

Requirements and Qualifications for Third-Party Verifiers

OCA's Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework helps us gain insights about the effectiveness of our farm projects in contributing to the aspired goals of the OCA Farm Programme. The Farm Programme Guidelines in combination with the Verification Manual provide an overview of the data collection, management and validation processes that must be in operation for OCA's farm projects. The data is collected and shared among respective OCA partners and facilitates fact-based learning about the impact of sourcing practices on the business case of organic cotton farmers. These insights inform both the future design of OCA's Farm Programme and the adoption of best practices in sourcing strategies. OCA also hopes that the increased level of transparency brought by the M&E system will foster trust among the different actors involved in the farm projects and contribute to enhancing the overall credibility of our efforts.

In summary, the design and implementation of a solid M&E system for the sourcing interventions serves the following objectives:

- **Performance measurement:** assessing the direct results of the OCA intervention practices, and the extent to which they lead to improvements in the business case for smallholder farmers. This includes the evaluation of existing and piloted activities to enable continuous and comparative learning.
- **Enhancing transparency and credibility:** enhancing the credibility of the farm projects and their results through adherence to a verifiable and transparent data collection system.
- **Communicating results:** sharing results to sector stakeholders and consumers to showcase the effect of the intervention activities.

Continuous improvement and learning: contributing towards a cycle of shared measurement and continuous learning to improve future intervention design and understand possible changes.

Third-party verifier organisations play a critical role in enabling the continuous cycle of learning and improvement we administer through our M&E system. To ensure their independence, impartiality, and rigor we mandate that verifiers who work with OCA meet certain requirements and demonstrate qualifications and competencies to illustrate their appropriateness for this role.

Third-Party Verifier Requirements

The verification organisation should meet the following requirements:

- “Credibility / recognition” of the organisation within industry, as measured by international accreditation and recommendations
 - The OCA M&E process follows the requirements, where applicable, of ISO 19011, ISO 17065 and ISO 17021. Whilst accreditation to these ISO standards is not mandatory, TPAs are expected to have received training and be familiar with these standards to manage and perform TPA evaluations for OCA.
- Experienced in conducting monitoring and evaluation, verification and impact assessments in agro-commodity chains in India and Pakistan
- Experienced in agro-commodity sampling / cotton GM sampling and coordination
- Experienced in conducting audits / risk assessments in the cotton supply chain in India and Pakistan
- Experienced in conducting mobile based data collection
- Demonstrated ability to develop proposed methodology, activity plan and timeline
- Organisation has a suitable infrastructure to undertake the validation process as per the required scope
- Registration in India and Pakistan under the relevant laws and holding valid FCRA.
 - Please note that licenses/certificates supporting these may be requested by OCA
- Able to provide references that demonstrate a strong background in verification
- Organisation has team members experienced in monitoring and evaluation, verification, and impact assessments in organic/cotton supply chains in India and Pakistan
- • Organisation must be able to supply required and experienced personnel for each project: At least 1 project coordinator (to be confirmed in-consultation with OCA depending on the number of projects), required number of field managers and surveyors (as found fit by the organisation) and 1 data analyst.
- Personnel from the third-party verifier must demonstrate the ability to read and communicate effectively in the language(s) used by project farmers, control farmers and Implementing Partners during the verification audit. If an interpreter is needed, s/he should ideally be independent from the organisation being verified.
- Organisation must provide suitable health and accidental insurance coverage for the team members who will be responsible for data collection and project visits.

Third-Party Verifier Organisation Responsibilities

- Report findings must be delivered in a timely fashion, in English, using the reporting documents prescribed by OCA
- Demonstrate accountability for information gathered from the verification process
- Ensure the competency and on-going training of verifier teams
- Ensure a qualified Lead Verifier leads the third-party verification and that other verification team members are effectively supervised by them

Lead Verifier Qualifications

Lead Verifiers from third-party agencies should have the following qualifications:

