

National Information Security Compliance Framework (NISCF) – National Information Assurance (NIA) – Audit Work Program

[NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-SOP-AWP]

Standard Operating Procedure

National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA)

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National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) has designed and created this Standard Operating Procedure, titled "National Information Security Compliance Framework (NISCF) – National Information Assurance (NIA) – Audit Work Program –Standard Operating Procedure" - V1.0 - C0 – Public / PS1 – Non-Personal Data (Non-PD) , in order to provide the required steps and actions to be performed by the Accredited Audit Service Providers for audit work program development and update during NIA Certification Audits, as part of National Information Security Compliance Framework (NISCF) Certification Services of the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA).

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Based on Emiri Decree No 1 of year 2021, National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) – National Cyber Governance and Cyber Assurance Affairs (NCGAA) is the entity responsible for issuing certificates for Technology and Information Security service providers and Certificates of Compliance with National Information Security standards and policies.

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1. Introduction

The National Information Security Compliance Framework (NISCF) helps to support the achievement of Qatar's National Cyber Security Strategy; it complements Qatar's National Information Assurance Framework (including wider applicable information security legislation, regulation, and standards) to establish safe and vibrant cyberspace.

NCSA offers Audit Service Accreditation for Service Providers that are willing to participate in the delivery of audits related to NISCF's Services.

National Information Assurance (NIA) Certification is one of the NISCF's services that requires the reliance on Audit Service Providers.

Accredited Audit Service Providers shall comply with the steps and rules defined in this document when performing NIA Certification Audit. Conformance to this procedure is considered in the maintenance of the Audit Service Providers Accreditation.



2. Purpose and Scope

2.1. Purpose

This Standard Operating Procedure has been developed with the objective to instruct the Accredited Audit Service Providers for National Information Assurance (NIA) on the mandatory steps for audit work program development and update.

This Standard Operating Procedure shall be read in conjunction with the NISCF Audit Standard (NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND) and NIA Audit Accreditation Standard (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-STND).

2.2. Scope

This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all National Information Assurance (NIA) Certification Audits.



3. Terms and Definitions

The terminologies used in this document are consistent with the definitions provided in the NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-GTXD (General Taxonomy Document for National Accreditation - Public), NCSA-NISCF-CERT-GTXD (General Taxonomy Document for National Certification - Public), NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-NIA-AUD-STND (NIA Audit Accreditation Standard) and the NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND (NISCF Audit Standard -Public).

For the purpose of this document, the following verbs indicate:

Appropriate	Suitable for or to.
Can	A modal verb that entail a possibility or capacity.
May	A modal verb that entail a permission.
Shall	A model verb that entail a requirement.
Should	A modal verb that entail a recommendation

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4. Standard Operating Procedure

4.1. Introduction

As defined in section A.P.2.2.2. Audit Work Program of the NISCF Audit Standard (NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND), the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall have a clear and document audit work program covering the complete NIA Certification lifecycle (i.e., from initial Certification audit to Re-Certification).

The audit work program is the most critical document in NIA Audit Accreditation and NIA Certification audit engagements.

The rules and principles applied in developing and documenting the audit work program for initial Certification audit (i.e., for planning, execution, supervision, reporting and completion of the audit) shall also be applied to subsequent audit(s) (i.e., Maintenance, special audit(s) and Re-Certification).

The audit work program is related to:

- The objective and scope of the audit(s) (Please refer to the Technical Directive on Objectives and Audit Scope (NCSA-NISCF-NIA-TD-OAS-001) for more information on the objectives of the different audit engagements under the NIA Certification Service);
- The detection risk level required to keep the audit risk at low acceptable level (Please refer to the Standard Operating Procedure on Audit Risk (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-SOP-AR) for more information on the detection risk); and
- The sampling methodology impact the extent of the audit procedures (Please refer to the Standard Operating Procedure on Sampling (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-SOP-SAMP) for more information on samples sizes required).

