



**REPORT OF THE AUDITOR
GENERAL**

ON

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC ASSISTANCE
VOUCHER PROGRAMME**

PERFORMANCE AUDIT



The Auditor General is the external auditor of the public accounts of Guyana, and is responsible for conducting Financial and Compliance, Performance and Value-for-Money and Forensic Audits with respect to the Consolidated Financial Statements, the accounts of all budget agencies, local government bodies, all bodies and entities in which the State has controlling interest, and the account of all projects funded by way of loans or grants by any foreign State or organization.

In conducting Performance and Value-for-Money Audits, the Auditor General examines the extent to which a public entity is applying its resources and carrying out its activities economically, efficiently and effectively with due regard to ensuring effective internal management control.

This report has been prepared in accordance with Part V Section 24 (1) (b) of the Audit Act 2004. In conducting this Performance Audit, we followed the Code of Ethics and Standards and Guidelines for Performance Auditing of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), of which the Audit Office of Guyana is a member.

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PERFORMANCE AUDIT

COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme



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Glossary

Committee of Sponsoring Organizations (COSO)	COSO is a joint initiative of private sector organizations that is dedicated to providing thought leadership and guidance on enterprise risk management, internal control and fraud deterrence. It has established a widely adopted framework that is considered a best practice for designing, implementing and evaluating internal controls in organizations.
Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology (COBIT) Framework	COBIT is a framework created by the Information Systems Audit and Control Association (ISACA) for information technology management and governance. It is a comprehensive, internationally recognized guideline that can be applied to any organization and ensures quality, control, and reliability of information systems.
General Information Technology and Application Controls	<p>General IT Controls: A Control, other than an application control, that relates to the environment within which computer-based application systems are developed, maintained and operated, and that is therefore applicable to all applications.</p> <p>Application Controls: The policies, procedures and activities designed to provide reasonable assurance that objectives relevant to a given automated solution (application) are achieved.</p>
Information System Security	Information systems security refers to the processes and methodologies that focus on maintaining the confidentiality, integrity and availability of information.
Internal control	Rules, policies, and procedures implemented by those charged with governance, and management to provide reasonable assurance about the achievement of an entity's objectives with regard to reliability of financial reporting, effectiveness and efficiency of operations and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why we did this audit

The Government of Guyana provided economic relief to citizens during the pandemic via the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme. Persons received toiletries, food and sanitary supplies, by way of a voucher valued between \$25,000 and \$32,000. A performance audit for the period March to September 2020 was done to find how well the programme was managed.

Key messages

Officials processed COVID-19 vouchers in line with the programme guidelines. However, significant gaps were noted during the conduct of the audit. Officials of the National Data Management Authority did not respond to the audit findings.

What we found

People who needed assistance were denied. Over 9,000 out of 11,000 qualified applicants did not receive vouchers, and officials have not explained why. The programme excluded persons in the hinterland regions. Instead, they were promised hampers.

Payments worth millions were not verified. Vouchers totalling \$56M were not checked before paying suppliers. This weakness could have resulted in overpayment to suppliers and eligible persons not given much needed relief.

Vouchers not used were left unsecured. Over 3000 unused vouchers valued at least \$90M were unsecured on a desk. As a result, the vouchers could have been easily accessed and used to obtain items from suppliers.

Information system was not fully protected. Lack of standard controls put the information system at risk. Therefore, unauthorized persons could have changed or deleted information. In addition, there were no yearly security checks and business continuity and disaster recovery plans prepared.

Way forward

The Audit Office made 13 recommendations to management for improvements. Through the full implementation of the recommendations, future programmes will be better managed.

Introduction

1. Guyana recorded its first case of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in March 2020. In response, emergency control measures such as a curfew, stay-at-home orders, workplace closures, restrictions on the size of gatherings, and social distancing guidelines were implemented to curb the rapid spread of the disease. This resulted in loss of income due to unemployment and reduced productivity in workplaces. In order to provide some economic relief to persons who suffered financial losses, the Government implemented the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme.

Programme background

2. The COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme came into operation in April 2020. The objective of the Programme was to provide economic relief to vulnerable households through the supply of hampers with fresh foods, dry ration, toiletries, and sanitation items. The Programme targeted single-parents, senior citizens, disabled persons, and persons who suffered a loss of income due to the pandemic.

3. Persons interested in benefiting from the Programme were required to register online. Those without internet access were required to contact either the Ministry of Social Protection or the Ministry of Communities to have their application forms completed. Applicants were then shortlisted based on eligibility criteria approved by the Ministry of Finance. Eligible applicants' information was verified and approved. Vouchers valued between \$25,000 and \$32,000 were despatched by the Post Office. The voucher included a flyer showing the list of items that could be obtained from approved supermarkets and shops. The vouchers were encashed at supermarkets for the items. Suppliers submitted encashed vouchers to the Civil Defence Commission for reimbursements. The vouchers were not transferable or redeemable for cash.

4. The Programme was funded through the allocation of funds from the budget for the financial year 2020 of the various agencies responsible for the management of the Programme.

Roles and responsibilities

5. The COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme was executed through a collaborative effort between the Ministries of Finance, Communities and Social Protection; and the National Data Management Authority and the Civil Defence Commission. The roles and responsibilities of the agencies are described in the flowchart at Figure 1.

