

Guidance Document on Remote/*Hybrid* Assessments

1 Introduction

The evolution in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) had resulted to a more efficient access to operational systems including data information. ICT is the use of technology for gathering, storing, retrieving, processing, analyzing and transmitting information. It includes software and hardware such as smartphones, handheld devices, laptop computers, desktop computers, drones, video cameras, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and others. The use of ICT may be appropriate for auditing/ assessment both locally and remotely. Examples of the use of ICT during audits/assessments may include but are not limited to ^[1]:

- Meetings by means of teleconference facilities, including audio, video and data sharing
- Audit/assessment of documents and records by means of remote access, either synchronously (in real time) or asynchronously (when applicable)
- Recording of information and evidence by means of still video, video or audio recordings
- Providing visual/audio access to remote or potentially hazardous locations

Cognizant of the opportunities and benefits of these technological innovations and in keeping with the challenges and uncertainties of current circumstances due to extraordinary events, the Philippine Accreditation Bureau (PAB) aims to use ICT to:

- redefine its processes and optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of assessment activities
- support and facilitate the credibility and integrity of the assessment process
- conduct assessment activities as necessary to comply with expectations, regulations and stakeholders to ensure competence of conformity assessment bodies

This document was developed to provide specific guidelines to facilitate remote/hybrid assessments in order to continue the operation of PAB for ensuring the competence of its Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs), specifically, during circumstances that prevent PAB to conduct an on-site assessment.

Remote assessment is a virtual assessment of CABs allowing one person to execute a process and access the documented information in an online environment. This assessment is managed through the use of technology in which web conferences, screen sharing and personal interviews may be organized and carried out. Through this platform, PAB can:

- facilitate the same amount of assessment of CABs or even more
- witness and assess more locations and capability with approximately the same resources it utilizes for on-site assessments

Hybrid assessment is the combination of on-site and remote assessment.

Remote or Hybrid assessments can also provide PAB and CABs an opportunity to improve efficiency, accessibility, safety, and avoidance of travel delays and restrictions.

Remote/Hybrid assessment may be on voluntary basis, by mutual agreement or may be initiated by PAB for its assessment needs (e.g. surveillances, investigations, verification, etc.). The program for remote assessments depends on the *risk involved in the* structure of the CABs, or types of assessment and may cover all or part of the

requirements of the accreditation criteria. Key personnel including top management are still expected to be available. The acceptability and the extent of remote/hybrid assessments should be subject to evaluation and approval. A follow-up on-site assessment may still be necessary to establish the level of competence such as actual witnessing of technical activity(ies). This will be discussed and agreed during the pre-assessment and planning stage of the remote assessment.

2 Eligibility of CABs for Remote/Hybrid Assessments

2.1 Generally, PAB will determine the feasibility of remote assessments based on, but not limited to, the following conditions and circumstances:

- a. Travel to CABs or specific location is not reasonable (e.g. for safety reason, risk exposure, travel restrictions, etc.)
- b. There are unavoidable changes in scheduling for the assessor/experts or CAB (e.g. personal matters, change in business priorities, etc.)
- c. The number of sites to be assessed is difficult for PAB to completely fulfill within its time frame
- d. The CAB has systematic implementation of its management system where records, data, etc. can be reviewed at any site, despite where the work is being performed
- e. The CAB has proven track record of conformance
- f. The risk to the integrity of accreditation is low
- g. The planned activity for the on-site assessment could not be completed and extending the on-site assessment is not the best solution
- h. Complaint investigation and/or verification of corrective action implementation
- i. Special situation for which PAB grants approval

2.2 The implementation of remote/hybrid assessment is subject to PAB evaluation and approval. As to when and how it can be applied is on case to case basis depending on the circumstances. CABs requesting for remote/hybrid assessment must accomplish the LA/SF29 form (Evaluation and Approval for Remote/Hybrid Assessment) and submit to PAB along with the pre-defined documented information. PAB will evaluate and approve based on the merit and feasibility of remote/hybrid assessment.

2.3 Remote/hybrid assessment may be less favorable in the following scenarios:

- a. When CAB has a history of significant nonconformities relating to its management system and technical operation
- b. When the CAB's historical records show repetitive findings that cast doubts to the CAB's continuing effective implementation of its management system
- c. Applications for initial assessment activity of a new CAB facility, additional scope(s) and signatory(ies) and/ or significant change(s) in the CAB's operation
- d. When no on-site assessment has taken place for an extended period of time

3 Specific Requirements

3.1 Responsibilities of CABs

- a. CABs shall have the appropriate resources to facilitate the remote assessment. This includes but not limited to reliable and fast internet access and bandwidth, virtual meeting capabilities (web conferencing solutions) and readily accessible

documented information in electronic forms.

- b. CABs shall ensure that it has the competency in and familiarity with the operation and effectiveness of ICT
- c. CABs shall provide security and access to the assessment team for the collection of objective evidence to support conformity to the assessment criteria. The CAB shall take appropriate measures to safeguard the security, protection and confidentiality of data in any format.
- d. CABs shall designate a representative who will facilitate, manage and coordinate the arrangements of the remote/*hybrid* assessment. This may include translators, if necessary. The details of the technology will be discussed and decided on during the pre-assessment and planning stage.
- e. Upon request, CAB shall participate in a preliminary meeting and validation process using the agreed media platform prior to actual schedule of remote assessment. This is to ensure that appropriate resources and system capabilities (i.e. internet bandwidth verification, availability of technology platform, access to information management system and web conferencing tools, etc.) are in place and scheduled assessment will be performed in accordance with assessment plan.

