Evaluation Framework

A POLICY DOCUMENT FOR THE WORKFORCE

NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

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NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Message from Nicole R. LeBoeuf

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We at the National Ocean Service (NOS) have a long and distinguished history of providing critically important data, tools, and services that support coastal communities and their contribution to the national economy. With the goal of building on past successes and readying ourselves for the future, I am pleased to introduce a new initiative that will foster a culture of evaluation and continuous improvement here at NOS.

In order to understand the current state of NOS's programs and their potential future state, NOS leadership will initiate an ongoing series of evaluation efforts to identify NOS program strengths as well as opportunities for improvement. After carefully analyzing the results of these evaluations, NOS leadership will share lessons learned and best practices across NOS. Doing so will arm us with the knowledge that we need to be innovative, communicative, and meet the needs of our nation. Working together as one NOS, we can not only meet our mission, but exceed it.

I am especially proud that the planning for this initiative was a collaborative, thoughtful effort developed across all NOS programs. NOS office directors, deputies, and program office staff worked together with the team at NOS headquarters to create an evaluation system that I am confident will provide an invaluable return on investment for our efforts.

Evaluation is never easy, however, it is the best way to honestly and critically see where we are, and where we can go. I am very much looking forward to our future.

Steady as we go,

Nicole R. LeBoeuf

Cover photo: Haenke Island, Alaska, seen from above, with an orange utility boat visible in the glacial flour colored water. Credit: Lt. Cmdr. Damian Manda, NOAA

THE NOS APPROACH TO EVALUATION:
Creating a Culture of Evaluation to Promote a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

NOAA's National Ocean Service (NOS) is dedicated to advancing safe and efficient transportation and commerce, fostering preparedness and risk reduction, and promoting coastal and marine stewardship, recreation, and tourism. In doing so, NOS provides many tools, services, and natural and historical resource protections to the American public. Through statutory grants of authority, the dedicated, professional staff of NOS have the honor of overseeing and implementing these critical functions and protections and do so with the highest degree of effectiveness, efficiency, and accuracy.

To that end, NOS has developed a systematic approach to understanding and improving our programmatic execution, business practices, and organizational structure. In order to understand the current and potential future state of our programs, we will undertake a series of evaluation practices.

These practices will complement any existing program-by-program evaluation activities. Additionally, we will collect best practices from NOS program offices (POs) and staff offices (SOs) with the goal of developing a toolkit of evaluation approaches we will employ together to make progress with greater consistency and speed than could be achieved otherwise.

By creating a **Culture of Evaluation**, NOS aspires to achieve a **Cycle of Continuous Improvement**. Creating a culture of evaluation requires the formation and maintenance of attitudes, values, and behaviors that make evaluation an accepted, regular, and routine part of an organization's operations. It involves embracing the idea that evaluation can lead to improved public service and performance. A cycle of continuous improvement requires periodic introspection and a willingness to incorporate changes into our programmatic and business operations. These changes should be based on a cycle of continuous evaluation and re-examination of current practices to determine if additional improvements are necessary.

The benefits of such an approach include: enhanced processes, improved understanding of resource allocation requirements, better alignment of processes, greater consistency, and enhanced stakeholder engagement. Evaluation allows us to obtain third-party feedback on business processes and programmatic execution, provide stakeholders with an avenue for input, engage staff in meaningful discussions on the future state of the organization, identify areas for growth and/or contraction, and obtain third-party validation of programs and resource needs.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EVALUATION

NOS will implement three distinct but synergistic evaluation efforts.

Self Evaluations:

- Provide a structured approach to continuous improvement.
- Identify and document best practices for sharing with other POs.
- Facilitate the sharing of best practices without having to invent new processes from scratch.

Business and Organizational Reviews:

- Provide POs and SOs with an independent perspective by utilizing a structured, within NOAA, peer evaluation approach regarding business and organizational operations.
- Assist in identifying business processes that may need attention or improvement.
- Promote appropriate consistency across NOS POs.