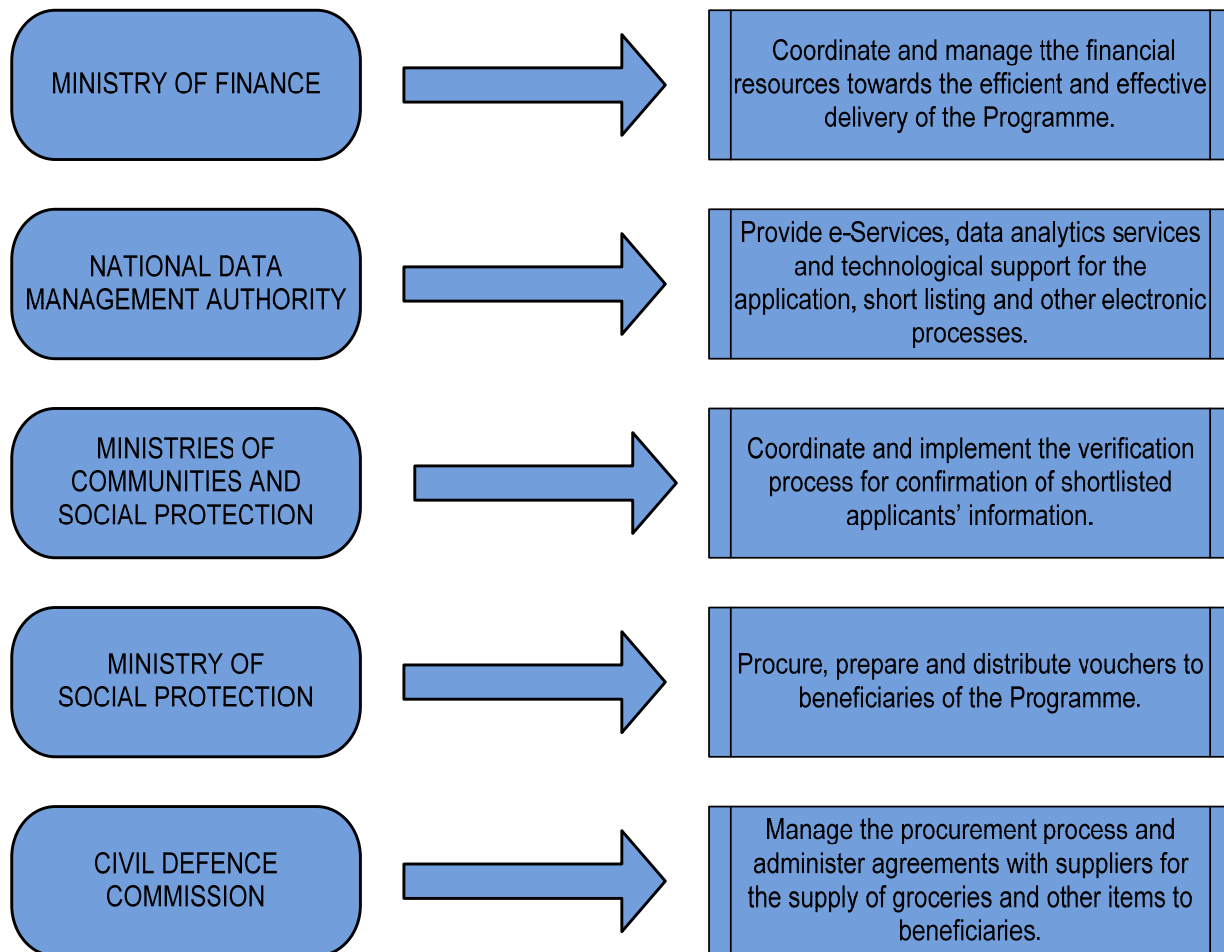


Figure 1 – Roles and responsibilities of agencies
Source: Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme information

Reasons for undertaking the audit

6. In order to provide economic relief to persons who suffered financial losses and unemployment due to COVID-19 pandemic, the Government implement the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme. A substantial amount was spent on the Programme to reimburse suppliers for items supplied to eligible persons. The Audit Office of Guyana has undertaken this review to determine whether the:

- Programme was effectively managed to ensure that only eligible applicants received assistance.
- Tender board procedures were followed to select suppliers.
- Payments made to suppliers for vouchers encashed were accurate.
- Information system used to process and manage data was secured.

Audit objective

7. The main objective was to determine whether the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme was effectively implemented and managed in accordance with applicable laws, regulations and guidelines.

8. The audit sub-objectives were to determine whether the:

- National Data Management Authority, Ministry of Communities and the Ministry of Social Protection processed applications and distributed vouchers in accordance with established criteria and guidelines to ensure only eligible individuals received assistance.
- Civil Defence Commission complied with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2003 for the procurement of suppliers, and whether payments made were in support of items supplied to beneficiaries of the Programme.
- National Data Management Authority implemented adequate General Information Technology and Application Controls to ensure that the security of the information system was maintained.

Audit criteria

9. Audit criteria are reasonable standards against which management practices, controls and reporting systems can be assessed. The audit criteria and their sources are presented in the “About the Audit” section of the report.

Report structure

10. This report consists of the following three chapters, which cover the Lines of Enquiry considered by this audit:

Chapter 1 - Processing of Applications and Distribution of Pandemic Assistance Vouchers.

Chapter 2 - Selection of Suppliers and Administration of Agreements.

Chapter 3 - General Information Technology and Application Controls.

Chapter 1

Processing of Applications and Distribution of Pandemic Assistance Vouchers

Objective: To determine whether the National Data Management Authority, the Ministry of Communities, and the Ministry of Social Protection processed applications and distributed vouchers in accordance with established criteria and guidelines to ensure only eligible individuals received assistance.

Criterion 1.1: We expected the National Data Management Authority to accept and assess applications in accordance with approved criteria, established in the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.

Application assessment process

11. The COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme was for residents of Regions № 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. The application process started in May 2020. Application forms were required to be submitted electronically to the National Data Management Authority by the 08 June 2020. At the closing date, 26,283 applications were received. The process used for application submission and assessment is set out in Figure 2 below.

