GUIDE FOR QUALITY SYSTEM CERTIFICATION

ISO 9000 Suite

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INTRODUCTION

AEA Quality Advantage Corporation is incorporated in the State of New York with its principal office located at 71 E Main Street PO Box 237, Wappingers Falls, New York 12590, USA. It provides internationally recognized third party certification and registration of client quality management systems to the ISO 9000 series of standards.

AEA operates in accordance with EN45012, European standard for registrars and
ISO 10011, International standard for auditing, auditors and audit program management.

To date the AEA staff has completed over 100 quality management system assessments.

This guide covers the scope of AEA's assessment, certification and registration services. Throughout this guide AEA's client is referred to as the "supplier."

ISO 9000 SUITE OF STANDARDS

Internationally accepted requirements for quality management is defined in the ISO 9000 series of three standards: ISO 9001, ISO 9002 and ISO 9003. Additional documents in the series are provided for guidance on use and interpretation. Almost every country in the world has adopted these documents so all requirements are identical. ANSI/ASQC 9000 is the American standard, BS5750 is the British standard and in Europe the standard is designated as EN29000. ISO 9000 is the international standard.

A supplier seeking registration must select the standard which is appropriate to its activities. ISO 9001 applies to suppliers who design a product or service and offer it to their customers. ISO 9002 is applicable when a product is manufactured, or a service is provided with customer instructions. ISO 9003 is used when a service is rendered to the product or data which is provided by the customer. The details are provided in the standard itself. AEA will be pleased to help make the right choice.

ISO 9000 registration is not simply a one-time program: it’s an ongoing process and basis for continuous improvement. The key concepts are:

Document
This means writing down how a supplier's organization conducts business at each step of the entire operation that affects the quality of the product or service in accordance with the requirements of the standard selected.

Follow the Documentation
Everything that employees do within a supplier's organization must be carried out in accordance with the written documentation.

Demonstrate
The supplier should be able to demonstrate, through documented objective evidence, to a third-party auditor that his quality management system is implemented effectively and meets the requirements of the relevant quality standard.

Verify
The supplier must conduct thorough internal audits of its quality system, at least annually to ensure continuing effectiveness despite changes in business conditions.

CERTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION

Certification and registration to the ISO 9000 series of standards provides market confidence that the supplier is capable of systematically meeting the requirements set forth in the selected standard for any product or service supplied within the scope specified on the certificate.

Registration is provided to a supplier by a certification body, such as AEA, after the supplier's quality management system has been assessed and certified as meeting the requirements of applicable ISO 9000 series of standards.

Subsequent to registration, the supplier receives a certificate displaying the appropriate certification marks and is permitted to use this per the rules outlined in the service contract. The supplier is included in a list of certified suppliers with an outline of the scope of the certification. This list is published periodically by AEA.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is a status awarded to certification bodies by a national authority called Accreditation Body or Board. It indicates that the certification body has been audited by the national authority to determine its ability to audit against the requirements of ISO 9000 series of standards for a specific activity.

Currently AEA is accredited by ANAB, the ANSI-ASQ National Accreditation Board.

It is AEA's policy to apply for accreditation in every new business area in which it intends to serve.

Currently, there are many different accreditation bodies throughout the world each with their own rules for accreditation. Until a system for international accreditation exists, AEA continues to position itself through accreditation in all countries where it chooses to operate, directly or through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

REGISTRATION PROCESS

Application for Registration
The first step in AEA's procedure requires the supplier to complete the application form. This information enables AEA to understand the nature of the supplier's business, the activities that support it and to establish a match with AEA's expertise.

Quotation and Contract
When AEA receives a completed application from a supplier, it sends a quotation with a contract to the supplier. If the supplier wishes to proceed with the registration, receipt of the signed contract by AEA starts the process.

Scheduling of Dates
AEA's Director of Operations contacts the supplier and arranges mutually agreeable dates for both documentation review and initial assessment. The documentation review is scheduled at least six weeks prior to assessment to enable the supplier to correct any nonconformity that may be identified. The Director of Operations also assigns an assessment team to complete the assignment.

Documentation Review
The documentation review is conducted by a member of the assigned assessment team and normally takes place at the supplier's premises. During the review, the assessor ensures that the supplier's documented quality management system meets the requirements of the selected ISO 9000 series of standards. Any nonconformity must be corrected before assessment can commence.

Assessment
The assigned assessment team carries out the assessment in accordance with AEA's rules and procedures. The assessment starts with an opening meeting and ends with a closing meeting with the supplier's management. All Noncompliances identified during the assessment are required to be acknowledged by the supplier. The lead assessor informs the supplier's management regarding the team's recommendation along with the required corrective actions during the closing meeting.

Reporting
The lead assessor submits the assessment report with the team’s recommendation to the Director of Operations. The Director of Operations reviews the report for completeness and submits it to the Director of Certification. The Director of Certification acts on the recommendation of the Director of Operations and informs the supplier accordingly. In the event the supplier does not meet the requirements for certification, the Director of Certification decides on the follow-up activities, including special surveillance visits with the supplier.

