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## **ACCREDITATION CRITERIA FOR THIRD-PARTY PERMITTING, PLAN REVIEW AND INSPECTION SERVICE PROVIDERS**

**AC402  
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### **PREFACE**

The attached accreditation criteria has been issued to provide all interested parties with guidelines on implementing performance features of the applicable standards referenced herein. The criteria was developed and adopted following public hearings conducted by the International Accreditation Service, Inc. (IAS), Accreditation Committee and is effective on the date shown above. All accreditations issued or reissued on or after the effective date must comply with this criteria. If the criteria is an updated version from a previous edition, solid vertical lines (|) in the outer margin within the criteria indicate a technical change or addition from the previous edition. Deletion indicators (→) are provided in the outer margins where a paragraph or item has been deleted if the deletion resulted from a technical change. This criteria may be further revised as the need dictates.

IAS may consider alternate criteria provided the proponent submits substantiating data demonstrating that the alternate criteria are at least equivalent to the attached criteria and otherwise meet applicable accreditation requirements.

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# ACCREDITATION CRITERIA FOR THIRD-PARTY PERMITTING, PLAN REVIEW AND INSPECTION SERVICE PROVIDERS

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

**1.1 Scope:** This criteria sets forth requirements for obtaining and maintaining International Accreditation Service, Inc. (IAS), accreditation of nongovernmental third-party permitting, plan review and inspection service providers (third-party service providers).

**1.2 References:** Publications listed below refer to current editions (unless otherwise stated), current editions of related construction codes published by the International Code Council or codes duly adopted by the relevant jurisdiction.

**1.2.1 International Building Code® (IBC),** current edition, and related construction codes published by the International Code Council.

**1.2.2 ISO/IEC Standard 17020, General Criteria for the Operation of Various Types of Bodies Performing Inspection.**

**1.2.3 Building Department Administration,** by Robert E. O'Bannon, published by the International Code Council and International Accreditation Service, Inc.

**1.2.4 Establishing Building Permit Fees (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition),** by Michael Bouse, published by the International Code Council and International Accreditation Service, Inc.

**1.2.5 IAS Rules of Procedure for Third-party Permitting, Plan Review and Inspection Service Providers.**

**1.2.6 IAS Policy on Accreditation Certificate Validity.**

## 2.0 DEFINITIONS

**2.1 Accreditation:** Formal third-party recognition that a body fulfills specified requirements and is competent to carry out specific conformity assessment and regulatory tasks.

**2.2 Accreditation Committee:** A committee appointed by the IAS Board of Directors to monitor the work of and to develop accreditation criteria for IAS.

**2.3 Accreditation Review Committee (ARC):** A committee established by the IAS Board of Directors to render accreditation decisions on the IAS Third-party Permitting, Plan Review and Inspection Service Providers Accreditation program.

**2.4 Appeal:** Request for reconsideration of any administrative decision by the third-party service provider. Administrative decisions include:

- refusal to accept an application for issuance of a permit;
- refusal to proceed with plan review or inspections;
- corrective action requests;
- refusal to agree with the designer's code interpretation;
- decisions to deny, suspend or halt construction work, if empowered to do so;

– any other action that impedes the attainment of a permit for construction or certificate of occupancy.

**2.5 Applicant:** An individual or corporation applying for a building construction permit or plan review in accordance with local codes or other normative documents.

**2.6 Approved:** Acceptable to the authority having jurisdiction.

**2.7 Approved Agency:** An established and recognized agency regularly engaged in conducting tests or furnishing inspection services, when such agency has been approved. Accreditation by the International Accreditation Service as a testing laboratory, special inspection agency, or product certification agency meets the intent of IBC Section 1702.1 relative to approved agencies.

**2.8 Building:** Any structure used or intended to support or shelter any use or occupancy.

**2.9 Building Code Administrator/Building Official/Code Official:** Governmental officer or other designated authority having jurisdiction (AHJ) charged with the administration and enforcement of codes as adopted in a particular jurisdiction.

**2.10 Building Department/Code Enforcement Agency:** Governmental body which performs functions related to enforcement of construction and other laws.

**2.11 Complaint:** Expression of dissatisfaction, other than appeal, by any person or organization, concerning some matter related to the department, where a response is expected.

**2.12 Construction Documents:** Written, graphic and pictorial documents prepared or assembled to describe the design, location and physical characteristics of a building project.

**2.13 Control:** The direction, regulation and coordination of procedures and related documents to assure consistency of operations.

**2.14 External/Internal Pressures and Influences:** Interference with due process of permitting, plan review, or inspections.