External Reviews:

- Generate third-party assessments of the quality, relevance, and performance of PO products and services.
- Provide input on the PO's unique risks and challenges that can be used to better position the program in the future.
- Assist in prioritizing competing program priorities and allocation of resources.

To achieve a rapid cycle of improvement, each NOS PO and SO will conduct an annual **Self Evaluation.** The combined results of the Self Evaluation will identify best practices and areas for improvement across all POs and SOs, inform the other two efforts, and also aid programs in preparing for them. The **Business and Organizational Review** and **External Review** differ primarily in their focus — the External Review focuses on the program's strategy and success in achieving its mission, while the Business and Organizational Review focuses on the smooth and efficient operation of the program's business processes. Because these reviews involve more in-depth evaluation and require a higher level of effort, each program will complete each of these reviews at least once every five years.

Evaluation Type:	Frequency:	Conducted By:
Self Evaluation	Annual	Program Office
Business and Organizational Review	4-5 yr	Chaired by MBO, panel external to PO being reviewed
External Review	4-5 yr	Chaired by MBO, panel external to PO being reviewed

These three efforts, together with our existing evaluation practices, will provide a clear and measurable direction for each of NOS's POs and SOs over time. The policies and approach for each of the three evaluation efforts is described in the following three sections and will be updated over time with more detailed information.
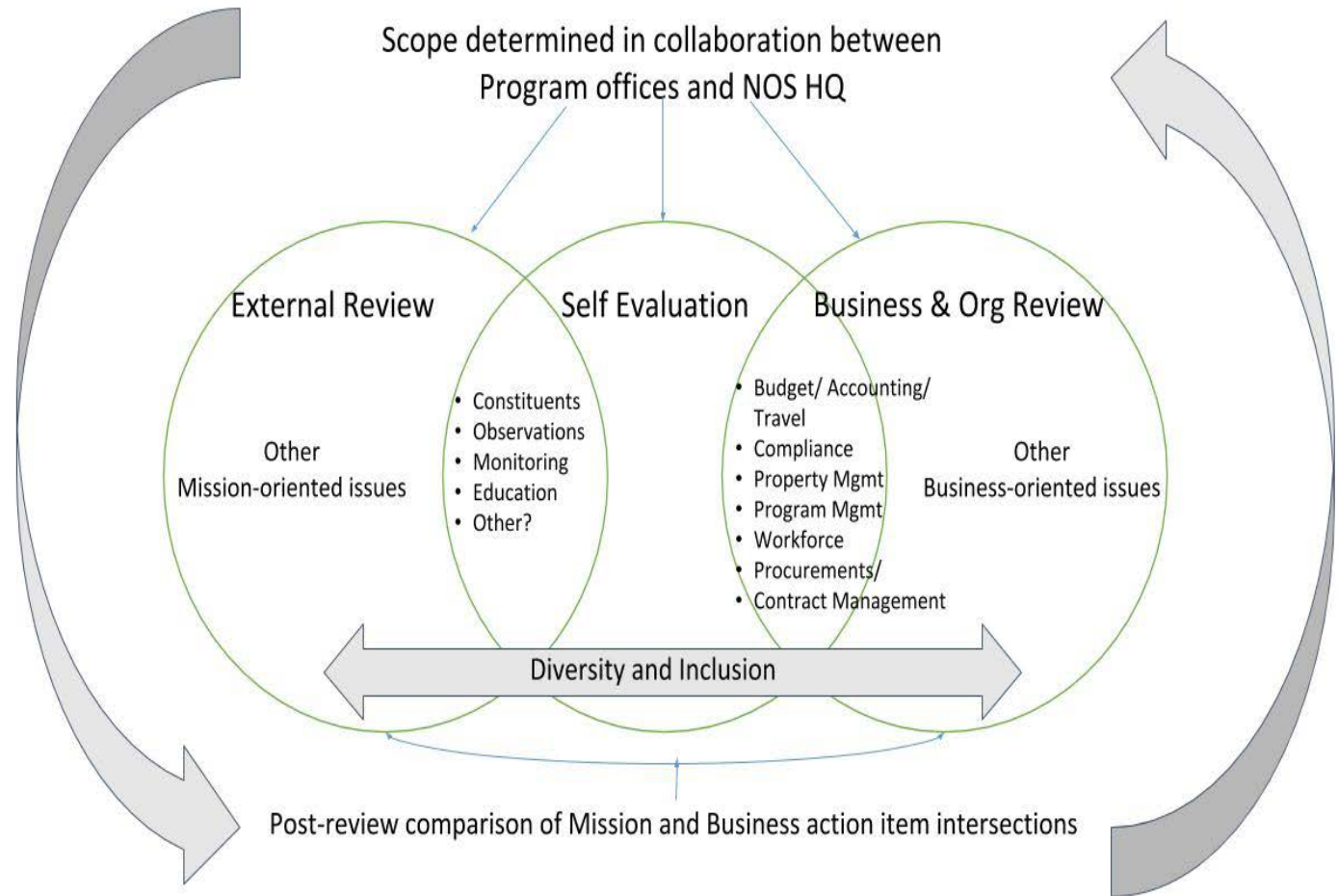

