

# Receivables Management Certification Program

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## I. Mission Statement

- 1.1 **Mission.** The DBA International Receivables Management Certification Program (Certification Program) adopts a national standard for the debt buying industry to help ensure that those who are certified are aware of and are complying with state and federal statutory requirements, responding to Consumer Complaints and inquiries, and are following debt buying industry best practices.

## II. Definitions

- 2.1 **Definitions.** The following terms, when capitalized, shall have the following meanings:

“Applicant” shall mean the person or legal entity who submits an Application to DBA to be considered for certification or to renew their certification.

“Application” shall mean the procedure by which an Applicant submits information and documentation required by DBA to be considered for certification or to renew their certification.

“Audit” or “Compliance Audit” shall mean an assessment of a Certified Party’s conformity to the Certification Standards that is performed by an Auditor.

“Audit Period” shall mean the time between the Certified Company’s last full Compliance Audit and the date contained on the written notice provided by the Audit Committee pursuant to section 8.4 (B), provided that if no prior full Compliance Audit had been performed it shall be measured from the date of the initial Application for certification. The Audit Period shall always include a review of the accuracy of the information provided in the Certified Company’s most recent Application.

“Auditor” shall mean an individual, company, or firm that is an independent third party approved or retained by the Council to perform Compliance Audits. The Council shall provide multiple options to Certified Companies for independent third parties, including individuals, companies, or firms that are not certified public accountants.

“Board” shall mean the DBA International Board of Directors.

“Certification Program” shall mean the DBA International Receivables Management Certification Program.

“Certification Standards” or “Standards” shall mean the minimum requirements necessary to become and to maintain the status of a Certified Party.

“Certified Company” shall mean any legal business entity regardless of its legal structure, including but not limited to corporations, partnerships, sole proprietorship, and associations, that has applied for and has been granted certification based on the requirements contained in the Governance Document of the Certification Program and remains in good standing.

“Certified Party” shall mean a Certified Individual and/or a Certified Company.

“Certified Individual” shall mean an individual who is employed by a Certified Company or as otherwise provided in section 5.6 (B) who meets or exceeds the Certification Program requirements to be certified, has been granted certification, and remains in good standing.

“CFPB” shall mean the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

“Consumer Complaint” shall mean submissions that express dissatisfaction with, or communicate suspicion of wrongful conduct by, an identifiable entity related to a consumer’s personal experience with a financial product or service.<sup>1</sup>

“Consumer Data” shall mean personally identifiable information associated with a consumer account that needs to be protected due to the confidential nature of the information.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: CFPB’s Consumer Response Annual Report, 2013.

“Council” shall mean the DBA International Receivables Management Certification Council.

“DBA” shall mean DBA International, a 501(c)(6) non-profit association.

“Debt Buying Company” shall mean a legal entity that is engaged in the business of purchasing consumer and/or commercial debt (i.e. distressed assets), whether it collects the debt itself, hires a third party for collection, or hires an attorney-at-law for litigation.

“Deficiency” shall mean a failing of a Certified Party to conform to one or more of the Certification Standards as identified through a Compliance Audit.

“Executive Director” shall mean the Executive Director of DBA International or his or her designee.

“FDCPA” shall mean the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act.

“FTC” shall mean the Federal Trade Commission.

“Governance Document” shall refer to all of the content contained on this and any prior or subsequent pages that comprise the Certification Program, including the appendices.

“Remediation” shall mean the process of conforming to the Certification Standards once a Deficiency has been identified through a Compliance Audit.

### **III. Receivables Management Certification Council**

- 3.1 **Governing Body.** The DBA International Receivables Management Certification Council (Council) is the governing body that administers the Certification Program on behalf of the DBA Board of Directors.
- 3.2 **Appointment.** The Council shall be appointed by the DBA International Board of Directors (Board). All vacancies that occur on the Council prior to the expiration of a term shall be filled by the Board for the remaining portion of the term.
- 3.3 **Composition.** The Council shall consist of eleven (11) individual members. The composition of the Council shall represent each of the following demographics:
  - A. An experienced consumer representative from: (i) academia, (ii) a consumer focused non-profit agency, (iii) the Better Business Bureau, (iv) a non-profit consumer credit counseling service, (v) a former attorney general or assistant attorney general, former employee of the CFPB or FTC, former member of a legislative branch consumer protection committee, or former member of the judiciary, or (vi) other consumer advocate familiar with the debt buying industry. The consumer representative shall be

an ex-officio member of the Audit and Standards Committees. The consumer representative shall have no financial interest in a Debt Buying Company and is not required to be a Certified Individual;

- B. Representatives of six (6) certified Debt Buying Companies, provided that the Board ensures that small, medium, and large Certified Companies are equally represented;
- C. A Certified Individual;
- D. A representative of a certified third party collection agency, provided that the agency has until March 1, 2016 to become certified;
- E. A representative of a certified consumer collection law firm, provided that the firm has until March 1, 2016 to become certified; and
- F. A representative of an originating creditor. The representative is not required to be a Certified Individual.

3.4 **Term.** Council Members shall serve a two (2) year term that commences on the first day of March and ends on the last day of February except that the first members of the Council shall have their terms staggered to create two classes. No individual may be appointed by the Board to more than two (2) consecutive terms on the Council.

3.5 **Qualifications.** Each Council Member shall be selected based on the following qualifications:

- A. No more than one representative from a company (including parent and subsidiaries) may serve on the Council;
- B. No Board Member may serve on the Council;
- C. The Council should reflect the diversity of the debt buying industry, to the maximum extent possible;
- D. Council Members shall be recognized professionals who: (1) are in compliance with their respective Codes of Ethics within their industry, if applicable, (2) have not been convicted of a felony, and (3) have never been dismissed from the Council pursuant to section 3.6 of this Governance Document;
- E. Council Members who represent Certified Companies pursuant to section 3.3 (B), (D), or (E) who do not hold a Certified Individual designation should become a Certified Individual within one (1) year of their appointment to the Council; and
- F. Preference should be shown to individuals who are employed with companies that are members of the Better Business Bureau.

3.6 **Dismissal from the Council.** Any member of the Council may be removed from office by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of all Council Members, with prior notice to the Board of such potential action, for engaging in any conduct or behavior contrary to the best interests of the Certification Program. Council Members having three (3) or more unexcused absences from scheduled Council meetings per year may be dismissed.

### 3.7 Relationship with DBA.

- A. **Council Authority.** The Council and the Certification Program shall be contained within the DBA International (DBA) corporate entity. The Council shall have the authority to:
1. Elect a Council Chair from the appointed Council Members to a one (1) year term that commences on the first day of March and ends on the last day of February;
  2. Develop policies and procedures of the Council, including the creation of additional officers and committees not provided in this Governance Document;
  3. Develop Certification designations<sup>2</sup>, Certification Standards, educational requirements, examination requirements, Audit requirements, the granting and revocation of certifications, the Remediation of Deficiencies, and the general administration of the Certification Program, provided it is consistent with this Governance Document;
  4. Suggest qualified individuals to the Board for appointment to the Council when a vacancy exists; and
  5. Provide semi-annual reports to the Board regarding the Certification Program and monthly updates on the roster of Certified Entities.
- B. **Board Authority.** Nothing in this Governance Document shall diminish the powers of the Board. The Board shall at a minimum:
1. Appoint the Council Members;
  2. Approve and/or reject individually or as a slate: (i) the Council's selection of the Council Chair, (ii) the Council Chair's selection of Committee/Task Force Chairs, and (iii) the Committee/Task Force Chairs' selection of committee or task force members;
  3. Hear appeals from Certified Parties on disciplinary actions taken by the Council;
  4. Have oversight authority of the Council and the Certification Program to ensure that the Certification Program as developed and operated by the Council is conducted in a fair and equitable manner;
  5. Provide staff for the operation of the Certification Program. The Executive Director of DBA International (Executive Director), or his or her designee, shall serve as the chief staff position supporting the Certification Program;
  6. Provide financial support for the Certification Program. The Council shall provide the Board with an annual budget for the operation of the Certification Program.

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<sup>2</sup> The Council has currently adopted the Certification designations of "Certified Professional Receivables Company" (CPRC) for Certified Companies and "Certified Receivables Compliance Professional" (CRCP) for Certified Individuals.

The Board will exercise final authority in approving such budgets and the accompanying fee schedules for the Certification Program; and

7. Retain independent third parties to audit the Certification Program and the administration of the Certification Program to ensure conformity with this Governance Document and generally accepted business practices.

- C. **Board Review Procedures.** The Executive Director shall transmit to the Board all final decisions of the Council within two (2) business days of the decision, including the rationale for the decision. Except for the process provided in the Remediation Procedures Manual (**Appendix E**), the Board shall have the right to reverse any decision of the Council, in their complete discretion, provided that such action takes place within five (5) business days from the Executive Director's transmittal. If no action is taken by the Board, the Council's decision shall be implemented at the end of the seventh (7th) business day. In the case of reversing a disciplinary action taken by the Council, the Board's power to reverse will be dependent on an appeal of such action by the Certified Party.

## IV. Committees

- 4.1 **Standing Committees.** The Council Chair shall appoint all chairs of standing committees from the Certified Parties who are members of the Council. Committee Chairs, except for the Chair of the Remediation Committee, shall appoint the members of their committees. The members of the Remediation Committee shall include the Chair of the Remediation Committee, the consumer representative on the Council, the Executive Director, DBA General Counsel, and such other individuals selected and approved by the Council. Each committee shall have a minimum of three (3) members and a maximum of seven (7) members, provided that a majority of the members on each committee shall be Professional Certified Members or Professional Members of DBA (as defined in the DBA Bylaws) and meet the qualifications provided in section 3.5(C) and (D). The standing committees shall include the following:
  - A. **Administration & Budget Committee.** The Administration & Budget Committee shall be responsible for issues concerning the administration and oversight of the Certification Program, Application procedures, Application approvals, and the development of a proposed annual budget and fee schedule. The committee is also responsible for assuring affordable access to the Certification Program.
  - B. **Audit Committee.** The Audit Committee shall be responsible for issues concerning the administration and oversight of the Certification Program's Compliance Audits.
  - C. **Educational Requirements Committee.** The Educational Requirements Committee shall be responsible for issues concerning the administration and oversight of the Certification Program's Educational Requirements. The development of all DBA education programming shall be managed by the Board's Education Committee.

- D. **Remediation Committee.** The Remediation Committee shall be responsible for issues concerning the administration and oversight of Deficiencies and Remediation within the Certification Program.
- E. **Public Relations & Marketing Committee.** The Public Relations & Marketing Committee shall be responsible for educating and promoting the Certification Program with DBA membership, the debt buying industry, press, public officials, and the general public. This shall include the development of all physical and electronic publications and resources, provided that they are developed jointly with the appropriate subject matter committees. All written material shall be approved or developed in collaboration with the Board's Editorial Committee to ensure a consistent message from the DBA.
- F. **Standards Committee.** The Standards Committee shall be responsible for issues concerning the administration and oversight of the Certification Program's Certification Standards.
- 4.2 **Additional Committees and Task Forces.** The Council may establish additional committees or task forces in their discretion with the appointment of Chairs made by the Council Chair.

## V. Certification Standards

- 5.1 **Base Line.** The Council may change the Certification Standards contained in this Governance Document, provided that any alteration does not decrease the base line level established by the Governance Document.
- 5.2 **Annual Review.** The Standards Committee shall annually review the Certification Standards and make recommendations to the Council for changes based on the effectiveness of the Certification Program, changes in laws and regulations, and the evolution of best practices.
- 5.3 **Uniformity.** The goal of the Certification Program is to create a national standard for compliance based on uniform principles that are formed by statutes, regulations, ethical standards, interactions with regulatory agencies, and best practices.
- 5.4 **Conformity.** A Certified Party, as a condition of certification, shall demonstrate conformity with the Certification Standards and acknowledge that violations may result in sanctions being imposed on the Certified Party under this Governance Document and policies adopted by the Council, including expulsion from the Certification Program.
- 5.5 **Company Certification Standards.** In order to become and remain certified, a company shall demonstrate the following, unless a stricter requirement is imposed by state or federal law or regulation:

- A. **Chief Compliance Officer.** The company shall create and/or maintain the position of “Chief Compliance Officer” with a direct or indirect reporting line to the President, CEO, Board of Directors, or General Counsel (unless the Chief Compliance Officer is the President, CEO, or General Counsel). The Chief Compliance Officer shall be a Certified Individual, provided that the Council may upon written request approve temporary waivers of this requirement to accommodate new program implementation deadlines and to provide new hires an opportunity to qualify for certification. A Certified Company shall have someone serving in an “acting” capacity while transitioning between Chief Compliance Officers and should attempt to fill a vacancy within three (3) months of the prior incumbent’s departure. The Chief Compliance Officer shall be an employee, owner, or a corporate officer of the Certified Company or of a corporate affiliate of the Certified Company. The responsibilities of the position of Chief Compliance Officer shall be described in the Certification Standards Manual (see **Appendix A**).
- B. **Conformity with the Certification Standards Manual.** The company shall conform to the Certification Standards Manual (see **Appendix A**) as may be amended from time-to-time by the Council.
- C. **Publication.** The company shall authorize DBA to publish its name, certification number, year certified, website address, mailing address, and telephone number along with its Chief Compliance Officer’s name, title, certification number, year certified, employer issued telephone number, and employer issued email address on a publicly accessible website maintained by DBA. The company shall also publish on their company website certain information for the benefit of consumers which shall be described in the Certification Standards Manual (see **Appendix A**).

5.6 **Individual Certification Standards.** In order for an individual to become and remain certified, the individual shall demonstrate the following, unless a stricter requirement is imposed by state or federal law or regulation:

- A. **Educational Requirements.** The individual shall comply with the Educational Requirements as established by Article VI of this Governance Document in order to be certified. The subject matter that will qualify for continuing education credit shall be listed in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**), unless otherwise qualified pursuant to section 6.8(C).
- B. **Publication.** The individual shall authorize DBA to publish his or her name, title, certification number, year certified, employer issued telephone number, and employer issued email address along with his or her employer’s name, certification number, year certified, website address, mailing address, and telephone number on a publicly accessible website maintained by DBA. The individual shall also be required to provide the same information to a consumer upon request.
- C. **Good Character.** The individual shall demonstrate good character, the requirements of which shall be provided in the Certification Standards Manual (see **Appendix A**).