**2.15 Historic Buildings:** Buildings that are listed in or are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or designated as historic under appropriate state or local law.

**2.16 Internal Quality Audits:** Internal studies to identify the extent to which documented procedures are followed and the effectiveness of current processes.

**2.17 Jurisdiction:** A governmental unit that has authority to adopt and enforce construction codes.

**2.18 Licensed Contractor:** Any contractor who has registered with the appropriate state agency or local jurisdiction pursuant to fulfilling the competency requirements in the jurisdiction for which the registration is

issued. Registered contractors may contract only in such jurisdictions.

**2.19 Management or Operational Audits:** Independent evaluations conducted by a qualified entity to measure the operational consistency and overall efficiency of the organization.

**2.20 Management Reviews:** Reviews performed by management of internal audit findings (including quality audits) to assess the organization's level of procedural conformance, identify and correct areas of nonconformance and inefficiency, and engage staff in improving processes and procedures.

**2.21 Permit:** An official document issued by the authority having jurisdiction which authorizes performance of a specified activity.

**2.22 Quality Assurance Plan:** Documents which set forth the policies and practices aimed at ensuring the quality of the organization's services through the observation of work in progress or sampling of completed work.

**2.23 Quality Assurance Program:** The agency's system for maintaining minimum quality levels of service through a collection of self-imposed standards through activities such as internal quality audits, document creation and control, management reviews, etc.

**2.24 Registered Design Professionals:** Individuals registered or licensed to practice their respective design professions as defined by the statutory requirements of the professional registration laws of the state or jurisdiction in which the project is to be constructed.

**2.25 Service Goals:** Goals set for performance in each area of service offered by the third-party service provider. Goals must be quantified (expressed as a number, rating or grade) and established in cooperation with users of services provided by the third-party service provider (citizens, architects, engineers, contractors, etc.) as well as elected and appointed governmental officials. A system must be in place to regularly measure progress in meeting service goals. As part of this system, targets should be established for improvements in three separate areas of overall service: timeliness (turnaround time); quality (error rate); and professionalism (quality of interactions with staff [e.g., knowledge, attitude, responsiveness and helpfulness of staff members] as perceived by users of the services the third-party service provider provides).

**2.26 Special Inspection:** Inspection as herein required of the materials, installation, fabrication, erection or placement of components and connections requiring special expertise to ensure compliance with approved construction documents and referenced standards (see IBC Section 1704). Special inspection agencies are required to demonstrate competence, to the satisfaction of the building or other code official, for inspection of the particular type of construction or operation requiring special inspection. IAS-accredited special inspection agencies satisfy the requirements of Section 1702 of the IBC.

**2.27 Structure:** That which is built or constructed (see "Building").

**2.28 Third Party:** A competent, independent entity recognized to perform specified tasks subject to approval by the governmental authority having jurisdiction.

### 3.0 CODE ADMINISTRATION

The third-party service provider must provide to IAS the information noted in Sections 3.1 through 3.5.

#### 3.1 General Information

**3.1.1** Copy shall be provided of service contract with jurisdiction which establishes the third-party service provider as being in responsible charge for the administration of the adopted code(s). The third-party service provider shall designate an individual who, under the provisions of this contract, will be authorized and directed to enforce the provisions of the building code as set forth in Section 104 of the *International Building Code*<sup>®</sup>.

**3.1.2** Copy shall be provided of organizational chart showing lines of authority within the third-party service provider's organization and within the jurisdiction served under contractual agreement.

**3.1.3** Map shall be provided showing boundaries of jurisdictional area in which the third-party service provider provides services.

**3.1.4** Environmental and topographical information shall be provided on the jurisdiction for which the third-party service provider provides permitting, plan review and inspections: area (in square miles), geographical and topographical features, wind zone, flood risk zone, seismic or other geologic risk zone, and other local environmental health and safety concerns.

**3.1.5** Economic and demographic information shall be provided on the jurisdiction for which the third-party service provider provides permitting, plan review and inspections: current residential and daytime populations; population growth trends and projections; current housing count and future-needs projection; median housing price; property tax rate; and major contributors to local economy (tourism, manufacturing, education, etc.).

#### 3.2 General Operations

**3.2.1** Third-party service provider shall define its responsibility, if any, for administration of zoning, transportation, storm-water, utilities (water and sewer), landscaping, fire inspections, contractor licensing, occupational licensing, etc.

