PROCEDURES

1. THE NIGP ACCREDITED COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

   a. Overview. The mission of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Program (“Accredited Cooperative Program” or “Program”) is to recognize entities by objectively assessing their public procurement program practices. The Accredited Cooperative Program establishes standards of performance derived from consensus guidance developed for the public procurement field. Entities that obtain Accredited Cooperative Program accreditation will have the practices, personnel, policies, and procedures that are needed to meet the Program standards for high-quality cooperative procurement practices.

   b. Defined Terms and Program Elements.

      i. “Accreditation Qualification Period (AQP)”: One of two periods during a calendar year during which time NIGP receives applications for accreditation assessment, conducts assessment and related activities, and announces Cooperative Programs that successfully achieved accreditation during that qualification period. Each AQP consists of an eight-week application period, followed by an eight-week assessment period, and a subsequent four-week announcement period. Specific dates associated with each AQP are posted on the NIGP website. NIGP reserves the right to modify the length of each period at its own discretion.

      ii. “Active Accreditation Period”: The three-year period during which the NIGP Accredited Cooperative designation is valid and maintained as required to maintain “active” status.

      iii. “Assessment Domain(s)”: The three broad areas of Cooperative Program practice under which the assessment criteria are categorized.

         1. Domain I: Cooperative Program Management.
         2. Domain II: Contracting Agency Management.

      iv. “Contracting Agency” and “Contract Originator”: The public agency or non-profit entity that establishes the contract made available for use by other such entities through the Cooperative Program.
v. **“Cooperative Program”**: The entity responsible for the overall operation, promotion, and administrative management activities associated with the programmatic offering of contracts for use by public and non-profit entities. Management of the Cooperative Program may be undertaken by a public entity that is also the contract originator, contract manager, and procurement department manager, or by a third-party entity that is independent of the contracting agency.

vi. **“Initial Assessment”**: The first assessment of the Cooperative Program conducted that determines eligibility for accreditation.

The Initial Assessment consists of:

1. **Phase I**: Cooperative Program review against all Mandatory Criteria in each of the three Assessment Domains. One-hundred percent (100%) compliance with all Mandatory Criteria is required to continue with the assessment process.

2. **Phase II**: Cooperative Programs successfully achieving Part I requirements will be assessed against all Scored Criteria identified in each of the three Assessment Domains.
   
   a. Procurement and Contracting Process criteria will be assessed against twenty-five percent (25%) of the Cooperative Program’s contracts, up to twenty (20). The specific contracts to be reviewed will be at the sole discretion of NIGP.

   b. Contracting Agency Management criteria will be assessed against either:
      
      i. the contracting entity or entities, up to ten (10), that self-manage the Cooperative Program; or

      ii. twenty-five percent (25%) of contracting agencies, up to ten (10).

   c. Successful achievement of Part II is defined as achieving a score in each of the three Assessment Domains equal to or greater than ninety percent (90%) of the total points possible in each Domain. Failure to achieve at least ninety percent (90%) of the points possible in any one of the three Domains will disqualify the Cooperative Program from accreditation award during the current AQP.
vii. “**Maintenance Assessment**”: After the initial award of Accreditation, review of the Cooperative Program every eighteen (18) months and successfully achieving the same requirements as the Initial Assessment is necessary to sustain active accreditation. The Maintenance Assessment repeats the Initial Assessment process with the following exceptions:

1. To assess Procurement and Contracting Processes, ten percent (10%) of the Cooperative Program’s contracts will be assessed, up to 10.