5.7 **Amending Certification Standards.** The process for review and approval of any new or updated Certification Standards shall be as follows:

- A. **Annual Review.** The Standards Committee shall annually review the Certification Standards and make suggestions for updates on or before the fifteenth day of October based upon evolving debt buying industry best practices, input from key stakeholders and communities of interest, areas of Board or Council concern, and recent regulatory and statutory changes. The changes will be documented in such a manner as to be easily recognizable as changes to the Certification Standards for the reader. The Standards Committee shall submit any proposed changes to the Council via the Executive Director to begin the approval process.
- B. **Comments.** The Council shall provide a copy of the proposed changes on a website maintained by DBA for thirty (30) days with the process for submitting comments prior to taking any official action.
- C. **Approval.** The Council shall approve, alter, or reject the proposed changes to the Certification Standards. Any changes to the Certification Standards may be reversed by the Board within seven (7) business days of the Council's approval pursuant to section 3.7(C) of this Governance Document.
- D. **Effective.** Provided that no action is taken by the Board after the Council's approval of the revised Certification Standards, a copy of the revised Certification Standards shall be made available to the primary contact for each DBA member, Certified Parties, and individuals and companies who have submitted an Application for initial certification, as well as made publicly accessible on a website maintained by DBA. Certified Parties shall have six (6) months (unless a longer time is specified) from the date of this notice or publication on the DBA web site to conform and attest to conformity with the new Certification Standards in their next biennial Application. Applicants submitting an Application after the Council approves new Certification Standards shall conform with the new Certification Standards before becoming certified.

## VI. Educational Requirements for Individual Certification

- 6.1 **Base Line.** The Council may change the Educational Requirements for Individual Certification contained in this Governance Document, provided that any alteration does not decrease the base line level established by the Governance Document.
- 6.2 **Annual Review.** The Educational Requirements Committee shall annually review the Educational Requirements for Individual Certification and make recommendations to the Council for changes based on the effectiveness of the Certification Program, changes in laws and regulations, and the evolution of best practices.

- 6.3 **Uniformity.** The goal of the Certification Program is to create a national standard for the level of knowledge that is expected of Certified Individuals based on subject matter contained in case law, statutes, regulations, ethical standards, and best practices.
- 6.4 **Administration.** The Educational Requirements Committee shall manage the administration of the Educational Requirements for Individual Certification and the approval of any authorized providers with the assistance of staff. The development of all DBA education programming shall be managed by the Board’s Education Committee.
- 6.5 **Educational Requirements – Initial Certification.** An Applicant for Individual Certification shall have completed twenty-four (24) continuing education credits from an authorized provider prior to submitting an Application for initial certification. Included within the 24 continuing education credits shall be four (4) credits from DBA’s “Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying” and two (2) credits from ethics course(s). The credits shall comply with the requirements of this Article and the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**).
- 6.6 **Educational Requirements – Biennial Renewal.** A Certified Individual shall have completed twenty-four (24) continuing education credits from an authorized provider prior to submitting an Application for biennial renewal of their certification. Included within the 24 continuing education credits shall be four (4) credits from DBA’s “Current Issues in Debt Buying” courses and two (2) credits from ethics course(s). The credits shall comply with the requirements of this Article and the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**).
- 6.7 **Educational Requirements – DBA Courses.** DBA or its designated presenter shall annually provide the following courses based on guidance contained in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**):
- A. **Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying.** The “Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying” shall be a four (4) credit course that focuses on the “core” laws and regulations that all Debt Buying Companies should know.
  - B. **Current Issues in Debt Buying.** “Current Issues in Debt Buying” course(s) totaling at least two (2) credits that focuses on the latest statutory, regulatory, and judicial developments of relevance to Debt Buying Companies and their vendors.
  - C. **Ethics.** An ethics course of at least one (1) credit.
- 6.8 **Educational Requirements – Continuing Education.** Certified Individuals shall take continuing education classes from an authorized provider based on the following criteria:
- A. **Time Limit.** Continuing education credits shall only be accepted from courses taken within the two (2) year period immediately preceding the submission of an Application.

- B. **Credit Calculation.** One (1) continuing education credit shall be equal to receiving fifty (50) minutes of class instruction. Instructors are eligible to receive double continuing education credit for providing class instruction, provided that an instructor cannot receive multiple credits for repeated lectures on the same material.
- C. **Subject Matter.** Continuing education credits shall be provided for classes from a DBA authorized provider in a subject matter listed in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**), except that an authorized provider may seek approval for continuing education credit for a class whose subject matter is not listed in the Certification Standards Manual if it is preapproved pursuant to criteria contained in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**).
- D. **Online Classes.** Authorized providers may offer online classes subject to the following restrictions:
  - 1. No more than sixteen (16) continuing education credits in a biennial cycle shall be from online classes, provided that the Council may approve temporary adjustments based on new educational requirements or program implementation deadlines; and
  - 2. Online classes shall have either a question/answer component or electronic prompts to continue the lecture to ensure active listening.
- E. **Examination.** There shall not be an examination component for the entry level certification designation. If the Council creates additional certification designations beyond the entry level certification designation, the Council shall require an examination administered by DBA and/or a contracted third party.

6.9 **Authorized Providers.** DBA International shall be an authorized provider of continuing education credit for the Certification Program. The Educational Requirements Committee may designate additional authorized providers based on demonstrated excellence in providing educational instruction in the subject matter required for the Certification Program and who meet the criteria contained in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**). The Council may, at its sole discretion, take remedial action to restrict, suspend, or revoke the status of an authorized provider for failure to comply with the provisions of this Article or Appendix B.

6.10 **Non-Authorized Providers.** DBA, in its complete discretion, may consider qualifying a class for continuing education credit from a non-authorized provider pursuant to criteria contained in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**), provided that the instructional material and a certificate of attendance are submitted to DBA after completion of the course.

6.11 **Specialty Certifications.** The Educational Requirements Committee may recommend to the Council the creation of specialty certification designations beyond the entry level certification designation. The Educational Requirements Committee shall determine the required subject matter for any specialty certifications.

- 6.12 **Educational Requirements Manual.** The Educational Requirements Committee shall maintain an Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**) that provides guidance and clarification on: (i) continuing education requirements for the Certification Program, (ii) subject matter eligible for continuing education credit, (iii) requirements for becoming an authorized provider of continuing education classes, and (iv) examination requirements, if applicable.
- 6.13 **Amending Educational Requirements.** The Educational Requirements Committee shall follow the same process established in section 5.7 of this Governance Document for the review and approval of any new or updated Educational Requirements.

## VII. Application

- 7.1 **Annual Review.** The Administration & Budget Committee shall annually review the Application Requirements Manual (see **Appendix C**) and make recommendations to the Council for changes as the Committee deems appropriate.
- 7.2 **Applications.** The Administration & Budget Committee shall create and amend from time-to-time the Applications required for the Certification Program based on the requirements of the Governance Document and the Application Requirements Manual (see Appendix C). Minor clerical amendments to Applications may be made by staff as needed.
- 7.3 **Application Review.** The Administration & Budget Committee shall be responsible for reviewing all Applications for the purpose of approving or denying the Applicant's request for certification. The members of the Committee shall utilize the requirements of the Governance Document and their professional judgment in making their determinations. The Committee may establish written internal review criteria to assist the Committee in discerning the appropriate weight to apply to subjective matters such as those concerning good character and prior business practices. Any Application denied or approved with probationary conditions, pursuant to section 7.11, shall be referred to the Council for final determination. The Committee, in its sole discretion, may forward any Application to the Council for final determination.
- 7.4 **Shared Certification.** A family of companies may be granted certification through a single Certified Company in the sole discretion of the Administration & Budget Committee, provided that their shared status is indicated in the publication requirements of section 5.5(C). The term "family of companies" shall mean business entities that: (i) have the same Chief Compliance Officer, (ii) have the same executive management team that exerts control over business operations, provided that this requirement may be waived by the Administration & Budget Committee if there exists other unifying factors that would obviate its necessity, (iii) maintain a uniform network of compliance on all accounts serviced between the business entities under the shared certification, (iv) are governed by the same corporate policies and procedures, (v) agree to be audited in a single unified audit, and (vi) agree any Deficiency and Remediation against one business entity will apply to all of the business entities under the shared certification.

- 7.5 **Certification Period.** The certification period for a Certified Party shall be two (2) years from the point the initial Application is approved. A renewal of certification shall be based on the anniversary date regardless of whether the Application is processed and approved before or after such date. A grace period of ninety (90) days shall be provided for renewals before the Certified Party automatically loses their Certification.
- 7.6 **Eligibility.** Only eligible Applicants shall be considered for certification. Eligibility shall include but may not be limited to the following:
- A. **Certification Standards.** Agreeing to, achieving, and ongoing conformity with the Certification Standards.
  - B. **Audit Procedures.** Agreeing to and complying with the Audit Procedures.
  - C. **Remediation Procedures.** Agreeing to and complying with the Remediation Procedures.
  - D. **Unresolved Deficiency Allegations.** The Applicant shall not have any unresolved allegations pursuant to the requirements in Article IX of this Governance Document.
  - E. **Prior Application Denial.** The Applicant shall not have had an Application for certification denied within the prior year.
  - F. **Prior Sanctions.** The Applicant may have had sanctions imposed upon them in the past pursuant to the Certification Program; however, a former Certified Party who has been expelled from the Certification Program shall never be eligible for re-certification.
- 7.7 **Mergers/Acquisition/Change in Ownership of Certified Parties.** In the event of a change of structure or control of a Certified Party, the certification may or may not remain valid. Certified parties involved in mergers, acquisitions, or changes in majority ownership must notify DBA in writing of the new status within thirty (30) days of the close of the transaction. This notice shall be provided to the Administration & Budget Committee for review and shall include the following:
- A. **Business Structure.** A description of the business structure of the new or changed entity shall be provided and shall include at a minimum a listing of the management team, the Employer Identification Number, and a declaration whether the new business structure is in conformity with the Certification Program.
  - B. **Transitional Plan.** In the event that it is determined that the new or changed entity is not in conformity with the Certification Program, the entity shall provide a transitional plan with a timeline that details how it intends to maintain or conform to the Certification Standards. The Administration & Budget Committee shall review the new or changed business structure and how the relationship of the original Certified Company is contained within the new business entity in order to determine whether the

certification remains valid or will require re-Audit and/or re-Application. Non-Certified Companies involved with a merger or acquisition with a Certified Company are not allowed to claim to be certified or use the Certification Program logo until approved in writing as being in conformity by the Administration & Budget Committee.

- 7.8 **Certificate and Logo.** Certified Parties shall be provided with a certificate, a sample press release for media distribution, and graphics/art work with the Certification Program logo including an explanation of limitations and proper use of this mark. Displaying or utilizing the certificate or logo of the Certification Program shall immediately cease if after certification the Certified Party: (i) withdraws its certification; (ii) fails to renew its certification; (iii) has its certification suspended during such period; or (iv) has been expelled from the Certification Program.
- 7.9 **Voluntary Withdraw of Certification by a Certified Party in Good Standing.** Certified Parties may withdraw from certification at any time. A written letter signed by (i) the President/CEO/Owner/Officer of the Certified Company or (ii) the Certified Individual, as applicable, shall be sent to the Council documenting such a request. No certification fees are refunded in conjunction with voluntary withdrawals of certification. A Certified Party in good standing who voluntarily withdraws from certification may reapply for certification at any time. This shall include any Certified Party that voluntarily withdraws from certification during the Audit process but prior to the completion of the Compliance Audit.
- 7.10 **Voluntary Withdraw of Certification by a Certified Party Prior to Remediating a Deficiency.** If a Certified Party is the subject of a Deficiency finding in a Compliance Audit and voluntarily withdraws from the Certification Program during the Remediation process but prior to entering into a Remediation Agreement with DBA, the Deficiency shall be dismissed without prejudice and without any further action by the Remediation Committee or the Council. The Certified Party may not reapply for certification for a period of two (2) years from the effective date of its withdrawal, except in the case of a company where the allegation was against a Certified Individual serving as an employee and that employee is no longer employed by the company.
- 7.11 **Probationary Conditions.** The Administration & Budget Committee may approve an Application for initial certification subject to probationary conditions, provided such conditions shall not exceed the length of the initial two (2) year certification. The Committee may use probationary conditions when an issue regarding an Applicant's past character or past business practices raises concerns with the Committee and evidence of Applicant's rehabilitation may not be sufficient. The probationary conditions must be reasonable and based on the gravity of the circumstances at issue. A Certified Individual may not serve as the Chief Compliance Officer of a Certified Company if his or her individual certification is subject to probationary conditions.

## VIII. Audit Procedures

- 8.1 **Base Line.** The Council may change the Audit Procedures contained in this Governance Document, provided that any alteration does not decrease the base line level of review established by the Governance Document.
- 8.2 **Annual Review.** The Audit Committee shall annually review the Audit Procedures to be followed and make recommendations to the Council for changes based on the effectiveness of the Certification Program, changes to the Certification Standards, and the evolution of generally accepted business practices.
- 8.3 **Scope.** The purpose of the Audit Procedures is to ensure that Certified Parties are conforming to the Certification Standards.
- 8.4 **Full Compliance Audit of Certified Companies.** The following Audit Procedures shall apply to Full Compliance Audits of Certified Companies:
- A. **Timing.** A Full Compliance Audit performed by an Auditor shall be required of each Certified Company once every three (3) to four (4) years, except that the first Audit after becoming certified shall take place prior to renewal. A Limited Compliance Audit may be performed at any time, at the direction of the Remediation Committee, based on the requirements of this Governance Document.
  - B. **Written Notice.** The Audit Committee shall notify a Certified Company in writing when an audit is required. A Certified Company may voluntarily perform a Full Compliance Audit at any point in time prior to receiving written notification by the Audit Committee and its submission shall serve to reset the Audit Period. When a Certified Company receives a written notice from the Audit Committee requesting a Full Compliance Audit be performed, the Certified Company shall have four (4) months to have the Audit completed, inclusive of the Audit Committee's receipt of the Audit findings. Failure to comply shall result in the immediate suspension of certified status. A written extension of no more than two (2) months may be granted by the Audit Committee, in its discretion.
  - C. **Auditors.** DBA shall maintain a list of authorized Audit providers from which Certified Companies may contract for the performance of Full Compliance Audits. Each Certified Company shall be responsible for negotiating and payment of all costs associated with its Audit.
  - D. **Scope of the Full Compliance Audit.** The Auditor shall validate conformity with the Certification Standards for the Audit Period that is the subject of the Full Compliance Audit. This review shall be based on the Certification Standards and criteria for observation and documentation contained in the Audit Review Manual (**see Appendix D**). An onsite inspection shall be one of the components of the review to ensure the Certified Company's processes are not just on paper but that they are integrated into the everyday workflow of the Certified Company. A Certified Company with multiple

locations must verify conformity in all locations as the Certification Program does not provide for partial or process-based certification.

E. **Alternate Audit Method.** The Audit Committee may in its sole discretion permit a Certified Company who is performing another required audit of a similar nature to add the Certification Program Full Compliance Audit to the list of audited deliverables for cost efficiency. The Certified Company shall be required to get the written preapproval of the Audit Committee for this exception to qualify. Only that portion of the audit that addresses the Certification Program Full Compliance Audit needs to be provided to the Audit Committee. This audit can be performed prior to a scheduled Full Compliance Audit and shall serve to reset the clock on the next required Audit.

