Verification scheme Frequently Asked Questions

The following frequently asked questions have been developed to help organisations, interested parties and other stakeholders find out more about the CHS Alliance Quality Assurance Verification Scheme (commonly known as the CHS Verification Scheme). We haven't covered your questions? Then email us at verification@chsalliance.org so we can respond and add your questions to the FAQs.

Contents

OVERVIEW

Why should you verify your performance against the CHS?

The [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)](#) was designed so that its application can be measured. The CHS Alliance has created the tools to make this possible (see below the Verification Scheme and Verification Framework).

There are several reasons why your organisation should conduct a verification, including to:

1. **Measure how well you are meeting your commitments to people affected by crisis**. Evaluating your performance through the CHS verification scheme helps you understand the extent to which you are meeting the Nine Commitments made to people and communities affected by crisis.
2. **Tailor your own evidence-based improvement plan**. See how well you score against objective quality and accountability measures, so you can invest in the right changes and continue to make improvements.
3. **Compare your results to sector averages**. Find out how you are doing compared to similar organisations and learn from your peers.
4. **Gain external recognition from partners and donors**. An increasing number of donors (governments and NGO funding bodies) require adherence to the CHS, with some requiring CHS Verification to illustrate this[1].
5. **Demonstrate your commitment to improving the quality and accountability of aid!** Show your stakeholders what your organisation really values. Self-Assessed organisations are issued with a stamp from the Alliance to help make your commitment public. Externally verified organisations have a public summary of their audit report available on [HQAI's website](#).

What is the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme?

Verification is a structured, systematic process to assess the degree to which an organisation is working to achieve the CHS. **The scheme sets out the policies and rules of the verification process to ensure it is conducted in a fair and consistent manner for all participating organisations.** It is owned and managed by the CHS Alliance, and the CHS Alliance governing board has the authority to amend the scheme, based on recommendations from the Verification Advisory Panel.

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[1] Different donors require different CHS Verification options. CHS Alliance and HQAI are actively following the discussion with donors, see an overview from 2020 here (https://hqai.contentfiles.net/media/documents/supporting_the_CHS_and_HQAI_-_status_-_2020-09-27.pdf).

The Scheme offers three verification options with different degrees of rigour and confidence in the results. These are CHS self-assessment, independent verification and certification. The indicators used in the verification framework are common to all three options.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest and in line with international good practice, the audits for independent verification and certification are undertaken by an ISO accredited conformity assessment body, independent from the CHS Alliance, the CHS standard setting process and the organisations it audits.

Currently the only accredited organisation is the Humanitarian Quality Assurance Initiative (http://www.hqai.org/).

What is the CHS Verification Framework?

To ensure the verification options are coordinated and the data they produce is comparable, all verification tools are derived from the CHS Verification Framework.

The CHS Verification Framework sets out the list of 62 indicators all organisations must measure when they undertake any of the three verification options available. Thus, it ensures there is a harmonised approach to monitoring, evaluating and reporting the application of the CHS. The indicators included in the Verification Framework are taken directly from the requirements of the CHS Nine Commitments i.e., the 36 Key Actions and the 26 Organisational Responsibilities.

What are the three verification options?

There are three verification options that can be undertaken: self-assessment, independent verification, and certification.

- **CHS Self-Assessment** is a learning exercise. It. is completed internally, and helps an organisation gain an understanding of their capacity and performance against the CHS. The process can be validated by the CHS Alliance for CHS Alliance members only.
- **CHS Independent Verification** provides organisations with an external, independent assessment of capacity and improvement against the CHS.
- **CHS Certification** is a process that provides organisations with an independent, external assessment, leading to issuing a certification of compliance against the CHS.

SCHEME REVISION

Updates to Scheme

2020 updates

The original verification scheme was launched in 2015. Since then, the CHS Alliance has been collecting feedback from users and has identified areas for improvement, including the need to better clarify the purpose and objectives of the scheme, the articulation between the different verification options and their respective primary objectives, amongst others. To confirm and the deepen the analysis it commissioned in 2019 an [external review](#) of the Quality Assurance Verification Scheme, undertaken by KPMG Norway. The findings of this review have fed into a first update of the Scheme in 2020.

The 2020 update of the Scheme included:

- Updated Verification Options available to organisations applying the CHS, with a new Self-Assessment tool and the removal of the Peer Review option.
- Conditions and claims for external recognition for organisations participating in verification, and certificates and stamps issued by the CHS Alliance for external recognition of its members that have completed one of the verification options.
- Clarification on roles and responsibilities for the development, management and oversight of CHS verification, amongst the relevant stakeholders (CHS Alliance, the CHS Alliance board, HQAI).
- The introduction of the Verification Advisory Panel – comprised of experts with a clear mandate to oversee the scheme and ensure that it remains fit-for-purpose. It's also a body that will help resolve interpretation issues for some indicators during verification process when required.

