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## Chapter 1. Quality

#### 1. General

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| Introduction | This topic provides an overview of the Quality Management Program (QMP) within the Benefits Assistance Service (BAS), Quality Client Services (QCS). |

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| a. Purpose of the Quality Management Program | The purpose of the BAS Quality Management Program (QMP) is to measure and ensure consistent, high quality service to those who telephone, visit, or write the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). |

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| b. Overview of Quality Client Services | Quality Client Services involves four separate activities:* Telephone interview quality reviews
* Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) electronic correspondence quality reviews
* Site visits for the National Call Centers (NCCs), the National Pension Call Center (NPCC), and the National IRIS Response Center (NIRC)
* Quality Review Team (QRT) quality evaluations
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| c. Personal Interview Activity | The Personal Interview Activity (PIA) does not have a national quality review process at this time. However, stations must check the quality of responses provided clients and ensure a high standard of professionalism. |
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1. General, Continued

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| d. Purpose of the Quality Review Process | It is essential that a QMP be in place to provide regular systematic evaluation, quality feedback, and necessary corrective actions for quality assurance of the NCCs, NPCC, and NIRC. These reviews assess the overall quality experience of the client.Stations must have a standard operating procedure in place to ensure all deficiencies that are identified during local and BAS-conducted quality reviews are efficiently and effectively managed and addressed. Local management teams must:* Provide feedback to the PCR to address all deficiencies and provide any necessary corrective training.
* Appropriately address any outstanding issues, i.e., document evidence, submit an intent to file, etc., to ensure all necessary actions have been submitted and appropriately documented.
* Contact the customer to correct any incorrect or incomplete information that was provided during the interaction.

**Notes:*** Quality review requirements and procedures are provided at the BAS Quality Web Site: <http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/BAS/quality-training/quality/index.asp>
* All quality review sheets completed by QCS shall be kept for a one-year period.
* Performance documentation files are subject to review on site surveys, and/or may be requested by BAS at VA Central Office.
* Stations may keep their own review sheets electronically; however, they must be available for printing and review.
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#### 2. Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process

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| Introduction | This topic contains guidance on the Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process including:* Call Monitoring
* Review Sample Size
* Review Sheet
* Review Criteria
* Data Reporting
* Data Analysis, and
* Requests for Reconsideration.
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| a. Call Monitoring | Call monitoring is used to assess the overall recorded call accuracy of each interaction with a caller. Call monitoring is conducted:* monthly at the Veterans Benefits Administration National Call Centers (NCCs) and National Pension Call Center (NPCC) for calls placed to the VA Benefits toll-free number: 1-800-827-1000 and the Pension toll-free number: 1-877-294-6380; and
* monthly by the Quality Assurance Specialists (QASs) via the BAS Quality Client Services’ National Quality Management Program (QMP).
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| b. Required Local Monitoring of Calls | The Manila Regional Office (RO) is ***not*** part of the NCC system. Therefore, RO management is required to perform local monthly call reviews for quality purposes. |

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2. Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process Quality Management Process, Continued

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| c. Call Review Sample Size | QCS will monitor a minimum of 70 randomly selected calls per month for each NCC and the NPCC.The following table provides the minimum monthly reviews required for those ROs that are not part of the NCC system:

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| --- | --- |
| If Prior FY Telephone Interviews Totaled: | Then… |
| Less than 100,000 | 50 calls should be reviewed per month |
| More than 100,000 | 100 calls should be reviewed monthly |

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|  | ***Note***: The monthly minimum number of calls reviewed by the Manila Regional Office is based on the total number of telephone interviews the particular station completed during the preceding fiscal year (FY). |

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| d. Review Sheet for Monitoring Calls | The reviewer shall complete one [*QCS Call Quality Scorecard*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bas/quality-training/quality/reviews/quality.asp)for every monitored call. |

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| e. Telephone Interview Quality Review Criteria | Telephone interviews are reviewed for:* Appropriate greeting
* Compliance with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and the Privacy Act (PA) (identification protocol)
* Acknowledgment of the Veteran’s service
* Technical accuracy
* Call closing
* Communication skills (courtesy, professionalism, call control, and willingness to help)

 Particular attention and higher point values are placed upon correctly following ID protocol requirements, technical accuracy, and courtesy/professionalism. However, failure to correctly address any of the above items during the telephone call will result in loss of points on the call evaluation.  |

