



**USAID**  
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# RESOURCE GUIDE: PREPARING FOR AND PARTICIPATING IN A DATA QUALITY ASSESSMENT

## A GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

### **USAID Learns**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Contents.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>List of Figures and Tables.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acronyms.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>I</b>
Who Should Use This Guide .....	I
DQA Process Overview .....	I
<b>IP Roles &amp; Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>3</b>
IP Team Composition .....	3
Step 1: DQA Preparation.....	4
Documentation .....	4
MEL System and Data Flow Presentation Overview .....	5
Step 2: Field Review.....	5
Field Review Preparation.....	5
Review Meeting.....	5
Step 3: Documentation and Follow Up Actions.....	7
<b>USAID Learns Support.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Remote DQA Guidance.....</b>	<b>8</b>
Prior to the Meeting.....	8
During the Meeting.....	8
<b>Annex I: Calculating Data Variance .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Annex II: Resources for Planning and Implementing DQAs.....</b>	<b>11</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: DQA Process for USAID Vietnam.....	2
Figure 2: Sub-steps the IPs Should Carry Out to Prepare for the DQA .....	4
Figure 3: DQA Meeting Preparation Checklist .....	5
Table 1: Stakeholder Roles.....	3
Table 2: List of Required and Recommended Documents.....	4
Table 3: IP's Responsibilities during the Field Review.....	6

## ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
A/COR	Agreement/Contracting Officer's Representatives
AMELP	Activity Monitoring Evaluation Learning Plan
COP	Chief of Party
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
DQA	Data Quality Assessment
IP	Implementing partner
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MELO	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Officer
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OU	Operating Unit
PIRS	Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
PRO	Program Office
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## INTRODUCTION

While the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Vietnam's Program Office (PRO) and Agreement/Contracting Officer's Representatives (A/CORs) are responsible for leading the Data Quality Assessment (DQA) planning process for externally-reported indicators, Activity staff – both Implementing Partners (IPs) and local organizations – play a significant role in implementing DQAs.

USAID Learns (hereinafter Learns) created this resource guide to assist Activity staff in preparing for and participating in DQAs led by USAID Vietnam. It overviews the steps IPs and local organizations should take to prepare for and participate in DQAs and provides links to Learns-developed resources, which are annexed to this guide. The guide references these resources throughout the guide, and it should be used to support the preparation and implementation processes. This guide is a complement to the [Resource Guide: Planning and Implementing a Data Quality Assessment](#) created by Learns to support USAID Vietnam's PRO and A/CORs in planning and implementing DQAs.<sup>1</sup> The guide is divided into three steps: (1) preparation, (2) field review, and (3) follow-up actions. Actions to be undertaken by the IP and local organization staff are detailed within each step. Finally, this guide overviews the role that Learns can play in supporting IPs to prepare for DQAs.

## WHO SHOULD USE THIS GUIDE

This guide should be used by Activity staff including IP (Chief/Deputy Chief of Party [COP/DCOP], Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Officers [MELOs], and technical) staff as well as any local organizations responsible for implementing activities. It should be referenced while preparing for DQAs. Learns encourages IPs to make this guide available to relevant staff and local partners as soon as they are informed of a DQA.

## DQA PROCESS OVERVIEW

### DQA Requirements: A Quick Reminder

As per the Automated Directives System (ADS) 201 guidance, all externally-reported indicator data must undergo a DQA. If an indicator's data quality has not been assessed, then it cannot be reported externally. Furthermore:

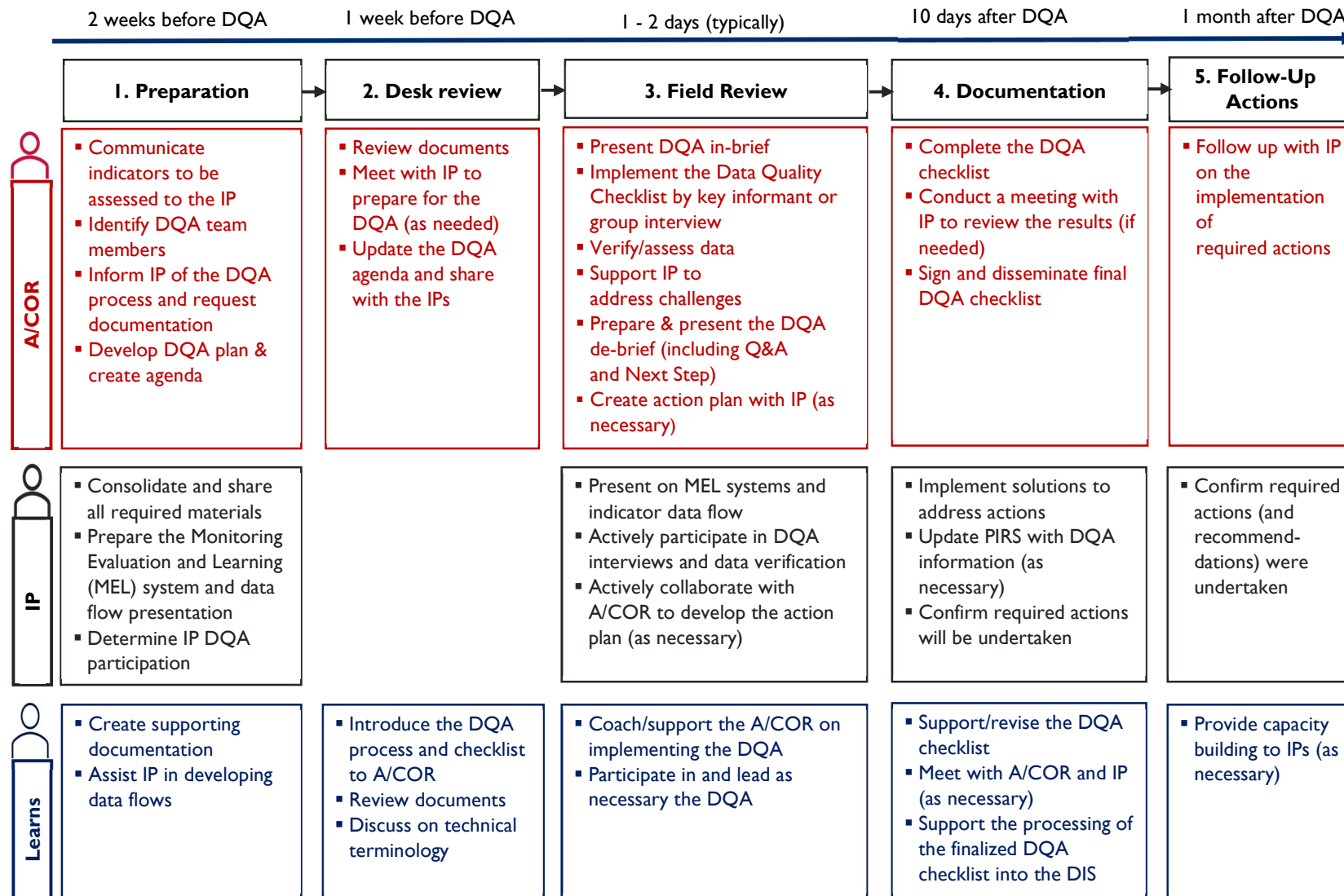
- DQAs must occur after data has been collected on a new indicator AND within 12 months prior to new indicator data being reported
- DQAs must be conducted every three years thereafter on indicators
- Missions and Washington Operating Units (OUs) may choose to conduct DQAs more frequently if needed.

Figure 1 overviews the USAID Vietnam process and corresponding timeframes for planning and implementing DQAs. It can be used as a reference for participating in DQAs and implementing post-DQA actions. It incorporates the roles each DQA stakeholder plays, including Learns who is tasked with increasing DQA capacities. For more information on Learns DQA support, please contact Truong Bui, Monitoring Director, at [truong.bui@socialimpact.com](mailto:truong.bui@socialimpact.com)

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<sup>1</sup> While this resource guide was created for USAID Vietnam A/CORs, it can also be used by Implementing Partners for conducting internal DQAs.