F. **Deficiencies.** If a Compliance Audit shows material deficiencies in a Certified Company's conformity with the Certification Standards, the Audit Committee shall forward the Compliance Audit to the Remediation Committee for remedial action.

8.5 **Limited Compliance Audits of Certified Companies.** A Limited Compliance Audit can be required by the Remediation Committee to verify compliance with a Remediation Agreement or to investigate a third party allegation of nonconformity with the Certification Standards as provided in Article IX of this Governance Document. The scope of a Limited Compliance Audit shall be restricted to the terms of the Remediation Agreement or the allegation. If the Audit is based on a third party allegation, the Auditor may contact such other individuals who may have knowledge of the facts and circumstances surrounding the allegation. Limited Compliance Audits shall be performed by an Auditor contracted by DBA and whose costs, except travel and lodging, will be paid by DBA. Any travel and lodging expenses associated with a Limited Compliance Audit shall be paid by the Certified Company being audited. It is the Certified Company's responsibility to bring together into one location all applicable representatives, documents, and information that are needed to verify conformance with company policies, procedures, processes, etc. that the Auditor will need in order to complete the Limited Compliance Audit.

8.6 **Audit of Certified Individuals.** The audit of Certified Individuals shall be conducted by DBA staff or as otherwise determined by the Council.

8.7 **Audit Review Manual.** The Auditor, the Council, and applicable Committees of the Council shall use the Audit Review Manual (**see Appendix D**) as may be amended from time-to-time by the Council as a guide for determining certification approvals, denials, or remedial action based on conformity with the Certification Standards.

8.8 **Amending Audit Procedures.** The Audit Committee shall follow the same process established in section 5.7 of this Governance Document for the review and approval of any new or updated Audit Procedures.



## IX. Remediation Procedures

- 9.1 **Base Line.** The Board may change the Remediation Procedures contained in this Governance Document, provided that any alteration does not decrease the base line level of review established by the Governance Document.
- 9.2 **Annual Review.** The Remediation Committee shall annually review the Remediation Procedures and make recommendations to the Board (which may be submitted through the Council) for changes based on the effectiveness of the Certification Program and prior experiences with the Remediation process.
- 9.3 **Scope.** The purpose of the Remediation Procedures is to provide an objective process for investigating third party allegations and remediating Audit Committee findings concerning a Certified Party's conformity with the Certification Standards.
- 9.4 **Third Party Allegations.** Any third party allegation of nonconformity with the Certification Standards made against a Certified Party shall be in writing and made to the Executive Director and Chair of the Remediation Committee. No anonymous allegations shall be considered by the Remediation Committee. Except as provided in section 9.8 of this Article, when the Chair receives a written allegation, he or she shall call a meeting of the Remediation Committee to review the allegation. If the Committee determines that the allegation contains sufficient information to warrant an investigation, the Committee shall refer the allegation to the Audit Committee for a Limited Compliance Audit. In determining the sufficiency of the allegation, the Committee may seek additional information from the relevant parties.
- 9.5 **Recommendation of Remedial Action.** The Remediation Committee shall recommend to the Council such remedial action that it deems necessary to correct the deficiencies found in a Full or Limited Compliance Audit. Remediation shall be the goal of the Committee but in circumstances of egregious conduct where it is determined that remediation is not possible or warranted, the Remediation Committee may recommend disciplinary action against a Certified Party, including expulsion from the Certification Program.
- 9.6 **Remedial Powers of the Council.** The Board shall adopt a Remediation Procedures Manual (see **Appendix E**) that the Council shall follow when entering into Remediation Agreements with a Certified Party or when taking disciplinary action against a Certified Party, including expulsion from the Certification Program. The Board shall hear all appeals on disciplinary actions and its decision shall be final.
- 9.7 **Retaliatory Action Prohibited.** Direct or indirect retaliation of any kind by DBA, the Council, or their directors, officers, staff, or agents against any individual that makes, initiates, or is involved in the making of an allegation is strictly prohibited. This prohibition on retaliation shall be enforced strictly by the Board and the Council. Similarly, allegations made with knowledge of their falsity, in whole or in part, are strictly prohibited. This prohibition on the making of knowingly-false allegations shall be enforced by the Council to the fullest extent possible, up to and including expulsion.

9.8 **Additional Procedures for Third Party Consumer Allegations.** DBA encourages open communications between consumers and Certified Companies and does not serve as a liaison between the parties. The following procedures for handling third party consumer allegations are intended to encourage open communication and shall take place before DBA investigates any third party consumer allegations against a Certified Company:

- A. The consumer shall send a written communication to the Chief Compliance Officer of the Certified Company at the Chief Compliance Officer's mailing or email address listed on the DBA website detailing the allegation or dispute. The Chief Compliance Officer shall ensure that the Certified Company provides the consumer with a written response;
- B. If the consumer does not receive a written response within thirty (30) days, the consumer may file the allegation with the Executive Director (which shall contain a copy of the written communication required by paragraph A of this section) and the Chair of the Remediation Committee. The Executive Director shall attempt contact with the Chief Compliance Officer to encourage communication with the consumer; and
- C. If the consumer does not receive a written response within thirty (30) days after the submission of the allegation to DBA, the Chair of the Remediation Committee shall follow the process outlined in section 9.4 of this Article. The Executive Director and/or the Chair of the Remediation Committee shall ensure that consumers, who submit allegations against a Certified Company, receive reasonable follow-up communications as well as a final communication at the end of the review process.

9.9 **Amending Remediation Procedures Manual.** The Remediation Committee shall follow the same process established in section 5.7 of this Governance Document for the review and approval of any new or updated Remediation Procedures, except that the recommendations shall be made to the Board.

## **X. Fee Schedule**

10.1 **Affordability.** The Council shall attempt to ensure that all fees and charges associated with the Certification Program are affordable and will result in neither a barrier for entry into the debt buying industry nor a reason that current Debt Buying Companies fail to become certified.

10.2 **Application Fees.** The Council shall recommend to the Board in the Certification Program's annual budget an application fee schedule for the following:

- A. **Individuals.** Individuals shall be assessed the following fees at the time of submitting an Application:
  - 1. **Administrative Fee.** A one-time nonrefundable administrative fee shall be charged for all first time Applicants.

2. **Biennial Certification Fee.** A biennial certification fee, which shall cover the costs associated with administering the Certification Program.
- B. **Companies.** Companies shall be assessed the following fees at the time of submitting an Application:
1. **Administrative Fee.** A one-time nonrefundable administrative fee shall be charged for all first time Applicants.
  2. **Biennial Certification Fee.** A biennial certification fee, which shall cover the costs associated with administering the Certification Program.
- 10.3 **Appeals Fee.** A fee of one thousand dollars (\$1,000) shall be included with the filing of an appeal on a decision made by the Council as provided in the Remediation Procedures Manual (see **Appendix E**). The fee will be refunded only if the appeal is successful.
- 10.4 **Other Fees.** The Administration and Budget Committee may recommend to the Council the creation of other fees that are either associated with the Application or are charged at the point of an administrative action or request such as obtaining a Certificate of Good Standing.
- 10.5 **Refunds.** Refunds, less an administrative processing fee of \$50, shall be provided to any Applicant on application fees if the Application is withdrawn prior to the issuance of the certification or the rejection of the Application, whichever occurs first. No refunds shall be provided after the issuance of certification or the rejection of the Application.
- 10.6 **Currency.** All fees shall be based on the currency of the United States.
- 10.7 **Amending Fee Schedule.** The Administrative and Budget Committee shall follow the same process established in section 5.7 of this Governance Document for the review and approval of any new or updated fee schedules.

## **XI. Confidentiality, Records & Conflict of Interest**

- 11.1 **Confidentiality of Information.** Information submitted as part of the Certification Program shall be kept confidential and used for the limited purpose of determining eligibility for certification, compliance with certification, or as provided in section 11.6 of this Article.
- 11.2 **Confidentiality of Investigations.** Investigations and deliberations of the Council or any Committee concerning a party's certification or potential certification shall be conducted in strict confidence, to the extent possible. Investigations by their very nature may require the disclosure of certain information to parties essential to the review and/or investigation of the alleged misconduct but should be limited, to the extent possible.
- 11.3 **Redaction of Proprietary Information.** The Applicant has the right to redact any proprietary information it deems necessary from all documentation and in compliance with

required laws and regulations. However, the redaction of information should not be of such a magnitude to impair the Council's ability to utilize the documentation in determining eligibility for certification and/or compliance with certification. Documents which are overly redacted and deemed unusable by the Auditor and/or the Council may be rejected and may result in an adverse certification decision.

11.4 **Property of DBA.** All information submitted during the certification process shall become the property of DBA.

11.5 **Records Retention.** The Council shall maintain original or electronic copies of the following Certification Program records in accordance with DBA's Records and Retention Schedule:

- A. Applications;
- B. Self-evaluation Materials;
- C. Reports of Auditors;
- D. Records of Certification including disciplinary actions;
- E. Records of Appeals;
- F. The Certification Standards with Effective Dates;
- G. Minutes of Council Meetings;
- H. Copies of Policies and Procedures; and
- I. Council Reports to the Board.

11.6 **Release of Information.** The Council shall not provide any additional information, including privileged information, to a third party except for the publication of information authorized by sections 5.5 and 5.6 of this Governance Document and for purposes of investigation and remediation as authorized by Article IX of this Governance Document. The Council shall not confirm or deny that a specific party is involved in any phase of the certification process prior to achieving certification, except as may be required for a reference check. The Council shall release information if it receives a written request from the Applicant or Certified Party indicating who the information may be released to or if the Council is required to release information by a court order. In the event that the Council receives a subpoena or other form of compulsory process other than a court order, the Council will review before deciding whether to comply with the compulsory process to release the information. To the extent permitted by law, the Council will make commercially reasonable efforts to provide prior notice to the Applicant or Certified Party concerning the court order or subpoena so that they may have an opportunity to intervene in an effort to block the disclosures. Except in the case of private censure, the Council may

communicate the fact, date, and general nature of a disciplinary action against a Certified Party. Additionally, the Council may communicate the fact, date, and nature of a Certified Party's voluntary withdrawal from Certification that occurred during an independent third party audit or during the remediation process to government agencies engaged in the administration of law or debt buying industry oversight.

11.7 **Confidentiality Agreement.** Council Members, Committee Members, staff, and vendors shall sign a Confidentiality Agreement where they agree to keep all information submitted as part of the Certification Program confidential. A violation of the Confidentiality Agreement may lead to dismissal from the Council, Committee, employment, or termination of a contractual relationship.

11.8 **Conflict of Interest.** Council Members, Committee Members, staff, and vendors shall recuse themselves from any discussion or actions associated with a party and/or issue where there is a personal or professional affiliation or interest that might have an impact on the deliberations. A violation of this paragraph may lead to dismissal from the Council, Committee, or employment.

## **XII. Meetings**

12.1 **Roberts Rules of Order.** Unless provided otherwise in this Governance Document, the Council and the Committees of the Council shall follow the most recent version of Roberts Rules of Order for voting procedures.

12.2 **Quorum.** A quorum for voting purposes shall be considered fifty percent (50%) plus one (1) of the positions filled.

12.3 **Public Meetings.** The meetings of the Council and the Committees of the Council are not open to the public unless stated otherwise in advance of the meeting.

## **XIII. Indemnification**

13.1 **Indemnification.** All Audit Committee Members, Remediation Committee Members, Council Members, DBA employees, DBA Counsel, independent contractors, and other individuals engaged in investigations or decisions on behalf of the Certification Program and DBA with respect to any allegation under the Certification Standards or an independent third party audit thereof shall be indemnified and held harmless and defended by DBA against any liability arising from such activities to the extent permitted by law, provided such individuals acted in good faith and with reasonable care, without gross negligence or willful misconduct, and did not breach any fiduciary duty owed to DBA or the Council.

# Appendices

## APPENDIX A CERTIFICATION STANDARDS MANUAL

- A.1 **Minimum Standards.** The Certification Standards Manual provides the minimum standards that Certified Parties shall maintain in order to become certified or to remain certified.
- A.2 **Failure to Conform to Standards.** Failure to conform to the Certification Standards can lead to the loss of certification or such other actions deemed appropriate by the Council.
- A.3 **Individual Certification.** Individual Certification is a requirement for individuals who serve as Chief Compliance Officer of a Certified Company and a voluntary designation for other individuals who meet the requirements of section 5.6 of the Governance Document. The following are the Certification Standards required for individual certification:
- (1) **Education Credit Requirements.** The individual shall have completed twenty-four (24) continuing education credits from an authorized provider prior to submitting an Application for initial certification and for each biennial renewal thereafter based on the following criteria:
    - (a) Four (4) continuing education credits from DBA’s “Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying” presented by DBA shall be required of each individual for initial certification;
    - (b) Four (4) continuing education credits from DBA’s “Current Issues in Debt Buying” courses presented by DBA on the latest statutory, regulatory, and judicial developments of relevance to Debt Buying Companies and their vendors shall be required of each individual for biennial renewal;
    - (c) Two (2) continuing education credits from an Ethics Course(s) shall be required of each individual for both initial certification and biennial renewal; and
    - (d) No more than sixteen (16) continuing education credits in a biennial cycle shall be from online classes, unless otherwise provided by the Governance Document.
  - (2) **Education Subject Matter.** An individual who seeks to be certified and remain certified shall take continuing education classes from an authorized provider on subject matter approved or otherwise authorized in the Educational Requirements Manual (see **Appendix B**).

- (3) **Publication.** The individual shall authorize DBA to publish their name, title, certification number, year certified, employer issued telephone number, and employer issued email address along with their employer's name, certification number, year certified, website address, mailing address, and telephone number in a directory of Certified Individuals that is provided on a publicly accessible website maintained by DBA. The information provided must be correct and any updates shall be provided to DBA within thirty (30) days of its occurrence. The individual shall also be required to provide the same information to a consumer upon request.
- (4) **Good Character.** DBA may revoke, terminate, suspend, or deny the Individual Certification of any Certified Party and/or Applicant if the Council determines that the party has demonstrated a lack of good character that may place consumers in jeopardy or adversely reflect on the industry, by any of the following:
  - (a) Engaged in any illegal conduct involving moral turpitude;
  - (b) Engaged in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of confidential data or information; or
  - (c) Engaged in any other conduct that adversely reflects on his or her fitness to engage in the business of debt buying.