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2. Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process Quality Management Process, Continued

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| f. Identification Protocol | In order to ensure the protection of the Veteran or beneficiaries’ privacy, the Public Contact Representative (PCR) must ensure proper identification requirements are met *prior* to providing any protected information or taking action requested by the Veteran or other interested third party. Specific identification protocol requirements, as outlined in M27-1 Chapter 7, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA), must be followed during each interaction.Identification protocol is an important part of the overall call score. When scoring identification protocol compliance, QCS uses a pass/fail system of scoring. The identification protocol category will be scored using either “Yes” or “No.” If “no” is marked, the evaluation will result in a “fail” of identification protocol, for which rationale will be provided.Use the table below to properly evaluate identification protocol interactions.

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| --- | --- |
| **If ...** | **Then ...** |
| no | evaluation will result in a fail of identification protocol, for which a rationale will be provided |
| yes, for interactions with a first-party inquirer | PCR must:* Ask all required identification protocol questions, to include any applicable enhanced ID protocol questions, as outlined in Knowledge Management article, [*Identification (ID) Protocol Requirements*,](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001001/article/554400000003633/Identification-ID-Protocol-Requirement <https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/)
* Verify all information in the system of records, and

Ensure the required information is provided by the Veteran/beneficiary.  |

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 Quality Management Process, Continued

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| **f. Identification Protocol, cont’d** |

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| yes, for interactions with a third-party inquirer | PCR must:* Determine if the inquirer is an authorized third party by:
	+ Review the system of records to determine if there is a valid VA Form (VAF) 21-0845, *Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party*, on record.
		- If a valid VAF 21-0845 is not of record, the inquirer is not authorized to receive protected information from the record.
		- If a valid VAF 21-0845 is of record, continue with the ID Protocol Process.
* Ask all required identification protocol questions, to include any applicable enhanced ID protocol questions, and the security question from the valid VAF 21-0845 as outlined in Knowledge Management article, [*Identification (ID) Protocol Requirements*](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001001/article/554400000003633/Identification-ID-Protocol-Requirement <https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/)*,*
* Verify all information in the system of records, and
* Ensure the information is provided by an authorized individual.
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2. Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process Quality Management Process, Continued

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| g. Technical Accuracy | Technical accuracy refers to recognizing all the caller’s issues and providing complete and correct information pertaining to those issues. QCS will monitor the accuracy of up to five central issues for each call. A telephone call may involve multiple issues, such as:* requests for the current status of a claim
* change in address, and/or
* request for general benefit information.

The PCR must provide complete and accurate information in response to all direct *and* implied questions by using all available computer applications and reference tools.Every call issue is assigned one of the following evaluations:

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| Evaluation Category | Description |
| Yes (completely correct) | Everything said about the particular issue was correct, all required information was provided, and the required actions were completed correctly and appropriately. |
| Partial Credit | Correct response to the main substance of the issue but: * Did not fully provide accurate responses to the minor parts of the issue,
* Failed to provide additional information that should have been provided, or
* Said something in error about a particular issue that is a minor infraction
 |
| No (incorrect) | Incorrect response to the issue, failed to provide required information, and/or failed to complete a required action. |

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2. Telephone Interview Activity Quality Management Process Quality Management Process, Continued

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| h. Courtesy and Professionalism | Courtesy and professionalism of the PCR is an important part of the overall call score and is based upon the call in its entirety. QCS will take into consideration the overall impact of the entire call.When scoring courtesy and professionalism, QCS uses a pass/fail system of scoring. The call courtesy and professionalism category will be scored using either “Yes” or “No.” If “no” is marked, the evaluation will result in a “fail” of courtesy and professionalism, for which rationale will be provided. |

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| i. Call Data Reporting | QCS provides a summary report of each station’s performance and overall Telephone Interview Activity (TIA) performance data to the Office of Performance Analysis & Integrity (OPA&I) on a monthly basis. This report provides monthly and cumulative fiscal year statistics on the overall call evaluation. In addition, this information is distributed to the NCCs, the NPCC, and the NIRC through the Office of Field Operations (OFO). QCS also maintains additional, detailed information about every call reviewed by entering the completed review sheet into the Call Monitoring Program.***Note***: Please refer to the current [call quality evaluation guide](http://vaww.infoshare.va.gov/sites/NCCTelephoneQuality/Shared%20Documents/New%20Quality%20Evalutation%20Form%20Documents/Updated%20Call%20Quality%20Evaluation%20Guide.docx) for additional information concerning call monitoring.  |

