SAAS Accreditation Process

Accreditation is the process by which formal recognition of competence is given to qualified auditing organizations, known as Certification Bodies (CBs), who are then granted the ability to perform certifications. Certification of compliance to standard systems within the scope of SAAS activity is available only through qualified CBs granted accreditation by SAAS.

The purpose of accreditation is to ensure that auditing bodies are competent to do the work they undertake and that their audit practices are undertaken impartially, competently and effectively, providing quality assurance to stakeholders and reducing risk to the system. Owners of social and environmental audit systems need to ensure that the audit system meets its intended purpose and that third party validation is performed by audit companies qualified to do so – accreditation provides validation and a high degree of assurance that the system fulfills its intended requirements.

Benefits
Accreditation by SAAS assures stakeholders that CBs have been assessed against internationally recognized standards and are able to consistently, reliably and effectively perform certification audits and that these audits are carried out in a professional manner. These evaluations demonstrate a CBs impartiality and ability to perform in a competent manner. Independent evaluation and monitoring of a system reduces risk to the developer of the code and provides confidence in the reliability of the system. SAAS sets strict standards and oversight procedures for accreditation of qualified organizations to audit and certify against SA8000 and other social and environmental codes within its scope.
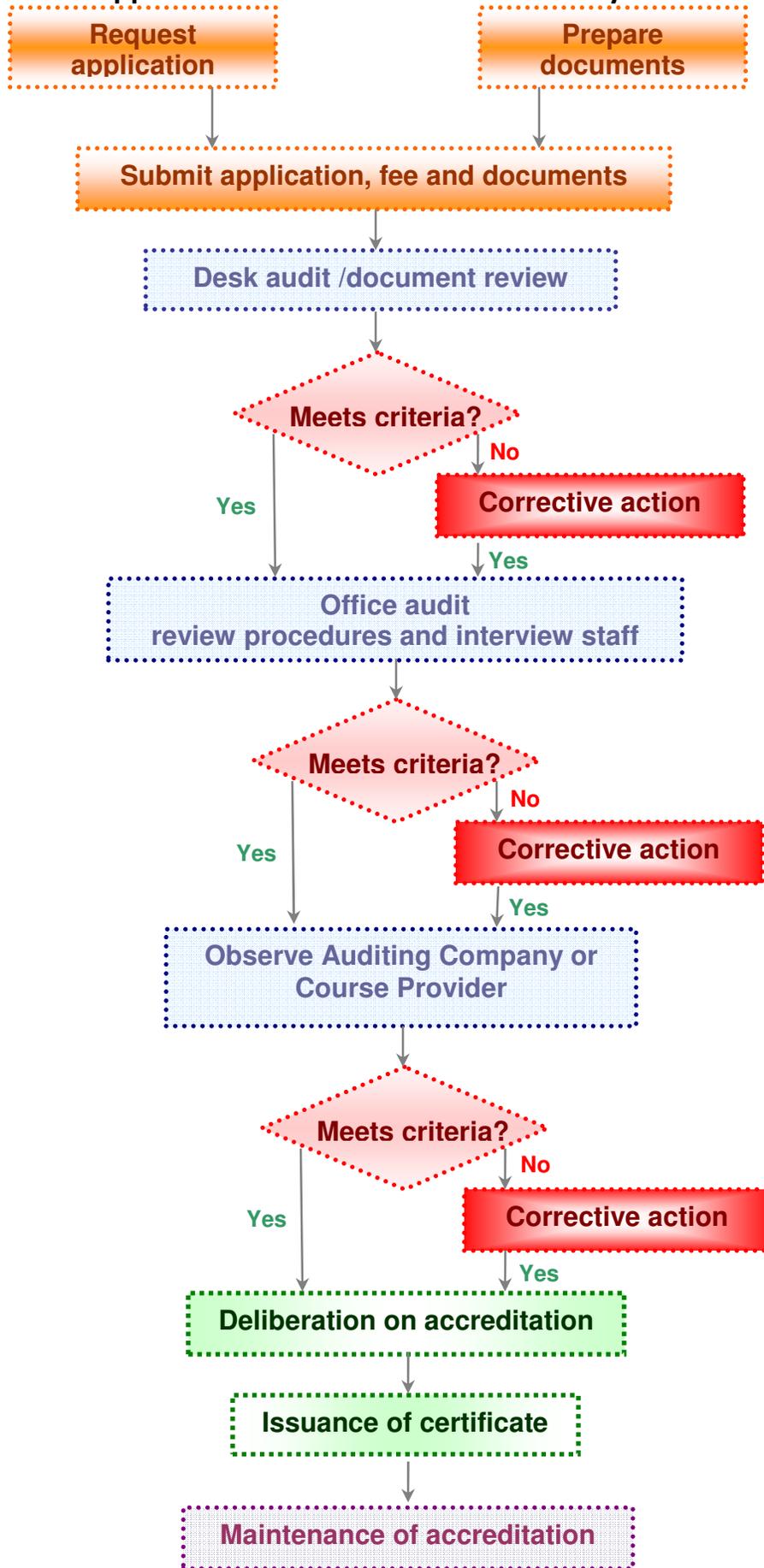
Process
The accreditation process by SAAS includes document review, site audits and observation of auditors in the field. SAAS undertakes impartial assessment and surveillance of CBs to ensure that the SAAS-accredited certification process is functioning and meets the SAAS criteria.

