

Guidance for Requesting NIH Evaluation Set-Aside Funds

September 2014

Table of Contents

I. AUTHORITY FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE EVALUATION SET-ASIDE.....	2
II. ELIGIBILITY	2
Program Evaluation	2
Evaluation-Related Activities	3
Trans-NIH Priority.....	3
Ineligible Projects	3
III. TYPES OF AWARDS.....	4
Program Evaluation	4
Evaluation-Related Activities	4
IV. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND REVIEW PROCESSES.....	5
Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee and Technical Merit Review Committee..	5
Level I Submission Requirement – Letter of Intent.....	6
Level I Review – Assessment of Eligibility and Potential Impact Based on Letter of Intent	6
Level II Submission Requirement – Application	7
Level II Review – Triage and Scoring of Application	7
Level III Review – Funding Decision	9
V. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR SCORING	12
Review Criteria	12
o Relevance	12
o Utility	12
o Technical Merit.....	12
o Project Management	13
Overall Assessment Score	15
VI. REVIEW TIMELINE	16

I. AUTHORITY FOR THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE EVALUATION SET-ASIDE

Section 241(a) of the Public Health Service (PHS) Act authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to allocate a percentage of annual appropriations for evaluating the effectiveness of PHS programs. The “tap” was set at one percent in FY 1970. However, Congress has increased the “tap” in recent years: It was raised to 1.25 percent in FY 2002, and it has remained at 2.5 percent since FY 2010.

HHS identifies the amount of ESA funds available to each PHS agency annually. In FY 2014, HHS “tapped” NIH for \$702 million for the PHS evaluation set-aside, and allocated \$13.9 million of those dollars to NIH for its internal evaluation activities (i.e., not specified in appropriations). The NIH Office of Budget (OB), within the Office of the Director (OD), allocates the IC assessment for these NIH ESA funds. The funds are administered by the Office of Program Evaluation and Performance (OPEP), located in the Division of Program Coordination, Planning and Strategic Initiatives (DPCPSI) within OD.

II. ELIGIBILITY

The NIH guidelines to determine whether a project is eligible for ESA funding are based on the *HHS Guidelines for the Use of the Evaluation Set-Aside* published in the 1993 GAO report entitled “Evaluation Set-Aside Has Not Realized Its Potential to Inform the Congress” ([GAO/PEMD-93-13](#)). Only applications that meet these guidelines are considered for funding.

Program Evaluation – Four types of program evaluation are eligible for NIH ESA funding:

- *Needs Assessment* – A program evaluation aimed at systematically determining the nature and extent of the issues that a proposed or existing program should address. Includes assessing the needs of stakeholders, developing appropriate program goals, and determining how a program should be designed or modified to achieve those goals.
- *Process Evaluation* – A systematic assessment of program operations to determine whether a program is being conducted as planned, whether expected output is being produced, and/or how program-critical processes can be improved. Includes assessing the extent to which process goals have been achieved.
- *Outcome Evaluation* – A systematic assessment of program accomplishments and effects to determine the extent to which a program's intermediate and/or long-term goals have been achieved. Includes examining the relationship between program activities and their effects, both intended and unintended, to identify why some program variations or strategies worked better than others.
- *Feasibility Study* – A systematic assessment to determine whether conducting an evaluation is appropriate, to design a process evaluation or outcome evaluation for a proposed or existing program, and/or to determine whether the evaluation can be conducted at a reasonable cost.

Evaluation-Related Activities¹ – ESA funding may be requested for the following eligible activities:

- *Development of Program Performance Measures* – The development of program performance measures needed for program evaluation or performance-based management planning and reporting activities, such as those required by the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA).
- *Evaluation Training* – Participation of NIH federal employees in short-term training in evaluation design and methodologies. Only NIH federal employees “whose professional concern is primarily the evaluation of programs” are eligible to receive ESA funds for evaluation training. An individual's eligibility is determined internally by his/her IC's or OD Office's Planning and Evaluation (P&E) Officers.