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| j. Call Data Analysis | Each month, QCS completes a comprehensive report of the prior month’s TIA quality review information. The evaluations are retained for one year. This report is provided to OFO by the 10th business day of the month and then distributed to the call centers for review and training opportunities. The quality evaluations are considered certified once the report is provided to OFO. QCS also provides instructional comments and guidance on any noted problems or error trends at the particular station. Call centers may use this information and feedback for individual or group training purposes.***Note***: Call Centers must complete local quality trending and analysis to address errors identified during local quality reviews. |

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| k. Request for Reconsideration of Call Evaluations | If the NCC or NPCC believes an erroneous error call has been made, a formal reconsideration must be submitted for review under the direction of the Chief, Quality Client Services. To request reconsideration of an error, prepare a memorandum over the NCC or NPCC Manager’s signature through the Regional Office Director and submit it to QCS. The memorandum should explain the error in the evaluation and the specific category/point value requested to be reconsidered. The request should also include a reference as to why the evaluation is in error and should be reconsidered.Within *30 days* of the certification and release of each station’s monthly performance data to PA&I and OFO, the call center may request QCS reconsider the following call point value evaluations:* Used call greeting as defined by OFO
* FOIA/Privacy Act correctly followed
* Acknowledged Veteran’s service
* Provided complete and accurate information about the caller’s issue and took all required actions
* Issue Specific Scorecard evaluations
* Used appropriate call closing
* Maintained courtesy and professionalism throughout the call
* Efficiently managed time and call flow
* Demonstrated willingness to help

Multiple reconsideration requests should be submitted separately (i.e., one request per memorandum).Reconsideration requests should be submitted to the Quality Client Services reconsideration mailbox: VAVBAWAS/CO/BAS/RECONS |  |
|  | Chief, Quality Client Services, will provide the reconsideration decision outcome within 30 days of receipt of the valid request. |  |

#### 3. Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) – Quality Management Process

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| Introduction | This topic contains guidance on the Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) Quality Management Process including:* IRIS Message Reviews
* Review Sample Size
* Review Sheet
* Review Criteria
* Data Reporting
* Data Analysis, and
* Requests for Reconsideration.
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| a. IRIS Response Reviews | The Quality Client Services’ National Quality Management Program (QMP) will evaluate IRIS responses closed by the National IRIS Response Center (NIRC) for quality purposes.  |

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| b. IRIS Quality Review Sample Size | QCS will randomly select and review a minimum of 50 closed IRIS responses each month.  |

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| c. IRIS Quality Review Sheet | The reviewer shall complete one IRIS Quality Improvement Review Sheet for every reviewed IRIS message. The review sheets are maintained in an [electronic database](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/apps/weblogon.asp). |

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| d. IRIS Data Reporting | QCS provides a monthly report of the NIRC’s performance to the Office of Performance Analysis & Integrity (PA&I) by the 10th business day of the following month. This report provides monthly and cumulative fiscal year statistics on the overall evaluation. In addition, this information is distributed to the NIRC through the Office of Field Operations (OFO). QCS also maintains additional, detailed information about every IRIS response reviewed by entering the completed review sheet into the IRIS National Quality Review database. |

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3. Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) – Quality Management Process, Continued

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| e. IRIS Data Analysis | QCS provides instructional comments and guidance on any noted problems or error trends identified during the IRIS reviews. The NIRC may use this information as feedback for individual or group training purposes.Note: NIRC must complete local quality trending and analysis to address errors identified during local quality reviews. |

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| f. Request for Reconsider-ation of IRIS Evaluations | If the NIRC believes an erroneous error call has been made, a formal reconsideration should be submitted for review under the direction of the Chief, Quality Client Services (QCS). To request reconsideration of an error, prepare a memorandum over the NIRC Manager’s signature through the Regional Office Director and submit it to QCS. The memorandum should explain the error in the evaluation and the specific category requested to be reconsidered. The request should also include a reference as to why the evaluation is in error and should be reconsidered.Within *30 days* of the certification and release of NIRC performance data to PA&I and OFO, the NIRC may request QCS reconsider the following evaluations * Identification Protocol
* Technical Accuracy
* Courtesy and Professionalism

