

# **Guide to validating your local practice: How to run a robust validation process**

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Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services® (**C4EO**)

[www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk)

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**Annex: C4EO validated local practice flowchart showing the five steps**

## 1. Introduction

This Guide provides recommendations on how to run a robust process for validating examples of local practice interventions developed to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. It is based on the lessons learned by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) in developing its system for validating local practice examples. It also provides information on packages of support which can be offered by C4EO should you wish to develop your own, local validation process.

The Guide complements *Guide to Validating Your Local Practice: From Conception to Validation* (C4EO, 2012).

### Background to C4EO

C4EO was established in 2008 and rapidly became a best practice hub for 'what works' in children's services. It is used by local authorities across England, as well as other organisations such as those in the third sector.

***C4EO aims to help those working in children's services improve the life chances of all children and young people and, in particular, those that are the most vulnerable.***

C4EO works with local services, drawing on expert practitioners recruited on a part-time basis from across the children's sector and who have a sound understanding of the current issues facing the sector. A key part of the training received by these expert practitioners is focused on Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA), see Friedman (2005). Experts and representatives from academic, research and other institutions have also supported C4EO's work to ensure that improving outcomes for children, young people and their families is based on the best available evidence.

C4EO has developed a range of products and support services to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. Excellence in local practice, combined with national research and data about 'what works' has been gathered in one place. C4EO shares this evidence and the best of local practice with all those who work with and for children and young people and provides practical 'hands on support' to help local areas make full use of this evidence.

C4EO's services are commissioned by a wide range of organisations including the Department for Education; the Children's Improvement Board, involving the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), the Local Government Association (LGA), and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE); individual or regional groupings of local authorities; social enterprises and charitable foundations; local consortia (of schools, GPs etc); and voluntary and community organisations.

### Why validate local practice?

In the current economic climate, and against the background of performance and results-based accountability, there is an increasing need for organisations (including local authorities, their partner agencies, charitable foundations etc) to demonstrate that key

performance indicators have been met and that they have delivered value for money. In addition, third sector organisations are under increasing pressure to show that their work is having an impact in order for them to gain funding.

In this context, C4EO has developed a robust system for assessing the effectiveness of local practice submitted for evaluation under its validated local practice process. Working across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors, C4EO has built up a large evidence bank of best practice examples from the experience of frontline service provision, and these validated examples of practice which works are shared to help those working in the sector in the pursuit of excellence and to inspire further good practice across the regions.

You may wish to consider making use of the national C4EO validation system already in place see [C4EO VLP](#) or may be considering developing and implementing a similar system yourself at the local level. This guide will help you to think about the systems and processes you will need to put in place if you wish to move forward with a local process for validation of practice examples.

## **2. Running a robust validation process**

From our experience of developing the C4EO validation process, the following are just some of the elements you will need in place in order to develop and implement a similarly robust system for evaluating local practice examples:

- Networks and channels to enable you to learn about and collect new examples of practice for validation.
- Standard templates through which practice examples can be submitted, feedback can be provided to submitters, and the results of the validation process can be recorded. This will ensure consistency of process and robustness of procedures for all practice submissions received.
- Detailed systems for recording and monitoring each submission so that these can be easily traced and tracked.
- A secure storage system (data protection compliant) for data and files to ensure confidentiality at all times.
- A 'graded' validation process with clearly identified and differentiated criteria for each 'grade' in the process
- A carefully selected comparison group to match your data against and show improved outcomes.
- A validation panel of professional practitioners and experts to validate the practice examples received. This panel – either face to face or virtual – will ensure that judgements are reached by professional consensus and are consequently robust and subject to scrutiny.
- Training to ensure the panel of experts is suitably trained in robust validation techniques.
- A system for providing timely, accurate and constructive feedback that is clear about the outcome/judgement of the validation and encourages further improvement for the benefit of children, young people and their families.
- The ability to publish any agreed validated practice examples in a user-friendly and accessible form.
- A system for promoting and disseminating any practice or intervention acknowledged as worthy of validation to others so as to share learning and motivate others.

## **New examples**

The first requirement is to establish channels and networks through which new examples can be collected; these practice examples form the 'life blood' of any credible validation process. This can be achieved through, for example, already established regional networks, professional groups, newsletters, or approaching organisations direct where there is known good practice.

It is also essential when running any validation process that there is a continuous flow of new examples for consideration. In this way, it is possible to compare the submitted examples with agreed criteria and establish a minimum baseline for credible validation.

