

FAQ's Handout on QAPPs

1. What is a QAPP?

QAPP stands for Quality Assurance Project Plan. Some people call it a QUAP and they're talking about the same thing. A QAPP is a document that is required if your project involves collecting, producing or using environmental data. This includes activities like air monitoring, water sampling, soil testing or analyzing maps using GIS. A QAPP spells out how you will collect data, analyze it and how you will uphold quality assurance in your project. For example, your QAPP might describe how many soil samples you will take over a specific area, and how they will be collected and taken to a lab for analysis.

A QAPP is required for projects that involve:

- Collecting environmental data (e.g., air, water, soil samples)
- Producing environmental data (e.g., computer models, laboratory analyses)
- Evaluating environmental data (e.g., data analysis, interpretation)
- Using environmental data in decision-making processes (e.g., regulatory compliance, risk assessment)
- Environmental Technology Projects: Projects that involve the design, construction, operation, or application of environmental technology must also have a QAPP.

2. How long does it take to write a QAPP, and how much does it cost?

There is no universal answer to this question. Because a QAPP is describing the activities of your specific project, how long and how much it costs will depend on what your specific project entails. For projects that are more simple (like a project that is about training community members to read air quality data so they can provide comments during the public comment period of a permit review), it may cost \$5,000 - \$10,000. For projects that are more complex (like clean up at a Superfund site that involves complicated air, quality and water sampling), it may cost closer to \$40,000.

Also, keep in mind that costs for contractors may vary from one geographic location to another. If you're in a rural area, it could be more expensive for a contractor to get there and could cost more. The range of numbers provided here are estimates and not based on actual quotes from contractors.

Note that creating a QAPP can be time-consuming, and additional technical assistance or consulting may be necessary within your budget. Regular reviews and updates to the

QAPP will also be required to ensure ongoing effectiveness. The best way to nail down how long and how much is to work with a subject matter expert, like a contractor who has experience working with EPA on quality assurance.

3. How long is a QAPP?

QAPPs vary in length, depending on the project activities, and can range from one page to 40 pages. Below are the Key Components of any QAPP:

- Project Description: Objectives, scope, and methodology.
- Data Collection: Techniques and procedures for environmental data gathering.
- Data Analysis: Methods for analyzing and validating data.
- Quality Control: Measures to ensure accuracy and reliability.
- Reporting: How results will be documented and reported.

4. Is there an easy way to know if my project will require a QAPP?

EPA has created a screening checklist that communities can use to identify if their imagined project will require a QAPP. You can find that screening checklist [HERE](#). To better understand if your project activities trigger the need for a QAPP, we recommend that you speak with your UNITE-EJ program officer, who is in touch with Quality Assurance professionals at EPA.

5. Can you provide examples of projects that do and do not require a QAPP?

Whether or not a QAPP is required all depends on how EPA funds are being used and what activities are named in your project workplan.

Here are two scenarios to consider:

Scenario One

Example of where a QAPP is NOT required:

A community group is actively working in a neighborhood that is impacted by pollution from nearby XYZ chemical plant. XYZ chemical plant's permit is up for renewal and a public comment period will open up in four months. The community group wants to help impacted residents understand the pollution in their neighborhood by helping them read existing air quality reports issued by state and federal agencies.

Project activity:

- Host five workshops to teach 100 impacted community members how to navigate state and federal websites and databases. Train community leaders on where and how to find air quality data and understand it. Raise awareness about the impact pollution from XYZ chemical plant has in the neighborhood.

Example of where a QAPP is required:

A community group is actively working in a neighborhood that is impacted by pollution from nearby XYZ chemical plant. XYZ chemical plant's permit is up for renewal and a public comment period will open up in four months. The community group wants to help impacted residents understand the pollution in their neighborhood by helping them read existing air quality reports issued by state and federal agencies.

