

*International Accreditation Forum,
Inc. (IAF)*



IAF MLA Document

**Policies and Procedures for a
Multilateral Recognition Arrangement
on the Level of Accreditation Bodies
and on the Level of
Regional Groups**

Issue 4

(IAF ML 4:2005)

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited bodies are competent to carry out the work they undertake. Accreditation bodies which are members of the International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) are required to operate at the highest standard and to require the bodies they accredit to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF Guidance to the application of those standards.

Accreditations granted by accreditation body members of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA), based on regular surveillance to assure the equivalence of their accreditation programs, allows companies with an accredited conformity assessment certificate in one part of the world to have that certificate recognised everywhere else in the world.

Therefore certificates in the fields of management systems, products, services, personnel and other similar programs of conformity assessment issued by bodies accredited by members of the IAF MLA are relied upon in international trade.

Policies and Procedures for a MLA on the Level of Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups

PREAMBLE:

The International Accreditation Forum (IAF) is comprised of Accreditation Body Members that have an acceptance within an economy, region or internationally and Association Members representing the interests within an economy, region or internationally of entities that engage in, are subject to, make use of, accept or rely on, programs accredited by Accreditation Body Members of IAF, and which support the objectives of IAF. To serve its constituency, IAF aims to establish a worldwide multilateral recognition arrangement (MLA), based on the demonstrated equivalence of member accreditation bodies' operations. The MLA helps to demonstrate equivalency in the competence of certification/registration bodies accredited by signatories to this MLA. As a result, users of the certificates issued by these certification/registration bodies can have greater confidence in their acceptance.

CONTENTS

Part 0	Introduction	5
Part 1	Peer Evaluation Procedures of a Regional Group and a Single Accreditation Body	6
Part 2	Additional Requirements to IAF/ILAC A1, A2 and A3	7
Part 3	Appeals	10
Part 4	Model for the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) in the Field of (Area of Activity)	12
Annex 1	IAF Declaration of Confidentiality	14

Issue No: 4

Prepared by: IAF MLA Committee

Date: September.2005

Approved by IAF Members

Date: November 2005

Issue Date: 15 December 2005

Application Date: 1 January 2006

Name for Enquiries: John Owen, Corporate Secretary IAF

Contact: Phone: +612 9481 7343; FAX: +612 9481 7343

Email: secretary@iaf.nu

Policies and Procedures for a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) on the Level of Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups

Part 0 Introduction

0.1. Scope

0.1.1. This document defines the policies and procedures that the International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) will use to establish, maintain and extend a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) among both Accreditation Body (AB) Members and Regional Accreditation Groups which operate a Regional MLA, called here-in-after Regional MLA's. It also provides a model form for signature by individual accreditation bodies and regional bodies when they join the MLA.

0.2. Confidentiality

0.2.1. All oral and written information received relating to pre-evaluations, evaluations, re-evaluations, appeals and complaints shall be treated confidentially by all parties and persons concerned. This includes information relating to applicants and/or members of the MLA Group. All members and observers of the evaluation teams; all members, observers and secretariat personnel of the MLA MC and the Appeals Panel, other persons having access to confidential information and all applicants and members of the MLA Group which request access to any report on pre-evaluation, evaluation and re-evaluation of other applicants and members must have signed a declaration of confidentiality before being given access. (see Annex 1).

0.2.2. Unless otherwise agreed the Team Leader (TL) and Team Members (TM) shall destroy all documents they have received, when the final decision has been made by the MLA Group.

Part 1 Peer Evaluation Procedures of a Regional Group and a Single Accreditation Body

1.0 Introduction

1.0.1. The Peer Evaluation Procedures of a Regional Group and a Single Accreditation Body are described in the following documents:

- A1 ILAC/IAF Multilateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements) – Requirements for Evaluation of a Regional Arrangement Group.
- A2 ILAC/IAF Multilateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements) – Requirements for Evaluation of a Single Accreditation Body
- A3 ILAC/IAF Multilateral Mutual Recognition Arrangements (Arrangements) – Key Performance Indicators - A Tool for the Evaluation Process

These documents outline the operation of the IAF MLA programs and include the requirements to be met by a Regional Group/Single AB to be a member of the IAF MLA.

