Zero to 100: Starting an Animal Research Program from Scratch and Applying for AAALAC Accreditation in Two Years

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Problem Statement:
Tasked with cultivating a brand new animal research program for a young medical school, you soon realize you’re starting at an empty vivarium and have no staff, equipment, policies, forms, or oversight bodies. The institution has just hired a team of immunobiology researchers who are eager start working in six months, and leadership envisions applying for AAALAC accreditation in two years. Where and how would you begin?

Description of the research:
We outline the plan of action and sequence of events from May 2016, when the IACUC chair was appointed, to the AAALAC site visit conducted in October 2018. Some of the major undertakings include the following:

- Identifying and training members of a properly constituted IACUC, including a part-time veterinarian
- Developing animal use protocol submission forms and a review process
- Developing mechanisms to amend an approved animal use protocol
- Creating and approving key policies, including a disaster plan, and SOPs prior to animal arrival
- Collaborating with a new IBC to ensure biosafety risks are mitigated
- Negotiating the Domestic Assurance with OLAW
- Establishing and maintaining a vivarium capable of housing breeding colonies, immunodeficient and BSL-2 mice
- Establishing vendor all the connections needed for animal care and safety of animal care personnel
- Conducting semiannual facility and programmatic reviews with a new IACUC
- Making staffing changes within the organization and handling attrition of IACUC members
- Establishing an animal inventory system, and adjusting per diem charges to adequately support and promote animal research
- Submitting the program description and preparing for an AAALAC accreditation site visit.

Additional Information:
Starting an animal program from scratch is a relatively rare event. Starting an animal research program with NIH-funded researchers and needing to negotiate an Assurance Statement with OLAW from the
beginning is even rarer. During the early stages of our growth we quickly discovered there was a lack of published information to guide the development of new animal care programs. Thus, the primary goal of this project is to provide the details surrounding the formation of a new PHS-assured animal program, to hopefully help those institutions considering or in the process of building a new program.