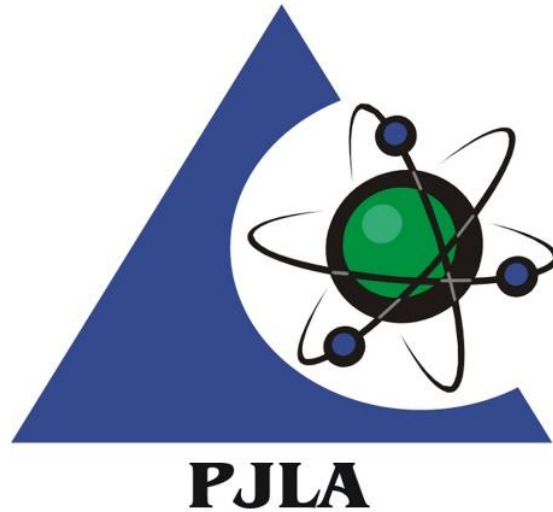


STEPS TO ISO/IEC 17020 ACCREDITATION



Steps to ISO/IEC 17020 Accreditation



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0.0 Foreword

Implementing an ISO/IEC 17020 management system is a means to ensuring efficiency and technical competency as an inspection body. An inspection body that establishes a management system compliant with ISO/IEC 17020 joins the growing world partnership of accredited inspection bodies.

An ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation certificate will show potential customers, regulating authorities, and accrediting bodies that your inspection body has the technical competence requirements and management system requirements to deliver valid impartial inspection results consistently.

ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation is available for both freestanding inspection bodies (Type A) and for inspection bodies which are part of larger facilities (Type B & C). While ISO/IEC 17020 is intended for use by inspection bodies, it can also be useful for confirming the competence and independence of inspection results for a wide array of inspection activities such as building, forensics, petroleum, and pressure vessels. If you want to solidify your inspection body's stance as a serious competitor, it is imperative that your management system comply with ISO/IEC 17020.



This booklet, *Steps to ISO/IEC 17020 Accreditation*, was created by Perry Johnson Laboratory Accreditation, Inc., to give laboratories interested in seeking ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation a clear understanding of the complete process. We hope that this material will provide insight and assist you with taking the necessary next steps towards achieving accreditation.

Tracy Szerszen

President

Perry Johnson Laboratory Accreditation, Inc.

1.0 The Benefits of ISO/IEC 17020 Accreditation

ISO/IEC 17020 “Conformity assessment – Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection” is used to develop and implement inspection body management systems. Accreditation under an ILAC MRA signatory like PJLA also encompasses requirements specified in ILAC P 15 %Application of ISO/IEC 17020:2012 for the Accreditation of Inspection Bodies+.

By having your inspection body management system accredited to ISO/IEC 17020, your organization will gain benefits that will help your inspection services excel in quality assurance. One of the main advantages is that your inspection body will gain international recognition for its commitment to quality, competency, and reliable results. ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation will signify that you comply with an internationally recognized standard, thus easing the global exchange of valuable information. This is only one example of what ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation can do for your company. There are many other reasons to pursue accreditation.

Benefits

- **International Recognition**
- **Sound Management System**
- **Prevents Defects**
- **Increase Customer Trust**
- **Cost Savings**
- **Reduced Waste**
- **Access to Global Marketplace**

Accreditation is an objective way to assure your customers that you have demonstrated technical competence to provide reliable and accurate inspection results and use validated methods. Accreditation is objective because an independent, third-party accreditation body performs annual assessments to verify whether your system is meeting all the requirements of ISO/IEC 17020. This independent evaluation is important to the customer because it is an unbiased guarantee that your inspection body is performing at its highest level of quality, management, and validated inspection results.

Another benefit of achieving ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation is that it will set your inspection body apart from your competitors. ISO/IEC 17020 is an ideal management system model for inspection bodies because it aims to control quality costs, improve measurement accuracy, and guarantee consistency of results. It is also customer driven. When implemented correctly, the elements of ISO/IEC 17020 work meticulously together to ensure that required quality levels are met and that customers' needs are satisfied. This can be a powerful strategic tool.

When your company achieves ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation, you will be presented with a certificate of accreditation. This certificate can be used in advertising, promotional literature, and stationery to show current and potential customers that your inspection body is committed to quality and has demonstrated technical competency to perform inspection services and rendering results.