Project activity:

- Host five workshops to teach 100 impacted community members how to navigate state and federal websites and databases. Train community leaders on where and how to find air quality data and understand it. Raise awareness about the impact pollution from XYZ chemical plant has in the neighborhood.
- The community group is planning to submit comments that emphasize how XYZ chemical plant is harming the community with the goal of influencing decisions made around renewing XYZ chemical plant's permit.
- The community group's trainings prepare impacted residents to be ready to provide comments during the public comment period for XYZ chemical plant's permit renewal process.

Scenario Two

Example of where a QAPP is NOT required:

A tribal group applies to the Thriving Community Grantmaker to fund a project that will grow their capacity to conduct water testing of streams on their land. They need to hire staff, purchase equipment and update their website to be able to adequately manage the data they collect.

Project activity:

- Hire one full time person to serve as the Tribal Water Testing Division Director and set aside \$50,000 to bring on two summer interns to staff the program.

- Purchase \$100,000 of equipment like a portable meter with calibration, turbidity testing kits and handheld probes.

Example of where a QAPP is required:

A tribal group applies to the Thriving Community Grantmaker to fund a project that will grow their capacity to conduct water testing of streams on their land. They need to hire staff, purchase equipment and update their website to be able to adequately manage the data they collect.

Project activity:

- Hire one full time person to serve as the Tribal Water Testing Division Director and set aside \$50,000 to bring on two summer interns to staff the program.
- Purchase \$100,000 of equipment like a portable meter with calibration, turbidity testing kits and handheld probes.
- The new Water Testing Division Director trains summer interns and other volunteers and assembles a team of Summer Streamkeepers who will activate for 6 weeks during the summer.
- The recently purchased equipment is turned on and used to conduct field testing.
- The team of Summer Streamkeepers analyzes the results and shares findings with the broader community, including the local water board.

Phased Approach:

Phase One - If buying equipment or hiring staff, no QAPP is needed

Phase Two - If wanting to turn on equipment and gather EOI, yes QAPP is needed

Recommendation is to start to work on the QAPP during Phase One while also concurrently moving forward with hiring staff and purchasing equipment. This will allow the grantee to be ready to get approval from EPA in Phase One and implement field activities in Phase Two.

6. Will my QAPP need to be approved by EPA before I am awarded a grant? Will I be able to draw down funds to hire an expert or contractor before my QAPP is approved?

Thriving Communities Grantmakers will review applications and make decisions on awards before a QAPP is required. If a project is selected for funding, the workplan might include the need to create a QAPP. A QAPP does not need to be approved by EPA before a grant is awarded.

No field work can take place until your QAPP is approved by EPA. That means no sampling or environmental data gathering activities can occur until you receive approval. However, other administrative activities can take place and you can receive advance funding and/or reimbursement funding for those activities only. Those include hiring your project team staff, identifying the goals of your sampling project, procuring a contractor such as a subject matter expert who can help you write your QAPP and submitting it to EPA for approval.

7. Can I start my project before my QAPP is approved?

Yes, project activities can begin before a QAPP is approved but only administrative activities can be completed before a QAPP is approved. Activities that do not involve the gathering of environmental data and/or environmental information are allowed before QAPP approval.

8. How long does it take for a QAPP to be approved by EPA?

Each EPA Regional office has different timeframes for approval processes. Generally, anticipate 1-4 months from submission of your QAPP to approval.

9. I have a clear idea of the kind of project I want to do but I've never written a QAPP before. Is it hard?

Creating a QAPP can be time-consuming, and additional technical assistance or consulting may be necessary within your budget. Regular reviews and updates to the QAPP will also be required to ensure ongoing effectiveness. UNITE-EJ plans to offer technical assistance to grantees so they have support to write QAPPs and get them approved with EPA. UNITE-EJ's technical assistance offerings intend to meet communities where they are, whether they have a little or a lot of experience with QAPPs.

10. After I am notified of my award, how long do I have to submit my QAPP? Is there a deadline?

There is no set deadline but keep in mind that you will not be able to start any field activities until your QAPP is approved by EPA. Delay of submission and approval of the QAPP may cause delays across your project timeline.