SEDL's Quality Assurance System
Updated Procedures
January 2003

Introduction

The purpose of SEDL's quality assurance (QA) review process is to ensure that SEDL products and services are of the highest quality. SEDL's QA system, first formally implemented in 1991 in response to OERI[1] contractual requirements for the Regional Education Laboratory (REL) contract, has undergone periodic review and modification in efforts to maintain its goal of providing high quality work and substantive products. During the first and second quarters of 2002, SEDL's current QA system was evaluated A report of that evaluation was provided to staff in the third quarter (See *Evaluation Report, September 30, 2002*). During the fourth quarter of 2002 modifications were made to the system. This document describes revisions to the QA system to be implemented during the first quarter of 2003. (See Attachment A for brief list of modifications to QA System.)

Components of the QA System

Review Stages

Products/services under development are to be submitted to **three required stages of review:** Conceptual, Early Draft, and Completed Draft. The general focus for each of the stages is as follows:

- The ***conceptual stage*** will focus on the plan for developing the product, its purpose, the need for such a product, its appropriateness for the intended audience, its potential usability, and its "fit" with the overall goals of the REL program.

- The ***early draft stage*** review will provide reviewers with a first look at the general design and content of the product. Issues to be discussed at this stage may include whether the design will achieve the intended purpose of the product, audience appropriateness, usability, intended outcomes and how they will be met, and dissemination strategies.

- The ***completed draft stage*** provides an opportunity for reviewers to assess whether all of the proposed components of the product have been fully developed, its overall quality, its overall coherence and fit with existing work in the area, and whether it has been developed in a way that will achieve its intended outcome(s).

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[1] Office of Educational Research and Improvement, currently renamed the Institute of Educational Science (IES).

Participants

Internal Reviewers

Internal review teams will be composed of REL programmatic and evaluation staff members (in Associate or Specialist positions) and senior staff members at the Dana Center involved in collaborative work with the Laboratory. A team of three staff reviewers will be assigned for specific product reviews, and the same internal team will participate in reviewing a product throughout the various stages of its development. SEDL's Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) will serve as an additional reviewer in the process.

The composition of internal review teams will be jointly determined by the recommendations of product developers and the QA Coordinator. Each review team will designate a team leader at the time of the team's assignment for the first review of a product. The team leader will be responsible for coordinating and scheduling reviews, facilitating group discussions about products under review, and providing documentation of the review process. The COO will review and provide documentation on all products subject to the QA process.

Managers and Developers

Managers will oversee the work of developing products and initiate the QA review process at particular stages of product design and development. When requesting a review, developers will provide the QA Coordinator with a completed Request for QA Review form (described below under Procedures - Developers). The manager will sign the Request for QA Review document, indicating that (s)he has reviewed the product and believes it is ready for QA review.

External Reviewers

The two primary categories of external reviewers are: (1) technical/subject-area experts and (2) practitioners or representatives of the intended audience for products. Products may be reviewed externally by individuals, expert panels, or focus groups, depending on the appropriateness of each of these approaches for a particular product and the timing of the review (e.g., focus groups of intended audience members may be most useful in the early stages of product development).

Developers will contract with multiple reviewers when conducting external reviews, and particularly when using practitioners or intended audience representatives as reviewers. When possible, developers should vary their selection of external reviewers so that the same reviewers are not providing feedback on multiple products. Exceptions may be made for the use of reviewers with technical expertise.
External reviewers are required to provide feedback at the ***early draft stage.*** At the conceptual and the completed draft stages, external reviews are optional and may be initiated at the discretion of the developer(s). External reviewers will be remunerated for

their services on optional as well as required reviews by completing a Contract Agreement form and submitting it to the manager of Evaluation Services.

Procedures

Developers

Requesting a QA Review. Developers will submit a Request for QA Review to the QA Coordinator for each stage review. (See Attachment B for a template of information required on the revised Request for QA Review. The required information for requesting a QA review can also be found on SEDL's intranet home page under "product quality.") Developers shall complete all of the information shown on the template in as much detail as possible. Questions are provided under each heading as a guide for Developers in supplying detailed information about their product. Revisions to the information form for requesting a QA review include:

- "Focus of Review" - Developers may suggest/direct a particular focus on the product for internal team review feedback.
- "Estimated Timeline for Product Development" – The timeline for product development will be set out. In addition, estimated dates on which the product will be submitted for the QA stage reviews (both internal and external) will be indicated by developers.
- Developers may recommend REL staff to serve on their product's internal QA review team. This need only be filled out when requesting the initial conceptual review.
- Developers will indicate whether an external review will also be requested, and if so, an area for indicating the names of external reviewers is provided.

External Reviews and Documentation. Only one external review is required. As noted above (in the section on Participants – External Reviewers), this review is to occur at the **early draft stage**. External reviews at the conceptual and the completed draft stages are optional, and may be initiated at the discretion of the developer(s).

Appropriate external reviewers will be selected by managers and product developers, and based on potential reviewers' area of expertise and/or anticipated use of a particular product. Developers and managers will be responsible for providing a rationale for their choice and a vita or resume for each external reviewer chosen to participate in the QA process (for documentation purposes).

A uniform format for the documentation of external reviewer feedback has been established. Developers will provide external reviewers with a documentation form (Attachment C – External Reviewer Feedback Form). External reviewers will complete and return the documentation form to developers. Developers will provide the QA Coordinator with a copy of the external reviewer documentation. When possible, it is

desirable that external reviewers and developers discuss their feedback either in person or by telephone conference.

