

Summary of Advocacy Committee Meeting
January 30, 2014

1. Call to order

Steve Arms called the meeting to order at 12 Noon CST, January 30, 2014. Attendance is recorded in Attachment 1. In Carol Batterton's absence, Lynn Bradley took notes and prepared the minutes.

2. Introduction

Steve Arms introduced the Committee members and discussed the origins of TNI's decision to take stock of the national accreditation program. He noted that the withdrawal of California, one of the long-standing NELAP Accreditation Bodies (ABs) may influence the discussions but the decision to hold this conversation to re-examine the program and whether it still suits the community's needs began prior to California's decision. It has been nearly a decade, since 2006, and the assumptions that drove the program back then may no longer be valid.

3. Re-Visiting National Environmental Accreditation

The general concept of exploring potential new directions for national environmental accreditation includes a series of webinars – format to be determined – to accept input from various stakeholder communities, and then a full day session at the end of the NEMC meeting in August, in Washington, DC, to review the information and concerns gathered from the webinars and use the synergy of a stakeholder assembly to craft a path forward.

Points from the discussion are itemized below:

- The initial question raised was whether this effort should focus on “environmental accreditation” or “environmental laboratory accreditation” – whether the National Environmental Field Activities Program will be part of the discussions or not.
- Several individuals expressed support for including mobile labs at a minimum, and preferably encompassing field sampling and measurement in the review and re-examination.
- One commenter noted that licensed operators of drinking water and wastewater plants do not want to have to become involved with accreditation in any way, and urged that both American Water Works Association and the Water Environment Federation be brought into the discussion to address this issue.
- Another commenter asked participants to consider how much to involve the non-NELAP states and ABs, and how involve them without demanding full participation in the national accreditation program.
- The original concept of NELAP was full reciprocity across the nation. While this has not occurred, NELAP is accepted by some states in part or in whole, and more importantly, quality systems are now the accepted norm for laboratory management – a significant step forward from a few decades ago.

- TNI should look at reciprocal or mutual recognition with other ISO programs such as NACLA as well as the ILAC programs – partnerships with all groups implementing and accrediting to ISO/IEC 17025.
- Minimizing the number of site visits that labs must undergo saves resources, regardless of the costs of the actual accreditations or certifications. For this reason, reciprocal recognitions are important.
- We don't actually know the reason(s) that the other 37 states continue not to choose to join the NELAP program. What will be the best way to collect this information? Initially, all states were part of NELAC but many have dropped all contact as the program shifted away from EPA.
- Some states may not know that they can accept NELAP accreditation without being a NELAP AB, but the existing NELAP ABs are not wanting to carry the full load of accrediting all labs for all states.
- It would be helpful if all states implemented the standard, even if they are not NELAP ABs.
- It would be helpful if all non-NELAP certified laboratories were in LAMS also, instead of just the NELAP accredited labs as now.
- NELAP should consider a lower tier of accreditation for small municipal wastewater labs in rural states. At least one state has a low cost certification program with only 4 tests in it, for rural wastewater labs, that was recommended as a model for a 2-tier system.
- Thus far, NELAP has resisted multiple tiers, in the belief that the quality system is vital to lab data quality.

The discussion moved to identifying and possibly grouping stakeholders within the community. Additional stakeholders noted are the associations of the related water and environmental regulatory sectors – ECOS, APHL, WEF, AWWA, ACIL, ASDWA, ASTSWMO, the air regulators, and so forth. Several commenters noted that, within the different federal agencies and at least the Department of Energy, it will be important to identify personnel beyond the certification programs – the various data users, the people who interface with the laboratories and use the results. For the Department of Defense, Jordan Adelson is the appropriate contact.

Another category of stakeholders is the recognition authorities – ILAC, NACLA and NIST. Still more stakeholders, often ignored, are the tribal nations and territories, and engineering firms. We noted that EPA's Contract Laboratory Program is outside of the accreditation area by choice. Also, the EPA Regional Science and Technology Directors should be invited to participate, or at least kept informed.

