

A140-02 - GUIDANCE FOR LABORATORIES ON REMOTE ASSESSMENTS

Revision# 1.0

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CALA
Trust, measured accurately

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----------|
| 1.0 Scope | 1 |
| 2.0 Tools | 1 |
| 3.0 Pre-assessment Arrangements | 1 |
| 4.0 Personnel | 2 |
| 5.0 Timing | 2 |
| 6.0 Assessment of Appendices | 3 |
| 7.0 Frequently Asked Questions | 3 |
| 8.0 Revision History | 5 |

1.0 SCOPE

Remote assessments are one tool used by CALA to determine conformance to ISO/IEC 17025:2017 and other CALA policies. Laboratories that are identified to undergo a remote assessment must comply with A140-01 - CALA Policy on Remote Assessments, which is publicly available on the CALA website (www.cala.ca). This document, on the other hand, is a guidance document to help CALA laboratories through the process. Following the guidance in this document will make the remote assessment efficient and effective for the laboratory.

2.0 TOOLS

Paramount to a successful remote assessment are the appropriate tools.

The laboratory will need internet access, with sufficient bandwidth to run virtual meetings.

If appendices are being assessed, it is best if the laboratory work area itself has internet access. Smart phones with video capability work great for this purpose, but be mindful that if the laboratory itself does not have Wi-Fi that cellular data will be utilized. If a smart phone is not readily available, a laptop with a camera or GoPro are two other devices that could be used. Ensure devices are fully charged or have alternative power sources available during the assessment. Where resources allow, it is useful to have multiple devices available for assessments with multiple assessors.

The videoconferencing application preferred by CALA is GoToMeeting. It has been proved to be robust, and assessors are familiar with it. GoToMeeting has a feature that allows the laboratory to share its screen with the assessor(s), which facilitates review of records. Information on accessing GoToMeeting will be provided by CALA approximately one week before the assessment. Laboratories may also use their own videoconferencing application.

It may be useful to have a scanner available, so that records can be scanned and submitted to the assessor. If the laboratory does not have a scanner, a photo of a document or record has proved to be a good alternative.

3.0 PRE-ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

As always, ensure that the assessor is aware of the laboratory hours of operation and availability of key staff. One thing that never has to be considered during an on-site visit is that the assessor(s) and laboratory may be in different time zones so be very clear in your communication!

The assessor will request more documents and records up front (e.g., nonconformance reports, complaint log, examples of opportunities and risks, calibration certificates, etc...) in order to save time during the virtual meeting. It is in the laboratory's best interests to submit any documents and records as requested (and in a timely manner), as this will only make the virtual interviews go more smoothly. Otherwise, during the virtual interviews, laboratory staff will have to scan those items at that time, which will make the virtual meeting more disjointed and will cause the virtual meetings to be prolonged longer than necessary. Also, documents and records should be submitted in a workable format (e.g., Word or an editable pdf) as much as possible so that the assessor can make notes and highlights directly on the documents and records. Use the FTP as much as possible to share documents and records; it is far more efficient and will not clog up e-mail systems.

As part of the pre-assessment arrangements, it is advisable to set up a test of the application that is to be used during the remote assessment.

4.0 PERSONNEL

It is best to have laboratory IT personnel nearby to troubleshoot any issues with virtual meetings on the laboratory's end.

Have key staff available for the Opening and Closing meetings.

5.0 TIMING

By far, one of the biggest differences between a remote assessment and the on-site assessment is the amount of time to deliver the assessment and the timing of the activities. As can be imagined, if an assessor needs to verify a document or record and the assessment needs to be put on hold so that laboratory staff can find and submit the document or record, valuable time will be lost and the process will seem very disjointed. That is the main reason why it is best to submit everything up front as is possible, or to keep notes and submit all the required objective evidence at an appropriate time. That being said, even with the most organized assessor(s) and laboratory staff will find that a remote assessment will likely take a bit longer than if an on-site was being conducted simply because being on a videoconference is totally different than being in the laboratory since most people can only be on a videoconference for finite amounts of time. As such, it is best to break up the days differently. For example, a reassessment that normally takes 2 days on-site may be best broken up into 3 days with only 4-5 hours per day.

