance, sensibly play on words a bit. Surprise people in a positive way. | Don’t be snarky. Don’t try to make someone or something appear in a negative light so that you can make yourself or your opinion look better. |
| **Knowledgeable**  
Be brief and informative and share what you know freely. Provide helpful resources to overcome obstacles. Offered informed suggestions. | Be all knowing. Don’t imply that your word is the only truth and that you are not open to learning more about a subject. Don’t be pedantic. |
| **Fun**  
Relax, be playful. It is often said that if you smile when you talk and write you will impart happiness when you communicate. Know your audience and what makes them smile. | Be silly or inappropriate. |
| **Casual**  
Use your own words, which means you can use colloquialisms, but be sure your audience knows it is intentional. Being informal is a sign of confidence. Use double entendrés (plays on words) if appropriate. | Be sloppy, misspell words or omit punctuation. Don’t curse. |
| **Confident**  
Own your words. Embrace criticism or counter arguments. Be respectful. | Don’t be arrogant. Don’t be condescending or inapproachable. |
| **Authentic**  
Tell stories that are appropriate and relevant. Tell how you feel and convey the type of person that you are. Reflect the history and atmosphere of the place or subject. Describe the subject so that your audience can feel or imagine it. | Don’t be phony. Don’t be overly complimentary or patronizing. Don’t use clichés or flowery words that don’t mean anything. Don’t be out of touch with your audience. |
| **Considerate**  
Listen and be perceptive. Allow others to give their point of view. Be open-minded and positive about every comment. Provide alternative ideas. | Don’t be impatient. Don’t be dismissive or inattentive. Don’t tell people if you think their ideas are bad. |
VisitPITTSBURGH Brand Voice Guide

Below are samples of communication that reflects the Pittsburgh brand: Mighty. Beautiful. We also focus on how Pittsburgh is a surprising town, with friendly and authentic people and a true sense of place. A place of hard-working, proud and innovative people. A place rich in culture and activities. We’re mighty because we are passionate and inventive. We help to build America. We’re the all-American slice of life. Please ensure that your submitted content is in line with these brand and tone guidelines.

Several statements are listed here and several ways of saying the same thing are listed under it.

- **Statement:** Pittsburgh is a surprisingly beautiful city with warm and friendly people who are proud of their culture and history.
  - Pittsburgh is a beautiful surprise. We have passionate people and fun attractions that are easy on the wallet.
- **Statement:** We’re determined to ensure that you have a hugely successful meeting.
  - We are the “go to” team to help you plan a hugely successful meeting.
- **Statement:** You’ll be surprised by the fun you’ll have in Pittsburgh.
  - Don’t be surprised by how much fun you’ll have in Pittsburgh.
  - Hold on to your hat! Pittsburgh will knock your socks off!
  - Hold on to your hat, we’ll knock your socks off in Pittsburgh!
  - You can leave your hat on, but we’ll knock your socks off in Pittsburgh!
- **Statement:** We can help you improve your marketing campaign.
  - We’ll champion your marketing efforts.
- **Statement:** This meeting/event will give you the tools you need to run your business.
  - Apply the experience and knowledge of your peers to champion productive ideas for your organization.
- **Statement:** Your delegates will appreciate a convenient location that is walkable, safe, and packed full of surprises.
  - Don’t be afraid to walk around and check out our city. You’ll be surprised how much there is to see and do!
- **Statement for Sports:** Have the championship of all meetings in a welcoming, walkable, safe, convenient world-class city.
  - World-class sporting events should only happen in a world-class city.
  - Have your championship in the City of Champions.
  - Become a part of our championship sports legend.
  - We’ll champion your event in our City.
  - Your meeting/event will score big in Pittsburgh.
From Pitch to Publication – A Process Document

Pitch
Thank you for considering guest blogging for VisitPITTSBURGH. VisitPITTSBURGH has an ongoing content calendar with slots for online publication every Tuesday and Thursday. In order to be eligible to submit content, the guest blogger must be an established blogger, willing to work with VisitPITTSBURGH to brainstorm ideas and pitches, submit content on time, and fill existing gaps in subject matter experts. We are looking for fresh ideas and new perspectives. We encourage guest bloggers to promote their posts for VisitPITTSBURGH to their existing networks, helping to extend our blog’s reach by tapping into your network as well as exposing our regular readers to your personal content platforms. We want to build community and have the #LovePGH blog function as a grassroots platform for local community members to share what they love about Pittsburgh with the world.