A.4 **Company Certification.** The following are the Certification Standards required to become and remain a DBA Certified Company [debt buying company (Standards 1- 20) / collection law firm (Standards 1- 16 and 21 - 26) / third party collection agency (Standards 1 - 16 and 27 - 29)]:

### **“SERIES A” STANDARDS**

The following “Series A” Standards shall apply to debt buying companies, collection law firms, and third party collection agencies:

- (1) **Laws & Regulations.** A Certified Company shall comply with the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and, as applicable, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, the United States Bankruptcy Code, section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, sections 1031 and 1036 of the Dodd-Frank Act, and all other local, state, and federal laws and regulations concerning: (a) collection activity on consumer accounts, (b) the rights of consumers, (c) debt buying, and (d) financial services as they may apply to Debt Buying Companies.
- (2) **Errors & Omissions Insurance.** A Certified Company shall maintain Errors & Omissions (E&O) insurance coverage in an amount of no less than:

- (a) Two million U.S. dollars (\$2,000,000) per event/occurrence if the Certified Company has more than \$10 million in annual receipts resulting from consumer debt collection; or
  - (b) One million U.S. dollars (\$1,000,000) per event/occurrence if the Certified Company has less than \$10 million in annual receipts resulting from consumer debt collection.
- (3) **Criminal Background Check.** Unless prohibited by state or federal law, a Certified Company shall perform a legally permissible criminal background check prior to employment on every prospective full or part time employee who will have access to Consumer Data to determine the following:
- (a) Whether the prospective employee has been convicted of any criminal felony involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of confidential data or information; and
  - (b) Whether the prospective employee has been charged with any crime involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of confidential data or information such that the facts alleged support a reasonable conclusion that the acts were committed and that the nature, timing, and circumstances of the acts may place consumers in jeopardy.

A Certified Company shall maintain guidelines in a policy, procedure, or manual on how it will handle criminal background checks and the potential consequences on employment that may result from such background checks. The criminal background check is not a retroactive requirement for employees hired prior to certification.

- (4) **Employee Training Programs.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain annual employee training program(s). Based on their job responsibilities, employees should be trained on how to comply with applicable: (i) Certification Standards, (ii) corporate policies and procedures, and (iii) laws and regulations. These programs should also inform employees of the possible consequences for failing to comply with them.
- (5) **Consumer Complaint and Dispute Resolution Policies.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain written Consumer Complaint and dispute resolution policies and procedures that instruct employees how to handle and process Consumer Complaints and disputes in compliance with the Certification Program and applicable laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and the Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- (6) **Consumer Notices.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a list of applicable local, state, and federal consumer notices in the areas in which the



Certified Company conducts business and maintain procedures to ensure that the appropriate notices are added to consumer correspondence.

- (7) **Data Security Policy.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a reasonable and appropriate data security policy based on the type of Consumer Data being secured that meets or exceeds the requirements of applicable state and federal laws and regulations. The Certified Company shall ensure that an annual risk assessment is performed on the Certified Company's protection of Consumer Data from reasonably foreseeable internal and external risks. Based on the results of the annual risk assessment, the Certified Company shall make adjustments to their data security policy if warranted.
- (8) **CFPB Consumer Complaint System.** A Certified Company shall establish a portal for the receipt of Consumer Complaints and inquiries on CFPB's consumer complaint system and respond to all complaints or inquiries received according to CFPB's prescribed guidelines.
- (9) **Payment Processing.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a Payment Processing Policy that requires taking payments consistent with consumer instructions that were made at the time the payment was accepted, prompt posting of all consumer payments, and processing of any refunds within a reasonable amount of time.
- (10) **State Licensing Requirements.** A Certified Company shall comply with state and municipal collection licensing laws to the extent that they are applicable.
- (11) **Credit Bureau Reporting.** If a Certified Company reports consumer account information to a credit bureau, the Certified Company shall:
  - (a) Notify the credit bureau of any inaccurately reported information that it identifies within thirty (30) days of its discovery;
  - (b) Notify the credit bureau when a consumer disputes the accuracy of an account within thirty (30) days of the dispute being made, unless the dispute is resolved prior to notification; and
  - (c) Notify the credit bureau within thirty (30) days if the Certified Company sells the account.
- (12) **Statute of Limitations.** A Certified Company shall not knowingly bring a lawsuit on a debt that is beyond the applicable statute of limitations; however, a Certified Company may continue to attempt collection beyond the expiration of the statute provided there are no laws and regulations to the contrary.
- (13) **Chief Compliance Officer.** A Certified Company shall create and maintain the position of "Chief Compliance Officer" with a direct or indirect reporting line to

the President, CEO, Board of Directors, Managing Partner, or General Counsel (unless the Chief Compliance Officer is the President, CEO, Managing Partner, or General Counsel). The Chief Compliance Officer's documented job description shall include, at a minimum, the following responsibilities:

- (a) Maintaining the Certified Company's official copy of the Certification Standards Manual;
- (b) Identifying policies, procedures, or activities of the Certified Company that are out of conformity with the Certification Standards;
- (c) Either directly or indirectly: (i) receiving Consumer Complaints, (ii) investigating the legitimacy of Consumer Complaints, and/or (iii) overseeing the complaint process, including complaint activity, root cause analysis, and timely response;
- (d) Developing recommendations for corrective actions when the Certified Company is not conforming with the Certification Standards and providing them to his or her direct and indirect report(s); and
- (e) Interacting as the point of contact for the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general regarding the oversight and accountability of the Certified Company's Consumer Complaint and Dispute Resolution Policy and the CFPB's Consumer Complaint System.

(14) **Website & Publication.** A Certified Company shall:

- (a) Maintain a publicly accessible website that can be found by a simple web search using the corporate name provided in communications with consumers. "Family of companies" that share certification pursuant to section 7.3 of the Governance Document shall maintain a website under the name of the company the certification was issued and under the name of any company within the "family" that communicates with consumers;
- (b) Publish on the home page of their website or on a single page directly accessible from the home page, the following information: (i) the Certified Company's name (along with the names of any companies that share the certification designation, if applicable), certification number, mailing address, and telephone number; (ii) the mailing address, email address, and telephone number where consumers can register a complaint with the Certified Company that is received by an employee who has the authority to research, evaluate, take corrective action if warranted, and respond to the complaint; and (iii) a hyperlink to the "Consumer Education" page on the DBA website;

- (c) Publish on their website their Chief Compliance Officer's name, title, certification number, and mailing address; and
  - (d) Authorize DBA to publish the information contained in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this Certification Standard on a publicly accessible website maintained by DBA.
- (15) **Vendor Management.** In order to identify and retain qualified third party vendors and to assure appropriate oversight of such vendors, a Certified Company shall:
- (a) Establish and maintain vendor management policies and procedures with defined due diligence and/or audit controls;
  - (b) Perform an annual assessment of its: (i) vendor management policies and procedures and provide recommendations for improvements, if warranted, and (ii) third party vendors to determine whether they continue to meet or exceed the requirements and expectations of the company. As part of the annual assessment, the Certified Company may need to perform additional due diligence, including by way of example rather than limitation, confirmation of certification status, vendor audits, review of policies and procedures maintained by vendors, and review of consumer complaints related to the vendor (including the data publicly available on CFPB's consumer complaint system); and
  - (c) Obtain the certification number when contracting with a vendor claiming to be a DBA Certified Company and confirm the vendor's certification status on DBA's website.
- (16) **Affidavits.** A Certified Company shall establish and maintain an Affidavit Policy that requires and ensures that:
- (a) An affiant shall only sign an affidavit that is true and accurate, and that no affiant shall sign an affidavit containing an untrue statement;
  - (b) An affiant either have personal knowledge or upon information and belief of the facts set forth in the affidavit or shall familiarize himself or herself with the business records applicable to the subject matter of the affidavit prior to signing an affidavit; and
  - (c) Each affidavit shall be signed by an affiant under oath and in the presence of a notary appointed by the state in which the affiant is signing the affidavit, in accordance with and to the extent required by applicable state law.

## “SERIES B” STANDARDS

The following “Series B” Standards shall apply exclusively to debt buying companies:

- (17) **Portfolio Acquisition.** A Debt Buying Company shall establish and maintain a Portfolio Acquisition Policy that provides the rules, processes, and procedures it follows in the acquisition of debt portfolios and the accounts contained therein to ensure accuracy and completeness of information. Additionally, on all new debt portfolios purchased after becoming certified, the Certified Company shall require in the purchase agreement (i.e. the contract):
- (a) The transmission of data elements required to sufficiently identify the consumers on the associated accounts and to confirm the accuracy and completeness of information pertaining to the accounts. The Certified Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate the inclusion of the following data elements in purchase agreements, provided that they are applicable to the type of debt being purchased: (i) first name and last name of consumer, (ii) the complete last known address of consumer, (iii) last known telephone number of consumer, (iv) name of originating creditor at the time of charge off, (v) account number or account identifier used by the originating creditor at the time of charge off, (vi) social security number or other government issued identification number of consumer as long as the original creditor received the number at the time the account was opened, (vii) account opening date, (viii) last payment date, provided a payment was made, (ix) the charge off balance, (x) the charge off date, (xi) the nature of the debt – i.e. auto, credit cards, medical, telecom, etc., (xii) the current balance at the point of sale, and (xiii) the total amount of any interest and the total amount of any fees accrued on the account since the charge off date, if applicable;
  - (b) Access to or transmission of documents required to sufficiently identify the consumers on the associated accounts and to confirm the accuracy of dates, balances, and other information pertaining to the accounts. The Certified Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate access to or inclusion of sufficient documents in purchase agreements, provided that they are applicable to the type of debt being purchased. Examples of documents may include, but are not limited to: (i) original application or contract, if available; (ii) last statement showing a purchase transaction, service billed, payment, or balance transfer; (iii) charge off statement; (iv) terms and conditions or cardholder agreements, and (v) affidavits, as applicable; and
  - (c) Adequate time to evaluate and review sufficient portfolio information for accuracy, completeness, and reasonableness and to discuss and resolve with the seller any questions or findings resulting from the review process prior to purchasing the portfolio.

- (18) **Chain of Title Requirements.** A Debt Buying Company shall identify and maintain the name, address, and dates of ownership of the originating creditor and all subsequent owners up to and including the Certified Company for each account within a portfolio that is purchased. The intent is to have each subsequent Certified Company maintain an accurate listing for chain of title on debts purchased after certification. This Certification Standard shall only apply to accounts purchased by the company after it obtains certification. This is not a retroactive requirement on accounts purchased prior to certification.
- (19) **Representations & Warranties.** A Debt Buying Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate the inclusion of the following representations and warranties in purchase agreements:
- (a) Seller is lawful holder of the accounts;
  - (b) Accounts are valid, binding, and enforceable obligations;
  - (c) Accounts were originated and serviced in accordance with law; and
  - (d) Account data is materially accurate and complete.
- (20) **Resale.** A Debt Buying Company shall not sell any consumer accounts:
- (a) Where outstanding written and non-duplicative consumer requests for verification of the debt pursuant to the FDCPA (15 USC 1692g) have not been responded to in writing;
  - (b) That have been identified as being created as a result of identity theft or fraud;
  - (c) Without conducting reasonable due diligence on the purchaser; and
  - (d) To a non-Certified Company without terms and conditions contained in the sales agreement requiring the purchaser of the accounts to meet or exceed the standards of a Certified Company with the exception that the purchaser need not be a Certified Party.

### **“SERIES C” STANDARDS**

The following “Series C” Standards shall apply exclusively to collection law firms:

- (21) **Bar Admission.** A collection law firm shall ensure that all practicing attorneys employed by the firm that are involved in collection-related matters:
- (a) Are admitted to the state bar for the practice of law;

- (b) Remain in good standing with the bar; and
- (c) Are in compliance with current Rules of Professional Conduct in the state(s) where they are licensed.
- (22) **Legal Education.** A collection law firm shall ensure that all practicing attorneys employed by the firm that are involved in collection-related matters receive at least twenty (20) hours of biennial legal education in a subject matter related to collection law and/or collection litigation.
- (23) **Legal Malpractice Insurance.** A collection law firm shall maintain legal malpractice insurance coverage in an amount of no less than one million U.S. dollars (\$1,000,000) per event/occurrence. This shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements of Standard # 2.
- (24) **Trust Accounts.** A collection law firm shall maintain trust account(s) at a federally insured financial institution for the segregation of client funds following the rules for such accounts established by the state bar. There shall be sufficient funds in the trust account at all times to pay clients the amount due them. Trust accounts shall be reconciled on a monthly basis. The establishment of a trust account may be waived by a client in writing, provided that the state bar permits such waivers.
- (25) **Judgment Retention.** After becoming certified, a collection law firm shall keep electronically imaged copies of all collection-related judgments it obtains on behalf of its clients for a period of time equal to the statutorily authorized enforcement period. The firm shall transmit a copy of the judgment to the judgment holder within five (5) business days from the receipt of a written request or within such period of time as clearly defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties.
- (26) **Consumer Complaints.** A collection law firm shall transmit to a client within five (5) business days, or such shorter period agreed to between the parties, copies of any written Consumer Complaints received by the law firm on one of the client's accounts, including complaints filed with the CFPB, FTC, state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general.

### **“SERIES D” STANDARDS**

The following “Series D” Standards shall apply exclusively to third party collection agencies:

- (27) **Bonding.** A third party collection agency shall maintain a bond for the protection of client funds in the amount of at least ten thousand U.S. dollars (\$10,000) unless a state has other bonding requirements.

- (28) **Trust Accounts.** A third party collection agency shall maintain trust account(s) at a federally insured financial institution in which all monies received on claims shall be deposited, except that negotiable instruments received may be forwarded directly to the client if such procedure is provided for by a writing executed by the client. There shall be sufficient funds in the trust account at all times to pay clients the amount due them. Trust accounts shall be reconciled on a monthly basis.
- (29) **Client Communications.** A third party collection agency shall ensure that its clients can reasonably communicate with the agency during business hours on any of their accounts being managed by the agency. An agency shall also ensure that it:
- (a) Responds to client inquiries within five (5) business days from receipt of the inquiry;
  - (b) Transmits to a client within five (5) business days, or such shorter period agreed to between the parties, copies of any written Consumer Complaints received by the agency on one of the client's accounts, including complaints filed with the CFPB, FTC, state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general;
  - (c) Ceases collection activity on any or all of a client's accounts upon written notice from the client, provided that this may be further defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties; and
  - (d) Returns all Consumer Data and/or accounts within fourteen (14) business days from receipt of a written request for their return or within such period of time as clearly defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties.

## APPENDIX B

### EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS MANUAL

B.1 **Purpose.** The Educational Requirements Manual (hereinafter referred to in this Appendix as “Manual”) provides additional information to supplement the content provided in the Governance Document. The Manual is designed to be updated on an annual basis provided that the changes do not decrease the base line requirements established in the Governance Document. The Manual will provide guidance and clarification on:

- (1) Continuing education of Certified Individuals;
- (2) Authorized providers of continuing education;
- (3) Continuing education credit from non-authorized providers of continuing education; and
- (4) Future specialty certifications or testing authorized by the Council.