6.0 ASSESSMENT OF APPENDICES

As with an on-site assessment, it is best that the analyst responsible for the test method being assessed is the person who is interviewed and that the interview is conducted at the analyst's work station. The assessor(s) will want to view instruments and records, and may even ask to witness some testing (in whole, or in part). Experience tells us that it's useful to have someone else hold the camera or have a fixed stand while the analyst is being interviewed or demonstrating equipment, in order to keep the image stable for the assessor(s).

7.0 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

[Q] With GoToMeeting, there are hosts/organizer and participants. What is the difference?

[A] *Host/Organizer* = is the lead assessor who starts the meeting using the username and password provided in an email from CALA. The host/organizer also assigns a meeting password. If the host/organizer closes the meeting for all, the meeting will end.

Participant = everyone else attending the meeting. That includes lab staff, non-lead assessors, CALA staff. To enter the meeting, participants must enter the password shared by the host.

[Q] What if my laptop or computer doesn't have camera and/or mic?

[A] If you have an iOS device (iPhone or iPad) or an Android device (phone or tablet), you can use the integrated camera/mic in your device for the audio and video portion of the meeting

1. Download the GoToMeeting app to your device
2. Make sure both laptop/computer and device are on Wi-Fi
3. HOST the meeting on laptop/computer to view docs etc.
4. Connect as a PARTICIPANT using device GoToMeeting app
5. Use device GoToMeeting app to share audio and video of yourself.

[Q] What if the audio quality is poor during the meeting?

[A] All CALA GotoMeeting licences include a toll-free number for Canada and the US. The phone number is included in the email to the lab.

[Q] Can the remote link be accessed several different times during the day and over at least 2 – 3 days?

[A] Yes, the link will be made inactive once the assessment is complete. The only caveat is that you cannot host the meeting on two separate computers at same time. Only one host at a time, up to 250 participants (non-hosts) may attend, including yourself – on your phone as a participant, for example.

[Q] Each time someone leaves a meeting session they will have to re-enter the password to join the meeting again, correct?

A Yes, that is correct. A reminder that the host sets the password before starting the meeting.

[Q] Are non-hosts/non-organizers able to share their screen? Lab staff will need to share their screens to show the lead some of their records.

[A] Yes, the host must be the one to grant them access to share their screen. From the list of participants on right hand menu, choose the participant your wish to grant access. They will receive a pop-up message on their computer asking them to share their screen.

[Q] I'm assuming that the lab can send the email from CALA containing the GoToMeeting link to fellow staff members that will be involved. Correct?

[A] Yes, the lab contact should share the link with whomever they think should participate. The lead may want to advise the lab contact of this.

[Q] Will the lab participants have the same code name they log in? It looks like they can change it to their real name once they're in.

[A] Each user can change their own name before and after login. A reminder that the host sets the password before starting the meeting, and each participant will need to enter the password at login. The host can set the password to be whatever they want, as long it is shared with the lab contact. However, it is advisable to use the CALA pre-assigned password, as this is the password (and link) the lab contact will share with lab staff.

[Q] One thing that I noticed is the video lag once I'm in GoToMeeting. There's a small amount of lag with my webcam outside of the GoToMeeting app, but not as slow as when I'm in the app. Any suggestions to improve the lag?

[A] Assuming you are holding the meeting at home, or in an environment where you have complete control over the router:

- Always use a hardwire ethernet connection.
- If hardwire connection is not possible, use Wi-Fi and set-up as close to your router as possible.
- Many home routers have a two-channel system, 2.4 and 5GHz, each identified with different SSID names (SSID is simply the technical term for a Wi-Fi/network name). 5GHz provides faster data rates at a shorter distance. 2.4GHz offers coverage for farther distances, but may perform at slower speeds. Use 5GHz first, if possible, and performs best when you are close to router. If you know you have two SSID and do not know how to switch SSID, contact the person who set up your router. If you have auto-switching enabled, it may not be possible to choose a different SSID manually.
- If the video lag become intolerable, turn video off and continue with audio.

Finally, restarting your router before starting a meeting can help you get started with a fresh session. Over time, routers can get bogged down and slow down, and a restart can help. Restarts are not always possible without disrupting other network users or affecting systems that require an always-on internet connection (i.e. home alarm).

8.0 REVISION HISTORY

| Revision No. | Revision Date | Revision |
|--------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1.0 | July 23, 2020 | Initial publication |