

A S F E

PEER REVIEW

User's Guide

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In October 1999, *Engineering News-Record* lauded ASFE's **Peer Review** as one of the 125 most innovative construction industry developments of the prior 125 years. **Peer Review** was the only association concept so honored. ASFE/THE BEST PEOPLE ON EARTH was the only association so named. That would have been an extraordinary laurel for most associations; something to hang their hats on. But not for ASFE, which, at the very time, was putting **Peer Review** through its most extensive overhaul since being launched in 1978. This *User's Guide* incorporates the changes that were made, resulting in a **Peer Review** that is an even more important and dynamic tool for enhancing the quality of a firm's service.

Inherent to **Peer Review** is awareness that it is a cyclical process for continuous improvement. As a consequence, firms that have undergone several Reviews no longer need the Comprehensive **Peer Review** that was of such great benefit to them in years past. It also recognizes that larger firms with an internal Review process only need an occasional external check; that many smaller firms do not necessarily need all the policies and procedures large firms do. In other words, **Peer Review** is flexible and, for that reason, each Review should begin with a mutual scope development session. Through it, a firm's CEO and the **Peer Review** Team Captain can design the **Peer Review** best-suited to the needs of the firm.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, which willingly shared its materials and experience to help ASFE initiate **Peer Review**. We also acknowledge the many members of ASFE who have contributed over the years, as members of committees that have nurtured and implemented the process, and as Reviewers. The long-time support of Terra Insurance Company merits special praise. Terra has been a **Peer Review** "believer" since "day one," and has consistently "walked the walk." To Terra, once again, our heartfelt thanks.

James K. Johnston, P.E., R.B.P.
ASFE President 2007-08

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Lauded as one of the construction industry’s most innovative developments of the past 125 years, ASFE’s **Peer Review** is a genuinely unique service designed to help ASFE Member Firms improve their business practices, internal and external communications, and overall risk management.

A Comprehensive **Peer Review** comprises an objective assessment of a firm’s eight core management components (CMCs) by a **Peer Review** Team of (typically) two or more principals of ASFE Member Firms. Through remote surveys and on-site personal interviews, among other means, Reviewers gauge how well the firm’s policies and procedures are understood, and how effectively staff applies them. The Review Team concludes its on-site work by reporting its findings and recommendations to the CEO and others the CEO may designate. This oral report is almost always supplemented by a written report issued a few weeks later.

At one time, the Comprehensive **Peer Review** was the only **Peer Review** option available. By contrast, today’s **Peer Review** is so flexible, each Review should include a mutual scope-development session so that the CEO and the **Peer Review** Team Captain can structure a process to meet the CEO’s specific needs and preferences.

Note that **Peer Review** is a “come-as-you-are” activity. The Reviewers are engaged to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and procedures, not to “bless” a firm because it has all its paperwork in place. If a firm has not prepared one document or another, all that’s needed is a memo explaining the policy or procedure involved. Through interviews and other means, Reviewers will determine how well written and unwritten policies and procedures are understood and followed, and the extent to which modifications may be worthwhile.

Although the cost of **Peer Review** is far less than that of outside management consultants, CEOs who have relied on both have said that **Peer Review** provides superior results. Because the **Peer Review** Team comprises successful professionals who are experienced with the challenges of operating similar firms, they can come “up to speed” quickly, to provide immediate value.

For **Peer Review** to be effective, you—the person in charge—must be committed to making it work. Do not pursue **Peer Review** with a casual attitude. Understand how it differs from other programs (see Appendix A). Speak with the CEOs of other firms that have gone through the process. You may even want to speak with CEOs who have decided they don't need a **Peer Review**. (Remember: **Peer Review** is the only effective means for substantiating a belief that a firm is as good as it can possibly be, and verifying that staff and clients agree.)

Once you decide to move forward, complete an application (see Appendix B) and submit it with your fee to ASFE. You will receive from ASFE a letter indicating the number of your Peer Review; e.g., 1061101. *Do not formalize your next step until you receive the number.*

The vitally important next step: Select an appropriate Team Captain from the list posted on ASFE's website, or ask ASFE to send you a copy. Even if you know some of those listed, you would be well advised to discuss Team Captain selection with the CEOs of Peer Reviewed firms.

Contact two or three Team Captain candidates. Discuss your needs and goals with each. Request information about their background, relevant experience, interest, and availability. (Refer to Appendix C for suggested interview questions.) Does the Team Captain have the background and experience necessary to evaluate your firm? To what extent will you be able to confide in a given individual? Once you select your Team Captain, arrange for a mutual scope-development session, allowing time for the Captain to collect and review a representative number of staff (Appendix D) and client questionnaires (Appendix E). The insights gained from that procedure may suggest specific issues that should be looked at, and could even influence the composition of the Review Team.

While flexibility is an important attribute of ASFE's **Peer Review**, most well-established firms that have not previously participated in the process opt for a Comprehensive **Peer Review** the first and second times. The first Review yields insightful opinions about the completeness of the firm's policies and procedures, the effectiveness with which management communicates them, and the diligence with which staff implements them. The second Review, usually conducted about four years later, and often by different Peer Reviewers, helps determine the efficacy of any changes made.

A Comprehensive **Peer Review** evaluates all eight core management components (CMCs) described in Appendix F:

- business management,
- facilities and technical resources,
- human resources management,
- professional development,
- project management,
- financial management,
- marketing practices, and
- electronic-resources management.

Some firms have found that "Peer Review Lite" is a valuable tool for focusing on a single issue that some of their peers have already encountered.

This approach is used by firms that are relatively small and still getting established in their marketplace or by firms of any size that desire input in just one primary area of business. This approach generally requires less preparation than a Comprehensive **Peer Review**. Contact ASFE for more details.