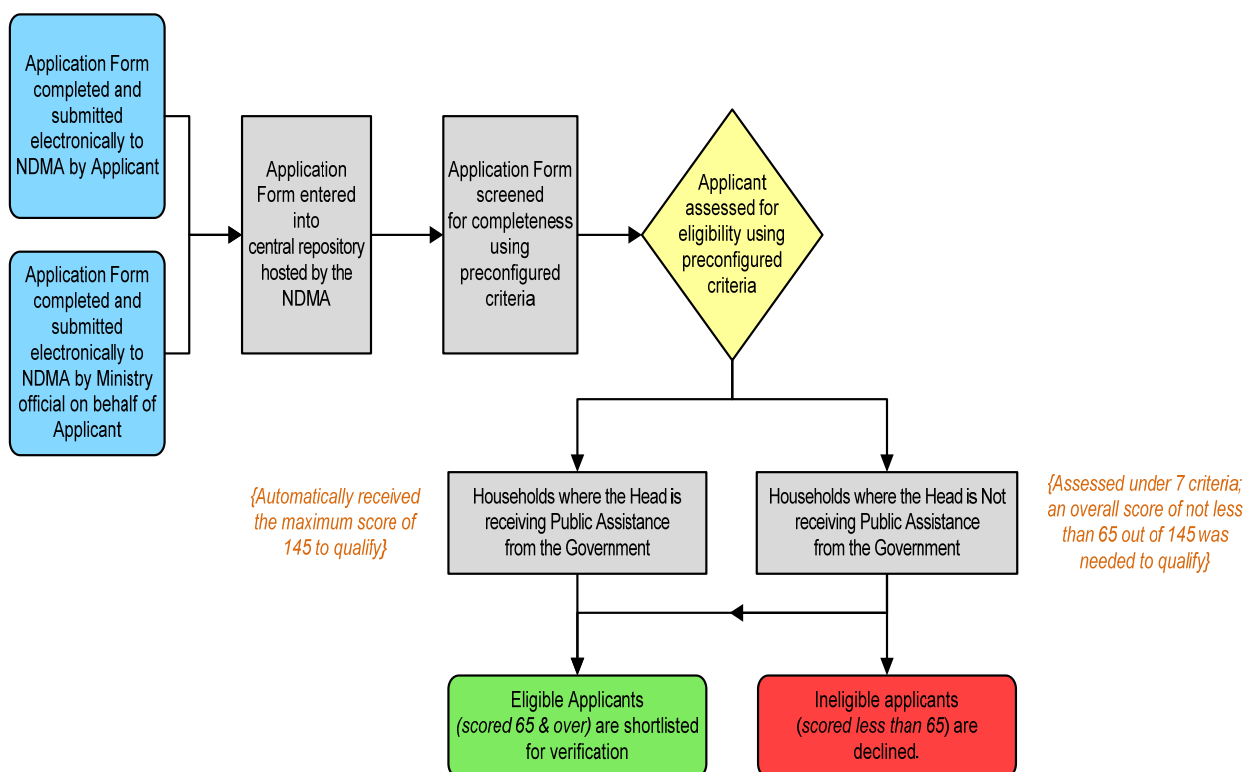


Figure 2 – Application and assessment process
Source: Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme information

12. The National Data Management Authority did not have adequate input controls to prevent inaccurate, incomplete and/or invalid data from being entered into the system. This resulted in more than one application being processed for an applicant. An examination of the database revealed seventy-one instances where the accepted forms of identification i.e. a national identification card, a passport or a driver’s licence, were not entered in the system. In addition, there were twenty-five instances where duplicate applications were processed by the system.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Management of the National Data Management Authority ensure appropriate controls are implemented for Programmes of a similar nature so that (i) all information accepted by the system is complete and in the required format, and (ii) applicants are uniquely identified to prevent duplicate entries being accepted by the system.*

Management’s Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not respond to the audit finding.

People who needed assistance were denied

13. Of the 11,098 applicants who gained the eligibility score of 65 points and over, only 1,814 were shortlisted for verification. The remaining 9,284 qualified applicants did not receive vouchers, and officials have not explained the reasons why.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Management of the National Data Management Authority present the reason/s for the disqualification of the applicants.*

Management's Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not respond to the audit finding.

Criterion 1.2: We expected the Ministries of Communities and Social Protection to have properly verified the shortlisted applicants' information in accordance with established criteria and the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines to determine the approved list of beneficiaries.

Applicants verification process

14. The applicants who gained 65 points and over were shortlisted. The shortlisted names were generated by the National Data Management Authority and submitted to the Ministry of Communities and the Ministry of Human Services to conduct the verification exercise. The exercise was led by the two ministries with support from other governmental agencies such as the Bureau of Statistics. The verification process was conducted during the period 15 to 23 June 2020. The verification process for the shortlisting of applicants' information is presented in Figure 3 below.

