

PREAMBLE

BACKGROUND

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 establishes the framework for a national workforce preparation and employment system. The WIA also reauthorizes the Job Corps program and incorporates a number of significant changes from the way the program has traditionally operated. In response to these changes, Job Corps has devised a system-wide approach and methodology for equipping students with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and support needed for long-term success in the workforce. The Career Development Services System (CDSS) is the vehicle for implementing the new approach. The 2001 revision to the Policy and Requirements Handbook (PRH) incorporates CDSS concepts and describes requirements for managing the program to meet WIA objectives. The Program Assessment Guide (PAG) is a companion to the PRH designed to support the assessment of outreach and admissions (OA), center, and career transition services (CTS) operations. This version of the PAG mirrors the PRH in concept and structure.

With implementation of the PRH, the shift in focus of the PAG is to assess how well Job Corps contractors are achieving program results, stated in the PRH as quality indicators. The process used to achieve these indicators is dependent on the contractors' design of their programs. Federal oversight will focus on determining the degree to which the quality indicators have been met. In addition, specific requirements stated in the PRH that address program integrity are also assessed.

The integrity of Job Corps' performance data is critical to providing effective oversight of center operations and to ensuring program credibility. Thus, concurrent with annual quality assessments, Regional Offices (ROs) will conduct **mandatory** audits of a minimum of 10% of all performance related student records. If excessive reporting problems are present, the extent of misreporting will be brought to the **immediate** attention of the National Office.

PURPOSE

The PAG is designed for use by the ROs as a tool for conducting quality assessments of Job Corps programs. It outlines a process by which the ROs evaluate contractor's attainment of quality indicators.

The emphasis of CDSS is to provide a continuum of individual and personal experiences and services that are infused throughout all phases of each young person's connection to Job Corps.

Hence, OA, CTS contractors, center operators, and agencies are being asked to customize their operations to best serve the students. Canned approaches do not recognize the differences in demographics of students or those of geography. The PAG is designed to evaluate the functions described in the PRH, regardless of where or by whom these functions are performed within the contractor's organization. These functions are the four periods of CDSS (OA, career preparation, career development, and career transition), management, and administrative support.

This is a working document. Since its baseline for assessment is the PRH quality indicators, the PAG will change as the PRH changes. When quality indicators are added, changed, or deleted from the PRH, the related material in the PAG will also change. When assessing services, reviewers using the PAG may not change or add quality indicators that are not in the PRH. The strategies for assessing quality indicators are provided as suggestions only. Reviewers should tailor each assessment to the specifics of each contractor, drawing upon the lists of strategies and ideas presented in the PAG. Reviewers should add, delete, or change suggested strategies for assessing quality indicators to suit specific operator needs or challenges at any time.

STRUCTURE

The sections of the PAG are as follows:

Preamble provides background and general information regarding the PAG.

Chapter 1: Outreach and Admissions covers the outreach and admission services provided to reach and enroll applicants. Center outreach, employer relationships, and public education requirements are included as well as the initial student contact with CDSS.

Chapter 2: Career Preparation Period covers the range of services and activities covered during the student's first phase of enrollment.

Chapter 3: Career Development Period covers the full range of career development activities including academic, vocational, workplace, social, and independent living skills.

Chapter 4: Career Transition Period covers the placement and transitional support services needed for a student to retain full and gainful employment.

Chapter 5: Management covers general, financial, and facilities management responsibilities and requirements for an overall CDSS plan.

Chapter 6: Administrative Support covers administrative activities required to support the program, including student support, health, and child development services.

Appendix A: Regional Office Quality Assessment Model provides a model process for conducting a quality assessment of all applicable PRH functions.

Appendix B: Tools and Tips provides how-to tools, ethical standards, and interview scripts for use when conducting a quality assessment.

Appendix C: PRH Requirements/Integrity Items identifies those requirements in the PRH that must be reviewed for compliance on an annual basis.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The RO conducts quality assessments every 12 to 24 months that result in a quality rating for center/OA/CTS contractors. The RO assessment uses the quality rating system (QRS) as the benchmark for assessing the quality of center/OA/CTS operations. This quality rating is reported to the National Office and provides a qualitative performance measure for center/OA/CTS operations. The quality rating is included as part of the calculation of the quality measurement system (QMS) and is used for contracting purposes as part of the past effectiveness rating. The RO quality assessment uses the QRS to establish a baseline rating for the center and for making changes to the rating as warranted by changes in operations. The resulting written report and quality rating are issued by the RO.