The **Peer Review** scope that you and the Team Captain develop should indicate, as a minimum:

1. CMCs to be reviewed;
2. CMCs to be emphasized;
3. specific operational problems to be considered;
4. the documentation required and materials to be issued to Review Team members before on-site review (see Appendix F);
5. selection of the hard-copy-questionnaires survey or electronic on-line survey (password-protected, secure and available only to the Peer Review team captain);
6. questions in addition to the standard **Peer Review** questions for the staff and client questionnaires;
7. offices to be Reviewed,
8. number of additional Reviewers needed and their qualifications;
9. date of the Review;
10. the schedule for completion of the written report; and
11. budget.

Once committed to writing and approved by both the CEO and Team Captain, the **Peer Review** scope becomes a road map for the process, permitting the CEO and Team Captain to collaborate in the selection of other Reviewers.

On-site Review, or “visitation,” may take from one to three days (or more) depending on the number of offices involved and their size. The CEO and Team Captain should discuss the schedule of activities in advance, as well as the Team’s need for office facilities and logistical support while on site, hotel reservations, and interoffice travel (when a multiple-office Review is involved). Advanced scheduling of staff interviews is particularly important, in order to reduce the interviews’ impact on normal operations. In smaller firms, as many as half the staff or more may be interviewed. When staff exceeds 100, at least 20 to 25 should be interviewed.

The on-site Review culminates with the Review Team providing an oral report to the CEO and others the CEO selects. (When sensitive issues are involved, the CEO customarily meets with the Review Team privately before the Team delivers its oral report.) The oral report encourages dialogue. If it can be arranged, a dinner following the oral report provides an excellent opportunity for continued discussion under more relaxed conditions.

The written report, although optional, is almost always requested. Compared to an oral report, a written report permits the Review Team to coalesce its observations and communicate its recommendations far more effectively. The written report should be prepared within the agreed-upon schedule (normally within 30 days) and, 30 days after the report is submitted, the Review is complete. Nonetheless, Review Team members usually are amenable to subsequent contact, to clarify or amplify. (*Note:* The written report is subject to civil-procedure discovery proceedings. Thirty days after you receive it, yours will be the only copy extant. How long you keep it is up to you.) After receiving the final report, the CEO of the Reviewed firm should complete the “CEO Critique of Review Team” form (Appendix H) and mail it to ASFE headquarters.

Firms use the information gained from *Peer Review* to develop plans for improvement, usually incorporating recommendations of the *Peer Review* Team. The *Peer Review* report provides a good checklist or reminder of those items the firm should be working on. With time, the *Peer Review* report will become “stale,” which is why many firms undergo *Peer Review* every three to five years, to assess general or specific operational effectiveness and adjust procedures as a result of changes in firm size, geographic spread, key management staff, or other significant factors.

A number of larger firms with multiple offices have established their own versions of ASFE's **Peer Review** as an internal procedure, in order to:

- improve internal communications,
- share ideas between offices,
- detect practices that may lead to risk or liability concerns, and
- give staff an opportunity for confidential input to management.

Although internal programs produce many benefits, they commonly have several weaknesses compared to the ASFE **Peer Review**, because:

- the corporate office is not usually reviewed,
- communication issues between the corporate office and branches commonly go unaddressed, and
- those who conduct the reviews generally do not have the perspective of peers who practice in different firms in different parts of the country.

An ASFE “Equivalency Peer Review” can strengthen an internal program by:

- reviewing the corporate office for conformance with firm policies and procedures,
- monitoring a limited number of internal reviews of branch offices to evaluate their effectiveness,
- evaluating communication between the corporate office and branches, and
- providing a broader perspective on practice issues using Peer Reviewers from outside the firm.

The scope of an Equivalency Peer Review is developed much as a conventional **Peer Review** scope is developed. Scheduling can be more complex, however, because Review Team participation in branch office Reviews may occur over several weeks or months. In that case, the Team Captain or a member of the Review Team may return to the corporate office to provide an oral report after the final branch office visit.

The frequency of Equivalency Reviews depends upon factors such as the results of previous evaluations, changes in firm leadership, and/or acquisition and merger activity. Equivalency Reviews usually are provided about once every five years.

Ethical issues are extremely important. For that reason, the Team Captain and all Team members should be affiliated with firms that operate outside the Reviewed firm's geographic marketing area to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain Review process confidentiality.

On an individual basis, each Peer Reviewer may be asked to sign an agreement that defines ethical performance (Appendix G). All Peer Reviewers are expected to conduct themselves according to that agreement whether or not the agreement is signed. Any individual who is unable to commit to the agreement's requirements should decline Peer Reviewer service.

Each Team Member receives an honorarium for each day on-site, and for one additional day for advance preparation and traveling to and from the firm. The Team Captain receives an honorarium for each day on site and for three additional days; one for travel, and two to recognize the Team Captain's additional effort in Review planning and implementation. If the Team Captain meets with the CEO as part of the scoping process, an additional one or two days' honorarium may be added.

The current suggested honorarium is \$1,200 per day for Team Members with previous **Peer Review** experience. The suggested honorarium for first-time Reviewers is \$800 per day. Reviewers are at liberty to request whatever fee they believe is appropriate. A \$500 fee is paid to ASFE for process administration and certain promotional activities. The Reviewed firm is responsible for all travel, hotel, and meal costs. The Reviewed firm should be prepared to reimburse Peer Reviewers as they incur these expenses. Alternatively, Peer Reviewers may request a retainer.

