



STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

QUALITY ASSURANCE FIELD ASSESSMENTS

NEIW PCC

Effective 1/11/2023

Version 1.0

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Bialowas".

02/02/2023

Emily Bialowas
Quality Assurance Program Manager

Date

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan J. Sullivan".

02/02/2023

Susan J. Sullivan
Executive Director

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Summary	3
II. Definitions	3
III. Procedure	4
Phase 1: Planning and Preparation	4
Phase 2: Onsite Assessment.....	5
Phase 3: Reporting and Communication	6

APPENDICES

- Appendix A: QA Field Assessment Data Sheet
- Appendix B: Photography Guide for Field Assessments
- Appendix C: QA Field Assessment Report Template

DOCUMENT CONTROL INFORMATION

Revised By	Date	Version	Summary of Changes
Emily Bialowas, QAPM	1/11/23	1.0	Initial Version

This SOP will be reviewed annually.

I. SUMMARY

This document was prepared to assist NEIWPCC staff in understanding the process for completing quality assurance field assessments on active projects that have NEIWPCC quality assurance project plans (QAPPs). All NEIWPCC QAPPs have language in them that authorizes NEIWPCC staff to conduct assessments to determine conformance and compliance with the plan as documented in the QAPP.

II. DEFINITIONS

QMP	Quality management plan. Overarching document that describes NEIWPCC's quality program.
QAPP	Quality assurance project plan (including all associated appendices, checklists, and forms)
Unique identifier	Alphanumeric label assigned to each QAPP submitted for NEIWPCC review and approval
NEIWPCC project manager (PM)	NEIWPCC staff person responsible for oversight of project in need of an approved QAPP
QAPP Tracker	Database used to track information and status of QAPP review and approval
QAPM	Quality assurance program manager (currently Emily Bialowas) is the point-of-contact for all quality assurance activities
Designee	Quality assurance program manager designee. An appropriately trained and certified staff person selected by the QAPM to review and approve a particular QAPP
Assessors	The individual or team conducting the QA field assessment. This can be the project manager on a project they oversee or the QAPM or one of their designees. Multiple NEIWPCC staff can participate in an assessment as assessors.
Project team	The individual or group of individuals responsible for implementing a given project. This may include the project manager for those projects directly implemented by NEIWPCC staff.

III. PROCEDURE

The primary objective of a quality assurance field assessment is to evaluate whether a project is being conducted in accordance with its approved QAPP and, if it is not, to take corrective actions to ensure that the data collected in the project are of sufficient quality to meet the stated objectives. In addition, field assessments allow an opportunity for staff in oversight positions to observe a project's implementation and better understand future opportunities for related projects. Field assessments are also an excellent avenue to collect pictures and videos of the work that NEIWPCPC funds and completes, which can be used in communications products and internal and external presentations.

Two groups of individuals are authorized to complete QA field assessments: project managers and the QAPM and their designees. Project managers are authorized to perform assessments of any project that they have oversight on (e.g., they signed the approved QAPP in a programmatic oversight role). The QAPM and their designees are authorized to assess any project with a NEIWPCPC-approved QAPP.

A typical field assessment occurs in three phases:

- Phase 1: Planning and Preparation
- Phase 2: Onsite Assessment
- Phase 3: Reporting and Communication

Details on each of these three phases is included below.

PHASE 1: PLANNING AND PREPARATION

It is important to prepare for a QA Field Assessment and to communicate accurately to the team under assessment about the expectations for the day and the potential outcomes of the assessment. Though most assessments go smoothly, and most teams operate within the confines of their documented plan, if you observe any nonconformances with the QAPP or issues with the data collection procedures, you *must* take action. If you have not communicated openly with the project team in advance on the potential outcomes of the assessment, your actions may cause friction with the project team and may lead to more challenges in your oversight role moving forward.

Step 1: Identify Candidate Projects and Schedule Assessments

1.1: Project managers, division directors, and the QAPM and their designees can all identify potential projects for QA field assessments. As indicated in the name, a project must contain a field data collection component to be eligible for a field assessment. Regardless of the role of the assessor on the project, the individual coordinating the assessment should notify the QAPM of any field assessments that are under consideration or planned.

1.2: The project manager (PM) should contact the project team implementing the project and notify them of the assessment, gathering information on when field work is planned¹.

¹ Typically, field assessments are coordinated with the project team in advance. However, NEIWPCPC has the authority to conduct assessments without advance notice to the project team. This is not a regular practice but is a tool that can be used if a project team is suspected of operating outside of the bounds of the QAPP and there is concern that a pre-arranged assessment will not result in an accurate representation of the project team's work. Any PM that has such a concern should contact the QAPM.

1.3: The PM works with the QAPM to determine the appropriate assessors for the project and schedules a date and time for the assessment with the project team and assessors². The PM should communicate expectations and potential outcomes to the project team.

