

EmPower+

Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures

For Participating Contractors

August 2023



NYSERDA

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Overview

NYSERDA maintains the integrity of the EmPower+ Program through an independent Standards and Quality Assurance (SQA) team. This team manages the Quality Assurance (QA) platform for the program. This manual covers the EmPower+ Program.

Quality Control (QC): Control of the process, prior to and during the process.

Planned and systematic activity implemented to ensure quality requirements are met and non-conformances documented in a Quality Assurance inspection are corrected. Participating Contractors should have their own QC resources to confirm their work.

Quality Assurance (QA): Assuring the work is done properly, at the end of the process.

Field Inspections to verify compliance of key milestones within projects to assess compliance with industry standards and program requirements; identify corrective action necessary to comply with said standards and requirements.

Quality Assurance Services Provider (QSP): Members of a Qualified Assurance Service Provider under contract with NYSERDA responsible for inspection services. The QSP is fully separate and independent from the Program Implementer.

NYSERDA's SQA team provides 3rd party QA and monitoring. The QA system has several components, including a review of qualifications and credentials, establishment of program standards, and comprehensive field inspections. QA inspections involve verification of the contracted scope of work, accuracy of site analysis, and verification that installations are consistent with program requirements, Building Performance Institute (BPI) standards, National Renewable Laboratory (NREL) Standard Work Specifications (SWS), and the New York State Uniform Building Code as they relate to the overall quality of the installation.

NYSERDA or its representatives may make a reasonable number of visits to the customer site before, during, and/or after installation of the approved work scope to assess overall compliance.

Corresponding with NYSERDA'S Standards and Quality Assurance Team

Each Participating Contractor has a Program-Implementer-assigned Account Manager to help resolve problems and issues that arise. Program-Implementer-assigned Account Managers can be found on the Contractor Support Website in the [Program Manual](#), under Section 1 - Contacts.

All correspondence with NYSERDA's SQA team should be sent to: inspections@nyserda.ny.gov. A member of the SQA team will respond in a timely manner.

Program Roles and Responsibilities

The program relies on Participating Contractors to implement energy efficiency and health and safety measures for customers seeking incentives through the program. The Participating Contractors have roles and responsibilities in the program including, but not limited to, the following:

- Contractor Roles and Responsibilities
 - Agree to terms of NYSERDA's participation agreement.
 - Hold the agreement with the customer.
 - Receive incentive payments.
 - Responsible for any complaints, warranties, and correction of non-conformances.
 - Responsible for installation and quality of project.
 - Responsible for maintaining a credentialed person on staff.

Inspections will primarily focus on the quality of the Participating Contractor's installation, and average inspection scores will be calculated using an algorithm for all observed non-conformances. The Participating Contractor will be included in any correspondence related to scheduling project inspections, if invited by the customer.

NYSERDA Partner Portal

The **Standards and Quality Assurance (SQA)** module is built within Salesforce, which is also known as the NYSERDA Partner Portal. All activity related to scheduling, conducting, reviewing, and approving inspections, and managing corrective action responses and resolutions, is documented and managed from within Salesforce. To log into Salesforce (NYSERDA Partner Portal), access the portal login page at <https://portal.nyserderda.ny.gov/login>, then enter your **Username** and **Password**. Information pertaining to specific project inspections can be found under the **Project Inspections** tab. A variety of reports and visual charts, relating to project(s), performance trends, and program data are available under the **Dashboards** tab.

Instructions for **Managing Portal Access**, as well as application resources for Participating Contractors in the EmPower+ Program, are available on [Knowledge Base](#).

NYSERDA Portal: Project Inspections

The SQA Inspection workflow includes automated email communication about project inspections. After the inspection report has been generated, contractors/builders/vendors/etc. will receive an email with a link to the inspection report. This report is also available on the portal under the **Project Inspections** tab. To access inspection reports for a project:

1. Click on **Project Inspections** tab.
2. Select either **Field or Photo Inspections** from the drop-down menu.
3. Click on the Project Inspection Record (PI-XXXXXX)
4. To view the inspection report, click on **View/Print Inspection Report** within the project record.
This will show the overall score, as well as any non-conformances identified by the inspector.