*Your professional liability insurance carrier may subsidize a significant portion of overall **Peer Review** costs. If your insurer does not do this, talk with its representatives. Your insurer benefits from your **Peer Review**, too.*

OTHER REVIEW, REGISTRATION, AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) Peer Review

ASFE helped ACEC replicate the ASFE **Peer Review** Program, which, today, differs from ACEC's in a number of ways. For example:

- ACEC peer review team selection is handled principally by administrative staff, following a structured routine. Through ASFE's **Peer Review**, the Reviewed firm's CEO selects the Team Captain; the CEO and Team Captain together select the rest of the Team.
- ACEC reviewers examine financial information. ASFE's do not.
- ACEC reviewers identify issues and concerns. ASFE Reviewers do as well, but also report findings and conclusions, and provide recommendations.
- ACEC reviewers do not prepare a written report. ASFE Reviewers almost always do. Experience shows that the written report is an excellent communication tool for capturing the results of the **Peer Review**, including suggestions and recommendations.
- The fees paid for an ACEC peer review go principally to ACEC, to cover its administrative costs. Most ASFE fees go to the **Peer Review** Team.

ACEC's program is the same one used for members of the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE), American Institute of Architects (AIA), and the Association of Consulting Engineers of Canada.

Details: www.acec.org/education/peerreview.cfm

American Association for Laboratory Accreditation (A2LA) Programs

A2LA programs have been developed as review mechanisms for A2LA members to help them evaluate their laboratories for A2LA accreditation. The A2LA program considers:

- organization and management,
- quality system audit and review,
- personnel,
- accommodations and environment,
- equipment and reference materials,
- measurement, traceability, and calibration,
- test methods,
- handling of test items,
- records,
- certificates and reports,
- subcontracting,

- outside support and supplies, and
- complaints.

The methods used to consider these issues are similar to those used for an ASFE **Peer Review**, except A2LA is more technically focused.

Details: www.a2la.org

International Standards Organization (ISO) 9000 Registrations

The ISO 9000 series (ISO 9001 through 9004) focuses on defining, developing, and maintaining a quality loop from the time a client's service need is recognized through follow-up with the client and supplier after the service is delivered. ISO 9000 registration indicates that a firm follows consistent communications and documentation protocol through the complete cycle of services to a client, but it does not focus on the quality of service that's delivered. By contrast, **Peer Review** examines the overall issues associated with effective business operations, leading to findings, conclusions, and recommendations that can help a firm improve.

Details: www.iso.org

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) Peer Review Program

Participation in the AICPA Peer Review Program, on which ASFE's is based, is a requirement for continuing AICPA membership. Any deficiencies noted in Peer Review Reports (which are available for other CPAs' review) must be corrected. However, an ASFE firm is free to accept or reject any of the recommendations made by the Reviewers recommendations.

Details: www.aicpa.org/centerprp/peer_review.htm

PEER REVIEW APPLICATION

Firm Name _____

Address _____

_____ ZIP _____

Name of **Peer Review** Coordinator (*Should Be CEO, Senior Principal, or Branch Manager*)

e-Mail Address _____

Telephone Number _____ Ext. _____

Facsimile Number _____ Website _____

☐ I need a copy of the **Peer Review User's Guide**.

☐ I need help understanding how **Peer Review** works.

☐ I need help selecting a Team Captain.

I have scheduled the **Peer Review** for: _____

My Team Captain will be: _____

Signed for the Firm: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Complete and Return to:



8811 Colesville Road
Suite G106
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Tel.: (301)565-2733
Fax: (301)589-2017
e-Mail: info@asfe.org

TEAM CAPTAIN SELECTION

Begin your interview of a Team Captain candidate by discussing your firm's geographical marketing areas (GMAs) to ensure that your GMAs are remote enough from the candidate's to prevent conflicts of interest. Next, provide a thumbnail sketch of your firm (including its size, age, number of offices, and range of technical services), describe your general expectations of **Peer Review**, and indicate when you would like the Review performed.

Assuming no conflict of interest exists and the candidate is available, gain background information about the candidate. Some sample inquiries:

1. Tell me about your career.
2. Tell me about your firm (*age, disciplines, size, branch offices, etc.*).
3. What is your role in the firm, especially as it relates to the eight Core Management Components?
(*Responses usually will suggest other questions that will yield more information about the candidate's experience in those areas that concern you the most.*)
4. How many Review Teams have you served on? How many as Captain?
5. How many times has your firm been Reviewed?
6. What benefits has your firm derived from **Peer Review**?
7. How has participation as a Reviewer benefited you and your firm?
8. Describe the procedure you propose to follow in working with me to develop a Review scope that will address my expectations.
9. Please provide references to at least three CEOs of firms you have Reviewed.

At the end of the conversation, advise the candidate of your schedule for making a selection.

STAFF QUESTIONNAIRE (Hard-Copy)

Peer Review No. _____

As you should know, your firm is undergoing an ASFE **Peer Review**. We need your help. Please complete this questionnaire and mail it directly to the Peer Reviewer identified below. Do not show or submit any completed copies of this questionnaire to any member of your firm. This questionnaire and any subsequent dialogue with the Reviewers will be held in strictest confidence. Please be completely candid in all your answers. If a question does not apply to you, please write N/A.