Figure 1. The NOS Evaluation and Continuous Improvement Cycle

Shared Responsibility:

The administration of these evaluations and reviews will be a coordinated and shared effort. NOS will provide direction and support via the NOS Management and Budget Office (MBO), while NOS POs will implement the evaluation efforts in a manner tailored to their individual organization.

The move toward establishing a Culture of Evaluation and a Cycle of Continuous Improvement is intended to be collaborative, and the NOS Assistant Administrator (AA) will be engaged in each of the three evaluation efforts to provide course corrections and to ensure that NOS evaluation requirements are being met. The NOS AA may delegate all of the responsibilities enumerated in this policy to the NOS Deputy Assistant Administrator (DAA) or others as appropriate.

A. Self Evaluation: MBO and POs develop the scope together. The PO conducts the review, then shares evaluation results and continual improvement plans with MBO. The plan will be tracked by MBO and discussed in quarterly program reviews.

B. Business and Organizational Reviews: MBO and POs develop a scope and select panelists together. The review will be conducted by a panel chaired by MBO. The PO shares results and improvement plan responses, agreed to by NOS leadership. The plan will be tracked by MBO and discussed in quarterly program reviews.

C. External Reviews: POs develop a scope. The PO shares results and continual improvement plan responses, which are agreed upon by the NOS AA. The completion of the plan will be tracked by MBO and discussed in quarterly program reviews.

Adaptability: In consultation with POs, MBO will review and update this evaluation policy and associated procedures on an ongoing basis. POs will provide process and framework feedback in conjunction with their final report and outbrief. MBO will work with POs to develop tools, resources, and documented best practices to aid programs in planning and conducting the reviews. MBO will facilitate an after-action discussion and evaluation of all reviews that occur during years one and two, with the objective of determining if these practices should be adjusted. Periodic review of processes will subsequently occur every 2-3 years.

A. SELF EVALUATION

1.0 Purpose

Self Evaluation is one of the three levels of evaluation within NOS's Culture of Evaluation framework (self, business and organizational, and external). Self Evaluation provides a structured approach to continual improvement and an opportunity to learn lessons from each other and improve together without having to invent new processes. Overall, Self Evaluation will:

• Enable programs to create an annual cycle of continuous improvement.
• Assist in identifying business processes that may need attention or improvement.
• Ensure that best practices across all programs are identified and shared across NOS.
• Assist in preparation and readiness for the Business and Organizational Review.
• Provide detail and structure to assist programs in assessing themselves against other requirements, such as the Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act (FMFIA) of 1982.

The types of processes evaluated as part of Self Evaluation are designed to help prepare POs for the Business and Organizational and External Reviews, which in turn will help validate the Self Evaluation by reviewing the process and findings. The External Review may identify areas of focus for future Self Evaluations and Business and Organizational Reviews.