B.2 **Failure to Meet Requirements.** Failure to meet the requirements contained in the Governance Document or this Manual can lead to the loss of certification or authorized provider status.

B.3 **Introductory Survey Course.** The Board’s Education Committee shall work with staff and any contracted vendor(s) on the development and presentation of an “Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying” based on the following guidance:

- (1) The “Introductory Survey Course on Debt Buying” should be a high level presentation of the life cycle of a charged-off consumer account;
- (2) The content should provide an overview of (i) applicable state and federal laws and regulations, (ii) DBA Certification Standards, and (iii) best practices (which may go beyond that required by law, regulation, or Certification Standard) that commonly apply to Debt Buying Companies and charged-off consumer accounts;
- (3) Given the nature of the course and the limited time available, an in-depth review of such subjects should be left for separate specialized continuing education courses;
- (4) An audience member should leave the course not as an expert on the subject matter but with sufficient understanding to recognize an issue if and when he or she encounters it;



- (5) The course shall be at least four (4) credits in length but may be increased by the Educational Requirements Committee if it is determined it is necessary to fulfill the goals of the course;
- (6) The course shall be offered at each DBA Annual Meeting and at any other time at the discretion of the Board's Education Committee; and
- (7) An online version of the course may be made available online for a fee.

B.4 **Current Issues in Debt Buying Course.** The Board's Education Committee shall work with staff and any contracted vendor(s) on the development and presentation of a "Current Issues in Debt Buying" course based on the following:

- (1) The course should provide a detailed presentation on a subject matter concerning new state and/or federal statutory, regulatory, and/or judicial developments of relevance to Debt Buying Companies and their vendors;
- (2) The course shall be two (2) credits in length;
- (3) The course shall be offered at each DBA Annual Meeting and at any other time at the discretion of the Board's Education Committee; and
- (4) An online version of the course may be made available online for a fee.

B.5 **Ethics Courses.** Ethics courses given by an authorized provider shall count towards continuing education credit if the subject matter is on the following list:

- (1) DBA International Ethical Code of Conduct;
- (2) ACA International, Commercial Law League of America (CLLA), or National Association of Retail Collection Attorneys (NARCA) Ethical Codes of Conduct;
- (3) Presentations by consumer groups and/or the Better Business Bureau;
- (4) Financial accounting as it relates to trust accounts and commingling of assets;
- (5) Real life accounts by consumers who were victims of fraud or identity theft and the resulting consequences to their life;
- (6) Consequences of making a false or misleading statement;
- (7) Inspirational lectures by prominent community, corporate, or governmental leaders designed to encourage behavior that promotes the betterment of the debt buying industry or society as a whole; and
- (8) Other subjects approved by the Educational Requirements Committee.

B.6 **General Courses.** The Certification Program requires the completion of twenty-four (24) continuing education credits by Certified Individuals on a biennial basis by taking classes from authorized providers in any of the following qualified subjects:

1099c	Convenience Fees
Account Documentation (at point of sale)	Court Rulings Impacting Debt Buying Companies
Account Documentation (access to after sale)	Credit Bureaus – In General
Account level data requirements (min. standards)	Credit Bureaus – E-Oscar and FACT Act Disputes
Accounts – Closing	Credit Bureaus – Reporting
Accounts – Recalling	Credit Bureau Updates
Affidavits (Account)	Data Access & Control
Affidavits (Portfolio)	Data Accuracy and Integrity
Affidavits (State requirements)	Data Backup
Attorney General Interaction	Data Destruction
Attorney Representation Issues	Data Reconciliation (conformity, integrity, system of record)
Audited Financial Statements	Data Security
Audits	Data Vendors
Automated and Predictive Dialers	Deceased Debtors
Background Checks	Disaster Recovery
Bankruptcy Code	Disclaimers and "Negative" Representation and Warranties
Bankruptcy	Do-Not-Call Policies
Better Business Bureau	Due Diligence (e.g. seller surveys, selection of vendors)
Bills of Sale	E-mail Communications
Business Management Practices	Employee Compensation & Commission Issues
Business Records Exception Rule	Employee Manual
Call Monitoring	Employee Supervision & Oversight
Call Recording and Retention Policies	Employment Policies
Cease and Desist Issues	Encryption
Cell-phone Communications	Escrow Account Issues
CFPB Portal	Ethical Codes of Conduct (Employees)
Chain of Title Issues & Requirements	Ethical Codes of Conduct (Industry – DBA, ACA, NARCA, and CLLA)
Charge-Off Account Statements	Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA)
Chief Compliance Officer – Role of	Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA)
Cloud Based Systems	FDCPA Complaints – How to handle them
Collection Letters	Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
Compliance Policies	Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
Confidential Tip Lines	Fraud
Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreements	Gramm–Leach–Bliley (GLB) Act
Consent to Sale Provisions	Hardship Policies and Programs
Consumer Bill of Rights	Hiring Practices
Consumer Communications	Identity Theft
Consumer Complaint and Dispute Resolution Process	Indemnification
Consumer Disputes – Verbal & Written	Ineligible Account Definitions (e.g. compliance, legally uncollectible, or unenforceable)
Consumer Education on Financial Responsibility	Insurance
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)	
Consumer Notices	
Consumer Support Services	

Insurance – Errors & Omissions (E&O)	Service of Process
Insurance – Directors & Officers (D&O)	Servicing Agreements
Insurance – Workers Compensation	Settlement Agreements
Interest Application	Skip Tracing
Investigations – External	Social Media
Investigations – Internal	Standards and Controls (e.g. SSAE 16, PCI, ISO 27001)
Itemization of Interest and Fees	State Licensing Requirements
Laptop Security	State Notice Requirements
Litigation	Statute of Limitations – In General
Location Requirements	Statute of Limitations – Out of Stat
Malware	Statute of Limitations – Rehabilitation
Media Systems and Operations	Supervisory Issues
Mini Miranda	Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)
Off-site Hosted Platforms	Terms and Conditions
Original Data Overrides – Issues	Theft
Pass through Rights	Third Party Issues
Passwords	Third Party Penalties for Non-Compliance
Payday Loans	Time-of-sale documentation standards (e.g. Bills of Sale, Portfolio Affidavits)
Payment Application	Training Programs
Payment History	Transmitting Files
Policy Violations – How to Find & Handle	Trust Fund
Privacy Laws – State & Federal	Truth in Lending Act
Publication of Contact Information	Unfair, Deceptive or Abusive Acts and Practices (UDAAP)
Purchase & Sale Agreements	Usurious Loans
Quality Assurance/Control Processes	Validation Notice Requirements
Recalling Accounts	Vendor Management – In General
Records Management	Vendor Management – Audits
Records Retention	Vendor Management – Oversight
Red Flag Rules	Verification of Consumer Debt
Representations and Warranties (standard language)	Voicemail Messages
Resale Issues – In General	Wrong Numbers
Resale Policies and Practices	
Right Party Contact	
Security Breaches	

B.7 **Authorized Providers.** DBA International is an authorized provider of continuing education credit for the Certification Program. The Educational Requirements Committee may designate additional authorized providers based on the following:

- (1) Demonstrated excellence in providing educational instruction in the subject matter that is qualified for continuing education credit;
- (2) Compliance with the provisions contained in paragraph B.8 of this Appendix; and
- (3) Application requirements for participation, including but not limited to fees, length of authorization, and renewal criteria.

B.8 **Requirements of Authorized Providers.** All authorized providers shall conform to the following criteria when issuing Continuing Education Certificates:

- (1) Be a member of DBA in good standing, provided this requirement may be waived for national nonprofit trade associations within the collections industry;
- (2) The subject matter of the class to be offered qualifies for continuing education credit pursuant to the provisions contained in paragraph B.6 of this Appendix.
- (3) If the subject matter does not qualify, the authorized provider may request written pre-approval from the Educational Requirements Committee to provide continuing education credits for the class. Such requests must include a description of course, the course objectives, and demonstrate the relevance of the subject matter to the debt buying industry. The Educational Requirements Committee may, at its sole discretion, require copies of the proposed course materials, or request other relevant information;
- (4) Provide written descriptions for all classes on a publicly accessible website prior to or contemporaneous to instruction, provided that classes may be subject to change;
- (5) Indicate adjacent to the written description of a class either: (i) the number of continuing education credits that an individual will receive for the completion of the class or (ii) the length of the class so that the number of continuing education credits can be calculated;
- (6) Provide individuals attending a class with a Continuing Education Certificate signed by a representative of the authorized provider that contains at a minimum the following:
  - (a) The name of the authorized provider;
  - (b) The name or a space for the name of the individual attending the class;
  - (c) The date and location that the continuing education class was held;
  - (d) The title of the class and either: (i) the number of continuing education credits associated with the class or (ii) the length of the class so that the number of continuing education credits can be calculated;
  - (e) A declaratory statement to be signed by the recipient of the continuing education that he or she has in fact attended the class for which he or she seeks continuing education credit, and that he or she acknowledges that providing false information may subject her or him to potential disciplinary action or the loss of certification;

- (7) Provide DBA with the name, title, and contact information for the employee overseeing the authorized provider's education programming;
- (8) Ensure class content is content-rich and not deemed a "sales opportunity" for additional classes, products, or services provided by the authorized provider and/or presenter. Introductory classes designed to be the first step of a fee-based program will not generally be considered for continuing education credit; and
- (9) Agree to assist the Educational Requirements Committee in the investigation of any complaint regarding an instructor or class content.

B.9 **Non-Authorized Providers.** A Certified Individual may make a written request to the Educational Requirements Committee to receive continuing education credit for a class taken from a non-authorized provider. The Educational Requirements Committee, in its sole discretion, may grant the request provided that:

- (1) The request shall be in writing and contain the following information:
  - (a) The name of the entity providing the class;
  - (b) The date and location of the class;
  - (c) The length of the class in minutes;
  - (d) A copy of any handouts associated with the class, if available;
  - (e) A class description from an advertisement, website, or other documented source; and
  - (f) A brief statement of the relevance of the subject matter to the debt buying industry.
- (2) DBA receives a declaratory statement that is signed and dated by the recipient of the continuing education that she or he has in fact attended the class for which he or she seeks continuing education credit, and that he or she acknowledges that providing false information may subject her or him to potential disciplinary action or the loss of certification; and
- (3) Proof of attendance is provided to DBA along with any handouts associated with the class if they were not previously submitted.

B.10 **Evaluation, Review, and Complaint Process.** Classes offered by authorized providers may be subject to evaluation and review by the Educational Requirements Committee should DBA receive a written complaint regarding the instructor or class content.

B.11 **Use of DBA "Authorized Provider" Status.** Non-authorized providers are prohibited from stating or suggesting that they are a DBA authorized provider either verbally or in writing. Violations of this provision shall prevent the Educational Requirements Committee from considering the acceptance of continuing education credit from the non-authorized provider pursuant to paragraph B.9 for one year from the date the violation is communicated to the non-authorized provider.

## APPENDIX C

### APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS MANUAL

- C.1 **Applications.** The Administration & Budget Committee shall develop the Application forms required for Company and Individual certifications.
- C.2 **Content.** The questions and information required in the Applications should be required and/or deemed necessary for programmatic and administrative support of the Certification Program.
- C.3 **Acknowledgments.** Applicants shall acknowledge by signature and/or initials that they have read the Certification Program Governance Document and any other confirmatory statements regarding their application or key provisions of the Certification Program.
- C.4 **Internal Self-Compliance Audits.** Applicant companies shall perform an internal self-compliance audit prior to submitting their application and indicate their conformity with each Certification Standard.
- C.5 **Background Reports.** Applicant companies shall provide signed authorizations from each owner (inclusive of shareholders, partners, principals, members, etc.) with a five (5) percent or greater share of ownership and each corporate officer authorizing DBA to obtain a civil and criminal background report on them as part of DBA's due diligence.
- C.6 **References.** Applicants may be required to provide professional references which may be contacted as part of DBA's due diligence.

# **APPENDIX D**

## **AUDIT REVIEW MANUAL**

### **General Directions to the Auditor**

The Compliance Audit that you are performing and that will be provided to DBA International is a requirement for a company to maintain its designation as a “Certified Professional Receivables Company” (Certified Company) in the DBA International Receivables Management Certification Program.

The Compliance Audit is considered confidential and shall not be shared with any party other than: (i) the DBA International Receivables Management Certification Council, (ii) the Certified Company, (iii) the Auditor, and (iv) any agents of such entities, unless provided otherwise in writing or as otherwise authorized in Article XI of the Governance Document. Any work product of an Auditor that is not required to be transmitted in the Audit Report pursuant to Article VIII or required for Remediation pursuant to Article IX, including the names and relationships of a Certified Company’s clients, shall be confidential and governed by the contractual agreement between the Auditor and the Certified Company.

### **Scope**

The Auditor shall validate the Certified Company’s conformity with the Certification Standards for the Audit Period that is the subject of the Compliance Audit using a standardized audit report form provided by DBA International. Demonstrating conformity with a Certification Standard or lack thereof may be achieved through a combination of interviews, documentation review, and control review.

Conformity with Certification Standards shall, wherever possible, be based upon objective findings only, but if interpretation is necessary due to the subjective nature of the Certification Standard, such subjective interpretation shall be noted on the audit report as such and any subjective interpretation shall be applied consistently to all Certified Companies.

Where control review is needed, it shall be based on a random sample. The Auditor shall indicate the size and scope of any random sample and may expand the random sample to determine whether a violation that is found in the first random sample is material. The Auditor shall perform an onsite visit to see work in progress in order to verify conformity. A Certified Company with multiple locations must verify conformity at all locations; however, an Auditor shall use their professional judgment in determining whether this requires an onsite visit at each location or whether a random selection of locations would suffice.

If a Certified Company contracts exclusively with a third party as its master servicer or servicer on the accounts owned by the Certified Company, the Auditor shall audit the Certified Company for conformity on all Certification Standards but shall test Certification Standards 4, 5, 6, and 9 exclusively through the Certified Company’s conformity with Certification Standard 15.



## **Responsibilities of the Parties**

*Auditor:* The Auditor's responsibility is to determine to the best of their ability whether or not the Certified Company is in material conformity with the Certification Standards. The Auditor is responsible for documenting findings of conformity and Deficiency.

*Certified Company:* The Certified Company must be forthright and accommodating to any reasonable request by the Auditor for the purposes of completing the Audit. If the Certified Company fails to meet this obligation it may be the basis for the Auditor to find a material Deficiency in each Certification Standard the Auditor cannot confirm.

*Disputes:* Should the Auditor and Certified Company have questions and/or disagreements about the interpretation of a Certification Standard or its applicability, the Auditor and/or Certified Company shall direct the inquiry to the Chair of the Audit Committee in writing, care of DBA International, 1050 Fulton Avenue, Suite 120, Sacramento, CA 95825 or [cert@dbainternational.org](mailto:cert@dbainternational.org).

