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Pursuant to Delegation 1-19, dated 07/07/2005

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

QUALITY POLICY

1. PURPOSE

This Policy:
- recognizes existing policies and procedures as the foundation of an Agency-wide Quality Program;
- establishes an approach for identifying and addressing Agency quality issues; and
- provides a structure and procedures to ensure and enhance the effectiveness of the Quality Program and its application to Agency products and services.

This policy affirms:
- EPA's commitment to applying quality principles and practices to products and services resulting from Agency programs and activities;
- the Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information and Chief Information Officer's (AA/CIO) and the Quality and Information Council's (QIC) leadership of the Quality Program at EPA in assuring the quality of Agency products and services;
- the AA/CIO's responsibility, as the designated federal official for quality at EPA, to lead, coordinate and maintain an effective Quality Program; and
- the roles of other key Agency managers and organizations that are implementing quality policies and practices across Agency programs.

2. SCOPE AND APPLICABILITY

The scope of this Quality Policy includes Agency products and services that are developed for external distribution or dissemination. EPA organizations may consider the application of this Policy to other products and services developed for internal use. Agency products and services encompassed by this Policy include, but may not be limited to: environmental data and technology; environmental information; assessments; reports; peer review; scientific research; regulatory development; and information technology supporting external applications such as services that collect and provide access to data and information. In addition, national or Agency-wide

systems that support administrative and financial activities may be included. Such products and services support the Agency's: compliance and enforcement decisions; critical research; and regulations.   The current range of products and services covered by this Policy includes, but is not strictly limited to, those that are covered by the policy, procedures and guidance documents cited in CIO Procedures (CIO 2106-P-01.0) *Procedure for Quality Policy*, (henceforth "Procedure"), Appendix 1.

This Policy applies to all EPA organizations including Headquarters Offices, Program Offices, Regions, and their sub-organizations. This Policy may apply to non-EPA organizations (e.g., States, Tribes, localities, regulated parties, volunteer organizations, contractors, cooperative agreement holders, grantees, other federal governmental agencies, intergovernmental organizations, educational institutions) performing work in support of EPA's mission or national program priorities as defined by and in accordance with federal laws, regulations or extramural agreements or performing work on a voluntary basis.

3. AUDIENCE

The principal audience for this Policy is all Agency employees (managers and staff) who are responsible for developing, distributing and disseminating products and services in support of EPA's mission as defined in Section 2. Managers and staff in non-EPA organizations (see Section 2 for examples) performing work for EPA may find this Policy helpful in understanding their roles and responsibilities in conjunction with applicable federal laws, regulations or extramural agreements. Also included are members of non-EPA organizations producing products and services on a voluntary basis in support of EPA's programs.

4. BACKGROUND

Since its inception, EPA has adopted the philosophy that the quality of environmental data and information supporting the Agency's decisions must be appropriate for their intended use. To build this philosophy into policy, EPA adopted voluntary national and international consensus standards for quality such as the American National Standard Institute/American Society for Quality Control -- ANSI/ASQC E4-1994[1] while developing and implementing organizational quality management systems. These systems have promoted best quality management practices and continual improvement processes specific to environmental data collection and use and to environmental technology programs.

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[1] Later updated as ANSI/ASQ E4-2004, *Quality Systems for Environmental Data and Technology Programs - Requirements with Guidance for Use, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 2004.*

Independently, quality principles have also been applied to other lines of business within EPA, including financial and administrative areas. Internationally recognized quality management system principles and standards have been adopted by many governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations to ensure the quality of their products and services. EPA, as a leader in the fields of environmental science and management, has recognized the need to further incorporate such standards and principles throughout its business operations.

While affirming EPA's commitment to quality, this Policy recognizes new and emerging factors influencing the need for ongoing assurance and continual improvement of the quality of the Agency's products and services. Moreover, this Policy recognizes that the expanded and consistent application of such quality management principles and practices in all areas of the Agency's operations is a desirable business objective.

Critical factors and events leading to the development of this Quality Policy:

A. The Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 assigned federal Chief Information Officers (CIOs) the responsibility for developing information technology architecture and processes linking the business, mission, strategic plans, and processes of an organization to its information technology strategy. The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Circular A-130 *Management of Federal Information Resources* established implementing policies for Federal agencies under the Clinger-Cohen Act. Within EPA, the AA/CIO is responsible for coordinating and implementing the Agency's quality assurance program for environmental data and information technology that support Agency programs.

B. In 1999, EPA strengthened senior management leadership and involvement in information technology and the Agency's quality system by establishing the Office of Environmental Information and the QIC chaired by the AA/CIO.

