

F301 - APPLICATION FOR ACCREDITATION: ISO/IEC 17020 INSPECTION BODIES - OVERVIEW

The American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA) Inspection Body Accreditation Program has been revised to meet the international standard ISO/IEC 17020:1998 “General criteria for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection.” (The previous program was based on ISO/IEC Guide 39; 1988, General requirements for the acceptance of inspection bodies.”) This standard not only requires the inspection body to have a quality system and manual but also requires that the inspection body be found competent to perform specific inspections or types of inspections.

Accreditation is based on the assessment of **the** performance of an inspection body including procedures, staff competence and reporting. It is available to all inspection bodies including in-house services. A2LA welcomes applications for the accreditation of all types of inspection work. The following are examples of work for which accreditation may be sought:

- Agricultural products
- Bulk cargoes (e.g. coal, iron ore, petroleum)
- Cargoes in containers and packages
- Cast products
- Cranes
- Electrical equipment
- **Gaming equipment**
- Foods
- Forged products
- Mechanical equipment
- Pipelines
- Protective coatings
- Rolled products
- Structures (e.g. concrete, steel, timber)
- Textiles
- Welding
- Other

The A2LA Accreditation Process (summary)

1. The applicant inspection body obtains an official copy of ISO/IEC 17020.
2. A2LA provides the inspection body with an electronic or hard copy version of the ISO/IEC 17020 Assessor Checklist (C301) so the inspection body can perform a self-assessment to verify compliance with all requirements. A2LA’s official application of **the Standard** is consistent with the current version of *IAF/ILAC-A4 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC 17020*. (*IAF/ILAC-A4 Guidance on the Application of ISO/IEC 17020* may be obtained free of charge in the documents section of the ILAC web site WWW.ILAC.ORG or by contacting A2LA headquarters).
3. The applicant inspection body completes and returns this full application for accreditation with payment and all required supporting documentation outlined on Pages 4 and 9.
4. A2LA reviews the application documents and, with inspection body concurrence, an appropriate assessor(s) is assigned.

5. The assessor contacts the inspection body to discuss the scheduling of the on-site assessment and request any additional quality documentation that may be needed. Once documentation is reviewed for completeness, the assessor can schedule the assessment.
6. The assessment or the pre-assessment is performed and includes: entry briefing; review of quality documentation; interviews with technicians; sample handling / demonstrations of inspections; examination of equipment and calibration records; written report of assessor's findings; and exit briefing.
7. The inspection body responds to any deficiencies with a written corrective action response.
8. The corrective action is reviewed by the A2LA staff and, once complete, is forwarded to the Accreditation Council for a vote.
9. Accreditation is granted when affirmative votes are received, all concerns are resolved, and all fees are paid in full.

NOTE: All documentation must be provided in English and the assessment conducted in English. An appropriate English translation of pertinent documentation must be provided as well as a translator, if needed, to facilitate the on-site assessment.

POLICIES

Pre-assessment: A2LA assessors are permitted to conduct pre-assessments. There are two situations when a pre-assessment may be conducted:

1. When the lead assessor finds major gaps in the inspection body quality manual, or actually begins the assessment and finds a large number of problems. In this case, the assessor identifies them and suggests to the inspection body that a full assessment should wait until the problems have been addressed. This first identification of the problems would be considered a pre-assessment; or
2. When the inspection body requests a pre-assessment to better prepare for the final assessment. In this case, the inspection body has applied, but is unsure of its documentation or system and wants someone to perform a pre-assessment to identify problems. The full assessment follows later.

To implement the pre-assessment program, the inspection body must first apply for accreditation, paying the appropriate fees and assessor deposit. A lead assessor, with the inspection body's concurrence, is assigned. If, during the preliminary discussions between the inspection body and assessor, the inspection body concludes that it is in its interest to have a pre-assessment, it informs the assessor. The assessor notifies A2LA that the inspection body wants a pre-assessment. The daily rate of the pre-assessment is the same as the regular assessment rate, and can be deducted from any assessor deposits held on account at A2LA. Please note, however, that careful attention to the requirements should preclude the need for a pre-assessment.

Delayed Assessment Policy: If an inspection body fails to undergo its full assessment within one year from receipt of the application at A2LA headquarters, the inspection body is prompted by A2LA to take action. If no action is taken within thirty (30) days of that reminder, the inspection body is required to begin the application process again and pay the new inspection body accreditation fees in effect at that time. Any fees paid with the initial application are refunded according to the A2LA Refund Policy (Page 7).

Confidentiality: A2LA is responsible for seeing that confidentiality is maintained by its employees and assessors concerning all confidential information with which they become acquainted as a result of their contacts with inspection bodies. A2LA agrees to hold all disclosed confidential or proprietary information or trade secrets in trust and confidence. The information shall be used only for assessment purposes, and shall not be used for any other purpose, nor shall it be disclosed to any third party without written consent of the applicant inspection body.

APPLICATION FOR INSPECTION BODY ACCREDITATION

A2LA Policies With Respect to Branch Systems

If you are applying as a multi-facility inspection body system, a separate application must be completed for each inspection body location. Inspection bodies applying as a branch inspection body receive a fee discount. See the Inspection body Accreditation Fees page 8 for appropriate computation of fees.

A2LA currently offers a \$200.00 discount on annual fees for all inspection bodies applying as a 'branch' of another inspection body that is either applying or enrolled in our program or that is currently accredited. The conditions for applying as a branch of another inspection body are as follows:

- All application, renewal of accreditation and annual review processes must be coordinated through one central person, the Corporate Representative;
- All fee payments and invoices must be coordinated through the Corporate Representative;
- All inspection bodies within a single branch system must have the same anniversary date;
- All inspection bodies within a single branch system are given related certificate numbers (e.g., 301.01, 301.02, 301.03, etc.).

This central coordination and arrangement within our database allows for greater efficiency in handling various processes and so a discount on fees is offered to all branch inspection bodies.

Please understand, however, that for large branch systems, this central coordination can become cumbersome and all branch inspection bodies within the system are often unable to complete the various processes (renewals and annual reviews) by the same anniversary date or deadline.

Unfortunately, there are only two solutions to these potential timing and coordination difficulties:

- Choosing not to apply as a branch system and, instead, applying as independent facilities. Each inspection body would be given a separate anniversary date as well as independent certificate numbers. In addition, all annual review and renewal paperwork and invoices would be sent to the individual inspection body contacts instead of a corporate representative. However, the branch discount would no longer apply and each inspection body would be responsible for the initial application fee and the full annual fee for each year of accreditation.
- Breaking up a larger branch system into two or more smaller branch systems (for example, consisting of five or fewer inspection bodies). Each of the smaller systems must have its own corporate representative and all items listed above would still be coordinated through this individual. In addition, all inspection bodies within each of the smaller branch systems would be assigned the same anniversary date and they would be given related certificate numbers.

Please consider these issues carefully as you decide whether or not to apply as a branch inspection body system. If you have any questions concerning this arrangement, please contact us at 301 644 3248.