1.0.2. These documents contain:

- the peer evaluation procedures;
- application to join the MLA;
- appointment, composition of and requirements for the qualification of peer evaluation team leaders (TL) and team members (TM);
- a typical evaluation program;
- evaluation reporting;
- decision making regarding evaluation, and
- monitoring and re-evaluation.

Part 2 Additional Requirements to IAF/ILAC A1, A2 AND A3

2.1. Evaluation Personnel

2.1.1. Each year the IAF MLA Management Committee (MLA MC) shall review the performance of each TM. It shall seek reports on the performance of each TM from the relevant TL(s), provide an opportunity to the TM to respond to the observations and shall remove from the list of TMs those whose performance is deemed not satisfactory by a majority of the MLA MC members. The resulting list of TMs shall be provided to the MLA Group.

2.1.2. Each year the MLA MC shall review the performance of all TLs based on feedback from the evaluated ABs/Regional Groups, provide an opportunity to the TL to respond to the observations and shall remove any TLs from the list whose performance is deemed unsatisfactory. The resulting list of TLs shall be provided to the MLA Group.

2.1.3. Each year the MLA MC shall review the performance of each TM who has served on two or more evaluation teams. It shall seek reports on the performance of each of these TMs from the relevant TL(s), and shall recommend to the MLA Group that those whose performance is regarded as satisfactory should be added to the list of TLs.

2.1.4. The TL shall prepare a written report on the performance (hereinafter called a performance report) of each TM and trainee TM and submit the report(s) to the MLA MC at the time the evaluation report is submitted.

2.2. The Evaluation Procedure

2.2.1. The MLA MC shall give the evaluation team its mandate (including any application for industry specific programs that fall under the MLA) with a copy sent to the applicant.

2.2.2. The applicant shall ensure that:

- (i) when requested, it provides the evaluation team with all the required information and documentation, as stated in IAF/ILAC A1 or A2;
- (ii) it has carried out all the actions required by the evaluation team before requesting further evaluation.

Note: If these conditions are not satisfied the accreditation bodies providing TMs for the evaluation reserve the right to seek payment from the applicant for any extra time they may use over and above what is normally required using the procedures in this document. Arrangement to make such payment shall be made before any evaluation commences.

2.2.3. Where requested, the team shall be provided with the opportunity of attending a meeting of the senior management concerned with decisions on accreditation. If this is not practical, the applicant's senior management shall describe the system.

2.2.4. If the applicant has applied for accreditation activities for an industry specific program, then the requirements set by that industry group for accreditation bodies shall also be considered.

2.3. Maintenance, Suspension and Withdrawal of MLA Group Membership

2.3.1. If the MLA MC can not accept the corrective action taken by a MLA Group member with regard to the significant changes notified by the MLA Group member or major nonconformities which have been found or substantiated information from interested parties, the MLA MC shall report the situation to the MLA Group with recommendation and ask the MLA Group to take appropriate action. This action can be suspension for a maximum period of 6 months or withdrawal from the MLA Group.

2.3.2. Maintenance, suspension or withdrawal of a MLA Group member shall be decided by the MLA Group after receipt of the recommendation by the MLA MC in accordance with the same procedures used for acceptance of a MLA Group member. Any suspension or withdrawal decided by the MLA Group shall be accompanied by an appropriate explanation stating the reason for suspension or withdrawal.

2.3.3. If, within 30 days of receiving notification of the decision for suspension or withdrawal, the MLA Group member lodges an appeal, the suspension or withdrawal shall be held in abeyance until the appeal process is completed. Any complaint or appeal shall be filed with the IAF Secretary in accordance with IAF PR 1:2004 "Procedure for the Investigation and Resolution of Complaints".

2.3.4. Notwithstanding any other clause in this document, an accreditation body member shall not remain a member of the MLA Group if it is, for any reason, suspended or withdrawn from the MoU Group. The IAF Secretary shall immediately notify the MLA MC when any member of the MLA is suspended or withdrawn from the MoU for any reason, and the MLA MC shall immediately suspend or withdraw the membership of the body in the MLA.

2.3.5. Membership in the IAF MLA Group shall be terminated if an accreditation body's membership was based on membership in a Regional MLA group and the accreditation body ceases to be a member of the Regional MLA, or if the IAF MLA Group ceases to be satisfied that the operation of the Regional MLA is consistent with its requirements.

