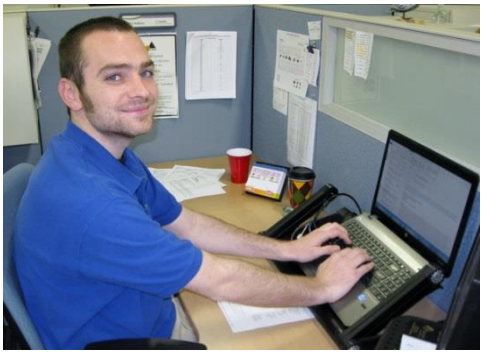
A Day in the Life of a Quality Analyst



In 2010, I wrote "A Day in the Life of an Assessor" about what it was like to be an AASHTO re:source Assessor on the road. Almost 4 years later, as a Quality Analyst (QA), I spend most of my time in the office working with laboratories in the AASHTO Accreditation Program (AAP).

When I volunteered to write this article, I thought about the many daily activities of a Quality Analyst. There are meetings, newsletter articles, AASHTO and ASTM standard reviews, and different tasks beyond our normal duties. Instead of going into all of that, this article will focus on a typical day spent processing accreditation files. At AASHTO re:source, we take great pride in achieving high customer satisfaction in all areas, and strive to offer professionalism, accuracy, competency and timeliness in regard to the services provided. I've always enjoyed a busy work day, which is good because as a QA most days are very busy. I understand how vital the service that we provide to our customers is and take pride in the work I do for the laboratories.

Laboratories in the AAP will most likely work with 2 or 3 different Quality Analysts. Each state or region is assigned a QA who works with laboratories on general accreditation issues, including Annual Reviews and Proficiency Sample Program suspensions. (See which Quality Analyst is assigned to your state.) On-site Assessment (OSA) review files, resulting from assessment or inspection reports, are systematically assigned to any one of the Quality Analysts.

Annual Review

Each Quality Analyst works with about 250 laboratories, which are assigned to them by state or region. Every month Annual Review files are due for a portion of these laboratories. The review month is determined by the date a laboratory was first granted accreditation. The Annual Review is a reexamination of the laboratories conformance to AASHTO R 18 and any additional Quality Management System standards they are accredited for. Many specifying agencies will require an additional Quality Management System standard such as C1077, D3666, D3740, and E329. While reviewing the Criteria Compliance Document (CCD) and organizational charts, I also look at all submitted certifications for conformance. Working with these files I feel like an investigator because labs need to submit any of the certifications they hold which they believe fulfill the requirements of these standards. Most of my time is spent reviewing the certifications to make sure they conform to the standard's requirements. Any given month I receive at least 30 Annual Review files to complete – so they keep me pretty busy on their own.

PSP

Whenever a new AASHTO re:source or CCRL proficiency sample report is issued, I receive an email that indicates if any of my assigned laboratories received low ratings on any of their test results. If necessary, I must take action to suspend laboratories that receive low ratings on the same test twice in a row. I then often work with laboratories to move toward reinstatement of their accreditation through testing of an Extra Proficiency Sample (XPS).

OSA Reviews

The most common type of files in which a laboratory works with a Quality Analyst directly are OSA Reviews. At any given time I have 40 to 60 open assessment reviews from AASHTO re:source assessments or CCRL inspections. I work from oldest to newest so I can get the files processed before the date by which any nonconformities must be resolved. Laboratories use the Accreditation Events web interface to submit corrective actions for nonconformities listed in their reports. I go through any new responses and either resolve them or ask for more information. There is great variety in the types of findings I will see and even more ways that labs choose to resolve them, which keeps me on my toes. The review process often gets quite involved, and I regularly refer to different AASHTO and ASTM standards, equipment manufacturer webpages, and records in order to complete my analysis of the responses received. Each of the work stations for our Quality Analysts have a second computer monitor that allows us to review corrective actions more efficiently. When a lab has resolved all of their nonconformities from their AASHTO re:source or CCRL report, I will process the file. Among other things, processing the file involves comparing the report to the laboratory's current accreditation to see if there are any new standards to add their listing, or methods that are no longer being performed by the laboratory. This process is very important because it will directly affect a laboratory's accreditation listing, which may influence their ability to bid on future project work. A peer review process, which I will describe in greater detail later on in this article, is also in place as a check to ensure the accuracy of my analysis and the laboratory's accreditation listing.

RURC

Another type of file Quality Analysts work on are Response to Unresolved Criteria (RURC) files. RURC files are follow-up files created when there are unresolved issues from items I've previously worked on – OSA Reviews, Annual Reviews, or Proficiency Sample suspensions. There are currently over 60 RURCs in my workflow queue. RURCs are important files because many times they are used to reinstate a laboratory's accreditation or to grant initial accreditation for specific test methods that weren't resolved during the OSA review process. The AASHTO re:source Administrative Task Group (ATG) uses this information in their accreditation decision-making process. Depending on how many laboratories responded the day before, I may have 15 to 30 of these files that I need to work on at any point in time. Due to the variety of these types of files, time seems to fly while I am reviewing them. I generally start the day with my RURC files (right after I have poured the perfect cup of coffee and read my Dilbert comic-of-the-day calendar). To prioritize, I sort by date working on the oldest files first. My first file might be an AASHTO T 89/T 90 accreditation reinstatement due to the laboratory getting good ratings on an XPS, while the second might be a certification follow-up for a technician that took ACI courses but didn't receive the certification before the Annual Review file was processed.

Peer Reviews

Peer Review files are an important part of the entire accreditation process and are one way the AAP helps reinforce the quality of the services we provide. Every file processed by a Quality Analyst is reviewed by another, guaranteeing all files have at least 2 sets of eyes on them. The peer review process has varying degrees of thoroughness based on the type of file. At a minimum, we make sure that any changes being made to the directory listing are the right changes. We strive for 100% error-free reporting on our directory after the peer review process is completed. Completed files go into a queue where a Quality Analyst signs it out and reviews the file to make sure all the standards and policies are being followed. This ensures that all files are being completed accurately and in a uniform manner.

As I walk to my car at the end a busy day, I know AASHTO re:source is still buzzing with information coming and going, and I will have new files, voicemails, and emails to look at tomorrow. There are never two days alike and every day I look forward to conquering the challenges ahead. I greatly enjoy my job and the contact I have with laboratories. Every Quality Analyst knows that, in the end, the laboratories we work with are our customers and we strive to provide the best customer service possible. Customer feedback is very important and is brought up at every meeting. Have you worked with a Quality Analyst recently? Submit feedback about your experience.

Editor's Note: This article was updated in June 2016 to ensure up-to-date information is being presented.