Figure 1: DQA Process for USAID Vietnam



## IP ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

This section details the roles and responsibilities of IPs during in the DQA process. It overviews the three steps of the DQA process and includes step-by-step instructions as well as links to useful resources for each step of the process.

### IP TEAM COMPOSITION

Learns advises that at least the following should be invited to participate in the DQA: COP/DCOP, MELO, technical staff, and any stakeholders including local partners. Generally, the COP/DCOP should coordinate the DQA preparation and participation while the MELO serves as a focal point to prepare for the DQA (e.g., gathering documents and creating presentations) and coordinate logistics. The MELO should participate in the DQA and coordinate next steps to address any issues and recommendations identified after DQA completion. Table 1 below overviews the role of each IP stakeholder.

Table 1: Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholder	Role
<b>COP/DCOP</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coordinate the DQA preparation and implementation process:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Work directly with the A/COR to set the DQA date</li><li>○ Decide who will prepare and participate in the DQA (both IP staff and stakeholders including local partners)</li></ul></li><li>• Participate in the DQA field review</li><li>• In consultation with the A/COR, lead the implementation of the required and recommended actions identified after DQA completion; inform the A/COR on the implementation process and final results in the agreed-upon timeframe</li></ul>
<b>MELO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare, collect, organize, and share all required and recommended documents</li><li>• Coordinate logistics with relevant IP staff and stakeholders who will participate in the DQAs (conducted in the field or at service delivery sites or those conducted remotely)</li><li>• Prepare the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system (focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the MEL system) and data flow presentations for indicators being assessed (supported by USAID Learns)</li><li>• Actively participate in the DQA by providing information, feedback, and/or clarifications on the activity MEL systems, data flow, indicator definition, data collection, management and construction, data reporting and use</li><li>• Under the leadership of COP/DCOP, serve as primary focal point in coordinating the implementation of the post-DQA action plan in order to address issues as well as recommendations identified (through closely working with technical staff, local partners, and USAID Learns (if needed))</li></ul>
<b>Technical staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Participate in the DQA and provide relevant information which may include: monitoring tool development, data collection process, data analysis, reporting and data use</li></ul>

Stakeholder	Role
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with MELO to address relevant issues and recommendations identified after the DQA</li> </ul>
<b>Local partners/stakeholders</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participate in the DQA as requested. If the DQA is conducted on the field or at service delivery site(s), the participation of local partners is very important contributing to the success of the DQA.</li> </ul>

## STEP I: DQA PREPARATION

Approximately two weeks prior to the scheduled DQA, the A/COR will communicate the final DQA timeframe to the IP. At that time, the IP should begin DQA preparations. The COP/DCOP should coordinate this step while the MELO serves as a focal point to prepare for the DQA as detailed in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Sub-steps the IPs Should Carry Out to Prepare for the DQA

r	Identify which staff and stakeholders will participate in the DQA and assign responsibilities for DQA tasks
r	Share the DQA invitation which should include: date(s), location(s), DQA agenda (if available), and suggested persons/positions who should participate in the DQA with relevant staff and stakeholders; expectations and requirements to prepare for and/or participate in the DQA should be clearly communicated.
r	Prepare logistics for DQAs conducted in the field or at service delivery sites (such as arranging transportation for participants and reserving meeting rooms) or for those conducted virtually (please see <a href="#">the Remote DQA Section</a> for further details)
r	Compile and share all required and recommended documents (see <i>Documentation section below</i> ) with the A/COR in accordance with the timeframe communicated by the A/COR
r	Prepare a MEL system and data flow presentation (see Annex 2: <a href="#">Data Flow Orientation</a> ) for each indicator being assessed (Learns will provide a coaching session and ongoing technical assistance during the development as necessary)
r	Prepare all data and supporting documents for the DQA, such as hard and soft copies of data collection tools. All documents should be stored in a place that can be easily shared and accessed during the DQA.