2.4. Procedure for Acceptance into the IAF MLA Group of a Member of a Regional MLA

2.4.1. When a member of a Regional MLA which has already been accepted as an IAF MLA signatory wishes to join the IAF MLA Group, the Chairman of the Regional Group shall notify the IAF Chairman and Secretary by letter of the name and the contact details of the applicant and the date of its acceptance into the Regional MLA.

2.4.2. Where the application is from an Accreditation Body which is a Member of IAF, upon receipt of the notification, the IAF Secretary shall review the IAF membership status of the applicant. Provided that the applicant:

- is a signatory to the IAF MoU as an Accreditation Body Member;
- has paid all membership fee dues; and
- is a signatory to a Regional MLA which is itself a signatory to the IAF MLA,

the IAF Secretary shall advise the IAF Chairman of the applicant's status, and the IAF Chairman shall approve, on behalf of the IAF MLA Group, admission of the applicant as a member of the IAF MLA Group.

2.4.3. Where the application is from an Accreditation Body which is not a Member of IAF, upon receipt of the notification, the IAF Secretary shall first request the body to apply for IAF membership as an Accreditation Body Member. The IAF Secretary shall forward to the applicant a copy of the Application for Membership in the IAF MoU, and ask the applicant to complete and return the application.

Once the applicant has submitted the Application for Membership in the IAF MoU, the IAF Secretary shall report to the Board which shall make a recommendation to the Members and arrange a vote of Members, in accordance with Section 3.01. of the IAF Bylaws. After approval by the Members an invitation to join IAF shall be extended to the applicant.

2.4.4. Following the admission of the applicant as an Accreditation Body Member and provided that the applicant has paid all membership fee dues, the IAF Secretary shall

advise the IAF Chairman that the applicant has met both requirements, and the IAF Chairman shall approve admission of the applicant as a member of the IAF MLA Group.

2.4.5. The IAF Chairman shall advise the IAF Members and the IAF MLA Group of the admission of the applicant to the IAF MLA.

2.5 Notification of Change

2.5.1. Each MLA Group member shall report any significant changes in its status and/or its operating practices (e.g. as listed below) without delay to all MLA Group members through the MLA MC.

- Legal status;
- Senior accreditation program personnel;
- Contact person or liaison officer for the MLA;
- Operational accreditation program;
- Accreditation criteria and procedures, related to the MLA;
- Office address (and postal address, if different), including head office and any offices;
- Relationship with government;
- Other changes that significantly affect the competence or credibility of the accreditation process.

2.5.2 The Secretariat of the Regional MLA shall notify the IAF Secretary as soon as possible of any significant changes that have occurred or will occur in its status. The Secretariat of the Regional MLA shall report to the IAF Secretary on new members and/or withdrawal of existing members of its Regional MLA and provide information on new members as required by the IAF Secretary. The Secretariat of the Regional MLA shall inform the IAF MLA MC about the results of evaluations and re-evaluations including providing access to the evaluation reports on request, as well as the plan for future evaluations within this Regional MLA.

Part 3 Appeals

3.0. Introduction

3.0.1. This Part describes the procedures for appeals, to ensure that the matters related to the MLA are settled objectively and impartially.

3.1. Handling of Appeals

3.1.1. When an applicant to or a Member of the MLA Group does not agree with the decision of the MLA Group it may appeal in writing to the IAF Secretary.

3.1.2. After authentication of the appeal, the IAF Secretary shall inform the IAF Chairman, who will, in conjunction with the Chairman of the IAF MLA MC, appoint two persons (as the Appeals Panel) who are not members of the MLA MC to investigate the appeal.

3.1.3. No member of the Appeals Panel shall have been involved in the peer evaluation team that evaluated the appellant (the Accreditation Body), or have a direct interest in the subject of the appeal, in any form. The IAF Chairman shall ensure that the composition of the Appeals Panel satisfies the requirements of objectivity and impartiality and has no conflict of interest.

3.1.4. The appellant has the right to object to the appointment of any member of the Appeals Panel for valid reason(s). The IAF Chairman, in conjunction with the MLA MC, shall make a decision on any objection by the appellant to an appointment. That decision shall be final.

