



Forensic Program Handbook

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A2LA Accreditation Process

Accreditation at A2LA requires a yearly activity beginning with an initial assessment. When an organization becomes accredited, they are referred to as a Conformity Assessment Body (CAB). After the initial assessment, a two (2) year anniversary (expiration) date is established. Renewal assessments are to be completed every two (2) years with Annual Reviews to be completed in the off years.

Overall Accreditation Cycle

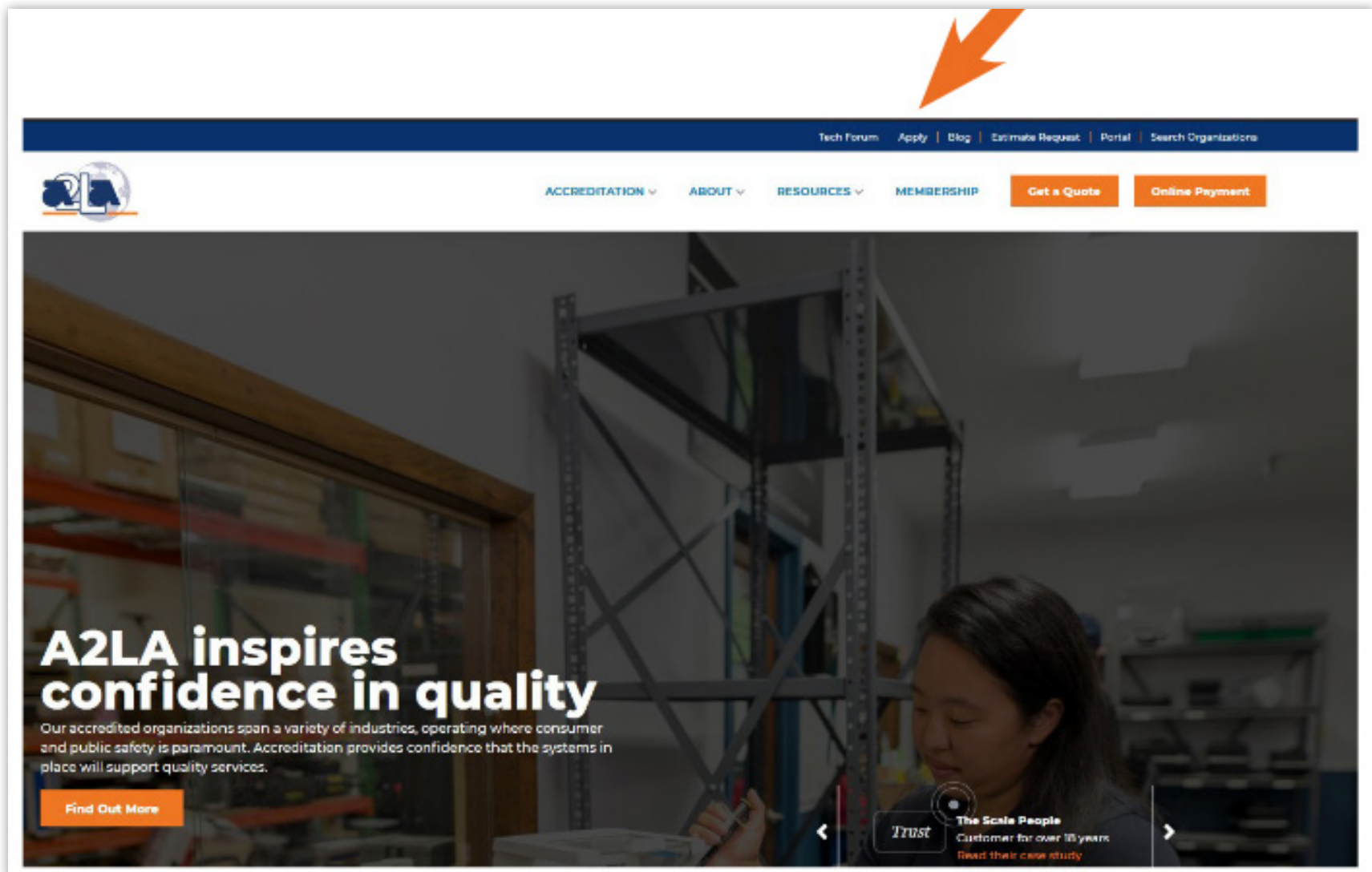


Note: Accreditation is a yearly activity. Renewal assessments are to be completed every 2 years with an annual review (or surveillance assessment) to be completed at the mid-point of the accreditation cycle.



