Overview
Hospitals self-administering the survey, hospitals administering the survey for multiple sites, and survey vendors approved to administer the CAHPS® Hospital Survey (HCAHPS) must develop a Quality Assurance Plan (QAP). This document provides a model for developing the hospital/survey vendor QAP that is needed to administer the HCAHPS survey. Each organization’s QAP is considered part of the HCAHPS Quality Assurance Guidelines (QAG) and is required to be developed for National Implementation. Hospitals/Survey vendors will submit their QAP to hcahps@azqio.sdps.org for review by the HCAHPS Project Team. Please monitor the What’s New page on the HCAHPS website for QAP submission dates.

Purpose of Hospital/Survey Vendor Quality Assurance Plan
Hospitals/Survey vendors approved to participate in HCAHPS must develop a QAP to guide their survey administration process. The QAP should be considered an evolving document in that it should reflect changes in personnel, resources and processes in the approved organization to administer the survey. The purposes of the QAP are to:

- Provide documentation of hospitals’/survey vendors’ understanding, application and compliance with the HCAHPS QAG
- Serve as the organization-specific guide for administering and training project staff to conduct the HCAHPS survey
- Ensure high quality data reporting and continuity in survey processes
- Act as the background guide for hospitals/survey vendors that receive an on-site visit from the HCAHPS Project Team for further oversight purposes

Specifications for Hospital/Survey Vendor Quality Assurance Plan
Hospitals/Survey vendors prepare the HCAHPS QAP following the specifications listed below.

- Include the following components:
  1. Organizational background and structure for project
  2. Work plan for survey administration
  3. Survey and data management system and quality controls
  4. Confidentiality, privacy and security procedures in accordance with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Develop in enough step-by-step detail so that the survey methodology is replicable by a new staff member in the organization’s survey operations
- Develop prior to National Implementation of survey administration but review and update periodically to incorporate changes in the survey operations
- Submit to HCAHPS Project Team by hospitals/survey vendors participating in HCAHPS National Implementation
Sample Outline of Hospital/Survey Vendor Quality Assurance Plan

Hospitals/Survey vendors must include information about the following topics in their Hospital/Survey vendor HCAHPS Quality Assurance Plan.

1. **Organizational Background and Structure for Project**

   This section includes a brief description of the history and background of the organization and a detailed description of the personnel and resources available to conduct this project:

   - Organization’s history and affiliation, plus scope of business and years in business.
   - Organization’s survey experience with all patient populations—description of the organization’s health-related survey experience, including mode(s) of survey administration and the number of years conducted¹
   - Organizational chart—should identify the personnel accountable for the overall project and reporting relationships, including names of staff (and subcontractors, if applicable) for each of the following project tasks:
     - Survey functions by mode of administration for which the organization has received approval (Mail only, Telephone only, Mixed Mode and/or IVR)
     - Data receipt and data entry
     - Data submission
     - Quality oversight
   - Key personnel—description of the background and qualifications of key personnel conducting the survey, including a description of the capabilities of all subcontractors and the hospitals’/survey vendors’ experience with their subcontractors, if applicable. Staff resumes should be available upon request.

2. **Work Plan for Survey Administration**

   This section includes a detailed description of the key events and timeline for survey administration, including sampling, fielding surveys, data collection, and data submission processes:

   - Description of survey administration by applicable approved mode of administration, including timeline of key events
     - Mail only—validating, updating, and tracking addresses; production and mailing of materials²
     - Telephone only—obtaining telephone numbers; programming and operating interviewing system; and contacting sampled patients
     - Mixed-Mode—see above for mail only and telephone only
     - IVR—obtaining telephone numbers; programming and operating interviewing system; and contacting sampled patients

¹ Appendices (optional) can include a detailed list of the organization’s experience with specific surveys to further demonstrate complete survey experience/expertise.
² Hospitals/Survey vendors must attempt to validate, and update addresses of sampled patients to ensure that addresses are accurate, formatted adequately, and current. Updated addresses should be tracked in the sample data base.
3. Survey and Data Management System and Quality Controls

This section provides a detailed description of the survey and data management system and quality controls for the survey administration process, including:

- System resources (hardware and software) available, such as a description of the telephone or electronic (CATI, IVR) interviewing systems, the mail equipment, and the data entry method
- Customer support personnel and telephone lines
- Personnel training
- Data checks implemented to ensure accuracy of sample frame creation
- Tracking of key events through the survey protocol
- Quality control checks – documentation describing hospital/survey vendor processes for ensuring quality control of the following survey procedures:
  - Sampling procedures – monitor to ensure selection is random and conducted in compliance with approved protocol
  - Manual data entry procedures – check accuracy via double key entry and ensure decision rules are applied appropriately, in compliance with the QAG manual
  - Electronic scanning procedures – check accuracy of scanning and ensure decision rules are applied appropriately
  - Telephone or electronic (CATI, IVR) procedures – ensure programming is accurate and data integrity is maintained
- Monitor on-site work and subcontractor’s work to ensure high quality results through:
  - Monitoring telephone interviewers
  - Seeded mailings
  - Quality checks of printed materials
- Checks to ensure that backup systems are working
4. **Confidentiality, Privacy and Security Procedures**

This section requires documentation of the hospital’s/survey vendor’s confidentiality, privacy and security practices and assurance that these are compliant with HIPAA guidelines. The hospital/survey vendor should address the following:

- Practices for protecting patient confidentiality through a de-identification process
- Confidentiality agreements with staff and subcontractors involved in any aspect of survey administration
- Physical and electronic security procedures to protect patient-identified files, survey questionnaires, and sample files

**Review Process**

Quality Assurance Plans will be reviewed within eight weeks of receipt. Hospitals/Survey vendors will receive an electronic mail notice of receipt after a QAP is submitted. The HCAHPS Project Team will contact hospitals/survey vendors with follow-up or requests for additional information, as needed.