C. Pursuant to the Information Quality Act (IQA) of 2001, EPA developed *Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by the Environmental Protection Agency* (IQG) providing EPA policy and procedural guidance to implement the IQA.

D. OMB published Bulletins and other guidance materials focusing on the stages during the life-cycle of products and services.

E. The Agency recognizes that by coordinating cross-programmatic quality assurance activities and quality management practices, it can more effectively assure the quality of its distributed or disseminated products and services.

5. AUTHORITY

Authorities include:
- Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 (PL 104-106)
- National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act of 1995 (PL 104-113, March 1996)
- Information Quality Act, Section 515 of the Treasury and Government Appropriations Act of 2001 (PL106-554, 31 USC 3516)
- Administrative Procedure Act (5 USC 511-599)
- OMB Circular A-119, *Federal Participation in the Development and Use of Voluntary Consensus Standards and in Conformity Assessment Activities*, Office of Management and Budget, February 1998
- OMB Circular A-130, *Management of Federal Information Resources,* Office of Management and Budget, November 2000
- EPA Delegation of Authority 1-41, *Mandatory Quality Assurance Program*, January 2000
- EPA Delegation of Authority 1-19, *Directives*, July 2005
- OEI *CIO Policy Review Process* July 2005
- EPA CIO Policy No. 2101, *Senior Information Officials*, July 2005
- EPA's Quality and Information Council Charter, July 2005

6. POLICY

This Policy recognizes EPA's Quality Program requiring products and services that are distributed or disseminated externally, as described in Section 2, to be of appropriate quality for their intended use(s) and to support EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment. The Agency's Quality Program will conform to accepted national and international consensus quality standards, federal and Agency requirements.

This Policy also re-affirms the Agency's long-standing commitment to quality principles. It recognizes and builds upon the existing quality-related policies and activities already implemented across the Agency. It ensures a comprehensive, coordinated approach for consistent implementation of, and continual improvement in, the quality of EPA's products and services. Organizations that oversee Agency-wide business lines will ensure that quality-related practices are described within business-specific policy, practices, and procedures. This Policy also defines the AA/CIO's role in leading the Agency's Quality Program.

EPA organizations will also:

A. Describe and document their current Quality Program by identifying appropriate quality-related policies, procedures and standards pertaining to the types of products and services within their business lines that support the Agency's mission.

B. Implement appropriate EPA quality-related policies and procedures for the products and services established under these business lines.

C. Assess and review the effectiveness of their Quality Program at a frequency consistent with the standards or practices established by their mission-related lines of business.

D. Ensure that quality-related issues or problems for products or services covered by this Policy that may adversely impact other Agency operations or organizations are reported through the appropriate Agency reporting mechanisms, for example, the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA), and if no mechanism exists, report these issues or problems to the AA/CIO.

The AA/CIO, assisted by the QIC will conduct an annual Agency-wide Quality Progress Review (QPR), maintain a current MAP, and establish a process to facilitate cross-Agency notification of issues or problems with products or services that may adversely impact Agency operations.

These activities are further described as:

A. The QPR will evaluate how well the Agency is meeting quality goals and objectives. The QPR will reflect individual program results as reported by organizations as well as the overall Agency status and progress. Information collected for the QPR will rely on existing Agency reporting requirements and reporting relationships. No new reports or additional tracking of information by EPA organizations will be necessary. Any exceptions will require approval by the QIC.

Some examples of existing reporting include:
- EPA organizations annually report and will continue to report on the implementation of their quality systems for environmental data operations via Quality Assurance Annual Reports and Work Plans (QAARWPs) to the AA/CIO;
- Agency peer reviewed products and science activities will continue to be reported by EPA organizations to EPA's Science Advisor; and
- reporting required by the FMFIA will continue through assurance letters from AAs and RAs to the Administrator via the Agency's Chief Financial Officer (CFO).

B. The MAP will be based on the annual Quality Progress Review (QPR) and will identify issues and areas for improvement. The MAP will be reviewed annually and changes will be reported to the QIC.   It will also include proposed activities and schedules for addressing identified issues as negotiated by the AA/CIO with the appropriate organization(s). Progress will be tracked as each MAP is updated.

C. The AA/CIO will review standard Agency reporting mechanisms and notify all SIOs in the Agency of any quality-related issues or problems with products or services covered by this Policy that may adversely impact multiple Agency organizations.

7. RELATED DOCUMENTS

CIO Procedure CIO 2106-P-01.0 *Procedure for Quality Policy.*

8. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

EPA Administrator: EPA 's Administrator promotes quality as an integral part of the Agency's mission by assuring that the products and services supporting EPA's programs and activities meet our customers' needs and expectations of quality. Assistant Administrators (AAs) and Regional Administrators (RAs) are responsible for maintaining quality within their respective programs and activities as delegated by the Administrator.

