

I Outline of Audit Activities

Basic Policy on Audit for 2014

Approved by the
Audit Commission on
September 2, 2013

To carry out audits for the year 2014 efficiently and effectively and perform its missions accurately in keeping with social and economic trends, the Board of Audit established its Basic Policy on Audit Activities for the year 2014 as follows:

1. Missions of the Board of Audit

The Board of Audit (the Board) has the following missions as a constitutional organization independent of the Cabinet.

The Board shall audit all of the final accounts of expenditures and revenues of the State every year and also such accounts as are provided for by laws.

The Board shall constantly conduct audits and supervise the public accounts to secure their adequacy and to rectify their defects, and based on its audit results, shall verify the final accounts of expenditures and revenues of the State.

The Board shall prepare and send the Audit Report to the Cabinet. This Report, together with the final accounts of expenditures and revenues of the State, shall be submitted to the Diet.

2. Social and Economic Trends and the Situation Surrounding the Board of Audit

In recent years, Japan's society and economy have faced difficult challenges, such as a sharp decrease in the population, an increase in social security expenses due to the decreasing birthrate and the aging population, structural changes in domestic and overseas economies, and global environment problems.

In addition, reconstruction from the Great East Japan Earthquake (the earthquake and tsunami that occurred along the Pacific Ocean coast in the Tohoku Region on March 11, 2011, and the resultant accident at a nuclear power plant; hereinafter referred to as the "Great Earthquake") has become an important issue for Japan, therefore, the administrative authorities are required to deal with these challenges appropriately.

As for the fiscal position of the State government, continual issuance of government bonds is steadily increasing the outstanding balance, which is estimated to reach about 750 trillion yen at the end of FY2013. In the budget for FY2013, the level of dependence on public bonds is about 46% and the total expenditure required for redemption of national debts comprises about 24% of the general account expenditure, which imposes a major challenge in achieving sound fiscal position.

In order to achieve fiscal soundness under these circumstances, the State government is planning to make the public sector efficient and effective by way of prioritized and effective allocation of expenditures together with eliminating wasteful expenditures aiming at making the primary balance of the public finance of the central and local governments in the black by FY2020.

Moreover, the importance of grasping the result of the State budget execution and reflecting these in following budgets is deliberated in the Diet from the viewpoint of enhancing and strengthening fiscal administration control by the Diet.

Because the Diet requested the Cabinet to submit the final accounts of the State earlier, the Board has been striving to submit its Audit Report to the Cabinet earlier since the Audit Report for FY2003, which helps the Diet deliberate the final accounts of the State earlier and enables the audit results to be further reflected in the budget. Furthermore, the Board has been steadily undertaking audits related to audit requests made by the Diet under the provisions of Article 105 of the Diet Act and reporting the audit results to the Diet, as well as issuing “Special Reports to the Diet and the Cabinet” on an as-needed basis every year for the purpose of contributing to enhancement of the Diet's deliberations of the final accounts of the State.

In this way, achievement of fiscal soundness has become an important issue. Moreover, as importance is placed on the strict assessment and verification of the result of the State budget execution as well as the Government's thorough fulfillment of accountability to the people, the role of the Board has taken on more importance, and public expectations regarding audit functions have grown.

3. Basic Policy on Audit

The Board has been striving to conduct audits in order to adequately respond to public expectations in the light of social and economic trends at all times. Under the situation mentioned above, the Board continues to pay sufficient attention to the public interests and make every effort to ensure the strict and fair discharge of its duties in accordance with the following policies.

(1) Focus of audit

In response to Japan's social and economic trends and its current financial situation, the Board has decided to focus its audit activities on the following policy areas of public administration.

- Social security
- Education, science and technology
- Public works
- Defense
- Agriculture, forestry and fisheries
- Environmental protection
- Economic cooperation
- Small and medium enterprises
- Information technology (IT)

In addition, the Board enhances cross-cutting audits on policies jointly executed by several ministries and agencies and cases commonly related with several ministries and agencies, and, if necessary, also responds to matters of much social concern, in a timely and proper manner.

Furthermore, the Board timely and appropriately audits various measures for promoting the reconstruction from the Great Earthquake according to the status of progress, noting that a large amount of national expenses will be spent during a certain period. When conducting audits, the Board pays attention to the conditions in the disaster stricken areas and whether each project contributes to social and economic revitalization in such disaster stricken areas.