Trans-NIH Priority – With regard to funding requests for program evaluation and the development of program performance measures, the highest priority is given to applications for ESA funding which demonstrate that the proposed project or activity will have relevance to more than one NIH IC (unless the request is for evaluation training). Trans-NIH relevance is established if an application fulfills one or more of the following:

- The program being evaluated is funded by more than one IC or an OD Office.
- More than one IC sponsors the funding request.
- An OD Office sponsors the funding request.
- The funding request includes a letter of support or interest from more than one IC or an OD Office.
- The DPCPSI official making the funding decision determines that the proposed project or activity or its products will be relevant to more than one IC or an OD Office.

Ineligible Projects – Based on the HHS guidelines in the 1993 GAO report, the following activities are not eligible for ESA funding:

1. The evaluation of individual local projects.
2. The evaluation of individual ‘R&D’ experiments and demonstration projects.
3. The continuing operation of management information systems or ongoing monitoring systems. (The use of ESA funds to finance the design and development of management information systems is limited to a maximum of two years.)
4. The continuing collection of baseline data.
5. On-site review and monitoring of local projects. (The development and pilot testing of instruments and procedures for on-site project review and monitoring is eligible for funding, but the operation of ongoing monitoring systems is not.)
6. The assessment of prospective policies, where no programs yet exist.

¹ Types of evaluation-related activities that are no longer eligible for funding as stand-alone activities include: Evaluation Support, Website Evaluation, Initial Design and Development of Data System (for evaluation purposes), and NIH Participation in an External Evaluation. However, the last three activities may be considered for funding if they are proposed within the context of eligible program evaluation applications.

III. TYPES OF AWARDS

The table below summarizes the types of awards supported by the ESA Program.

Type of Request	Type of Award	Maximum Amount Per Award	Eligibility Requirements
Program Evaluation	Program Evaluation Award	None	• Program evaluation (needs assessment, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, feasibility study for designing a process and/or outcome evaluation). • A Letter of Intent (LOI) must be submitted by the posted deadline prior to submission of the application.
Evaluation-Related Activities	Development of Program Performance Measures Award	\$100,000	• Development of performance measures in support of program evaluation and performance-based management planning and reporting activities. • A LOI must be submitted by the posted deadline prior to submission of the application.
	Evaluation Training Award	Varies based on IC budget level (range \$5,000 - \$14,449) (Maximum total of \$195,000 available per year)	• Short-term evaluation training² for federal employees whose professional concern is primarily program evaluation (as determined by IC/OD P&E Officers). • Each IC or OD may submit only one application for multiple trainings and/or participants and receive only one award. • See Appendix A in the application template for the maximum amount that may be awarded to each IC.

² Examples include evaluation training provided by The Evaluators' Institute, Graduate School USA, and AEA/CDC Summer Evaluation Institute.

IV. SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND REVIEW PROCESSES

Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee and Technical Merit Review Committee

In general, ICs and OD Offices request ESA funds by submitting an application to OPEP, which performs a detailed review of its eligibility, completeness, and technical merit. For requests to support program evaluations and the development of program performance measures, a Letter of Intent (LOI) outlining the proposed project is required prior to submitting the application (described in further detail on the next page). The review process is anchored by the work of two trans-NIH committees, which provide oversight for the ESA Program.

The Evaluation Policy and Oversight Committee (EPOC) consists of NIH senior-level personnel, such as IC Deputy Directors, IC Associate Directors, NIH Associate Directors, or NIH OD Office Directors. The committee is chaired by the DPCPSI Director, who has the authority to approve applications for ESA funding. EPOC members review LOIs to assess proposed projects' potential impact on an IC or NIH in general, based on established criteria (page 6).

The Technical Merit Review Committee (TMRC) consists of NIH staff, often active members of the P&E community, who have evaluation expertise and are knowledgeable about NIH programs. TMRC members review and score applications based on established review criteria. (These criteria are described in the next section on pages 12-15.) TMRC members also provide written review summaries for the applications.

In addition to reviewing applications, EPOC reviews and sets policies governing the ESA Program, including appropriate uses of funds. TMRC supports EPOC by reviewing ESA policies and/or procedures and making recommendations to EPOC.

The table below outlines the levels of review by type of award.