Assistant Administrator for the Office of Environmental Information /Chief Information Officer: The Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information (AA) and Chief Information Officer (CIO) acts as the Agency's Senior Management Official for quality management and leads Agency-wide implementation of this Policy and EPA's Quality Program. The AA/CIO is responsible for issuing the Agency's QPR maintaining and tracking the progress of implementing the Agency's current Management Action Plan and informing AAs and RAs of any issues or problems related to the quality of Agency products or services encompassed by this Policy.

Senior Information Officials: EPA organizations' Senior Information Officials (SIO) constitute an Agency-wide network to assist the CIO in the effective oversight, coordination and management of quality and related issues.

Senior Policy Council: An EPA internal leadership organization, chaired by the Deputy Administrator with members comprising the Chief Information Officer (chair of the Quality and Information Council), Science Advisor (chair of the Science Policy Council) and Associate Administrator for Policy, Economics and Innovation (chair of the Regulatory Policy Council).

Quality and Information Council: The Quality and Information Council (QIC), composed of SIOs and other senior managers as stipulated in the QIC Charter, advises and assists "the Assistant Administrator for Environmental Information/Chief Information Officer in developing and implementing the Agency's quality … goals and policies." The QIC also serves as a forum to discuss coordination of the development and effective application of quality management principles and practices across EPA business and organizational lines and will act to recommend actions to improve consistency and uniformity in implementing the Agency Quality Program. The AA/CIO and the QIC ensure that all other policies or procedures that support or implement aspects of the Agency's Quality Program are aligned and consistent with this Policy and its related procedures and guidelines. The Science Policy Council, along with the QIC and the Regulatory Policy Council, are primary members of the Senior Policy Council, chaired by the Deputy Administrator.

Assistant Administrators: Assistant Administrators (AAs) will ensure that quality-related policies and procedures are developed and implemented for their programs consistent with their specific missions, and will dedicate sufficient resources to support the effective implementation of this Policy within their organizational units for products and services across all business domains. Depending on the organization, such implementation may be accomplished through the SIO or other designated management representative(s).

Responsibilities, under this Policy, may be re-delegated by the AA to appropriate senior managers (e.g., SIOs), where specified, who will oversee the implementation of quality for business domains of environmental data and information, research, and administration. Depending on the organization, various implementation responsibilities may be accomplished through further re-delegations to an appropriate senior manager, Quality Manager and/or other management representative(s).

Chief Financial Officer: Consistent with the Chief Financial Officer's (CFO) Act of 1990 and the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996, the CFO is responsible for ensuring that (1) accounting, financial, and other relevant administrative information systems are designed, developed, maintained, and used effectively to provide financial or program performance data; and, (2) financial and related program performance data are provided on a reliable, consistent, and timely basis to financial management systems. In addition, the CFO is the responsible authority for activities under OMB Circulars A-123 and A-127. This Policy does not supersede the quality assurance provisions of these or other CFO authorities.

Regional Administrators: Regional Administrators (RAs) will ensure that quality-related policies and procedures are developed and implemented for their regions consistent with their specific programs and regional missions, and will dedicate sufficient resources to support the effective implementation of this Policy within their organizational units for products and services across all business domains. Depending on the organization, such implementation may be accomplished through the SIO, or other designated management representative(s).

Responsibilities under this Policy may be re-delegated by the RA to appropriate senior managers (e.g., SIO, Regional Science & Technology [RS&T] Directors, et al.) who will oversee the implementation of quality for business domains of environmental data and information, research, and administration. Depending on the organization, various implementation responsibilities may be accomplished through re-delegations to an appropriate senior manager, a Quality Manager and/or other management representative(s).

Science Policy Council: The Science Policy Council serves as a mechanism for addressing EPA's many significant science policy issues that go beyond regional and program boundaries. With a goal of integrating policies that guide Agency decision-makers in their use of scientific and technical information, the SPC works to implement and ensure the success of selected initiatives recommended by Agency staff and external advisory bodies such as the National Research Council and others such as the Congress, industry and environmental groups.

The SPC is chaired by EPA's Science Advisor with members representing all HQ Offices and Regions. The SPC is supported by a Steering Committee of Agency managers and scientific staff, *ad hoc* working groups formed to study specific topics, EPA's Risk Assessment Forum and staff from the Office of Science Advisor. The SPC, along with the QIC and the Regulatory Policy Council comprise the Senior Policy Council, chaired by the Deputy Administrator.

9. DEFINITIONS

Consensus Standards: Standards that are developed and adopted by achieving agreement with all affected parties. These standards are developed in accordance with procedures used by the International Organization for Standardization or organizations accredited by the American National Standards Institute.