The first step in applying toward accreditation is to submit the application through the A2LA.org website by clicking 'apply'.

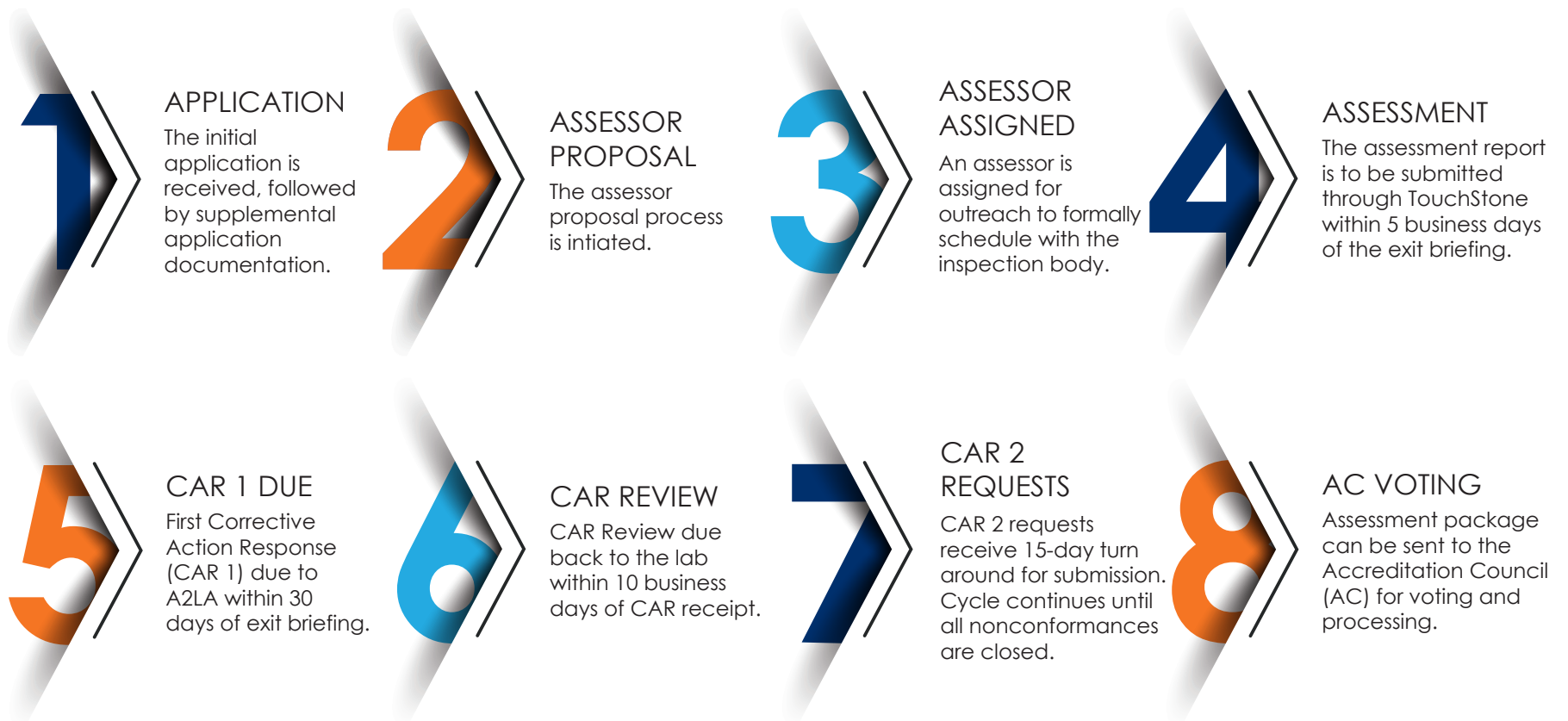
After the submission of supplemental documentation through the customer portal, we will then propose the technical assessor(s) to your organization. If accepted, the assessor(s) will then be assigned to your organization and will contact you directly to schedule the assessment.