QUALITY RATING SYSTEM

Purpose

The QRS provides a vehicle for assessing the quality of services provided to students and employers by center, OA, and CTS contractors. The QRS evaluates the systems, processes, and activities present in each assessed function. It assesses to what degree these systems, processes, and activities lead to the expected results described in PRH-defined quality indicators. The purpose of the QRS is to:

- Set and define clear expectations for program quality.
- Capture, assess, and provide feedback on quality aspects that are not measured by statistical outcomes.
- Recognize best practices and commendable aspects of program operation.
- Communicate clearly what needs to be done to improve program delivery.
- Provide a quality rating.
- Provide a clear rationale for the quality rating assigned.

The QRS provides reviewers with a consistent approach to assessing the delivery of Job Corps services by OA, center, and CTS contractors. Program activities are assessed in relationship to six functions – the four phases of CDSS (OA, career preparation, career development, and career transition), and management and administrative support.

The QRS focuses on how well the contractor is achieving the results defined by the PRH quality indicators. The six functional areas of the rating system mirror the functions described in the respective chapters of the PRH. The QRS definition describes the degree to which quality indicators are meeting or not meeting expectations for quality.

The functional areas rated in the QRS may or may not reflect the actual organization of the contractor's operation. Contractors have the flexibility to construct and deliver programs that achieve the best results for students. Many Job Corps operations will have differing organizational structures supporting the assessed functions. Therefore, reviewers will need to be flexible when organizing their data gathering and analysis techniques. Communicating and sharing information is required to adequately assess the functions in the QRS, especially management and administrative support. These functions have a number of cross-cutting quality indicators. Each quality indicator is scored and reported in only one functional area, even though information contributing to the assessment of that area is gathered from multiple organizations and staff across program operations. Careful coordination between individuals assigned to each function and information sharing among all team members, regardless of assignment, is critical for a thorough assessment. Team members conduct a quality assessment to:

1. Determine the level of quality of services provided;
2. Identify strengths and areas that need improvement;
3. Verify that PRH requirements are being met; and,
4. Determine the quality rating for the center.

The RO quality assessment provides feedback on the quality of what is happening for students during their stay in the program. The intention is to look at what is present at the time of the assessment. The QRS measures quality in present time as compared to the definitions.

QRS Matrix

The quality matrix, shown below, provides a structure for recording quality assessment results. It consists of a matrix of cells for recording the quality ratings for each of the six functions, weighted scores of each function, and the overall summary rating.

As team members evaluate activities and services, it is important throughout the assessment to keep in mind which function in the QRS matrix is affected by the data.

As already noted, team members may wish to annotate notes with an indicator of the appropriate function in the QRS matrix to which the data pertain. This facilitates discussing the information with the team during the week, assigning a quality rating for each function, and making decisions about where and how to place information in the formal report.

Functional Area	Regional Quality Rating	
	Weight (b)	Weighted Rating (a*b)
Chapter 1: Outreach and Admissions		
Chapter 2: Career Preparation Period		
Chapter 3: Career Development Period		
Chapter 4: Career Transition Period		
Chapter 5: Management		
Chapter 6: Administrative Support		
National Average Rating		
Regional Weighted Average Rating	100%	

A national score will be derived using a straight averaging method, rounded to the nearest tenth (e.g., 4.32 would be rounded to 4.3, 4.55 would be rounded to 4.6). Regions may assign weights based on identified center or regional needs.

QRS Definition

To ensure that the government is getting what it has contracted for, each program function must meet a minimum defined set of expectations. The PRH quality indicators define the benchmark for the expectations. The QRS definition describes the degree to which indicators are met. Indicators are either *acceptable* or *not acceptable*.

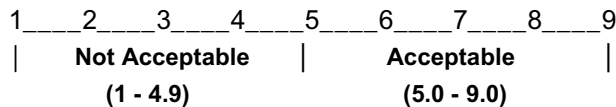
QRS QUALITY DEFINITION	
Not Acceptable	Acceptable
Quality indicators are missing or minimally evident in applicable program areas.	Quality indicators are generally evident in applicable program areas with minor exceptions.

Each function is scored in the matrix based on the information gathered during the assessment that pertains to the quality indicators (QIs) for that function. Each chapter of the PAG presents the applicable PRH QIs by section. Suggested strategies for each quality indicator are identified.

Quality Rating

Once evaluators have determined which definition most closely describes the performance for a function, a numerical rating is assigned and entered in the appropriate cell in the quality rating matrix. The six functional scores are combined to produce the overall summary score for the center/operation.

The ratings are made against a nine-point scale, as shown below.



Changing the Quality Rating

Quality ratings assigned to ROs are established or changed based on the following:

- RO quality assessments are performed every 12 to 24 months for each OA/center/CTS contract.
- The initial RO quality assessment performed using this PAG and QRS system is a full quality assessment. Quality factor/center component combinations in the past system are not compatible with the baseline established by this PAG. The ROs may choose to build a full quality rating over 12 to 24 months using smaller teams, project manager visits, or other methods by assessing one or more functions during a visit. Completing the full assessment during one visit by a single assessment team is not necessary. However, every function in the quality matrix has to be assessed and have a resulting quality rating. These functional ratings are then tabulated to determine the overall rating. Functional ratings and the resulting overall rating provide the initial baseline QRS rating for the contractor.