This provides an overview of the portal functionality. Step-by-step instructions for responding to inspections can be found on page 15.

NYSERDA Portal: Dashboards and Reports

Dashboards and Reports are intended to provide Participating Contractors with up-to-date information on the projects and trends relating to all work performed on behalf of NYSERDA.

The **Dashboard** page provides an overview of your projects and links to the available reports. To access Dashboards:

1. Click on Dashboard tab.
2. Several visual charts will be available to help track projects.

3. Use the dropdown menu on the left to navigate between dashboards.
4. Click Refresh to display the most up-to-date information.
5. Hover the mouse over data points to see details.
6. Click on the chart to view the underlying report.

Reports are also available under the **Dashboard** tab. To access available reports:

1. Click on **Dashboard** tab.
2. Next, click on the [Go to Dashboard List](#) link on the top left below the tabs.
3. Select the **Program** folder to view the report list, available reports will display on the right.
4. After accessing a report, use the **Filter** on the top of the page to define how information is displayed.
5. Click any Underlined Link in the report table to open the corresponding project record.

Inspection of Completed Projects

The purpose of the QA inspection is to provide NYSERDA with an opportunity to evaluate and verify the accuracy and compliance with program requirements, building performance standards, customer satisfaction, and to ensure homes are left in a healthy and safe condition. Non-conformances identified during the inspection may be required by NYSERDA to be corrected with all remediation activity documented via the corrective action resolution process. The QA inspection also includes selected health and safety, performance items, and specific compliance items per applicable code.

Field Inspections

Field inspections are conducted by a qualified independent third party using comprehensive field inspection QA checklists and processes.

In general, QA field inspections are scheduled directly with the customer, at the customer's convenience. The Contractor will be invited to attend the inspection unless the customer requests that the Contractor not attend. Customers are encouraged to allow the Contractor to attend.

NYSERDA may select any completed project at any point in the future for a field inspection based on customer complaints, warranty-related issues, or a review of the work done by the Contractor under status review or program disciplinary action. All Contractors are encouraged to perform in-house quality control of their projects.

Scheduling Field Inspections

Setting up the Customer Call List

The QSP is responsible for scheduling field inspections of completed projects within the assigned region(s) using the NYSERDA Partner Portal. The Quality Services Provider shall strive to conduct field inspections within 30 days of project completion and to meet the specified average Program inspection percentage rate, and rational sampling plan for individual Participating Contractors as stipulated by NYSERDA. The QSP shall not regularly schedule Field Inspections later than 90 days from project completion unless in response to special circumstances.

Obtain Project Data Prior to Conducting Field Inspections

Once sites are selected and inspections are scheduled using the NYSERDA Partner Portal, the Scheduler shall obtain the complete project file from the Program Portal and upload required information to the QA portal to support the retrieval, review, and field use of project files by the Field Inspectors.

Participating Contractor Invitation to Field Inspection

Customers contacted by NYSERDA's Quality Service Provider to schedule a field inspection will have the option of allowing the Participating Contractor to be present at the time of inspection.

Customers are encouraged to allow the Participating Contractor to attend so that any questions can be answered, and minor fixes may be made on site. If the customer agrees, the Participating Contractor shall be notified of the upcoming inspection via email. Inspections are typically scheduled at least two weeks in advance and no less than five (5) business days from scheduling call.

Customers have the right to request that the Participating Contractor not attend the field inspection. In these situations, the Participating Contractor will not be notified of the scheduled inspection but will receive the result of the inspection within five (5) business days after inspection.

Field Inspection Procedures

Field inspection procedures are generally outlined below and are used to assess the performance of Participating Contractors and their level of compliance with technical standards and programmatic rules. To view a detailed list of all field inspection check points, please refer to the link provided in the current [Program Manual](#), under Section 10 -Quality Assurance.

Field Inspection Types

There are three Inspection Types outlined by Project Type and Market Sector in Table 1. The Inspection Type, "Field Inspection: Comprehensive" includes all elements described in the "On-Site Field Inspection Protocol" below, whereas the Inspection Type, "Field Inspection: Direct Install" includes only those elements required for direct install projects.