2. A Contracting Agency management assessment will not be undertaken.

viii. “**Mandatory**” and “**Mandatory Criteria**”: The body of criteria that must be met by the Cooperative Program in order to be eligible for the second of a two-part review that is necessary to achieve the NIGP Accredited Cooperative designation. Inability to achieve 100% compliance with all Mandatory Criteria will disqualify an entity from consideration for accreditation award during the accreditation qualification period.

ix. “**NIGP**”: The National Institute of Governmental Purchasing, its staff, and agents.

x. “**Scored**” and “**Scored Criteria**”: The criteria against which Cooperative Programs will be assessed following successful achievement of all Mandatory criteria. Cooperative Programs must earn a score equal to or greater than ninety percent (90%) of the total points possible for each of the three Assessment Domains. Failure to achieve 90% of total points possible in any one category will disqualify an entity from consideration for accreditation award during the accreditation qualification period.

c. **Obtaining NIGP Accredited Cooperative Status.** Successful achievement and maintenance of NIGP Accredited Cooperative status requires an initial, two-phase assessment and one maintenance assessment conducted approximately 18-months into the three-year Active Accreditation Period following initial award. Active accreditation after the initial three-year Active Accreditation Period will be sustained through maintenance assessments conducted approximately every 18 months.

d. **Program Assessments.** Program Assessments will be conducted as desk audits by NIGP staff and NIGP Consulting assessors utilizing the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Assessment Criteria attached at **Attachment A**. NIGP assessors will rely on documents available from applicant entity website(s), Contracting Agency website(s), and as provided by their respective staff upon request to inform their disposition toward each criterion.
e. **Principal Elements of Program Assessments.**

i. **Assessment.**

1. Evaluation of Program against “NIGP Accredited Cooperative”
   Assessment Criteria, attached at [Attachment A](#).

2. Phase I Program Review: Program assessed against all “Mandatory”
   criteria (100% achievement required to proceed to Phase II Program
   Review).

3. Phase II Program Review: Program assessed against all “Scored”
   criteria.
   a. 25% of all active contracts, up to 20, will be assessed.
      Selection of contracts for assessment will be at the sole
      discretion of NIGP assessors;
   b. (If Cooperative Program utilizes a “lead agency” model),
      twenty-five percent (25%) of all contract-originating agencies,
      not fewer than five (5) and not more than twenty (20), will be
      assessed; OR
   c. (If the Cooperative Program is owned/managed by the
      contracting agency), assessment of the contracting agency;
   d. Assessment report

ii. **Maintenance Review.** Occurs every 18-months following an award of
    accreditation. The Maintenance Review is required to sustain active
    accreditation. Should accreditation lapse for non-renewal or failure to meet
    accreditation criteria, the Program must reapply and undergo an Initial
    Assessment.

iii. **Maintenance Review Elements.** The Maintenance Assessment repeats the
    Initial Assessment process with the following exceptions:

   1. To assess Procurement and Contracting Processes, ten percent (10%)
      of the Cooperative Program’s contracts will be assessed, up to 10.
   2. A Contracting Agency Management assessment will not be
      undertaken.

2. **THE PROCESS OF APPLYING FOR NIGP ACCREDITED COOPERATIVE
   STATUS**

   a. **Governing Principle.** Because the accreditation process is initiated by an entity that
      submits itself for review, the burden of proof of compliance with Program standards
      rests with the applicant. Therefore, an application must be prepared with the degree
      of thoroughness that will satisfy detailed review. Application fees are nonrefundable.
b. **Acceptance of the Application.** An entity’s application will be accepted when the entity completes the Program application, signs the Accreditation Review Agreement, and pays all required fees.

c. **Withdrawal from Accreditation Process.** At any time after acceptance of the application but before the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee takes final action to grant or refuse accreditation to an applicant entity, the senior signatory to the application may withdraw from the accreditation process without prejudice and forfeit application fees.