## **Standard templates**

Standard templates are needed for consistency. There are three main stages of the validation process where these are needed: the submission stage, the validation stage, and when the results of the validation process are fed back to submitters.

## **Systems for recording and monitoring**

A master log for all practice examples received enables the recording of all essential details for each submission. Appropriate systems will include a field for a unique identification (ID) number for each submission/entry, along with fields for the submitter's name, organisation and contact details, title of the submission, and status/progress through the validation process. You may also wish to consider 'keywording' submissions by theme or topic area.

## **Secure storage**

To comply with the Data Protection Act, all electronic and paper files relating to practice examples received should be securely stored. Any papers or electronic files used in validation panels should be destroyed as confidential matter, deleted or shredded.

## **'Graded' validation process**

The C4EO experience has been that a grading system for successful submissions is necessary in order to accommodate good and effective practice that is at different stages of development or progress. C4EO has developed a set of criteria for each of its three levels of validation which are: emerging practice (where there has been a service redesign or major transformation process), promising practice and full validation.

## **Validation panels**

Evaluating received practice examples by means of a small panel of expert practitioners or similar ensures judgements regarding validation or validation 'grade'/level are robust. Experience has taught us that panel members will not always be in exact agreement but that robust judgements can be reached by debate and consensus. For this reason, panels often work best as face-to-face groups, but virtual panels are more cost-effective and can work as an alternative.

C4EO has also developed a central 'C4EO Assessor' role. This Assessor attends every panel to ensure that the process is fair and equitable for each submitter and consistent across panels.

### **Experts trained in robust validation techniques**

In C4EO's experience, three is the minimum number of members required for a validation panel. Panels work best where members are experts in the area/s under scrutiny and are professional practitioners and peers from another local authority, region or sector. These expert panel members will still need some training in the validation system to include an introduction to the system and to making judgements against the evidence submitted.

### **Constructive feedback**

It is important to provide timely and constructive feedback to those submitting practice examples for validation. This includes acknowledging initial receipt of the practice example; providing the submitter with an estimate of when he/she can expect to hear more; and then, as soon as a judgement has been made, contacting the submitter with the result. We have found that returning the validation form, which records the results from panel, offers a transparent and professional way of doing this. Panel comments recorded on this form provide the submitter with the judgement of their practice example (panel result), along with constructive feedback and, where relevant, a clear steer for any future development of the practice. The return of these forms is particularly helpful for submitters where judgements on practice examples may be borderline or where the panel has judged that the practice is not yet at a level for validation.

### **Publication**

Validated practice examples will be supported by sufficient impact evidence to show that outcomes and changes have been achieved for a target group of children, young people and/or their families. Increasingly, validated local practice examples include additional information on the cost-effectiveness/value for money of a specific practice, giving leaders and managers the unit cost of interventions and supporting the social return on investment. C4EO has always published this evidence (online) – in the form of the practice examples themselves - with a view to inspiring further best practice across the regions and other local areas. It is therefore important to have a publishing process in place, with accompanying editorial and quality assurance processes.

### **Promotion and dissemination**

Sharing local practice which works is vital in today's climate, not only as inspirational models of what can be achieved in a 'more for less' environment, but also as a cost-effective measure to guard against 'reinventing the wheel'. Under the C4EO system, submitters agree to their organisation's name and example being shared with others. For example, C4EO validated examples, once published, are promoted and disseminated through various channels and networks that have been built up by C4EO and its partners. C4EO has also produced online videos to bring some of its practice examples to life and has an established seminar and events programme at which practice examples feature heavily.

## **3. The C4EO model: more about processes and roles**

In the C4EO validated practice model, all local practice examples received are evaluated by appropriately trained peer professionals and experts in the field from another region, local authority or organisation. This external and objective validation, along with robust criteria against which to make judgements, plays a vital role in ensuring credibility and recognition

by others. Although local authorities and other organisations may have conducted their own internal or external evaluations, submitting a practice or service redesign example to undergo further external validation by C4EO ensures successful organisations can confidently promote the fact that their local practice has been validated through a nationally recognised, objective and rigorous scrutiny process.

The five fundamental steps that C4EO has found to be necessary to ensure a robust validation process are detailed below.

### **Five steps in the C4EO validation process**

#### **STEP 1 Submissions received**

New submissions – received on the standard C4EO local practice submissions template/form - are processed and recorded and receive a unique identification number

#### **STEP 2 Pre-filter stage**

A pre-filter checklist is used to check forms for missing essential information which the panel will need to reach a judgement.