Although we are always looking to talk about things to do, schedules of events, food and restaurants, holidays, and the arts and culture scene in Pittsburgh, we are looking for your specific take on them. If you are accepted as guest blogger, you will be asked to pitch a handful of ideas to VisitPITTSBURGH for consideration as possible blog posts. VisitPITTSBURGH will work with you to find the perfect angle on your story. We expect you to contribute at least 4 posts throughout the year.

It is important for a sense of your personality to come through on your blog. Excitement and passion for your topic is encouraged, as well as writing through a particular “voice” and “style”. If it’s not fun for you to write on some level, it won’t be fun four readers to read. Tell stories, make it personal, and be yourself. Try and enjoy the process and the end product will be better.

Submission
In the near future, you will be able to access important information through our online guest blogger portal which will also allow you to submit your story ideas as well as your finished posts online.

However for the time being, please submit all posts to molly.allwein@visitpittsburgh.com in a Microsoft Word Document. Links should be included in parenthesis immediately following the word or phrase that is to be linked. Example: “The best blogs are written by VisitPITTSBURGH (http://www.visitpittsburgh.com/blog).” Never link in the word document – this is ineffective for our current purposes.

Images need to be as high resolution as possible. Images must be either a 950 x 633 rectangle or 950 x 950 square. If you are able to pre-format these images that is preferred. If not, with enough time VisitPITTSBURGH staff can assist with this. Images need to be properly attributed and any images submitted by guest bloggers must be permitted for public use. Please submit images via Dropbox as high resolution images might not come through via email.

Publication
Guest posts are generally posted on Tuesday mornings. In order to have time to edit and format blog entries for publication on the #LovePGH Blog, we need all content a week before the posting date of the piece. Please remember that VisitPITTSBURGH has final editorial call. This means that we may have to delete or rework sections, change wording, etc.

First time guest bloggers will also need to submit a 2-3 sentence bio (which can include links to your personal content platforms) and a headshot that will be used in your author byline.
Guest Blogger Job Description

Summary:
We seek talented writers to develop content for tourism and visitor-focused blogs for publication on VisitPITTSBURGH.com. This volunteer position will research and write periodic Pittsburgh-based articles in a conversational engaging style. This position will interface with the Digital Marketing Department to ensure blog content captures readers' interest, while promoting VisitPITTSBURGH's message of “Pittsburgh. Mighty. Beautiful.” These blog articles must be pitched and submitted in accordance with VisitPITTSBURGH's guidelines and content calendar.

Duties and Responsibilities:
1. Pitch, research, create and submit a minimum of 4 blog entries throughout the calendar year for publication on VisitPITTSBURGH.com.
2. Strong knowledge of SEO tenants, and ensure that your submitted content has a strong SEO build
3. Access to high resolution images to submit in addition to your written content. These must be your own work or photos that you have been given permission to use.
4. Research and include as many links as possible in your submitted content.
5. Pitch topic ideas to our content curator who will work with you to choose subject, create and outline, and choose a due date in accordance with VisitPITTSBURGH’s content calendar.
6. Share your content with your social media audiences and other networks.
7. Respond promptly to blog comments and emails.

