

Dear VQA Participants,

Below is a list of key rules and guidelines to remember about the VQA Proficiency Testing (PT) Programs. Detailed information regarding each item can be found in the Participation Requirements and Scoring Procedures for each PT(attached).

- Participation in the real-time testing phase of the program can only occur after the successful completion of a prequalification panel or assay validation. VQA HIV-1 RNA proficiency testing panels (5 samples) are to be run every three months and must be assayed in a single batch in the month in which the panel is due.
- Participation in any VQA proficiency testing program must be approved by the VQA Contracting Officer Representative (COR, aka Project Officer) and the laboratory must be doing testing for a NIH funded program.
- All data must be submitted by the PT due date to avoid being counted late unless an exemption, extension, or on-hold request has been granted by the VQA to the participating site. All late PT submissions will receive a non-technical penalty.
 - **Exemption Requests:** Only 1 exception per four PTs can be granted to a participating site
 - **Extension Requests:** Extensions may be granted up to two weeks for the Quantitative HIV-1 RNA and the Qualitative HIV-1 Total Nucleic Acid testing programs and up to threeweeks for the HIV-1 Genotypic Drug Resistance program.
 - **On-hold Requests:** A laboratory may go on-hold for the VQA program for up to one year without penalty. However, if a laboratory is placed on hold for more than 6 months they will be expected to run and pass the two most recent 5-member panels upon re-entering the program. Laboratories that are on-hold for longer than 12 months will need to be recertified as a new lab. Network approval must be obtained prior to resuming protocol testing. Reasons for being placed may include operational circumstances such as: personnel problems, laboratory issues, waiting on assay kits, *etc.*
- If a laboratory wishes to re-enter the VQA HIV RNA proficiency testing program subsequent to removal that laboratory will need to be recertified as a new laboratory.
- VQA is initiating a new non-technical penalty for data submitted that contains data entry errors and is not corrected prior to the PT due date. Data entry errors may include entering the wrong values, putting decimals in the wrong place, entering data in the wrong location, switching samples, or submitting the wrong file. If a data entry error occurs once within four rounds of testing, the proficiency testing score will be down-graded one level (i.e. a technical score of C would be assigned a score of C1^D, which equates to 2 points for a panel score). If a data entry error occurs for the second time in four rounds of testing, then the proficiency testing score will be down-graded two levels (i.e. a technical score of C would be assigned a score of C2^D, which equates to 4 points for a panel score). The new non-technical penalty will go into effect **January of 2022**.