



ARAC MLAG Policy and Procedure for Guiding Remote Peer Evaluations

CLASSIFICATION

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AVAILABILITY

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I. Foreword:

This document has been issued in response to IAF/ILAC-A1/A2: Addendum 01/2021 Requirements.

This document was developed to support keeping the necessary level of confidence in the ARAC peer-evaluation system during the COVID-19 pandemic but also for other potentially similar unforeseen circumstances in the future.

This document provides requirements and guidance for ARAC peer evaluators on how to plan, manage, and facilitate remote evaluations using ICT as a complement or substitute to traditional evaluation techniques.

II. Definitions:

Remote peer-evaluation: peer evaluation of an accreditation body (AB) using information and communications technology (ICT) software (programs, apps).

Information and Communication Technology: Use of electronic technology to store, retrieve, transmit, or receive information electronically in a digital form. ICT refers to all communication technologies, including the internet, networks, cell phones, computers/laptops, robots, drones, software, middleware, video-conferencing, and other media applications and services (e.g. personal computers, digital television, email, or robots) in addition to cloud storage programs.

III. General Policy:

1. Whenever there is a possibility to do so, on-site evaluations will be preferred over remote evaluations.
2. Remote evaluations shall follow as close as possible the usual peer-evaluation process established in ARAC MD 002.
3. The rationale for remote evaluations shall be presented by the Team Leader and approved by the MLAG Chair
4. For re-evaluations and Level 3 scope extensions, peer evaluations may be performed as fully remote exercises.
5. For mature ABs, witnessing assessments should be reduced as extensively as possible. Unless there are facts from the previous peer-evaluations (or from our relevant sources of information as complaints) directing the evaluators to a different approach.
6. In case of initial evaluations; remote evaluations may be used in combination with onsite witnessing of AB assessments for one scope at least.

IV. Procedure:

Identifying risks to evaluation

7. The request of remote peer evaluations may be initiated by the AB or the TL, given that there are serious causes preventing the onsite evaluation, such as
 - Travel restrictions,



- Security and health issues,
 - planned on site activity(ies) cannot be completed and extending the on-site evaluation is not a practical option,
 - need for extended or increased observation/ sampling.
8. Based on mutual agreement of the TL and AB and the feasibility of conducting a remote evaluation, the MLAG Chair will approve the decision.
 9. ARAC evaluators shall identify and document the risks that may impact evaluation effectiveness for each use of ICT. (Annex 1)
 10. When using ICT, evaluators and other personnel involved (e.g. technical experts) should have the competency and ability to understand and utilize the ICT employed in order to achieve the desired results of the evaluation. The evaluator should be aware of the risks involved in the use of the ICT and the impacts that they may have on the validity and objectivity of the information gathered.
 11. Evaluators will be asked in advance to declare that they are able to properly use the relevant ICT technologies involved. Any unexpected difficulty revealed during the test connections will be reported by the Team Leader to the Secretariat. If needed the Secretariat will involve the MLA Group in order to solve those difficulties.
 12. The security and confidentiality of electronic or electronically transmitted information are particularly important when using ICT for evaluation purposes. This includes data in storage, data in transit, and data in use taking into consideration that responsibility of securing the connection and the electronic transmission besides the stored data and its transfer are affiliated to AB.

Planning and Scheduling:

1. If ICT is used for evaluation purposes, it often contributes to the total evaluation time, no. of meetings required to implement the evaluation according to witnessing international organizations / witnessed CABs / no. of scopes under evaluation / ..etc, as additional planning may be necessary which may impact evaluation duration.
2. Before initiating remote evaluation techniques, it is important to specify:
 - a) the agenda and sequence of activities for the remote evaluation;
 - b) the scope of accreditation activities to be subject to the remote evaluation techniques, including the list of accreditation activities, areas and schemes;
 - c) clear expectations for pre-defined documented information that is to be made available during the remote evaluation; (e.g. records etc.);
 - d) the availability of necessary AB personnel, conformity assessment body personnel and interpreters (if relevant);
 - e) the agreed timing of the remote evaluation activities taking into account the different time zones of all parties involved in the remote evaluation activity; and

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- f) the timeframe for conducting the remote evaluation (e.g. 4 hours a day for 3 consecutive days).
 - g) a plan on how to review information that cannot be shared remotely (e.g. due to confidentiality or access issues). The evaluator should define or express how this will be dealt with (e.g. follow-up evaluation, issuance of a nonconformance, etc.).
3. The AB shall provide to the ARAC evaluator prior to the conducting of remote evaluation:
- a) all the normal information required for the evaluation in accordance with ARAC MD 002;
 - b) contact details of designated individual(s) that will facilitate, manage, and coordinate the arrangements of the remote evaluation on behalf of the AB, including any translators where required;
 - c) applicable files, projects, reports, etc.;
 - d) summary of key changes (i.e. personnel, organization, equipment, accredited methods) in the AB since last on-site evaluation; and
 - e) any other evidence deemed essential and necessary.
4. Planning shall include selection and confirmation of the specific ICT technologies and testing ICT compatibility between the evaluator(s) and the AB before the evaluation by performing a trial run;
5. If demonstration of conformity with a requirement is not able to be reviewed, or a complete determination not be able to be made, this failure or limitation shall be recorded as a nonconformity in the evaluation report.
6. Preplanning and preparation for each area to be witnessed should be performed.

Witnessing

1. Access to high-speed internet and/or cell signals is critical to assure clear and effective audio and video. An alternative video/audio and internet connection should be readily available to be used in case of any interruption or cut of the internet signal.
2. Preplanning and testing of the chosen ICT should be performed for each witnessing activity at the location of witnessing. Dead spots or weak connectivity should be identified.
3. Video presentation skills of the AB during witnessing are critical. This should be discussed in the planning phase. The AB may need to set up a fixed camera location or consider a dedicated personnel to take the video and photos. AB video/camera skills often improve over time and may result in increased evaluation effectiveness and efficiency.
4. Portability, connectivity, and battery life of the video device should be considered.



5. Live video streaming should be preferred. This provides real-time and interactive evaluation and reduces risks to integrity that may be associated with pre-recorded video.
6. Pre-recorded AB video demonstration may be considered. The evaluator should consider any risks associated with the quality, integrity of a pre-recorded video and implement measures to mitigate this risk associated to the video/audio recording materials, and confirm how pre-recorded material is to be stored or securely deleted once the evaluation activities are completed.
7. Evaluators should be able to direct the video imaging of the witnessed activity by the AB to ensure the effectiveness of the demonstration. Evaluator proficiency to perform this activity should be considered.

Reporting requirements

The evaluation report should describe how the remote activities were met in accordance with this document and IAF MD 4



Annex (1)

Risk Source	scope/sub-scope	Grade (1-4)*	mitigation strategy
Team cannot choose the visualization			
Remote connection instable or slow			
One or more team members cannot act autonomously			
Lack of familiarity with the specific technology			
Risks to successfully interview persons			
Risks of proper access to documents and records			
Risks to proper witness assessments			
Confidentiality			
other			

* 1: Risk negligible; 2: Risk under proper control; 3: Risk not controlled; 4: Significant risk