Type of Award	Level I: Letter of Intent		Level II: Application		Level III: Funding Decision
	OPEP Assessment of Eligibility	EPOC Assessment of Potential Impact	OPEP Triage	TMRC/OPEP Scoring	EPOC Chairperson
Program Evaluation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Evaluation-Related					
- Development of Program Performance Measures	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes*	Yes
- Evaluation Training	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Yes	No	No**

* OPEP is the primary reviewer, and may request TMRC review as needed.

** Funding decisions are made by OPEP.

Level I Submission Requirement – Letter of Intent

NIH staff who are interested in requesting ESA funds, for either program evaluation or the development of program performance measures, must submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) outlining their proposed project by the due date specified by OPEP. The LOI does not apply to applications for evaluation training.

Level I Review – Assessment of Eligibility and Potential Impact Based on Letter of Intent

OPEP screens all LOIs to determine whether the proposed projects are eligible for funding under NIH and HHS guidelines. Only LOIs for eligible projects are forwarded to EPOC for review.

- If minor problems are found in an LOI (e.g., omissions, inclusion of an activity ineligible for funding), OPEP contacts the applicant and allows them to correct the problems within 3 working days. If the LOI cannot be corrected within this time period, it is not forwarded to EPOC for review. If an LOI describes a project that is ineligible for funding, OPEP forwards the LOI to the EPOC Chairperson for additional review.
- If an applicant submits an application along with the LOI, only the LOI will be reviewed. If an application is submitted instead of an LOI, OPEP notifies the applicant to submit the LOI within 3 working days. If the LOI is not submitted within this time period, it is not forwarded to EPOC for review.

EPOC reviews all eligible LOIs to assess the potential impact of the proposed projects. For the purpose of the ESA Program, potential impact is broadly defined as the likelihood that a proposed project will make useful contributions to an IC, multiple ICs, or NIH as a whole.

For each LOI, EPOC considers the criteria below in assessing potential impact. The response categories are “Yes,” “No,” and “Cannot determine.”

- o Does the proposed project focus on a program that supports a key priority of the IC and/or NIH?
- o Does the proposed project focus on a program that represents a substantial investment (financial or non-financial) for the IC and/or NIH?
- o Will the proposed project address knowledge gaps about the program?
- o Will the proposed project support critical and timely decision-making about the program?
- o Will the proposed project benefit other ICs and/or NIH in general (e.g., by contributing to the knowledge base about similar programs or by improving processes to comply with major policies or regulations)?

In consideration of the above criteria, each EPOC member rates each proposed project's potential impact as one of the following:

- o High – The proposed project as outlined is consistent with the review criteria. The applicant should be encouraged to submit an application for technical review and funding consideration.
- o Moderate – The proposed project as outlined is not considered high impact based on the review criteria. The applicant may submit an application, but the possibility of funding will depend on the relative merit of competing applications and funding availability.

- o Low – The proposed project as outlined is not consistent with the review criteria. The applicant should be discouraged from submitting an application.

For each proposed project, OPEP determines the overall rating based on the majority of ratings provided by EPOC members. In the event of a tie, the overall rating is in favor of the applicant. For example, if two members rate a proposed project as “High” and two members rate it as “Low,” the final rating is “High.” OPEP notifies each applicant of EPOC’s overall rating and includes any comments provided by EPOC members.

Level II Submission Requirement – Application

Applications to request ESA funding for program evaluation or the development of program performance measures must be submitted by the due date specified by OPEP.

If an applicant submits an application without having submitted an LOI by the established deadline or if the applicant has been notified that the proposed project described in the LOI is ineligible for funding, the application will not be considered for funding. This policy does not apply to applications for evaluation training.

If an applicant submits an application that is substantially different from the LOI in purpose and/or scope, he/she must attach to the application an appendix (limited to one page) explaining why the changes are needed and justified. This information will allow the EPOC Chairperson, when making funding decision, to assess whether it is necessary to adjust EPOC’s overall rating based on the LOI.

Level II Review – Triage and Scoring of Application

All applications are reviewed by OPEP to ensure that they meet eligibility requirements and are complete. This process is also known as “triage.”