3.2 Responsibilities of PAB

The assessors' and experts' eligibility to conduct the remote/*hybrid* assessment using ICT is determined by PAB. Eligibility criteria may include but not limited to the following:

- ICT competency, familiarity and ability to understand and utilize the information and communication technologies employed to achieve assessment objectives
- Awareness of the risks and opportunities of the ICTs used and the impacts that they may have on the validity and objectivity of the information gathered
- Previous experience

Prior to the actual schedule of remote/*hybrid* assessment, PAB assessors and experts shall review pre-submitted documentation, as necessary, to assist PAB in determining feasibility of remote/*hybrid* assessment and shall participate in a preliminary meeting and validation process using the agreed media platform.

4 Remote Assessment Process

4.1 General

- a. The remote/*hybrid* assessment process follows the same on-site assessment including the schedule of fees, pre-assessment and planning, conduct of the assessment, recommendation process, and post-assessment activities.
- b. Key personnel shall be available throughout the entire process. Representative of CAB's management may be asked to be available during the opening and closing meetings, as well as in various times throughout the assessment, if necessary.
- c. The assessment should be facilitated in quiet settings whenever possible to avoid interference and background noise.

4.2 Pre-assessment and Planning

- a. If the document review process determines that a remote/*hybrid* assessment can be completed and assessment objectives can be fulfilled, the designated assessment team shall review all relevant documentation.
- b. Before initiating a remote/*hybrid* assessment, PAB shall identify and document the risks and opportunities that may impact assessment effectiveness under the same conditions as on on-site assessments including the selection of the technologies, selection of the team and how they are managed by the team.
- c. PAB shall define the following:

- The agenda for the planned remote/*hybrid* assessment with pre-defined documented information to be available during remote assessment

Note: Examples of documentation that may be requested during the remote assessment includes but are not limited to applicable files, projects, reports, etc.; CAB's procedure(s) and documents for process(es) being assessed; and other evidence(s) deemed essential and necessary.

- The scopes to be assessed including the list of activities, areas, information and personnel to be involved in the remote/*hybrid* assessment
- Duration of the remote/*hybrid* assessment

Note: Cooperation and communication with the CAB and the assessment team on the duration of any remote assessment activity is vital to the achievement of the assessment objectives. To estimate the duration of a remote/*hybrid* assessment activity, essential inputs from the assessment team and the CAB's designated representative may consider various factors such as but not limited to:

- any relevant & valid existing accreditation
- length and diversity/ complexity of scope
- number of personnel and management structure of the CAB,
- type of assessment to be undertaken (e.g. surveillance, renewal etc.)
- number of applicable requirements
- CAB's historical data considering the cycles of accreditation

- d. A trial meeting using the same communication platform agreed upon by PAB and the CAB should be conducted to ensure that the scheduled assessment will proceed and performed as planned; and to verify that security concerns are addressed.

4.3 During the Assessment

- a. For witness assessment of the scope of activities, a live video with ability to interact with the authorized personnel performing the scope of activities shall be conducted through the use of proper technology(ies) and equipment.

Note: PAB recognizes that some conformity assessment activities cannot be covered remotely due to various reasons. In this aspect, the CAB can video record the scope activity(ies) performed by authorized personnel and submit to PAB.

- b. In the event that the CAB cannot support and meet the requirements and objectives during the remote assessment (e.g. provision of requested information in a timely manner, availability of key personnel, etc.), the assessment activity may

be terminated and an on-site assessment will be scheduled.

4.4 Post Assessment Activities

- a. The assessment team meeting and closing meeting shall be conducted as defined in the assessment plan. This can be done on a separate day giving due consideration to the nature of assessment conducted.
- b. The assessment team shall provide the CAB an assessment report detailing their findings (i.e. compliance to the accreditation requirements, nonconformities, opportunities for improvement, etc.).
- c. Communication between the assessment team and CAB for sending documents or clarification on issues and corrective action management shall be pre-defined and coursed through the PAB Accreditation Officer.
- d. Once the assessment is complete, the external assessors and experts shall delete from its system or remove access to any documented information and records not required to be retained as objective evidence. The external assessors and experts should confirm deletion of any confidential documents, images, recordings, etc.
- e. The final assessment report and related records shall indicate:
 - the extent to which ICT has been used in carrying out the remote assessment
 - the effectiveness of ICT in achieving the assessment objectives.
 - If ICT is used for all or part of the assessment this is documented in the assessment report.
 - If virtual sites are included within the scope, the documentation shall note that virtual sites are included and the activities performed at the virtual sites shall be identified

5 Confidentiality

All information supplied by the CABs as part of the remote assessment shall be treated with utmost confidentiality. This information will however be made available, as necessary, to technical experts and/or members of the applicable Technical Committees only for the purpose of evaluating and decision-making regarding assessment of a particular CAB.

6 References

- [1] IAF MD 4:2018: IAF Mandatory Document for the Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Auditing. Assessment Purposes, Issue 2
- [2] IAF ID 12:2015: Principles on Remote Assessment
- [3] IAF ID 3:2011: IAF Informative Document for Management of Extraordinary Events or Circumstances affecting ABs, CABs and Certified Organizations, Issue 1
- [4] ISO 9001 Auditing Practices Group Guidance on: REMOTE AUDITS, 2020-04-16, Edition 1