#### **STEP 3 Request further information if necessary**

Submitters are contacted using a standard feedback template detailing the further information required. At this point also, those submitters whose practice examples have been judged, at pre-filter stage, as not providing enough evidence for possible validation at panel, are informed that 'no further action' can be taken on their practice example until further information of impact can be provided.

#### **STEP 4 Validation panel**

Successfully 'pre-filtered' submissions progress to panel at which a grade of validation is agreed by professional consensus. Panel members receive the submissions for the panel approximately one week in advance to allow sufficient time for preparation. Panel members provide constructive feedback and a steer for the future, particularly for those submissions which are judged as not meeting the criteria for validation. The validation form is completed by the C4EO Assessor.

#### **STEP 5 Post-Panel**

Records of judgement are emailed to submitters as soon as possible by the C4EO Assessor. The publication process begins for successful examples.

### **The role of the Sector Specialists**

C4EO is committed to supporting sector-led improvement and the experts used in C4EO validation panels are specially trained practitioners from all areas of children's services. They are known as C4EO Sector Specialists. C4EO trains and accredits these professionals using the most current research evidence and a range of tools, including Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA).

The role of the Sector Specialists during the validation panel is to provide a judgement based on their own knowledge and experience. Normally three Sector Specialists form the body of the panel and at least three signatures are required to endorse a validation 'grade' or level on the C4EO local practice validation form. On occasion, Sector Specialists will challenge each other's judgement until professional consensus on a validation level is reached.

Outside of their role on local practice validation panels, C4EO Sector Specialists can be commissioned to provide 'peer to peer' support, helping local areas build their own capacity. This support can be tailored to meet your local or regional requirements.

#### **The role of the C4EO Assessor**

The C4EO Assessor ensures the validation process is run correctly and that processes are applied rigorously at validation panel. She is also responsible for quality assurance throughout the whole validation process. The C4EO Assessor attends the validation panels in an 'active' and unbiased monitoring capacity, ensuring that an accurate reflection of the panel judgements is recorded on the validation forms and confirmed to submitters.

#### **4. Support available from C4EO**

There are various routes open to those wishing to take their local practice examples through a C4EO model validation panel. These routes include:

- Support from C4EO to establish local/regional procedures which could include one to one support; mentoring; training; quality assurance and evaluation.
- Submitting your examples to C4EO for us to process and validate on your behalf. We will publish all validated examples on the C4EO website and you will also have the right to use the C4EO logo on any further dissemination you wish to do yourself. The costs of the validation process and running the panel will be shared with other authorities requiring the same service.
- As an individual local authority, organisation, region or group of local authorities, purchasing rights to use the C4EO validated local practice 'regional kitemark'. This will be provided as part of a bespoke package of C4EO training and support on how to run your own validation panels. You may or may not want to include the services of C4EO Sector Specialists and the C4EO Assessor in this model of bespoke support.
- Submitting your locally and regionally validated examples for further national scrutiny by C4EO and purchasing the rights to use the C4EO validated local practice 'national kitemark'.

C4EO can also support you in evidencing and validating your practice by:

#### **Providing peer to peer tailored support**

C4EO Sector Specialists can be commissioned to provide 'peer to peer' support, helping local areas build their own capacity throughout any stage of the validation process. This support can be tailored to meet your exact local or regional requirements.

### **Working with you to calculate the cost-effectiveness/value for money of your practice examples**

All services and agencies need to use public funds wisely and efficiently to secure maximum improvements for children, young people and their families. C4EO has developed a model to apply to local practice examples, to help leaders and managers assess 'value for money' at a time of reducing resources. To help you in this, C4EO offers a team of finance specialists equipped with the latest tools to help develop effective strategies for success. A free 'costs and outcomes' tool is also available for your local use on the C4EO website see [cost effectiveness](#).

### **Publishing and dissemination**

Through our publishing capacity, established networks, media contacts, experience of developing videos and running or contributing to conferences, events and the use of webinars for dissemination, we can help you to raise the profile of your local practice examples as well as sharing these with others.

### **External events**

C4EO can support you in organising events to highlight your local practice. Services can include:

- advice on thematic content
- key note speakers
- conference chairs
- facilitators
- trainers
- provision of publications and support tools.

Please don't hesitate to contact us on 020 7843 6358 or [contactus@C4EO.org.uk](mailto:contactus@C4EO.org.uk) to discuss your requirements.

