

# Social Auditor Standards

## UPDATE

November 2008

- What should social auditors know, and what should they be able to do?
- How can training courses best teach the knowledge and skills required?
- What accreditation or other system can best guarantee that courses reliably teach the skills and knowledge required of competent social auditors?

These are the core questions of the Social Auditor Standards Project. We will continue to foster dialogue and facilitate consensus around these questions during the next year. At this point, we wanted to update stakeholders on the current status of the project and communicate the next stages as we move from broad public participation and comment through increasing levels of consensus.

**Phase One: Survey** – deadline extended to November 30, 2008

**Phase Two: On-line Consensus Building** – December to April , 2009

**Phase Three: Discussion Forums** – March to June, 2009

**Phase Four: Expert Review - Committee on Standards**– concluding July, 2009

**Phase Five: Pilot Testing of Training Approaches – Autumn, 2009**

**Phase Six: Dialogue/Consensus Building around Institutionalizing Standards – Autumn, 2009.**

The two-year project term concludes in December 2009.

## Phase One: Outreach and Survey

In August we disseminated an online survey to consolidate the progress from earlier standards-setting efforts, as well as to allow new stakeholders to participate. The major purpose of this survey is to determine areas of agreement and disagreement on a comprehensive set of issues related to auditor standards, and to enable new issues to be raised. **We have so far received hundreds of responses from a range of stakeholders, including from:**

- ✚ companies in a variety of sectors
  - ✓ retail
  - ✓ oil and gas
  - ✓ apparel
  - ✓ footwear
  - ✓ jewelry
  - ✓ food and beverage
  - ✓ toys
  - ✓ electronics
  - ✓ packaging
  - ✓ personal care
- ✚ social auditing firms
- ✚ multi-stakeholder initiatives
- ✚ non-governmental organizations from the labor, development and environment sectors
- ✚ NGOs that conduct social auditing
- ✚ trade unions
- ✚ institutional investors
- ✚ consultants

We have undertaken outreach with numerous institutions that have a stake, a role to play, and a commitment to making social auditing more effective, more transparent and more impactful. These include:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ✚ American Apparel and Footwear Association CSR Committee | ✚ Global Monitoring Institute                    |
| ✚ BEAC – Board of EHS Auditor Certifications              | ✚ Global Social Compliance Program of CIES       |
| ✚ Electronics Industry Citizenship Coalition              | ✚ Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility |
| ✚ Ethical Trading Initiative                              | ✚ ISEAL Alliance                                 |
| ✚ Fair Labor Association                                  | ✚ Social Accountability International            |

In addition to the institutions noted above, we are in the process of reaching out to international organizations including the International Labor Organization and the UN Global Compact.

This outreach does not of course imply that these institutions formally endorse our process or will participate in the same way. Yet it is clear that these and other institutions representing the vast majority of users of social auditing, as well as social auditing institutions themselves, are eager to participate in a consensus-oriented conversation about how to improve social auditing efforts. We remain eager to expand participation as widely as possible so that survey results can best be utilized as a platform for further dialogue and consensus-building.

Please visit [www.socialauditor.org](http://www.socialauditor.org)  
**Survey Deadline November 30, 2008**

## Next Steps

Once input to the survey is completed (the deadline has been extended at the request of the State Department), we will analyze and publicize these preliminary results. Each respondent will receive a personal communication with the findings. We will also reach out to the institutions with which we aim to collaborate to ensure that our learning from the survey is integrated in their own plans. Furthermore -- with the survey results as with all aspects of this program -- findings and reports will be posted on **[www.socialauditor.org](http://www.socialauditor.org)**.

Our project outcomes remain the same as when we launched:

- Promoting dialogue and building consensus among the full range of stakeholders around a comprehensive set of standards for the knowledge and skills of social auditors.
- Promoting dialogue and building consensus around pathways by which auditors can receive recognition for achieving that knowledge and those skills, both in terms of accepted training pathways and formal accreditation.

