



Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 31 January 2024

1. What is the Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation?

The Local Infrastructure Quality Accreditation (LIQA) is the quality accreditation process designed specifically for local VCSE infrastructure organisations (LIOs). It assesses impact of delivery of the [Four Functions of Local Infrastructure](#); a framework of activities and outcomes that, when combined, provide effective local VCSE infrastructure support services. It enables LIOs to benchmark work against a clear set of criteria, demonstrate their strengths and impact, and identify opportunities for future development.

2. Why have we created the LIQA?

We have developed the LIQA to further NAVCA's mission of supporting high quality local VCSE infrastructure everywhere, and to promote the value, impact and outcomes of local infrastructure. The accreditation:

- Is a badge of prestige that celebrate excellence and good practice
- give holders confidence their organisation meets local needs, is reflective and reviews and learns from best practice.
- support organisational development, providing opportunities to gain invaluable insights into organisational strengths and areas for development.
- Gives local communities and VCSE organisation accessing services confidence in receiving effective, high-quality support that meets their needs and is informed by best practice from across the country.
- fosters better connections within local VCSE sectors, building local organisations' knowledge and confidence on where to go to reach sector leaders and those who drive collaborations and partnerships.
- support stakeholders including local authorities, health systems and other commissioners and funders to be confident they are investing in, and working alongside effective local partners linked in to a national network of support and information. They provide assurance the services will be high-quality and effective in supporting local community needs.
- offers support to shape local commissioning and funding intentions; guiding development of service specifications and helping describe expectations to potential providers.

3. Who can undertake the LIQA, how much does it cost and how long does accreditation last?

The LIQA is available to all NAVCA members. It costs £2,250 (ex. VAT) and, once achieved, accreditation lasts for three years with no further costs during this time. We have worked hard to keep the cost to the minimum, and approximately half of the fee we receive is spent directly on paying the Independent Assessor. The remainder of the cost reflects our investment in developing the standard, the work involved in administering the process, and our ongoing work to ensure the standard remains current, understood and valued amongst stakeholders at a local and national level.

4. Is the LIQA appropriate for smaller local infrastructure organisations?

Yes. The process has been designed to reflect the diversity of LIOs that exist within NAVCA's membership. The LIQA assesses the impact and outcomes expected under the Four Functions of Local Infrastructure within the context of the applicant organisation, the area it operates in and the local VCSE sector it supports. The application process provides an opportunity to describe this context and the Assessor will make judgements with this information in mind, and information gathered through interviews with stakeholders including local VCSE organisations and statutory partners. It is not a "tick box" assessment; whilst the standard requires evidence of impact of all of the Four Functions of Local Infrastructure, it is responsive to the scale and focus of each organisation, and the assessment process builds on an understanding of this.

5. Can more than one organisation hold the LIQA in the same area?

Yes. When developing the LIQA, we engaged members on this question and the consensus was that providing "exclusivity" would not be helpful. NAVCA members cover different size areas spanning from individual lower-tier district council areas, to second-tier county areas comprising multiple districts, to whole regions. In some cases, this means multiple NAVCA members working collaboratively at different tiers within the same geographic space to deliver complementary work and the LIQA is designed to recognise this. As the LIQA is open to NAVCA members only, there are sufficient checks in place to ensure we support positive collaboration between LIOs whilst safeguarding against unhelpful fragmentation and ineffective competitive environments.

6. How long does the process take and when can I start my application?

The process takes approximately six months to complete. The majority of this is for you to collate and submit your portfolio of evidence. It may be possible to complete the process more quickly, but we encourage applicants to use the full time available to develop their application. Undertaking the LIQA is by no means a small task. Those who take up the process are expected to provide considerable evidence of their work and its impact, and be prepared to discuss this with their Assessor. It will require input from across your team, and you may want to consider engaging trustees and other volunteers as well as paid staff members.

We are currently inviting expressions of interest for applications beginning from June 2023. To ensure we have capacity to meet demand, we are offering a maximum of 10 application slots per month on a first-come-first-served basis. We will work with you to arrange an application timetable that suits your organisation. Please complete [this form](#) to let us know your preferred start date and we will be in touch with you to discuss your needs.

7. How can I decide if it's the right time for our organisation to apply, and that we have the required evidence to demonstrate the impact and outcomes?

To protect the integrity of the LIQA, we do not make the full criteria available until an organisation has signed the agreement and paid the fee deposit. However, we recognise members will want to understand what's involved before committing to the process. To assist, we have produced these FAQs and a Criteria Preview document available on our website, and we encourage you to contact us to discuss any queries you may have about to your readiness to undertake the LIQA.

