

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA)**

**National Outcome Measures (NOMs)
Client-Level Measures**

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
for Center for Mental Health Services
(CMHS) Discretionary Programs Using CSV
Batch Upload**

March 2024

Presentation and Materials

1) What resources are available to assist in the CSV batch uploading process?

- [CSV Batch Upload Training](#)
- [CSV Batch Upload Data Preparation Training](#)
- CSV Batch Upload Guide (in development)
- [CMHS NOMs Batch Upload Template](#)
- [CMHS NOMs Codebook](#)
- [CMHS NOMs QxQ](#)
- [NOMs Paper Tool](#)
- [CMHS Quick Reference Guide](#)
- [SPARS Announcements](#)
- [SPARS Help Desk](#)

2) What documentation exists for the data validation process?

Documentation concerning the SPARS batch upload data validation process can be found in the CSV Batch Upload Guide, the [Batch Upload Data Preparation Training](#), and the [CSV Batch Upload Training](#). Additionally, information concerning the required interview sections, field names, and permissible data values can be found in the corresponding [Codebook](#), [NOMs Paper Tool](#), [Batch Upload Template](#), and [NOMs QxQ](#).

3) For those transitioning from paper-based data to the Batch Upload feature, what resources are recommended as a starting point?

Grantees should review resources like the [CMHS NOMS Client-Level Measures Codebook](#) and [CMHS NOMs CSV Upload Template file](#) to prepare their upload files. Both of these and more are accessible in the [SPARS Resources](#) module.

4) Is it possible to access template files to better understand the CSV format?

Yes, the [CMHS NOMs CSV Upload Template file](#) is accessible in the [SPARS Resources](#) module.

5) Are there CSV templates for baseline, reassessment, and discharge or are they all in one?

The same [Batch Upload Template](#) and [Codebook](#) is used for all types of assessments and the CSV Batch Upload can accommodate interview records of all 3 types in one upload format. However, for CMHS NOMs data, certain interview sections may not be applicable to specific assessments. Please review the corresponding [Codebook](#) to determine which interview sections are applicable to a given assessment. Grantees should also be aware that interview records for the same client must be uploaded in separate files for each timepoint (first Baseline, then typically Reassessment next, and Discharge last).

6) How frequently is the SPARS CMHS Codebook updated?

The [Codebook](#) is updated only when clarifications are needed, or if/when changes have been made to the NOMs Tool.

7) Is there a guide detailing the different types of errors that might occur during upload?

Yes, a CSV Batch Upload Guide document provides this information. It will be available on the [SPARS Resources](#) module.

8) Is there a separate codebook available for client-level data concerning child data?

The current [Codebook](#) includes all information regarding the new NOMs Tool, which is the merged interview form for adults and children. Any rules or requirements specific to data from child clients are included.

9) When we are creating our CSV files to upload to SPARS, what can we use to enter our NOMs data into the CSV file correctly?

The [Codebook](#) has specific information indicating metadata, possible valid values, and other data rules and restrictions needed to craft a valid CSV Batch Upload data file.

10) When must data be uploaded?

CSV Batch Uploads can be uploaded at any time of day. The record-level validation check can take up to 15 minutes to complete. All records containing no errors are processed and added to SPARS. All records containing one or more errors are included in the Upload History table's corresponding Error Report; the user can use this report to correct the error(s) and resubmit. It is important for grantees to remember the goal is to enter or upload NOMs Client-Level Measures data into SPARS within 30 days of the interview date, or due date of the interview, for administrative entries.

File Format and Structure

11) Can multiple grants be uploaded in the same CSV file?

No, a single CSV file prepared for batch upload must be associated with a specific grant. Grantees cannot combine records for multiple grants in a single CSV file for batch upload.

12) Should “not applicable” responses be left blank?