By becoming accredited, you can look forward to an efficient management system, improved inspection methods, fewer customer complaints, and a strong competitive edge.

2.0 Choosing an Accreditation Body

Quality has become a critical issue to people all over the world. ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation provides the assurance that inspection bodies are delivering good services and consistent data.

As mentioned earlier, a key ingredient of the recipe for quality and competency is third-party accreditation. A company cannot achieve accreditation until it hires a well-recognized accreditation body to conduct a complete and thorough assessment of its inspection management system.

The accreditation body is responsible for assessing the quality system and technical aspects of your system to determine your compliance to the requirements of ISO/IEC 17020. It is the accreditation body that decides if an inspection body is complying with the standard.



Knowing this, you should study the credentials of potential accreditation bodies carefully. To assist you in selecting an accreditation body that is best suited for your inspection body needs, you will want to examine the following areas:

Key Questions to Ask:

- **Does the accreditation body have assessors qualified to conduct assessments in your scope of activities? Where are the assessors located?**
- **Is the accreditation body willing to provide you with a complete description of its accreditation process? Find out if there are any policies or contract restrictions that may affect you.**
- **Is the accreditation body recognized for its accreditation program? Check the credentials of the accreditation body. Refer to the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) listing of signatories at www.ilac.org.**
- **Is the accreditation body financially stable? Will they still be in business during the period that your accreditation certificate is valid?**

3.0 ISO/IEC 17020 Accreditation

The graphic to the right illustrates each step of the ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation processes. We will explain each procedure, in detail, on the following pages.

Let us begin our path toward accreditation by talking about the first step, filing an application for accreditation services.

Filing Application

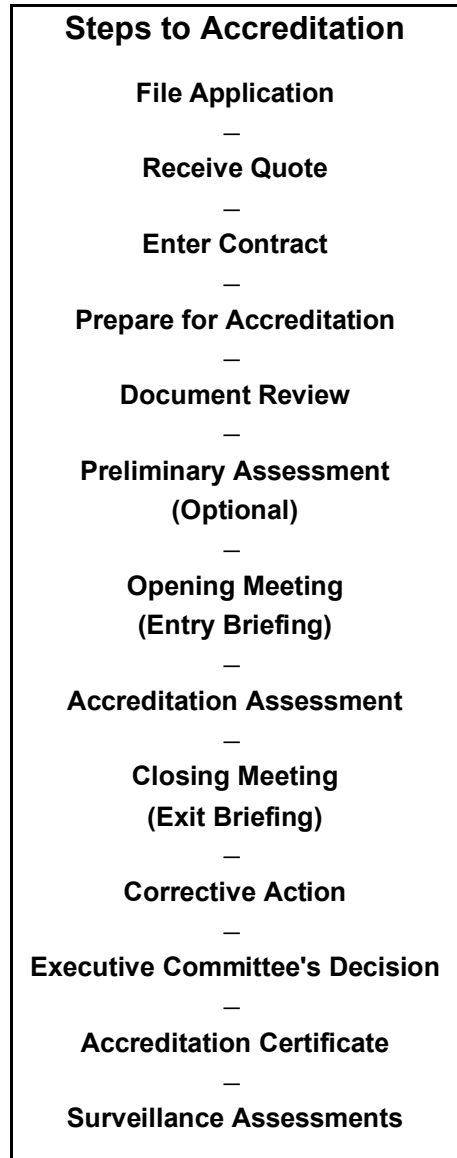
It is typically a clever idea to establish a relationship with an accreditation body in the initial stages of implementing your inspection management system, that way you can familiarize yourself with its practices and establish a schedule for accreditation in advance, thereby avoiding delays.

PJLA will ask you to complete an application. Here are some standard questions you can expect to answer:

- **What is your desired time frame for accreditation?**
- **What is your inspection body scope of activities?**
- **Is your inspection body freestanding or part of a larger facility?**
- **What is the status of your existing inspection body management system implementation?**
- **What is the state of your inspection body management system documentation?**

Receiving the Quote

It is important that you compare all quotes thoroughly to ensure you are getting the most for your money. Using your information from the application, PJLA will prepare a price quote and an estimate of time required for completing the accreditation assessment. All aspects of the accreditation process are offered up front during our quotation process.



Entering the Contract

After you have decided to enter into a contract with PJLA, the relationship is formalized. The contract will spell out the responsibilities of all parties involved, including financial obligations and acceptance terms of adherence to the standard and PJLA policies.