Organizations interested in applying to be accredited by SAAS must meet the criteria set out in SAAS Procedures and ISO requirements. SAAS Procedures specify requirements regarding accreditation to conduct audits and the certification of organizations to social standards. The systems set out in SAAS procedures and ISO requirements are binding to CBs accredited by SAAS and include requirements for certification body audit processes, auditor qualifications, procedures and issuance of certificates. These requirements also contain principles for the competence, consistency, and impartiality of an audit and the certification of management systems of all types for bodies providing these activities.

Prospective certification bodies may apply for accreditation in one or more countries and are accredited based upon their ability to satisfy the SAAS accreditation criteria. SAAS accepts applications for CBs to conduct certification audits to SA8000 and several other systems, as well as delivers social systems auditor training. Accreditation, when granted by SAAS, lasts for four years with periodic on-site and witnessed surveillance audits throughout the cycle.

For more information, visit www.saasaccreditation.org

Application Process for Accreditation by SAAS

Request application → **Submit application, fee and documents** ← **Prepare documents**

Submit application, fee and documents

Desk audit /document review

Meets criteria?
- No → **Corrective action** → Yes
- Yes

Office audit
review procedures and interview staff

Meets criteria?
- No → **Corrective action** → Yes
- Yes

Observe Auditing Company or Course Provider

Meets criteria?
- No → **Corrective action** → Yes
- Yes

Deliberation on accreditation

Issuance of certificate

Maintenance of accreditation

The initial accreditation process by SAAS includes a document review, on-site office audits and observation of auditors in the field. SAAS undertakes impartial assessment of CBs to ensure that the SAAS-accredited certification process is functioning and meets the SAAS criteria.

Below is an overview of the initial accreditation process.

1. Order an application package. The application package lists the requirements and documents needed to set up a SAAS-accredited certification system and can be ordered through our website. SAAS does not accept any other application other than the application packet mentioned above. All applicants must submit the required application form, fee, and supporting materials to SAAS to begin the application process.

2. Document and procedure preparation. The organization seeking to become a SAAS-accredited certification body must prepare documents and procedures to meet SAAS-specific requirements, detailed in SAAS Procedure 200. Applicant organizations must also base their certification system on the requirements found in ISO/IEC 17021-1:2015, detailing the requirements for bodies operating assessment and certification of quality systems. Some organizations that are very familiar with ISO can use many of their existing documents to set up the documents for SA8000 with some adjustments. Our Procedure 200 is not part of ISO but is also a requirement. Some organizations not familiar with the ISO requirements might need some assistance from outside experts that can help them set up this system. This is an unknown cost based on the individual organization's needs.

3. Document and records review. After the organization prepares its documents and procedures, it may submit an application and documents, along with the required application fee to SAAS. Once the package is received, SAAS staff will ensure that the materials submitted are complete and assign a SAAS lead auditor to conduct a review of the submitted materials to confirm that the applicant has a documented certification system that meets the requirements set forth by SAAS. There are several steps which must take place after we receive the application documents and fee.

