

**Summary of the Laboratory Accreditation Body Expert Committee Meeting
Monday, August 4, 2014
Environmental Measurement Symposium, Washington, DC**

The LAB Expert Committee shared a half day session with the Information Technology Committee on the first morning of the 2014 Environmental Measurement Symposium. LAB used an hour of that session to present, and receive feedback on, its draft proposal for “TNI Recognition of Assessors for Contracting with NELAP ABs.” See Attachment 2 for the text of the draft. Attachment 1 lists those committee members who were present for the discussion.

Jeff outlined the history of this activity, from the TNI Board’s assignment of several options from the AB Task Force through the LAB’s initial proposal to the Board, and the current web page where third party assessors may display their qualifications and contact information. He then “walked through” the draft proposal, clearly indicating that this was a working draft and not a firm concept, and invited comments from the participants, both in the room and emailed later.

The following comments were made by participants, and are shown in chronological order:

- All requirements for assessors are in the standard, and it is the responsibility of the AB to ensure that those requirements are met. The evaluation process must ensure that ABs oversee the quality of assessors used.
- Third party assessors (TPAs) are well-vetted by ABs now, except for the 5 ABs that do not use TPAs.
- The concept of the proposal is to provide tools for screening candidates as well as a format for ABs to use in their Requests for Proposal. This will be a tool for states, a set of minimum qualifications, but would not allow states to abdicate their responsibility.
- The proposal as written exceeds the standard.
- Jeff noted that FL, TX, LA DEQ and NJ have expressed a desire to have a listing of qualified TPAs.
- The intent is good but may not be able to be carried out under the current standard. If TNI does the vetting, could a state AB just “accept” it? A non-governmental AB would need to re-verify all qualifications before contracting with an assessor, regardless of whether some other group had done so.
- Who would perform the credentialing? Would that individual or committee be required to meet the requirements of the relevant ISO standard for credentialing (ISO 17024 sets out criteria for an organization's certification program for individual persons.)
- This credentialing would cost TPAs roughly \$5,000-\$10,000 for a program that meets the 17024 standard, but possibly less if not certified to meet the standard. This price seems cost-prohibitive, since that amount would need to be incorporated into the fees that labs pay to use TPAs.
- Add a third option – if an AB has vetted the credentials of a TPA, then let TNI recognize that as acceptable (reciprocity.)
- It appears that the main objection is redundancy of vetting, as well as some fear that additional requirements will be imposed that are not in the TNI standard (Volume 2.)

- Make clear in the proposal that if a state recognizes a TPA organization, then the TNI program (if established) should recognize that TPA organization's credentialing program for its assessors.
- Uncertainty exists about whether this vetting will be a "toolbox" or a new program.
- A tool for use by state purchasing departments to write requirements for TPAs should be included in the proposal – "draft contract language" to specify the "desired credentials."
- From a state that presently does not use TPAs but can envision a possible need to do so, the language specifying "desired credentials" might be more useful and immediately beneficial to the NELAP ABs. NOTE: Multiple TPAs agreed with this idea.
- One commenter envisioned a 3-step process:
 - 1) establish a list of qualifications (per the standard or as presently used by state ABs is unclear);
 - 2) establish a training program to address the desired qualifications (succession planning as well as a service to ABs)
 - 3) vet the qualifications offered by TPAs (but not credentialing)
- Would having such a program (any of the alternatives) would cost the labs more?
- Such a program would provide more consistent implementation of the standard, where the goal is to have consistent assessments
- One AB noted that it only contracts with organizations/companies, not with individuals.
- However the program is built, it needs to include both organizations (assessor bodies) and individuals (TPAs), and acknowledge that the organizations must vet and oversee their own employees.

Jeff summarized the points made as follows, and committed the LAB committee to reworking the draft proposal.

- 1) Avoid redundancy
- 2) Recognize existing vetting processes (NGABs, states, companies that assess)
- 3) Develop a model set of credentials for AB use
- 4) Consider costs to the labs.