After some discussion, all agreed that the non-NELAP state certification programs will be contacted by phone, individually. TNI staff will do these calls, hopefully during the month of March. Recommendations were made to have an initial letter of introduction followed by a scheduled call, perhaps with an informal script to ensure that certain information is collected from all interviewees. We talked about a survey asking how the state certification programs would prefer to respond, but prior surveys have shown that

responses seem to vary by who actually gets contacted (program versus certification body, perhaps.)

Regularly scheduled meetings of regional and national stakeholder groups might also provide venues for in-person discussions, but TNI should plan to hold webinars for larger groups. Participants generally agreed that the “what to ask” will vary by stakeholder group, but generally we would be seeking information on barriers to accreditation. A plan for multiple sessions of the same “live” webinar emerged, oriented towards laboratories but with data users and PT providers also invited. Timeframe would be to plan from now through May, to advertise in May, to hold the webinars in June, and then to assimilate the feedback in July for use at the conference session in early August.

For the actual session at conference, we discussed a structure of initial presentations on the purpose of the forum – to shape the future direction of the national accreditation program -- and the feedback received from interviews and webinars, then breakout sessions to address particular topics and create ideas for how to move forward, with a final (post-lunch) report-back session and some additional discussion about the ideas generated, while the synergism from the breakout sessions remains with the participants.

4. Next meeting

The next meeting will be Thursday, February 6 at 1 pm Eastern. Carol will set up the meeting and Lynn will prepare minutes.

Attachment 1

	Name	Stakeholder Group	Present/Absent
1.	Lara Phelps	EPA (Other)	Present
2.	Steve Arms	AB	Present
3.	Lynn Bradley	Other	Present
4.	Stephanie Drier	AB	Present
5.	Judy Duncan	Other	Absent
6.	Kenneth Jackson	Other	Absent
7.	Martina McGarvey	AB	Present
8.	Zonetta English	Lab	Present
9.	Paula Hogg	Lab	Present
10.	Marlene Moore	Other and NEFAP	Present
11.	Elizabeth Turner	Small Lab Advocate	Absent
12.	Gary Ward	AB	Absent
13.	Michael Wichman	Lab	Absent
14.	Janice Willey	Federal	Absent
	Associate Members		
	Kirstin Daigle	Lab	Absent
	Judy Morgan	Lab	Absent
	Aurora Shields	Lab	Absent
	JoAnn Boyd	Lab and FAC	Absent
	Keith Chapman	Other	Absent
	Karna Holquist	AB	Absent
	Sharon Mertens	TNI Board Chair	Present
	Staff		
	Jerry Parr	TNI ED	Present
	Carol Batterton	TNI PA	Absent

Attachment 2

Item	Status	Assigned to	Due Date
Small Lab Position Paper	Approved by TNI Board	Carol	

Prioritize future position papers	Agenda for next meeting	Committee	
PT position paper	Pending with Advocacy Comm.		
QS position paper	Pending		
FEM/ELAB response letter	Proposal for state/regional workshop approved by TNI Board. Will be discussed in Louisville	Carol, Jerry and Committee	Louisville meeting COMPLETED
Good practices handbook: Assign chapters for review/revision	Agenda for next meeting	Committee	
Follow up on Benefits Panel, webinars? Newsletter articles?	Newsletter article assigned	Committee	
Small Lab Handbook revisions	In progress	Carol	
Calls to non-NELAP certification programs	TBD	Carol/Jerry	End of March
Plan for webinars for revisit of national accreditation	TBD	Committee/Staff	End of April
Advertise webinars	TBD	Staff/EDS	Month of May
Hold multiple webinars for stakeholders	TBD	Staff/Committee/Board members	Month of June
Assimilate all feedback re national accreditation	TBD	Staff/Committee	Month of July
Hold forum in DC	TBD	Committee/Staff	Early August
Prepare summary of forum and breakout results	TBD	Staff	No later than end of September