In addition to International Standards, your organization will be assessed to the following requirements (where applicable):

- R103 - General Requirements: Proficiency Testing to ISO/IEC 17025 Laboratories
- R105 - Requirements When Making Reference to A2LA Accreditation Status
- P102 - Policy on Metrological Traceability
- R205 - Specific Requirements – Calibration Laboratory Accreditation Program
- R221- Specific Requirements – Forensic Examination Accreditation Program- Testing and Calibration
- FBI Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing laboratories
- FBI Quality Assurance Standards for DNA Databasing Laboratories
- R221a - Annex A - Specific Requirements for Forensic Facilities Licensed in Maryland
- R221b - Annex B - Specific Requirements – A2LA Texas Forensic Science Commission Crime Laboratory Accreditation Program

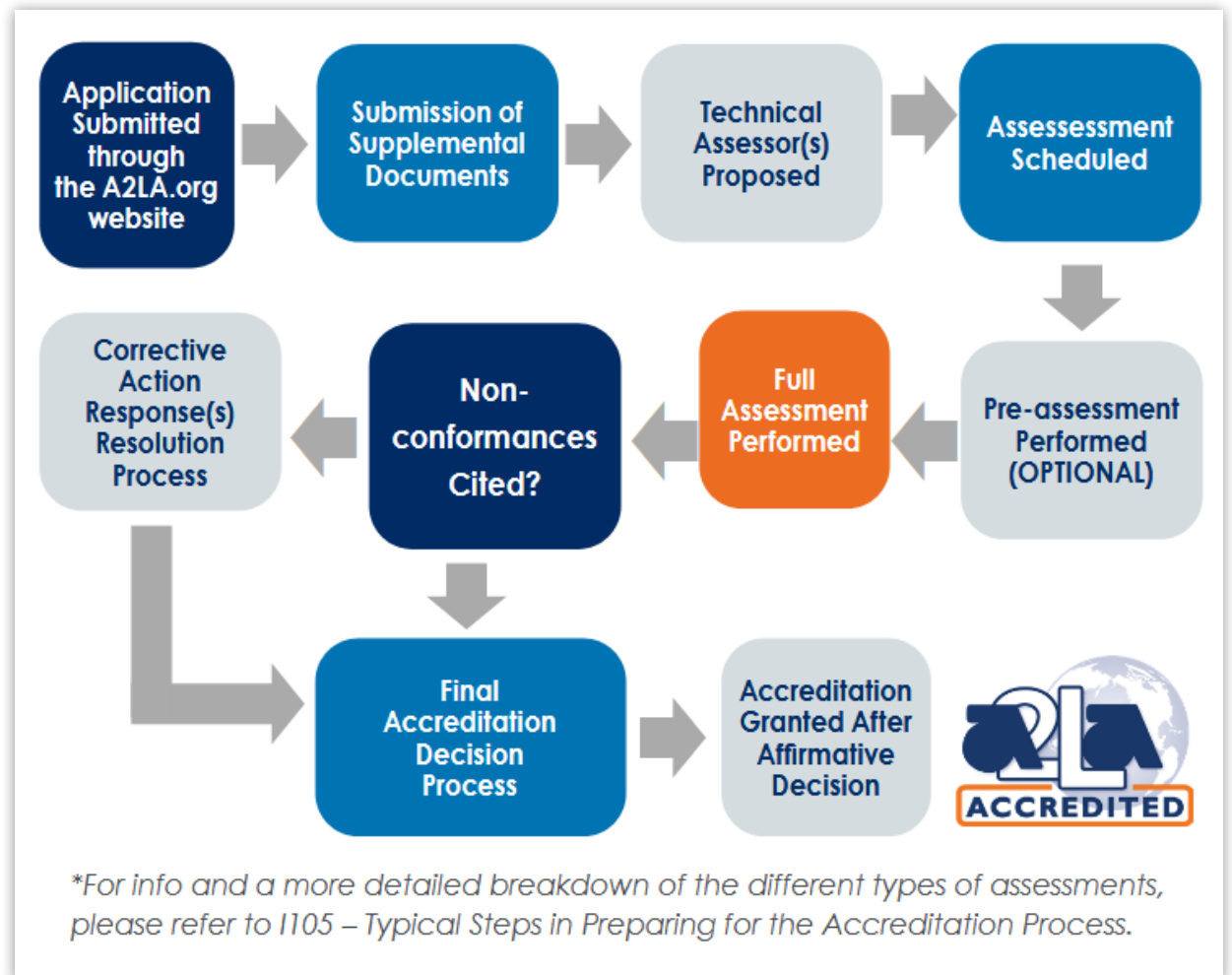
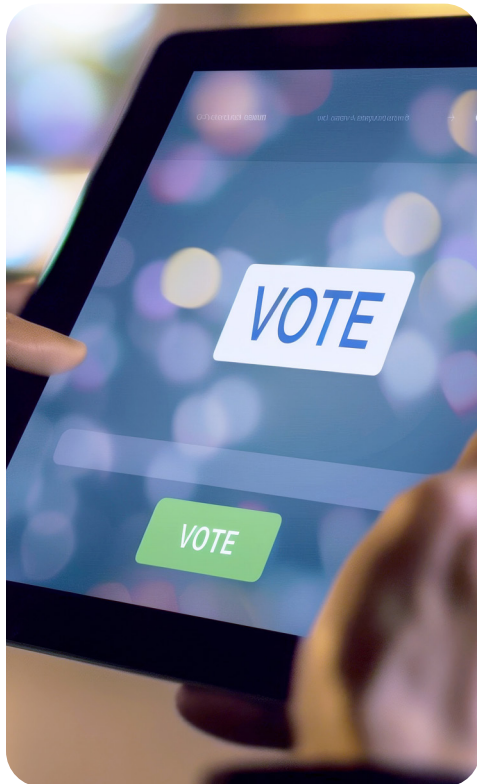
Forensic Accreditation Program Process