3. **ASSESSMENTS**

   a. **Desk Audits.** All Program assessment activities are anticipated to be conducted as desk audits based on information available on the applicant entity’s website, from applicant-provided electronic documents, and phone-based conversations.

   b. **Requests for Onsite Assessments.** Should the applicant request onsite assessment of any or all criteria, the applicant shall pay all related reasonable travel and operational expenses associated with onsite assessment activities. Requests for onsite assessments will be made by the applicant entity’s principal project contact(s) in writing and sent via e-mail to NIGP. All reasonable transportation, lodging, mileage, and meal expenses will be invoiced at a cost. “Reasonable” expenses mean not greater than ten percent (10%) over and above the GSA travel per diem guidelines (reference: http://www.gsa.gov/portal/category/100120) for the location of onsite assessment activities.

   Once travel reservations have been made, any penalties or change fees that may result from an applicant-requested change to the schedule will be the applicant entity’s responsibility. Any penalties or change fees that may result from NIGP-initiated schedule changes will be the responsibility of NIGP. Both parties agree that any and all schedule changes that may impact travel planning or additional travel expenses will be brought to the attention of the other party within one business day. Notifications must be in writing and sent via e-mail to the principal project contact(s) identified by the applicant entity.

   c. **Assessor Requirements.** NIGP expects its assessors to comply with all Program Policies and Procedures, including but not limited to the following:

      i. **Accreditation Knowledge.** Assessors are expected to maintain knowledge of the Program standards and be able to apply such knowledge when reviewing entity data and reporting review findings.

      ii. **Continuing Education.** Assessors must participate in professional development activities and orientation exercises designed for all Program Assessors. The goal of Assessor development is to help Assessors maintain or
improve upon the knowledge and skills articulated within the Assessor competencies for Program entity reviews.

iii. **Computer Skills.** Assessors are expected to have computer skills sufficient to allow them to collect data using current technologies and be able to complete survey forms in a timely manner.

iv. **Professional Conduct and Use of Appropriate Communication.** Assessors are expected to exercise professional conduct and use appropriate communication in accordance with Program Assessor procedures. Assessors serve as data collectors for NIGP; final decisions will be made by the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee as described below.

1. Assessors should describe their role to the entity, following the script provided by NIGP.

2. Assessors may not engage in communication concerning the Assessor’s observations during his or her review or concerning the applicant’s eligibility for accreditation with an entity after the entity visit.

v. **Conflicts of Interest.** Before accepting an entity review assignment, an Assessor must consider his or her ability to act impartially in reviewing the entity and whether such impartiality could be impaired by any financial interest, personal relationship, commercial relationship, or interest of the Assessor’s employer. Assessors must actively engage in the identification, disclosure and resolution of any conflicts of interests which arise. To this end, Assessors are expected to:

1. Disclose any financial or contractual relationships with an entity under review that could create the perception of a conflict of interest in the accreditation process (e.g., employment, consulting arrangement, or working for an entity which is in competition with the entity under review).

2. Disclose any fiduciary relationships with an entity under review that could create a perception of a conflict of interest in the accreditation process (e.g., board membership or participation on a committee).

3. Disclose a personal or professional relationship with staff of an entity under review that could create a perception of a conflict of interest in the accreditation process (e.g., familial or professional relationship with key staff at the entity).
4. CATEGORIES OF ACCREDITATION

a. The final accreditation status of applicants is determined by NIGP. Decisions are made on the basis of passage of the assessment. The following status determinations are possible:

i. **Full Accreditation** is granted to any applicant entity that, in the exclusive judgment of NIGP, meets the accreditation standards in a satisfactory manner.

ii. **Denials** are issued to applicant entities that are determined not to meet the requirements of the Program standards. Applicants may reapply after one year or such other period as NIGP shall identify in its sole discretion.

b. Once an entity has been accredited by NIGP, it can be placed on probation or its accreditation status can be revoked.

i. **Probation** of an entity can occur if NIGP learns that an applicant entity is not currently in satisfactory compliance with the Program standards or does not cooperate in a compliance investigation. Probationary status may be conferred by the action of NIGP staff, provided that notice of proposed probation shall be given in writing no less than thirty (30) days in advance of such action, and shall include the specific concerns at issue, as well as an opportunity to cure such concerns, as determined by NIGP. Probation shall continue for such period until NIGP determines that full accreditation should be resumed, or until accreditation is revoked.

ii. **Revocation** of accreditation status can happen when the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee determines that the applicant entity has a persistent or significant lapse that impacts the decision on compliance with one or more of the Program standards, has falsified information provided to NIGP, or has materially changed to the extent that it is no longer eligible for or compliant with NIGP’s accreditation requirements.