4.2. Principles

The following principles provide the cornerstone to develop and maintain an audit work program that is in conformance with the NISCF Audit Standard (NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND):

From standard to tailored: The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall have a standard audit work program that shall be provided as part of the Accreditation request. This standard audit work program shall be

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the basis to develop quickly and efficiently a tailored audit work program specific to a NIA Certification audit engagement allowing to reduce the audit timeline and ease of use by the audit team;

- Covering all audit activities: The audit work program shall cover all the necessary audit activities to perform the audit. Therefore, the audit work program shall not only include the audit testing scripts to audit the NIA requirements (audit criteria), but it shall also include the audit activities to be conducted for the planning activities (e.g., preliminary work, planning, audit risk assessment, sampling, the use of work of others...), the execution and supervision activities (e.g., kick-off meeting, audit evidence and documentation, Design Effectiveness (DE) and Operating Effectiveness (OE) audits, monitoring, adjustments, findings and conclusions confirmation...) and reporting and completion activities (e.g., preliminary reporting, completion meeting, final reporting, follow-up activities...);
- Covering all NIA Certification lifecycle: The audit work program shall cover all audit activities mentioned in the indentation above for all the types of audit(s) during the NIA Certification lifecycle. It is understood that certain special audit(s) are specific and it is infeasible to have a standard audit work program for them. However, for the audit(s) that are mandatory during the NIA Certification lifecycle (i.e., Maintenance and Re-Certification) and audit(s) for which the objectives are defined and are likely to be encountered by the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit (i.e., scope expansion and reinstatement after suspension), the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall have sections in its standard audit work program covering these aspects;
- Covering all NIA requirements: The audit work program shall cover all the NIA requirements by audit testing scripts (as Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit cannot anticipate which NIA requirements will be applied in each NIA Certification audit engagement and it will be impractical and time consuming to develop specific audit testing scripts during an engagement);
- Rotation on the scope to be audited: Based on the multistage layered sampling approach (Please refer to the Standard Operating Procedure on Sampling (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-SOP-SAMP) for more information on multistage layered sampling and scope coverage aspects), not all the business processes in the scope of audit (i.e.,

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Certification scope) will be audited in every audit. This by default extend, and is further accentuated, to the supporting information assets to those business processes. Therefore, and to ensure that not only a subset of the scope of audit (i.e., Certification scope) is audited during the NIA Certification lifecycle, the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall change the assignment made in the multistage layered samples between audit(s). This also applies for the audit of the effectiveness of the Corrective Actions Plan (CAP) either performed as follow-up during the same audit or during a subsequent audit, except when it comes to auditing corrections (Please refer to the Technical Directive on Corrective Actions Plan (NCSA-NISCF-NIA-TD-CAP-001) for more information on corrections); and

Update and accuracy: The audit work program shall be updated regularly during an engagement and shall reflect the actual activities performed during an audit engagement.

When it comes to coverage (i.e., all audit activities, all NIA Certification lifecycle and all NIA requirements), the focus for the audit(s) other than the initial Certification audit is on the specific application of audit activities related to these audit(s), in planning, execution, supervision, reporting and completion, considering the specific objectives and requirements.

The audit testing scripts related to NIA requirements (audit criteria) are not expected to have difference among the different audit(s) as the NIA requirements are unchanged from one audit to the other.

The objective of this Standard Operating Procedures is not to provide the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit with an audit work program but rather the minimum high-level steps and considerations needed to develop, tailor and maintain an audit work program.

Each of the audit activities in the audit work program shall be mapped with the working paper(s) that will serve as documentation of their performance.



4.3. Building a Standard Audit Work Program

Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
SOP-AWP-BLD-01	The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall translate NISCF Audit Standard (NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND), NIA Audit Accreditation Standard (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-STND-NIA), the NISCF Standard for Management Systems' Certification (NCSA-NISCF-CERT-SMSC) and related Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Technical Directives (TD) into audit activities. The graph Figure 1: Audit Work Program Activities Example is an illustrative example of audit activities and shall not be taken as the exhaustive and only audit activities.	 NISCF Audit Standard NIA Audit Accreditation Standard NISCF Standard for Management Systems' Certification Standard Operating Procedures Technical Directives 	Documented and compliant audit activities for the full NIA Certification lifecycle
SOP-AWP-BLD-02	The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall detail the audit activities in terms of nature, extent (based on audit risk assessment) and timing of audit procedures. The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit can either develop the audit procedures in the standard audit program based on the highest level of risk of material Non-Conformities (NC) or develop multiple audit work programs based on each expected levels of risk of material Non-Conformities (NC).	Output of SOP-AWP-BLD-01	Standardized nature, extent and timing of audit procedures



Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
SOP-AWP-BLD-03	Step Description The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall translate the nature, extent and timing of audit procedures into actionable tasks and develop a standard audit testing scripts for all NIA requirements (requirements do not only include the list of controls of NIA but other requirements stipulated in NIA Standard). The audit testing scripts shall be detailed enough and self-explanatory that the auditors do not need assistance from the audit work program owner to understand the audit testing procedures (taking account their level of competencies as defined in the NISCF Audit Standard (NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND) and NIA Audit Accreditation Standard (NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-STND-NIA). Therefore, the below examples are not considered as adequate	NIA Standard Output of SOP-AWP-BLD-02	Outputs Standard nature, extent and timing of audit procedures
	 audit testing scripts: Inquire about the change management process; Inspect the incident management procedure; Observe the media destruction process in action; or Review a sample of third-party contracts. In all of these examples, the audit testing scripts do not explain what will be inquired about, inspected, observed or reviewed. 		and audit testing scripts



Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
	Also, in certain NIA requirements (audit criteria) there is multiple attributes that are required, the audit testing scripts shall be exhaustive in covering all the attributes.		
SOP-AWP-BLD-04	The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall cover in its standard audit work program the audit activities required for the maintenance, scope expansion, reinstatement after suspension and Re-Certification. The audit work program shall detail the audit activities that will be performed based on the objective of each of these audit(s), including the audit activities to ensure that necessary rotation on the multistage layered sampling is performed in these subsequent audit(s).	Output of SOP- AWP-BLD-03	Standard audit work program for the full NIA Certification
	The audit activities to be performed in subsequent audit(s) are similar to the audit activities of the initial Certification audit; as for each audit, planning, execution and reporting are to be conducted. The main difference comes from the depth of the audit activities and the difference in the objectives of the audit(s).		lifecycle

Table 1: Build a Standard Audit Work Program Standard Operating Procedure



4.4. Update of Audit Work Program During an Engagement

Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
	The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall understand the specificities of the audit environment related to a particular NIA Certification Subject (Auditee).		C Tailored audit work program for a specific audit
	Based on that understanding and the audit risk assessment performed, the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit tailor the audit work program, particularly in terms of nature and extent of audit procedures to be deployed.		
SOP-AWP-UDE-01- A	Also, following the Design Effectiveness (DE), the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit should have acquired deeper understanding of the processes and procedures implemented by the NIA Certification Subject (Auditee) and may need to tailor the audit testing scripts to accommodate for the specific conditions of the NIA Certification Subject (Auditee).	 Output of SOP-AWP-BLD-04 Understanding of the audit environment Audit risk assessment 	
	Generally, the tailoring performed to the standard audit work program is related to the specific audit engagement being performed; i.e., if the current audit engagement is maintenance, the audit work program part related to maintenance is expected to be tailored.		
	Usually, the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit might be able to tailor the audit work program for the full NIA Certification lifecycle following the initial Certification audit.		

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Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
SIEP ID	At any moment during the audit engagement, if the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit discovers new or existing significant factors that changes its understanding of the audit environment, the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall assess the impact of these factors on the audit work program. The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall determine which		Updated tailored audit work program
SOP-AWP-UDE-01-B	audit activities are impacted by the newly discovered factors and update the audit work program, if necessary, as per the requirements defined in this Standard Operating Procedure. If the new factors that have been discovered by the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit are existing factors (i.e., existed prior to the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit conducting the	SOP-AWP- UDE-01-A Updated understanding of the audit environment	
	preliminary work), the Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall provide an explanation on the reasons that led to non-discovery of these significant factors during the preliminary work as part of the update to the audit work program.		

Table 2: Audit Work Program Update During an Engagement Standard Operating Procedure



4.5. Enhance the Audit Work Program

Step ID	Step Description	Inputs	Outputs
SOP-AWP-ENH-01-	The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall review the effectiveness of its audit work program after each audit engagement and introduce necessary updates. The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit should communicate	Output of SOP-AWP-BLD-04 Output of SOP-AWP-	Updated audit work program
	to NCSA the update its audit work program as part of the NIA Audit Accreditation notification.	UDE-01-A or SOP-AWP- UDE-01-B	
SOP-AWP-ENH-01-B	NCSA can request an update to a specific audit work program related to an audit engagement or to the standard audit work program based on review performed during the NIA Certification process or NIA Audit Accreditation processes. In such cases, Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall implement the required updates requested by NCSA as per the timeline and conditions set by NCSA.	Updated understanding of the audit environment of the certified scope	Justified updated or confirmed audit-risk sub- components levels, documented

Table 3: Enhance Audit Work Program Standard Operating Procedure



5. Compliance and Enforcement

5.1. Compliance Process

All applicants to NISCF's NIA Audit Accreditation Services and Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit by NCSA shall conform with the rules defined in this Standard Operating Procedure.