- **Eligibility** – OPEP assesses each application for eligibility. Eligible types of program evaluation include needs assessment, process evaluation, outcome evaluation, and feasibility study to design a process or outcome evaluation. Eligible evaluation-related activities include evaluation training and development of program performance measures.

In addition, OPEP reviews each application to ensure that it excludes any activities that are ineligible for ESA funding under HHS guidelines (page 3).

- **Completeness** – OPEP conducts a review of each application to determine whether each section is complete and all supporting materials are included. An application may be rated as:
 - o Complete – Each section of the application is determined to be complete and all supporting materials have been submitted. It is ready for technical review.
 - o Incomplete – If deficiencies are found in the application or supporting materials, OPEP contacts the applicant and allows them to correct the deficiencies within 5

working days. If the application and/or supporting materials cannot be corrected within this time period, it is not forwarded for technical review.

Only eligible and complete applications are forwarded for technical review, which requires reviewers to score each application on established review criteria.

- Reviewers – For program evaluation submissions, a subset (3-4) of TMRC members is selected to review each application, score each review criterion (see the next bullet point), provide an overall assessment score, and develop review comments. OPEP also reviews the application. In addition, OPEP compiles all reviewers' scores and comments. The compiled scores and review comments are provided to the TMRC reviewers, who meet to finalize the scores and review comments for the application.

TMRC review is not required for submissions related to the development of program performance measures. OPEP is responsible for the technical review of these applications and may request TMRC review as needed.

OPEP reviews and approves/denies evaluation training applications; no additional review by TMRC or EPOC is required.

- Relevant Review Criteria – Four criteria – relevance, utility, technical merit, and project management – have been developed to assess applications for program evaluations and the development of program performance measures. These criteria are described in the next section on pages 12-15.
- Scoring – The table below displays the nine-point scale for scoring each review criterion. The same scale is also used for assigning the overall assessment score.

	Score	Descriptor	Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
High	1	Exceptional	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
	2	Outstanding	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses
	3	Excellent	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
Moderate	4	Very Good	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Good	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
	6	Satisfactory	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
Low	7	Fair	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
	8	Marginal	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
	9	Poor	Very few strengths and numerous weaknesses

- Review Summary – For each application, OPEP prepares a review summary based on the reviewers' discussion. Once the review summary has been approved by the reviewers, it is forwarded to the applicant.
 - o Submission of Applicant Response (optional) – If the review summary includes one or more flagged comments about the application, the applicant may – but is not required to – submit a response to OPEP within 10 working days. The response may not exceed 3 pages and should address all the flagged comments in a concise and coherent manner.

If the applicant submits a response that is non-compliant (e.g., exceeds page limit) or after the specified due date, the response is not reviewed, and the original review summary is considered final and will not be altered for the next level of review.

- o Review of Applicant Response (if applicable) – If compliant, the applicant's response is forwarded to the reviewers who conducted the technical review. The reviewers assess whether the response strengthens the original application. Based on their collective assessment, the reviewers may retain or adjust the application's overall assessment score. The reviewers' justification for retaining or adjusting the overall assessment score will be included with the applicant's response in the next level of review.
- Ranking – For each type of application, once the review criterion scores and the overall assessment scores have been finalized, OPEP develops the table below for ranking the applications based on EPOC's overall rating for potential impact and the TMRC's overall assessment score.

