

# QUALITY ASSURANCE



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**All charities and community groups need to make sure that they are well run.**

**Quality assurance (QA) refers to the internal processes, policies, and procedures an organization follows to check that things are running well, identify any issues and make plans to improve. It involves monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of services to achieve consistency, effectiveness, and compliance with best practices. Examples include internal audits, staff training, feedback mechanisms and impact assessments.**

Quality assurance accreditation is an external recognition or certification from an independent body that confirms that an organisation meets specific quality standards. It usually involves a formal assessment process, often requiring evidence that the charity follows best practices in governance, service delivery, and impact measurement. Using such a scheme can act as a strong assurance to boards, managers and team, a way of demonstrating effectiveness to funders and partners and can help you to build trust with service users. It demonstrates a commitment to accountability, efficiency, and compliance with legal standards, including those set by the Charity Commission.

While gaining formal QA accreditation may seem daunting, especially for smaller groups, the benefits can include better service delivery, increased funding opportunities, and a stronger reputation.

## Practical steps to achieving an externally-recognised quality assurance accreditation:

### 1 Start with a self-assessment

Before committing to a full, externally assessed QA scheme, conduct a simple self-assessment to identify gaps.



- Use the [Charity Excellence Framework](#) (free online toolkit) to measure where you currently are.
- Review core policies: safeguarding, financial management, data protection, governance, and volunteer management.
- Nominate a person or small team to take responsibility for quality assurance and ensure progress is made.

Tower Hamlets CVS can provide advice and guidance on local best practices.

### 2 Prioritise key policies and governance

Focus on strengthening essential areas first.



- **Governance:** Use the [Charity Governance Code](#) to assess and improve board leadership.
- **Safeguarding:** Ensure compliance with the latest [Charity Commission safeguarding advice](#).
- **Financial management:** Adopt financial procedures and controls set out by the [Charity Commission](#). Funders will also need to know that you have these procedures in place.
- Free policy templates are available from NCVO and Charity Excellence to help organisations put the right structures in place. See the checklist towards the end of this document.

### 3 Use affordable and accessible QA resources

Not all QA schemes require major financial investment. Some suggestions for different areas of work are given at the end of this document.

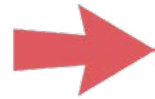


#### Consider:

- [Charity Excellence Framework](#): Free online toolkit for continuous improvement.
- [NCVO's Trusted Charity Mark](#): A well-respected structured accreditation for voluntary organisations.

#### 4 Set achievable milestones

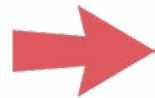
Quality assurance is a journey, not a one-time task. Break it into manageable steps.



- **Month 1:** Conduct a self-assessment and identify key policy gaps.
- **Month 2:** Implement basic policies using free templates and guidance.
- **Month 3-6:** Engage with a QA accreditation scheme or external support.
- **Ongoing:** Review and update policies annually and gather feedback from staff and service users.

#### 5 Link to funding success

Many funders, including the National Lottery Community Fund, prioritise organisations with strong governance and quality standards. Implementing basic QA steps can make your funding applications more competitive. Having policies and processes in place also increases funders' confidence in your ability to manage grants effectively.



##### The benefits of quality assurance - Achieving QA accreditation can:

- Improve efficiency, compliance and transparency.
- Boost credibility, helping to attract more volunteers, staff and donors.
- Strengthen funding applications and open new opportunities.
- Ensure sustainability by embedding best practices within your organisation.



## Checklist of policies and procedures

In order to get quality assurance you will need some form of the following documents:



**Business plan.**



**Equalities/equal opportunities policy.**



**Safeguarding policy.**



**Health & Safety policy.**



**Data protection policy.**



**Volunteer management policy (the [Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets](#) can help you write this).**



## How to find an externally-recognised quality assurance accreditation

Whilst quality assurance is an internal process, a quality assurance accreditation is an external validation that demonstrates your charity meets high standards. Accreditation can enhance credibility, improve funding prospects, and reassure stakeholders. This is how you can find an accreditation that suits you:

✓ Do some research to find out which schemes are most used in your subsector, and for your type and size of organisation (there are some suggestions at the bottom of this resource). As well as searching online, it might also be helpful to check in with any specialist support organisations or umbrella bodies for your area of work and to speak to others in your field to see what they use and what has worked for them.

✓ Whilst it can be very helpful and heartening to find a scheme or accreditation that fits with your specific area of work, if part of the reason you're looking for QA accreditation is to demonstrate your effectiveness to funders or partners (e.g the council or NHS) it's also important to make sure that whichever scheme you pick is recognisable and acceptable to those who are likely to scrutinise your work.

✓ Consider whether you are looking for an externally or internally-evaluated approach. Each option has benefits and limitations in terms of time commitment and perception.

✓ Be mindful of the cost of going through a QA process, both in terms of your team's time and in terms of any payment you will need to make for external assessment, inspection or accreditation

✓ Consider how long the accreditation will last and how to build any re-assessment process into your budget and future plans.



## List of different quality assurance schemes

### General

- [ISO 9001](#).
- [Charity Excellence Framework](#) offers a free toolkit for self-assessment.
- NCVO's [Trusted Standard](#) is specifically designed for voluntary organisations, providing an affordable path to accreditation.
- [Improving Quality and Pre-VISIBLE](#) from Community Matters.

### Small organisations

- [Charity Excellence Framework](#): Free online toolkit for continuous improvement.

### Youth work

- [London Youth Quality Mark](#): Designed for youth organisations, with staged development support.

### Volunteering

- [Investing in volunteers](#).

### Advice

- [AQS](#): A sector-owned, independently audited standard that focuses on advice.
- [Matrix Standard](#): Owned by the Department of Education, ensures the delivery of high-quality information, advice and guidance services.

- [Immigration Advice Authority](#) (previously OISC): The Immigration Advice Authority regulates immigration advisers, ensuring they are fit, competent and act in their clients' best interests.

### Early Years and childcare providers

- You will usually have to register with [Ofsted](#).
- Play organisations sometimes choose to use Play England's [Quality in Play](#).
- YPF Trust runs a [quality mark for supplementary education](#).
- [Madrassah Quality Standards Framework](#) for education provision in madrassahs and mosques.

### City farms and gardens

- [Green Care](#) has one for city farms and gardens.

### The arts

- [Artsmark Award](#): accredited by Arts Council England this is the only award for arts and culture provision in England.



If you have any questions about any of the information in this resource, THCVS can give 1-1 support and advice. Please email us at [info@thcvs.org.uk](mailto:info@thcvs.org.uk).