## DOCUMENTATION

Table 2 below contains a list of required and recommended documents that should be compiled and shared with the A/COR at least two weeks prior to the scheduled DQA. The MELO serves as a focal point to prepare and share documents for the DQA.

Table 2: List of Required and Recommended Documents

Required Documents	Recommended Documents
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Approved Activity Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Plan (AMELP) and PIRS for indicators being assessed</li> <li>Working documents (consolidating files such as: indicator tracking table which includes baselines, targets, and actuals data)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most current Activity workplan</li> <li>Other relevant MEL documents including MEL Standard Operating Procedures (such as MEL training document, MEL procedure, tools training material)</li> </ol>

3. Monthly, quarterly, and annual reports	3. DQA protocol/procedure and reports of the previous DQA(s) (if available)
4. Data collection tools for indicators being assessed	
5. MEL system and data flow presentation for indicators being assessed	

### MEL SYSTEM AND DATA FLOW PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

The IP should prepare a presentation of the Activity's MEL system and data flow for indicators being assessed. This presentation should describe the following: MEL procedures, staff responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses of the MEL system and data flow of indicators being assessed. The data flow should include: the data process (data collection tools, data sources, analysis, reporting, data storage and data use), timeline and sequencing of data processing, responsibilities, and reporting and feedback mechanisms.

For each selected indicator, the data flow should clearly describe a procedure of how, what, and when data is collected, transferred, synthesized, and analyzed. The data flow also should overview roles and responsibilities of both external and internal stakeholders who are involved in these processes and any actions that are being implemented to ensure the quality of data collected.

The link to the data flow presentation template and introduction can be found [here](#). The IP should request Learns' support as needed by contacting Quyen Quach, Monitoring Specialist, at [quyen.quach@socialimpact.com](mailto:quyen.quach@socialimpact.com).

### STEP 2: FIELD REVIEW

This section details key actions and responsibilities of the IP during the DQA.

#### FIELD REVIEW PREPARATION

Figure 3 below is a checklist of logistical considerations the IP should review and prepare prior to the DQA date:

Figure 3: DQA Meeting Preparation Checklist

r	Inform relevant stakeholders (including activity staff and local partners) of the DQA and ensure field site(s) are ready if the DQA team plans to travel to the site(s) to verify data and supporting documents
r	Send reminder invitations to remind all DQA participants with the most updated DQA agenda attached
r	Prepare a meeting room that the DQA team and participants can use during the DQA with key provisions including a screen to present on, flipcharts and/or whiteboards, and stationery; for remote DQAs, ensure logistics are addressed ( <i>please see the Remote DQA Section for more information</i> )
r	In coordination with relevant stakeholders (e.g., technical teams and local partners), ensure all required and recommended documents (see <i>Documentation section</i> ) are accessible to the DQA team and participants. If there is additional documentation that was not previously shared or has been updated, the IP should share these documents with the DQA team.

#### REVIEW MEETING

On the day the DQA is conducted, participants should seize this as an opportunity to share, learn, and adapt in order to improve the quality of data; thus, active engagement of the IP is important to contributing to the success of the DQA, especially during the MEL systems and indicator data flows sessions. The field review should create a non-judgmental space where DQA participants, including



IPs and relevant stakeholders, are able to openly discuss challenges and share their successes and lessons learned during the activity implementation. Table 3 below lists proposed tasks and IP's responsibilities during the field review meeting.