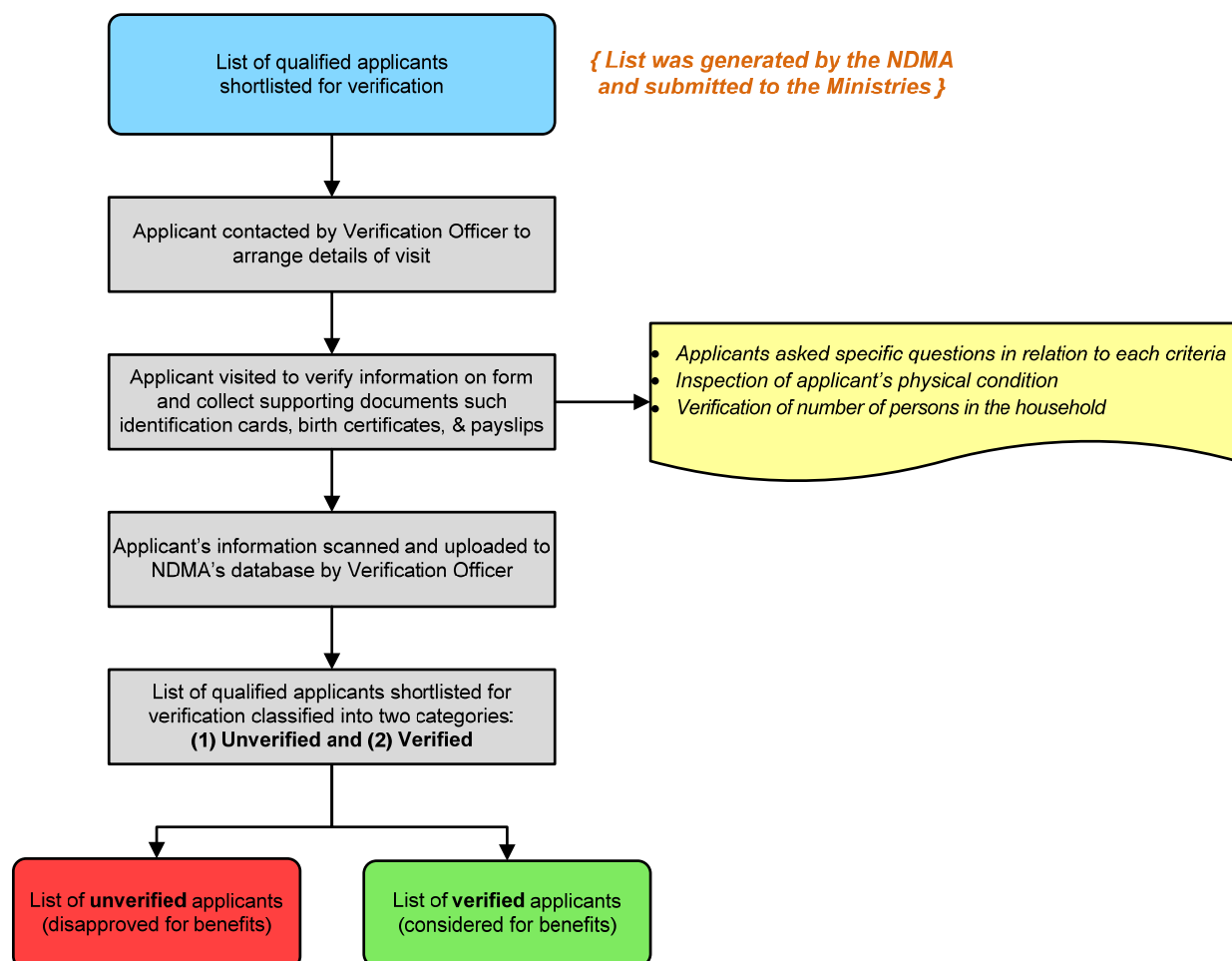


Figure 3 – Applicants verification process
Source: Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme information

Application controls were lacking

15. There was a lack of controls to prevent duplicate applications from being shortlisted and incomplete information being accepted by the system. An examination of the database of verified applications, revealed five sets of duplicate applications. In four instances, the names of the Verification Officers were not recorded. As a result, vital information that was required was not entered in the database.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that Management of the National Data Management Authority establish appropriate controls to ensure (i) duplicate applications are not shortlisted and (ii) all required information are inputted into the system before the verification process is completed.*

Management’s Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not respond to the audit finding.

16. Verification of information was done for applicants of Regions № 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. The programme was not for residents of Regions № 1, 7, 8 and 9. The residents of these Regions were promised hampers. However, we found nine applicants from Regions № 1, 7, 8 and 9 who were given vouchers. See Table 1 for details of persons who received vouchers.

Region №	Administrative Region	Village	Voucher №
1	Barima - Waini	Mabaruma	307
1	Barima - Waini	Mabaruma	308
1	Barima - Waini	Santa Rosa	309
7	Cuyuni - Mazaruni	Bartica	314
7	Cuyuni - Mazaruni	Bartica	315
8	Potaro - Siparuni	Mahdia	310
9	Upper Takutu - Upper Essequibo	Lethem	311
9	Upper Takutu - Upper Essequibo	Lethem	312
9	Upper Takutu - Upper Essequibo	St. Ignatius	313

Table 1 – Persons who received vouchers in Regions № 1, 7, 8 and 9

Source: Beneficiaries list

17. Verification Officers were recruited and trained on how to conduct the verification process. We observed that one Verification Officer verified seven of the nine applicants. However, an examination of the training attendance register revealed that the officer never attended training. Also, the dates of the verifications were not recorded in the verification report. In relation to the other two applicants, the names of the Verification Officers were not stated.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Head of Budget Agencies present for audit, documentation to support the reason/s for conducting verifications and issuing vouchers in the Regions where the Programme was not approved.*

Management’s Response: The Officers from the Ministry of Human Services who were trained, only conducted verification exercise in Regions № 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 as stipulated. The Officers who verified Regions № 1, 8 and 9 were from the Ministry of Communities and were trained in the first batch. The two applicants from Region № 7 were not verified because they were Public Assistance recipients and qualified for assistance automatically, henceforth there was no need for verification. The verified list of applicants was sent to the Ministry by the National Data Management Authority. The vouchers were prepared and sent to the Guyana Post Office Corporation for mailing to the recipients within the regions.

Management’s Response: The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Communities did not respond to the audit finding.

Criterion 1.3: We expected the Ministry of Human Services to determine the approved final list of beneficiaries, and to prepare and distribute vouchers to only approved beneficiaries in accordance with the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.

Voucher approval and distribution process

18. The Ministry of Human Services was responsible for determining the beneficiaries and distributing vouchers to them. The National Data Management Authority produced the first set of vouchers on the 23 June 2020, which was sent to the Ministry for distribution. The distribution process started on the 29 June 2020 and ended on the 31 August 2020. The distribution process is shown at Figure 4 below.