1. What are the firm's three major goals? *List the highest-priority goal first.*

2. What are the firm's strengths? *Please describe fully.*

3. What makes the firm unique compared to your competition?

4. What are the firm's weaknesses? *Please describe fully.*

5. What should the firm stop doing?

6. How could the firm increase its profitability?

7. What are the headquarters office's major responsibilities to the branch offices?

8. What are the branch offices' major responsibilities to the headquarters office?

9. How could the firm improve the quality of its services?

10. What do you see as the firm's major opportunities?

11. What do you see as the major threats to the firm?

12. How would you rate your firm's loss-prevention record? Why does it have that record?

13. Who are the emerging leaders in the firm?

14. How does the firm nurture its emerging leaders?

15. Using the following form, rate your firm's business practices according to this scale:

- 3 – outstanding in all respects
- 2 – generally adequate for the majority of our needs
- 1 – lacking in form, structure, or execution
- 0 – virtually nonexistent

Element	3	2	1	0
Business Management				
Clear understanding of firm's mission and goals.				
Clearly defined and understood policies and procedures.				
Trained and responsive staff.				
Timely and useful information provided.				
Facilities and Technical Resources				
Well-defined lines of authority for selection, acquisition, and maintenance of facilities and other resources.				
Up-to-date equipment and facilities to meet clients' needs.				
Human Resources Management and Professional Development				
Even-handed and fair treatment of staff at all levels.				
Clearly stated and understood policies in all areas of employer-employee relations.				
Clear understanding of opportunities available to staff for training and advancement.				
Regular and adequate performance reviews.				
Project Management				
Clearly understood policies and procedures for client selection and contract formation.				
Effective record-keeping and file maintenance for project files.				
Effective means of selecting and assigning appropriate staff to each project.				
Quality control and quality assurance procedures in place and regularly practiced.				
Effective financial reporting procedures for tracking project progress, expenditures, and rate of completion.				
Financial Management				
Well-established and clearly understood chart of accounts.				
Corporate financial data made available at regular intervals.				
Billing and collection procedures in place and effectively used.				

Element	3	2	1	0
Marketing Practices				
Hard copy promotional materials accurately reflect the firm's image and represent firm's experience and capabilities.				
Website accurately reflects the firm's image, is updated often, and consistently and accurately represents the firm's experience and capabilities.				
Practices in place and followed to maintain and build on client relationships.				
Effective support in the evaluation of and response to requests for statements of qualifications and proposals.				
Electronic Resources Management				
Strategic plan for the firmwide information system infrastructure to meet client needs and expectations on a timely basis.				
Policies for the acquisition, maintenance, and use (both business and personal) of hardware, software, e-mail, and Internet.				
Policies for maintenance of electronic data files, system security, and back-up procedures.				

Submitted by:

Name _____

Title _____

Office _____

Department _____

Please send your response directly to:

Name _____

Address _____

_____ ZIP _____

Tel. _____

Fax _____

e-Mail _____

CLIENT QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE (Hard Copy)

Questionnaire Cover Letter

[Firm letterhead]

[Month, Date, Year]

[Individual's Name]

[Name of Client Organization]

[Client Organization Address]

Peer Review No. _____

Dear [Title] [Name]:

[Firm Name] is undergoing an ASFE *Peer Review* to improve our client service. I enclose a brochure that explains what *Peer Review* is.

We need your feedback to make *Peer Review* effective. Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to the Peer Review Team Captain in the addressed, stamped envelope by [date].

[Peer Review Team Captain's Name]

[Home Address]

Tel.: []

e-Mail: []

Please note that you have a choice: You can allow your responses to be shared with our firm or you can keep them confidential. Indicate your preference on the last page of the questionnaire. (If you want your responses kept confidential, only Peer Reviewers will see your information. They will use it solely to develop trend data, without indicating who said what.)

Thank you for your help. If you have any questions, please get in touch with me.

Sincerely,

[Firm Name]

[CEO's Name]

[CEO's Title]

cc: [Peer Review Team Captain's Name]

Enclosure

Client Questionnaire

Peer Review No. _____

1. Rate your most recent experience(s) with the services provided by the firm for the following items that are applicable (1 poor; 3 average or typical; 5 excellent):

	1	2	3	4	5
TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE					
Quality of Deliverables					
Adequacy of Recommendations					
Quality of Field/Engineering Support Services					
Credibility with Government Agency Personnel					
Quality of Oral Presentations in Meetings					
BUSINESS PRACTICES					
Management Efficiency and Effectiveness					
Availability of Staff					
Meeting Budget Commitments					
Effective Decision-Making					
Appropriate Follow-up					
Quality/Accuracy of Invoicing					
PROFESSIONALISM					
Meeting Scope Commitments					
Meeting or Exceeding Expectations					
Appropriate Conduct					
Rapport with Staff					
Ability To Work Effectively with Client/Client's Other Service Providers					
TIMELINESS					
Meeting Schedule Commitments					
Responsiveness to Changes					
COMMUNICATION					
Understanding Client's Needs					
Status Reporting					
Timeliness in Communicating Problems/Changes					
REPRESENTATION					
Presents Client's Positions in a Fully Objective, Supportable Manner					
OVERALL SATISFACTION					

2. How familiar are you with the firm? (If the firm has multiple offices, which office do you work with? _____)

_____ Very _____ Somewhat _____ Not at All

3. How many similar/competitive firms have you retained in the past two years?

4. Why did you choose the firm being Reviewed?

5. What strengths do you see in the firm? (*Please rank in importance*)

6. What weaknesses do you see in the firm? (*Please rank in importance*)

7. How could the firm improve its services to you?

8. Would you retain this firm again?

___ Yes ___ Possibly ___ No

9. Would you recommend this firm to your colleagues?

___ Yes ___ Possibly ___ No

10. How does this firm's service compare to others' on similar projects?

___ Worse ___ About the Same ___ Better ___ Much Superior

11. Is there anything else Peer Reviewers should know about the firm?

12. ☐ Share my responses with the firm ☐ Keep my responses strictly confidential

Submitted by:

Name _____

Title _____

Company _____

Date _____

Mail to:

[**Peer Review** Team Captain's Name]

[**Peer Review** Team Captain's Home Address]

CORE MANAGEMENT COMPONENTS

The eight Core Management Components (CMCs) considered in a Comprehensive *Peer Review* are outlined below, each being amplified by a bulleted list of desirable, but not mandatory, documentation, plus questions to assist in evaluation. When Comprehensive *Peer Review* is conducted, the Reviewers' report to the CEO could be organized in the order shown below, to provide a more structured and uniform appraisal. Otherwise, the report format should be established ahead of time by the Team Captain and the CEO.