**3.2.2** Third-party service provider shall demonstrate its participation in coordination of work if zoning, transportation, storm-water, fire inspections, contractor licensing, occupational licensing, etc., are not under the responsibility of the third-party service provider, and explain how these approvals are coordinated.

**3.2.3** Third party service provider shall demonstrate that its preparations are coordinated with other departments to respond after natural hazard events to identify damaged buildings and conduct safety inspections.

**3.2.4** Third-party service provider shall demonstrate the existence of policies and procedures in place which address ethical behavior including the prevention of

conflict of interest, methods utilized for employees and staff to avoid external/internal pressures and influences (as defined in Section 2.14) and full disclosure statement pertaining to any financial interest within the jurisdiction where any service is performed other than governmentally contracted inspection, permitting or plan review.

**3.2.5** Third-party service provider shall provide evidence of establishment of standard operating procedures; details of the process in place to ensure uniformity of operating procedures, procedural documents, and forms (see Section 2.13).

**3.2.6** Third-party service provider shall describe accessibility of information and records, documented minimum retention times for records, and provide evidence of safe storage of records.

**3.2.7** Third-party service providers shall provide evidence of control of access to records: safeguards in place to prevent unauthorized access or modifications to records.

**3.2.8** Third-party service providers shall provide evidence of a comprehensive quality assurance program (as defined in Section 2.23) which shall contain, at a minimum, the following components:

**3.2.8.1** Frequent quality assurance activities (as defined in Section 2.22),

**3.2.8.2** Annual, or more frequent, internal quality audits (as defined in Section 2.16),

**3.2.8.3** Management review meetings (as defined in Section 2.20).

**3.2.9** Third-party service providers shall furnish copies of reports of management or operational audits (as defined in Section 2.19) if conducted within the past six years.

**3.2.10** Third-party service providers shall provide adequate facilities and equipment available to employees and contract personnel (i.e., books; manuals; and tools, gauges, meters and equipment used for plan review and inspection functions) and describe how defective equipment is replaced.

**3.2.11** Third-party service providers shall describe method of identification and calibration of available tools and equipment used, as applicable.

**3.2.12** Third-party service providers shall provide list of available transportation equipment; and provide policies on use and maintenance.

**3.2.13** Details on relevant computer software and programs in use shall be provided.

**3.2.14** Availability of information technology (IT) support shall be demonstrated.

**3.2.15** Evidence of validation procedure for computer programs used for plan reviewing shall be provided.

**3.2.16** Evidence of availability of, and policies guiding appropriate employee and contract personnel use of, wireless voice and data communication, such as cell phones, wireless networks, etc., shall be demonstrated.

**3.2.17** Third-party service provider's access to legal counsel shall be demonstrated.

**3.2.18** Description of the third-party service provider's participation in awareness programs and community outreach activities, as applicable, shall be provided.

**3.2.19** Description of all relevant documents available to the public shall be provided.

**3.2.20** Description of innovative practices, if any, shall be provided.

**3.3 Staff Information:** Third-party service providers shall have a sufficient number of staff with the range of expertise to carry out their normal functions.

**3.3.1** Organizational chart providing employee names and titles for all full- and part-time staff positions within the organization shall be provided.

**3.3.2** Training requirements for third-party service provider's personnel in post-disaster assessment and posting of structures shall be provided.

**3.3.3** Job descriptions for all full-time and part-time staff positions, including information on minimum qualifications, education, training, technical knowledge, skills, experience, and certification/licensing requirements shall be documented. Detailed criteria on qualification/certification and/or licensing requirements, if applicable, shall also be documented.

**3.3.3.1** Number of plan reviewers currently employed, by category; i.e., single-trade, such as structural, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, etc., or multi-trade shall be provided.

**3.3.3.2** Number of inspectors currently employed, by category; i.e., single-trade, such as structural, mechanical, electrical, etc., or multi-trade shall be provided.

**3.3.4** Third party service provider shall list additional qualification requirements over and above the state or local requirements for staff, if any, such as P.E. license, contractor license, etc.

**3.3.5** Information on registered design professionals (i.e., number employed, full or part time, by profession) shall be provided.

**3.3.6** Methods of hiring, training and supervising shall be provided.

**3.3.7** Process for verification of individuals' qualifications, education, etc. shall be documented.

**3.3.8** Current standings, and expiration dates, of required certification(s) issued by a national construction code promulgation organization, such as the International Code Council, or other acceptable certification organization, as determined by local ordinance or state laws, for certified staff shall be tracked.

**3.3.9** Performance evaluations shall provide for the establishment of clearly defined performance goals and shall be performed annually, at minimum.