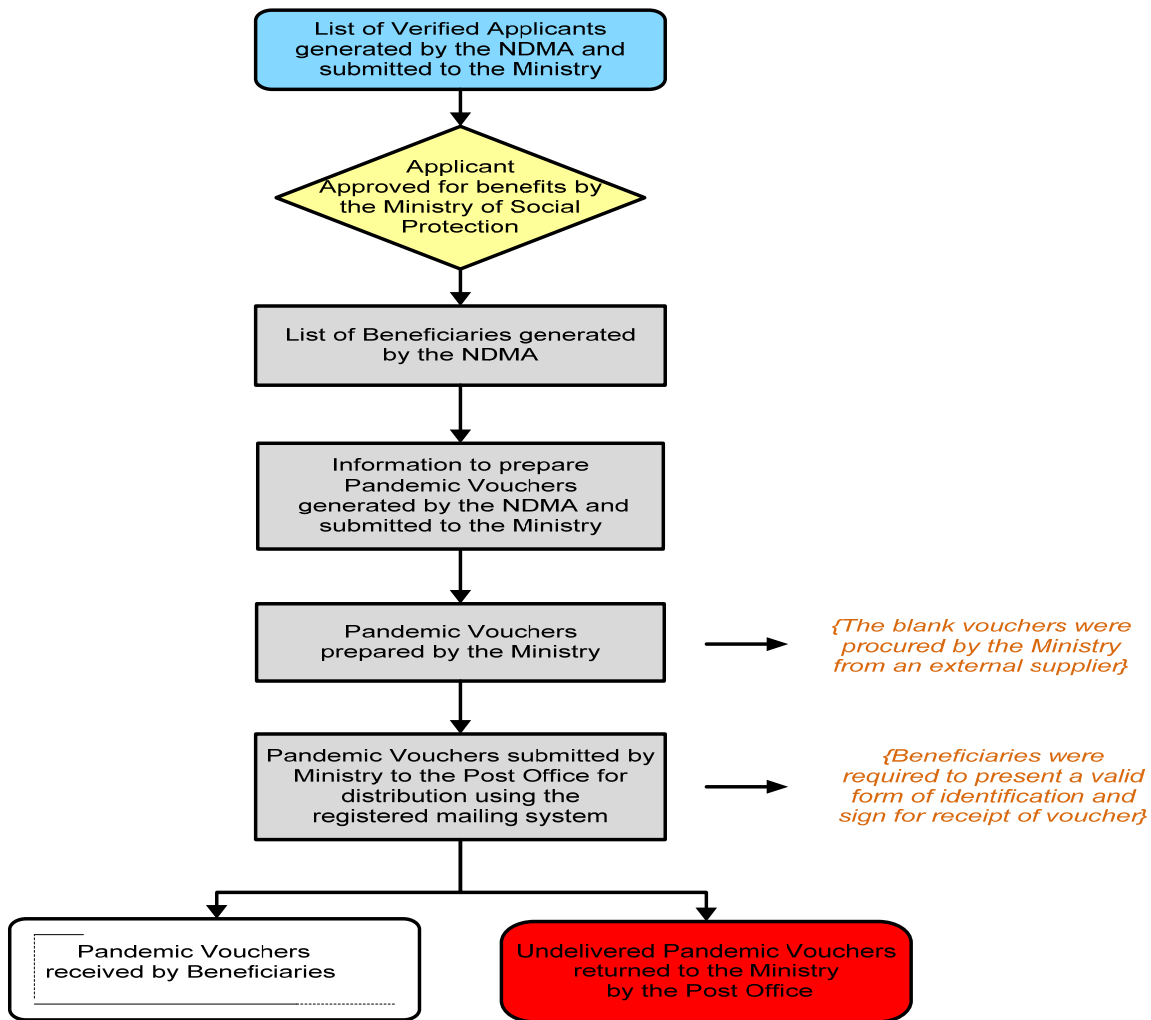


Figure 4 – Approval and distribution process
 Source: Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme information

Reasons for not approving all applicants unknown

19. The National Data Management Authority shortlisted 1,814 applications. The Ministries verified 1,774 shortlisted applicants and processed 1,760 vouchers for verified applicants. Of the remaining fourteen applicants, vouchers were not processed for five because they were duplicate entries. The reason for not approving the other nine applications could not be determined.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Head of Budget Agency of the Ministry of Human Services establish appropriate controls to prevent the processing of duplicate applications.*

Management’s Response: The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Human Services explained that the remaining nine applications could not be verified and as a result could not be approved.

Procurement of pandemic vouchers

20. The Ministry of Human Services was responsible for preparing the Pandemic Assistance Vouchers. The process involved (i) procuring the vouchers and stickers, (ii) placing the security stickers on the vouchers, and (iii) printing and affixing name labels on the vouchers. The procurement of the vouchers and security stickers were sourced from two local suppliers contracted by the Ministry. The name labels with the beneficiaries’ information were printed in-house by the Ministry of Social Protection with assistance from the National Data Management Authority. A total of 5,000 vouchers and security stickers were procured at a cost of \$103,000. The items were verified as being received and entered into the store’s record on the 18 June 2020. Table 2 gives a breakdown of the total pandemic vouchers procured, including used and un-used vouchers.

Sequence of Numbers	Quantity of Vouchers	Remarks
0001 — 0050	50	Specimen Vouchers
0051 — 1810	1,760	Used Vouchers (includes 4 duplicates)
1811 — 5000	3,190	Un-used Vouchers
Total	5,000	

Table 2 – Pandemic vouchers procured, used and un-used
Source: Stores records and voucher usage report

Vouchers left unsecured

21. Verification exercise conducted on the 18 August 2020, revealed that over 3,000 unused vouchers valued at approximately \$90M were left unsecured on a desk and could have been accessed by unauthorised personnel, as shown at Figure 5 below. This was as a result of all 5,000 vouchers being requisitioned and collected from the stores on the 18 June 2020. However, only

1,760 vouchers were needed for the approved applications. As a result, the unused vouchers could have been accessed and used to obtain items from suppliers.