Minimum Job Requirements:
Possess engaging "conversational" writing skills with a professional posture. Must be able to provide writing samples upon request along with reader statistics. Must be computer savvy. Also agree that you will be granting us ownership to the content you produce on our behalf, however, you are able to request. Essentially, duplicate content cannot appear anywhere else.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Required:
- Writing
  - Strong writing, proofreading, and editing skills
  - Ability to write simply and conversationally, with the intent to engage and inform readers
- Technical
  - Solid understanding of the anatomy of a good blog
  - Ability to utilize word processing, blogging and internet software
  - Solid foundation in search engine optimization (SEO) techniques
  - Topical knowledge of basic html and web development a plus
- Project Management
  - Ability to effectively manage time and schedules
  - Ability to work independently and as a member of a team
  - Strategic planning skills – ability to submit content on time
- Social Networking
  - Strong interpersonal and communication skills
  - Present professional, but friendly posture with blogsphere colleagues and throughout the Internet
  - Collaborate with internal departments to enhance blog features and presence
  - Act as ambassador and liaison for company with the Internet community
  - Develop collaborative partnerships on-line and off-line
Benefits of Blogging for VisitPITTSBURGH

- Gain visibility and a new audience through VisitPITTSBURGH's established website.
  - Link to your personal website or blog in your editorial content
  - Social media links in your author biography
  - Generate inbound and outbound links to your information
  - Increased search engine traffic – SEO for your name/brand

- Build authority/Expert status in your areas of expertise
  - Write content that humanizes and furthers your personal brand
  - Extend your existing website influence into the travel/tourism space for visitors to Pittsburgh

- Access to VisitPITTSBURGH networks
  - As a blogging partner, you will have indirect access to our contacts and may attend our events and networking opportunities (Be Digital education series, Official Visitor’s Guide release, holiday celebrations, hospitality icebreakers, customer service trainings, etc.)

- Be discovered through social media
  - VisitPittsburgh will likely link to your blog entry on Facebook or Twitter
  - VisitPittsburgh has over 40,000 followers on Twitter
  - VisitPittsburgh has over 35,000 followers on Facebook

- Freedom to develop an outside revenue sponsor for your blog content

- Share your love for Pittsburgh!
#LovePGH Guest Writer/Blogger Agreement

We are agreed that within the date range written below, VisitPITTSBURGH may consent to publish certain editorial content written by you on the #LovePGH blog on the following terms and conditions:

- You hereby irrevocably transfer and assign to VisitPITTSBURGH all rights, title and interest in and to all such editorial content, including without limitation any and all “moral rights” that you may have in any editorial content. You grant VisitPITTSBURGH ownership to the content you produce;
- You will receive a promotional “byline” and author photo in connection with such content, which byline and photo must be approved by VisitPITTSBURGH’s editorial staff;
- Any requests directed to you regarding the use of provided editorial for any additional purpose must be made in writing to VisitPITTSBURGH’s Digital Marketing Department, and, if approved, any such usage must contain a notice stating that the content is used with such permission, and was originally published on VisitPITTSBURGH’s website (with url stated);
- VisitPITTSBURGH has the final editorial call, which means that we have the right to freely edit the content of your submission (will be done mostly for clarity and format);
- You will receive no compensation for any editorial content, or the rights granted to VisitPITTSBURGH herein; and
- The term “editorial content” will also include all editorial content previously submitted by you and published by VisitPITTSBURGH, including words, photos, and video.

You agree to indemnify VisitPITTSBURGH and hold it harmless from and against all claims, damages, losses and expenses, including court costs and reasonable fees and expenses of attorneys, expert witnesses, and other professionals, arising out of or resulting from any action by third party against VisitPITTSBURGH that is based on any claim that any content infringes a copyright or other proprietary right or violate a trade secret.

The laws of the State of Pennsylvania (other than the provisions thereof relating to conflicts of laws) will govern this Guest Writer/Blogger Agreement.

If the foregoing accurately reflects our agreement with respect to the subject matter hereof, please so indicate by signing a copy of this Guest Writer/Blogger Agreement in the space provided below, and sending the original of that signed copy to VisitPITTSBURGH. This Agreement is valid for the following date range:

Date Range of Agreement: ______________________________

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of Guest Writer  Date

__________________________________________  _________________________
Signature of VisitPITTSBURGH Staff Member  Date