Multiple reconsideration requests should be submitted separately; i.e., one request per memorandum. Reconsideration requests should be submitted to the Quality Client Services reconsideration mailbox: VAVBAWAS/CO/BAS/RECONS |  |
|  | Chief, Quality Client Services, will provide the reconsideration decision outcome within 30 days of receipt of the valid request  |  |

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#### 4. Non-Punitive Quality Reviews

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| Introduction | This topic describes the process Benefits Assistance Service (BAS); Quality Client Services (QCS) uses to conduct non-punitive quality reviews on the local quality performed in each National Call Center (NCC) and National Pension Call Center (NPCC). |

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| a. Purpose  | The purpose of QCS monthly quality reviews of the local NCC and NPCC reviews is to facilitate dialogue and organizational alignment. This review will also validate the Quality Review Team (QRT) process and support enhanced direct feedback and training in a two-way communication flow.  |

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| b. Goals and Objectives of the Non Punitive Reviews | The goals and objectives of these reviews include:* ensuring consistency in application of policies and procedures;
* creating a mechanism to provide training and facilitate meaningful discussions regarding BAS quality assurance procedures;
* providing feedback to enhance and improve local QRT skills without affecting the specialist’s individual performance.
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| c. Committee Composition and Work Assignment | The QRT committee is comprised of members of the QCS staff and consists of two or more members with one person designated as the lead. The committee completes quality evaluations of local NCC/NPCC reviews and provides a trend report and feedback to call centers based on the results of the monthly reviews. The calls under this review are not a part of the monthly QCS national quality reviews and will not be considered in the NCC’s national quality. |

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| d. Call Review and Selection | Locally completed evaluations are randomly selected each month by a member of the QCS committee. Committee members complete a non-punitive review of the locally completed quality review and results are provided to call center managers for review and distribution to the individual under review. Trends are discussed and feedback is provided during monthly call calibration training sessions.  |

#### 5. NCC, NPCC, and NIRC Site Visits

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| Introduction | This topic provides the purpose, goals, objectives, and the protocol for site visits conducted at the NCCs, NPCC, and NIRC by Quality Client Services. |

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| a. Purpose of Site Visits | The purpose of Quality Client Services staff site visits is to ensure that VBA policies and procedures pertaining to National Call Center (NCC), National Pension Call Center (NPCC), and National IRIS Response Center (NIRC) operations are followed. |

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| b. Goals and Objectives of the Site Visit | The goals and objectives of these site visits include, but are not limited to:* ensuring consistency in application of policies and procedures;
* reviewing local quality review processes ;
* providing on-site training as needed;
* reviewing NCC/NPCC/NIRC training plans, reports, performance standards, and quality data;
* reviewing SAOs and SOPs specific to each NCC, the NPCC and NIRC;
* monitoring and assessing internal controls, as appropriate;
* identifying trends, unique challenges, and/or out-of-line situations;
* reviewing workflow and workload management and associated plans;
* identifying NCC/NPCC/NIRC best practices and deficiencies;
* providing feedback with suggestions to improve customer service; and
* evaluating and reinforcing the need for positive communication between managers and employees.
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| c. Pre-Visit Preparation | At least 45 days prior to the scheduled site visit, QCS will provide a site visit letter to the director of the RO detailing all information being requested with any established timeframes. The letter will also include a solicitation to identify any training needs that can be fulfilled during the site visit.The information that will be requested and evaluated during the pre-visit preparation and onsite visit is identified in the [BAS Site Visit Protocol](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/BAS/outreach/sitevisit.asp) document.RO management must deliver all requested information timely to ensure the effectiveness of the pre site visit review. |

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5. NCC, NPCC, and NIRC Site Visits, Continued

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| d. Post Visit Requirements | The final site visit report will be distributed to BAS management, Deputy Under Secretary for Field Operations (DUSB), VAVBAWAS/CO/20P, VAVBAWAS/CO/OFO, Director, Program Integrity & Internal Controls Staff, applicable District Office, applicable regional office director’s office mailbox, and applicable regional office NCC mailbox. A copy should also be sent to VAVBAWAS/CO/21, VAVBAWAS/CO/214A, VAVBAWAS/CO/Pension & Fiduciary Service, and BAS site visit team members. The report must be sent within 60 days of completion of the site visit.The regional office Director shall have 60 days to respond to the findings included in the final site-visit report. |