5.2. Roles and Responsibilities

National Cyber Governance and Assurance Affairs (NCGAA) is responsible for enforcing and monitoring conformance to this Standard Operating Procedure.

5.3. Transitioning and effective date

5.3.1. Effective date

This Standard Operating Procedure is effective from January 1, 2025.

5.3.2. Transition period

The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall apply this Standard Operating Procedure for audit(s) related to new NISCF Certification requests submitted starting from January 1, 2025.

The Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit shall apply this Standard Operating Procedure for Maintenance, Re-Certification audits and any other audit related to issued NISCF Certificate of Compliance, occurring after January 1, 2025.

Existing Accredited Audit Service Providers at the time of the publication of this Standard Operating Procedure shall make the necessary updates to conform with this Standard Operating Procedure before January 1, 2025.

Any new request for NISCF Audit Accreditation shall be in conformance with this Standard Operating Procedure from the date of publication.

5.4. **Exceptions and deviations**

5.4.1. Exceptions to Policy Statements

Exceptions to this Standard Operating Procedure shall only be defined by the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) and / or any NCSA's organizational structure that has been given the authority over the NISCF or the Accreditation Services.

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5.4.2. Deviation process from Policy Statements

Deviation from Standard Operating Procedure steps shall be formally authorized in writing by the National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA).

5.4.3. Sanctions

National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) reserves the right to not accept NISCF Accreditation Services requests and / or suspend or withdraw Certificates of Accreditation or any other Certificates, Credentials or Licenses provided by NCSA from applicants to NISCF's NIA Audit Accreditation Services and Accredited Service Provider for NIA Audit that do not conform with the requirements defined in this Standard Operating Procedure.

National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) reserves the right to impose any monetary or procedural sanctions in virtue of the authority that has been granted to NCSA, through laws and regulations.

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6. Annexes

6.1. Acronyms

CAP Corrective Actions Plan

DE Design Effectiveness

Non-Conformities NC

NCGAA National Cyber Governance and Assurance Affairs

NCSA National Cyber Security Agency

National Information Assurance NIA

NISCF National Information Security Compliance Framework

Operating Effectiveness OE

SOP Standard Operating Procedure

TD Technical Directive



6.2. Tables, Graphs and Figures

6.2.1. Audit Work Program Activities Example

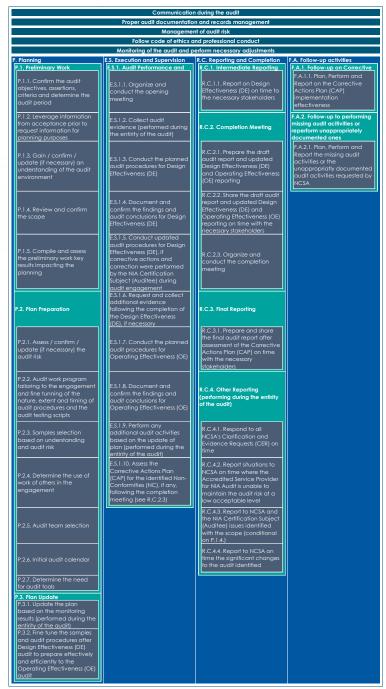


Figure 1: Audit Work Program Activities Example

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6.3. Reference

Emiri Decree No 1 of year 2021

President of National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) Decision No 3 of year 2022

NCSA-NISCF-CERT-GTXD (General Taxonomy Document for National Certification - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-GTXD (General Taxonomy Document for National Accreditation - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-GPNA (General Policy for National Accreditation - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-CERT-GPNC (General Policy for National Certification - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-CERT-SMSC (Standard for Management Systems Certification - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-SNA (Standard for National Accreditation - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-AUD-STND (NISCF Audit Standard - Public)

NCSA-NISCF-ACCR-AUD-NIA-STND (NIA Audit Accreditation Standard - Public)



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