(2) Audit from various audit aspects

The Board conducts audits not only to identify and disclose inappropriate or improper cases but also to evaluate the performance of operations and projects. Moreover, the Board conducts audits with a focus on the necessity of specific operational systems itself, if necessary.

The Board conducts audits with the following aspects:

- (a) Accuracy: whether or not the statements of accounts accurately reflect the financial status such as the execution of the budgets
- (b) Regularity: whether or not the financial transactions are properly processed in conformity with the approved budgets, laws and regulations
- (c) Economy: whether or not the implementation of projects and programs or budget execution is administered with the minimum cost
- (d) Efficiency: whether or not the projects and programs gain the maximum result with the given cost or have the best cost-efficient outcome
- (e) Effectiveness: whether or not the projects and programs achieve the intended objectives and produce the expected effects
- (f) Other aspects necessary for auditing

Because there are still many improper cases, the Board continues to adequately conduct audits from the aspects of accuracy and regularity. The Board focuses on examining basic accountancy while considering the fact that there were fraud or improprieties in some ministries. Furthermore, the Board pays attention to the competitiveness and the transparency of contracts, through examining propriety of contract methods such as negotiated contracts and adequacy of the selection of contractors and confirming whether proper procedures for bidding and contracts are taken to secure fair competitive bidding.

Moreover, in light of the serious economic and financial situation of recent years, the Board puts greater importance on the aspects of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness. From the aspect of effectiveness, in particular, the Board actively endeavors to review the results of operations, projects and budget execution as well as situations of the assets possessed by the State and funds developed by subsidies. In such cases, the Board conducts audits with attention to auditees' self-evaluation of their policies and various measures carried out by the government for efficient and effective implementation of projects.

If there is any problem with the implementation of the operations, projects and the budget execution, the Board thoroughly investigates the causes and considers measures for improvement and if needed, abolishment of the programme.

In addition, to contribute to the improvement of the transparency and accountability of public administration and finance as well as the better project implementation, the Board analyzes and evaluates public finances such as the State's final accounts of revenues and expenditures, and more closely audits the financial status of the special accounts and the independent administrative agencies. In the above cases, the Board pays attention to utilize information on public accounting such as financial documents of special accounts prepared with reference to practices of corporate accounting.

(3) Approach corresponding to conditions of internal control

Since the conditions of internal control in auditees affect the level of adequacy of accounting to be ensured in auditees, etc., the Board pays sufficient attention to the effectiveness of the internal control. The Board also requests the auditees to improve their internal control systems, if necessary, so that they ensure the adequate level of accounting ,etc.

(4) Follow-up of the audit findings

The Board continually checks on whether or not auditees take remedial and preventative measures against improper and irregular cases to ensure that audit results are reflected in the State budget compilation as well as in project implementation adequately and effectively.

Moreover, concerning improper accounting in the Audit Report, the Board conducts audits necessary for improving similar cases with other auditees.

(5) Cooperation with the Diet

The Board always pays attention to the deliberations in the Diet. In auditing issues in response to audit requests from the Diet, the Board makes every effort to facilitate the Diet's examination and investigation by including the necessary research contents in the Board's audit activities, paying full attention to the intention of the Diet's request. In addition, to contribute to the Diet's sufficient examination on final accounts, the Board makes efforts to actively submit reports to the Diet and the Cabinet at any time as necessary.

(6) Improvement of audit capability

The Board enhances its ability to conduct audits through efforts such as the development of new audit methods to respond to the increasing complexity of society and economy as well as accompanying change in the State's financial and administrative operations.

The efforts include: research studies to vary the method and scope of audit activities, human resource development for auditing areas of expertise as well as recruitment of personnel who have acquired practical skills and experts from the private sector, promotion of the use of IT in audit activities and utilization of devices for audits. By adopting these practices, the Board conducts a full and thorough audit for not only accounting but also other related project/program matters as a whole.

4. Designing an Appropriate Audit Plan

The Board designs appropriate audit plans and carries them out to effectively and efficiently achieve its mission, based on the above-mentioned Basic Policy on Audit.

In the audit plan, the Board establishes its priority audit issues, on which it should focus in audits, taking into full consideration the scale and content of the budgets of auditees, measures, projects and programs, the situations of internal control such as internal audits and internal checks, the previous audits and results, etc.

Also, in auditing, the Board attempts to enhance and strengthen audit activities by promptly and flexibly responding to the progress status of audits as well as public interests, for example, reviewing the audit plan when necessary.