The next committee teleconference will be Tuesday, September 19, 2014, at 11 am Eastern, to take up this task. 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	No
Nilda Cox nildacox@eurofinsus.com	12/31/2014	Lab –Eurofins-Eaton Analytical Inc.	Yes
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	No
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
Lucrina Jones Jones.Lucrina@epa.gov	12/31/2016	Other -- EPA Region 9 Laboratory	Yes
Carl Kircher, Vice Chair carl_kircher@doh.state.fl.us	12/31/2015	AB – Florida Department of Health	No
Rebecca Pierrot Rebecca.Pierrot@ALSGlobal.com	12/31/2015	Lab – ALS	No
Aurora Shields ashields@lawrenceks.org	12/31/2015	Lab – City of Lawrence, KS	No
Program Administrator: Lynn Bradley Lynn.Bradley@nelac-institute.org	N/A		Yes
Associate Members:			
Nirmela Arsem narsem@ebmud.com		Other – East Bay Municipal Utility District (San Francisco Bay area)	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	No
Guests: none			

TNI Recognition of Assessors for Contracting with NELAP ABs

The TNI Board charged the LAB Expert Committee with implementing Option 4 of the Final Report of the AB Assistance Task Force (July 2011.) LAB offered a proposal to the TNI Board on January 8, 2013, for how to proceed. The Board approved the initial listing of individuals and organizations available to work as contract or third party assessors (TPAs) and LAB was asked to prepare a more detailed proposal for a program to provide a vetted credentialed community of TPAs that are qualified to conduct assessments in support of NELAP Accreditation Bodies.

This document is a suggested outline for that more detailed proposal, with steps in roughly chronological order.

1. Establish a staff position and committee to support this activity.
2. Determine how to verify the submitted credentials of existing listees, and do so.
3. Establish a matrix of suitable training and experience for assessors in the areas noted in V2M1 §6.2-6.3 and V2M3 §4 of the TNI Environmental Laboratory Sector Standard (ELSS).
 - a) Use collective knowledge of the LAB as incorporated into the templates on the TPA website plus assessor qualifications as specified in V2M3 §4.2.3-4.2.5
 - b) Survey NELAP ABs and NGABs briefly to determine what training and experience are required and offered in current contracts and for in-house assessors (per V2 ELSS) as well as how on-going monitoring of assessors is conducted. If actual written tests are used, obtain example tests, if possible, for various scopes per V2M3 §4.2.6. At minimum, the scopes would be the technical disciplines listed in the “note” of V2M3 §4.2.4
 - c) Merge that information into a preliminary checklist or matrix for assessor qualifications for lead assessor, assessor and as required expertise for the various scopes
4. Determine whether and how well the vetted credentials of existing TPAs match that matrix.
5. Vet that matrix with the existing NELAP ABs, understanding that it would initially apply ONLY to TPAs. Adapt as warranted within the language of V2.
6. Agree on appropriate personal attributes and incorporate those into a standardized interview which all TPAs would undergo (videoconference if not in person.) (*From ISO 19011 – ethical, open-minded, diplomatic, observant, perceptive, versatile, tenacious, decisive and self-reliant.*) Interview to include verbal check on credentials presented, also.
7. Determine form of recognition to be awarded and length of time it will be valid (3 years?) Recommend certificate with listing of scopes for which the individual assessor is qualified. Can only individual assessors be recognized and not organizations?
8. Establish acceptable AB/TNI evaluation techniques and tools for on-going monitoring of performance and competence of TPAs, plus settle on acceptable refresher training. Feedback mechanism to incorporate peer comments and laboratory feedback as well as the observation of assessment and continuing education.
9. Establish feedback mechanism for peers and laboratories.

10. Succession planning: Investigate necessity and practicality of identifying suitable commercial courses or establishing TNI training for future assessors, whether online or in person, for both basis assessor training as well as in the technical disciplines. **PERFORM THIS STEP CONCURRENTLY WITH STEPS 4-9.**