## **5. C4EO packages and examples of costs**

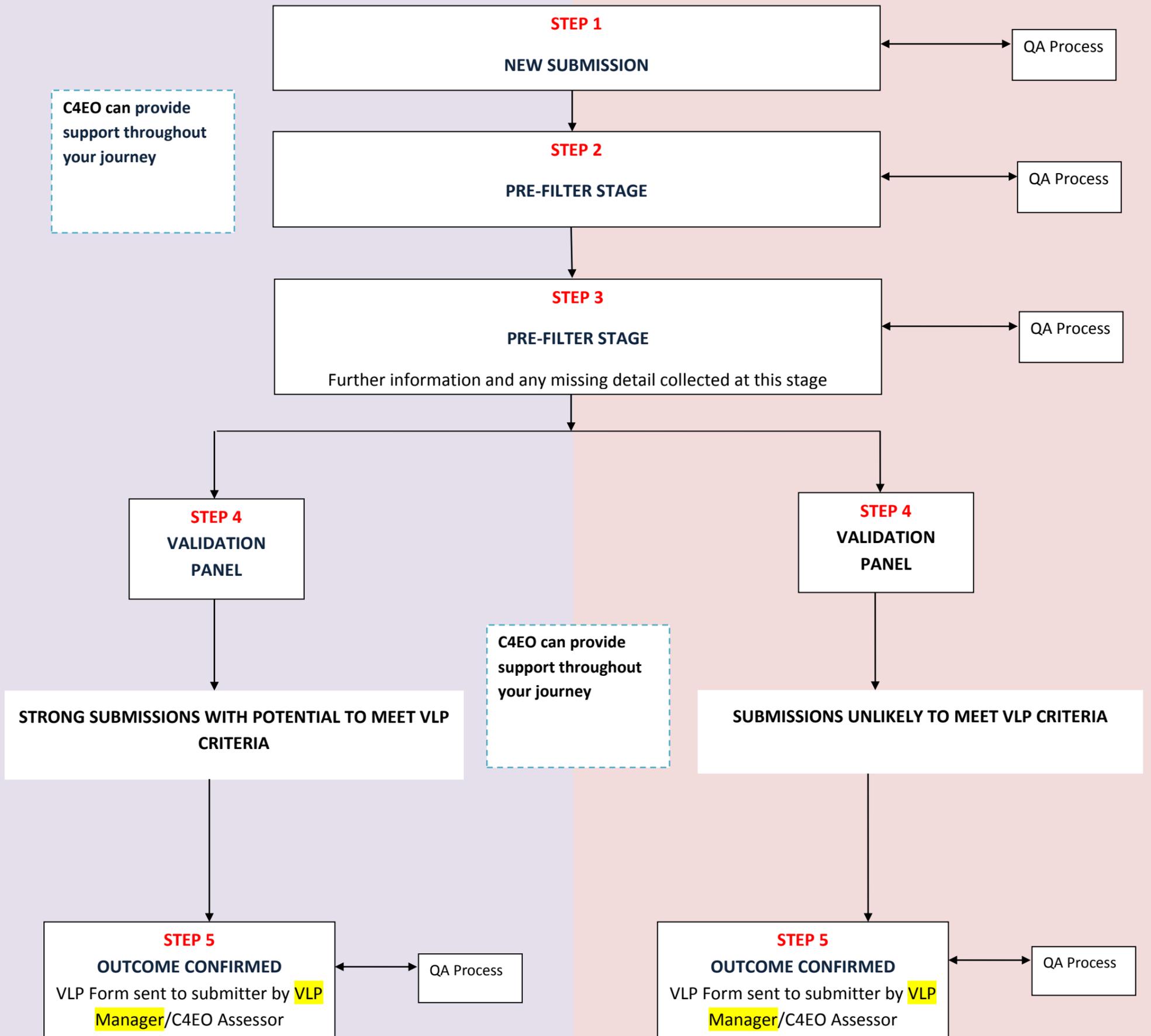
Please [contactus@c4eo.org.uk](mailto:contactus@c4eo.org.uk) for details

### **References and bibliography**

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children's and Young People's Services (2012). *Guide to Validating Your Local Practice: From Concept to Validation*. London: C4EO.



**ANNEX**  
**C4EO Validated Local Practice Flowchart Showing the Five Steps**



C4EO can provide support throughout your journey

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**Note:**  
 An example from a previous panel where further information has been requested and needs endorsement is sent by email to the appropriate

**Key:**  
 QA = Quality Assurance  
 VLP = Validated Local Practice  
 PP = Promising Practice  
 EP = Emerging Practice

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