



## **Background Screening Organization Accreditation Program (BSOAP) Accreditation FAQs**

### **Why accreditation?**

#### **Why should my organization become accredited?**

Governed by a strict and thorough set of professional standards of specified requirements and measurements, the BSOAP has become a widely recognized seal of approval bringing national recognition to an employment background screening-affiliated organization for its commitment to achieving excellence through high professional standards with accountability that results in continued institutional improvement.

BSOAP provides a detailed process for evaluating and improving internal operating procedures from which every consumer reporting agency/organization, and their clients, benefit. Employers who are themselves not qualified to evaluate an organization's processes rely upon the BSCC's audit to show that how an organization complies with industry-set standards. Accreditation strengthens the marketplace perception of a business' commitment to excellence, compliance, and consumer protection, a powerful advantage in today's competitive environment.

Accreditation is a substantial step in building value within your organization, offering a roadmap to build the quality that will make the difference in what you have to offer, what you deliver, and the kind of organization you create. Becoming accredited requires you to formally document all your policies and

procedures and requires that your processes adhere to those documented policies and procedures. When going through the accreditation process, you may come across items that you are doing today but have not documented and therefore are not doing consistently, items that you had not previously considered, and more. Formally documenting your policies makes it easier for you to train new employees and ensure the uniformity of your processes.

Accreditation strengthens the marketplace perception of a business' commitment to excellence, compliance and consumer protection, a powerful advantage in today's competitive environment.

Tangible benefits include using the BSOAP accreditation logos, accreditation status designation in the online directory, and a press release template announcing your accreditation and exposure resulting from PBSA's marketing and public relations efforts.

## **Is my organization eligible for accreditation?**

### **Who can apply for accreditation?**

All eligibility requirements are outlined in the [Background Screening Organization Accreditation Program \(BSOAP\) Policies and Procedures](#).

### **I only provide criminal searches, (or verifications services), to end-users, am I eligible for accreditation?**

Yes. The accreditation programs requires that the organization is currently and regularly engaged in the business of providing employment (for the U.S.) or background (for the General) screening services. If you do not provide all the services in the accreditation standard, you must be able to demonstrate policies and conformance to each clause. All eligibility requirements are outlined in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **I provide background checks as one of my many service offerings. Can I still get accredited?**

Likely, yes. All eligibility requirements are outlined in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

## **Do you need to be in the U.S. for the U.S. accreditation or outside of the U.S. for the General accreditation?**

No, neither accreditation program is based on a geographic requirement. Each program is based on what type of work you are conducting and the regional focus of that work. There is no requirement to reside in either the U.S. for the U.S. Employment Screening accreditation or outside the U.S. for the General Background Screening accreditation.

## **Tell me more about the accreditation process**

### **What does the accreditation process entail?**

Organizations have six months from the date their letter of intent is submitted to submit their application and payment. Upon acceptance of the application, the applicant has an additional six months to send supporting documentation. (Applicants can submit application, payment and supporting material altogether if preferred). Once the materials, application and payment are received, the information is provided to the auditor who performs a desk audit. Next, the auditor contacts the organization and arranges a day and time to visit the facility and perform an onsite audit. Once the review is complete, the auditor provides the applicant with a copy of findings, recommendations and any suggested improvements. The applicant has the opportunity to modify its processes according to recommendations and respond to the auditor's report. At the conclusion of the process, the auditor's full report is provided to the BSCC for final approval. For more details, view the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **How long does it take to get accredited?**

This depends on the state of the organization's current practices, and how adequately policies are documented and procedures are followed. The period before submission usually takes six months while the audit process usually takes 3-4 months, depending on the organization's preparedness, auditor's schedule and when the auditor can coordinate the onsite (virtual) audit with the organization. The entire process and approximate timelines can be found in the appendix of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **How long does the BSOAP accreditation last?**

Accreditation is valid for five years, provided the accredited organization successfully completes an Interim Surveillance Audit during its third year of accreditation. At least six months prior to the five-year expiration date, the review process must be repeated which involves submission of an application, fee, supporting self-audit materials, as well as an onsite audit.