Table 3: IP's Responsibilities during the Field Review

Task	IP Responsibilities
<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present MEL system including strengths and weaknesses of the system. The presentation should take approximately 45 - 60 minutes, including a question-and-answer session.</li> <li>• Present the data flow for each indicator being assessed. The session should take approximately 15 - 20 minutes for each indicator being assessed.</li> <li>• NOTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The DQA participants can decide whether to include a question-and-answer session during this presentation or wait until the DQA interview.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>DQA Interview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide relevant explanations to questions related to the five data quality dimensions described in the <a href="#">DQA checklist and data verification tool</a></li> <li>• Actively engage with the DQA team during the interview process and ensure relevant Activity staff are available to provide additional information / justification as needed.</li> <li>• Seek clarification on any unclear questions or datapoints asked by the DQA team (if needed)</li> <li>• Take note of key findings, recommendations, and any follow-up actions identified during the DQA for the post-DQA action plan</li> <li>• NOTE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All relevant staff should receive the DQA agenda and make themselves available to participate in the DQA discussion when needed.</li> <li>- The interview process for remote DQAs may be structured differently. Please see the <a href="#">Remote DQA</a> section for more information.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Data Verification</b>	<p>The DQA team will verify data reported by directly reviewing and reconstructing actuals reported using source documents (e.g., the Activity's database and records, and logbooks). The IP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe what, how, and where data and source documents (both hard copies and/or electronic copies) are managed and stored.</li> <li>• Demonstrate how the Activity cleans, analyzes, stores, and visualizes data (including any software that is used to perform those tasks as needed). If relevant, IP also should describe how the data is deduplicated. This allows the DQA team to understand the processes and identify potential data quality risks.</li> <li>• Provide relevant documentation as requested (such as data collection tools, M&amp;E documents, etc.)</li> <li>• Seek clarification on any unclear questions or datapoints asked by the DQA team (if needed)</li> <li>• Note key findings, recommendations, and any follow-up actions identified during the DQA for the post-DQA action plan.</li> <li>• NOTE:</li> </ul>

Task	IP Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The interview process for remote DQAs may be structured differently. Please see the <a href="#">Remote DQA</a> section for more information.</li> </ul>
<b>Discussion on Key Challenges/Support</b>	<p>Following the DQA interview, the A/COR may engage the IP in discussing solutions and support to address the issues identified during the DQA. During this session, the IP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Propose solutions to address the issues identified during the DQA</li> <li>• Document all required and recommended actions</li> </ul>
<b>DQA Out-brief</b>	<p>At the conclusion of the meeting, the DQA team will present a <a href="#">DQA out-brief</a>. During the out-brief, the IP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise questions to DQA team to clarify main points. The IP can request support from the DQA team, especially the USAID Learns team, to address the issues identified.</li> <li>• Consent on a plan for data quality improvement</li> <li>• Identify solutions and clearly determine how, when, and who will be responsible to implement the post-DQA action plan</li> <li>• Document all DQA findings, required, and recommended actions</li> </ul>

### STEP 3: DOCUMENTATION AND FOLLOW UP ACTIONS

Following the DQA, IPs should implement the actions discussed and agreed upon during the DQA and communicate these to the A/COR. After the DQA, the IPs should:

#### IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS ACTIONS

The COP/DCOP should lead the overall process of implementing the solutions with close involvement of the MELO. Following the DQA, the IP should establish internal timelines and responsibilities for implementing the action items.

In many circumstances, the actions must be implemented prior to Performance Plan and Report (PPR) reporting to ensure that PPR data is of high quality. Examples of solutions which may be implemented include: revising data collection tools and processes; revising data management systems; or increasing staff and stakeholder capacities through training or coaching. The IP may also consider planning regular internal DQAs or data reviews to promote ongoing data quality.

The IP should request Learns' support as needed during this process by contacting Quyen Quach, Monitoring Specialist, at [quyen.quach@socialimpact.com](mailto:quyen.quach@socialimpact.com).

#### UPDATE DOCUMENTATION

All relevant documentation must be revised and updated. In addition to revising tools as part of the action plan, the IP may also need to: update the AMELP content and change log to document changes in tools, systems, or processes; update the PIRS content including definitions, method of data collection and construction, data limitations (if needed) and the DQA section of the PIRS; or revising training documents to reflect changes to data collection and management tools, systems, and processes.

#### COMMUNICATION WITH USAID ON POST-DQA ACTION PLAN

Once the IP has implemented the agreed-upon actions, the COP/DCOP should inform the A/COR of the results and any challenges encountered during implementation of the post-DAQ action plan.

In many circumstances, all post-DQA corrective actions should be completed and related documents should be shared with the A/COR before the data is used for PPR reporting.