CMHS NOMs Tool sections that are not applicable may be left blank. For example, an entire section of the tool may not be applicable because that section is either not used at the particular interview or the interview itself was not conducted; in these instances, the fields for that section may be left blank. Fields that are not answered due to a skip pattern should be left blank. Please see the [Codebook](#) and [QxQ](#) for more detailed information on which questions and/or sections can be left blank.

13) Will SPARS automatically populate ‘-1,’ ‘-7,’ ‘Refused,’ or ‘Not Applicable’ values for items skipped under a skip pattern or for sections that are left blank?

No, SPARS will not automatically populate any values on a user's behalf.

14) Is there a default value for the QA field?

The default value is ‘0’ which indicates that the validated record will be saved in SPARS if the Grantee has Full Processing Mode Batch Upload access.

15) How should choose-all-that-apply items be formatted?

The [Batch Upload Template](#) includes a field for each valid response (e.g., ‘RaceAsian,’ ‘RaceBlack,’ ‘RaceWhite,’ etc.). However, responses for ‘Refused,’ ‘Missing Data,’ or ‘Not Applicable’ apply at the question level rather than the field level. Respondents refuse the entire question rather than specific fields. Therefore, if any field in a choose-all-that-apply question is ‘Refused,’ ‘Missing,’ or ‘Not Applicable,’ all must be. Users must be sure to specify all questions as the corresponding value (e.g, -7 for ‘Refused,’ -9 for ‘Missing,’ and -1 for ‘Not Applicable’), as SPARS will not automatically populate those values.

16) How should a file containing multiple reassessments (e.g., follow-up and discharge) be formatted?

All fields included in the [Batch Upload Template](#) must be present for all uploads. However, for CMHS NOMs data, certain interview sections may not be applicable at certain interview timepoints. If an entire section of an interview is irrelevant for a given record because it is not used at the interview timepoint or because the interview was not conducted, the fields for that section may be left blank for the applicable record. Otherwise, generally, all fields for all records should have a value.

17) If there is a 6-month reassessment and discharge done on the same day, can it be entered into the same batch file?

Multiple reassessments for a single record cannot be uploaded within the same batch file. Such reassessments should be uploaded in assessment-specific batches (e.g., one batch containing the reassessment interview and a second batch containing the discharge interview).

18) Can a project elect to change response options on the tool?

No. A project cannot elect to change response options or items on the tool.

19) Which fields must be included in a batch upload file?

Every field in the [Batch Upload Template](#) must be included in the CSV upload file. The field names must match the case observed in the template. For example, if the template has a 'GrantNo' field, but the uploaded file notes this field as "Grantno," the column will not match the required field name and will result in an error. The order of fields does not matter; SPARS matches fields by name, not by the cell in the CSV file. Additional fields are allowed; SPARS ignores additional fields.

20) Does column order matter?

Column order in the CSV file does NOT matter. SPARS verifies fields by name rather than by their position, so the order of the columns does not matter.

21) How should text responses be formatted?

Text responses should be text or character strings.

22) What format should data files be in?

Data files must be in CSV (comma-separated values) format.

23) What format should date values be in? (Including dates that were refused)

Grantees should refer to the [Codebook](#) for formatting as date formats may vary. If a date is refused or missing, leave it blank.

24) Does the calculated field for birthdate just use the month and year of birth variables?

Yes. Birthdate is a calculated field based on birth month and birth year.

25) What are the allowable values for each field?

The allowable values for each field may vary by question. Please follow the specifications for that field as detailed in the corresponding tool's [Codebook](#). There are some general data coding rules that are helpful to know:

- For categorical fields, SPARS uses integer numeric codes and generally follows the order of the response options on the paper tool, such that the first response option listed on the paper tool for a categorical question is coded '1,' the second is coded '2,' and so forth. There are some exceptions to this rule; for example, response options that were aligned between the expiring and new versions of the tools, were kept as consistent as possible rather than re-numbered.
- For yes/no items, generally, '0' = No, and '1' = Yes.
- Invalid data values generally follow:
 - '-1' = Not applicable
 - '-7' = Refused
 - '-8' = Don't Know
 - '-9' = Missing Data

- Please note that not all of these codes are applicable in the tool, and specific questions may have different sets of allowable options. The [Codebook](#) specifies which invalid data codes are allowed for each field.