Once the on-site assessment is performed, there are two different paths that your organization may follow:

- If there are no nonconformances, the assessment package provided to A2LA by the technical assessor will be sent directly to the Accreditation Council for vote. The Accreditation Council are members who are primarily responsible for reviewing assessment reports and recommending accreditation decisions on A2LA applicants.
- If there are nonconformances, your organization will enter the corrective action process where you will begin to address the nonconformances. Nonconformances must be resolved prior to A2LA sending the assessment package to the Accreditation Council.

Once affirmative accreditation votes are received, you will receive your accreditation.



Pre-Assessment (Optional)

A2LA does offer the option of having a pre-assessment. A pre-assessment provides an opportunity for the organization to evaluate its preparedness for the initial assessment. In most cases the same (lead) assessor assigned to perform the initial assessment, or an A2LA Staff Assessor will perform the pre-assessment. The assessor will usually spend a day assessing the facility evaluating the management system. This is an opportunity to identify areas of possible non-compliance before a full assessment is carried out.

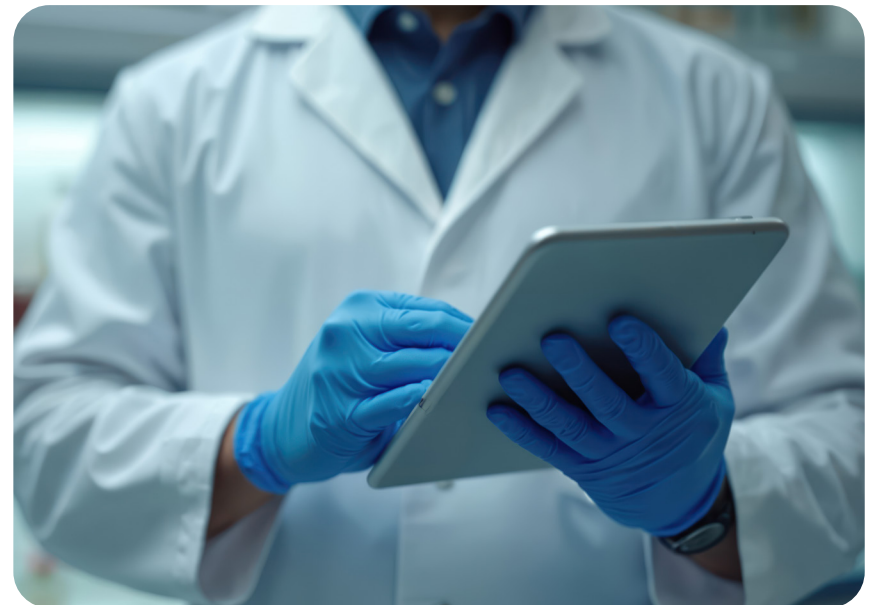
During this pre-assessment, the management system will be assessed for implementation and compliance with the applicable conformity assessment standard as well as the applicable A2LA requirements. If requested, a sampling of technical activities may also be evaluated.