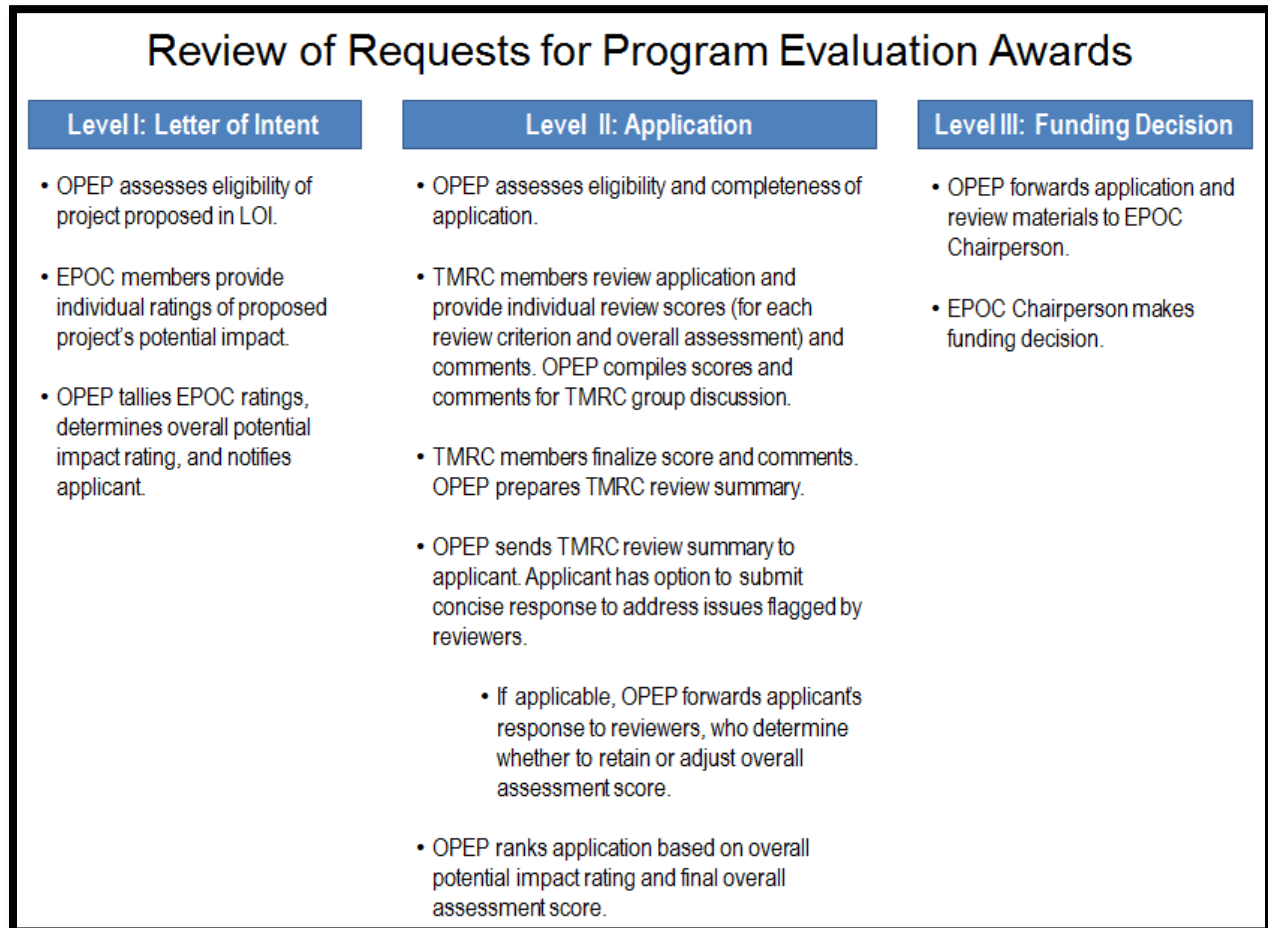
Sample Table for Ranking Program Evaluation Applications by Potential Impact and Overall Assessment Score							
Application (Project Title)	Amount Requested	Relevance Score	Utility Score	Technical Merit Score	Project Management Score	Original Overall Assessment Score	Final Overall Assessment Score
Projects of Potentially High Impact (based on EPOC's overall ratings of LOIs)							
Application C	\$\$\$\$	1	2	2	2	2	2
Application F	\$\$\$\$\$	3	2	3	3	3	3
Application D	\$\$	4	5	5	2	5	4
Projects of Potentially Moderate Impact (based on EPOC's overall ratings of LOIs)							
Application E	\$\$\$	3	3	5	4	4	3
Application A	\$\$\$	2	4	6	6	6	6
Projects of Potentially Low Impact (based on EPOC's overall ratings of LOIs)							
Application B	\$\$\$\$	5	5	6	4	5	5