Table 1. Inspection Type by Project and Market Sector

Project Type	Market Sector	Inspection Type
Comprehensive or Single Measure requiring blower door testing	LMI	Field Inspection: Comprehensive
Direct Install Measures	LMI	Field Inspection: Direct Install
Special request by NYSERDA	LMI	Non-Standard Inspection

Preparation for Field Inspection and Homeowner Orientation

The Quality Services Provider’s Field Inspector shall conduct one of three inspection types based on the Project Type as outlined in Table 1. Each inspection type requires the following:

- An introduction to the customer, including the QA Field Inspector’s name and company.
- A description of the inspection and testing procedures.
- An overview of the program and answer customer questions.
- Ask customer questions about any identified project concerns after having reviewed project documentation.
- Determine whether health and safety issues were identified by the Participating Contractor audit and assess whether the approved work scope addressed those issues.
- Determine whether the most cost-effective energy efficiency measures were recommended by the Contractor, whether the approved and contracted measures were installed, and whether the installed measures meet program standards.

Field Inspection: Comprehensive (Whole House)

Application: Low- to Moderate Income (LMI) Comprehensive Whole House Projects

- Complete exterior visual inspection, *i.e.*, chimneys, ventilation, roofing, siding, windows, foundation, obstructions, and landscaping.
- Complete interior inspection, *i.e.*, visual inspection, place home under winter conditions, test carbon monoxide (CO) levels, and set up blower door.
- Complete basement inspection, *i.e.*, visual inspections of condition, insulation levels and distribution system, measure CO in combustion appliance zone (CAZ), gas leak detection, combustion efficiency testing, and worst-case depressurization.
- Complete attic inspection.
- Conduct blower door test.
- Complete building shell inspection with thermal imaging infrared scan required for all times when temperature delta allows for good imaging results, *i.e.*, insulation levels in walls, attics, floors, windows, and doors.

- Verify wall insulation installation using a combination of the following:
 - Probing around outlets or drilling holes, required on all projects.
 - Pulling and checking under siding.
 - Borescope.
 - Infrared scans, conditions permitting.
 - Core sampling to verify density as directed by NYSERDA.
- Appliance and lighting inspections to determine if the recommended measures were the most cost-effective.
- Ensure all approved energy conservation measures are installed, operating, and in compliance with Program requirements, BPI standards, NREL, SWS, and applicable codes.

Field Inspection: Direct Install

Application: Direct Install projects

- Appliance and lighting inspections to determine if the recommended measures were the most cost-effective.
- Determine whether all energy efficiency and conservation measures approved by the program were installed, and that they operate properly and in compliance with technical/manufacturer standards, applicable BPI building science standards, and Program requirements.

RES SF (1-4 units) Desk Review: Measure Verification (Non-Standard Inspection)

Application: Special circumstances as determined by NYSERDA

- Participating Contractor will provide equipment technical data sheet and nameplate photo for the installed energy conservation measure, e.g., appliance, heating equipment, water heater, etc.
- Desk Reviewer will verify installation with the customer, including total cost and homeowner cost-share.

Quality Assurance Inspection Report

The QA inspection report will provide a list of all non-conformances identified. The report will provide an overall score of the project inspection and identify a pass or fail.

The inspection report will be made available to the Participating Contractor within approximately five (5) days after the inspection. The report would indicate if the project passed or failed inspection, a score based on the scoring criteria, and a list of any non-conformances observed during the inspection. Inspection reports will be made available to the homeowner upon request directly to NYSERDA.

Scoring Criteria

The scoring criteria characteristics will be used as a guideline for inspectors to gauge relative installation quality but cannot predict every possible situation. These QA scores will:

- Allow NYSERDA to track trends in installation quality over time.
- Allow NYSERDA to gauge the relative quality of installations across installers, regions, or other screening criteria.
- Provide valuable feedback to contractors, local code officials, and inspectors.

