

NIH POLICY MANUAL

1965 - Program Evaluation Set-Aside

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1. Explanation of Material Transmitted: This revised chapter contains an updated description of the policies and procedures associated with the National Institutes of Health Evaluation Set-Aside Program.

2. Filing Instructions:

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A. Purpose:

This chapter describes the Evaluation Set-Aside Program that may be used to fund program evaluations at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The following sections discuss the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) authority for this program and delegation of authority to the NIH. They also describe NIH delegated authority for policies and procedures governing requests for funds, record keeping, and reporting requirements.

B. Legal Authority:

Section 241(a) of the Public Health Service Act [\[1\]](#) authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to allocate a percentage of annual

appropriations for PHS programs to evaluate their effectiveness. Historically this amount was set at 1 percent of annual appropriations until Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 when the HHS began to increase the percent set-aside for this purpose. In FY 2005, Congress set the amount of the “tap” on PHS appropriations at 2.4 percent. This amounted to a total of \$827.4 million available for PHS evaluation funding in FY 2005, of which the NIH contributed \$608.4 million. Of this amount, the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program received \$13.5 million. [2] In short, the Act provides a funding mechanism by which PHS agencies can carry out their responsibilities to evaluate and report on program performance.

C. Responsibility:

The Secretary, HHS, identifies the amount of Evaluation Set-Aside funds available to each PHS agency annually. At the NIH, the Office of Budget (OB) within the Office of the Director (OD), NIH, allocates the IC assessment for the Evaluation Set-Aside Program. After examining the NIH review procedures in 1991, the Assistant Secretary for Health delegated the authority to the NIH for approval of evaluation proposals requesting Evaluation Set-Aside funds.

Three separate but interdependent NIH entities are responsible for different aspects of the Evaluation Set-Aside Program: the Evaluation Branch (EB), the Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee (EPOC), and the Technical Merit Review Committee (TMRC). Working together, they comprise a system of checks and balances that covers the entire range of tasks and responsibilities necessary to meet NIH program evaluation needs.

1. The Evaluation Branch, Division of Evaluation and Systematic Assessments, Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives, OD (formerly the Office of Evaluation, Office of Science Policy, OD), manages the day-to-day activities of the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program. The EB, which consists of Federal employees and contractors, has several responsibilities:

- Soliciting, receiving, and reviewing evaluation proposals from Institutes and Centers (ICs) as well as offices within the OD requesting Evaluation Set-Aside funds.
- Staffing the Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee and the Technical Merit Review Committee.
- Disseminating timely information on evaluation projects funded with NIH Evaluation Set-Aside funds. This includes posting final reports on the [EB website](#) and reporting annually on the status of the Evaluation Set-Aside Program and individual evaluation projects to the NIH, the HHS, the Office of Management and

Budget, and to Congress.

- Maintaining the [EB website](#) as an online resource for information and guidance about the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program. Maintaining official files for the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program.
- Proposing policies and/or procedures to make the Evaluation Set-Aside Program more efficient, more effective, and more useful NIH-wide. Disseminating these across the NIH community via revisions to this chapter, the [EB website](#), publications, and in meetings with NIH staff, e.g. representatives of IC Planning and Evaluation (P&E) offices.

2. **The Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee** consists of NIH senior-level managers, such as IC Deputy Directors or NIH Associate Directors. The EPOC Chairperson, from the OD, has funding authority to approve proposals for Evaluation Set-Aside funding. The EPOC Chairperson also appoints members to the committee in staggered three-year terms. The EPOC has three major responsibilities:

- Reviewing and setting policy governing the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program, including appropriate uses of funds.
- Conducting concept reviews of evaluation proposals requesting Evaluation Set-Aside funds to ensure that they conform to NIH evaluation policy.
- Recommending new NIH-wide evaluation studies that will use Evaluation Set-Aside funds.

