



IAF MLA Document

Guidance for the Exchange of Documentation among MLA Signatories for the Assessment of Conformity Assessment Bodies

Issue 3, Version 3

(IAF ML 1:2024)

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) facilitates trade and supports industry and regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF members can be accepted globally.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. ABs that are members of IAF and their accredited CABs are required to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF mandatory documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PL 3 - Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA. The scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in the IAF MLA Status document.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- The main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandated standards e.g. ISO/IEC 17065. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.
- The sub scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO 22003-1. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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Prepared by: IAF MLA Committee

Approved by: IAF Members

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Name for Enquiries: Victor Gandy

IAF Corporate Secretary

Contact: Phone: +1 (571) 569-1242

Email: secretary@iaf.nu

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Guidance for the Exchange of Documentation among MLA Signatories for the Assessment of Conformity Assessment Bodies

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope

1.1.1. This document provides guidance for the exchange of documentation among IAF MLA signatories, where such documentation issued by the originating accreditation body is requested for consideration as part of assessment activities relating to the granting, maintaining, extending, reducing, suspending, and withdrawing of accreditation by the receiving accreditation body. The publication of this document by IAF does not make it mandatory for IAF member accreditation bodies to exchange documents. It sets out guidelines for such an exchange when it is appropriate to do so.

Note: This document may also be used by accreditation bodies not IAF MLA signatories when receiving documentation from IAF MLA signatories.

1.2. Purpose

1.2.1. This guidance aims to recommend practices for requesting and sharing documentation among IAF MLA signatories, enhancing cooperation between them, enabling the receiving AB to gather appropriate and relevant information for their specific purpose. Increasing the available information on a CAB should assist in reducing time spent by the receiving accreditation body, thus reducing the overall cost of accreditation and certification.

1.3. References

1.3.1 ISO/IEC 17011:2017 Conformity assessment – Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies

1.4 Terms

Abbreviations and definitions given in references of 1.3 above and the following apply.

1.4.1. **Documentation:** Any relevant and pertinent documented information such as assessment reports and that relating to complaints, appeals, and the current conformity status of a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB).

Note: Whenever the term “CAB” is used in the text, it applies to both the “applicant and accredited conformity assessment body” unless otherwise specified.

1.4.2. **Originating accreditation body (AB):** IAF MLA signatory that issued documentation.

1.4.3. **Receiving accreditation body (AB):** IAF MLA signatory that receives documentation.

2. ROUTES AND METHOD OF EXCHANGE

2.1. The exchange of documentation among IAF MLA signatories typically occurs via two routes as described in 2.2 and 2.3 below:

2.2. An accredited CAB may submit documentation provided by the originating AB to the receiving AB.

2.2.1. In the case outlined in Section 2.2, the receiving AB should request the CAB's written consent (refer to ANNEX 1 for an example), allowing the originating AB to exchange information, including any additional documentation, for review of acceptability. The receiving AB is responsible for checking the authenticity and should communicate with the originating AB in accordance with 2.3 and 2.3.1 below.

2.3. The receiving AB can request documentation from the originating AB concerning a CAB.

2.3.1. In the case of 2.3 above, the originating AB should obtain written consent from the CAB before releasing the requested documentation to the receiving AB (see example in ANNEX 1).

3. REVIEW OF EXCHANGED DOCUMENTATION

3.1. The originating AB is responsible for the correctness and accuracy of the documentation exchanged.

3.1.1 Unless otherwise requested by the receiving AB, the latest documentation should be provided. Arrangements for translation of the documentation, if necessary, should be agreed upon between the originating and receiving accreditation bodies. The arrangement should involve the CAB if it is to bear the cost of translation.

3.2. The receiving AB should review and analyse the documentation exchanged to determine acceptability as an alternate to all or part of their standard assessment process.

3.2.1 If the documentation exchanged is not deemed sufficient, the receiving AB should communicate with the CAB and the originating AB to request additional information.

3.3 If the CAB restricts the originating AB from providing confidential documentation to the receiving AB, the receiving AB may lack the necessary information to make an informed decision based on the documentation. In this circumstance, the receiving AB should not rely on documentation provided by the CAB and should consider undertaking an initial assessment.

4. OUTCOME OF REVIEW

4.1. Should the final analysis result in the conclusion that the documentation is insufficient to suit the needs of the receiving AB, it should inform the CAB and the originating AB.

4.2. If the documentation in part or entirety is found acceptable for purposes of assessment, the receiving AB should inform the CAB of what assessment process, will be used.

5. ACCREDITATION DECISION

5.1. The use of exchanged documentation from the originating AB for the purposes of initial accreditation, re-accreditation, or surveillance assessments (including witnessing) by the receiving AB should not be used as a means to delegate its decision-making authority and/or exonerate from responsibility (ISO/IEC 17011 clauses 5.5, 6.4.2 and 6.4.5a refer).

5.2. Each IAF MLA signatory should independently decide on accreditation, using available information, without feeling compelled to accept conclusions from the exchanged documentation.

ANNEX 1 (Non-mandatory)

Example of Consent to Exchange of Documentation among IAF MLA signatories

(*Name of CAB*) hereby agrees to the exchange of mutually relevant accreditation information, including documentation from (*name of originating AB*) to (*name of receiving AB*) for use in assessment activities relating to the granting, maintaining, extending, reducing, suspending, and withdrawing of accreditation, as appropriate, under the International Accreditation Forum Multilateral Recognition Arrangement.

Documentation will be held confidential in accordance with the requirements of the ISO/IEC 17011:2017 Conformity assessment – Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies, clause 8.1.

This consent is effective for the entire term of (*CAB's*) accreditation.

Authorized Signature:

Name:

Title:

CAB:

Date:

Further Information

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

For contact details of members of IAF, see the IAF website: <http://www.iaf.nu>

Secretariat:

IAF Corporate Secretary
Telephone: +1 (571) 569-1242
Email: secretary@iaf.nu