5. COMPLAINTS

a. **About the Operation of an Accredited Entity.** A complaint about the operation of an accredited entity must:

i. be submitted in writing;

ii. identify the individual, group, or legal entity represented by the complainant;

iii. provide a clear description of the issue(s) in question;

iv. identify the Program standard(s) implicated in the complaint; and

v. grant permission to send the complaint, in its entirety, to the entity.
NIGP will review each complaint and, in its sole discretion, will determine whether the allegation(s), if true, would indicate that the subject entity is not in compliance with one or more of the Program standards in use at the time referred to in the complaint. If a complaint does not meet these requirements, NIGP will notify the complainant in writing. If a complaint does meet these requirements, it will be acknowledged by the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee and sent to the entity for comment. Both complaint and comment are placed on the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee agenda for its next scheduled meeting. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee may reach a decision at that meeting wherein the matter is resolved and so inform the entity. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee may vote to pursue the matter further, either by further correspondence with the entity or by means of a special request to provide additional information on which to reach a decision on the accreditation status of the entity. The entity is afforded the opportunity to comment on any additional information provided to the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee as a result of a special review. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee communicates the disposition of the complaint, in writing, to the complainant and the entity.

b. **About an Entity Assessor.** The applicant entity, through an authorized representative, may file a complaint regarding the actions of an entity’s Assessors if it is believed that such actions were inconsistent with applicable NIGP requirements and resulted in prejudice or adverse action with respect to the applicant entity. The complaint should be addressed to the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee and must:

   i. be submitted in writing;
   ii. identify the entity submitting the complaint and the Assessor(s) who are the subjects of the complaint;
   iii. provide a clear description of the incident or other facts that form the basis of the complaint in question; and
   iv. grant permission to send the complaint, in its entirety, to the entity’s Assessor team.

NIGP will review each complaint and, in its sole discretion, will determine whether the allegation(s), if true, would indicate that the Assessor is not in compliance with the Program Assessor’s policies and procedures in use at the time referred to in the complaint. Receipt of a complaint meeting these requirements is referred to the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee for appropriate investigation and action and is acknowledged in writing.

The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee will afford the Assessor(s) in question an opportunity to comment on the complaint and will engage in other efforts to gather information regarding the allegation. The Accredited Cooperative Committee will make a determination regarding the allegation and assess whether it influenced the content of the entity review report and the outcome of the accreditation process.
process. Where the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee determines the issue regarding the Assessor affected the accreditation review and/or outcome, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee will take action to redress such effect. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee will communicate the disposition of the complaint, in writing, to the entity and to the entity Assessor(s).

c. **Processing an Accreditation Complaint that is in Litigation.** If, in the course of processing a complaint, the Accredited Cooperative Committee finds that the party against which the complaint is filed is involved in litigation over the same issue, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee, upon advice from legal counsel, may exercise its discretion in determining the most appropriate action to take in the case before it. That discretion can be guided by a number of factors, including whether the complainant is willing to cooperate with the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee, how protracted the litigation is likely to be, whether the failure to initiate action against the entity immediately might damage the public interest, and the impact on the confidentiality of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee’s deliberations if its files are subpoenaed during the course of litigation. In all instances, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee should consider the potential effect of its actions upon the interests of the public and the profession.