Classification of Program Non-Conformances

Prior to issuing an overall QA score, it is important to understand the magnitude of non-conformances observed during the onsite and photo inspections. A high-quality installation will:

- Comply with the Residential Code of New York, NREL, SWS, and BPI Standards.
- Meet all NYSERDA program requirements and standards.
- Result in a measurable reduction in energy use.

Table 2. Non-Conformance Definitions

	Energy Impact	Non-Energy Impact
Incidental	May result in a savings shortfall, but the impact will be small and may not be measurable.	Not expected, on its own, to pose a substantial risk of system failure or hazard.
Minor	Will result in a savings shortfall, but the impact will be small and may not be measurable.	Requires modifications to address but not expected to pose a substantial risk of system failure or hazard.
Major	Will result in a measurable shortfall in energy savings.	Presents an increased risk of system failure or hazard but not determined to be in imminent danger of failure or hazard.
Critical	N/A	Presents an imminent hazard and/or probability of system failure.

Incidental

Examples of incidental non-conformances include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Smoke detector was not proposed in homes not equipped with a smoke detector.
- Installed LED bulbs are not Energy Star® rated.
- Electrical shutoff not installed within sight of the appliance.
- Rigid board insulation has not been securely sealed and secured to the wall.
- OEM manual was not left with the installed unit.

Minor

Examples of minor non-conformances include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Installed ductwork is not properly supported at the proper intervals.
- Attic access is not insulated to R-14 or greater.
- Insulation R-value and quantity installed does not match contract.
- Bypasses around the chimney have not been air sealed using non-combustible materials.

Major

Examples of major non-conformances include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Contracted amount of insulation has not been installed.
- Blower door test-in and test-out results were not submitted to program portal.
- Exhaust fan has not been vented directly outside using appropriate duct materials.
- Combustion appliance CO is equal to or above threshold limit under greatest depressurization achievable.
- Contracted quantity of LED bulbs has not been installed.

Critical

Examples of critical non-conformances include, but are not limited to, the following:

- CO detector was not proposed in homes not equipped with a CO detector.
- Contracted, CO, smoke, or combination CO/smoke detector(s) have not been installed as contracted.
- Gas piping system's valves at unused outlets are not plugged or capped.
- Operational unvented heaters are not ANSI Z21.11.2 listed.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and inspectors will fully evaluate each installation on a case-by-case basis.

Performance Reports

Each Participating Contractor shall have the ability to access all field inspection results through the QA Portal as well as having access to the following dashboard tabs.

Non-Conformances by Category:

This pie chart represents the number of critical, major, minor, and incidental non-conformances identified during the specified time frame.

Count of Non-Conformances:

This bar chart represents the number of each non-conformance identified and the category (Critical, Major, Minor and Incidental).

Avg QA Score by Quarter:

This line chart represents the average QA score by quarter.

Average Field Inspection Score:

This bar graph represents the average field inspection score by year.

Overall QA Inspection Scoring Criteria

EmPower+

It is anticipated that quality inspections will be provided at a 10% inspection rate for whole house and electric reduction projects. Participating Contractors with high quality scores and who prove to have well defined and effective internal quality assurance and quality control practices may benefit from a lower inspection rate. The program average inspection rate will not be reduced to less than 5%.

Each inspection will receive a score on a five-point scale. This score is an indicator of the overall quality and compliance with program requirements, based on the number and type of non-conformances observed. Projects receiving an inspection score of 1-2 are considered failing scores, whereas projects receiving an inspection score of 3-5 are passing scores.

Projects with an inspection score of 5 represent a fully compliant project that employs best practices. Projects with an inspection score of 3 signify a fully acceptable project. Receiving a 1 or 2 on an inspection represents a project with major or critical non-conformance.

Projects that have non-conformances related to critical, health and safety, or major system performance attributes will automatically fail. Specific criteria for each score are given in the following table:

Table 3. Inspection Score Criteria

QA Scoring Matrix				
Score	Incidental	Minor	Major	Critical
5	Up to 3	Up to 2	0	0
4	More than 3	Up to 3	0	0
3	N/A	More than 3	0	0
2	N/A	N/A	Up to 1	0
1	N/A	N/A	More than 1	More than 0

When assigning a QA score, the SQA Salesforce module will automatically generate a score based on the inspection results. For example, a system with two major non-conformances will receive a score of 1, even if there were no minor or incidental non-conformances. Systems with any critical non-conformance will automatically receive a score of 1. The passing scores of 3, 4, and 5 may depend on the number of incidental and minor non-conformances found in the inspection report. In this case, a system with up to 3 minor non-conformances will receive a score of 4 since it does not quite meet the requirements for a 5 but exceeds the threshold of a score of 3.