When the CAB feels that they have addressed the items noted during the pre-assessment they should contact their Accreditation Officer to proceed with the initial assessment described previously.



Surveillance Assessment

Your organization will be required to undergo a surveillance assessment. This is typically a one-day assessment to confirm implementation of the management system. Reaffirmation of accreditation to the established anniversary date will be based upon having the surveillance assessment, A2LA's receipt of the appropriate final payment of fees, and resolution of all (where applicable) nonconformances cited during the surveillance. An assessor (usually the same person who performed your initial assessment or an A2LA Staff Assessor) will be proposed to your organization upon receipt of the aforementioned documents. The assessor will schedule and perform the surveillance assessment.





Transferring Accreditation to A2LA

A2LA has a streamlined transfer policy that allows organizations to stay in their current accreditation cycle. We request your last, full, on-site assessment report and correlating corrective actions to determine your anniversary date and prorate the annual fee- so you won't pay more than you have to. Your application and required documentation will be submitted to the Accreditation Council for a vote and return within 15 days.

Forensic Accreditation Program Requirements

Forensic testing, calibration, and inspection organizations earn public trust, meet regulatory and statutory requirements, and ensure a robust system of quality assurance and control for their organizations when they are accredited by A2LA.

A2LA accreditation conveys to potential customers and to judicial and regulatory authorities that an organization has confidence in its work product, and that this confidence has been confirmed by a third-party, non-profit organization.

A2LA's accreditation of forensic organizations spans two programs:

- Forensic Testing/Calibration Laboratories
- Forensic Inspection Units

To obtain both laboratory and inspection body accreditations, complete both application processes and comply with all the requirements in each program.

Forensic Testing/Calibration Laboratories

All organizations seeking accreditation for forensic testing and/or forensic calibration must meet the general requirements of ISO/IEC 17025 and supplemental accreditation requirements in R221- Specific Requirements- Forensic Examination Accreditation Program- Testing and Calibration.

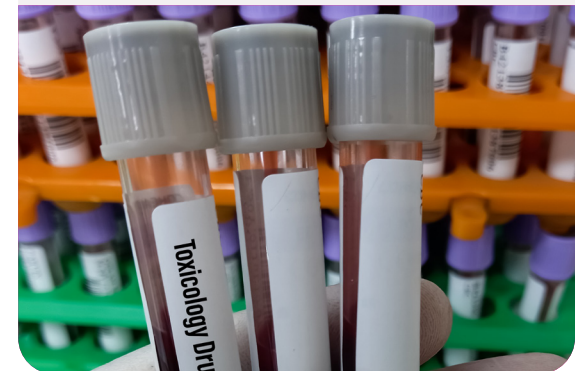
The ISO/IEC 17025 program applies to organizations performing forensic testing, which would include activities of qualitative or quantitative analysis to identify characteristics of an item, such as dimension, physical structure, or elemental structure. The program also applies to organizations performing calibrations of breath alcohol measuring instruments.



Discipline Examples

- Breath Alcohol Measuring Instrument Calibration
- Crime Scene Investigation and Evidence Collection*
- Digital Forensics*
- Fire Debris and Explosives
- Firearms & Toolmarks*
- Forensic Biology (includes DNA Analysis)
- Friction Ridge*
- Questioned Documents*
- Seized Drugs
- Toxicology
- Trace Evidence

**These disciplines fall under the ISO/IEC 17020 program but will be accredited under ISO/IEC 17025 program, if requested.*



Forensic Inspection Units

Forensic inspection is considered the examination of an item or location and, on the basis of professional judgment, the determination of conformity with proposed events or known conditions. All inspection bodies seeking accreditation for forensic inspection must meet the general requirements of ISO/IEC 17020 and supplemental accreditation requirements in R318- Specific Requirements- Forensic Examination Accreditation Program- Inspection.

