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# **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Associate Qualified Security Assessor (QSA) Program**

August 2017

A QSA Company is a data security firm certified by the PCI SSC to perform on-site assessments of a company's PCI Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) compliance to ensure that robust policies and procedures are in place to protect cardholder data. The QSA program plays a critical role in the adoption of PCI Security Standards.

The PCI SSC is developing a new Associate QSA program for 2018, with the goal of attracting new cyber talent to the QSA program and easing the resource constraints felt by QSA Companies. The Associate QSA certification will provide a professional path for new entrants to join the industry and gain experience to qualify as a QSA.

This project is the first part of a phased initiative to evolve the QSA program to ensure its sustainability and quality in a changing payment environment. Additional changes to the QSA program will focus on supporting future standards and technologies and attracting new cyber talent to develop the next generation of QSAs, and will be developed and implemented in conjunction with a dedicated industry task force.

**Q 1 Why is the PCI SSC creating the Associate QSA certification?**

- A** *An overall shortage of cyber security talent is making it difficult for QSA Companies to find suitable new assessors. As a result, assessors are increasingly expensive to hire and retain, driving assessment costs up for merchants that rely on their services. The Associate QSA certification program is designed to bring new cyber talent to the QSA program, easing the resource constraints for QSA Companies, and ensuring high quality QSA services are available for merchants and service providers into the future.*

**Q 2 How is the Associate QSA certification different than the QSA certification?**

- A** *The Associate QSA certification is designed for employees of QSA Companies that do not yet have enough experience to be a QSA but who are interested in achieving QSA certification in the future. It provides a professional path to gain the necessary experience to become a QSA.*

**Q 3 What is an Associate QSA eligible to do?**

- A** *Associate QSAs can assist in conducting PCI DSS assessments with the oversight of a QSA mentor at their QSA Company. They are not qualified to confirm PCI DSS compliance or sign off on Attestations of Compliance (AOC) or Reports on Compliance (ROC).*

**Q 4 What is a QSA mentor?**

- A** *A QSA mentor is a QSA employee designated by their QSA Company employer to provide guidance and support to an Associate QSA. Some examples of QSA mentor responsibilities may include the onboarding, evaluation of skills and ensuring Associate QSAs are given appropriate assignments to expand their skills and experience. QSA mentors must be experienced QSA employees. Pre-requisites will include: At least three years' experience as a QSA having managed several PCI DSS Assessments resulting in ROCs.*

**Q 5 What are the pre-requisites to become an Associate QSA?**

- A** *Associate QSAs must be employed by an eligible QSA Company. Based on feedback from the industry we expect pre-requisites to also include a college or university degree in an IT or security-related field or two years' experience in IT or security. It is the QSA Company's responsibility to nominate appropriate candidates for Associate QSA training.*

**Q 6 How does one become certified as an Associate QSA?**

- A** *Individuals must submit an application that meets the Associate QSA Qualification Requirements, complete the Associate QSA training and pass the exam. Upon certification, they will be listed on the PCI SSC website.*

**Q 7 When will the PCI SSC begin accepting applications for the Associate QSA certification program?**

- A** *The Associate QSA Qualification Requirements will be available by the end of 2017, and the PCI SSC Council is targeting early 2018 to begin accepting applications for the Associate QSA certification program.*

**Q 8 What does the Associate QSA training cover?**

- A** *The Associate QSA training equips trainees to perform assessments of merchants and service providers who must comply with the PCI DSS. The PCI SSC anticipates Associate QSAs will complete the same training as QSAs, which includes the online prerequisite PCI Fundamentals course and a two-day instructor-led course.*

**Q 9 When will Associate QSA training be available?**

- A** *The training calendar for 2018 will be published on the PCI SSC website later in 2017. Associate QSAs will be able to sign up for training as soon as the PCI SSC opens the program for applications in early 2018.*

**Q 10 How much will it cost to be trained and certified as an Associate QSA?**

- A** *As Associate QSAs will complete the same training and exam as QSAs, organizations can expect the pricing to be consistent with pricing for QSA training and certification.*

**Q 11 How long is the Associate QSA certification good for?**

- A** *The certification is good for 12 months. At that time, Associate QSAs will need to recertify to maintain status as an Associate QSA and listing on the PCI SSC website.*

**Q 12 What is involved in the Associate QSA recertification process?**

- A** *The PCI SSC anticipates that the recertification process will be the same as the QSA recertification process, requiring completion of an online training and passing an exam.*

**Q 13 Can Associate QSAs take their certification with them from QSA Company to QSA Company?**

- A** *Industry stakeholders have requested that this be a transferable certification, and the PCI SSC anticipates that Associate QSAs will be able to take their certification with them from QSA Company to QSA Company, subject to the terms of the program being met.*

**Q 14 How does an Associate QSA become a QSA?**

- A** *Once an Associate QSA can fully meet the QSA Qualification Requirements they are eligible to apply to PCI SSC to become a QSA. Progression from Associate QSA to QSA will not involve re-training or re-taking the QSA exam.*