26) Should values have quotation marks around them?

It is not necessary to include quotation marks around data values.

27) How to handle old/expired tool data?

All old or expired tool data should be uploaded via the data entry screens. Old or expired tool data may not be uploaded via CSV batch upload.

28) Does each upload include ALL historical data, or does it need to be just changed/new data?

Only data from new (i.e., not previously uploaded) interviews should be included in each batch. Uploaders should not include historical data.

29) Should we exclude system-generated question numbers when preparing a CSV Batch Upload file?

Grantees should use the column names as provided in the [Codebook](#) and [Template](#) files, available in the SPARS Resources module.

System Modes and Features

30) Is the batch upload option available for all CMHS grants?

Currently, the Batch Upload is available for all grantees in Quality Assurance (QA) Only mode. Any CMHS grant can request to activate the Full Processing mode from the SPARS Help Desk when they are ready.

31) What is the Quality Assurance (QA) Only mode, and is it temporary?

The Quality Assurance mode is made available to grantees to test their record uploads before saving them in the system. Once upload records are verified as error-free, grantees can then request that their batch upload status be switched to Full Processing mode to proceed with saving the data in the system.

32) Is QA Only mode the default setting for batch uploading?

QA Only mode is the default setting for batch uploading. Grantees must contact the SPARS Help Desk to request the switch from QA Only mode to Full Processing mode.

33) If we complete batch uploads in QA Only mode, will we still need to upload data a second time to load the data into SPARS?

Yes, QA Only mode allows grantees to test uploading batch files, but never actually loads data to the system. When the grant has been changed to Full Processing mode, error-free records in later uploads will be saved.

34) Do we need to notify SPARS when we would like to transition out of QA Only mode?

Yes, Grantees must contact the SPARS Help Desk to request to switch from QA Only mode to Full Processing mode.

35) Even after Full Processing mode has been activated for my grant, can I still upload data in QA Only mode?

Yes. This can be achieved on a per-record basis by setting the column "QAOnly" = 1 for all records a grant wishes to upload in QA Only mode. Such records will not be loaded into SPARS, even if they receive no errors on the upload's Error Report.

36) What functionality does the QAOnly field provide?

“QA” stands for “Quality Assurance.” This field allows Grantees to check their data for any errors prior to upload. The default value for this field is ‘0.’ Grantees may set this field to ‘1’ for any rows they wish to use as test or QA records. SPARS runs all validation checks on these rows, as though they were actual reported data, but does NOT add and save them to its database. In any one upload file, none, some, or all rows of records can be set this field’s value to ‘1.’ Grantees may mix test rows and regular data rows as desired.

37) Does SPARS offer the flexibility for Grantees to use either or both batch upload and individual manual data entry?

Yes, Grantees have the choice to enter data into SPARS per their needs. However, if a Grantee manages large amounts of client records, and has the operational means to do so, we recommend using the Batch Upload feature to save time on data entry.

38) Will we be required to use the CSV Batch Upload utility rather than the data entry web portal?

No, either can be used, based on each Grantee's specific data entry needs.

39) Is there an option on SPARS for Grantees to modify or add multiple email addresses for error report notifications?

SPARS sends the notification email to the email address of the user who is performing the upload. Please note that SPARS does NOT send the error reports themselves via email for data privacy reasons. The user must access the batch upload feature in SPARS and view error reports there.

40) After using the batch upload, will Grantees be able to view individual records on the SPARS portal, similar to manual entries?

Yes, and at that point, Grantees can choose to view, edit or delete their uploaded records via the data entry portal if and as needed.

41) Does the Batch Upload functionality offer the ability to modify previously entered or uploaded records?

No, the Batch Upload facilitates only the addition of new records into SPARS and currently does not support any updating of any record that exists in SPARS already. Grantees can edit previously uploaded data manually through the Data Entry screens if needed.