Preparing for Accreditation

Your company is ready for accreditation after you have implemented an ISO/IEC 17020 inspection management system and allowed ample time for employees to 1) become familiar with the system and 2) develop a sufficient evidentiary trail of documents that can be assessed.

As per ISO/IEC 17020:2012 - The inspection body's top management shall establish, document, and maintain policies and objectives for fulfilment of this International Standard and shall ensure the policies and objectives are acknowledged and implemented at all levels of the inspection body's organization.

Documentation may include the following:

- Quality Manual:** Outlining how your inspection body conforms to the standard.
- Procedures:** Describing how the system functions.
- Work Instructions:** Defining specific job activities affecting the quality of Inspections.
- Quality Documentation:** Documents, which explain how quality will be managed for individual inspection projects or contracts, as well as other types of specific documents such as the calibration of equipment and training of personnel.
- Records:** Various records including charts, files, inspection, and testing records, audit results, management review minutes, and any other records of objective evidence supporting compliance to ISO/IEC 17020:2012.

Preliminary Assessments

In many cases, the inspection body may request a preliminary assessment, or dry-run assessment of its inspection body management system, prior to the accreditation assessment. This gives the accreditation body an opportunity to identify, in advance, any weaknesses that may exist in the inspection body management system.

During the preliminary assessment, PJLA will send an assessment team to your inspection body. The team, composed of competent assessors, will assess your inspection body, management system, records, and other documentation, alerting you to any concerns that may interfere with a successful accreditation assessment.

The main advantage of a preliminary assessment is that it allows you to correct any potential problems before the accreditation assessment begins. But you should remember that a preliminary assessment is not required for ISO/IEC 17020 accreditation. It is strictly optional, depending upon your own needs.

The extent of the preliminary assessment is also up to you. You may decide that you want a full preliminary assessment performed on every aspect of your inspection bodies operations, or, to save on costs, you may decide that all you need is a sampling of your management system. It is your decision.

While a preliminary assessment is optional, it is recommended. Overall, it can save you time and money by revealing deficiencies or nonconformities that, if corrected before the accreditation assessment, can save you the expense of follow-up actions.

Preliminary Assessment Perks

- 1) Helps to determine an inspection body preparedness for an accreditation assessment.**
- 2) Can pinpoint major deficiencies in the management system, giving an inspection body enough lead time to correct any problems before the accreditation assessment.**
- 3) Aids PJLA in planning for the accreditation assessment by determining the number of assessors needed, the length of time required to complete the assessment and other pertinent criteria.**

Inspection Management System Documentation Review

Once you are ready to begin the accreditation process, PJLA will request an uncontrolled copy of your inspection body management system documentation, last internal audit, management review and your listing of inspectors and locations. It is required that you submit your documentation **at least 30 days** before your scheduled assessment for your assessor to prepare for the on-site visit and seek clarification prior to the visit.

PJLA will review your documentation to determine whether it meets all the requirements of ISO/IEC 17020. It is recommended to review PJLA's policies and standard operating procedures such as: SOP-1 Inspection, SOP-3 Claims of Accreditation Language and Symbols, and Scopes of Accreditation Requirements for Inspection Bodies and ILAC P15 Requirements. These documents can be downloaded from the PJLA website.

After your documentation has been reviewed, a report will be submitted at this time; PJLA will continue or delay the on-site assessment. Any reasons for the delay of the on-site assessment will be clearly communicated to the inspection body and a new target date for the on-site assessment will be discussed.

Once PJLA has determined that your documented inspection body management system is satisfactory, arrangements will be made for the preliminary assessment or the initial accreditation assessment at your inspection body. PJLA will appoint a qualified assessment team to conduct a full assessment of your inspection body management system. The team will consist of a Lead Assessor, who is responsible for coordinating assessment activities, and one or more assessors, depending on the size of your inspection body. At least one of those team members must be experienced in your area of inspection.

The Lead Assessor will work with your Inspection Body Management Representative in devising an assessment agenda for the on-site visit. Prior to arriving, the Lead Assessor will send you an agenda confirming the daily schedule of events and any accommodation requests.

It is the assessment team's job to verify whether your inspection body management system is meeting all the requirements of ISO/IEC 17020 and PJLA Policies and Procedures. The team determines this by assessing inspections performed by the inspection body including records, equipment, and personnel.