Data: A collection of facts and estimates from which conclusions may be drawn.

Data Standard: Documented consensus-based agreement on the format and definition of common data.

Environmental Data: Any measurements or information that describe environmental processes, location, or conditions; ecological or health effects and consequences; or the performance of environmental technology. For EPA, environmental data include information collected directly from measurements, produced from models, and compiled from other sources such as databases or literature.

Environmental Data Operations: Work performed to obtain, use, or report information pertaining to environmental processes and conditions.

Environmental Technology: An all-inclusive term used to describe pollution monitoring, measurement and control devices and systems, waste treatment processes and storage facilities, and site remediation technologies and their components that may be utilized to remove pollutants or contaminants from or prevent them from entering the environment.

Framework: For the purposes of this policy, an organizing structure comprising Agency quality policies, procedures, guidance, and tools.

Information: For purposes of this policy, information means any communication or representation of knowledge such as facts or data, in any medium or form, including, but not limited to, textual, numerical, graphic, cartographic, narrative, or audiovisual forms. (OMB Information Quality Guidelines)

Information Product: Any book, paper, map, machine-readable material, audiovisual production, or other documentary material, regardless of physical form or characteristic. (OMB Circular A-130)

Information Quality Guidelines: An Agency document that provides criteria for ensuring the quality, utility, and transparency of disseminated EPA data and information products and services. Quality is defined as a performance measure that ensures that products and services meet Agency requirements and customer needs.

Information System: An organized collection, storage, and presentation system of data for decision making, progress reporting, and for planning and evaluation of programs. It can be either manual or computerized, or a combination of both.

Life Cycle: The life span of a product or service from its original planning and development, through to its use and maintenance, and then its final closure or disposal.

Management Action Plan: The ongoing Plan issued by the AA/CIO that identifies the Agency's quality issues, sets schedules and notes progress being made in addressing areas for improvement. The Plan is based on the AA/CIO's Quality Progress Review.

Management System: A system to establish policy and objectives and to achieve those objectives (e.g., ISO 9000). A management system may describe the policies, objectives, principles, organizational authority, responsibilities, accountability, and implementation plan of an organization covering its products and services.

Metadata: Information about data required to facilitate its use, understanding and management. Metadata should answer questions about data such as why they were collected, how they were collected, what was done to the data, what they were used for and what were their limitations.

Process: A set of interrelated resources and activities which transforms inputs into outputs. Examples of processes include analysis, design, data collection, operation, fabrication, and calculation.

Product: The intended result or final output of an activity or process that is disseminated or distributed among EPA organizations or outside of EPA.

Quality Assurance: A management or oversight function that deals with setting policy and running an administrative system of management controls that cover planning, implementation, review, and maintenance to ensure products and services are meeting their intended use.

Quality Control: The overall system of technical activities that measure the attributes and performance of a process, item, or service against defined standards to verify that they meet the stated requirements established by the customer; operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfill requirements for quality.

Quality Management: The aspects of an organization's overall management system that drive the implementation of EPA's Quality Policy. Quality management includes strategic planning, allocation of resources, and other systematic activities (e.g., planning, implementation, and assessment) pertaining to an organization's quality program.

Quality Management Plans: A formal document or manual that describes a quality system in terms of the organizational structure, functional responsibilities of management and staff, lines of authority, and required interfaces for those planning, implementing and assessing all activities conducted.

Quality Program: The totality of management controls, processes, and documentation in EPA's planning, implementation, and assessment of applying quality in the creation of Agency products and services.

Quality Progress Review: This review evaluates how well the Agency is meeting its quality goals and objectives. It reflects individual program results as reported by organizations as well as overall Agency status and progress. Information collected for the review will rely on existing Agency reporting requirements and reporting relationships except for those which may be approved by the QIC.

Service: A discrete function that performs one or more operations and returns a set of results to an external requester.

10. WAIVERS

No waivers from this Policy will be accepted. Because this Policy encompasses a broad range of products and services based on various policies, procedures and guidance documents as noted in Section 2, organizations that wish to appeal a particular requirement should address their request to the Agency official responsible for that requirement. For example, an organization that is seeking a waiver from peer review requirements would address its appeal to EPA's Administrator.

11. RELATED PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

CIO Procedure CIO 2106-P-01.0 *Procedure for Quality Policy.*

12. MATERIAL SUPERSEDED

This Policy does not change the authorities or responsibilities of individual EPA organizations to apply quality principles and practices in the development of their products and services.

13. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For further information about this Policy or the Agency Quality Program, please contact the Office of Environmental Information, Quality Staff.

Molly A. O'Neill, Assistant Administrator
and Chief Information Officer
Office of Environmental Information