A2LA recognizes the very close relationship between inspection, sampling, testing, and measurement; yet understands that inspection includes a variety of activities not covered in testing laboratory accreditation. For the purposes of accreditation, measurements that are used to assist in documenting the inspected location or item and tests or processes that are used to assist in the identification, visualization, and collection of forensic evidence may be listed on the inspection body's Scope of Accreditation.



Discipline Examples

- Crime Scene Investigation and Evidence Collection
- Digital Forensics
- Environmental Investigation
- Fire/Arson Investigation and Evidence Collection
- Firearms & Toolmarks
- Friction Ridge
- Questioned Documents
- Structural Failure Investigation – Forensic Engineering

The ISO/IEC 17020 program applies to organizations performing forensic inspections rather than testing.



Forensic Examination Accreditation Subprograms

A2LA's Forensic Examination Accreditation Program offers the following subprograms:

- Forensic Facilities Licensed in Maryland
- Texas Forensic Science Commission Crime Lab Accreditation Program
- FBI QAS Assessment



Forensic Facilities Licensed in Maryland

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) and the Office of Health Care Quality (OHCQ) recognize A2LA as a deemed accreditation body under the State of Maryland in accordance with the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) Title 10, Subtitle 51 Forensic Laboratories. As a deemed accreditation body by the DHMH, forensic laboratories that are regulated under the Maryland Forensic Regulations may obtain accreditation services from A2LA and/or continue using A2LA as an accreditation body. Licensure in the State of Maryland in accordance with COMAR 10.51 is overseen by the OHCQ, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. While gaining accreditation from A2LA is one method for obtaining licensure, laboratories seeking licensure must still apply and be approved by the OHCQ to be licensed in the State of Maryland. Laboratories under this program shall meet R221a- Annex A- Specific Requirements for Forensic Facilities Licensed in Maryland.

Texas Forensic Science Commission Crime Lab Accreditation Program

A2LA has been identified by the Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC) as a "Recognized Accrediting Body" for the accreditation of laboratories performing forensic analysis of physical evidence for use in a criminal proceeding in accordance with Texas Administrative Code Title 37, Part 15, Chapter 651, Subchapter A, Rule §651.4. Participation in this program is mandatory for all A2LA-accredited organizations that are accredited under the TFSC Crime Laboratory Accreditation Program to perform forensic analyses in or for the State of Texas. Organizations under this program shall meet R221b- Annex B- Specific Requirements- A2LA Texas Forensic Science Commission Crime Laboratory Accreditation Program.

FBI QAS Assessment

On January 13, 2014, the National DNA Index System (NDIS) Procedures Board approved the designation of A2LA as an accrediting agency under the United States Federal DNA Identification Act (42 U.S.C. 14132). As a designated agency, A2LA, through its Forensic Examination Accreditation Program, is recognized to assess laboratories performing DNA analyses on DNA samples obtained from identified subject(s) for the purposes of entering the resulting DNA profile or DNA record into a DNA database, as well as laboratories performing DNA analyses on known or casework reference samples.

A2LA offers two options:

- An assessment-only service to the FBI Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing and DNA Databasing Laboratories to all organizations that are currently approved by the NDIS board and are seeking an external assessment to meet Section 15.2.
- A dual assessment of the FBI Quality Assurance Standards for Forensic DNA Testing and/or DNA Databasing Laboratories and ISO/IEC 17025.

Guidance Documents

- G104- A2LA Guide for Estimation of Measurement Uncertainty in Testing
- G133- A2LA Guide for Establishing Proficiency Testing Plans
- G135 - Guidance for Application of A2LA's Policy on Metrological Traceability

Get Involved

There are many ways to become involved in A2LA's accreditation process and make your mark in the forensic science community.

- Forensic Examination Advisory Committee
- Accreditation Council
- Forensics Assessor
- A2LA Membership
- AnnCon



Forensic Examination Advisory Committee (FEAC)

The scope of the FEAC is the development of accreditation and assessment guidelines in accordance with the ISO/IEC 17025 and ISO/IEC 17020 requirements and any other requirements that are applicable for organizations performing testing or inspection-related activities where the result of those activities will be used in civil and criminal proceedings.