The survey results will lead us toward those outcomes in several ways. The survey will have identified areas of consensus and commonality in approaches to standards of knowledge and skills for social auditors, and also areas where disagreement or non-alignment persists. The project's next step will focus on the latter category, where progress towards alignment remains needed.

#### **Survey Suggestions or Troubles?**

If you can recommend someone who might be interested in taking the survey, or if you are experiencing trouble taking the survey or have any questions about it, please email us at [standardsmoderator@verite.org](mailto:standardsmoderator@verite.org).

Please note that the survey can be taken in English, Spanish, Chinese, or French! Please indicate your language of choice when you contact us.

### **Phase Two: Consensus-Building To be completed April, 2009**

These areas on which respondents lack consensus will be discussed specifically in the next phase of on-line interaction. We will create an **interactive wiki** that allows on-going discussion of specific topics. These discussions will be moderated to drive them, where possible, towards consensus.

### **Phase Three: Discussion Forums To be completed June, 2009**

The third stage of the program will be public meetings, allowing face-to-face and on-line interaction and discussion (through WebEx or other technology). These meetings will take the consensus developed during the survey and separately during the *wiki* discussions and further identify areas of agreement.

### **Phase Four: Experts Review Committee on Standards To be completed in July, 2009**

Lastly, we will convene an expert review committee from experienced users and practitioners of social auditing to finalize the standards and begin making recommendations for pathways to institutionalize the standards.

### **Phase Five: Pilot Testing of Training Approaches – Autumn, 2009**

The final stage of the program will determine ways effectively to embed the standards in training and testing of social auditors. During Autumn 2009 we will coordinate the piloting of training and testing modules by a range of interested institutions so that an array of course providers and course users can

begin to experiment and collaborate. . This pilot training phase will also serve to demonstrate concretely how standards can be implemented in practical, cost-effective ways.

## **Phase Six: Dialogue/Consensus Building around Institutionalizing Standards – Autumn, 2009**

We will utilize a survey, the *wiki*, meetings, and other mechanisms for dialogue and consensus-building to facilitate the creation of a set of consensus-based recommendations for how standards of skills and knowledge for social auditors should be institutionalized. in terms of accreditation or other mechanisms for ensuring that the standards are adequately taught by those providing training courses or certification of social auditors. We aim for mechanisms to emerge from this dialogue that will ensure the standards are embedded effectively in training courses or certification schemes for social auditors.

Our project is not, nor will it become, the official, institutionalized home for emergent standards. Rather our role is to facilitate recommendations that others may act upon.

### **Participation**

In the ten months since the project began, we have conducted significant research and outreach, built buy-in, developed mechanisms and launched the first phase of research and discussion. Outreach has covered major institutions in the US and Europe, and the survey has been distributed in Chinese, Spanish and French. With the survey underway, followed by the *wiki* discussions and consensus-building, we anticipate moving efficiently towards a conclusion to the standards creation process in the summer of 2009.

We have chosen at these early stages to ensure breadth of participation, and that may have come at the sacrifice of some speed. While some companies and social auditing firms have been discussing this topic for some time, many crucial stakeholders are newer to this process. Leaving them out is not an option. This process actively solicits input from all who need to be involved in the discussion, and allows participation at this stage from anyone who has an interest to join. We believe that such a transparent and open approach is essential to ensure that the program's outcomes have broad buy-in and credibility.

We have chosen to build the program around easily accessed and transparent mechanisms (such as the on-line survey and upcoming *wiki*, and the eventual public meetings) in order to ensure that participants can understand the institutional perspective of other respondents. This approach will allow each step to build on consensus developed in the previous steps, so that the ultimate outcomes are broadly held.

As always we welcome your comments, thoughts and suggestions. We also encourage your participation as we work over the next months to establish standards for knowledge and skills for social auditors, and identify pathways to accreditation. Please contact us at [standardsmoderator@verite.org](mailto:standardsmoderator@verite.org).

Thank you.