## **Plain Meaning**

The Compliance Audit shall be based on the plain meaning of the words contained in each Certification Standard unless defined otherwise in Article II of the Governance Document.

## **Methodology**

For each Certification Standard, the Auditor shall include in their review their observations, where appropriate, on: (a) policies, (b) processes, (c) controls, (d) training, and (e) verification.

## **Materiality**

When the Auditor is determining a Certified Company's conformity with the Certification Standards, the Auditor shall only report material violations. All violations shall be considered material unless there was a good faith attempt to comply with the Certification Standard and the Auditor is satisfied that the evidence shows that the violation resulted from a bona fide error notwithstanding the maintenance of procedures reasonably adapted to avoid such error and appropriate corrective steps were taken prior to the Audit taking place to ensure that the violation will not recur.

## **Conflicts with Laws & Regulations**

Where a municipal, state, or federal law or regulation is in conflict with a DBA Certification Standard so that complying with the DBA Certification Standard would place the Certified Company in violation of such law or regulation, the Certified Company shall conform to the governmental standard. For purposes of the Audit, conforming to the law or regulation is the same as adhering to the Certification Standard and should be noted as such in the report.

## **Findings**

The findings of the Compliance Audit Report shall state either “Met Requirements” or “Deficiency Discovered” for each Certification Standard.

*Met Requirements:* If the Auditor finds no material deficiencies in a Certified Company’s conformity with a Certification Standard, the Auditor shall indicate “Met Requirements” and no other commentary is required except for any documentation which may be required to be submitted with the report.

*Deficiency Discovered:* If the Auditor finds material deficiencies in a Certified Company’s conformity with a Certification Standard, the Auditor shall indicate “Deficiency Discovered” and state and document only that which is required to be submitted with the report and to provide a recommendation for the remediation of the Deficiency. If the Deficiency was already identified and corrected by the Certified Company prior to the audit, then that should be stated in the report and no recommendation for remediation is required to be provided.

Any additional work the Auditor does for the Certified Company outside of the scope of the Compliance Audit of the Certification Standards shall not be provided to DBA International.

## **Management Representation Letter**

A Certified Company may provide a management representation letter to DBA International to provide any explanations or state any disagreements concerning the findings in the Compliance Audit.

## **Questions Concerning the Interpretation of a Certification Standard**

If at any time the Auditor has a question or requires clarification as to the intention or requirements of a Certification Standard, the Auditor shall direct the inquiry to the Chair of the Audit Committee in writing, care of DBA International, 1050 Fulton Avenue, Suite 120, Sacramento, CA 95825 or [cert@dbainternational.org](mailto:cert@dbainternational.org).

## **“SERIES A” STANDARDS**

The following “Series A” Standards shall apply to debt buying companies, collection law firms, and third party collection agencies:

### **Standard #1 – Laws & Regulations**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall comply with the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and, as applicable, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, the Telephone Consumer Protection Act, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, the United States Bankruptcy Code, section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act, sections 1031 and 1036 of the Dodd-Frank Act, and all other local, state, and federal laws and regulations concerning: (a) collection activity on consumer accounts, (b) the

rights of consumers, (c) debt buying, and (d) financial services as they may apply to Debt Buying Companies.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a list and a copy of all judicial decisions and any local, state, and federal regulatory orders, directives, and decrees from the CFPB, FTC, state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general that were issued within the dates of the Audit Period where the ruling determined the Certified Company violated a law or regulation within the scope of the Certification Standard. The list shall include: case name, court, case number, a description of the violation, the holding of the court, and the judicial relief granted.
2. The Auditor shall also independently conduct a search for reported local, state, and federal judicial decisions involving the Certified Company within the dates of the Audit Period; however, the Auditor shall not disregard other judicial cases should it come to their attention. The Auditor will reconcile their list with the list provided by the Certified Company and if there are discrepancies, the Auditor shall endeavor to reconcile the list with the Certified Company. The result of this reconciliation shall be attached to the report.
3. If there were final judicial decisions and/or regulatory orders, directives, and decrees, the Auditor shall test against the court and regulatory agency's findings for those dates within the Audit Period that occurred after each judicial decision and regulatory order, directive, and decree to determine compliance with the court or such regulatory agency's decision and summarize those findings within the report.
4. The Auditor shall not consider the following a violation of a Certification Standard for the purposes of the report: (a) judicial decisions that are under appeal, (b) regulatory orders, directives, and decrees that are under appeal, (c) settlements, or (d) news accounts of a settlement.

## **Standard # 2 – Errors & Omissions Insurance**

Standard: A Certified Company shall maintain Errors & Omissions (E&O) insurance coverage in an amount of no less than:

- (a) Two million U.S. dollars (\$2,000,000) per event/occurrence if the Certified Company has more than \$10 million in annual receipts resulting from consumer debt collection; or
- (b) One million U.S. dollars (\$1,000,000) per event/occurrence if the Certified Company has less than \$10 million in annual receipts resulting from consumer debt collection.

Directions to the Auditor:

The Auditor shall obtain a copy of the E & O insurance policies sufficient to demonstrate that the Certified Company had the required amount of E & O insurance in place within the dates of the Audit Period. A failure to provide a continuum of coverage shall be considered a Deficiency.

**Standard # 3 – Criminal Background Check**

Standard: Unless prohibited by state or federal law, a Certified Company shall perform a legally permissible criminal background check prior to employment on every prospective full or part time employee who will have access to Consumer Data to determine the following:

- (a) Whether the prospective employee has been convicted of any criminal felony involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of confidential data or information; and
- (b) Whether the prospective employee has been charged with any crime involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, misrepresentation, or any misappropriation of confidential data or information such that the facts alleged support a reasonable conclusion that the acts were committed and that the nature, timing, and circumstances of the acts may place consumers in jeopardy.

A Certified Company shall maintain guidelines in a policy, procedure, or manual on how it will handle criminal background checks and the potential consequences on employment that may result from such background checks. The criminal background check is not a retroactive requirement for employees hired prior to certification.

Directions to the Auditor:

- 1. The Auditor shall determine whether the Certified Company has a written policy, procedure, or manual which requires all new employees (including rehires) who will have access to consumer financial data to have a criminal background check performed and the potential consequences on employment that may result from such background checks.
- 2. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company evidence that criminal background checks have been performed. Receipts or statements from a criminal background provider showing account activity shall be sufficient.
- 3. The Auditor shall choose a random sample of employees that were hired by the Certified Company within the dates of the Audit Period to verify that the Certified Company conformed to its policy, procedure, or manual and document their findings in the report. This requirement shall be waived if the Certified Company can demonstrate the provision of this information would violate an applicable state law on employee confidentiality.

## **Standard # 4 – Employee Training Programs**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall establish and maintain annual employee training program(s). Based on their job responsibilities, employees should be trained on how to comply with applicable: (i) Certification Standards, (ii) corporate policies and procedures, and (iii) laws and regulations. These programs should also inform employees of the possible consequences for failing to comply with them.

### *Directions to the Auditor:*

1. The Auditor shall review the Certified Company's employee training programs and determine whether they conform to the Certification Standard.
2. The Auditor shall document in the report the Certification Standards, corporate policies and procedures, and laws and regulations for which the Certified Company is providing annual employee training.
3. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company evidence that the training has occurred and confirmation that attendance is being tracked.

## **Standard # 5 – Consumer Complaint and Dispute Resolution Policies**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall establish and maintain written Consumer Complaint and dispute resolution policies and procedures that instruct employees how to handle and process Consumer Complaints and disputes in compliance with the Certification Program and applicable laws and regulations, including but not limited to the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and the Fair Credit Reporting Act.

### *Directions to the Auditor:*

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company copies of their Consumer Complaint and dispute resolution policies and procedures.
2. The Auditor shall review the policies and procedures to determine whether they provide sufficient guidance to employees on how to handle Consumer Complaints, disputes, and requests for information, including but not limited to:
  - (a) Consumer requests for verification of the debt pursuant to 15 USC 1692g.
  - (b) Consumer claims of identity theft or fraud, including adequate procedures for investigating and determining the legitimacy of the claims.
3. The Auditor shall confirm whether the Certified Company has a system in place to flag accounts (i) while the Certified Company complies with a FDCPA (15 USC 1692g) verification request and (ii) where the Certified Company determined that the

debt was incurred as a result of identity theft or fraud. The ability to flag these accounts is necessary to prevent the unintentional sale of an account in compliance with Certification Standard 20.

4. The Auditor shall choose a sample of Consumer Complaints, disputes, and requests for information that the Certified Company received within the dates of the Audit Period to verify that the employees conformed to the Certified Company's policies and procedures in the handling of the complaint, dispute, or request for information. The Auditor shall document their findings in the report.

## **Standard # 6 – Consumer Notices**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a list of applicable local, state, and federal consumer notices in the areas in which the Certified Company conducts business and maintain procedures to ensure that the appropriate notices are added to consumer correspondence.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

1. The Auditor shall review and document the Certified Company's list of state and federal consumer notices.
2. The Auditor shall review and document the procedures the Certified Company has adopted to identify new or amended consumer notice requirements.
3. The Auditor shall review and document the procedures the Certified Company has adopted to ensure that appropriate notices are added to the outgoing consumer correspondence. A random sample of consumer correspondence should be tested to verify the procedures are working as intended.

## **Standard # 7 – Data Security Policy**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a reasonable and appropriate data security policy based on the type of Consumer Data being secured that meets or exceeds the requirements of applicable state and federal laws and regulations. The Certified Company shall ensure that an annual risk assessment is performed on the Certified Company's protection of Consumer Data from reasonably foreseeable internal and external risks. Based on the results of the annual risk assessment, the Certified Company shall make adjustments to their data security policy if warranted.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

NOTE: There are a number of differing standards in the field of data security depending on the nature of the underlying consumer debt portfolio and the type of Consumer Data associated with

the asset class. Additionally, the standards in data security are constantly evolving so as to require constant vigilance. Consequently, each Certified Company shall adopt standards that are appropriate for their consumer debt portfolio and the Consumer Data contained therein and review those standards annually. If the Certified Company has questions as to which data security standards to adopt they should consult the requirements contained in the original purchase agreement with the originating creditor and such other experts and sources of information on information security as they deem appropriate. Generally, Certified Companies should consider adopting provisions that are applicable to their circumstances, which might include but are not limited to provisions found in PCI DSS, BITS, ISO 27002, and SAFE.

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a copy of their data security policy.
2. The Auditor shall document how the Certified Company determines what standards to adopt in their data security policy and if they perform an annual review of the policy.
3. The Auditor shall perform random tests to verify whether the Certified Company is conforming to its data security policy. If the Certified Company in the twelve (12) months prior to the Compliance Audit has passed a data security audit performed using PCI DSS, BITS, ISO 27002, SAFE, or such other standards approved in writing by the Audit Committee, the Auditor shall accept the audit as conforming with this requirement.
4. The Auditor shall confirm that the required annual risk assessments have been performed by the Certified Company within the dates of the Audit Period. The Auditor shall review the assessments and confirm that any risks that were identified have resulted in adjustments to the data security policy. Any year in which a Certified Company passes a data security audit performed using PCI DSS, BITS, ISO 27002, SAFE, or such other standards approved in writing by the Audit Committee, the Auditor shall accept the audit as conforming with the annual risk assessment requirement for that year.

## **Standard # 8 – CFPB Consumer Complaint System**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall establish a portal for the receipt of Consumer Complaints and inquiries on CFPB’s consumer complaint system and respond to all complaints or inquiries received according to CFPB’s prescribed guidelines.

### *Directions to the Auditor:*

The Auditor shall review the publicly accessible information and data that is published on the CFPB website to verify whether a Certified Company is conforming to the standard and report their findings.

## **Standard # 9 – Payment Processing**

Standard: A Certified Company shall establish and maintain a Payment Processing Policy that requires taking payments consistent with consumer instructions that were made at the time the payment was accepted, prompt posting of all consumer payments, and processing of any refunds within a reasonable amount of time.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a copy of their payment processing policy.
2. The Auditor shall choose a random sample of accounts to verify whether the Certified Company is conforming to its payment processing policy and report their findings.

## **Standard # 10 – State Licensing Requirements**

Standard: A Certified Company shall comply with state and municipal collection licensing laws to the extent that they are applicable.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company the list of states that correspond to the consumer account addresses where there is active collection activity by the company or an agent of the company at the time of the Compliance Audit.
2. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company the list of jurisdictions where the company is licensed as well as any jurisdictions where their license was suspended, revoked, or an application denied, including any jurisdictional license numbers.
3. In jurisdictions where the Certified Company is not licensed, the Auditor shall make a reasonable effort to confirm whether the company should be licensed depending on the specific facts and circumstances. If in the opinion of the Auditor, the Certified Company is not licensed in a particular jurisdiction where licensure may be required and collection activity is occurring, the company shall provide an explanation as to why they are not licensed.

## **Standard # 11 – Credit Bureau Reporting**

Standard: If a Certified Company reports consumer account information to a credit bureau, the Certified Company shall:



- (a) Notify the credit bureau of any inaccurately reported information that it identifies within thirty (30) days of its discovery;
- (b) Notify the credit bureau when a consumer disputes the accuracy of an account within thirty (30) days of the dispute being made, unless the dispute is resolved prior to notification; and
- (c) Notify the credit bureau within thirty (30) days if the Certified Company sells the account.

Directions to the Auditor:

- 1. The Auditor shall first determine whether the Certified Company reports any consumer account information to a credit bureau. If the Auditor verifies that the Certified Company has adopted a corporate policy that prohibits the reporting of consumer account information to credit bureaus and the company is in compliance with the policy, this Standard shall be waived.
- 2. The Auditor shall select a random sample from consumer accounts that had been reported to a credit bureau within the dates of the Audit Period to determine whether the Certified Company conformed to the requirements of this standard.

## **Standard # 12 – Statute of Limitations**

Standard: A Certified Company shall not knowingly bring a lawsuit on a debt that is beyond the applicable statute of limitations; however, a Certified Company may continue to attempt collection beyond the expiration of the statute provided there are no laws and regulations to the contrary.

Directions to the Auditor:

- 1. The Auditor shall document and report how the Certified Company determines which accounts they own are past an applicable statute of limitations, including but not limited to whether the Certified Company:
  - (a) Has established a policy and procedure concerning how employees and agents are to handle accounts after the statute of limitation has expired.
  - (b) Has a standard in place that defines and identifies the applicable statute of limitations as applied to each account.
  - (c) Has a process for determining when a state changes their statute of limitations.

2. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company the states that correspond to the consumer account addresses where the Certified Company has sought a judgment within the dates of the Audit Period to verify through a random sample that:
  - (a) The statute of limitation was properly calculated.
  - (b) The litigation conformed to the Certification Standard.
3. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a list of accounts in those states that prohibit collection activity after the statute of limitations has expired and through a random sample shall verify whether any attempts were made to collect on those accounts or whether those accounts were sold.