Level III Review – Funding Decision

- Funding Determination – When the total amount available for ESA project funding is known and the amount to be awarded has been determined, the EPOC Chairperson reviews the applications, review scores and comments, and the preliminary ranking of applications (see sample table above). Availability of funds along with NIH-wide priorities inform the EPOC Chairperson's final funding decisions.
- Appeals – If a submission for program evaluation or program performance measure development is denied funding, the applicant may appeal the decision if he/she has reason to believe that the denial is due to the reviewers' misunderstanding or misconstruction of the technical approach described in his/her submission. The appeal must be submitted in writing within 30 calendar days of the issuance of the funding decision. The appeal should (1) explain the reason(s) for the appeal, (2) include a detailed rebuttal of the technical issues raised in the review summary, and (3) provide additional evidence in support of the rigor, appropriateness, and feasibility of the proposed technical approach. Appeals that do not specify how the reviewers have misunderstood or misconstrued the technical approach

described or are based solely on differences of opinion will not be accepted. OPEP is responsible for coordinating all appeals and providing the necessary information for TMRC to review and determine the merit of each appeal.

- The two diagrams that follow depict the review process by type of application.



Review of Requests for Development of Program Performance Measures Awards

Level I: Letter of Intent

- OPEP assesses eligibility of project proposed in LOI.
- EPOC members provide individual ratings of proposed project's potential impact.
- OPEP tallies EPOC ratings, determines overall potential impact rating, and notifies applicant.

Level II: Application

- OPEP assesses eligibility and completeness of application.
- OPEP reviews application and provides review scores (for each review criterion and overall assessment) and comments.
- OPEP prepares OPEP review summary.
- OPEP sends OPEP review summary to applicant. Applicant has option to submit concise response to address issues flagged by reviewers.
 - If applicable, OPEP forwards applicants response to reviewers, who determine whether to retain or adjust overall assessment score.
- OPEP ranks application based on overall potential impact rating and overall assessment score.

Level III: Funding Decision

- OPEP forwards application and review materials to EPOC Chairperson.
- EPOC Chairperson makes funding decision.

V. REVIEW CRITERIA FOR SCORING

Review Criteria

This section describes each of the review criteria in detail and includes assessment questions that are provided to the reviewers. The assessment questions are focused on evaluation projects, but many of them may also be applicable for reviewing program performance measure development projects.

Relevance – Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed evaluation will provide information needed for decision-making. The level of relevance is related to the degree to which the program goals are clearly articulated and directly linked to the mission and/or priorities of the IC(s) or OD Office, as well as to the activities and the size/scope of the program to be evaluated (e.g., total annual cost of the program). Assessment questions include:

- To what extent will the proposed evaluation provide information for critical decision-making?
 - o Does the program have clearly defined goals/objectives?
 - o To what extent are the program goals/objectives directly linked to the mission and/or priorities of the IC(s) or OD Office? To what extent do the program goals/objectives directly support key IC(s), NIH, HHS, or federal priorities?
 - o To what extent do the program activities help achieve the program goals/objectives? How reliable and valid is the information provided to support the claim?
 - o What is the approximate size/scope of the program? How does it compare with similar NIH programs?
- What is the rationale for conducting the proposed evaluation at this time?
- What is the justification for believing that the proposed evaluation will address evidence gaps about the program's operations and/or effects? How reasonable is the justification given what is known about the program?

Utility – Reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposed evaluation will provide new and important information about the program to be evaluated. The level of utility is related to the timeliness of the information, how the information will be used to address evidence gaps, and the targeted user(s) of the information. Assessment questions include:

- Who are the decision-makers who will use the evaluation results?
- How will the evaluation results be used to address evidence gaps and make critical decisions about the program?
- If assumptions are included to demonstrate the potential usefulness of the evaluation results, how reasonable are the assumptions given what is known about the program? How reliable and valid is the information provided to support the claim?
- Will the evaluation be completed within a specified timeframe to ensure that the results will be available for decision-making when needed?