### **What happens if an organization is not granted accreditation on the first try?**

During the review process, the auditor may note non-conformities or opportunities for improvement. The applicant has the opportunity to modify its processes according to the findings and respond to the auditor's report. Typically, any deficiencies can be handled and addressed enabling the organization to become accredited. If, however accreditation is denied, and any appeals are not successful, the applicant will be eligible to re-apply for accreditation in one year. Full details are available in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **Who is the auditor?**

[CyberGuard Compliance](#) is the auditor for both the U.S. and General Accreditation Programs. This auditor is familiar with our requirements and process and has worked with the BSCC for several years.

### **I have multiple locations; how does the audit work with multiple locations?**

Fees are determined by the audit and staff based on the responses provided by the applicant organization on their application and in discussions the auditor may have with the organization related to the structure of their operations. Typically, the organization's primary operating location is the location that will be audited. However, if operations are conducted in several locations or the structure of the organization is unique, it may be determined that the audit is more complex than the standard, and additional fees may apply.

### **Who oversees the accreditation program? What about privacy?**

#### **Who is the Background Screening Credentialing Council?**

The Background Screening Credentialing Council is made up of PBSA members and community members selected for their expertise in compliance, technology, operations, and other areas to oversee the accreditation programs. The BSCC reports to the PBSA Board. Specifics on the nomination and approval process for members may be found in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

The role of the BSCC members can be found in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#) and is summarized as follows:

- Annually review all BSOAP Standards and propose changes in the Standards that reflect best practices in consumer reporting.
- Review the goals and the program's mission at the Council's first meeting of each year.
- Periodically review all policies and procedures and propose changes in these documents to meet the ongoing needs of the accreditation program.
- Periodically review accreditation fees and propose modifications as deemed necessary.
- Vote (with the exception of the Chair) on accreditation and decisions.
- Participate in subcommittees of the Council.
- Attend scheduled meetings.
- Review complaints of an accredited agency's alleged non-compliance with the Accredited Agency Code of Conduct or the BSOAP Standard and propose appropriate probation periods and/or sanctions.
- Select and oversee BSOAP third-party auditor.

**Which Councils are involved in the audit or accreditation review process?** PBSA Regional Councils – APAC, Canada, Europe, and U.S. – are not directly involved in the audit or accreditation process. They were, however, involved in the creation of the accreditation programs, are participants in the public comment and reviews of the programs and have provided valuable feedback and guidance in the expansion of our programs over the years. Each Council may also have members on the BSCC.

**Will the BSCC or the PBSA Board know my business information?**

The entire audit process is “blind” to all BSCC and Board members. Upon receipt at the PBSA office, each application is assigned a unique identifying number used on all subsequent audit letters, votes, discussions, or other matters presented to the BSCC or Board. This means that each organization is only referred to by a

number, and the specifics of who the entity is are known only to PBSA Staff and the auditor. The Board and BSCC will only review general information related to the audit and will not be privy to the organization name, or individuals, involved in the audit process.

## **U.S. Accreditation Program**

### **Is U.S. accreditation available to organizations outside of the United States?**

Organizations providing services under the BSOAP United States Employment Screening Services can apply for accreditation regardless of its physical operating locations. The organization will be subject to the same audit expectations outlined in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#). For additional details, please see the [Physical Location of Agency Applying for US Accreditation Opinion Letter](#).

### **Is the existing U.S. program changing?**

Aside from some minor updates to improve the auditability of the program and ensure it addresses the evolution of technology, and in particular security standards, on a few clauses, the U.S. program will remain the same.

## **General Accreditation Program**

### **What is the name of the new accreditation program?**

The new program will be called the General Background Screening accreditation.