A Documented Management System:

- **Defines the authority and responsibilities of personnel.**
- **Clearly communicates the objectives of the system, the inspection bodies policies, procedures, and work instructions.**
- **Promotes continuous improvement, which means the system, is monitored regularly and changes can be incorporated easily.**
- **Ensures consistent performance.**

The Accreditation Assessment

The Opening Meeting (Entry Briefing)

On the first day of your scheduled assessment, an opening meeting or entry briefing will be held with upper management and other parties directly involved with the inspection body management system. Under the direction of the Lead Assessor, the assessment team will present an overview of the assessment process, giving you a clear understanding of what can be expected in the days to follow.

The team will review your assessment scope and objectives. They will confirm times, schedules, and resources with you, and they will go over the procedures for identifying and reporting nonconformances or deficiencies.

At this time, you will be expected to introduce your selected guide(s) who will accompany the assessment team through the facility and its procedures.

The Accreditation Assessment Consists of:

- * **An opening meeting (Entry briefing)**
- * **A detailed examination of your inspection body management system**
- * **A closing meeting (Exit briefing)**
- * **Recommendation**

The Assessment

Inspections are performed away from the fixed facility and on-site at customer locations. Arrangements would need to be made for the assigned assessor to go on site to witness inspections on your proposed scope of accreditation. The coordination and details of this would be worked out with the lead assessor prior to the assessment and captured on the assessment plan.

Following the opening meeting, the assessment team will begin to assess inspection activities. These will be conducted at an inspection site or if necessary, at the fixed home office, as long as the inspection activity can be demonstrated in a similar fashion. Throughout the assessment, they will be seeking evidence of technical competency such as statements, documented procedures, records, and written policies to support their observations.

If any deficiencies or nonconformances are found during the assessment, the assessor will bring them to your attention and record them on a nonconformance report. In the report, the assessor will specifically describe what the nonconformance or deficiency is and the related section of the standard the nonconformity or deficiency pertains to.

The Closing Meeting (Exit Briefing)

When the assessment team has completed its on-site assessment of your inspection body, a closing meeting or exit briefing will be held. This meeting is usually attended by the same people who sat in on the opening meeting.



At the closing meeting, the Lead Assessor will summarize the results of your assessment. The Lead Assessor will explain, in detail, any nonconformities or deficiencies that were found and will provide you with an assessment report. In this report, the findings of your assessment will be reiterated in detail. If any nonconformities or deficiencies are identified, the assessment team will allow you 60 days to take corrective action. The Lead Assessor will also provide a recommendation as to your inspection bodies eligibility for accreditation.

Taking Corrective Action

If the assessment team indicates that your inspection body needs to take corrective action, it is nothing to become alarmed about. However, all nonconformances must be addressed and corrective action taken before accreditation can be granted.

Your corrective action response must include a copy of objective evidence, such as calibration certificates, inspection procedures and training records, to indicate that corrective actions have been implemented and completed.

After you have corrected the nonconformance, PJLA may require a follow-up assessment, limited to the area of concern, to confirm that the problem has been resolved. The Lead Assessor cannot recommend accreditation until he or she has verified that all nonconformances or deficiencies have been corrected.

Accreditation

After all nonconformities have been corrected and verified by the Lead Assessor, your accreditation documents are forwarded to PJLA's Executive Committee, an independent decision-making body. The Executive Committee will review your assessment material and the Lead Assessor's recommendation and decide whether to grant accreditation to your company.

If the Executive Committee determines that you have met all of the requirements for accreditation, you will be notified immediately, and your accreditation certificate will be prepared. The certificate will bear the PJLA logo and ILAC MRA mark when appropriate.

Displaying Your Certificate of Accreditation

You can display your certificate of accreditation in advertising, promotional literature, and stationery to show customers that your company has demonstrated technical competency to perform inspection services.

Complaints, Disputes and Appeals

If you think your inspection body has been unfairly denied accreditation, you can dispute the decision. PJLA is required to have a dispute board with an impartial panel. This board is independent of PJLA and will listen to your arguments and reevaluate your assessment material.

Maintaining Accreditation

Once you have attained accreditation status, your inspection body will be subjected to surveillance assessments by PJLA. This is required 12 months from your initial accreditation assessment. This is a partial assessment of your inspection body management system which focuses on maintenance criteria such as: internal audits, management review, complaints, corrective action, proficiency testing (if applicable) performance, changes within the organization (management, technical staff, equipment, location) and as time permits at least one item on the scope of accreditation will be selected to be assessed including the review of technical personal, records, reporting, equipment, traceability, measurement uncertainty and proficiency testing results. Once inspection bodies are accredited for one full accreditation cycle, surveillance assessments are conducted through a documentation review upon a favorable review of their accreditation history. Some may continue to be assessed on-site depending upon past assessment results or the size and complexity of the facility.