The A2LA FEAC discusses how relevant technical methods, procedures, techniques, and/or guidelines are to be interpreted and assessed. They also assist in addressing technical questions that may arise in any phase of the accreditation cycle and with the development and review of forensic program requirements.

Accreditation Council

The Accreditation Council (AC) is the A2LA committee responsible for issuing decisions on the accreditation status of organizations that apply for accreditation.

A2LA continually seeks volunteers to serve on the AC. Benefits of serving on the council include:

- Contribution to the improved quality coming from A2LA-accredited organizations
- Up-to-date knowledge of accreditation requirements and industry practices
- The opportunity to build personal networks and work with A2LA in other capacities (e.g., as an assessor or on the Criteria Council)
- Credential for demonstrating expertise and experience to be a part of this unique high-level review panel
- Honorary A2LA membership, with voting rights at the annual meeting of the Association and for the election of the A2LA Board of Directors



AC members are primarily responsible for reviewing assessment reports and recommending accreditation decisions on A2LA applicants. Council members can expect to review one assessment package per month on average, with each review typically taking one to two hours to complete. AC members are requested to return their votes in a timely manner (normally within five days) utilizing A2LA's online balloting system.

If you are a subject matter expert in any of these areas with at least **five years** of direct experience, possess well-developed skills in evaluating and analyzing **written and verbal communication**, and can exercise **independent and objective judgment**, then A2LA wants to hear from you.

Forensics Assessor

The A2LA corps of conformity assessment professionals are committed to providing comprehensive, technical accreditation experience.

Interested in becoming an assessor with the premier accreditation body in the United States? If you have the following qualifications, A2LA wants to hear from you:

- You are a peer expert with at least 7-10 years of direct experience.
- You communicate effectively; verbally and in writing.
- You demonstrate the leadership, poise, tact, persistence, integrity, maturity, and other personal attributes necessary to carry out assessments.

The A2LA corps of conformity assessment professionals are committed to providing comprehensive, technical accreditation experience.

A2LA is seeking subject matter experts in many areas in the field of forensics, including but not limited to:

- Bloodstain Pattern Analysis
- Crime Scene Investigation
- Digital Forensics
- DNA Analysis (including Mito, SNP, Probabilistic Genotyping, WGS, Rapid DNA, etc.)
- Fire Investigation
- Latent Prints
- Medicolegal Death Investigation
- Questioned Documents
- Footwear/Tire Impressions
- Shooting Reconstruction
- Toxicology
- Trace Evidence

Familiarity with ISO/IEC 17020, ISO/IEC 17025, and/or the FBI Quality Assurance Standards is a plus!

The Path to A2LA's Forensic Examination Accreditation Program Made Easier with the Coverdell Grant

The Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Act of 2000, which became public law (106-561), was established to improve the quality, efficiency, and integrity of forensic science services within the criminal justice system. To achieve this objective, the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program (also referred to as the Coverdell Grant) awards federal funding to states and units of local government to aid crime laboratories and medical examiner's offices to enhance the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner services. In collaboration with the Justice for All Act of 2004, these funds can be utilized to address the backlog in the analysis of forensic evidence, provide training for forensic science practitioners, and acquire necessary equipment, instrumentation, and lab supplies.

Additionally, it also provides support for crime laboratories and medical examiners' offices to obtain and retain accreditation. From FY 2002 to FY 2024, more than 1,780 Coverdell Grant awards were received by states and units of local government. From FY 2017 to FY 2021, more than 20 agencies obtained initial accreditation after being awarded the Coverdell Grant, which be utilized for the following purposes:

1. Improvement in the quality and timeliness of services provided by crime laboratories or medical examiners offices in the state
2. Elimination of a backlog in the analysis of forensic science evidence
3. Training, assistance, and employment of forensic laboratory personnel
4. Address emerging forensic science issues (statistics/contextual bias/measurement uncertainty) and forensic science technology
5. Training and education of forensic pathologists
6. Facilitation of accreditation and certification

Crime laboratories and medical examiner's offices interested in becoming accredited by A2LA and applying for the Coverdell Grant can request an accreditation cost estimate by visiting [A2LA.org](https://a2la.org). To learn more about the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program and other potential funding opportunities, visit <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/coverdell/overview>. the application and review processes may take time, so it is imperative to prepare and have all the required information and documentation ready.



A Better World Through Accreditation

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