Figure 5 - Storage of the unused pandemic vouchers
Source: Physical verification on 18.8.2020

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Human Services put systems in place to ensure the unused pandemic vouchers are properly stored and secured at all times to prevent unauthorised access.*

Management's Response: The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Human Services explained that all vouchers were requisitioned because the process was ongoing and was kept for easy access by the Distribution Officers. Unused vouchers were returned to the stores for checking off then placed in safekeeping. At the time of the visit, the Stores Clerk was preparing to check off the vouchers. Hence, the state in which it was seen in the picture.

Conclusion

22. All applications were not processed and vouchers were not distributed in accordance with established criteria and guidelines of the Programme. Significant gaps were seen where controls were weak, which caused duplicate applications to go undetected and processed. Also, vouchers were distributed to persons in Regions not identified for vouchers. We must conclude that established criteria and guidelines were not always followed to ensure that only eligible individuals received vouchers.

Chapter 2

Selection of Suppliers and Administration of Agreement

Objective: *To determine whether the Civil Defence Commission complied with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2003 and the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines for the selection of suppliers, and whether payments made were in support of items supplied to beneficiaries of the Programme.*

Criterion 2.1: We expected the Civil Defence Commission to have managed the tendering process for the selection of suppliers to supply goods and other items to beneficiaries of the Programme in accordance with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2003 and the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.

Suppliers selection process

23. We examined the tendering process used to select suppliers for the Programme. The Civil Defence Commission was responsible for executing the tendering process summarized in Figure 6 below.



Figure 6 – Tendering process for suppliers
Source: Invitation to tender

24. The Civil Defence Commission was responsible for publishing the invitation to tender in newspapers of wide circulation and posting in public places. The advertisements were published during the period 11 to 17 June 2020. Nine suppliers from Regions № 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10 submitted their Expressions of Interest (EOIs), as detailed in Table 3 below.

Region	№. of Suppliers
Region 2 - Pomeroon - Supenaam	1
Region 4 - Demerara - Mahaica	5
Region 6 - East Berbice - Corentyne	1
Region 7 - Cuyuni - Mazaruni	1
Region 10 - Upper Demerara-Upper Berbice	1
Total	9

Table 3 – Expressions of interest received
Source: Evaluation report

25. The Expressions of Interest were assessed based on specific criteria used to shortlist qualified suppliers. The criteria included the submission of Business Registration, Guyana Revenue Authority, and the National Insurance Scheme compliance certificates. Examination of the certificates showed that two suppliers copies of business registration certificates, income tax and national insurance compliances were unreadable. As such, it could not be determined whether the two suppliers were qualified to participate in the process.

Management’s Response: The Head of the Civil Defence Commission explained that documents referred to were electronically submitted as required by the criteria, and a few were indeed illegible. A request was made to the suppliers to resend. However, not all suppliers would have responded in a timely manner. The Civil Defence Commission takes note of this anomaly and pledges to take better care in future transactions.

Suppliers letters of credit were not seen

26. The suppliers were required to provide a letter of credit to show that they have access to financing. However, the suppliers’ letters of credit were not presented for audit scrutiny. As a result, we could not say whether the Civil Defence Commission was protected against suppliers’ non-performance.

Management’s Response: The Head of the Civil Defence Commission explained that selection criteria were designed by the Ministry of Finance and discussed in detail with the Committee set up to spearhead the project, which included the Ministry of Social Protection, National Procurement and Tender Administration Board, Ministry of Finance, National Data Management Authority, and Civil Defence Commission, among other agencies. The project was open to

supermarkets and community shops. Given that the latter would not have been in a position to obtain and produce a letter of credit; and also, the fact that the procurement process did not make a distinction between the two categories of business, it was agreed that in order for the project to go forward without further delay, the letter of credit requirement would be relaxed.

Suppliers quotations were evaluated

27. Suppliers were required to submit quotations for the items to be supplied. The Civil Defence Commission's Evaluation Committee was required to assess the quotations against prevailing market prices and the estimated costs of the hampers. The Committee conducted the evaluation and all nine suppliers were deemed satisfactory to participate in the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme.

28. The Evaluation Report was required to be submitted to the Guyana Defence Force Tender Board for approval. However, documentation in support of the Defence Board approval was not presented for audit scrutiny.

29. In July 2020, a request was made to the Chairman of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board to use the single-source method of procurement. In August 2020, approval was granted for procurement of items from the nine suppliers in the sum of \$56.320M. Approval was also granted for the vouchers to be encashed at the suppliers. The value of each voucher ranged from \$25,000 to \$32,000.

Suppliers signed memoranda of agreements

30. The Memoranda of Agreements were signed with eight suppliers on the 29 June 2020, thirty-four days before the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board approval, which was granted on 1 August 2020. The first set of pandemic vouchers were sent to the Guyana Post Office Corporation for delivery to beneficiaries on the 23 June 2020, seven days before signing the agreements.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that Management of the Civil Defence Commission put measures in place to ensure that Tender Board Approvals are obtained before signing the Memorandum of Agreements with Suppliers.*

Management's Response: The Head of the Civil Defence Commission explained that the Commission received the working draft copies of the Memoranda of Agreements from Ministry of Finance on 23 June 2020 along with the updated guidelines for the roll out of the project. The Memoranda of Agreements were discussed in a meeting on the same day with the Committee after which they were prepared for the suppliers to sign. At this point, the vouchers were already dispatched by the Ministry of Social Protection and were being received by beneficiaries.

Criterion 2.2: We expected the Civil Defence Commission to have reconciled the vouchers encashed by suppliers against the vouchers despatched by the Ministry of Social Protection before effecting payments in accordance with the requirements of the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.

31. Approved suppliers were required to encash vouchers from beneficiaries for items supplied in accordance with the agreement. Within fourteen days suppliers were required to submit the encashed vouchers to the Civil Defence Commission for verification. The purpose of the verification process was to reconcile encashed vouchers with despatched vouchers to enable payments to suppliers. The payments were processed by the Guyana Defence Force.