## USAID LEARNS SUPPORT

This section details support that USAID Learns can provide to IPs before and after the DQA process. USAID Learns is available to provide support to IPs during any step of the DQA process by contacting Quyen Quach, Monitoring Specialist, at [quyen.quach@socialimpact.com](mailto:quyen.quach@socialimpact.com).

Examples of how USAID Learns can support include:

- Providing an introductory session on understanding and documenting an indicator's data flow
- Supporting the development of the data flow and MEL systems presentation
- Providing technical assistance in addressing data quality issues as well as updating and/or reviewing PIRS(s)
- Supporting the development and implementation of a post-DQA action plan
- Reviewing MEL tools and structures including data collection and/or data management tools, data analysis and utilization procedures to identify potential issues/challenges and corrective actions
- Providing on-demand technical assistance on data management and use including data analysis methods, data de-duplication to avoid double-counting, and data visualization for decision-making (depending on availability of USAID Learns resources and USAID priorities).

## REMOTE DQA GUIDANCE

Implementing remote DQAs may be necessary during the COVID-19 pandemic. DQA preparation steps remain the same; however, in-person fieldwork will be substituted by virtual interviews and discussions.

### PRIOR TO THE MEETING

1. Determine how DQA participants will attend the virtual meeting (e.g., will everyone call in from the office, or will each participant call in from their home). Ensure participants have reliable Wi-Fi access.
2. Determine responsibilities of each participant (e.g., who will present the data management systems; if necessary, who will travel to the office to share the hard-copy storage systems).
3. Ensure DQA participants understand the platform used for the virtual meeting and its functions prior to the meeting (such as screen-sharing, chat, operating the microphone and video).
4. Ensure all devices are working properly prior to the meeting (e.g., laptop, microphone, camera).
5. Ensure that all material you want to share is available and accessible from your computer; if allowed, IP should be able to access source documents storage at the office.

### DURING THE MEETING

1. All DQA participants should join the meeting early and familiarize themselves with the virtual meeting platform. It is also helpful to ensure there is sufficient time for trouble shooting.
2. At meeting onset, ensure relevant documents and data management systems are open on your computer. This will allow you to quickly refer to and/or share these documents during the meeting when needed.

3. Be prepared to share your screens and/or provide screenshots of documents or systems that might not be shareable. During the data verification process, the MELO should walk the DQA team through all steps on how data are collected, consolidated, constructed, and reported. The MELO must share soft copies or screenshots of the data collection tools, raw data, and data consolidation files. These can either be presented during the meeting or prior to the meeting, during the desk review phase. In order to verify online data effectively, working documents (data sources, tools, raw data, data consolidation files and reporting) need to be shared prior a meeting.
4. Virtually present data management systems, allowing for extra time for questions and discussions.

## ANNEX I: CALCULATING DATA VARIANCE

One method of verifying reported data is calculating the variance of reported data against its source data. The DQA checklist used by USAID Vietnam includes a data variance tab which will guide the [DQA checklist and data verification](#) process. The tool will automatically calculate the variance once data is inputted. If the variance is greater than 10 percent, the DQA team will engage the IP to understand why there is discrepancy and discuss possible solutions to rectify the variance.

The IP should be prepared to engage in this process and provide any supporting documents upon request. The process for calculating data variance is as follows:

- Depending on the reporting period selected for data verification, the data source will be selected fully or partly to review
- Actuals will be consolidated and recalculated by the DQA team using a similar data construction procedure described in the PIRS(s) (verified data)
- Verified data will be entered into the [DQA checklist and data verification](#) to calculate variance
- The data verification process for remote DQAs will be structured differently as detailed in Remote DQA Guidance section above

## ANNEX II: RESOURCES FOR PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING DQAS

Resource Guide: Planning and Implementing a Data Quality Assessment	<a href="#">Click here</a>
Data Flow Orientation	<a href="#">Click here</a>
DQA Checklist and Annex - Data Verification	<a href="#">Click here</a>
DQA Out-Brief	<a href="#">Click here</a>