42) Can we use the CSV Batch Upload feature even if we only manage a small amount of NOMs data in SPARS?

Yes, there is no minimum threshold needed for using this feature.

43) What's the maximum number of records that can be uploaded simultaneously?

While there is no strict maximum of records that can be uploaded to SPARS using a single batch upload file, we recommend that no more than 1,000 records are included in each file to aid system processing.

44) Does the Batch Upload accommodate NOMs old records predating December 2022?

No. The CSV Batch Upload feature loads data conforming only to the new version of the NOMs tool.

45) What is the Batch ID number of a given batch upload?

Each file uploaded to SPARS using the CSV Batch Upload feature is automatically assigned a unique Batch ID reference number. If the Grantee needs to contact the SPARS Help Desk for assistance with this feature, we recommend including any batch ID(s) that might be relevant for the request.

46) If a Baseline administrative entry is submitted via CSV Batch Upload, how can we add to SPARS a full-interview Reassessment record for that client?

In this scenario, either the CSV Batch Upload feature or manual data entry screens can add the new Reassessment record.

47) Can the CSV Batch Upload process be automated?

The CSV Batch Upload process currently requires manual upload by a person. An API or Secure FTP site may be a future enhancement.

48) How often should batch uploading be conducted?

This varies depending on your volume of data, resources, and workflow. It is important for grantees to remember the goal is to enter or upload NOMs Client-Level Measures data into SPARS within 30 days of the interview date, or due date of the interview, for administrative entries.

49) Should paper copies be maintained after data are entered into SPARS?

SAMHSA does not require paper forms are maintained following data entry in SPARS. Grantees should follow their own data retention policies and procedures.

50) Does a user need to log in to SPARS to upload data?

Yes, a user must login to SPARS to upload files into SPARS.

51) Does CVS Batch Upload restrict access to certain IP addresses?

No, files can be uploaded from any device upon which SPARS users can log in.

52) What data can be uploaded via the CSV Batch Upload?

The CSV Batch Upload feature is available to all SAMHSA grantees working with CMHS NOMs Client-Level Tool data.

53) What are the benefits of using the CSV Batch Upload feature?

CSV Batch Upload:

- Allows simultaneous upload of multiple records in SPARS from a CSV file that can be created and edited using spreadsheet software (e.g., Excel), as an export from another system(s), or via other software tools;
- Does not require special access or permissions;
- Does not require special expertise to create or upload files in SPARS; and triggers error messages and reports that facilitate efficient resolution of data issues in the CSV file.

54) Is CVS Batch Upload an additional/new requirement for the GPRA?

No, CSV Batch Upload is an optional feature that may be used to assist data entry at a Grantee's discretion.

55) What is the average response time for files to process?

Record-level validation checks of a CSV file can take up to 15 minutes to complete in SPARS. An email is sent to the address associated with the uploader's SPARS account upon completion. The email contains information on the number of records uploaded and the number of errors detected. After receiving this email, users may return to SPARS and navigate to the Batch Upload page for further details on the outcome of their batch upload.

Error Handling and Feedback

56) What do Error Reports look like?

After CSV file- and record-level validation checks are complete, a new row appears in the Upload History table with information about the latest upload. The "Error Records" column in the Upload History table displays a count of the number of records found to have errors, and the "Errors" column contains download links for two Error Reports.

The *Error record file* is designed to allow users to easily make corrections to the CSV upload file and resubmit it. The *Error record file* is a CSV file that includes a row for each original record that contained one or more errors at upload. It also includes all the originally submitted field names as well as several additional columns to help grantees identify the error(s) that occurred for each record. Grantees may open this CSV file in Excel, correct the errors, and then resubmit it in SPARS.