32. Only 1,658 pandemic vouchers of the 1,706 vouchers delivered to recipients were honored as at 30 September 2020. The status of the remaining forty-eight could not be determined.

Payments to suppliers were not verified

33. Eight suppliers presented encashed vouchers to the Civil Defence Commission for reimbursements. As at October 2020, the eight suppliers received \$51M as payment for the 1,658 vouchers honored. However, reconciliations of vouchers encashed with vouchers despatched were not presented for audit verification. This weakness could have resulted in overpayment to suppliers and eligible persons not given much needed relief.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that Management of the Civil Defence Commission present for audit, reconciliations of encashed and issued vouchers.*

Management's Response: The Head of the Civil Defence Commission explained that at the time of the Audit, reconciliation was on-going and was subsequently completed. A total of forty-eight (48) vouchers, representing the difference between the number of vouchers issued and those honored, in monetary value was returned to the Ministry of Finance by the Guyana Defence Force.

Conclusion

34. Our review indicated that the procurement procedure was not fully adhered to. The Tender Board approval was obtained after suppliers signed the Memoranda of Agreements. Also, there was no evidence that reconciliation was done before suppliers were reimbursed for items supplied. As such, we conclude that the procurement process was not properly managed.

Chapter 3

General Information Technology and Application Controls

Objective: *To determine whether the National Data Management Authority implemented adequate General Information Technology and Application Controls to ensure that the security of the information system was maintained.*

Criterion 3.1: We expected that the National Data Management Authority had systems in place to ensure that access to the hardware, software, database and network established for the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme were controlled, protected and secured.

35. The National Data Management Authority established and managed the information system for the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme. The system was used to collect, analyze and process data of persons who had applied for relief. The organization used various technology platforms and tools to manage this system, which included the portal through which applications were submitted. The portal for the Programme was established within the government's website, which the Authority also managed.

Information technology system not fully protected

36. The Control Objective for Information and Related Technology Framework for control over the information technology process requires:

- system security that satisfies the business requirement;
- information safeguard against unauthorized use, disclosure or modification, damage or loss; and
- systems, data and programmes access are restricted to authorized users.

37. As such, we expect management to have firewalls, virus protection and detection mechanisms in place; to test its security and report on it.

38. The National Data Management Authority did not ensure that all applications and platforms were secured, as security assessment was not performed on the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme information system. As a result, the information system could be exposed to security threats which could alter, damage or destroy data.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Management of the National Data Management Authority ensure that yearly security assessment of the management system is conducted to ensure continued security.*

Management's Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not reply to the audit finding.

39. Session time-out is another way of protecting an information technology system from unauthorized use and hacking attempts. We were informed that the National Data Management Authority has a programmed session time-out for users. The time-out is activated after one hour of inactivity for Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Excel and Power BI users. Jaspersoft Report server users are allowed twenty minutes of inactivity before session time-out is activated.

40. There is no session time-out for users of the Government.gy and Kobo Toolbox platforms. Management explained that the Government.gy platform was used to submit the COVID-19 pandemic assistance electronic application forms and persons were not required to login to access or submit the form. As it relates to the Kobo Toolbox platform, this was used by government clerks to collect data for the electronic application forms. The platform was designed to be used while offline, so user sessions were allowed until the person logout.

41. Access to the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Database was controlled and protected with user status and password. This was assigned based on the user job title, role and responsibility within the programme. The Senior Information Communications Technology Engineer/Manager, was the only person authorized to change data. Verification Officers were allowed to input data, while the other users only had access to read information within the database.

Users did not have unique passwords

42. We found that not all users were programmed into the system according to their legal names. An examination of the database logs revealed that individuals had accessed the database using passwords 'Administrator' and 'Analyst'. This resulted in weakness of the controls established for the database. Therefore, unauthorised persons could have access to change or delete information.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Management of the National Data Management Authority put measures in place to ensure all users are assigned a unique password, so that only authorised persons can access the database.*

Management's Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not reply to the audit finding.

Servers were not fully protected

43. The Control Objective for Information and Related Technology Framework requires management to have:

- control over the information technology process of managing facilities that satisfies the business requirement;
- suitable physical surrounding which protects the information technology equipment and people against man-made and natural hazard; and
- suitable environmental and physical controls which are regularly reviewed for their proper functioning.

44. As such, we expected management to have physical security controls in place for the facilities, which house the servers and other information technology equipment to ensure its proper functioning is maintained.

45. The National Data Management Authority has three layers of physical security in place to control access to its servers and other critical information technology equipment. The servers and equipment were only accessed by management approval and in the presence of a member of the Data Centre Services Unit.

46. We observed that the servers were housed in a specialized facility. They were placed on concrete base that is elevated 3½ feet from the ground. This would be deemed inadequate taking into consideration that the city is prone to flooding. Industry best practices recommend that servers are located away from ground level to mitigate the risks of natural disasters, such as flooding.

47. There is a fire control system in place to protect the servers, which includes fire, smoke and temperature detectors and a halocarbon fire cabinet. The halocarbon is clean gas that leaves no residue and is environmentally safe. The gas is automatically released whenever smoke is detected within the server room. When released, it changes the composition of oxygen which is needed for fire to burn.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that the Management of the National Data Management Authority, ensure that the location housing the server room meets international best practices specifications to mitigate the risk of damage.*

Management's Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not reply to the audit finding.

Criterion 3.2: We expected that the National Data Management Authority had controls in place for the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme's Information System to ensure only complete, accurate and authorized data was accepted and processed, and the availability of the system was maintained.

Absence of Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans

48. The Control Objective for Information and Related Technology Framework for control over the information technology process states that management should have:

- continuous service that satisfies the business requirement;
- available information technology services as required to ensure a minimum business impact in the event of a major disruption; and
- operational and tested information technology continuity plan, which is in line with the overall Business Continuity Plan; and related business requirements.