8. What type of evidence is required for the LIQA?

The LIQA asks for a mix of case studies which demonstrate your impact against each of the Four Functions, and evidence to support these. This might be in the form of documents, videos or audio or datasets.

Whilst the Four Functions of Infrastructure are an effective framework for describing what makes up the core of local VCSE infrastructure delivery, we know it's not a "one size fits all" model, and the specifics of how these are delivered, and what evidence might exist to demonstrate this, will vary considerably from place to place. As a result, we do not specify exactly what evidence we expect to see. Instead, in the Application guidance you will find ideas of what your evidence should show and some examples of what types of evidence might be submitted. But this is not a definitive checklist – only you will know what documentation best demonstrates your delivery of the activities, objectives and outcomes of each Function.

Whatever you choose to submit, your evidence must be no more than 24 months old from the date of your submission as the LIQA requires relevant and recent demonstration of your work toward each of the Four Functions.

9. What support is available throughout the process?

You can speak to us at any time throughout the process. NAVCA prides itself on being a network of supportive organisations with similar goals and value and we will gladly offer advice where we can. However, to retain independence of the assessment, we cannot review partial submissions or specific pieces of evidence as this will only be reviewed by your Independent Assessor.

NAVCA also has a range of forums that offer space to discuss all aspects of the Four Functions of Infrastructure and wider local VCSE infrastructure delivery. Members use these forums to share learning, experiences and resources, and to collaborate on identifying solutions to tricky problems. These forums are not just for CEOs – any member of staff within a NAVCA member can join. We recognise there's no hard-and-fast rule on who does what within a LIO, so as many of your team as wish to join are welcome. If you're not already connected into our forums, please email quality@navca.org.uk.

10. Can we hear from someone who has been through the process?

We asked members who went through the LIQA pilot to give their honest reflections on the process to help others understand the process and what to expect. Their views have been captured in a series of short videos on our [website](#). As more organisations go through the process, we will continue to seek insights and feedback to share with members, and respond to feedback to further improve the process.

11. Who assesses LIQA applications?

The LIQA uses a peer assessor model. In most cases, your Assessor will be a CEO or other senior staff from within a NAVCA member organisation which currently holds the LIQA or has demonstrated their quality through some other means. Assessors act independently of NAVCA, are subject to a Code of Conduct and must complete a Conflict of Interest statement which is reviewed by NAVCA. We carefully assign an Assessor to each Application, ensuring there is complete independence between the Assessor and the Applicant organisation. LIQA Assessors are required to undertake periodic training on the process and their assessments are moderated to ensure consistency and quality are maintained.

12. Does an organisation need to have completed the LIQA to become an LIQA Assessor?

No. Assessors may be engaged on a freelance/self-employed basis, or through their employer organisation if they have one. Each candidate is subject to an application process which considers the individual's knowledge and experience. Therefore, it is not a requirement for an Assessor to work for an LIQA accredited organisation, as it is the individual's knowledge and experience that is considered, rather than the organisation they might be employed by.

If you are interested in applying to be an assessor on any of our quality accreditations please contact us at quality@navca.org.uk

13. What happens at the end of accreditation/what is the process and cost for re-accreditation?

At the end of the three-year period, organisations that wish to retain LIQA accreditation will need to undertake a full LIQA assessment process at the full cost. Given the constantly changing environment the VCSE sector operates in, the LIQA will continuously evolve to recognise and reflect the changing needs of local VCSE organisations and the impact expected from high-quality local infrastructure organisations. As a result, it would not be effective to offer a light-touch reaccreditation process. In addition, the LIQA requires evidence no less than 24 months old, to ensure applicants demonstrate relative a recent delivery of the outcomes. Therefore, completely new evidence of the impact and outcomes would be required at the point of re-accreditation.

14. What is NAVCA doing to promote the LIQA to relevant stakeholders?

Engaging local and national stakeholders has been a vital part of the LIQA's development and will continue to be an important focus for the future. During the development phase, in addition to members, we engaged a range of stakeholders on a steering group and through workshops to test and refine the standard. We have engaged NHS England, government departments DCMS and DLUHC, local councils (via the Local Government Association) and key national funding bodies including The National Lottery Community Fund.

We plan to continue this engagement to increase awareness and understanding of the LIQA, including specific workshops and webinars and building promotion into our general communications messages. We have events planned with LGA members and with Integrated Care System leaders via NHS Confederation and encourage you to promote opportunities for your local stakeholders to engage with NAVCA about the LIQA.