1. Business Management

- Statement of the firm's mission, vision, goals, and objectives.
 - Description of the firm's ownership structure.
 - Organization chart identifying positions and the names of all professionals, technicians, and administrative personnel.
 - Job descriptions of key personnel.
 - Outline indicating the scope of the firm's services.
 - Policy and procedure for strategic planning and tactical implementation.
- a. *Does the firm have a strategic plan that includes specific, measurable, and attainable goals?*
 - b. *Is the firm's strategic plan supported by a marketing plan?*
 - c. *Does the firm monitor attainment of the goals described in its strategic plan?*
 - d. *Are the plan's goals being met?*
 - e. *Is a statement of the goals available to employees and clients?*
 - f. *Does the organization structure define reporting relationships and assign responsibility to managers and other employees?*
 - g. *Do employees understand the organization structure?*
 - h. *Do employees understand the decision-making process and the levels at which various types of decisions can be made?*
 - i. *Has the CEO delegated authority to others so that the CEO is not overloaded and decisions are made in a timely manner?*
 - j. *Are communications between management personnel adequate and effective?*
 - k. *Does the firm's planning consider ownership transition?*
 - l. *Is the firm's long-range plan for leadership development and transition formulated and understood?*
 - m. *Are employees given written job descriptions?*

- n. *Does staff understand the job descriptions?*
- o. *Have position descriptions been prepared and appointments made for specialized position such as Loss Prevention Coordinator, Health and Safety Officer, Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Human Resources Manager, and Information Technology Systems Manager?*
- p. *Does the firm have an office manual or similar document summarizing important company operating policies and procedures?*
- q. *Does the firm have any internal audit or quality assurance procedures to determine that policies and procedures are understood and implemented?*
- r. *What process does the firm have in place to promote continuous improvement in the quality of its services and to evaluate the level of client satisfaction being achieved?*
- s. *What measurable results has the firm recorded since implementing this process?*
- t. *How has the firm responded to the recommendations given in any past Peer Reviews?*
- u. *What percent of your practice involves services for owner-occupied residential projects (single-family or multiple-ownership; e.g., condominiums)?*
- v. *Other business management inquiries?*
- w. *What have you learned from your loss experiences?*
- x. *How do you determine that a claim is serious?*
- y. *Have potential future leaders of the firm been identified?*
- z. *Does the firm have a leadership skills development program?*

2. Facilities and Technical Resources

- **Standards for space and furniture allocation.**
 - **Inventory of major laboratory equipment, field instrumentation, safety equipment, computers, and other available facilities or resources.**
 - **Statement of procedures and description of facilities for handling and storing hazardous materials, contaminated samples, and specialized equipment used in geoenvironmental operations.**
- a. *Are employees' working conditions, physical facilities, and office environment satisfactory?*
 - b. *Does the firm's facility enhance its image?*
 - c. *Are in-house technical resources adequate; e.g., library, laboratory equipment, and personal computers?*

- d. *Are the firm's resources generally current or out-of-date/obsolete?*
- e. *Do the firm's retrieval systems give professional staff ready access to the firm's past experience and project records?*
- f. *Have adequate provisions been made for employees' health and safety?*
- g. *Do employees receive protective equipment?*
- h. *Are there proper facilities for handling and storing hazardous materials?*
- i. *In your opinion, does the firm have an OSHA-compliant hazard communication plan and emergency preparedness plan?*
- j. *Have adequate provisions been made for the security of the firm's important files, documents, and reports, etc.?*
- k. *Other facilities and technical resources inquiries?*

3. Human Resources Management

- **Procedures for monitoring laws and regulations that affect the firm's practices.**
- **Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action plans.**
- **Substance-abuse screening/testing policies.**
- **Background check policies and procedures.**
- **Description of recruitment procedures.**
- **Personnel manuals and procedures.**
- **Medical monitoring program.**
- **Health and safety program.**
- **Performance review procedures.**
- **Employee advancement policies.**
- **Resumes of professional and technical personnel.**
- **Management information systems for personnel experience records.**
- **Description of retention strategies.**
- **Exit interview guidelines.**

- a. *Are personnel recruitment activities performed according to set standards and procedures?*
- b. *Are recent hires asked for suggestions on how to improve the recruiting and hiring process?*
- c. *Is the authority for employment of both entry-level and experienced staff clearly defined?*
- d. *Are new employees given adequate descriptions of their jobs and benefits?*
- e. *Do new employees receive a formal introduction to the firm's organizational structure, policies and procedures, and management staff?*
- f. *If there is a personnel policy manual, are new employees asked to "sign off" on having read and understood it?*
- g. *If there is a personnel policies manual, do you believe it adequately reflects federal employment standards?*
- h. *Does the firm have adequate procedures for career-path development, salary-structure review, and benefit-package development?*
- i. *Do administrative procedures document employee progress, training, registration, etc.?*
- j. *Do personnel records regularly document employee training, etc.?*
- k. *Does the firm have effective policies and procedures to assess individuals' strengths and weaknesses, periodically evaluate employee performance (using individual conferences to discuss progress toward past goals and set new goals), and advance personnel?*
- l. *Do personnel records reflect systematic implementation of evaluation policies and procedures?*
- m. *Is access to personnel files limited?*
- n. *Do employees understand and agree with the firm's policies for their evaluation and advancement?*
- o. *How effectively is information communicated to staff?*
- p. *Does the firm conduct scheduled staff meetings to keep staff informed of company activities?*
- q. *Describe staff morale.*
- r. *Is the human resources management function clearly defined in the organization?*
- s. *Is there a policy about moonlighting?*
- t. *Does the firm have written Equal Employment Opportunity(EEO) and Affirmative Action plans?*
- u. *How well have any EEO or Affirmative Action plans been implemented?*
- v. *Does the firm have a substance-abuse/testing policy?*
- w. *Does the firm's drug policy seem to satisfy federal, state, and client requirements?*