2.0 Frequency

Self Evaluation will be a continuous process, and is an expression of our commitment to continual learning and improvement. Each PO will complete a structured Self Evaluation on an annual basis.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

NOS's chief financial officer (CFO) and deputy CFO (hereinafter referred to as MBO leadership):
- Determine a subset of common areas to be reviewed by all offices as part of Self Evaluations (overall scope is jointly decided between MBO leadership and PO).
- Periodically discuss progress regarding continual improvement plans with the PO, including discussion of how MBO can provide support.

PO director, deputy director, and business manager (hereafter referred to as PO Leadership):
- Determine additional areas to include as part of evaluation scope. Overall scope is jointly decided between MBO leadership and PO leadership.
- Conduct Self Evaluations.
- Review the results and select items for continual improvement plans.
- Share lessons learned and best practices with other POs.
- Develop continual improvement plans.
- Review progress of continual improvement plans as well as FMFIA-related corrective action plans.
- Periodically report progress on continual improvement plans to MBO.

MBO divisions:
- Provide tools (example documents, templates, checklists, etc.) and initial training to facilitate Self Evaluations.
- Provide support to POs in preparing for, conducting, and identifying improvement opportunities from Self Evaluations.

4.0 Procedures

Establishing the Scope
MBO will decide on a subset of common areas to be evaluated across programs to promote best practice sharing, and focus on systemic challenges uncovered in prior Business and Organizational Reviews. PO leadership may choose to include additional focus areas in the evaluation scope, which may include known or suspected process weaknesses as well as strengths. MBO will develop tools and templates for a core set of processes in Fiscal Year 2021, with additional tools added over the next 1-2 years and on an as needed basis.

To avoid duplication of effort, the Self Evaluation will include, but not be limited to, the FMFIA assessment. MBO will work with programs to develop structured questions for common areas to enable programs to conduct a robust, targeted, and objective assessment. Lessons learned from these individual assessments will be analyzed for commonalities across NOS and opportunities for collective improvement.

Assigning Staff to Conduct Review

PO leadership will assign an evaluation coordinator to oversee the evaluation. The evaluation coordinator will identify additional expertise required and will recommend additional staff to be assigned by PO leadership.

Preparation for the Review

Thorough preparation will make conducting the evaluation much easier and quicker. The coordinator should work with their office leadership to assign staff to identify and request documents, schedule interviews with appropriate staff, and conduct interviews. MBO will provide tools and training to assist programs with this preparation. The coordinator is encouraged to work with MBO to seek clarification when needed, and should provide feedback to continually improve those tools.

Conducting the Review

The specific steps required for conducting the review will be guided by tools and templates provided by MBO. Generally, the program will be responsible for:

- Analyzing the documents gathered during preparation.
- Conducting interviews with internal process stakeholders.
- Using tools and templates to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement based on the documentation and interviews.

The evaluation coordinator will oversee the process after defining the scope and ending with the presentation of results to PO leadership.

Presentation of Results and Continual Improvement Plan

The evaluation coordinator will deliver a document to PO leadership that includes the scope, staff assignments, an overview of the process, evaluation results, and recommendations. PO leadership will then decide which recommendations to pursue and will develop a continual improvement plan. As part of the plan, leadership will assign staff to lead the improvement actions in the plan. A suggested template for the evaluation results will be provided as part of the toolkit for the Self Evaluation.

Follow-up and Accountability

MBO will conduct an analysis of evaluation results and improvement plans to identify potential opportunities for sharing best practices, and make those results available to PO leadership. Progress on continual improvement plans will be reported at quarterly program reviews.

B. BUSINESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

1.0 Purpose

Business and Organizational Reviews are one of the three types of evaluation within NOS's Culture of Evaluation framework (self, business/organizational, and external). A structured peer evaluation of business and organizational processes serves several purposes:

- Provide programs with an external perspective regarding business and organizational operations without going outside of NOAA.
- Identify business processes that may need attention or improvement.
- Maintain consistency in evaluation from one program to the next.
- Ensure that best practices across all programs can be identified and shared across NOS.
- Build on and validate the results from the Self Evaluation by capturing an external perspective on similar content areas.