We aim to ensure the LIQA is known widely as the mark of quality for local VCSE infrastructure, giving stakeholders confidence they are working with a high-quality partner linked in to network of best practice and support. We also aim to encourage local and national partners to support NAVCA members to undertake the LIQA, recognising the value of a reflective process which supports organisational development and improvement, and helping to meet shared aims for working with local VCSE sectors.

15. How will NAVCA help accredited organisations to promote their success?

We will promote the success of each organisation that achieves accreditation via our [website](#), social media and other communications channels. We also offer to write to local stakeholders of each LIQA accredited organisation to promote their success. Organisations achieving accreditation will be able to use the branding and promote their quality to users, stakeholders and funders. With NAVCA's support you will join a growing group of organisations advocating the collective quality, value and impact of local infrastructure to a national audience.

16. What happens if we don't achieve accreditation?

The LIQA is a robust and independent assessment of impact and outcomes. As a result, there will be situations where applicants do not achieve accreditation. In these instances, there are two possible outcomes based on the specific circumstances.

In some instances, we may identify actions we feel are needed before accreditation can be provided. This may be where one of the criteria was only partially met and where a specific action is needed to address this.

In these cases, we will provide an interim accreditation, with full accreditation subject to the satisfactory completion of the agreed actions. We will discuss with you what is required, and agree a timescale of no more than six months for this to be completed.

In other cases, if there are several gaps, or large areas of the impact and outcomes have not been evidenced, this would result in the need for a reapplication. Due to the work involved and the requirement to re-engage an Independent Assessor, the full fee will apply to the reassessment process.

In addition to a badge of quality, we have designed the LIQA to be a tool to support reflection and organisational development. Those who have been through the process have told us that, regardless of the outcome, it has provided invaluable insights into their organisation – both through self-reflection and through the expertise and experience of independent peer-assessment. If you are unsuccessful in achieving the LIQA, or if you awarded an interim accreditation, NAVCA will provide advice and support to help you to address any areas that were deemed to need work. This may include access support from within NAVCA or a partner organisation, and helping you to make links with other NAVCA members to engage in peer learning and development activity. Over the coming year, a focus for NAVCA is building and refining this support offer; building on learning from LIQA assessments to refine our offer, and working across members to build an effective model of peer support and learning.

17. How does the LIQA differ to the Volunteer Centre Quality Accreditation (VCQA)?

The VCQA is based around the [Five Functions of Volunteer Centres](#) and is focused on the specific impact and outcomes associated with delivering a Volunteer Centre. Whilst there is a focus on volunteering within the LIQA (via Function Four of the [Four Functions of Local Infrastructure](#)) these differ significantly from the VCQA. The volunteering element to the LIQA focuses on creating good conditions for and promoting volunteering and does not go into the depth of the Five Functions of Volunteer Centres the VCQA requires to be evidenced. There is no requirement to be delivering a Volunteer Centre function in order to demonstrate the requirements of the LIQA. The Four Functions of Local Infrastructure recognise and reflect the role LIOs play in supporting local volunteering and a culture of volunteerism in the area they operate. In contrast, the expectations around volunteering within the VCQA are much more expansive and specific, expecting work across a wider range of activity, each with specific evidenced outcomes. However, if your organisation already holds the VCQA, we anticipate much of the evidence you have gathered for this will greatly assist in demonstrating your impact under Function Four of the LIQA. Bear in mind, however, the requirement for evidence submitted for either standard to be no more than 24 months old from the date it is submitted.

18. Which standard is right for us?

We suggest you use the Four Functions of Local Infrastructure and Five Functions of Volunteer Centres as a guide to which standard is most aligned to your organisation. Only you will know which best reflects your focus. However, we feel organisations delivering the broader range of local VCSE infrastructure functions are likely to benefit most from the LIQA, which looks across the breadth of this activity, whereas, organisations with a predominant or exclusive focus on delivering Volunteer Centre functions are more likely to benefit from the VCQA.

We know many NAVCA members incorporate a Volunteer Centre into their delivery. For these organisations, it may be entirely appropriate to consider both the LIQA and VCQA. For NAVCA members, the cost of the VCQA is £2,000 (ex. VAT). However, if you do choose to undertake both accreditations consecutively, we are able to offer members a 10% discount on the cost. Therefore, the total cost of undertaking both LIQA and

VCQA would be £3,825 (ex. VAT). Given the work involved, we do not advise members undertake both the LIQA and VCQA at the same time.

19. Where can I get more information?

A conversation with the Membership Team is the best way to get answers to any questions you have. Please contact us on quality@navca.org.uk. This document will be updated regularly to reflect any questions we receive.