Expanding Your Scope of Accreditation or Expanding New Sites

Once you have achieved your initial accreditation, you may desire to expand your scope of accreditation to include additional inspection types and procedures or add satellite locations. This can be easily done by requesting this expansion to PJLA headquarters. Scope expansion assessments can be done solely or concurrently with routine visits. In some cases, they can be completed via documentation review depending upon the scope addition and whether the equipment/technology is similar to what was previously assessed and currently on the inspection bodies scope of accreditation.

4.0 How Much Does Accreditation Cost?

When you enter the market for an accreditation body, you will find there is a wide range of prices for accreditation services, depending on varied factors.

Each inspection body has its own unique characteristics, and these come into play in estimating costs. There are three key elements that make up the cost of accreditation:

1. **Daily rate**
2. **Overhead expenses**
3. **Travel and accommodations**

Most accrediting bodies will charge a daily rate. This part is straightforward. But when it comes to overhead costs and travel expenses, things can get clouded. Some companies will quote a daily rate, and then tack on extra charges for office preparation or other services. This creates confusion and presents an inaccurate picture of the total cost.

During the accreditation process, it is PJLA's desire to provide assessors with the highest qualifications at the lowest total cost to your organization. Scheduling of assessments and assessors is based on qualifications and location of assessors. PJLA will always schedule the best-qualified assessor that is closest to your location to help minimize travel expenses associated with your accreditation process.

Cost Estimates Should Include:

- **Fees for document review**
- **Fees for preliminary assessment (optional)**
- **Fees for accreditation assessment**
- **Miscellaneous fees associated with accreditation, such as travel and accommodations**
- **Fees for surveillance**

5.0 PJLA Advantages

- No mandatory preliminary site visit
- Awards ceremony option
- No penalty for changing schedule with reasonable notice
- No hidden costs in proposal
- No application fees
- No overtime charges
- Free press release assistance by PJLA technical writing staff
- Detailed preparation is done off-site
- Assessors' expenses minimized
- No travel mark-up; all expenses at cost



6.0 How Long Does It Take to Achieve Accreditation?

Just as cost estimates can vary, there is no set timeline for completing an accreditation assessment. The number of days required, will depend on several factors.

The length of time required to complete an accreditation assessment is determined by the desired scope of an inspection body, the number of employees and the complexity of a company's operations.

The Number of Days Required to Complete an Accreditation Assessment Depends Upon:

- 1) **Size of the inspection body**
- 2) **Number of employees**
- 3) **Complexity inspection operations**

Typically, it takes an inspection body six months to one year to prepare for the accreditation assessment. However, depending on the scope of the inspections performed and maturity of the staff, it is very possible to be prepared sooner. Once an organization schedules their initial assessment, it takes an average of 60-days from the last day of the assessment to receive a final certificate. This allows enough time for corrective action processing and for the Executive Committee to make their recommendation on assessment documents.

7.0 About Perry Johnson Laboratory Accreditation, Inc. (PJLA)

A company built upon a solid foundation in quality, PJLA is an experienced accreditor in the inspection body industry and other quality conformity assessment programs. PJLA was founded by **Perry L. Johnson**, one of the world's top experts and authors on ISO 9000 and a leading educator on the theories and practices of Total Quality Management. Based on its heritage, its experience in the field of laboratory accreditation, and the expertise of its assessment staff, PJLA is destined to become a prominent and respected accreditation body in the United States.

PJLA is a full-service accreditation body with technical experts and technical assessors on staff. PJLA's technical assessors have years of experience in a wide range of inspection body fields. They have undergone training in ISO/IEC 17020 and other relevant training sessions. PJLA has selected our assessors to conduct ISO/IEC 17020 services due to their extensive work experience in inspection fields and their years of experience in ISO/IEC 17020 assessing practices.



PJLA is a MRA Signatory of the **International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC)** and of the **Asia Pacific Cooperation (APAC)**.

With the recognized support of international organizations, our firm will be able to provide tremendous marketing and business advantages to our accredited inspection bodies, especially those with foreign business interests.

Reach out today for more information on PJLA's accreditation services!

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