Step 2: Prepare for the Onsite Assessment

2.1: The assessors review the approved QAPP for the project. If the QAPM or one of their designees is assessing the project, they will contact the PM to learn about the current status of the project and will conduct a review of the available quarterly reports for the project.

2.2: The assessors compile relevant documents and equipment for the onsite assessment, including a copy of the QAPP for reference, a copy of the QA Field Assessment Data Sheet (Appendix A), and a camera or smartphone for taking pictures.

PHASE 2: ONSITE ASSESSMENT

During the assessment itself, it is important that assessors are observant and actively compare the activities they observe with the approved QAPP. Assessors should ask questions, document notes of the activities of the day, and take pictures and videos.

Step 3: Complete Assessment

3.1: The assessors accompany the project team during their field work and compare the work of the project team to the approved QAPP. The assessors should not participate directly in data collection activities, though the project team often appreciates an extra set of hands in unloading and carrying supplies and equipment. It is at the discretion of the assessors the extent to which they assist the project team in logistical activities.

3.2: The assessors complete the QA Field Assessment Data Sheet (Appendix A), document the activities that they observe, and take pictures of the activities of the project team (refer to Appendix B for guidance on taking pictures and videos during field assessments).

3.3: If any noncompliance or nonconformance to the QAPP is observed, the assessors initiate necessary corrective actions. For minor issues, corrective actions may include instruction to the project team on changes to their procedures to return to compliance with the QAPP or notation of minor corrections that need to be made in a memo update to the QAPP. For more significant issues, the assessors may need to issue an immediate stop work order or work with the QAPM to develop additional corrective actions that follow. Note that any nonconformance or noncompliance observed, as well as any corrective actions issued during the assessment, must be documented.

NOTE: Contact the QAPM if you are uncertain of how to proceed when faced with taking corrective actions. It is critical that the QAPM is informed of the assessment in advance so that they are available by phone in the case that the assessors need support.

² QA field assessments may be conducted for both projects implemented by contractors and those directly implemented by NEIWPCC staff. For those projects implemented by NEIWPCC staff, the QAPM or their designee should be included as an assessor, as often the PM on such a project is a direct participant in data collection.

PHASE 3: REPORTING AND COMMUNICATION

Accurate and complete documentation is critical in all quality assurance-related activities. A field assessment report template is included as Appendix C and a fillable Word version is available upon request to the QAPM.

Step 4: Write Report

4.1: The assessors document their observations, any nonconformance or noncompliance, and corrective actions taken in a report. Pictures should be included in the report with descriptive captions, including the names of each person shown in the picture and the activity taking place.

NOTE: Before submitting the report, the assessors should contact the QAPM if any nonconformance or noncompliance was observed to ensure that the documentation is appropriate and any additional actions have been identified.

4.2: The assessors submit their report to the QAPM by email in Word format, including a copy of the completed QA Field Assessment Data Sheet.

4.3: The QAPM proofs the report and ensures all documentation is included. The QAPM finalizes the report and produces a final pdf version, which includes a copy of the QA Field Assessment Data Sheet. A copy of this report should be retained on the Lowell office server in the appropriate folder ("I:\COMMON\Quality\Assessments\Field Assessments").

4.4: The QAPM enters a record in the QAPP Tracker database for the field assessment using the "Field Assessments" form.

Step 5: Communicate Findings to Leadership

5.1: The QAPM notifies the QMSC of the completion of the field assessment by email, including a copy of the final report for reference. All assessors should be copied on this message. During distribution, the location of pictures and videos on the server should be provided to the appropriate communications staff person for their use.

Step 6: Report Assessment Activity to EPA

6.1: The QAPM includes field assessment activity in the quarterly report for the Quality Program.

6.2: The QAPM includes information about the field assessment in the annual system status report and quality management plan review. This document should include a copy of the full field assessment report as an appendix.

APPENDIX A: QA FIELD ASSESSMENT DATA SHEET

Note that a fillable Word document is available from the QAPM upon request.



QA FIELD ASSESSMENT DATA SHEET

Project Title:

QAPP ID:

Assessor(s):

Assessment Date:

Project Location:

Project Staff:

Brief Project Description:

Is there an approved QA Project Plan for the overall project and has it been reviewed by all appropriate personnel?

Is a copy of the current approved QA Project Plan maintained at the site? If not, briefly describe how and where quality assurance and quality control requirements and procedures are documented at the site.

Is the implementation of the project in accordance with the QA Project Plan?

Are there deviations from the QA Project Plan? (If yes, explain)

Do any deviations from the QA Project Plan affect data quality?

Have any corrective actions been taken during the project?