The Business and Organizational Review will provide the greatest benefit for evaluating processes that are common across multiple programs, such as, but not limited to, business processes related to budget and finance, program management, property management, and the workforce. Because of this, NOS has named this type of evaluation the Business and Organizational Review.

The purpose of the Business and Organizational Review is to create a platform for sharing best practices among the POs as a means to promote continuous improvement. The various parts of the NOS evaluation program work together to enable programs to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their key processes. Enhanced communication, collaboration, and continuous improvement are expected outcomes.

The main products from the Business and Organizational Review will be the final evaluation findings and the program's continual improvement plans based on those findings. Progress toward these improvements will be a topic of subsequent discussions between the PO director and NOS AA. It is not necessary for the program to address all findings at once, but rather, to prioritize actions in improvement plans based on findings and recommendations from the evaluation.

2.0 Frequency

Each PO will conduct a Business and Organizational Review at least once every five years.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

PO leadership:
- Determine the scope of the review in collaboration with MBO.
- Suggest panel members to MBO leadership.
- Ensure staff preparation for review and cooperation with panel members throughout the review.
- In collaboration with MBO, develop and supply a briefing book to the panel in advance of the review.
- Develop, track, and report progress on continual improvement plans for priority recommendations from the final evaluation findings.

Panel members:
- Familiarize themselves with the briefing book content prior to the review.
- Attend all panel meetings and the final review.
- Contribute to the final evaluation findings.
- Provide to MBO's Formulation and Planning Division (FPD) and the PO suggestions for improving the review process and tools as indicated in the scope.

MBO leadership:
- Determines the scope of the review in collaboration with PO leadership.
- Provides final approval of the scope.
- Serves as chair of the review panel (unless MBO is the subject of the review).
- Selects review panel members using suggestions from PO leadership and expertise requirements based on the review scope.
- In collaboration with the PO, develops and supplies a briefing book to the panel in advance of the review.
- Reviews and approves PO improvement plans based on final evaluation findings.

MBO's FPD:
- Supports the review process through all phases.
- Educates panel members on their responsibilities.
- Provides tools (example documents, templates, checklists, etc.) and training to facilitate the review.

NOS AA:
- Champion the program evaluations.
- Attend the final outbrief.
- Reviews the improvement plan following the report.

4.0 Procedures

The text below specifies the policy for the review. Recommendations and best practices for conducting the review are contained in the Business and Organizational Review Handbook.

Establishing the Scope and Charge
The scope will include some core elements that are required by MBO leadership for all POs, with additional elements selected through mutual agreement by PO and MBO leadership. The core elements are prescribed due to some combination of the following factors:

- They are essential elements of any Business and Organizational Review.
- MBO intends to baseline all programs in these areas with the intent of identifying and sharing best practices.
- Self Evaluation results indicate that NOS may benefit from a more in-depth evaluation.
- External Review findings point to a potential underlying weakness in a given business function.
- There is a particular interest in these areas due to the mission and nature of the PO scheduled for review.

The scope will also specify the evaluation criteria to be used. Once the scope is developed, the PO will develop the charge to be sent to the panel. A well-defined scope statement and charge is the foundation for a successful evaluation.

Panelists and Their Selection
After the scope and charge of the review are determined and approved by MBO leadership, NOS and PO leadership will work together to carefully select the panel. The panel should come from within NOAA, but outside the program under review, and should be diverse in many respects, including expertise and seniority.

Preparation for the Review
The PO determines logistics (e.g., meeting rooms, travel), establishes review dates and agenda, schedules interviews, and — in collaboration with MBO — develops briefing materials. The briefing book will include general PO information, such as legislative mandates and constraints on business operations, current organizational charts, Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results, the FMFIA Internal Controls assessment chart, and identified leads for all business processes for potential interviews. The book will also include more specific information that supports the agreed upon scope of the review, such as financial summary and budget execution statistics, descriptions and standard operating procedures for key business processes, etc. Results from the Self Evaluation should greatly assist programs in identifying and gathering the needed program documentation for the briefing book.

