



The Volunteer Monitor's Guide To

Quality Assurance Project Plans



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Dear Reader:

Across the country, volunteers are monitoring the condition of streams, rivers, lakes, reservoirs, estuaries, coastal waters, wetlands, and wells. The number and variety of these projects are continually on the rise. So, too, is the complexity of the monitoring volunteers conduct and the uses of the data they collect.

One of the most difficult issues facing volunteer environmental monitoring programs today is data credibility. Potential data users are often skeptical about volunteer data -- they may have doubts about the goals and objectives of the project, about how volunteers were trained, about how samples were collected, handled and stored, or about how data were analyzed and reports written. A key tool in breaking down this barrier of skepticism is the quality assurance project plan.

The quality assurance project plan, or QAPP, is a document that outlines the procedures that those who conduct a monitoring project will take to ensure that the data they collect and analyze meets project requirements. It is an invaluable planning and operating tool that outlines the project's methods of data collection, storage and analysis. It serves not only to convince skeptical data users about the quality of the project's findings, but also to record methods, goals and project implementation steps *for current and future volunteers* and for those who may wish to use the project's data over time.

Developing a QAPP is a dynamic, interactive process that should ideally involve quality assurance experts, potential data users, and members of the volunteer monitoring project team. It is not an easy process. This document is designed to encourage and facilitate the development of volunteer QAPPs by clearly presenting explanations and examples. Readers are urged to consult, as well, the additional resources listed in the appendices to this document, and to contact their state or U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Regional quality assurance staff for specific information or guidance on their projects.

Sincerely,
Geoffrey H. Grubbs, Director
Assessment and Watershed Protection Division

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Acknowledgements

This manual was developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through contract no. 68-C3-0303 with Tetra Tech, Inc. The project manager was Alice Mayo, USEPA Office of Wetlands, Oceans, and Watersheds. Principal authors include Margo Hunt, USEPA Region 2; Alice Mayo, USEPA; Martin Brossman, USEPA; and Abby Markowitz, Tetra Tech, Inc.

The authors wish to thank the many reviewers who provided constructive and insightful comments to earlier drafts of this document. This guidance manual would not have been possible without their invaluable advice and assistance.

Original illustrations by Dave Skibiak and Emily Faalasli of Tetra Tech, Inc., and Elizabeth Yuster of the Maryland Volunteer Watershed Monitoring Association.

September 1996