Registration
AEA will issue a certificate of registration on the completion of a satisfactory assessment. This assumes that the Noncompliances identified during the assessment have been satisfactorily resolved. The certificate will detail the supplier's scope of certification. The certificate is valid for three years subject to satisfactory maintenance of the supplier's quality management system. The certificate remains the property of AEA.

Maintenance Surveillance
Once a supplier's quality management system has been certified and registered, it is essential to maintain the system's operation to the applicable ISO 9000 standard. To ensure this, AEA conducts surveillance assessments at approximately nine-monthly intervals in such a way that all sections of the supplier's quality system are examined at least once during the three-year registration period.

Special Surveillance
If it becomes necessary, AEA will conduct special surveillance visits in the course of maintaining the registration. Circumstances may include a supplier wishing to extend the scope of certification, in response to an incident or a significant change in the supplier's quality system.

Re-assessment
At the end of the three-year registration period, the supplier's entire quality system is reviewed to verify its continuing effectiveness in accordance with the applicable standard. The extent of this review depends on the supplier's demonstrated ability to maintain its system as determined during the surveillance visits. A successful review results in the extension of the certification for an additional three-year period.

PRE-ASSESSMENT

While developing their quality management system for certification, the suppliers often need an outside opinion to reassure them that they are proceeding in the right direction. To address this need, AEA offers an optional pre-assessment service. However, this service does not influence in any way the conduct of assessment for certification. Pre-assessments are designed to help provide suppliers with a clear understanding of interpretations of ISO 9000 standards, details of quality system deficiencies and an evaluation of their progress towards ISO 9000 certification.

Pre-assessment is conducted as an informal assessment. The findings are presented to the management at the end of the assessment followed by a detailed report on the system's deficiencies. The results could help in planning the activities leading to the assessment certification in a realistic manner.

Pre-assessment provides an opportunity to develop an effective working relationship between the supplier and the assessment team at an early stage. The resulting partnership could significantly reduce the anxiety often associated with the certification process.

USE OF CERTIFICATE AND CERTIFICATION MARKS

A supplier, whose quality management system has been certified, will be issued a certificate of registration and camera-ready artwork of the certification marks together with relevant instructions covering the reproduction and use of the certificate and certification marks, which AEA is obliged to control in compliance with EN45012.

The supplier is entitled to display his certificate at his place of work or in any promotional or advertising literature. He also has the right to use certification marks on letterheads and brochures, etc. for related publicity activity.

Under no conditions may the marks be affixed to a product or used in a way that might suggest product certification.

SUSPENSION, WITHDRAWAL OR CANCELLATION OF CERTIFICATION

The certificate of registration is the property of AEA. For a valid reason, AEA reserves the right to suspend, withdraw or cancel the certificate at any time during the three-year registration period.

Certificate of registration may be suspended, withdrawn or canceled per AEA procedure OP 807-09, which is available upon request. Generally, suspension, withdrawal or cancellation is considered in the following instances:

- If a supplier requests withdrawal of the certificate.
- If a supplier has not paid fees after the due process for collection.
- If a supplier fails to take corrective action as directed.
- If a supplier refuses or fails to schedule required maintenance surveillance assessment, special surveillance assessment or re-assessment.
- If a supplier ceases to exist as a legal entity in its form as certified.
- If a supplier misuses the certificate or the certification marks and refuses to take corrective action to cease the misuse.

AEA reserves the right to publish, in whatever way it feels fit, the suspension, withdrawal or cancellation of the supplier's certificate of registration.

APPEALS

If a supplier or a third party wishes to appeal the decision of AEA in regard to the following:

- Rejection of an application for registration.
- Failure to recommend certification.
- Suspension, withdrawal or cancellation of a registered certificate.

- An appeal by a third party against a decision to grant certification.
- Any other matter of contention.

AEA has a procedure, OP 806-02, for the appeal process. A copy of this procedure can be provided upon request.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Any supplier information received by AEA or its agents, during the course of certification, will be treated in strict confidence and will not be divulged to a third party without prior written consent of the supplier, except as required by the Laws of the Land or other relevant accreditation bodies.

COST OF CERTIFICATION

Each supplier's quality management system is unique as it reflects its management style and activities. Thus, the actual cost for certification and subsequent maintenance will vary for individual supplier. The information provided here is intended to give a broad outline of costs.

When a supplier completes and returns the enclosed application form, AEA prepares a specific quotation. AEA charges a one-time, non-refundable application fee, which covers administration costs throughout the three-year term of the certification process. All other costs are based on a standard day rate and are charged on a per day per person basis. This rate is used to calculate the costs of all visits to the supplier's premises including optional pre-assessment, documentation review, initial assessment and any other visits required to verify corrective actions before the certificate is issued. This rate is also used for subsequent visits during the three-year certification period. In addition to a day rate charge per visit, AEA charges travel and related expenses at cost. Time spent traveling and off-site report preparation is included in the total cost of each visit. AEA takes pride in controlling its costs and passing these savings on to its suppliers. Its day rate normally falls at the low end of the prevailing industry rate scale.

AEA's cost structure is simple and supplier friendly. The application fee is charged when the contract is signed. Thereafter, invoices are sent following each service activity. AEA issues the certificate once all invoices have been paid.