2022 updates

- Change of timeframe for independent verification and certification cycle from 4 to 3 years, to allow organisations to dedicate more time to making the improvements they need between audits.
- Self-assessment has been made more accessible, so all organisations can measure how they are meeting the Commitments, including non-members, while maintaining additional services especially for our members. This includes:
- Having the process of your self-assessment validated by the CHS Alliance through an official letter and stamp that can be shared publicly and with key stakeholders.
- Access to dashboards showing your organisation's full results.
- Ability to benchmark against others in the sector.
- Access to the services offered by the Alliance to members to facilitate improvements (including on key thematic areas of the CHS, good practices and tools, CHS

Communities of Practice on AAP, PSEAH, People Management, Training and Verification).

- Conditions and tools around claims have been adapted to reflect best practices in the certification sector.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

What is the CHS self-assessment?

The CHS self-assessment process provides guidance and tools for organisations, allowing them to collect information, analyse and present results. Organisations that complete a CHS self-assessment will have a comprehensive picture of their strengths and weaknesses, and a solid basis to focus resources where they are most needed. After the exercise is repeated (every two years), organisations will also be able to measure their progress and the impact of capacity development efforts. Self-assessments are meant to identify and recognise good practice as much as they can help identify and address issues and are a learning tool.

What is validated by the CHS Alliance?

For our members only, the CHS Alliance reviews the Self-Assessment report and improvement plan, and validates, through a letter and a Self-Assessment stamp, the commitment made by the organization. This validation is restricted to the completion of a *process*, and not a confirmation of the *results* that remain under the unique responsibility of the organisations that complete their Self-Assessment.

What is the Self-Assessment stamp and letter?

The CHS Alliance issues these for its members only, upon completion of a CHS self-assessment. The letter also includes the claim that organisations can use in relation to their Self-Assessment.

The intention of the stamp and letter is to provide more recognition for the efforts of CHS Alliance members which have demonstrated their commitment to the CHS' Nine Commitments by undertaking the Self-Assessment and subsequently improving the quality and accountability of their programmes based on their results.

Can non CHS Alliance members undertake a self-assessment?

Yes. All organisations are welcome to use the Self-Assessment tools, but they do not all get the letter of validation and stamp, the detailed online dashboards allowing them better to visualize and analyse their results, nor the additional support services, available to the CHS Alliance members.

VERIFICATION DATA

What does the verification data show?

At the organisational level, the verification data shows where the strengths and the areas for improvement are for each organisation that has completed a verification option. It also shows how this organisation is benchmarking against the average results of other organisations in the sector.

At the collective level, the verification data shows how the group of verified organisations is performing on quality and accountability, what progress is being made as well as which of the CHS commitments are more challenging.

Who owns the verification data?

The data produced by the self-assessment is owned by the CHS Alliance. It is managed in a way that ensures confidentiality and security.

The data produced by third party verification option is owned by the Conformity Assessment body, currently HQAI only. The CHS Alliance encourages its members undergoing third-party verification to share their detailed reports[2] with us as well. This allows the organisation to benefit from the Tableau online dashboards produced to illustrate these results, as well as for the CHS Alliance to feed the data into the collective analysis, which aggregates the results from all verification options.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Who is responsible for establishing the rules for verification against the CHS?

CHS Alliance has overall responsibility for the management and oversight of the CHS Quality Assurance Verification Scheme. CHS Alliance ensures that the different quality assurance verification options set out in the Scheme meet the needs of stakeholders, including people vulnerable to and affected by crises; adhere to internationally recognised good practices for verification, are open and accessible to all interested organisations; and are conducted in a fair and consistent manner for all participating organisations. Working in consultation with stakeholders, CHS Alliance establishes the framework for the different CHS verification options and the overarching criteria to assess and determine compliance with the CHS.

To support the CHS Alliance in its role and ensure that the Scheme remains up to date and fit for purpose, the CHS Alliance has introduced in 20202 a Verification Advisory Panel to oversee and regularly review the Scheme and different options proposed to the users.

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[2] Including results at indicators level.

What is the Verification Advisory Panel?

The Verification Advisory Panel is a body comprised of experts of both the aid and the certification sector. It oversees the Verification Scheme to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and can answer interpretation questions raised during verification processes. It is an advisory body that makes recommendations to the CHS Alliance board to implement.

Who are the members of the panel?

The panel is comprised of five to ten experts from both the aid and / or certification sector, volunteering to take part in this activity. It also has one sit for a representative of the Conformity Assessment body (HQAI). The list of members is accessible here on the CHS Alliance website.