3. **The Technical Merit Review Committee** consists of NIH employees who have evaluation expertise and are knowledgeable about NIH programs. They are often active members of the NIH P&E community. The TMRC Chairperson, from the OD, has the delegated authority to approve certain proposals and appoints members to the TMRC in staggered three-year terms. The committee has three primary responsibilities:

- Reviewing the technical merit of evaluation proposals to ensure that evaluations meet high technical standards.
- Recommending funding decisions to the EPOC.
- Discussing policy issues and recommending policy changes to

the EPOC.

D. Background:

In FY 2000, the EB expanded the scope of its activities to encourage Institutes and Centers (ICs) and OD offices to evaluate more NIH programs. The EB began working with IC P&E offices to increase understanding of evaluation methodologies, develop better evaluation proposals, and hold regularly scheduled seminars to discuss evaluation issues. The EB also wrote and published the [NIH Program Evaluation Guide](#). This is a comprehensive “how-to” publication about designing and implementing program evaluations and using the Evaluation Set-Aside funds.

The EB currently receives nearly 100 requests each year to fund needs assessments, feasibility studies, process evaluations, outcome evaluations, development of databases for evaluation, Roadmap evaluations, special projects, and other evaluation-related activities.

E. Review Procedures:

The level and length of review depends on the complexity of the proposal and the amount of funding requested. Professional evaluators in the EB examine each evaluation proposal to determine if a proposal is ready for further review and the level of review needed. The first tier of review includes a rigorous technical review process by the EB and members of the TMRC and can last from two-three months. The second tier includes review by members of the EPOC and can take another two-three months.

The latest information about policies and procedures for this program is available on the [website maintained by the EB](#), or in the [NIH Program Evaluation Guide](#).

F. Financial Procedures:

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the OD Budget Office assigns the EB Common Account Numbers (CAN), as requested, for evaluation work. After the EB and necessary committee members complete the review process and the delegated funding authority makes a funding decision, the EB notifies the proposer of the decision. At the end of the fiscal year, the EB and the OD Budget Office ensure that the funds obligated have not exceeded funds available.

G. Records Retention and Disposal:

All records (e-mail and non-e-mail) pertaining to this chapter must be retained and disposed of under the authority of [NIH Manual 1743](#), "Keeping and

Destroying Records, Appendix 1, "NIH Records Control Schedule," Item 1900-B-5, "Evaluation Fund Files."

NIH e-mail messages. NIH e-mail messages (messages, including attachments, that are created on NIH computer systems or transmitted over NIH networks) that are evidence of the activities of the agency or have informational value are considered Federal records. These records must be maintained in accordance with current NIH Records Management guidelines. Contact your IC Records Officer for additional information.

All e-mail messages are considered Government property, and, if requested for a legitimate Government purpose, must be provided to the requester. Employees' supervisors, NIH staff conducting official reviews or investigations, and the Office of Inspector General may request access to or copies of the e-mail messages. E-mail messages must also be provided to Congressional oversight committees if requested and are subject to Freedom of Information Act requests. Since most e-mail systems have back-up files that are retained for significant periods of time, e-mail messages and attachments are likely to be retrievable from a back-up file after they have been deleted from an individual's computer. The back-up files are subject to the same requests as the original messages.

H. Management Controls:

The purpose of this manual issuance is to describe the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program.

- 1. Office Responsible for Reviewing Management Controls Relative to this Chapter:** The Evaluation Branch, Division of Evaluation and Systematic Assessments, Office of Portfolio Analysis and Strategic Initiatives, OD, has operational responsibility of the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program.
- 2. Frequency of Review** (in years): The EB will review and update the manual chapter every 1-3 years.
- 3. Method of Review:** The EB will review the manual chapter for consistency with current policies and procedures for the NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Program. The office will make appropriate updates to reflect changes in the program.
- 4. Review Reports** are sent to: The Deputy Director for Management (DDM) and the Director, Office of Management Assessment.

Footnotes:

[1] [P.L. 108-447, Consolidated Appropriations for FY 2005, Sec. 207](#)

[2] [Use of Public Health Service Evaluation Set-Aside Authority for FY 2005, June, 2005](#) (*takes a few minutes to load!*)

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