Quality Assurance Score Descriptions

5: System Meets All Program Criteria

A system receiving a score of 5 is generally well-installed, with no noticeable non-conformances in workmanship, code compliance, or expected energy output. These systems are examples of best practices in Commercial/Industrial solar electric installation.

3: System Meets Key Program Requirements

A system achieving a score of 3 meets basic program requirements, but it may require some modification to be considered fully compliant.

1: System Does Not Meet Program Requirements

Systems receiving a score of 1 have not met key program requirements and do not meet minimum safety requirements and/or will not achieve the expected energy savings. These systems may require urgent attention to address safety concerns.

Target Inspection Rate by Status

Below are the established sampling protocols based on the Participating Contractor's participation status or upon special request from NYSERDA or the homeowner.

Provisional Status

Newly Participating Contractors are designated as 'Provisional' status and must complete a minimum of three (3) projects meeting the minimum Standard Quality requirements, score a 3 or higher. These quality requirements must be met by the sixth inspected project or within a period of one year from the date of completion of the first completed project, whichever comes first. Provisional Participating Contractors are strongly encouraged to attend at least the first three (3) field inspections as it provides an opportunity to learn first-hand the Program quality expectations and field inspection process.

Full Status

The target inspection rate for Full Status Participating Contractors is 10% of completed projects, with a minimum of one (1) inspection per quarter. NYSERDA reserves the right to adjust the field inspection rate based on the individual performance of each Participating Contractor.

Special Status Request

Projects may be selected for inspection at the request of program customers, or NYSERDA within one year of project completion. All field inspections conducted beyond 90 days from signing this form will not be scored and will be limited to specific concerns, and may include, but not be limited to:

1. Health and safety testing such as gas leaks, combustion appliance drafting, and CO measurement.
2. Verifying that the contracted energy conservation measures are installed.
3. Verifying that the measures on the contract are present and have been installed correctly.

Probationary Status

Up to 100% of projects completed while on Probationary status may be subject to field inspections, at the sole discretion of NYSERDA. Inspection findings will be used by the Program Technical Services team as one of many factors in determining a Participating Contractor's future participation status.

Suspended Status:

Up to 100% of projects completed while on a Suspended status may be subject to field inspections, at the sole discretion of NYSERDA. Inspection findings will be used by the Program Technical Services team as one of many factors in determining a Participating Contractor's future participation status.

Terminated Status:

Depending on the circumstances of termination, NYSERDA may at its sole discretion, conduct field inspections on a percentage of projects as deemed appropriate.

Procedure for Handling Non-Conformance and Corrective Action

The QA inspection report will list any non-conformances identified. The report will provide an overall score of the project and identify a pass or fail. Projects that have non-conformances related to critical, health and safety, or major system performance attributes will automatically fail. Projects that have minor or incidental non-conformances may pass or fail based on their overall merits.

All identified non-conformances from the Inspection Report, and in future work conducted in the program, are expected to be addressed and corrected. Acknowledgment and plans for preventing future problems may be requested with the report. Non-conformances can be corrected post-installation through corrective action to the documentation, incentive applied to the project, or remediation of the installation or its components.

Participating Contractors are required to respond to NYSERDA with proof of corrective action for all non-conformances. A failed inspection report must be either disputed within 15 days by responding to the Salesforce Project Inspection record or remedied within 30 days. Sufficient evidence of remediation must be provided to NYSERDA via Salesforce, documenting the completion of required actions. NYSERDA may, at its discretion, conduct a field verification of the remediated installation.

Procedure for Contesting an Inspection Score

A Participating Contractor may contest the findings of an inspection report by responding to the Salesforce Project Inspection record within 15 days of receiving the inspection report.

