

SQA Advisory: No. 6

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TOPIC: Assessment Activities – Planned vs. That Listed in SQA Agreement (Proposal):

Introduction:

SQA develops proposals (i.e., quotations) for service based on input provided by clients and/or prospects and proper application of rules and requirements. The resultant proposal is based on circumstances as known at the time the proposal was developed. However, it is not uncommon for circumstances and conditions to change.

Discussion:

The SQA staff executes due diligence in applying the applicable requirements to the circumstances as described by the client and/or prospect. We use an “account manager” approach to communication. Once the Agreement is accepted, a qualified lead auditor is assigned to each client. It is the job of the assigned lead auditor to assure that either 1) the assessment is executed as proposed in the Agreement or 2) if the circumstances have changed, that the client is made aware of the affect the changes will have on the assessment process. As long as the circumstances upon which the proposal was developed have not changed, there are typically very few reasons for the actual assessment process to differ from that proposed. However, things do change: employee counts increase or decrease; names of organizations change; environmental issues arise during Stage-1 assessments that were not realized during the proposal development process; rules for accreditation and/or approval may have changed. These and others may cause there to be a difference between the assessment processes proposed (e.g., number of audit-days; grouping of sites) and the assessment processes actually required.

SQA Position:

SQA must assure itself and its clients that the integrity of SQA certificates is valid and remains so. This is achieved via professional application of rules and requirements throughout the process. Should circumstances change between the proposal and actual assessment phases, it is the responsibility of the assigned SQA lead auditor to communicate these changes to the client. The official means for communicating the assessment process is termed the Audit Plan. This document is developed by the assigned lead auditor and then sent to the client for review and approval. It is incumbent upon the lead auditor and client management representatives to review Audit Plans and discuss any differences that may exist between what was proposed in the Agreement. If there are any questions, clients are urged to review them with their assigned lead auditor.