- The RO quality assessment ratings subsequent to the initial baseline QRS rating established for an OA/center/CTS contract may or may not assess all quality matrix cells. If one or more functions is not assessed during an assessment, the rating for that function(s) is carried over from the previous RO assessment (or last change to the quality matrix rating if it occurred after the last RO assessment) and used with the newly assessed function ratings to calculate the overall quality rating. Any ratings that are carried over should be annotated as to their source.
- Adjustments to the overall quality rating may be made by the RO. Rating changes are based on significant changes documented by the RO. They frequently result from verification of the change by the project manager during monitoring visits. If the RO determines that one or more quality matrix function ratings warrant change, the new rating(s) is recorded in the matrix, replacing the rating for that function(s) from the previous RO quality assessment (or last change to the quality matrix rating if it occurred after the last assessment). The quality matrix is then recalculated to produce a new overall OA/center/CTS contract rating.
- All adjustments to ratings are examined in light of the applicable quality indicators for the entire adjusted function to ensure that the program change is of sufficient weight to justify a new function rating.
- All adjustments to the overall quality rating are submitted to the National Office of Job Corps by the RO in a letter requesting the change. The request should include a brief statement of the program change that precipitated the rating change, the method of assessment (e.g., monitoring trip, records review), the date the change applies, and a new quality matrix with the changed rating(s) annotated. A copy of the request should be provided to the contractor. The National Office ensures that the quality rating is transmitted to the Job Corps Data Center for inclusion in data system reports.
- Adjustments to the overall quality rating may be submitted once per month.

ASSESSMENT REPORT

Following a RO quality assessment, a report is prepared reflecting the results of the assessment. In preparing the report, the assessment results must be presented in a logical manner that relates to the methodology used for the assessment, to identify areas of improvement with associated priority for correction/improvement, and includes the quality matrix with final ratings for each function and an overall rating.

The audience for the report is the RO, the contractor, and the Job Corps National Office. The report provides the current quality rating for the contractor. The National Office ensures that the national quality rating is recorded for the QMS. In addition, the National Office retains RO quality assessment reports to provide responses to oversight groups when requested. ROs and contractors use reports to monitor continuous improvement and provide historical data regarding operations.

The report, signed by the Regional Director, is submitted to the contractor, as well as the National Office of Job Corps no later than 30 days after the assessment. The National Office ensures that the quality rating is transmitted to the Job Corps Data Center for inclusion in data system reports. The contractor/center prepares a corrective action plan in response to identified areas needing improvement within 30 days after receipt of the report.

The following format will be used by ROs to report assessment results to the National Office. Each narrative report must include at a **minimum**:

- **Executive Summary:** This should serve as an overall snapshot of the assessment team's view of the center. It should be short, concise and should be able to stand alone as a short summary of the review in order to be provided as a response to an information request. The summary **could** include information gleaned through the pre-on-site analysis. However, the summary should include at a minimum:
 1. Purpose of the Assessment: regular, special, by whom, and the outcome of the last assessment;
 2. History of the Center: location, characteristics;
 3. The Assessment Team: assignment and composition;
 4. General Assessment of the Center for the Six Areas of the PRH/PAG (OA, Career Preparation, Career Development, Career Transition, Management, and Administrative Support); and,
 5. The Quality Rating Matrix for these six areas.
- **Quality Rating:** The overall final score determined by the regional assessment team and the formal score need to be forwarded in writing to the National Office and then sent to the Job Corps Data Center for inclusion in the QMS.
- **Quality Rating Narrative:** Presents the documentation for the overall rating. This narrative is internal, pre-decisional documentation and must be provided for both acceptable or unacceptable quality ratings.

The ROs have the discretion in their full report, to include any other information (safety, health reviews, project manager checklists, staff/student surveys, etc.) and to design their own format for the documentation of the operator's performance. However, the National Office of Job Corps requires only the **electronic** submission of the three bulleted items above: the executive summary, the overall QR score, and the rationale behind that score. The RO is expected to maintain a copy of the full report for at least 5 years, in the event that a request is made for additional information.

REGIONAL OFFICE FOLLOW UP

Follow up provided by the contractor and the RO ensures continued improvement. At times, the action taken fails to achieve the expected outcome. Early discovery and intervention help the contractor focus on resolution. The expected objective of each corrective action should be defined. As the RO prepares for follow-up activities, priority items are selected from the contractor's response to the RO quality assessment to examine during the follow up.