Upon review, if NYSERDA agrees with the Participating Contractor, the non-conformance will be removed. The inspection score may or may not change based on other non-conformances. If NYSERDA agrees with the inspector, the non-conformance will stand, and the score will remain the same.

Procedure to Resolve a Corrective Action Request (CAR) or Contest the Inspection

This step-by-step process will assist Participating Contractors on how to upload images and documentation for a corrective action or to contest non-conformances.

1. Access the **Review Failed Tasks** page, which can be found in the email communication sent to Participating Contractors when an inspection uncovers non-conformances.
 1. This page can also be accessed directly on the portal by going to the **Project Inspection** tab, selecting the appropriate **Project Record (PI-XXXXXX)**, and clicking on **Review Failed Tasks**.
2. On the Review Failed Tasks page, use the side navigation bar to locate all CAR eligible non-conformances that require a response are denoted with a **Red X** to the right of the task.
 1. To resolve a failed task, click on the **Action** dropdown list and select **Mark as Resolved**.
 2. To contest a failed task, select **Contest Rating** from the **Action** dropdown list.
3. Follow steps 4- 6 after selecting either **Mark as Resolved** or **Contest Rating** from the dropdown list for each failed task:
4. Add a note in the **Notes** section. Then click on **Insert** to update the failed task and open the attachment window.
5. Click on the **Paperclip** icon in the **Attachment** column to open the **CAR Failure Review Attachment** window, where documents can be attached.
6. Click **Choose Files** in the new window to locate the files on the computer. Choose the appropriate file(s) for upload.
 1. After uploading the document, a thumbnail of the file being displayed in the **Attachment** window will be visible. When uploading is completed, click on the **Close** button.
7. After successfully responding to *all* Failed tasks, click on **Submit** at the bottom of the page to submit the CAR replies for review.
8. Once submitted, the **Contested/Resolved Failed Tasks** will either be **Denied** or **Upheld** by Program Implementers during the review process.
 1. If the Program Implementer denies the contest, the Participating Contractor is still responsible for resolving all the failed tasks.

Field Inspections Requiring Corrective Action

1. All non-conformances are required to be addressed within 30 days of issuing report.
2. All non-conformances require a response through the link sent with the report.
3. Responded Corrective Actions will be reviewed and responded to by NYSERDA staff.
4. If NYSERDA staff accepts the corrective action, the non-conformance will be marked resolved.
5. If NYSERDA does not accept the response, the non-conformance will be marked “Deny Resolved Task” or “Deny Contested Task” with a description of why the response was not accepted. The non-conformance will remain open until NYSERDA accepts a response.

System Shutdowns

In an emergency, NYSERDA or its representatives may shut down fossil fuel system(s). NYSERDA will notify the Participating Contractor whenever it takes such action as soon as is possible. In the event an inspector identifies a gas leak the following procedure will take place:

1. Inspector or homeowner contacts the utility to report the leak.
2. Inspector notifies the installing Participating Contractor, program implementer, NYSERDA program, and the NYSERDA QA Manager via email.
3. The program implementer follows up with the customer/installing contractor to provide guidance as needed to repair the gas leak.

Prescriptive Probation and Disciplinary Action

When a Participating Contractor fails to consistently complete projects that pass NYSERDA's QA evaluation or does not respond to or remedy failed inspections, NYSERDA may review their status in the program and take further action.

A Participating Contractor may be issued a prescriptive plan, in which specific results and a timeline for demonstrating those results will be prescribed and monitored. The Participating Contractor may be suspended or terminated from the program if determined necessary. Complete details of demonstrating continued project viability are located in the current [Program Manual](#), under the Program Resources tab.

Scheduling a Call with NYSERDA

At times, NYSERDA Quality Assurance and Program staff will contact a Participating Contractor should they see a negative trend in their performance and see how NYSERDA staff can assist to better performance. Subsequently, a Participating Contractor may schedule a call with their account manager at any time to review their inspection reports, contesting a corrective action, and overall check-in with NYSERDA. Account Manager assignments can be found on the Contractor Support Website in the [Program Manual](#), under Section 1 - Contacts.



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