Developer Documentation of Feedback Use. Developers shall complete a database form describing how they responded to feedback from internal reviewers and, when used, external reviewers (See Attachment E – Developer Response to QA Feedback). Items to be addressed parallel questions asked of all reviewers. When submitting their documentation form to the QA Coordinator, developers shall attach a copy of the external reviewer feedback (the External Reviewer Feedback Form and any attachments thereto) if/when utilizing an external review. This documentation form should be provided to the QA Coordinator **prior to** requesting the next QA review for the product, or **prior to** the product's dissemination, implementation, or delivery to IES.

Internal Review Team

Staff shall be notified via email by the QA Coordinator when they have been assigned to serve on a QA review team. The team shall select a team leader and inform the QA Coordinator of their selection. The team leader shall have the responsibility of coordinating and scheduling review sessions, facilitating group discussions during review meetings, and providing documentation of review feedback.

A copy of the product under review will be forwarded to each of the QA team members and the COO at the time that the team is assigned. After reviewing the product and prior to the review meeting with developers, the QA team and the COO will have completed Part I of the Internal QA Review Feedback Form (Attachment D) which may be found on the QA database. At the conclusion of the review meeting, Part II of the Feedback Form should be completed, and a printed copy, signed by developers and reviewers, submitted to the QA Coordinator.

Additional Procedural Revisions

Timeframe for QA Reviews. Product developers shall specify a timeframe within which their product will move through the entire QA system. In order to avoid development delays, the time for the review process at each stage should not exceed three weeks (i.e., submission of request for review to time of review meeting). Developers should incorporate QA stage reviews into their product development timetables to ensure that reviewers have adequate time to consider and provide thoughtful feedback about the product to developers.

Toolkits. With respect to toolkits (a compilation of various products), each piece of the toolkit shall be submitted to the QA process as it is developed. In addition, once complete, the entire toolkit is subject to a *completed draft* stage review. This review will focus primarily on the overall coherence of the toolkit with respect to its intended goal(s) and overall usability by the intended audience.

Data Gathering Tools/Instruments. In some instances, the entire cycle of product review through the QA system may occur over an extended period. In particular, data collection tools and instruments (e.g., site surveys, questionnaires, interview protocols, and other information-gathering protocols) may require field testing and piloting procedures prior to their finalization. In such cases, at the time of the conceptual review, developers and the internal review team shall negotiate the timeframe for which such tools and instruments will be submitted for further reviews. The following guidelines should be considered in negotiating the continued review cycle for such products:

- ***Field-testing*** is generally a process by which to gain expert or potential intended audience perceptions of a tool or instrument's items. Field tests may be conducted after the initial ***conceptual review*** takes place. Field tests are expected to solicit a relatively small sample of expert or intended client perceptions of clarity, relevance, understanding, organization, presentation, etc., of tool/instrument components. Such testing is not intended as "data gathering" for use in analyses related to population characteristics, performance, or other reportable statistics with respect to project goals and objectives. It is intended as a first step in the tool/instrument refinement process.

- ***Pilot testing*** of data collection tools or instruments requires an ***early draft review*** prior to their use in the field. Pilot tests are those procedures where tools/ instruments are developed to the point at which they may be used (or tested) in gathering data on intended audience characteristics, performance, or other reportable statistics with respect to project goals and objectives. While the tools/ instruments may be further refined based on the results of their implementation in the field, a review of their form and intended purpose prior to the first field administration is required.

- When ***substantial alterations*** in tools/instruments occur from the process of field testing, they must be resubmitted to a ***second conceptual review*** prior to further field tests. For piloted instruments, if substantial changes occur after an initial pilot procedure, these instruments must be resubmitted to a ***second early draft review***.

- It is acknowledged that instrument development is an ongoing procedure, and refinements often occur with repeated administrations. Developers should, therefore, attempt to provide a realistic timeframe for field and pilot tests. If negotiations with the review team during the conceptual review result in a change to the timetable specified on the developer's *Request for QA Review*, a new timetable shall be submitted to the QA Coordinator by the developer.

The requirements of this three-stage review process will apply to all major Laboratory products and services. Some specific requirements may be adjusted for products intended for internal use at SEDL.

Appeal Process

An appeal system is established to deal with unresolved conflicts (e.g., among reviewers or between reviewers and developers) that might arise during the review process. In such cases, the QA Coordinator should be informed and the issue will be referred to the President and CEO for resolution.

Role of Evaluation Services in the QA Process

Responsibility for the QA system has been assigned to SEDL's Evaluation Services (ES) unit. An Evaluation staff member has been designated as the QA Coordinator and will be responsible for internal review team assignments as well as for carrying out the monitoring, reporting, and training functions for the system.

A tracking system for all reviews will be maintained, and copies of all written reviews and the products to which they refer will be filed by ES. Records maintained in this way will be used for reporting purposes and as an information source for evaluations of the QA system. Information on the status and outcomes of QA reviews will be reported in quarterly progress reports to IES, and copies of written reviews will be made available to IES upon request.

The QA Coordinator will be responsible for monitoring the system on a continuing basis. Implementation issues and system outcomes will be the focus of descriptive summaries of the QA process. These summaries will be reported as a part of selected Annual SEDL Evaluation Reports. Periodic staff surveys will be used to provide data to inform continuous improvement efforts, and less formal feedback from staff and managers about the QA system will be encouraged (with the QA Coordinator as the primary contact for such discussions).

Members of the externally staffed Evaluation Advisory Team will be available to provide input to staff about various facets of the QA system.

Evaluation staff will be responsible for training SEDL and Dana Center staff members who participate in the QA system. Periodic trainings will be held to orient newly hired staff to the QA process. Overall, these training efforts will focus on ensuring that reviewers are well-prepared to conduct reviews and to deliver feedback. More specifically, training components will include: an overview of the purpose of the system, the identification of products to be included in the QA process, the general procedures to be used for the review process, and the reporting responsibilities of participating staff. Staff training will be offered during the first quarter of 2003, and thereafter as needed.