The second link is for the *Error Report* file. This file contains a row for each error found in the data file; a single data record may occupy more than one row if it contained more than one error. This file contains the following columns:

- A BatchID column indicating the batch ID;
- An UpdateDate column indicating the date of the upload attempt;
- A GrantNo column indicating the grant number chosen from the drop-down menu;
- A column containing ID or Event information to help identify the record with the error;
- An ErrorMessage column indicating the error encountered;
- A Fields column indicating the fields, or columns, that contained the error, and the values they were set to at upload.

A full list of file-level and record-level errors can be found in the CSV Batch Upload Guide.

57) What kinds of file-level and record-level errors does SPARS detect?

Error Reports detect both file- and record-level errors, including:

- Incorrect File Type (not a CSV file);
- Column name not found (column name is missing, misspelled, or case insensitive);
- Invalid field values (invalid categorical values, invalid continuous values, cannot be null or blank);
- Other Without Other SpecifyOther;
- Specify Without Other;
- Duplicate records.

A full list of file-level and record-level errors can be found in the CSV Batch Upload Guide.

58) How are error reports returned to data entry personnel?

Error Reports are found in the Upload History table after the uploaded file has completed file- and record-level validation checks. An email is also sent to the address associated with the account that

uploaded the data to inform the user that the Error Report is ready to view.

59) If an error is detected, what happens to the upload?

When a CSV file fails the file-level validation step at upload, a file-level error message is displayed in a pop-up window that indicates the file did not meet validation requirements. The pop-up window lists the missing, misspelled, and/or case insensitive field names. A file-level error prevents any records in the CSV file from upload to SPARS; the error(s) must be corrected, and the file must be resubmitted for its records to be added and saved in SPARS.

When a CSV file passes the file-level validation step at upload, SPARS next conducts a record-level validation check on each row in the file. These are detailed validation checks that ensure each variable is of the right data type, contains an allowed value, and is coherent given other data values provided. All records within a given file that pass the record-level validation check are added and saved to the SPARS database. Any records within a given file that fail the record-level validation check are included in error reports listed in the Upload History table. When the processing is complete, SPARS will fill in the rest of the information in the Upload History table, and the system will send the uploader an email saying that their upload has been processed. This process takes up to 15 minutes to complete. The uploader will get an email approximately 15 minutes after the upload. This email will be sent to the email associated with the uploader's SPARS account.

60) Will SPARS reject the entire batch upload if there are errors in only some records?

No, SPARS rejects only records in the CSV file containing errors. SPARS processes and uploads any records that do not contain errors even if other records in the same CSV file contain errors.

61) What happens if you upload a record already in SPARS?

Duplicate records are flagged as errors and are not uploaded to SPARS.

62) Does SPARS first check if the entered Reassessment interview has an existing Baseline interview?

Yes, SPARS checks that reassessment interview data can be matched to an existing baseline interview at upload. The Error Report indicates when SPARS cannot find a corresponding baseline interview.

63) Does the CSV Batch Upload feature provide feedback on erroneous entries?

Yes, the Web Interface displays the number of client records that have erroneous entries. When an upload file has been processed, the Error Report lists detailed information on each record that pertains to the data, e.g., error message, relevant field name, and the affected Client ID(s).

64) Will the file encounter an error for duplicate SPARS Client IDs?

For any existing Client ID in the system, the system flags in the Error Report all records considered duplicates, e.g., based on Client ID and Assessment type.

65) If data corrections are needed after a CSV file has been uploaded, should Grantees conduct those edits via another batch upload, or can corrections be made directly in the SPARS online portal?

Grantees may only edit records that have been loaded in the manual data entry screens. Errors in the CSV Batch Upload's Error Report need to be corrected in a subsequent batch upload.

66) For audit purposes, can Grantees download a copy of the records that contain errors of all their batch uploads?

Yes, the CSV Batch Upload feature includes a link to download information for client records that have erroneous entries.

67) Manual data entry in SPARS restricts certain NOMs entries based on interview timelines and previous inputs for a client. Will batch uploads flag older interviews or specific interview types that don't align with these constraints?