Did these corrective actions impact data quality (If yes, describe)

APPENDIX B: PHOTOGRAPHY GUIDE FOR FIELD ASSESSMENTS

Pictures and videos are a critical part of the documentation of activities for QA field assessments. As much as is feasible, pictures of all data collection activities should be captured. If you observe any nonconformance or noncompliance to the QAPP, those specific actions should be captured in pictures and/or videos. If there are multiple assessors on site, consider assigning one as a photographer.

Beyond the utility purpose of documentation, pictures and videos captured during field assessments are an important source of media for our communications staff. Capturing landscapes, general activities of the project team, interaction among the assessors and the project team, or other engaging topics is a valuable activity during field assessments. Photos that you include in your assessment report are shared with Headquarters-based communication staff during distribution of the assessment report to the QMSC. If you have additional photos or videos that you would like to share with them, send them to photos@neiwppcc.org or contact one of the Communications division staff to direct them to the file location where they are stored.

Smartphones are capable of taking high-quality pictures and videos and can be a convenient option to use during field assessments. Become familiar with the capabilities and options of your phone before going into the field.

SUBJECTS

It can be difficult to determine what exactly to focus on when completing an assessment and capturing photographic or videographic documentation.

Here are focal points you should consider capturing:

- Data collection activities – focus on a specific process being completed and document each critical action, capturing each individual involved.
- Data entry – Document datasheets so that they are legible. Additionally, capture individual personnel entering data on paper or in digital formats. These shots often highlight a subject's hands and are tactile in nature.
- Underwater activities – if you have a device that is capable of being submerged, taking pictures or videos underwater can provide unique and interesting perspectives on a project. Be cautious of dropping your device where it cannot be recovered.
- Field site – step back a few yards or look for high ground to capture broader documentation of the field site.
- Assessment activities – pass the camera to another person and ask them to take a picture of you and the project team member completing the work.
- Project team members – capture activities of each person. Capture interactions of the team.

GUIDANCE FOR SPECIFIC MEDIA TYPES

Pictures

Ensure your photos are in focus.

Be dynamic in your approach. Avoid standing in one spot, taking pictures only from chest or head height, and always bringing an entire subject into the composition. Try kneeling down and taking pictures straight on or looking up. Take close up photos that show textures or highlight an

individual subject's face or hands. Move around the site and look for different elements to include when focusing on the same subject.

Shoot in a mix of portrait and landscape. When composing a picture, take advantage of asymmetry. Try filling two thirds of the photo with the sky or lining up your subject in the right or left third of the photo.

Videos

Short videos are best. Focus on concise and discrete aspects of a given process to focus on. It is best to record individual segments of video for discrete components of a given process, adjusting your vantage between shots to best capture the subject and action. Where there are repetitive processes, consider filming multiple iterations of the process from different vantage points.

Shoot in a mix of portrait and landscape modes, as different orientations are useful for different communications products. If you are filming a sequence of actions with multiple shots, maintain a single orientation throughout the series.

Filming scenery can be effective for b-roll in communications products. Consider short videos capturing a slow pan of a landscape scene or a stationary shot of a dynamic subject (e.g., moving ripples in a stream).

AN ADDED NOTE ON LIGHT

Equal to the importance of the composition of a picture or video as the subject, is the consideration of light. Luckily, field assessments are typically conducted outdoors, where the quantity and quality of light is generally less challenging to work with than typical indoor settings (e.g., offices or conference centers). Regardless of environment, it is critical to be cognizant of the available light and adjust your composition to best take advantage of your circumstances.

Here are some helpful tips when planning a shot in consideration of the available light.

- The subject should generally be lighted. Try to position yourself so that your back is towards the sun. If you are facing the sun, consider ways to use shadow in your composition (e.g., capturing silhouettes).
- Take advantage of morning and evening light when you can. If you can get to a field site a few minutes early in the morning or linger a few minutes later in the afternoon, you may find excellent opportunities to capture scenery shots.
- A cloudy day can result in difficult, flat lighting conditions. Don't be discouraged. Be creative in your approach and try different settings on your camera or phone and try different styles of composition.

APPENDIX C: QA FIELD ASSESSMENT REPORT TEMPLATE

Note that a fillable Word document is available from the QAPM upon request.



[Insert Date of Report Here]

QA FIELD ASSESSMENT REPORT

Project Title: [Insert title here]

QAPP ID: [Insert QAPP ID here]

Assessor(s): [Insert your name here and other NEIWPCPC staff involved in assessment]

On [Insert DATE of assessment], the NEIWPCPC Quality Assurance Program Manager (Emily Bialowas) accompanied [Insert project staff names, titles, and organizations here] during field activities associated with the [Insert project title here] project.

Field activities conducted on [Insert DATE of assessment] included [Describe field activities].

All field efforts observed were conducted in accordance with the approved quality assurance project plan (QAPP). No deviations from (or discrepancies with) the approved QAPP approved were observed or noted.

[Insert pictures from field assessment here & add captions; identify individuals in photos]