Conducting the Review
- The panel will conduct a kick-off meeting with PO leadership and staff to ensure common understanding of the structure and expectations for the review.
- The panel will conduct interviews, meet to deliberate and review briefing materials, and develop individual recommendations and findings from panel members.

- The review, including all interviews, is expected to start and finish within the course of one week. Much of the background work in preparation for the review will be done prior to the review date. This background work includes reviewing written processes, selecting interviewees, and scheduling interviews.

Evaluation Results (Findings and Recommendations)

Individual reviewer findings will be compiled and summarized in the final evaluation findings by the review panel chair, and delivered to the PO director at the final outbrief. The panel's final findings and recommendations will be used by PO leadership to make continual improvement plans.

Follow-up/Accountability

The PO is required to respond to the final evaluation findings within 30 days, including development of their continual improvement plan, at which point they will brief the AA, DAA, and CFO. PO leadership, in consultation with MBO, will identify which actions will be included in improvement plans.Capacity for implementing changes should be considered when developing the plans.

PO leadership will track progress of action in the improvement plan and report progress and results from these improvements at quarterly program reviews.

C. EXTERNAL REVIEW

1.0 Purpose

The overarching purpose of External Review is to obtain regular, systematic feedback on NOS programs that can be used to improve programmatic operations by:
- Obtaining third-party assessment of the quality, relevance, and performance of the PO's products and services, and assess alignment with the PO's mission.
- Using findings to inform programmatic decisions and increase the effectiveness and efficiencies of programs, products, and services.
- Complementing the findings from PO Self Evaluations and NOS Business and Organizational Reviews.
- Inform the PO's strategic planning.

Benefits of External Review

There are multiple benefits of conducting an external program review, including:
- Obtaining third-party, objective feedback on the recent past performance of the program.
- Acquiring input on future considerations the program may or may not have identified.
- Soliciting commentary on the program's unique risks and challenges that can be used to better position the program in the future.
- Prioritizing competing program activities and allocation of resources and determining what factors play a critical role in the success of the program.
- Validating and/or informing program strategic decisions.
- Encouraging information exchange, learning, and meaningful connection.

11

- Obtaining written recommendations. These communications can be used to:
  - Highlight the positive aspects of the program and the demand for provided services.
  - Demonstrate a commitment to obtaining critical feedback.
  - Document rationale for proposed program changes, including resources required to undertake those changes.
  - Support the program's current operations and/or intended changes.

Program Evaluation Criteria

The External Review of NOS programs will provide a systematic and standard assessment of how well a program is implemented and offer guidance for future operations. When considering standards for reviewing NOS POs, NOS leadership selected quality, relevance, and performance as the three overarching External Review criteria, which have a basis in NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 216-115A: Research and Development in NOAA. This NAO provides guidance by which NOAA's research and development (R&D) can be continually reviewed, evaluated, and rebalanced in light of evolving mission needs. The NAO calls for a periodic evaluation of research, development, and transition activities as well as outreach efforts and stakeholder engagement. The criteria outlined in the NAO is applicable to the wide variety of NOS programs, whether R&D or not. Because of this broad applicability, NOS has elected to use **quality, relevance,** and **performance** as the three overarching External Review criteria.

Quality measures the soundness and accuracy of a set of products and services, the expertise of the staff, and the ability to continue to provide impactful products and services to NOAA and the public. It requires evidence of established procedures for assuring funding and meeting the growing need for new and improved services. The functionality of the PO product/service should demonstrate continuous improvement and effort from staff to exceed the expectations of other NOAA entities and/or public users.