- x. *Are there procedures for responding to inquiries about former employees?*
- y. *Are single-person subcontracts reviewed for subcontractor/employee status?*
- z. *Other human resources management inquiries?*

4. Professional Development

- **Professional development and continuing education policies.**
 - **Descriptions of employee training programs.**
 - **Seminar and professional organization attendance policies.**
 - **Registration/certification policies.**
 - **Policies and procedures for implementing ASFE and other loss-prevention/risk-management materials and programs.**
- a. *Does the firm have appropriate policies and procedures including budgetary support and controls for the continuing professional development of employees?.*
 - b. *Does the firm conduct in-house training programs and technical seminars? And if it does, do records reflect the topics covered and who took part?*
 - c. *How does the firm encourage participation in professional and technical societies and committees?*
 - d. *Is a conscientious effort made to assign professional and technical employees to projects of various types?*
 - e. *Do personnel records reflect the rotation of employees' assignments to expose them to various project types?*
 - f. *Are personnel familiar with ASFE materials, such as manuals, cassette tapes, CDs, CD ROMs, and case histories?*
 - g. *Have appropriate personnel participated in ASFE programs; e.g., BackYard Seminars, Project Manager Training Program, Fundamentals of Professional Practice, national meetings, etc.?*
 - h. *Is the office staffed with enough competent individuals to mentor persons with less experience, to help them reach their career goals?*
 - i. *Is there a formal process that permits sharing of project experience among the appropriate staff?*
 - j. *Are applicable employees encouraged to become registered or certified?*
 - k. *Is staff trained in health and safety and medically monitored as applicable?*
 - l. *Is the staff well versed in the firm's business and professional ethical standards?*
 - m. *Other professional development inquiries?*

5. Project Management

- Standard contract(s).
- Policy for including construction-phase services in the scope of service.
- Procedures for assigning personnel to projects.
- Communication policies and procedures.
- Procedures for maintaining client confidentiality.
- Communication recording systems; documentation policies.
- Systems for storage and retrieval of the firm's current and prior records.
- Record retention/purging policies.
- Job-cost recording procedures.
- Guidelines for monitoring project progress and completion, including billing and financial tracking.
- Procedures for identifying individuals who performed and/or reviewed specific work.
- Warning systems to alert personnel to signs of trouble.
- Overrun reviews and procedures.
- Quality assurance/quality control procedures for review of technical correspondence and reports.

- a. Are the duties, responsibilities, and authority of project managers clearly defined?*
- b. Are project managers appropriately trained and managed?*
- c. What policies and procedures are in place to see that all projects have written contracts?*
- d. What percentage of the projects actually have written contracts?*
- e. Are standard forms or templates for letter proposals and contracts used?*
- f. Does the firm use checklists for reviewing contracts submitted to them?*
- g. Are contracts signed by persons legally authorized to sign on behalf of the firm?*
- h. Do employees know who is and who is not authorized to sign for the firm?*
- i. Are standard provisions in the firm's contracts reasonable?*
- j. Do any contract provisions inadvertently allocate liability to the firm?*

- k. *Are ASFE practices and/or language implemented in the formation of proposals and contracts?*
- l. *Are work plans prepared or reviewed by a senior person? Do work plans detail staff and resource requirements and estimate in-house costs?*
- m. *Do the files indicate that scope of service changes are documented and communicated to the client in writing?*
- n. *Does the firm require that key project staff be briefed on the overall scope?*
- o. *Do project managers receive timely reports of project costs in relation to budgets, the status of invoicing and accounts receivable, and other applicable information?*
- p. *Do project files indicate that clients are kept well-informed during project execution?*
- q. *Are clients' reports and other project information held in confidence?*
- r. *Are there satisfactory procedures for selecting personnel with adequate technical training and proficiency to perform the work required for a particular project?*
- s. *Do working papers in project files indicate the names or initials of persons performing the services so that an inquiry could determine their qualifications?*
- t. *Do project files indicate that calculations are checked and that other reviews are performed?*
- u. *Are records maintained to indicate the proficiency of technical and applicable professional personnel for performing various laboratory testing and field observation procedures?*
- v. *Is there continuity in the participation of personnel throughout the project?*
- w. *Is there adequate management review of employee workloads and schedules, as well as project schedules and deadlines?*
- x. *Are schedules regularly met?*
- y. *Is staff size adequate for the current workload?*
- z. *Are policies and procedures for supervision of employees, for checking of calculations and other work, and for review of oral presentations and reports adequate to provide quality services?*
- aa. *Are checklists used for self-reviewing of reports and drawings to help ensure that all applicable items are considered?*
- bb. *Are project reports well-organized and well-written?*
- cc. *Do reports separate fact from opinion and identify risks and limitations?*
- dd. *Has appropriate, ASFE-recommended language been used in reports?*
- ee. *Are construction or remediation cost estimates adequately qualified?*