Technical Merit – Reviewers will assess the extent to which the technical approach for the proposed evaluation is rigorous, appropriate, feasible, and likely to produce useful information to address the study questions. Technical merit is related to strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation design and the data collection and analysis plan. A high quality evaluation provides

a reasonably objective, balanced picture of program operations and/or effects. Assessment questions include:

- Are the study questions clearly articulated? Do they clearly address the stated purpose of the evaluation? To what extent will the specific objectives of the evaluation be achieved by answering the study questions?
- How appropriate are the target population and key variables given the specific objectives and study questions of the evaluation? Where appropriate, does the target population (or a sample from which it is drawn) have the general characteristics needed to serve as a valid representative for extrapolating the results to a larger population?
- How appropriate are the data sources and data collection strategies given the study questions and key variables? If assumptions regarding data availability or data quality are made, how reasonable are the assumptions and how reliable and valid is the information provided to support the claim? What is the degree of confidence that the data collection can be carried out as planned and completed in a timely manner?
- How appropriate is the data analysis plan for answering the study questions? What is the degree of confidence that the plan will provide the descriptive, inferential or qualitative information needed for decision-making? Does the plan include adequate verification, quality control, coding procedures, and other steps necessary to prepare the data for analysis?
- Are there any known limitations about the evaluation design or potential obstacles about the data collection and analysis plan? To what extent are the limitations adequately addressed with respect to how they will be managed or overcome?

Project Management – Reviewers will assess the appropriateness of the project management approach. Factors that should be considered include the qualifications of the project officer who will oversee the proposed evaluation, his/her understanding of the project requirements, the use of an evaluation advisor or advisory group (where appropriate), the selection and management of independent evaluation contractor (where appropriate), and the appropriateness and reasonable of the project timeline and estimated budget. Assessment questions include:

- Who will serve as the project officer? What qualifications does he/she have to oversee the proposed evaluation? How well does he/she understand the technical requirements and can identify the types of expertise needed to conduct the evaluation effectively?
- Will an evaluation advisor or advisory committee be used? If so, what is the expertise of the individual(s) and how will they contribute to the evaluation? How appropriate is it for the evaluation advisor or advisory committee to serve the technical and practical functions described?
- If an independent contractor will be hired to conduct the evaluation, how will they be selected? How appropriate is the plan for the project officer to oversee and assess the work of the contractor?
- To what extent does the project timeline clearly illustrate when each major task will be completed and the deliverable associated with each task? Is sufficient time allowed to obtain the necessary clearances and approvals³ for the proposed evaluation? Is the proposed timeline appropriate and reasonable?

³ Including but not limited to regulations and requirements such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals, the [Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995](#) (for OMB clearance), and the [Privacy Act of 1974](#).

- How reasonable is the estimated budget given the size/scope and technical requirements of the evaluation?
 - o How reasonable are the Direct Labor Costs (DLCs)⁴ and Indirect Labor Costs (ILCs)⁵?
 - Is the labor mix reasonably able to perform the technical requirements of the evaluation? Are there any redundancies?
 - Does the number of hours associated with each labor category reasonably represent the level of effort required to complete the evaluation?
 - If **Fringe Benefit** is applicable, is the rate **at or below 30%** of the Direct Labor Cost? If not, is justification provided?
 - o How reasonable are the Other Direct Costs (ODCs)⁶ and Other Indirect Costs (OICs)⁷ associated with the evaluation?
 - Are the miscellaneous supplies and materials⁸ justifiable and allowable based on the evaluation? Do the costs associated with miscellaneous supplies and materials exceed \$1,000? If yes, is a cost breakdown included and is justification provided?
 - Are travel costs broken out by individual trips? Is the travel location and number of days proposed justified based on the nature of the evaluation? Are relevant costs such as transportation, lodging and meals and incidentals expenses (M&IE) included? Are the costs within acceptable General Service Administration (GSA) per diem rates⁹? Do the travel costs include only those costs incurred by employees of the contracting firm while traveling for the evaluation project?
 - If applicable, is the honorarium¹⁰ within acceptable government rates? If not, is justification provided?
 - Is the technical expertise of a subcontractor or consultant required to meet the technical requirements of the evaluation? Are the proposed number of hours justified based on the requirements of the task?
 - If **General and Administrative (G&A) costs** are applicable, is the rate **at or below 15%**? If not, is justification provided?
 - If **fee** is applicable, is the rate **at or below 8%**? If not, is justification provided?
 - o Is the total cost of the proposed evaluation reasonable? Is it more or less costly than comparable projects?
 - o Are ESA funds used only for conducting the evaluation and not for developing or implementing program activities, such as those that are based on the evaluation's findings or recommendations?