49. As such, we expected management to have an operational and tested (i) Business Continuity Plan; and (ii) a Disaster Recovery Plan in place, which includes back-up, security and recovery of information for its database and government online portal.

50. We were informed that the National Data Management Authority does not have a Business Continuity Plan or a Disaster Recovery Plan in place for the programme's database and applications. In the absence of these plans, it could not be determined whether mission critical applications and the database could be restored in a timely and orderly manner after an information technology disaster or incident. In addition, information generated from activities within the database is backed-up every fourteen days at three locations, including two offsite locations. All backup information is coded and access is restricted by physical security and authorization protocols to ensure its security.

Recommendation: *The Audit Office recommends that Management of the National Data Management Authority should seek to have an Information Technology Business Continuity Plan and a Disaster Recovery Plan developed, implemented and tested as soon as possible. Also, ensure that the plans are updated as required to guarantee that the applications and database can be restored/recovered in the event of a disaster.*

Management's Response: The Management of the National Data Management Authority did not reply to the audit finding.

Controls were in place to protect data

51. The Control Objective for Information and Related Technology Framework for control over the information technology process of states that management should:

- manage data that satisfies the business requirement;
- ensure that data remains complete, accurate and valid during its input, update and storage; and
- have an effective combination of application and general controls over the information technology operations.

52. As such, we expected management to have controls in place that allows only complete and accurate data to be inputted, processed and stored in the database, and reliable information produced.

53. Management indicated that a number of measures were put in place individually and collectively to protect the integrity of data inputted, processed, stored and produced from the COVID-19 pandemic assistance database. As such, the risks of incorrect data are minimized, so reliance could be placed on information generated from the system.

54. We found that the National Data Management Authority used the Jasper Software to establish and manage the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance database. It allowed management to customize the database programs, its access, security, use and information generated. This was supported with user status logs, login passwords and session timeouts. It also supported restricted access to data changes, system report requests and generation, multiple device use and unrestricted location use.

55. The Ministry of Communities was responsible for data collection, input and verification. Verification Officers were recruited and trained on how to conduct the verification process. They met the applicants in person, verified and took pictures of personal information provided and uploaded the system. The training ensured that the Verification Officers were knowledgeable about data collection methods and security.

Conclusion

56. Although there were controls to protect the information technology equipment, these were not sufficient to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the information system. This was evident as users shared common passwords. No yearly security assessment was conducted on the online portal, which houses the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance database. There were no Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery Plans in place. Also, the servers were not fully protected from disasters. We conclude that the controls in place were not adequate to ensure the security of the information system was maintained.

About the Audit

The audit sought to determine whether the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme was effectively implemented and managed to ensure only eligible applicants received assistance, accurate payments were made to suppliers, and the security, integrity and availability of the information system was maintained.

Scope and Approach

The audit covered the period 1 March 2020 to 30 September 2020. The audit examined Government's management of Phase 1 of the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, guidelines and international best practices.

Audit Methodology

In undertaking this audit, we used the following audit methodology:

- interview key officials;
- review and examine key documents including electronic records and data on applicants of the Programme;
- verify stores items;
- provide a draft audit report to the Management of the responsible agencies for review of accuracy of the findings.

Audit Criteria and Sources

The audit criteria and sources used in the conduct of the audit are as follows:

PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS AND DISTRIBUTION OF PANDEMIC ASSISTANCE VOUCHERS

AUDIT CRITERIA	SOURCES
1.1. We expected the National Data Management Authority to accept and assess applications in accordance with approved criteria established in the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.	❖ COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme - Approved Selection Criteria and Eligibility Scoring Range for Applicants.
1.2. We expected the Ministries of Communities and Social Protection to have properly verified the shortlisted applicants' information in accordance with established criteria and the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines to determine the approved list of beneficiaries.	❖ COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme - Methodology for the Verification Process and Verification Evidence Required.
1.3. We expected the Ministry of Social Protection to determine the approved final list of beneficiaries, and to prepare and distribute vouchers to only approved beneficiaries in accordance with the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.	❖ COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines - Section 5: 5.1 & 5.3.
SELECTION OF SUPPLIES AND ADMINISTRATION OF AGREEMENTS	
2.1. We expected the Civil Defence Commission to have managed the tendering process for the selection of suppliers to supply goods and other items to beneficiaries of the Programme in accordance with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2003 and the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.	❖ Procurement Act 2003 - Part V - Section 1 - 30. (1) & (2), Part III – Section 23. (5 – 7), Part V - Section 111 - 39. (1) & (2) & 42. (1) & (2). ❖ The Cooperative Republic of Guyana COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines - Section 5: 5. 2.
2.2. We expected the Civil Defence Commission to have reconciled the vouchers encashed by suppliers against the vouchers despatched by the Ministry of Social Protection before effecting payments in	❖ The Cooperative Republic of Guyana COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines Section 5.4 & 5.5.

AUDIT CRITERIA	SOURCES
accordance with the requirements of the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Guidelines.	❖ Fiscal Management and Accountability Act 2003 Part II 11. (1) (a).
GENERAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND APPLICATION CONTROLS	
3.1. We expected that the National Data Management Authority had systems in place to ensure that access to the hardware, software, database and network established for the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme were controlled, protected and secured.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ IT Governance Institute TM Control Objective for Information and Related Technology (COBIT) Framework 3rd Edition, DS4, 5 & 12. ❖ Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) Framework, Control Activities Component.
3.2. We expected that the National Data Management Authority had controls in place for the COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme's Information System to ensure only complete, accurate and authorized data was accepted and processed, and the availability of the system was maintained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ IT Governance Institute TM Control Objective for Information and Related Technology (COBIT) Framework 3rd Edition, DS11 & M2. ❖ Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) Framework Monitoring Activities Component.