Frequently Asked Questions
Certification of U.S. IOOS Regional Information Coordination Entities

February 02, 2015

STRATEGIC OPERATIONAL PLAN

Question (QA SOP):
Section 997.23 d)4)i) and ii) both talk about referring to best practices for Standard Operating Procedures for equipment QA practices and keeping equipment inventories and logs. Is this something that you have examples of?

Answer:
The short answer is that no, there are not any examples that we can point to.

Our intent is to give the applicant flexibility in how they meet this requirement. We expect that most, if not all, applications for certification will come from organizations who work directly with Principal Investigators (PIs) that have years of experience in the operations of coastal observing systems. We think the processes these PIs have in place, represent "best practices" for the operation and maintenance of regional observing systems.

The standard operating procedures described by the RICE to meet the requirements in section 997.23 d) 4) i) and ii), may at a minimum, be a broadly worded statement that is included in all sub-awards stating that sub-contractors should follow industry best practices and manufacturer guidance where applicable, and be prepared to provide documentation upon request.

A RICE may add language to its standard operating procedure, specifying the need for specific requirements for calibration, validation, logs, record keeping, etc., depending on the experience of the sub-contractor, but this is not required to meet the certification requirements.

Question (QA for HF radar):
There is a question in the IOOS Certification Application that asks the RICE to describe the standard operating procedures for calibrating, validating, operating, and maintaining equipment owned by the RICE. For HF radar we plan to use standard best practice procedures defined by the National HF Radar Steering Team. We plan to point to this document for the HFR Team's Best Practices: http://cordc.ucsd.edu/projects/mapping/documents/SCCOOS-BestPractices.pdf, as it is referenced in the National Plan. Is this sufficient?

Answer:
Yes, for HF radar, it is sufficient to reference this document.

Question (QC and QARTOD):

How does the requirement that all data be quality control (QC) checked apply to those variables that have new QARTOD manuals approved? Is there a grace period for applying the QARTOD protocols to data? Is it expected that QARTOD protocols will be retroactively applied to historical data?

Answer:

QC must be done for all data (with the exception of Citizen Science data as it is defined in these FAQs). The use of QARTOD protocols, for real time data streams, can be done in a "phased" implementation. QARTOD protocols do not need to be in place, for those variables with approved manuals, prior to certification, but this does not exempt these variables from the QC requirement, and the certification application must describe how a RICE will implement the QARTOD protocols over an identified period of time.

Question (QC of Citizen Science):
One of the goals of IOOS is to make new data sets available for use by stakeholders. Data from citizen science efforts are an important new data set that we'd like to display, but there are limits to the ability to QC these data. Working with our partners to display this data is a great way for the RAs to contribute to the community and meet our strategic goals. However, some of the citizen science groups simply do not have the data management capacity needed to perform proper data management practices, and frequently, the details on the data collection methods are not clear.   Is there any way that data collected through citizen science efforts can be displayed without performing QC on it?

Answer:

The sole exception to the requirement to perform QC on data distributed by the RICE, is for data collected as part of a "Citizen Science" effort or project. For the purpose of certification, we are defining Citizen Science data ***as any data that is collected by members of the general public who are not trained scientists, often in cooperation with a scientific program.***

It must be obvious to all users that Citizen Science data has not had any QC done to it. For any website display, this data must be clearly marked as such, and for machine to machine transfer it must be flagged appropriately and a disclaimer should be associated with the transmission.   Prior to approval of certification, we request that the RICE share with us its plans for how they would do this.

We have defined Citizen Science data narrowly, and we want to emphasize that we expect QC to be performed on all the data that does not meet this definition, including research data.

Question (Archiving) – *updated 2/2/15*:
Is there a plan at the national level to establish an archive agreement with NODC so that each individual RA does not need to establish a separate agreement?

Answer:

There are no plans or current efforts to establish a single, national level, agreement with NODC to archive IOOS data.   We cannot do this for each region because the agreements contain detailed information on the data sets themselves and on how and when they will move from a provider to

the archive (e.g. on the third Thursday of each month a file will be published to a certain FTP site for pickup by NODC.) We simply don't have that information.

We are pursuing a few things to make the archiving requirement easier, however. We are working on national level SIFs for HF radar data through NDBC and the national servers at SIO. Similarly we are working on another for all glider data submitted to the Glider DAC and CDIP is working on one for the wave buoys they manage. For data that is submitted to these nationally coordinated efforts, the RICE is not expected to establish their own SIF, since the archiving will go from the national servers to NODC.

Question (RICE Employee) – *new 02/02/14*:
The Strategic Operational Plan requires applicants provide CV's of those individuals serving in the roles identified in §997.23(d)(3) and §997.23(f)(1)(i). What information should be included in the CV and what is the best way to demonstrate that the individuals are qualified and work across the region?

Answer:
In addition to providing some background on the individual's experience and knowledge proving they are capable of performing their work, the CV must clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of the individual in the RICE. The applicant is responsible for documenting how each individual meets the requirements to be an employee of a certified RICE. The CV must document that the individual performs one of the three roles identified in §997.23(d)(3) and §997.23(f)(1)(i). To do this, applicants must successfully describe the role and responsibilities of the individual within the RICE organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Question (solicit input):
In 997.21 b)5)ii asks with what frequency we solicit and receive advice on RICE diversity, coordination, etc.? What do you mean by 'receive advice'? Who are you thinking provides this advice on this level of operations for the RICE - external groups, advisors, or contractors?

Answer:
Receiving advice can mean any feedback that informs the RICE on how it addresses organizational diversity, stakeholder coordination, etc. This could be from partners, stakeholders, your members, perhaps even the Governing Council if it serves in an oversight role. External groups, advisors, and contractors could all fit this requirement. We've left this open to give each RA the opportunity to do as it needs. The key is that the RICE has a process for actively seeking feedback on how and who it engages with.

Application Form

Question:
For the application questions, is it true that you will accept EITHER a description or documentation? Or do you need both for each question, if requested?

Answer:

When the requirement asks for a description, **you must provide a description**. This description can be typed directly into the description box in the application form (in this case you do not need to put anything in the documentation box). Or you can provide a brief sentence in the description box letting the reviewer know the description is located in an existing document and provide the specific location of the description in the documentation box.

When the requirement asks for documentation, you must provide documentation, no description is necessary. Location of the documentation should be provided in the documentation box in the application form.

Question:
There are few differences in the guidance document and the actual application. Many of the sections in the application require both a description and documentation, whereas sections in the guidance document requested one or the other. Do we need to have everything documented?

Answer:
Documentation is only required where the requirements in the rule specify it. Documentation can be provided to point to a description in an existing document when that is being used to meet a requirement that asks for a "description"

A RICE can refer to a document that has similar, but possibly less, description than is provided in the application as long as it provides sufficient detail to demonstrate that it meets the requirement, but if the description is submitted as text in the application, no referencing a separate document is necessary.

When documentation is required, there should be specific information provided about where each document is located and how it demonstrates meeting the rule requirement. The application should "walk" the reviewer directly to the information.