

Summary of the Laboratory Accreditation Body Expert Committee Meeting Tuesday, April 15, 2014

1. Welcome and Roll Call

Chair Jeff Flowers opened the meeting and the roll was called. Those present are noted in Appendix A. Minutes from March 18, 2014, were approved.

2. Third Party Assessor Credentials

This meeting was devoted to discussion of Phase 3 of our January 8, 2013, proposal to the TNI Board of Directors. In approving Phases 1 and 2, assembling and posting information from third party or contract assessors to the TNI website, the Board had asked the committee to create a more detailed proposal for addressing the third phase before carrying out the fourth (implementation) phase. Phase 3 from that proposal is quoted here:

Develop a program in TNI that provides a vetted credentialed community of Third Party Assessors (individuals and/or organizations) found qualified to conduct on-site assessments in support of NELAP Accrediting Body activities. Phase III is the most challenging to produce. The product of this phase could be of several different forms and as of yet has not been determined. It could be in the form of an SOP, an additional TNI Program or some other TNI format.

This wide-ranging discussion lasted well over an hour with no consensus in sight. Jeff asked that committee members reflect further on the issue, and committed to continuing the discussion for our May 20 meeting. Points made during the discussion are bulleted below:

- Florida requires that the lab select its assessor from a list of state-approved individuals, with the lab being responsible for assuring (from credentials provided in that list) that the chosen assessor is qualified in all fields of accreditation (FoAs) that the lab maintains. The lab pays the assessor, but the list of qualified individuals is a key component of the process.
- At least one other AB plans to initiate a contract to use third party assessors where the AB collects from the lab and pays the assessor. The state's contract will be with one or more organizations rather than with an individual, and the organization will be responsible for selecting a qualified assessor for each lab. At least three other ABs use contract assessors in various ways. All ABs retain in-house staff to review contractor work products and recommendations.
- Uncertainty exists about whether our task is to verify credentials as presented, to establish that the verified credentials constitute "qualification" as a NELAP assessor, or to establish a credentialing program that may include the full scope of training.
- Can we establish a process to verify credentials as offered, and then if so, do we match those credentials against the existing standard or create a new standard for credentialing assessors? To phrase another way, are we creating a new program or simply examining evidence presented?
- It seems necessary to examine and evaluate both training and experience.
- In an earlier conversation between Jeff and Jerry Parr, the expectation seemed to be that TNI will eventually establish an "office" or staff function to receive and "vet" the credentials.
- Will any system that establishes or verifies third party or contractor credentials necessarily create a two-tier system of assessors? This seems likely, since state

assessors (as state employees) are held to each different state's assessor requirements and TNI would be unable to include the state assessors in its credentialing process.

- As envisioned presently, TNI will not be hiring third party assessors directly, but "checking" credentials only.
- TNI cannot warrant the quality of an assessment, but can only verify the credentials.
- We should limit ourselves to the requirements defined in the NELAP standard (TNI ELSS), not create a new standard for assessor credentialing.
- If we limit ourselves to the TNI standard requirements, does that have significant value to the NELAP community? Perhaps TNI should "approve" assessors in a manner that leaves no question about the assessors' competence and capabilities.
- When we say "credentialed," will that be the same as TNI-approved?
- Would it be a conflict of interest for TNI to verify credentials and at the same time certify competence for assessors? For now, the decision about assessor competency is completely the responsibility of the individual ABs.
- One suggestion was that "credentials" should be the minimum requirements for performing assessments plus the requirements for the various technical specialty areas, verified against the standard as it exists now. Anything further would require development of a new standard.
- At least one AB would like to have a non-AB or "external" body evaluating the competency of assessors.
- Confusion exists about whether TNI is only a standards development organization. Lynn stepped in to explain that one of TNI's programs is its consensus standards development program, but that other programs (NELAP, NEFAP, and PT) have other functions and are not part of the ANSI-certified consensus standards development program.
- Current models for certifying assessors are the ISO model and the EPA Drinking Water Certification program. Both of these include establishing credentials by training (and passing a test?) and then through supervised experience eventually making the assessor eligible for some form of assessment of the individual's competency.
- For a credentialing program (assessor certification), would we need to establish some new TNI program to "inspect" third party assessors "on the job?"
- Another option would be "shared resources" where TNI provides assessor training (or perhaps verification that training has been completed) and the individual ABs address the on-the-job training (accumulating experience) and competency assessment aspects.
- If we choose to credential individual assessors, should we retain the option (now on the website) to include organizations in the listing of available assessors?
- The world of laboratory assessors is relatively small, and most have been trained by non-governmental ABs or the Department of Defense. Is it really necessary to duplicate the credentialing systems already used by those groups?