### **Standard # 13 – Chief Compliance Officer**

*Standard:* A Certified Company shall create and maintain the position of “Chief Compliance Officer” with a direct or indirect reporting line to the President, CEO, Partner, or General Counsel (unless the Chief Compliance Officer is the President, CEO, Board of Directors, Partner, or General Counsel). The Chief Compliance Officer’s documented job description shall include, at a minimum, the following responsibilities:

- (a) Maintaining the Certified Company’s official copy of the Certification Standards Manual;
- (b) Identifying policies, procedures, or activities of the Certified Company that are out of conformity with the Certification Standards;
- (c) Either directly or indirectly: (i) receiving Consumer Complaints, (ii) investigating the legitimacy of Consumer Complaints, and/or (iii) overseeing the complaint process, including complaint activity, root cause analysis, and timely response;
- (d) Developing recommendations for corrective actions when the Certified Company is not conforming with the Certification Standards and providing them to his or her direct and indirect report(s); and
- (e) Interacting as the point of contact for the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general regarding the oversight and accountability of the Certified Company’s Consumer Complaint and Dispute Resolution Policy and the CFPB’s Consumer Complaint System.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

NOTE: The term Chief Compliance Officer is meant in terms of role and not necessarily in terms of title. The person who performs this role for the company can be an employee where the

CCO is a part of their job responsibilities, an owner, or a corporate officer of the Certified Company or of a corporate affiliate of the Certified Company.

NOTE: The requirements set forth in this Certification Standard apply to all Certified Companies regardless of the volume of accounts they own, the number of individuals they employ, and how they seek to collect or recover on the debt they own. The Certified Company owns the debt and is therefore accountable for the debt. Consequently, the Certified Company should reflect how this is accomplished when work is being outsourced to third party servicers, such as collection agencies and legal collection firms.

1. The Auditor shall document the name and title of the Chief Compliance Officer and the date that the individual started in that capacity. If the individual has been acting in the capacity of Chief Compliance Officer for greater than a year, confirm whether the individual has an Individual Certification through the Certification Program.
2. The Auditor shall obtain a copy of the Chief Compliance Officer's job description from the Certified Company and confirm that it is in conformity to the Certification Standard.
3. The Auditor shall obtain a copy of the management organizational chart from the Certified Company and document the name and title of the Chief Compliance Officer's direct and indirect supervisor.
4. The Auditor shall obtain sufficient evidence from the Certified Company's Chief Compliance Officer on how he or she has complied with the requirements of his or her job description as enumerated in the Certification Standard.

## **Standard # 14 – Website & Publication**

Standard: A Certified Company shall:

- (a) Maintain a publicly accessible website that can be found by a simple web search using the corporate name provided in communications with consumers. "Family of companies" that share certification pursuant to section 7.3 of the Governance Document shall maintain a website under the name of the company the certification was issued and under the name of any company within the "family" that communicates with consumers;
- (b) Publish on the home page of their website or on a single page directly accessible from the home page, the following information: (i) the Certified Company's name (along with the names of any companies that share the certification designation, if applicable), certification number, mailing address, and telephone number; (ii) the mailing address, email address, and telephone number where consumers can register a Consumer Complaint with the Certified Company that is received by an employee who has the authority to research, evaluate, take corrective action if warranted, and respond to the complaint; and (iii) a hyperlink to the "Consumer Education" page on the DBA website;

- (c) Publish on their website their Chief Compliance Officer's name, title, certification number, and mailing address; and
- (d) Authorize DBA to publish the information contained in paragraphs (b) and (c) of this Certification Standard on a publicly accessible website maintained by DBA.

Directions to the Auditor:

NOTE: The authorization from the Certified Company to publish their information pursuant to this Certification Standard is a condition which is accepted in the initial Application for Certification and is not a requirement that needs to be verified by the Auditor.

1. The Auditor shall perform a simple web search using the corporate name that the Certified Company provides in communications with consumers and document the results.
2. The Auditor shall confirm that the individual who serves in the role of Chief Compliance Officer is the same individual identified on the DBA and Certified Company's websites and the information required to be published is present and correct.
3. The Auditor shall confirm that the information required to be published by the Certified Company on its website is present and correct and is the same information that is published on the DBA website.
4. The Auditor shall confirm that there is a working hyperlink to DBA's Consumer Education page on the Certified Company's website.

## **Standard # 15 – Vendor Management Policy**

Standard: In order to identify and retain qualified third party vendors and to assure appropriate oversight of such vendors, a Certified Company shall:

- (a) Establish and maintain vendor management policies and procedures with defined due diligence and/or audit controls;
- (b) Perform an annual assessment of its: (i) vendor management policies and procedures and provide recommendations for improvements, if warranted, and (ii) third party vendors to determine whether they continue to meet or exceed the requirements and expectations of the company. As part of the annual assessment, the Certified Company may need to perform additional due diligence, including by way of example rather than limitation, confirmation of certification status, vendor audits, review of policies and procedures maintained by vendors, and review of consumer complaints related to the vendor (including the data publicly available on CFPB's consumer complaint system); and

- (c) Obtain the certification number when contracting with a vendor claiming to be a DBA Certified Company and confirm the vendor's certification status on DBA's website.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a copy of their vendor management policies and procedures. The Auditor shall verify that the policies and procedures are in conformity with the Certification Standard and the company is in compliance with those policies and procedures.
2. The Auditor shall confirm that the annual assessment of the vendor management policies and procedures has occurred and has been properly communicated to the executive management and/or Board of the company, including any recommendations for improvements.
3. The Auditor shall document how the Certified Company determines and/or confirms that the third party vendors (i.e. their agents) they use to communicate with consumers and/or their attorneys on the Certified Company's behalf are conforming with the applicable Certification Standards.
4. A violation of a Certification Standard by a third party vendor on a Certified Company's account may be considered a violation of such standard by the Certified Company.

## **Standard # 16 – Affidavits**

Standard: A Certified Company shall establish and maintain an Affidavit Policy that requires and ensures that:

- (a) An affiant shall only sign an affidavit that is true and accurate, and that no affiant shall sign an affidavit containing an untrue statement;
- (b) An affiant either have personal knowledge or upon information and belief of the facts set forth in the affidavit or shall familiarize himself or herself with the business records applicable to the subject matter of the affidavit prior to signing an affidavit; and
- (c) Each affidavit shall be signed by an affiant under oath and in the presence of a notary appointed by the state in which the affiant is signing the affidavit, in accordance with and to the extent required by applicable state law.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain from the Certified Company a copy of its Affidavit Policy and review it to confirm that it meets or exceeds the requirements of this Standard.

2. The Auditor shall choose a random sample of affidavits that were signed within the dates of the Audit Period to determine compliance with the Affidavit Policy.
3. The Auditor shall interview a random sample of the affiants who signed affidavits within the dates of the Audit Period to determine compliance with the Affidavit Policy.
4. The Auditor shall interview a random sample of notaries who witnessed the signing of affidavits within the dates of the Audit Period to determine compliance with the Affidavit Policy.

### **“SERIES B” STANDARDS**

The following “Series B” Standards shall apply exclusively to debt buying companies:

#### **Standard # 17 – Portfolio Acquisition**

*Standard:* A Debt Buying Company shall establish and maintain a Portfolio Acquisition Policy that provides the rules, processes, and procedures it follows in the acquisition of debt portfolios and the accounts contained therein to ensure accuracy and completeness of information. Additionally, on all new debt portfolios purchased after becoming certified, the Certified Company shall require in the purchase agreement (i.e. the contract):

- (a) The transmission of data elements required to sufficiently identify the consumers on the associated accounts and to confirm the accuracy and completeness of information pertaining to the accounts. The Certified Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate the inclusion of the following data elements in purchase agreements, provided that they are applicable to the type of debt being purchased: (i) first name and last name of consumer, (ii) the complete last known address of consumer, (iii) last known telephone number of consumer, (iv) name of originating creditor at the time of charge off, (v) account number or account identifier used by the originating creditor at the time of charge off, (vi) social security number or other government issued identification number of consumer as long as the original creditor received the number at the time the account was opened, (vii) account opening date, (viii) last payment date, provided a payment was made, (ix) the charge off balance, (x) the charge off date, (xi) the nature of the debt – i.e. auto, credit cards, medical, telecom, etc., (xii) the current balance at the point of sale, and (xiii) the total amount of any interest and the total amount of any fees accrued on the account since the charge off date, if applicable;
- (b) Access to or transmission of documents required to sufficiently identify the consumers on the associated accounts and to confirm the accuracy of dates, balances, and other information pertaining to the accounts. The Certified Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate access to or inclusion of sufficient documents in purchase agreements, provided that they are applicable to the type of debt being purchased.

Examples of documents may include, but are not limited to: (i) original application or contract, if available; (ii) last statement showing a purchase transaction, service billed, payment, or balance transfer; (iii) charge off statement; (iv) terms and conditions or cardholder agreements, and (v) affidavits, as applicable; and

- (c) Adequate time to evaluate and review sufficient portfolio information for accuracy, completeness, and reasonableness and to discuss and resolve with the seller any questions or findings resulting from the review process prior to purchasing the portfolio.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall review the purchase agreements that were entered into within the dates of the Audit Period to determine what data elements/documents were included. In the report, the Auditor shall document the type of consumer debt and the data elements/documents that were subject to the agreement. If the data elements/documents described in the Certification Standard are missing in the purchase agreement, the Auditor shall note which elements/documents are missing and the Certified Company's documented explanation for the lack of those elements/documents. Provided that the Certified Company used commercially reasonable efforts to include the data elements/documents in the purchase agreement and documented the reason for their absence, the failure to obtain the data elements/documents in the purchase agreement shall not be a basis for a violation of this Certification Standard.
2. The Auditor shall select a random sample of accounts associated with each purchase agreement to verify whether the required data elements were in fact transmitted. The Certified Company can provide either a sampling of accounts from their system or from a file if the accounts are not on their system. The Auditor is not testing whether the data is correct but rather the availability and delivery of the data pursuant to the agreement. The Auditor's findings shall be documented in the report. The Auditor will not perform a similar analysis on documents included in the purchase agreement as the standard provides the latitude to negotiate "access" to the documents which would prevent sampling.
3. The Auditor shall review the Certified Company's Portfolio Acquisition Policy to determine whether it provides a process or procedure for the evaluation and review of portfolio information for accuracy, completeness, and reasonableness prior to the purchase of the portfolio and indicate in the report whether the Certified Company conformed to its policy.

## **Standard # 18 – Chain of Title Requirements**

Standard: A Debt Buying Company shall identify and maintain the name, address, and dates of ownership of the originating creditor and all subsequent owners up to and including the Certified Company for each account within a portfolio that is purchased. The intent is to have each

subsequent Certified Company maintain an accurate listing for chain of title on debts purchased after certification. This Certification Standard shall only apply to accounts purchased by the company after it obtains certification. This is not a retroactive requirement on accounts purchased prior to certification.

Directions to the Auditor:

NOTE: For purposes of conforming to the Certification Standard, the information maintained by the Certified Company need only be accurate at the point of each sales transaction. For example, if the originating creditors name changed from Bank A to Bank B after the accounts were sold, the chain of title would be in conformity if it listed Bank A.

1. The Auditor shall select a random sample of accounts from various portfolios and differing asset classes, if applicable, to review the account level chain of title for the selected accounts to determine if the documentation is in conformity with the Certification Standard. The account level chain of title documentation should enable the Auditor to identify:
  - (a) The name of the charge-off creditor and each subsequent owner of the account;
  - (b) The address of the charge-off creditor and each subsequent owner of the account;
  - (c) The date of each purchase in the chain of title;
  - (d) Information or documentation supporting each sale that identifies the accounts being sold and purchased; and
  - (e) A copy of any judgments obtained on an account by the previous owners, if applicable.
2. If the Certified Company partially or exclusively uses a debt registry to maintain full chain of title for its accounts, the Auditor shall document this fact, indicate how Auditor tested compliance, and indicate how the company performed oversight pursuant to Standard # 15.

## **Standard # 19 – Representations & Warranties**

Standard: A Debt Buying Company shall use commercially reasonable efforts to negotiate the inclusion of the following representations and warranties in purchase agreements:

- (a) Seller is lawful holder of the accounts;
- (b) Accounts are valid, binding, and enforceable obligations;
- (c) Accounts were originated and serviced in accordance with law; and



(d) Account data is materially accurate and complete.

Directions to the Auditor:

NOTE: While representations and warranties that are not qualified with either “to the best of seller’s knowledge” or “to the best of seller’s actual knowledge” are preferable, either of these knowledge qualifiers is acceptable to comply with Standard 18.

The Auditor shall review the purchase agreements that were entered into within the dates of the Audit Period to determine whether representations and warranties consistent with this Certification Standard were included. If the representations and warranties described in this Certification Standard are missing in the purchase agreement, the Auditor shall note which representations and warranties are missing and the Certified Company’s documented explanation for the lack of those representations and warranties. Provided that the Certified Company used commercially reasonable efforts to include the representations and warranties in the purchase agreement and documented the reason for their absence, the failure to obtain representations and warranties in the purchase agreement shall not be a basis for a violation of this Certification Standard.

## **Standard # 20 – Resale**

Standard: A Debt Buying Company shall not sell any consumer accounts:

- (a) Where outstanding written and non-duplicative consumer requests for verification of the debt pursuant to the FDCPA (15 USC 1692g) have not been responded to in writing;
- (b) That have been identified as being created as a result of identity theft or fraud;
- (c) Without conducting reasonable due diligence on the purchaser; and
- (d) To a non-Certified Company without terms and conditions contained in the sales agreement requiring the purchaser of the accounts to meet or exceed the standards of a Certified Company with the exception that the purchaser need not be a Certified Party.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall first determine whether the Certified Company sells any consumer accounts on the secondary market. If the Auditor verifies that the Certified Company has adopted a corporate policy that prohibits the sale of consumer accounts and the company is in compliance with the policy, this Standard shall be waived.
2. The Auditor shall select a random sample of accounts that the Certified Company sold within the dates of the Audit Period to verify that the accounts were not flagged

by the system for a 15 USC 1692g verification request or determined to be debt that was incurred as a result of identity theft or fraud.

3. The Auditor shall review a Certified Company's sale agreements involving the sale of consumer accounts that were entered into within the dates of the Audit Period to verify that the agreements contain terms and conditions that conform to the Certification Standards.