- ff. How does the firm respond to requests to certify the adequacy of work?*
- gg. Does the firm use outside consultants?*
- hh. Does the staff know what consultative resources are available to them, both in-house and outside?*
- ii. Does the firm enter into written contracts with subcontractors?*
- jj. Does the firm require subcontractors to provide proof of insurance?*
- kk. Are project files well-organized?*
- ll. Do the files provide a reasonably complete and chronological record documenting project activity?*
- mm. Has the firm established practical policies and procedures for closing projects, such as disposal of samples and reviewing, purging and storing files of completed projects.*
- nn. Have project close-out procedures been uniformly implemented?*
- oo. Does the firm commonly recommend or require as a condition of engagement that its participation on a project be continued through construction?*
- pp. How successful is the firm in securing the construction observation work?*
- qq. Does the firm have a consistent records-retention policy?*
- rr. Do employees know what the records retention-policy is? Do they follow it?*
- ss. Are there policies and procedures for field personnel relative to their responsibilities for testing, observing, and reporting?*
- tt. Do field personnel understand their responsibilities and authority limits?*
- uu. Are standard forms available for field personnel's use in gathering data and providing documentation during construction?*
- vv. Are field reports properly qualified as to the observer's inability to witness all conditions?*
- ww. Are site-specific health and safety plans prepared for work on contaminated or potentially contaminated sites?*
- xx. Does evidence indicate that employees receive health and safety briefings prior to undertaking work in the presence of hazardous or potentially hazardous materials?*
- yy. Does the firm track regulations governing reporting of hazardous materials?*
- zz. Do staff members involved know their responsibility to report the finding of hazardous materials?*
- aaa. Other project management inquiries?*

6. Financial Management

- Procedure for budget and business plan development.
 - Policy for regular preparation of financial statements.
 - Procedure for monitoring backlog of work.
 - Billing procedures.
 - Collection procedures.
 - Procedures for the timely distribution of a project's financial data.
 - Procedures for storage and retrieval of financial records.
- a. *Does the firm prepare an annual budget? Does it include capital, revenue, and overhead projections?*
- b. *Are financial statements prepared frequently enough so that performance can be monitored in relation to budgets?*
- c. *Are actual results compared to budget?*
- d. *Are invoices to clients prepared and issued in a timely manner?*
- e. *Has the firm established reasonable policies for the collection of overdue accounts receivable?*
- f. *Are procedures for backing up and storing important financial records satisfactory?*
- g. *Other financial management inquiries?*

7. Marketing Practices

- Statement of qualifications.
- Quality assurance review procedures for marketing publications.
- Brochures and/or other marketing materials (including website, news releases, etc.)
- Guidelines for responding to requests for proposals.
- Procedures for screening potential clients and projects before accepting them.
- Identification of persons authorized to commit the firm contractually on projects.
- Marketing plan.

- a. *Does the firm have a marketing plan? If so:*
- *Is its depth consistent with the size and complexity of the firm?*
 - *Does it outline the firm's business development philosophy and approach to the marketplace?*
 - *Is it updated at an appropriate frequency?*
- b. *Has the responsibility for preparation and control of public relations documents been clearly assigned?*
- c. *Does the firm follow a reasonable procedure for securing clients' approval before release of marketing materials referring to their clients?*
- d. *Do brochures and other materials, including web pages, reasonably represent the firm's actual scope of services, qualifications, experience, and personnel?*
- e. *Does the marketing material include language that could create contractual liabilities or client misunderstandings?*
- f. *Are the resumes of professional and key technical personnel current?*
- g. *Do most or all employees have business cards?*
- h. *Are there satisfactory policies and procedures for screening new clients and projects?*
- i. *Is the authority for accepting new projects on behalf of the firm clearly stated and understood by employees?*
- j. *Do personnel in the firm write technical papers?*
- k. *Does the firm participate in awards programs?*
- l. *Is there adequate follow-up to proposals that were not successful?*
- m. *Is there an established policy or procedure for soliciting feedback from clients on a consistent basis after completion of projects?*
- n. *How is client feedback information documented and used by management?*
- o. *Does the firm regularly communicate with current and past clients through newsletters, press releases, e-mail, personal notes, social outings, etc.?*
- p. *Other marketing practices inquiries?*

8. Electronic Resources Management

- Policies for acquisition and maintenance of hardware and software.
 - Established monitoring procedures for software licensing compliance.
 - Organizational definition of responsibility and authority for planning, implementing, and maintaining the firmwide information systems infrastructure.
 - Written policies for maintenance of electronic data files, backup procedure, system security and staff use, and management surveillance of facilities for appropriate use for company business.
 - Guidelines for business and personal uses of company e-mail, Instant Messaging, and Internet services.
 - Software inventory.
- a. *Has the firm established appropriate policies and procedures for the continuing development of electronic data systems with budgetary support and controls?*
 - b. *Does the firm have policies and implemented procedures to monitor software monitoring procedures for compliance with licensing agreements?*
 - c. *What policies and procedures are used to ensure back-up of important files and purging of obsolete data?*
 - d. *What procedures are in place to secure access to information stored on the firm's computers?*
 - e. *Are reasonable policies and procedures applied to govern the use, storage, and deletion of e-mail?*
 - f. *What procedures or guidelines are in place to assure QA-QC review of outgoing project e-mail in accordance with the firm's QA-QC practices for other outgoing project correspondence such as letters and report?*
 - g. *Do appropriate employees have the skill and system capabilities needed to download project-related information from the Internet?*
 - h. *What software and/or hardware solutions are in place to protect the firm's computers from both receiving and sending viruses? How often are the software solutions updated?*
 - i. *Other electronic resources inquiries?*