### **What are the benefits of the new accreditation program?**

There are a number of benefits organizations realize when they achieve accreditation, including but not limited to:

- external confirmation and audit of business practices and compliance as it relates to the delivery of background screening outside of the U.S.,
- recognition of achieving the only industry mark/seal specific to background screening,
- and the ability to market the business as an accredited organization.

As we have seen with the U.S. program, end-users/clients regard an organization's accreditation status positively and often seek out accredited organizations as potential partners.

## **In what language will audits be conducted?**

All audits will be conducted in English.

## **Who is the auditor and why were they chosen?**

[CyberGuard Compliance](#) is the auditor for both accreditation programs. This auditor is familiar with our requirements and process and has worked with the BSCC for several years. Additionally, they were involved in the review of the General Standard and the discussions around audit requirements. Given this experience, we felt they were best suited to act as the auditor for our expansion program.

## **What will the pricing be for the General accreditation program?**

The pricing for the General and the U.S. accreditation programs will be the same. The price is not predicated on the type of accreditation being sought. There may be variables that impact the pricing, and all details can be found in the appendix of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

## **Who will oversee the General Accreditation program?**

Per the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#), the General Background Screening accreditation program will be overseen by the existing Background Screening Credentialing Council. The BSCC will be responsible for all accreditation programs and will ensure the consistent and compliant administration of the policies and program. The BSCC is comprised of a cross-section of PBSA members and represents both geographic and member diversity. The BSCC is not affiliated with any specific geographic Council and reports directly to the PBSA Board of Directors.

## **What about GDPR or other geographic-specific requirements?**

The General Background Screening accreditation program is the first expansion program beyond the existing U.S. Employment Screening accreditation program. It is meant to meet the needs of those PBSA members who deliver screening services outside the U.S. To make the most impact and get a program to the greatest number of members as efficiently as possible, the decision was made to create a more generic program to address global screening and compliance.

As a result, the General program is based on the Fair Information Privacy Principles (FIPPs), the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Privacy Principles, and APEC Privacy Framework, which endorsed the Cross- Border Privacy Rules (CPBR) System. Together, these approaches embody the requirements for organizations to demonstrate compliance with internationally recognized data privacy standards, and it is upon these same principles many country- specific privacy programs were based. If an organization is compliant with GDPR, for example, it should be able to meet the requirements of the General Background Screening accreditation program.

This approach also ensured that no geographic Council would be required to create its own program to have something to offer its members. This general approach also creates the opportunity for future geographic-specific programs to be created, much like the U.S. Employment Screening standard, that will allow a demonstration of a specialized area of expertise.

## **Comparing the U.S. and General Accreditation Programs**

### **What is the difference between the U.S. and General accreditation programs?**

The existing U.S. Employment Screening Standard focuses on requirements related to U.S. employment screening, specifically meeting requirements for compliance with the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and the Driver Privacy Protection Act (DPPA).

The General Background Screening Standard is made up of clauses related to the delivery of background screening services outside of the United States with a more general approach to privacy principles and global compliance. Because “employment screening” is not a commonly used phrase around the globe we have not used it in the General Standard. Like the U.S. Employment Screening Standard however, the General Background Screening Standard does not apply to tenant screening or drug screening/testing.

### **Will the process be the same for both accreditations?**

Yes, the process will be the same. The only distinction between the programs is the clauses being audited. All audits have moved to a virtual format and will use the same online platform for materials submission, and all audits will include the

application, desk audit, virtual onsite review of conformance to the Standard and a 3-year Interim Surveillance Audit.

## **Choosing a program or becoming accredited under both programs**

### **How do I know which accreditation program to apply for?**

This will be a business choice for your organization based on which areas of your business you wish to demonstrate compliance. If most of your operations involve U.S. Employment Screening, the General accreditation may not be as beneficial for you. Likewise, if most of your operations focus on background screening outside of the U.S., you may choose to bypass U.S. accreditation and pursue the General Background Screening accreditation instead.