- First, the application is reviewed for completeness by SAAS's accreditation staff. If all is in order, we will send a letter confirming receipt of the application.
- We will then assign an auditor to do the document review of the applicant's procedures. The timing depends on auditor availability and typically takes place within 4-6 weeks of receipt of the complete documentation.
- The auditor will determine whether any additions or changes to the documents are needed and will write a report of the findings.
- This document review process takes approximately two days of the auditor's time, which is billed to the applicant.

If the procedures submitted with the document review are not found to be in compliance with SAAS's requirements, the applicant will be notified of such and is then able to revise its procedures and resubmit then. The amount of time an applicant might need for this process varies.

Once the document review is successfully completed, we then work to set up a schedule for an office and witness audit. The schedule for the office and witness audit will depend on the

availability of a SAAS Accreditation Auditor and the location of the certification body, and may take several months to coordinate these dates and locations.

4. Office audit. If the documents received meet the criteria set out for accreditation, an office audit of the applicant can be scheduled. The purpose of the office audit is to assess the degree and effectiveness of the implementation of the applicant certification body's system within its defined scope. During the office audit, the SAAS accreditation auditors will review the organization's procedures, documents, records and files, and conduct interviews with staff. The office audit may result in the issuance of non-conformities. Such non-conformities must be addressed prior to moving forward in the accreditation process.

5. Witness audit. Witness audits are scheduled pending satisfactory results of the document review and initial office audit. The purpose of the witness audit is to assess the degree and effectiveness of the implementation of the applicant certification body's system and to determine the certification body auditors' competence. SAAS auditors observe the applicant CB's SA8000 auditor conducting an audit at a facility against the SA8000 Standard, to ensure it is following its own certification procedures and that the procedures are effective. The witnessed audits must be initial certification audits, therefore, it is necessary for the applicant CB to have a client willing to go through the process of certification with the intention of becoming certified once the accreditation process is complete. Again, the witness audit may result in the issuance of non-conformities. Such non-conformities must be addressed prior to moving forward in the accreditation process.

- Once the office and witness audits are complete, any Corrective Action Requests (CARs) issued at the office and witness audits must be closed out before the audit reports can be sent to the Accreditation Review Panel (ARP).
- The closing of CARs may take several months or longer on the part of the certification body, in order to implement new systems and procedures to address the CARs.
- The corrective actions must be accepted by SAAS and evidence must be shown which effectively closes the CAR.
- In some cases, SAAS must schedule additional audits to witness that the new procedures addressing the CARs have been implemented. This could add several months onto the process.

6. Final report and audit team recommendations. Once the office and witness audits have been completed, a final report and the audit team's recommendations on accreditation will be drafted. These recommendations are reviewed by the Accreditation Review Panel (ARP). The ARP has 30 days to recommend granting or refusal of accreditation. At that time, the Director of Accreditation makes a final decision on granting accreditation. If accreditation is granted, the accreditation agreement will be issued and must be signed by both parties. The Applicant CB will then be accredited to conduct SA8000 audits and issue SA8000 certificates.

7. Maintenance of accreditation. When an organization becomes accredited, its accreditation is valid for a period of four years. During this time, SAAS carries out periodic surveillance office and witness audits of the accredited certification body, at a minimum of twice annually, to

verify that the CB continues to comply with the accreditation criteria. The number of surveillance audits is determined by the number of certifications granted by the CB and the scope of accreditation granted to the CB by SAAS.

8. Re-accreditation. At the end of the 4-year cycle, the CB must undergo re-accreditation, including steps 3-6 listed above.

As this process is very detailed and thorough, and contains many steps depending on the readiness of the individual applicant certification body to ensure quality SA8000 audits, there is no set timeline. This process could take anywhere from 6 months to more than a year.

For more details on the process of accreditation, please review all of the information found in Procedure 201A, which can be downloaded directly from the Document Library. Details include:

- Routes to Accreditation
- Application Process
- Estimated Initial Accreditation Audit Days
- Process Requirements for Accreditation
- Initial Assessment
- Continuance of Accreditation
- Reaccreditation
- Complaints Management

Please visit the Accreditation Fees for additional information on the cost of accreditation.

Please feel free to contact Lisa Bernstein with questions on the accreditation process.