### **“SERIES C” STANDARDS**

The following “Series C” Standards shall apply exclusively to collection law firms:

#### **Standard # 21 – Bar Admission**

*Standard:* A collection law firm shall ensure that all practicing attorneys employed by the firm that are involved in collection-related matters:

- (a) Are admitted to the state bar for the practice of law;
- (b) Remain in good standing with the bar; and
- (c) Are in compliance with current Rules of Professional Conduct in the state(s) where they are licensed.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

1. The Auditor shall obtain documentation from the collection law firm that describes the process established by the firm to conform to this Standard and verify the process was followed within the dates of the Audit Period.
2. The Auditor shall obtain from the collection law firm the full list of practicing attorneys employed by the firm along with a listing of the states that each attorney is currently or was previously admitted to the bar for the practice of law within the dates of the Audit Period. The Auditor shall cross reference those names on the publicly accessible attorney registration list maintained by each state and document their findings in the report.

#### **Standard # 22 – Legal Education**

*Standard:* A collection law firm shall ensure that all practicing attorneys employed by the firm that are involved in collection-related matters receive at least twenty (20) hours of biennial legal education in a subject matter related to collection law and/or collection litigation.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain documentation from the collection law firm that describes the process established by the firm to conform to this Standard and verify the process was followed within the dates of the Audit Period.
2. If the collection law firm provides internal legal educational programming for its practicing attorneys, the Auditor shall obtain a list of the topics covered by such programming within the dates of the Audit Period and document them in its report.

### **Standard # 23 – Legal Malpractice Insurance**

Standard: A collection law firm shall maintain legal malpractice insurance coverage in an amount of no less than one million U.S. dollars (\$1,000,000) per event/occurrence. This shall be deemed to satisfy the requirements of Standard # 2.

Directions to the Auditor:

The Auditor shall obtain a copy of the collection law firm's legal malpractice insurance policy to verify that the firm had the required amount of legal malpractice insurance in place within the dates of the Audit Period. A failure to provide a continuum of coverage shall be considered a Deficiency.

### **Standard # 24 – Trust Accounts**

Standard: A collection law firm shall maintain trust account(s) at a federally insured financial institution for the segregation of client funds following the rules for such accounts established by the state bar. There shall be sufficient funds in the trust account at all times to pay clients the amount due them. Trust accounts shall be reconciled on a monthly basis. The establishment of a trust account may be waived by a client in writing, provided that the state bar permits such waivers.

Directions to the Auditor:

The Auditor shall obtain from the collection law firm the rules governing the administration of client trust accounts established by the state bar. The Auditor shall select a random sample from a list of the firm's clients within the dates of the Audit Period to verify the firm's compliance with such rules and with this Standard and document their findings in the report.

## **Standard # 25 – Judgment Retention**

*Standard:* After becoming certified, a collection law firm shall keep electronically imaged copies of all collection-related judgments it obtains on behalf of its clients for a period of time equal to the statutory authorized enforcement period. The firm shall transmit a copy of the judgment to the judgment holder within five (5) business days from the receipt of a written request or within such period of time as clearly defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties.

### *Directions to the Auditor:*

The Auditor shall obtain documentation from the collection law firm that describes the process established by the firm to conform to this Standard, determine if the process is reasonable to ensure timely transmittal of the requested documents, verify the process was followed within the dates of the Audit Period, and document their findings in the report.

## **Standard # 26 – Consumer Complaints**

*Standard:* A collection law firm shall transmit to the client within five (5) business days or such shorter period agreed to between the parties, copies of any written Consumer Complaints received by the law firm on one of the client's accounts, including complaints filed with the CFPB, FTC, state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general.

### *Directions to the Auditor:*

1. The Auditor shall obtain documentation from the collection law firm that describes the process established by the firm to conform to this Standard, determine if the process is reasonable to ensure timely transmittal of the requested documents, verify the process was followed within the dates of the Audit Period through a random sample of Consumer Complaints, and document their findings in the report.
2. If the Auditor identifies Consumer Complaints as coming from the CFPB's consumer complaint system, the Auditor shall inquire if the firm generally responds to such complaints under the firm's name or if the complaints are transferred administratively in the CFPB's system to the client's name with the response being filed by the client. The response to this question is for informational purposes only.

## **“SERIES D” STANDARDS**

The following “Series D” Standards shall apply exclusively to third party collection agencies:

### **Standard # 27 – Bonding**

*Standard:* A third party collection agency shall maintain a surety bond for the protection of client funds in the amount of at least ten thousand U.S. dollars (\$10,000) unless a state has other bonding requirements.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

The Auditor shall obtain a copy of the third party collection agency’s surety bond, if required. No bond shall be required if the collection agency operates exclusively in states that have statutory bonding requirements. The Auditor shall confirm compliance with any state statutory bonding requirement. A failure to provide a continuum of coverage shall be considered a Deficiency.

### **Standard # 28 – Trust Accounts**

*Standard:* A third party collection agency shall maintain trust account(s) at a federally insured financial institution in which all monies received on claims shall be deposited, except that negotiable instruments received may be forwarded directly to the client if such procedure is provided for by a writing executed by the client. There shall be sufficient funds in the trust account at all times to pay clients the amount due them. Trust accounts shall be reconciled on a monthly basis.

*Directions to the Auditor:*

The Auditor shall select a random sample from a list of the third party collection agency’s clients during the dates of the Audit Period to verify compliance with this Standard and document their findings in the report.

### **Standard # 29 – Client Communications**

*Standard:* A third party collection agency shall ensure that its clients can reasonably communicate with the agency during business hours on any of their accounts being managed by the agency. An agency shall also ensure that it:

- (a) Responds to client inquiries within five (5) business days from receipt of the inquiry;

- (b) Transmits to the client within five (5) business days, or such shorter period agreed to between the parties, copies of any written Consumer Complaints received by the agency on one of the client's accounts, including complaints filed with the CFPB, FTC, state consumer regulatory agencies, and state and federal attorneys general;
- (c) Ceases collection activity on any or all of a client's accounts upon written notice from the client, provided that this may be further defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties; and
- (d) Returns all Consumer Data and/or accounts within fourteen (14) business days from receipt of a written request for their return or within such period of time as clearly defined pursuant to an agreement between the parties.

Directions to the Auditor:

1. The Auditor shall obtain documentation from the third party collection agency that describes the process established by the agency to conform to this Standard, determine if the process is reasonable to ensure a timely response, verify the process was followed within the dates of the Audit Period, and document their findings in the report.
2. If the Auditor identifies Consumer Complaints as coming from the CFPB's consumer complaint system, the Auditor shall inquire if the third party agency generally responds to such complaints under the agency's name or if the complaints are transferred administratively in the CFPB's system to the client's name with the response being filed by the client. The response to this question is for informational purposes only.
3. To determine if clients can reasonably communicate with the third party collection agency during business hours, the Auditor shall randomly select a different day and time to contact the agency's Chief Compliance Officer using the telephone number published on the DBA website and the agency's client account manager using the telephone number provided to clients. If voice mail is available, the Auditor shall leave a message with the nature of the call and requesting an immediate response. The Auditor shall document their findings in the report.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **REMEDIATION PROCEDURES MANUAL**

- E.1 **Purpose.** The Remediation Procedures Manual (hereinafter referred to in this Appendix as “Manual”) provides the remedial authority granted to the Council by the Board when entering into Remediation Agreements with a Certified Party or in taking disciplinary action against a Certified Party.
- E.2 **Remediation-Based Program.** The Certification Program’s primary goal is for the Certified Party to take remedial action to conform to the Certification Standards when a Deficiency is identified through a Compliance Audit. However, when remedial action cannot be achieved, the Council shall consider disciplinary action against the Certified Party.
- E.3 **Remediation Procedures.** The Remediation Committee (hereinafter referred to in this Appendix as “Committee”) and Council shall comply with the following procedures when reviewing Deficiency findings contained in a Compliance Audit:
- (1) The Committee shall perform an initial review of the Deficiency findings within fifteen (15) business days from the receipt of the Audit from the Auditor;
  - (2) The Committee has the authority to dismiss the matter as either without merit or with a cautionary letter if the Committee determines there is no current basis to support the need of a Remediation Agreement due to: (a) the nature of the nonconformity, (b) extenuating circumstances leading to the nonconformity, (c) the nonconformity has already been remediated, or (d) a determination that there was insufficient grounds for the Auditor to conclude the existence of a nonconformity to a Certification Standard;
  - (3) If the Committee determines that remediation is necessary to achieve conformity with the Certification Standards, the Committee shall prepare a draft Remediation Agreement with the assistance of staff and submit it to the Council Chair no greater than thirty (30) business days from the receipt of the Audit;
  - (4) Upon the Council Chair’s approval, staff shall send the signed Remediation Agreement to the Certified Party;
  - (5) Upon receipt of the Remediation Agreement, the Certified Party may either:
    - (a) Accept the agreement as written by indicating their acceptance of the terms of the agreement by signing the agreement and returning it to DBA; or
    - (b) Suggest edits to the agreement pursuant to the process identified in an enclosure with the agreement.

- (6) If within ninety (90) days of the initial transmittal of the Remediation Agreement a mutual agreement has not been reached and adopted, the Chair of the Remediation Committee in consultation with the Council Chair and the Executive Director shall submit to the Council at least two (2) options for their consideration, which may include:
  - (a) Requiring a new Compliance Audit;
  - (b) Adoption of the last edited version of the Remediation Agreement received from the Certified Party;
  - (c) Based upon further review, there is no current basis to support the need a Remediation Agreement due to: (i) the nature of the nonconformity, (ii) extenuating circumstances leading to the nonconformity, (iii) the nonconformity has already been remediated, or (iv) a determination that there was insufficient grounds for the Auditor to conclude the existence of a nonconformity to a Certification Standard; or
  - (d) Disciplinary action as authorized in clause E.5 of this Appendix.
- (7) If the Council chooses any option that would result in the temporary or permanent loss of certification, the Council shall notify the Certified Party in writing of such decision in a Deficiency Notice which shall take effect fifteen (15) business days from transmittal unless DBA receives a written appeal from the Certified Party following the process and procedures identified on the DBA website and enclosed with the Deficiency Notice. The Certified Party shall be deemed to have waived the right to respond to the terms and allegations contained in the Deficiency Notice and such terms and allegations shall be deemed admitted and/or accepted by the failure to appeal.

#### E.4 **Additional Grounds for a Finding of a Deficiency.**

- (1) In addition to failing to conform to the Certification Standards, the following acts or omissions, whether performed individually or in concert with others, may constitute grounds for the Committee or Council's request for a Compliance Audit or a finding by the Council that a Deficiency exists that is a basis for Disciplinary Action:
  - (a) Any act or omission involving dishonesty, theft, or misappropriation which violates the criminal laws of any State or of the United States or of any province, territory or jurisdiction of any other country, provided however, that conviction thereof in a criminal proceeding shall not be a prerequisite to the institution of Deficiency proceedings, and provided further, that acquittal in a criminal proceeding shall not bar a Deficiency action;



(b) Failure to respond to a request by the Council, Board, or any committee, panel, or agent thereof, without good cause shown, or obstruction of such entities in the performance of their duties; or

(c) Any false or misleading statement made to the Board or Council.

(2) The enumeration of the foregoing acts and omissions constituting grounds for a finding by the Council that a Deficiency exists that is subject to disciplinary action by the Council is not exclusive and other acts or omissions amounting to unprofessional conduct may constitute grounds for discipline.

E.5 **Disciplinary Action.** Where grounds for discipline have been established by the Council, any of the following forms of discipline may be imposed upon a Certified Party:

- (1) **Private Censure.** Private Censure shall be an unpublished written reproach;
- (2) **Public Letter of Admonition.** A Public Letter of Admonition shall be a publishable written reproach of the Certified Party's behavior. In the event of a public letter of admonition, the Council may publish the Letter of Admonition in a press release or in such other form of publicity selected by the Council;
- (3) **Suspension of Certification.** Suspension of Certification shall be for a specified period of time, not to exceed five (5) years, for those Certified Parties the Council deems can be rehabilitated. In the event of a suspension, the Council may publish the fact of the suspension together with identification of the Certified Party in a press release, or in such other form of publicity as is selected by the Council;
- (4) **Non-Renewal of Certification.** Non-Renewal of Certification shall be a decision not to renew the certification upon the expiration of the Certified Party's biennial term; and
- (5) **Expulsion from the Certification Program.** Expulsion from the Certification Program shall be a permanent loss of a Certified Parties certification which shall be for willful and egregious conduct. In the event of an expulsion, the Council may publish the fact of the expulsion together with identification of the Certified Party in a press release, or in such other form of publicity as is selected by the Council. Pursuant to section 7.5(F) of the Governance Document, Certified Parties that are expelled are not eligible for future certification.

E.6 **Reinstatement after Suspension.** Unless otherwise provided by the Council in its order of suspension, a Certified Party who has been suspended for a period of one (1) year or less shall be automatically reinstated upon the expiration of the period of suspension, provided the Certified Party provides the Council prior to the expiration of the period of suspension an affidavit stating that they have fully complied with the order of suspension

and with all applicable provisions of these Certification Standards, unless such condition is waived by the Council in its discretion.

E.7 **Council Guidelines for Disciplinary Action.** The following scalable guidelines shall be considered by the Council prior to the issuance of a Disciplinary Action against a Certified Party and are by no means intended to limit their authority. Rather, the following guidelines are intended to ensure the Council takes into consideration such factors as the (i) frequency and persistence of the violation of Certification Standards, (ii) efforts of the Certified Parties (or lack thereof) to maintain or obtain conformance with the Certification Standards, and (iii) efforts to comply with any Remediation Agreement:

- (1) **Private Censure:** Should be considered in matters where the violation of the Certification Standards is minor and has been remediated yet a message is needed to convey Council concern.
- (2) **Public Letter of Admonition:** Should be considered in cases where the violation may be minor but nonetheless pervasive or not remediated. Alternatively, if the violation is a serious legal or regulatory violation but that which has been remediated yet the Council desires to admonish the Certified Party to avoid repeat violations, a Public letter of Admonition may be issued.
- (3) **Suspension of Certification:** Should be considered when a violation of a Certification Standard is a serious legal or regulatory violation and has not been remediated or the attempt to remediate is without merit.
- (4) **Non-renewal of Certification:** Should be considered when the Certified Party has a history of violating the Certification Standards and the Council believes that no other form of disciplinary action will alter that behavior.
- (5) **Expulsion from Certification:** Should be considered when egregious conduct is a willful violation of law or regulation or an egregious violation of the Certification Standards and no remediation efforts have been made. Also, if a suspension has lasted more than one year and has expired without a request for renewal and no other good cause exists for reinstatement, expulsion may be warranted.

E.8 **Appeals.** Any appeal of a disciplinary action taken by the Council shall be received by DBA within fifteen (15) business days from the Council's transmittal of the Deficiency Notice to the Certified Party following the process and procedures identified on the DBA website and enclosed with the Deficiency Notice. All appeals will be heard and decided by the Board within sixty (60) days of DBA's receipt of the appeal and a decision will be rendered within thirty (30) days after the conclusion of the Board hearing. The Board's decision will be final.

E.9 **Costs.** In all Deficiency matters, the Council shall assess against the Certified Party the costs of the investigations.