**3.3.10** State-mandated and locally mandated minimum continuing education requirements; and information on jurisdictional continuing education

requirements, over and above state and local minimum requirements shall be documented and tracked. Please note: third-party service providers contracted to provide services in jurisdictions located in coastal areas and flood plains must provide information on the number of inspectors holding ICC Coastal and Flood Plain Construction Inspector certifications or equivalent certifications.

**3.3.11** Participation of individuals in code development activities, with a description of the levels of participation shall be demonstrated.

#### **3.4 Budget**

**3.4.1** Budget for the past fiscal year — Revenue versus Expenditure shall be provided.

**3.4.2** Financial audit method, e.g., internal or third-party shall be stated.

**3.4.3** Liability protection, e.g., errors and omissions insurance policy, bonding, etc. shall be provided.

**3.4.4** Legal structure, e.g., sole proprietor, partnership, limited liability partnership, corporation, S-corporation, not-for-profit corporation, etc. shall be provided.

#### **3.5 Permitting Information**

**3.5.1** Process for issuance of permits shall be documented.

**3.5.2** Coordination of permitting process with other government departments shall be documented.

**3.5.3** Process for establishment of permit and related fees and policies related to fee assessment and collection shall be documented.

**3.5.4** Number of permits issued in the last 12 months, by category shall be provided for:

**3.5.4.1** Residential Permits: new, alterations, additions; single family and multifamily. Commercial Permits: new, alterations, additions.

**3.5.4.2** Construction Type: number of permits issued for each construction type and occupancy classification (including mixed-use occupancies).

**3.5.4.3** Permit Type: number issued by category, such as building, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, fuel gas, etc., or combination/master permits shall be provided.

**3.5.5** Square footage most typical of buildings permitted in the past 12 months; square footage of the largest building permitted in the last 12 months; and story height of the tallest building permitted in the last 12 months shall each be identified .

**3.5.6** Information on Historic buildings: details of permit process, number of permits issued in the last 12 months shall be provided.

**3.5.7** Service goals for permitting shall be established with stakeholder input (as defined in Section 2.245) and performance toward meeting stated goals shall be monitored regularly.

**3.5.8** Procedure and process for dealing with expired or inactive permits shall be in place.

## **4.0 CONSTRUCTION CODES**

The following details are necessary:

**4.1** List of duly adopted construction codes used as a basis for the services provided by the third-party service provider shall be provided.

**4.2** Procedures followed for maintaining awareness of local amendments to any administrative provisions of the building code, fire code and related construction codes shall be documented.

**4.3** Procedures followed for maintaining awareness of local amendments to any technical provisions of the building code, fire code and related construction codes shall be documented.

**4.4** Method for implementation of applicable Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) requirements shall be provided.

## **5.0 PLAN REVIEWS**

The following information is necessary:

**5.1** Policies, procedures and checklists for plan reviews shall be documented.

**5.2** Number of reviews done annually, by category, such as residential buildings, commercial buildings, site development plan reviews, and others, such as fire sprinklers, alarms, etc., shall be tracked.

**5.3** Description of system used for tracking and coordinating plan review activities shall be provided.

**5.4** Procedural requirements for review of building plans for structural parameters shall be provided.

**5.5** Procedures for partial plan approvals and deferred submittals, if offered by the jurisdiction, shall be documented.

**5.6** Number of plan reviews completed in the last 12 months that resulted in rejection or correction of designs shall be tracked.

**5.7** Typical reasons for rejections or correction of designs shall be tracked.

**5.8** Service goals for plan review shall be established with stakeholder input (as defined in Section 2.245) and performance toward meeting stated goals shall be monitored regularly. A quality (error rate) service goal with no life-safety errors shall be established.

## **6.0 VERIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIALS/LICENSES**

Details on the following are required:

**6.1** Process for verifying builder and contractor licenses and insurance shall be documented and followed.

**6.2** Process for verification of licenses of registered design professionals shall be documented and followed.

**6.3** Process for verification of special inspector/special inspection agency credentials shall be documented and followed.

## **7.0 INSPECTIONS**

The following details are necessary:

7.1 Policies and procedures for inspections shall be documented. Use of checklists or inspection results reporting software shall be documented.

7.2 Number and types of inspections done in the last 12 months, by category, such as structural, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, fuel gas, fire and others shall be tracked. Percentage of work rejected and corrected: structural, mechanical, plumbing, electrical, fuel gas, fire and others shall be tracked.