### **Can an organization pursue both accreditations?**

Yes. If they are done simultaneously, there is even a financial benefit in doing so as PBSA offers a reduced fee for bundling both programs into one accreditation process. There is a significant overlap in the requirements between the two Standards (approximately 85% overlap). Both Standards have roughly the same number of clauses, and each has 5 or so clauses that are specific to their topic area (either U.S. or more general non-U.S. privacy and data handling requirements). In order to receive the reduced (i.e., bundled) pricing an organization must have both the US and General audits scheduled on the same timeline. PBSA staff can work with you on this.

### **Can organizations apply for both accreditation programs at the same time?**

Yes. The organization will be required to submit the required materials for both programs, but the time the audit will take is significantly reduced if they are done simultaneously. As a result, there is also a reduced fee for bundling both programs into one accreditation process.

### **Are there any benefits to becoming accredited under both the U.S. and General Standard?**

The most obvious benefit is the continued external validation of your business and operational processes which demonstrate compliance to the Standards. The

current U.S. Standard is seen as the gold star confirming the quality of U.S. operations, and the General Standard will now do the same for services delivered outside the U.S. If your organization delivers services both inside and outside of the U.S., accreditation to both Standards may be a valuable tool.

**Is one program needed before the other? Must my organization be accredited under the U.S. Standard to apply for the General Standard or vice versa?**

No, both programs are separate and stand alone as individual valid accreditation programs. Since there is an overlap in many clauses between the program, if you are accredited to one program, much of the work and process should already be in place if you wish to apply for accreditation to the second program. There is a financial benefit when completing both programs at the same time, but an organization does not need to complete one to achieve the other, and the programs do not “build” on each other in any way.

**Can an organization accredited to one Standard change to the other Standard?**

An organization can choose to let one accreditation lapse and seek compliance with the other accreditation, but they cannot change between the two accreditations without being subjected to the full audit process.

**Pricing**

**Where can I find the pricing?**

All pricing is listed on the Fee Schedule in the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#). These prices took effect on April 20, 2022 for all new applicants.

**My organization is currently accredited. When does the new pricing take effect for us?**

Beginning on October 3, 2022, all currently accredited organizations will be subject to the new pricing as listed on the Fee Schedule of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

**Is the pricing different for the two U.S. and General programs?**

The pricing for the General and the U.S. accreditation programs will be the same. The price is not predicated on the type of accreditation being sought. There may

be variables that impact the pricing, and all details can be found in the appendix of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **What is a bundled option?**

The bundled pricing option is available for any organization seeking accreditation to both Standards simultaneously. Due to the overlap in many of the clauses between both programs, there is considerable time savings and effort for both the organization and the auditor if these are done simultaneously, and that savings is passed on to the applicant organization. The pricing and all details can be found in the appendix of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **Did the fee increase for U.S. because of the implementation of the General accreditation program?**

No. The fees were amended per the agreement with our auditor and several years of experience with the program and the various increasing costs of conducting business. It should be noted that all audits have been moved to a virtual format, and as such, organizations will no longer have to pay the previous travel, lodging, and food expenses that were associated with an audit. As a result, many will find the fees have decreased from previous audits.

### **Is pricing based on location/time zone? Type of accreditation?**

The pricing for the General and the U.S. accreditation programs will be the same. The price is not predicated on the type of accreditation being sought. There may be a fee difference based on location if operations need to be audited in more than one location, in which case an additional fee may be levied. There may be variables that impact the pricing, and all details can be found in the appendix of the [BSOAP Policies and Procedures](#).

### **How are the additional locations or complexity fees assessed?**

These fees are determined by the auditor and staff based on the responses provided by the applicant organization on their application and in discussions the auditor may have with the organization related to the structure of their

operations. Typically, the primary operations location is the location that will be audited. However, if operations are conducted in several locations or the structure of the organization is unique, it may be determined that the audit is more complex than the standard, and additional fees may apply.

**I have more questions; who can I talk to?**

Any questions should be directed to our staff at [accreditation@thepbsa.org](mailto:accreditation@thepbsa.org). No questions should be posed to BSCC members directly or to the Board of Directors.