Fundamental

- University degree in agriculture, natural resources, environmental management or another relevant subject is encouraged; however relevant experience may substitute for education
- 3 years of auditing or other relevant experience in (cotton) farming, natural resources or environmental management
- Trained in auditing principles, procedures, techniques and behaviours as described in ISO 19011
- Knowledge of national and local laws and regulations on the environment, labour, health and safety, land and water ownership in the country where the verification visits will take place
- Knowledge of prevailing industry and cotton farming practices
- Knowledge of local social and cultural conditions to be considered in the conduct of a verification visit
- Ability to communicate clearly in English both verbally and through the writing of verification reports

Preferred

- Have passed ISO 19011 auditing training course and received training / be familiar with the following standards: ISO 19011, ISO 17065 and ISO 17021
- Strong social auditing competencies demonstrated through:
 - Post-secondary education and/or 1 year experience in social work or services that includes labour welfare or labour affairs
 - 2 years' experience in performing a gap analysis, internal social audits or second- or third-party social assessments
- Experience in information gathering and conducting interviews with knowledgeable local organisations or individuals related to farmers and farm workers

Mechanisms to Assess Competence

OCA will use the following mechanisms to assess whether third-party verifier organisations and their Lead Verifiers meet the requirements listed above:

- Certificate of passing auditor training course recognised by a reputable auditor registration organisation e.g., IRCA, RABQSA
- Review of previous third-party verification reports produced, with particular attention paid to consistency and quality of delivery between issued reports
- References from organisations who have hired the verification organisation / Lead Verifier in the past

Scope of Work

Third-party verifiers must validate data and facilitate GM testing of seed cotton and lint for the farm projects in OCA's Farm Programme. A summarised scope of work with the competencies required to fulfil each element is outlined below:

1. Data Collection and Validation:

Demonstrate a robust understanding of OCA's Farm Programme Guidelines and Verification Manual, and exhibit the following:

- Ability to create detailed workplans for project visits, data collection analysis and reporting. It is expected that the visits to the projects will be scheduled at critical stages of the cotton season to collect relevant data and facilitate sampling and testing of the seed cotton and lint.
- Ability to interview project farmers, control farmers and Implementing Partners (IPs) to:
 - Conduct checks on payment validation
 - Gather quantitative data and qualitative information as detailed by OCA's M&E guidelines
 - Must also demonstrate ability to:
 - Approach and engage all those interviewed in a non-threatening and effective manner
 - Conduct interviews under conditions that reassure participants that they can discuss sensitive issues
- Ability to conduct process validation
- Ability to evaluate the projects against the previous season's Project Improvement Reports
- Ability to develop project farmer case studies and prepare well-documented verification reports in a Results Report dashboard with clear analysis and specific evidence to support conformity / non-conformity findings

2. GMO Sampling and Reporting

Third-party verifiers must demonstrate a robust understanding of OCA's Standard Operating Procedure for GMO Sampling and Testing and do the following:

- Collate seed level GM test reports from Implementing Partners and these must be delivered in a standardised pre-agreed format.
- Coordinate the Implementing Partners to ensure samples collection follows GM guidelines at two stages – farm level and gin level.
- Collate and coordinate reports from labs and report findings to OCA. In addition, verifiers must deliver quality checked data from lab reports to OCA in a standardised pre-agreed format.

3. Data Collection: Topsoil and Carbon Testing

Third-party verifiers must demonstrate a robust understanding of OCA's Verification Manual and follow these protocols:

- Topsoil samples to be taken from pre-selected farmers across identified projects. Samples to be collected, identified, and sequenced.
- Samples to be sent to labs and payments made to labs and collect details and data within the data deliverables and timeline.
- Cost for laboratory testing to be paid in one interval / invoice by OCA directly.
- Deliver a closeout report detailing lessons learnt from piloting the topsoil carbon indicator, as well as the following indicators (pesticides use by type, fertilizer use by type, yield, income and expense indicators, market price, child labour). The closeout report should also include the following elements:
 - Feasibility of indicators (availability and reliability of the data, challenges faced during the data collection)
 - Costs and practicalities associated with data collection
 - Recommendations on how to improve the indicators
 - The level of representation ascertained by the sampling methodology
 - Indicate specific unusual results discovered by the selected indicators which require further attention by the OCA Secretariat

Questions regarding becoming an OCA Third-Party Validator should be directed to secretariat@organiccottonaccelerator.org