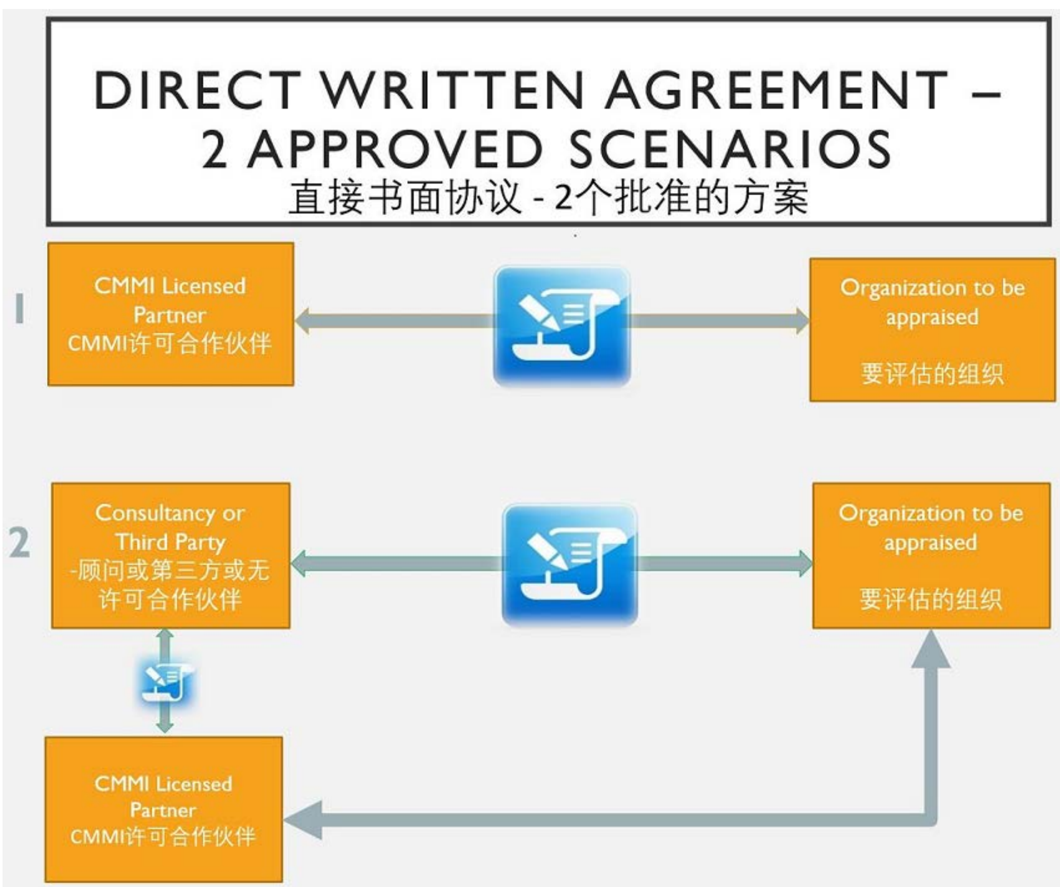
Working with Consultancies
Expectations and Responsibilities

Delivering an appraisal in collaboration with a consultancy

A SCAMPI Lead Appraiser (LA) will sometimes find and secure an appraisal opportunity through a consulting organization that has helped its client to adopt the CMMI, and now seeks to aid the client in benchmarking their progress and achievements. It is important to remember, though, that the involvement of a consultancy does not reduce or bypass the responsibilities of the LA during the planning and delivery of a SCAMPI appraisal.

The first thing to consider is the formation of the contract for the appraisal. The LA must ensure that the CMMI Institute Partner that will be sponsoring the appraisal delivery has a direct written agreement with the appraised organization, *and not through the consultancy*. The Partner organization cannot have an agreement for the appraisal with a consultancy, who then acts as a middleman between the Partner and the company being appraised, as this would present an unavoidable conflict of interest. If entering into a contract with the consulting organization, the Partner must also sign a separate contract with the company to be appraised, as seen here:



Once an appraisal has been agreed upon and endorsed by all parties, the consultancy may participate during the planning phase. Since it has a history with the company to be appraised, the consultancy often provides the initial input for the appraisal plan. Details such as an overview of the organization, names of potential appraisal team members (ATMs), information about the appraisal sponsor, and dates for the onsite may be given to the LA by a consultant. The LA then may use this information to form the initial draft and outline for the appraisal plan.

But, while a consultant can provide the initial input, the SCAMPI Method Definition Document (MDD) requires that an appraisal team leader must meet with the appraisal sponsor to gather further essential information for the plan, and to establish a firm understanding of the organizational unit (OU). Interaction with the sponsor is required and important to developing the plan, and for level setting the objectives of the appraisal. This interaction cannot be outsourced or allocated to the consultancy.

Some Lead Appraisers choose to include one or more employees of the consultancy on the appraisal team. This, of course, carries the risk of a conflict of interest, since the consultancy has an inherent investment in its client achieving the targeted maturity level. When choosing an appraisal team, therefore, the LA is responsible for interviewing potential ATMs, working to mitigate the risks associated with each ATM who is selected, and ensuring the team meets all minimum requirements set by the MDD. All such information, including the ATMs, their potential conflict of interest and the risk mitigations for each must be documented in the appraisal plan.

When an appraisal requires the services of a translator to facilitate the interviews, consultancies sometimes encourage the use of an “in-house” translator, who works for the consulting organization itself. Like a consultancy’s employee serving as an ATM, the use of an in-house translator also creates a serious conflict of interest: the consultancy is given an opportunity to manage critical data before it reaches the LA. Even if not instructed to do so by their employer, human nature may lead a translator to manipulate the interviewees’ answers in the interest of attaining a favorable result for their organization. CMMI Institute recommends, therefore, that appraisal team leaders always use translators who either work for a third-party company, or for the team leader’s Partner organization.

Because of their extensive knowledge of the organizational unit’s processes and people, a consultant is often asked to participate in—and, at times, lead—a readiness review prior to the appraisal onsite. In Version 1.3 of the MDD, there is no rule against allowing a consultant to lead a preliminary readiness review in the LA’s absence, provided that no Phase 2 activities will be taking place during that event (if the team will be performing any artifact review or collecting affirmations, the Lead Appraiser is required to be there in person; the LA must always be present when the team is performing data collection activities). The LA is required to coordinate with the consultant, who must brief the LA regarding the success of the readiness review, and any findings that come out of it. The LA must still perform the final readiness review prior to the onsite. The LA—and only the LA—is then responsible for giving the final go/no-go decision for the appraisal to the sponsor.

When appraising an OU, it is vital to go beyond simply looking for compliance with the referenced model, and look for institutionalization as well. A consultant may work with an organization to create their processes, but that alone is not sufficient for an OU to be considered Maturity Levels 2 – 5. The company must apply the model's practices, within the context of their business. The duty of the LA and his/her appraisal team is to then search for evidence that confirms the organization's employees have institutionalized the processes—i.e., the processes are performed in a constant and reliable manner. When a Lead Appraiser submits their appraisal record to the CMMI Institute for review, CMMI Institute expects that all the work submitted is that of the reporting LA. Therefore, it is reviewed as if the appraisal and all its contents are the work of the Lead Appraiser. The Lead Appraiser and the Partner organization reporting the appraisal are each verifying their own work and take full responsibility for the appraisal outcome. CMMI is a framework for improvement, and organizations that treat it like a checklist are not using that framework to build stronger, more effective ways of working.

Questions regarding this Quality Tip can be sent to quality@cmmiinstitute.com.