3.2. Recommendation and Decision

3.2.1. The Appeals Panel shall decide upon its recommendation on the appeal and inform the IAF Chairman, the MLA MC and the appellant, in writing, of the recommendation not later than ten (10) days after the date of decision.

3.2.2. The MLA MC shall forward the recommendation to the MLA Group for a decision.

3.2.3. Based on this recommendation, the MLA Group will make a decision on the appeal.

3.2.4. The decision by the MLA Group may be appealed in accordance with IAF procedures.

Part 4 Model for the Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) in the Field of (Area of Activity)

1. This Arrangement is based on the results of evaluations carried out in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures of the International Accreditation Forum; Inc. (IAF).

2. The parties to this Arrangement are the accreditation bodies or the Regional MLA's on whose behalf the Arrangement has been signed (the "participating bodies", collectively the "MLA Group").

3. Each participating body shall agree to abide by the terms and conditions of the MLA. Each participating body shall:

(i) maintain conformance with ISO/IEC 17011 and related IAF guidance;

(ii) ensure that all accredited bodies conform with the appropriate ISO/IEC standard and related IAF guidance.

4. Each participating body shall:

(i) recognize the operation of the other systems - within the programs as defined in this Arrangement - as equivalent to its own;

(ii) recommend and promote the acceptance of the certificates of conformity within the recognized scopes from the bodies accredited by the participating bodies as being on an equal basis with those of its own accredited bodies.

5. Each participating body shall:

(i) investigate all complaints initiated by a participating body resulting from certificates of conformity issued by the bodies it has accredited within its accreditation program;

(ii) notify all other participating bodies as soon as possible of any significant changes that have occurred or will occur in its status, in the operational practices of its system or in its accreditation programs;

(iii) contribute as appropriate to the work of the MLA Group;

(iv) participate as appropriate in the meetings of the working group(s) and/or committee(s) of IAF;

(v) provide evaluators for the evaluation and re-evaluation to the accreditation programs of the MLA Group members and applicants;

(vi) co-operate with other accreditation bodies so that the MLA may be extended;

(vii) use all information in a confidential and professional manner.

6. If, in accordance with the relevant rules and procedures, it is agreed that an additional accreditation body or Regional MLA may participate in the MLA, a MLA Signature Sheet shall be signed by the new accreditation body or Regional MLA and duly authorized by the IAF Chairman. The new signatory shall be added to the summary list of MLA signatories (available from the IAF website at www.iaf.nu). The same procedure shall be followed if it is agreed that a participant to the Arrangement may extend its accreditation programs.

7. If a participating body wishes to withdraw from this Arrangement or withdraw parts of its accreditation program for any reason whatsoever, that body shall notify the other participating bodies to this Arrangement in writing through the MLA MC not later than three months in advance of withdrawing. Upon withdrawal of a body or a change in the extent of its accreditation programs, that body's MLA Signature Sheet shall be cancelled, a new MLA Signature Sheet shall be signed (if appropriate) and the summary list of signatories shall be revised accordingly.

8. Any amendment of the text of this Multilateral Recognition Arrangement shall be approved by the IAF plenary meeting.

9. This Arrangement consists of ten (10) Clauses plus the IAF website summary listing of each participating body, along with the extent of its accreditation programs.

10. This Arrangement has come into force on: ___DD.MM.YYYY_____

ANNEX 1 – IAF DECLARATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I declare that I will not reveal information gained through peer evaluation, peer evaluation reports, or settlement of appeals and complaints to anyone who has not the right of access to such information and who has not signed an IAF Declaration of Confidentiality.

Date:

Name:

Signature:

(This declaration shall be signed by each member and observer of an IAF peer evaluation team, each member, observer and secretariat personnel of the MLA MC and the Appeals Panel, and any applicant or member of the IAF MLA Group who requests to see peer evaluation reports of other applicants and members)

End of Policies and Procedures for a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) on the Level of Accreditation Bodies and on the Level of Regional Groups

Further Information

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretary.

For contact details of members of IAF see - IAF Web Site - <<http://www.iaf.nu>>

Secretary -

John Owen,

IAF Corporate Secretary,

Telephone +612 9481 7343

Facsimile +612 9481 7343

email <secretary@iaf.nu>