P119 – A2LA Policy on Conducting Remote Assessments

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Scope and Field of Application

Everyday information and communication technology is becoming more advanced and things that were not possible a short time ago are now readily available. A2LA realizes the need to adapt to the ever-changing technology landscape and implement policies and procedures for how we can utilize new technologies and tools in our operations as an accreditation body. The intent of this document is to outline how we will utilize remote assessment in our accreditation processes to provide the best assessment experience for our accredited organizations while, most importantly, maintaining the integrity and the confirmation of competence that comes along with A2LA accreditation.

Through our normal operations as an accreditation body, we have experienced many different ways that technology is being used by our accredited organizations. We have already adapted to assessing electronic methods of performing activities that were previously handled manually or through face to face interactions. It is clear that the use of technology is only going to grow as time progresses. This realization has led A2LA to re-evaluate its assessment process and implement remote assessment techniques in areas where it can improve the current practices or where it is absolutely necessary to perform a proper assessment.

This policy document is intended to explain the different approaches and techniques that can be utilized in remote assessments and in what instances remote assessment techniques could be applied as part of the A2LA assessment process. This document also contains the A2LA requirements pertaining to use of remote assessment techniques in the assessment process. Even in cases where remote assessment may apply, it is acknowledged that some organizations may wish to have a more “traditional” assessment approach with no use of remote assessment techniques and that is acceptable to the extent possible. The acceptability of and the extent of remote assessment techniques will vary from organization to organization and will depend on circumstances such as level of technology available to the organization, the organization’s assessment preference, resources, etc. Remote assessment is not the norm and is typically used in coordination with or as a supplement to an onsite assessment.

Specific requirements found in this Policy are in italic type and numbered as in “(C1)”.

Definition of terms:

The following definitions are taken from ISO/IEC 17011:2017: Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies.

Remote Assessment - assessment of the physical location or virtual site of a conformity assessment body, using electronic means

NOTE 1: Examples of remote assessment include: webinars/web meetings, teleconferences, online video/audio services, remote access to organization’s data processing and management systems, databases, etc.

NOTE 2: to entry: A virtual site is an online environment allowing persons to execute processes, e.g. in a cloud environment.
Qualifications for the use of Remote Assessment during the Assessment Process

Typically, remote assessments will be used in coordination with or as a supplement to an onsite assessment. The level of remote assessment used will vary depending on the structure of the organization and other considerations such as the organization’s standing with A2LA and the type of assessment being performed (e.g. initial, surveillance, renewal, expansion of scope of accreditation, etc.). In general, initial assessments do not qualify for remote assessment, unless they are performed in coordination with a physical onsite assessment.

A surveillance assessment which takes place approximately a year after the initial assessment may be conducted remotely by a member of A2LA staff. However, an onsite surveillance assessment may be required depending on the outcome of the initial assessment and other considerations such as the relocation of the organization, request to add to the scope of accreditation, complaints received against the organization, etc. Accredited organizations may request the remote assessment option when the surveillance application is generated and will then be informed by A2LA regarding the decision on the assessment technique to be used.

The use of remote assessment will be evaluated organization by organization and on a case by case basis. A2LA management will make the ultimate decision as to when and how a remote assessment can be utilized.

If an organization performs: testing (unless in a virtual environment); calibration; certification; inspection; production of reference materials and/or proficiency testing samples; or similar activities, then these activities will require an onsite assessment, but may be supplemented in some cases by a remote assessment. At this time, remote assessment is not equivalent to the onsite witnessing and interaction between organization and assessor that is necessary to ensure that staff’s technical competence has been sufficiently evaluated and confirmed. However, there are many instances in which remote assessment can be appropriately used and the level of use will vary by accreditation program. Also, when a remote assessment is used to assess conformity for activities during an accreditation cycle those activities will likely need to be observed onsite during the next accreditation cycle. As such, it should not be expected that once approved for remote assessment that those activities will be assessed remotely on a routine basis.

Specific Requirements

The following requirements shall be met for remote assessment:

(C1) The organization shall have the appropriate resources to facilitate the level of remote assessment that is being used during the assessment process. That is, have appropriate internet access and bandwidth, have capabilities for remote access of their data processing and management system(s), have the appropriate computers, audio/visual, and other equipment to facilitate the process, etc. The organization must identify a member(s) of staff who is responsible for facilitating the remote assessment process. This includes all the logistical and technical considerations necessary to ensure that the appropriate staff and resources are available at the times requested by the assessor(s).

(C2) The organization is responsible for any additional expenses associated with the remote assessment process such as fees for teleconference, webinar, audio/visual, etc.

(C3) Remote assessment shall be capable of facilitating the conformity assessment process to the same level as a “traditional” onsite assessment.
(C4) Except in the case of a surveillance assessment or when a remote assessment is otherwise initiated by A2LA, the organization shall request the use of remote assessment using the “Remote Assessment Request Form” found in Appendix 1 of this document.

(C5) Upon request from A2LA, the organization shall provide information/evidence to validate their ability to perform the requested remote assessment with A2LA staff and the assessor prior to the remote assessment. This validation process may include verification of internet bandwidth, availability of acceptable technology, access to information management systems, access to web conferencing tools, etc.

(C6) The organization must grant the appropriate security and profile access to the assessor(s) to allow for remote collection of objective evidence to support conformity to the assessment criteria. This does not mean the assessor must have full access to the organization’s electronic systems but they must have the ability to review documents and records sufficient to assess conformance to the accreditation requirements.

(C7) Upon request by A2LA, the organization must participate in a pre-assessment meeting and validation process prior to the remote assessment to ensure that the appropriate resources and system capabilities/compatibilities are in place to conduct the remote assessment. Please note, this could take place immediately prior to the scheduled assessment.

If at any time during the assessment process, the organization cannot support the remote assessment process or the assessor(s) cannot perform the assessment sufficiently using the remote assessment approach then the organization must have an onsite assessment for those functions that could not be assessed using remote assessment.
APPENDIX A – Remote Assessment Request Form

This form is to be used when an organization is requesting that A2LA conduct a remote assessment of some or all of its conformity assessment activities. Please complete and submit this form to A2LA via email to your assigned staff contact along with the requested supporting information. Once received by A2LA, the request will be reviewed to determine if, and for what activities, remote assessment will be used during the conformity assessment process.

Organization Name: Click Here to Enter Text

Master Code: Click Here to Enter Text

Certificate Number(s): Click Here to Enter Text

Staff Lead(s) and Contact Information: Click Here to Enter Text

A. Information that is to be provided by the CAB:

1. A written justification of the reason(s) the CAB considers remote assessment is appropriate.

Click Here to Enter Text

2. Identify what conformity assessment activities (testing, quality system, sample preparation, inspection, etc.) you wish to be assessed remotely.

Click Here to Enter Text

3. Provide the physical address where each conformity assessment activity is being performed or indicate if it takes place at a virtual site and describe that virtual environment.

Click Here to Enter Text

4. Please list the resources (including their capabilities) that you have available to facilitate the remote assessment process (web conferencing tools, remote access to data management system, video conferencing, etc.)

Click Here to Enter Text

Please note that additional information may be requested in order for A2LA to perform the review of the request for remote assessment.

B. After the request and supporting information has been provided to A2LA, it will be reviewed by A2LA and a determination of the acceptability and extent of remote assessment will be made. At that time, the organization will be informed of the decision and the next steps required to proceed with the assessment process.

If you have any questions, please contact your assigned AcO for further information.
APPENDIX B - Document Revision History

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