6. **NIGP ACCREDITED COOPERATIVE AWARD COMMITTEE**

   a. **Functions.** The principal function of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee is to exercise professional judgment in making decisions regarding the administration of the Program standards. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee is charged with reviewing applicant reports from Assessors and issuing accreditation decisions when requested by NIGP program staff (in instances where no request is made, NIGP program staff shall conduct such reviews and make such determinations), as well as reviewing applicant appeals. Members of the Accredited Cooperative Committee are trained in compliance requirements of the Program accreditation standards. Each member attests to any potential conflicts of interest and adheres to NIGP’s conflict of interest policy and will recuse oneself from any matters where NIGP, in its sole discretion, identifies a potential conflict.

   b. **Membership.** The Accredited Cooperative Committee shall consist of those individuals appointed to the Committee by NIGP.

   c. **Quorum.** Two-thirds of the members constitute a quorum for the purpose of making a decision. When an Accredited Cooperative Committee member has withdrawn from a portion of the meeting, that member is not counted in determining a quorum. The vote of the simple majority of the Accredited Cooperative Committee members at a meeting at which a quorum is present is required to make an accreditation decision.
d. **Avoidance of Conflict of Interest.** Should a member of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee be in possible conflict of interest with respect to any matter before the Committee (such as a relationship with any entity scheduled for review by the Committee or having a personal, financial, or business interest in the outcome of any topic under review by the Committee, etc.), that member shall be excused during the discussion and decision on that matter. Furthermore, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee may, in its judgment, determine, by the vote of a majority of those present, that a member is in possible conflict of interest and ask that member to withdraw from discussion of, and decision on, a particular matter.

e. **The Exercise of Professional Judgment.** A high degree of professional judgment in the application of the Program accreditation standards is required in the review of applications, in the conduct and reporting of entity reviews, and in the deliberations of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee. Professional judgment must be used not only in evaluating the extent of compliance by an entity with each individual criterion but also by the Assessors in making its overall recommendation to the Accredited Cooperative Committee and by the Accredited Cooperative Committee in reaching its final decision. While the standards and processes of the Accredited Cooperative Program are transparent and objective, NIGP relies on the professional judgment of its NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee.

7. **NIGP ACCREDITED COOPERATIVE AWARD COMMITTEE DECISIONS**

a. **Bases for Decisions.** Before rendering a decision on the award, denial, renewal, or revocation of accreditation, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee reviews the Assessor’s report. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee may make a decision or it may defer action until its next scheduled meeting in order to obtain more information on which to base a decision. The decision of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee is recorded in the minutes and transmitted not later than one month following the decision to the entity. The entity also receives a statement of the factual basis for the decision and, in the case of an adverse decision, the standards the entity did not meet. That communication clearly distinguishes between statements speaking to actual or potential deficiencies in meeting standards and statements offering consultative recommendations to the institution or entity. In the decision letter, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee encourages the entity to share information about its accredited status and to do so in accordance with NIGP’s communication guidelines and rules governing the use of the Program name and mark.

b. **Decisions to Award Accreditation or Deny Accreditation.** The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee can award accreditation or deny accreditation, as follows and in its sole discretion:

   i. In the case of a new entity applying for accreditation, the Accredited Cooperative Committee votes whether to grant accreditation. If the entity
meets all of the mandatory standards and, equal to or greater than, ninety percent (90%) of the total points possible for each of the three Assessment Domains, full accreditation will be granted.

ii. Entities that receive neither provisional nor full accreditation are denied accreditation.

c. Effective Date of a Decision and its Public Announcement. Award of full accreditation and all other decisions of the Committee are effective as of the date of the adjournment of the Accredited Cooperative Committee meeting where the decision was made. Accredited entities will be published on the NIGP website. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee will correct any errors of fact in its public listing in a timely manner.

d. Revocation of Full Accreditation. The placing of an entity on probation is a clear warning that, if it does not substantially correct the deficiencies noted by the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee, the entity will have its accreditation revoked at the end of the probationary period. The NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee, in its sole discretion, has the authority to revoke accreditation when there is sufficient documentary evidence that the entity is no longer in compliance with the standards, with or without first placing the entity on probation. At a subsequent time, the entity may reapply for accreditation without prejudice.

e. Voluntary Withdrawal from Accredited Status. A program may request termination of accreditation and removal from the published list of accredited entities. NIGP staff will notify the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee of the request and delete the entity. At a subsequent time the entity may reapply for accreditation without prejudice. Subsequent application will be treated as a first-time application.