SUGGESTED AGREEMENT FOR SERVICE AS A PEER REVIEWER

Peer Review No. _____

I recognize that **Peer Review** is a singularly important service whose success depends upon the integrity of Peer Reviewers. In return for the professional, educational, and other benefits that service as a Peer Reviewer will bring to me personally, I herewith confirm my awareness of professional **Peer Review** practices and, accordingly, I agree:

- to treat as confidential and not disclose to any third party information gained or personal opinions formed by me about the participating firm during the course or as a consequence of Peer Review, including, without limitation, information or opinions about the firm's policies, methods of operation, instruments of service, employees, or clientele;
- to abstain from the targeted recruitment of employees of the participating firm based upon information gained during **Peer Review**;
- to abstain from marketing the participating firm's clients in the firm's geographic marketing area based upon information gained during **Peer Review**;
- to treat as confidential, not disclose to or discuss with any third party, and return to the participating firm or destroy Review-related documents, work papers, and memory media in my possession;
- when serving as a **Peer Review** Team Member, to treat as confidential, not disclose or discuss with any third party, and destroy or return to the Team Captain any drafts of the written report and any memory media containing them, or
- when serving as a Peer Review Team Captain, to treat as confidential, not disclose or discuss with any third party, destroy all drafts of the written report, destroy all memory media containing any drafts of the written report and the final report, and destroy all except one copy of the written report immediately after submitting the original copy to the participating firm, and, 30 days thereafter, to destroy the sole copy in my possession, and
- in the case of uncertainty about proper procedure, to address the issue to the appropriate party within the participating firm (such as the CEO) *and* within ASFE (such as the Chair of the Peer Review Committee, the President, or the Chair of the Council of Fellows).

Signed _____ Date _____
(Peer Reviewer)

CEO CRITIQUE OF REVIEW TEAM

Peer Review No. _____

The value and success of **Peer Review** depend on the participation of effective Reviewers in an up-to-date Review process. Your firm has just completed a **Peer Review**. Please help us improve the quality of our process and Reviewer training. Just complete the following critique and return it to us promptly. Thank you!

Instructions: This questionnaire is to be completed by the participating firm's or office's CEO. Most of the questions can be answered using brief comments or by checking the appropriate boxes. It should only take you a few minutes, but if you have strong feelings about certain issues, please expand your comments. Many of the questions can be answered on a 5 to 1 basis, 5 being a positive superlative and 1 being a negative superlative.

Note: ASFE records indicate that the following individuals are being evaluated by this questionnaire:

Captain: _____
 Team Member #1 _____
 Team Member #2 _____
 Team Member #3 _____

This questionnaire was completed by: _____

1. What is your assessment of the "scoping process" that was conducted with the Team Captain before the **Peer Review**?

2. Were you able to mold the **Peer Review** to suit your firm's unique situation?

3. What would you do to improve the Team Captain and/or Team Member selection process?

4. The task of assembling existing documents might have required some time. Did it? _____
 If so, was the process of gathering the documents of any value to your **Peer Review**? _____
 Did you "create" any documents for submittal in preparation for the **Peer Review**? _____

Comments: _____

5. How would you rate the overall **Peer Review** experience from your personal standpoint?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

6. How would you rate the overall **Peer Review** experience from your firm's standpoint?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

7. How well did the Peer Reviewers conform to the established schedule?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

8. How well did the Reviewers work as a team?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

9. How well did the Reviewers evaluate the Core Management Components you wanted reviewed?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

10. Evaluate the attitudes of the Reviewers toward management, technical staff, and support personnel.

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

11. How effectively did the Reviewers communicate with staff members?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

12. How do you rate the Reviewers' exit conference?

5 4 3 2 1

Comments: _____

13. How do you rate the Reviewers' written report?

Prioritized Recommendations	5	4	3	2	1
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Thoroughness	5	4	3	2	1
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Clarity	5	4	3	2	1
---------	---	---	---	---	---

Timeliness	5	4	3	3	1
------------	---	---	---	---	---

Comments: _____

14. How do you rate each of the Peer Reviewers?

Captain	5	4	3	2	1
Team Member #1	5	4	3	2	1
Team Member #2	5	4	3	2	1
Team Member #3	5	4	3	2	1

Comments: _____

15. Was the time spent by the Reviewers too long _____, too short _____, about right _____?

Comments: _____

16. What problems were not discussed during the *Peer Review*?

17. In your opinion, how often should your firm be Reviewed?

18. What were the most beneficial aspects of *Peer Review*?

19. Were there any significant negative aspects of *Peer Review*?

20. What should be done to improve the Peer Review process before your next Review?

21. Would you recommend the Team Captain to another CEO? _____ Yes _____ No

If No, why not? _____

22. Your evaluation of Team Members

Team Member #1 _____ (name)

Promote to Team Captain? _____ Yes _____ No

Keep as Team Member **ONLY**? _____ Yes _____ No

Remove from list of qualified Reviewers? _____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

Team Member #2 _____ (name)

Promote to Team Captain? _____ Yes _____ No

Keep as Team Member **ONLY**? _____ Yes _____ No

Remove from list of qualified Reviewers? _____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

Team Member #3 _____ (name)

Promote to Team Captain? _____ Yes _____ No

Keep as Team Member **ONLY**? _____ Yes _____ No

Remove from list of qualified Reviewers? _____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

23. In your own words, what did this **Peer Review** mean to you and your firm?

Can we use this quote in our promotion of the **Peer Review** process? _____ Yes _____ No

Please return form to:



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ATTN.: PEER REVIEW ADMINISTRATOR
Fax: 301/589-2017
e-Mail: info@asfe.org



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