7.3 Rejections and corrections shall be tracked on individual inspector basis.

7.4 Typical reasons for rejections and corrections shall be tracked.

7.5 Use of and compliance with IBC Chapter 17, Special Inspections shall be demonstrated unless otherwise excluded from adopted code.

7.5.1 Use of and requirements for special inspectors, structural observers, approved fabricators/welders shall be demonstrated.

7.5.2 Accreditation requirements or field monitoring of special inspection agency work shall be documented.

7.5.3 Procedures for acceptance of approved fabricators shall be documented.

7.5.4 Procedures for recognition of third-party inspection and testing agencies shall be documented.

7.5.5 Special inspector reporting requirements shall be documented.

7.6 Procedures for final inspections conducted by the third-party service provider shall be provided.

7.7 Procedures for clear, concise and accurate reporting of inspection results shall be in place. Procedures in place to guard against the alteration of inspection report records shall be documented.

7.8 Service goals for inspection shall be established with stakeholder input (as defined in Section 2.245) and performance toward meeting stated goals monitored regularly. A quality (error rate) service goal with no life-safety errors shall be established.

## 8.0 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Details on the following are required:

8.1 There shall be a documented procedure in place to record, investigate and resolve complaints against the department or complaints about contractors, work without permits and other similar violations.

8.2 There shall be evidence of the establishment of, and rules of procedure for, board of appeals as required by Section 112 of the IBC or Section 108 of the *International Fire Code*; or documented procedure for hearing and deciding appeals in accordance with other adopted national construction codes.

## 9.0 CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY

There shall be a documented procedure for the issuance of Certificates of Occupancy (CO) or Certificates of Completion (CC) or temporary certificates of occupancy, as applicable.

## 10.0 ON-SITE EVALUATIONS AND ACCREDITATION

On-site evaluations are required to determine the degree of compliance with the accreditation criteria. A team of trained evaluators and subject-matter experts, led by an IAS-approved evaluation team leader, shall visit the third-party service provider to conduct a thorough review of the organization and the services it provides. The evaluation team will interview leadership (such as mayor, city manager, city attorney, or county administrator), other department heads, staff and stakeholders, as applicable.

Evaluators and subject-matter experts assigned to evaluation teams are screened by IAS to preclude potential conflicts of interest such as: former employees, individuals that may have provided consultant services to the provider or the provider's competitors, etc.

**10.1 Pre-evaluation:** Prior to scheduling the full on-site evaluation, IAS will schedule a two-day visit to the applicant by the lead evaluator and a subject-matter expert(s), to review and comment on the applicant's degree of compliance with the AC402 criteria.

**10.2 Full Evaluation:** In consultation with the applicant, the team leader schedules the full on-site evaluation by a team of trained peer evaluators to verify compliance with the accreditation criteria.

**10.3 Follow-up Evaluation:** In some cases, the team leader may recommend to IAS Chief Technical Officer that a follow-up evaluation take place to verify implementation of corrective measures taken by the applicant in response to the full evaluation. Typically, follow-up evaluations include the team leader and another member for one or two days on-site.

**10.4 Full Accreditation:** Once the team leader indicates, through documented evidence, that the jurisdiction is in full compliance with the requirements of this criteria, the applicant is placed on a list for final review by the IAS Accreditation Review Committee for issuance of the formal accreditation certificate. Accredited service providers will be subject to an on-site surveillance evaluation at the conclusion of the initial year of accreditation.

**10.5 Conditional Accreditation:** At the discretion of the Accreditation Review Committee, conditional accreditation may be granted to an applicant who is substantially in compliance with the accreditation criteria and who has shown evidence of a clear action plan to address unresolved evaluation comments/concerns. The terms of conditional accreditation shall be determined by the Accreditation Review Committee. Conditional accreditation shall not exceed one year.

Accredited service providers will be subject to an on-site compliance evaluation, at the conclusion of the period of conditional accreditation, at which time the Accreditation Review Committee will re-evaluate the agency's accreditation status.

## 11.0 ANNUAL REPORTS AND RE-EVALUATION

To maintain accredited status, the accredited service provider must, at all times, be in compliance with the rules of procedure and the accreditation criteria. Annual reports, addressing key elements of the criteria, must be prepared

by the accredited service provider and submitted to IAS each year the service provider is not subject to an on-site evaluation. Submitted information must also include changes in key staff, changes in facilities or operating procedures, or any problems that could potentially impact the entity's accredited status.

| At the end of every three-year term commencing from the date of the on-site surveillance evaluation, the accredited third-party service provider will be subject to an on-site full re-evaluation by IAS.■