

**Domestic Fair Trade Association  
Criteria Evaluation Steps and Protocol  
Updated 4.4.14**

**Steps to Completing the Evaluation of a Standard-Setting, Certifying, or Labeling Program**

1. Identify the pieces of the program: who sets the standards, who certifies, and what the label is as well as any claim(s) attached to the label. Note this information as well as a link to the website describing the program/claim on the evaluation summary. The primary evaluation should be of the organization that controls the label/message.
2. Identify whether another organization has evaluated the program. (If so have we evaluated the other third party?) Although this information will not be used directly in our own evaluation, it is helpful to have a complete picture of the program. (Note: this step can also be taken at any time that such an evaluation or assessment is identified.)
3. Let the program know, in writing, that DFTA is evaluating this program and describe the process including the program's opportunity to review our findings. Request any written documentation related to the program, including standards, sample contracts, policy manuals, written program descriptions, auditing documents or anything identified by the organization as relevant. The initial request should go to the person known to DFTA to be or identified on the website as the director of the program; if that is not clear, it should go to a manager or director of the organization.
  - a. Explain the steps and what the materials will be used for. Request everything that would be relevant for a full evaluation, but make sure that the program understands that the shorter the evaluation must be successfully completed before we do a full evaluation.
  - b. Give a deadline of two weeks for providing materials; document all attempts to make contact.
  - c. If no response is received or if materials are promised and not sent, send a follow-up email.
  - d. If there is still no response, place a phone call to the program, documenting the time and date of the call, the number used, and the person spoken with or in what form a message was left.
  - e. If no response has been received after two weeks and three attempts, proceed using publically available information and note that there was not a transparent sharing of information.
4. At the same time, identify three qualified reviewers for the evaluation of each program, and conduct training as needed. All reviewers, evaluators, and others who may have access to the details of the process must submit signed Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality forms to the ED (See step 11).

5. Review all written documents and fill in the DFTA Criteria Evaluation chart of the *short form* using the categories of findings agreed to by the criteria committee, citing specific sources whenever possible.  
There may be cases in which a program meets a criterion minimally but significant room for improvement exists; in these cases notes the need for improvement.
6. Make a list of questions for the program including questions about any flagged items and anything that appears to not clearly meet DFTA Criteria to confirm that there is not any missing information or misinterpretation of information.
7. Schedule an interview with a person authorized to speak about the program. This should be someone in upper management or the director of the specific program or designated by that program. Note that some programs will opt out to send clarifications and responses by email rather phone, which is equally acceptable.
  - a. Give a deadline of **two weeks** for scheduling an interview and obtaining follow up information; document all attempts to make contact. Note: It is okay if the interview is postponed due to scheduling difficulties as long as within **two weeks** after contact an interview is scheduled at a mutually convenient time.
  - b. If no response is received or an interview date is not initially set, send a follow-up email.
  - c. If there is still no response, place a phone call to the program, documenting the time and date of the call, the number used, and the person spoken with or in what form a message was left.
  - d. If no response has been received or no interview scheduled after **two weeks** and three attempts, proceed to next steps when publishing the results of the evaluation, note that attempts to verify the information were made.
8. Finalize the short form summary.
  - a. If the short form threshold is met, proceed to step 9.
  - b. If the short form threshold is not met, write a summary report and skip to step 10 below.
9. If the threshold for the short form is met, first report to the criteria committee on the status and allow one week for committee questions and/or review. If there are no objections, report back to the program on the status and begin a full evaluation, repeating steps 6-6 for the full form. Note: During this week of committee review, work can begin on the full evaluation to conserve time, though the program should not be identified until committee has approved.
10. Fill out a report summary.
11. Have at least 3 qualified reviewers review the evaluation and summary report. The Criteria Committee is the first pool of reviewers; others may be selected if qualified and properly trained. All reviewers should have confidentiality and conflict of interest forms on file. These reviewers should check for completeness and may ask questions about accuracy based on their

- personal expertise, or discuss questions that were flagged by the reviewer. The reviewers, at their discretion, may independently verify facts or go back to the original evaluator with questions, but at a minimum should plan to review any items flagged by the reviewer as judgment calls or questions as well as any criteria for which there is a disagreement between the evaluator and the program. Reviewers may communicate with each other and/or evaluator by email or phone as needed to make sure they reach consensus on conclusions. Reviews should be completed within one week.
12. If the reviewers cannot reach consensus on the accuracy or conclusions of the report, issues for discussion can be sent to the full committee. Ultimately if necessary the evaluation can't begin again with a new evaluator. See step #13.
  13. Once three reviewers agree that the report is complete and accurate, send the report back to the program to provide it the opportunity to challenge any of the findings to be factually incorrect. The summary will be automatically sent and the option given to programs to see the complete evaluation.
    - a. Give a deadline of **two weeks** for verifying report accuracy; document all attempts to make contact.
    - b. If there is no response, send a follow up email.
    - c. If there is still no response, place a phone call to the program, documenting the time and date of the call, the number used, and the person spoken with or in what form a message was left.
    - d. If no response has been received after **two weeks** and three attempts, the results of the evaluation can be published after the below steps 15-19 are followed, noting that attempts to verify information were made.
    - e. If the program does not sign off on the accuracy of the report because of a disagreement, there should be a meeting or phone call between the evaluator (and the reviewers if they so choose) and the program to clarify any remaining areas of disagreement. The evaluator and three reviewers will then reach consensus on the issues in question. If the evaluator and reviewers feel the report is accurate, it can be published with a note describing the areas of disagreement. The program may also be invited to submit a statement for posting on the evaluation website. If the reviewers and the evaluator all agree that a mistake was made, the report should be amended before publication and program should be sent amended report.
  14. If three reviewers cannot come to an agreement on the completeness and/or accuracy of the conclusions, at any point, the full committee and/or board should be consulted. Ultimately an additional evaluator should be identified and the process should start from the beginning. All possible attempts to resolve discrepancies should be made before a decision is made to start the process over.
  15. The DFTA board will "sign off" that this process was followed for each evaluation to be published, and will be given two weeks to review each evaluation before publication.

16. Publish/post online the final report and evaluation with a date stating when it was updated.
17. Set an “expiration date” for the evaluation. Generally, an evaluation should hold for two years unless DFTA receives additional information, there are significant areas of continual improvement needed, or the program makes a significant change such as changes to governance or the release of new standards. A program can be re-evaluated upon notice of significant changes, upon request, or after three years; a minimum of six months should pass before a re-evaluation to ensure time for significant and lasting changes to be made by the program.
18. The comparative analysis should note the date of the most recent update of each program’s information.