Jeff sought to reach closure, seeking to formulate a short paragraph summarizing our plan for the Board. Some participants wanted to give the Board a set of options and let the Board choose, but others prefer to give a preferred option, if the committee chooses that route. Preliminary suggestion for draft options was as follows:

Option 1 – check and verify credentials as presented

Option 2 – provide credentials

2A – through training

2B – assess competency of individuals through a broad scope of review

Participants did NOT reach agreement on the set of options above, but they are recorded here to carry into the next meeting's discussion.

The meeting adjourned about 12:30 pm Eastern.

NOTE added during preparation of minutes -- This effort by the LAB Expert Committee is a result of the Board's assignment of one of the tasks from the AB Assistance Task Force's report to us. The language of that assignment follows:

Use of Third-Party Assessors (option 4 of the ABTF Report)

Findings

Third-party assessors could help facilitate problems with accreditation, especially for assessments of laboratories located in states that are not NELAP-recognized ABs. Third-party assessors are already used by one-third of the states who responded to a recent survey. Third-party assessors are most often used for radiochemistry in the drinking water program and states often rely upon EPA's contract for this service. Use of third-party assessors will not work in all states because of issues including union labor and laws about use of third-party contractors to replace state employees. Simplification of the contract process for third-party assessors would help some states. Qualification or credentialing of third-party assessors would assist on many levels and should include development of minimum qualifications, verification of training and annual performance reviews.

Next Steps to Implement This Option:

- Develop a process for TNI to qualify third-party assessors.
- Develop a model solicitation template for states to use in contracting.
- Develop a process for performance review of third-party assessors that TNI qualifies.
- Develop a service for a state to contract with TNI to obtain the use of third-party assessors.

3. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the LAB Expert Committee will be Tuesday, May 20, 2014, at 11 am Eastern. A reminder will be sent the week before.

Appendix A

LAB Expert Committee Roster

Name/Email	Term ends	Affiliation	Present?
Joseph Aiello joseph.aiello@dep.state.nj.us	12/31/2016	AB - NJ State Department of Environmental Protection	Yes
Nilda Cox nildacox@eurofinsus.com	12/31/2014	Lab –Eurofins=Eaton Analytical Inc.	No
Jeff Flowers, Chair jeff@flowerslabs.com	12/31/2014	Lab – Flowers Chemical Laboratories, Inc.	Yes
Myron Getman mrg05@health.state.ny.us	12/31/2014	AB – NY Department of Health	Yes
Chris Gunning cgunning@A2LA.org	12/31/2014	AB – A2LA	Yes
Virginia Hunsberger vhunsberge@pa.gov	12/31/2014	AB – PA Department of Environmental Protection	No
Carl Kircher, Vice Chair carl_kircher@doh.state.fl.us	12/31/2015	AB – Florida Department of Health	Yes
Rebecca Pierrot Rebecca.Pierrot@ALSGlobal.com	12/31/2015	Lab – ALS	Yes
Aurora Shields ashields@lawrenceks.org	12/31/2015	Lab – City of Lawrence, KS	Yes
Program Administrator: Lynn Bradley Lynn.Bradley@nelac-institute.org	N/A		Yes
Associate Members:			
Nirmela Arsem narsem@ebmud.com		East Bay Municipal Utility District (San Francisco Bay area)	Yes
Lucrina Jones Jones.Lucrina@epa.gov		EPA Region 9 Laboratory	No
Doug Leonard dleonard@L-A-B.com		AB – Laboratory Accreditation Bureau	No
Jeff Lowry JeffL@phenova.com		Other -- Phenova (PTP)	No
Judy Quigley JQuigley@dep.nyc.gov		Lab – NYC DEP	Yes
Guests: none			