⁴ Direct Labor Cost is the cost of salaries and wages paid to the individual or contracting firm for the performance of services.

⁵ Indirect Labor Costs consist of Fringe Benefits provided to employees of the contracting firm, which include paid vacations, sick leave and other benefits.

⁶ Other Direct Costs are charges in direct support of the project including but not limited to miscellaneous supplies and materials, travel costs, honorarium, and fees associated with consultants and subcontractors.

⁷ Other Indirect Costs consists of General and Administrative (G&A) Costs and total Other Direct Costs.

⁸ Miscellaneous supplies and materials are minor incidental expenses incurred during the course of the evaluation project.

⁹ [General Services Administration per diem rates](#) are available online.

¹⁰ An honorarium is an ex gratia payment made to a person for his/her services in a volunteer capacity or for services for which fees are not traditionally required.

Overall Assessment Score

Reviewers will provide a score to reflect their overall assessment of the likelihood for the proposed evaluation to enable critical decision-making at NIH, in consideration of the four review criteria described above.

VI. REVIEW TIMELINE

In recent years, the official HHS notice authorizing NIH to use the “internal use” portion of the PHS Evaluation Set-Aside has come between March and July of the fiscal year. After reserving a portion of the “internal use” funds for OPEP’s operating budget, the remaining funds are distributed through ESA awards in accordance with the timeline below.

Approximate Dates*	Program Evaluation Awards and Development of Program Performance Measures Awards	Evaluation Training Awards
10/6 – 11/14 (~6 weeks)	Applicants Prepare and Submit Letters of Intent (LOIs)	
11/17 – 11/28 (~2 weeks)	OPEP Reviews LOIs	
12/1 – 12/19 (~3 weeks)	EPOC Reviews LOIs	
12/22 – 1/2 (~2 weeks)	OPEP Compiles Ratings and Notifies Applicants of EPOC Review	
1/5 – 2/13 (~6 weeks)	Applicants Prepare and Submit Applications	
2/17 – 3/3 (~2.5 weeks)	OPEP Conducts Triage of Applications	
3/4 – 3/31 (~4 weeks)	Reviewers (TMRC/OPEP) Conduct Individual Reviews of Applications	ICs/OD Submit Applications
4/1 – 4/3 (~0.5 week)	OPEP Consolidates Reviews for Review Meetings	
4/6 – 4/21 (~3 weeks)	Reviewers Discuss Applications and Prepare Review Summaries	
4/27 – 5/1 (~1 week)	OPEP Sends Review Summaries to Applicants	
5/4 – 5/15 (~2 weeks)	OPTIONAL: Applicants Submit Responses to Address Issues Flagged by Reviewers	
5/18 – 5/29 (~2 weeks)	IF APPLICABLE: Reviewers Assess Applicants’ Responses	
6/1 – 6/5 (~1 week)	OPEP Prepares Review Materials for EPOC Chair	OPEP Reviews Applications
6/8 – 6/12 (~1 week)	EPOC Chair Makes Funding Decisions	
6/15 – 6/17 (~0.5 week)	OPEP Notifies Applicants**	OPEP Notifies ICs/OD**
6/18 – 9/15 (~13 weeks)	Applicants Obligate Funds***	ICs/OD Obligate Funds***

* Actual dates will be determined annually and posted on the OPEP website. Dates are subject to change.

** Note: Funding notification dates may be affected by: when NIH receives the HHS memorandum authorizing agencies to use PHS ESA funds for internal use; when the transfer of IC funds to the ESA Program is complete; and any changes in funding priorities.

*** ESA funds not obligated by September 15 (subject to change) will be rescinded as part of OPEP budget close-out.