8. APPEAL OF DECISION OF THE ACCREDITED COOPERATIVE COMMITTEE

Decisions of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee are subject to appeal.

a. Filing an Appeal. The entity may appeal any of the decisions of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee specified below within 30 days of receipt of written notice of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee’s decision. The appeal must specify the grounds on which the appeal is made and authorize sharing of information with the Ad Hoc Appeal Panel, to be appointed by the NIGP Governing Board Chair as consistent with NIGP Board Policy, and as necessary to conduct the review. The appeal should be addressed to NIGP staff. The burden of presenting the argument initially, and/or persuading the appeals body, rests with the entity filing the appeal.

b. Appealable Decisions. Only the following decisions of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee may be appealed:

i. In the case of an entity applying for accreditation, a denial of full accreditation.
ii. In the case of a fully accredited entity, a decision to revoke the entity's accreditation.

iii. In the case of an entity on probationary status, a decision to revoke accreditation.

c. **Formation of an Ad Hoc Appeal Panel.** Within 30 days of receipt of the appeal, the Chair of the NIGP Governing Board will refer the matter to a three-member Ad Hoc Appeal Panel (“the Appeal Panel”) with three alternates, none of whom shall have had affiliation with the entity. NIGP staff determines the willingness of the designated principals and alternates to serve and notifies the entity of the names of the three principals. If the entity shows good cause why a named principal is unacceptable, an alternate is selected who is acceptable to both parties.

d. **The Meeting of the Ad Hoc Appeal Panel.** The Appeal Panel meets within 60 days of the date on which the entity is notified of the adverse decision by the Accredited Cooperative Committee or on a date mutually acceptable to the entity, the Appeal Panel, and the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee representative, who will be allowed to present written materials to the Appeal Panel for consideration. The Appeal Panel may request the assistance of counsel to provide guidance in the interpretation and resolution of legal or procedural problems that may arise in the context of an appeal.

e. **Documents to Be Considered by the Appeal Panel.** The issues addressed by the Appeal Panel are limited to those relevant to the appeal made by the entity. The panel, the appellant, and the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee’s representative will be furnished with all the documents reviewed by the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee in making its decision and the letter notifying the entity of the Accredited Cooperative Committee decision.

f. **Decisions of the Panel.** The function of an Appeal Panel in a given case is to review the decision of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee based on the record that was before the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee at the time of its decision. In the event that the decision of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee is not upheld, the case will be remanded to the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee for disposition in a manner not inconsistent with the findings of the Appeal Panel.

g. **Reporting of the Decision of the Panel.** The report of the Appeal Panel, including the decision and the reasons for it, is prepared within 30 days and is addressed to the CEO of NIGP, the Chair of the NIGP Governing Board, and the Co-Chairs of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee. Copies are forwarded to the authorized representative of the entity.

9. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS.** The records of the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee and of Ad Hoc Appeal Panels used in making decisions on the accreditation of entities and recommendations on all applications before it, and all records of
the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee relating to accreditation, shall be shared only as specified in the Program procedures and otherwise shall be kept confidential except:

a. Listings of accredited entities are published, as determined by the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee.

b. Disclosure is made in those instances in which the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee is legally required to disclose information.

c. In the case of an appeal, the NIGP Accredited Cooperative Award Committee’s decision and record are made available to the NIGP Governing Board, the Ad Hoc Appeals Panel and other parties as necessary to process the appeal.