Yes, there are validations included in the Error Report that identify when older interviews are entered.

68) I received an Error Report for an invalid value concerning the "Assessment" column for a value of "600." How can this error be rectified?

SPARS requires this field to be a character value of 4 digits, so in this scenario a value of "0600" should be included in the CSV file.

69) Is it possible to upload a test Reassessment and Discharge interview in QA Only mode without errors, as they may not correspond to any Baseline Client ID in the system?

Yes, Grantees can upload such records, but they will receive errors for missing Baseline records (among any other applicable errors) on the Error Report.

70) How can we identify and handle an individual record that failed during the CSV Batch Upload?

The Error Report includes detailed information about each error on each record in their file. Grantees can use this information, in conjunction with the [Codebook](#) as needed, to correct their errors and upload an amended file.

Data Fields and Entries

71) Regarding the 'NoMentalHealthDiagReason' field, when is this required? If a diagnosis isn't under the Mental Health category, do we always need to provide a reason?

The field "NoMentalHealthDiagReason" is related to the question on the tool "If no mental health diagnosis, select reason" with the answer options: no clinician assessment, high risk factors, only met criteria for a z code, and other specify. If this question does not apply for the record then this field should be coded as "-1".

72) For the Batch Upload Template, which data values like 0, 1, or -1 should be entered?

It depends from field to field. Grantees should refer to the most recent [Codebook](#) available on the [SPARS Resources](#) module for more information.

73) What is the difference between "-1" (not applicable) and "-9" (missing)?

The value "-1" should be used when a field is not applicable for a given client and interview record. The value "-9" represents a field IS applicable for a response, but no response was collected from the client, and the client did not refuse to answer.

74) Is there a specific field in the file layout that distinguishes a record as a test record or a QA only record?

Yes, the "QAOnly" column captures this designation.

75) Regarding the Assessment field in the batch upload: The form lists "Baseline, Reassessment, & Clinical Discharge" as options, yet the coding provides distinct choices for 3- and 6-month reassessments. How can Grantees determine the appropriate selection when it's not explicitly mentioned on the form?

Only one reassessment time point is required for each program. So, if your program requires a 3-month reassessment you will use 0301, and if your program requires a 6-month reassessment you will use 0601. Grantee staff can contact their Grantee Director for more information.

76) Some questions in the NOMs only provide 'Missing Data' or 'Refused' as options. Will there be an option added for scenarios where the question isn't applicable to the interviewee?

The [Codebook](#) for the CMHS NOMs Tool includes guidance for this.

77) In the Diagnosis section, is it permissible to have multiple entries under the Mental Health category while the Substance category only allows a single diagnosis per category?

There are three separate columns for entering diagnosis codes of any type: DiagnosisOne, DiagnosisTwo, and DiagnosisThree. The [Codebook](#) provides detailed information on what code values should be used.

78) For the field named "DOB," should values like "June 2023" be formatted as "6/2023" or "06/2023" in the upload file?

Grantees need to format date values in columns like DOB to use MM/YYYY, so "06/2023" would be correct.

79) For the fields named "LastServiceDate" and "DischargeDate," what should be entered for a Baseline assessment?

In this scenario, CSV Batch Upload files should include "-1" in these columns. See the CMHS [Codebook](#) for more information.

80) Is the CSV Batch Upload feature compatible with administrative NOMs entries?

Yes, the module supports loading administrative entries as well as full interviews. See the [Codebook](#) for more information.

Who to Contact

81) We have additional questions that need to be addressed. How do we get them answered?

For all questions related to SPARS, please contact the SPARS Help Desk, Monday through Friday, 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM ET, by phone (1-800-685-7623, toll-free) and email (SPARSHelpDesk@mathematica-mpr.com). Grantees can contact their GPO for any other project-related questions.

82) If I have queries or feedback regarding the NOMs Tool, how can I reach out for assistance?

For assistance on the collection, submission or analysis of NOMs Tool data, grantees can submit a [SPARS Technical Support](#) request.