Relevance refers to the value and significance of the PO to NOAA's overarching mission and the benefits of the PO's products and services to stakeholders and broader society. The White House Office of Management and Budget refers to relevance as the "impact" of a program, i.e., measurable analysis of how the PO's products and services produced societal benefits, who uses the products, and how. During a review, program personnel shall identify public benefits of the program, including added benefits beyond those of any similar efforts that have been made by others. Benefits include increasingly more skillful and reliable program output, technologies, or methodologies that satisfy legal mandates and user needs, and provide effective expert counsel and technology transfer, as well as new options for the future.

Performance refers to whether a program is managed in a manner that produces identifiable results effectively (achieving desired results) and efficiently (with maximum productivity and minimal waste). Performance is evaluated by answering the following questions. First, do program management structures provide guidance and produce results that align with the agency's strategic goals and objectives? Second, do program management structures provide the flexibility to address changing priorities while accounting for interaction with stakeholders and other external collaborators?

2.0 Frequency

The substantial majority of the programmatic components in each PO must be reviewed at least once every five years. The timing of these reviews can be leveraged to provide input for office strategic plans.

There are at least two models that POs may choose from, with NOS AA concurrence. In the first model, POs may choose to conduct a single review that covers all programmatic elements every five years. This "all-in-one" model provides a broad assessment of the work of the office and can be helpful in establishing big picture direction and feedback. In the second model, POs may choose to conduct multiple reviews over a five-year span that each cover a discrete programmatic component. This "divide and conquer" model provides more in-depth assessment of different programmatic areas of the office and can be helpful in providing specific guidance. There are benefits and drawbacks to each approach and PO leadership should determine the approach that best suits the needs of their program. PO leadership must consult the NOS AA prior to finalizing the External Review model to be used by each office.

The outcomes of External Reviews can be used as inputs for the office's next strategic planning process.Therefore, External Reviews should be timed accordingly.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

PO director:
- Establishes a working group to prepare for the review. The responsibilities of the PO director may be executed by that entity, but the PO director is accountable for their completion.
- Identifies the appropriate review model to be used and communicates with the NOS AA regarding that selection.
- Forms the scope of the review.
- Develops and delivers the charge to the External Review panel.
- Identifies representational "seats" on the External Review panel and provides the list of candidate panelists to the AA for approval.
- Oversees all aspects of implementing the External Review.
- Develops the PO's written response to the External Review and recommendations received from the panelists. This public document will be used to communicate the PO's intended actions as a result of the input received.

NOS AA:
- In concert with the PO director, determines the review model to be used for each PO.
- Approves the slate of panelists from among the candidates proposed by the PO, allowing for an unbiased panel.
- Reviews the PO's draft written response to the External Review and recommendations received from the panelists.

NOS MBO

MBO plays a smaller role in External Reviews when compared to the Business and Organizational Review and PO Self Evaluation. MBO will act in a coordination role, including tracking the 5-year cycle of reviews for all eight POs. In addition, as programs identify actions to take based upon the output of External Reviews, MBO will assist with the tracking of follow-up actions and associated milestones to ascertain the impact of these evaluations on NOS programs as a whole. MBO will incorporate External Review recommendations and PO responses in strategic planning efforts, as appropriate. In order to fulfill their larger role in the Business and Organizational Review and Self Evaluation processes, MBO should be kept apprised of any significant changes the program intends to make after the External Review, especially those related to budget and strategic planning.

External Review Panel

There are two general models for forming an External Review panel. First, a PO can enter into an agreement, often a contract, with an outside organization that will select the group of reviewers. In these situations, the PO being reviewed can specify certain conditions the panelists must meet, but should recognize that the actual selection of panelists and the distribution of their duties is often up to the external organization (such as the National Academy of Public Administration or the Center for Independent Experts). Second, a PO can select the group of reviewers themselves. These temporary panels formed to conduct External Reviews of NOS programs are not intended to be Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)-compliant advisory committees. As such, care must be exercised to ensure feedback comes from the individual panelists and not in the form of a consensus report. The following duties are typical of those External Review panels formed by the PO being reviewed.

The panel chair:

- Serves as the primary point of contact for the review panel and communicates with other members of the panel to articulate the three core evaluation criteria (quality, relevance, and performance).
- Examines, in consultation with the panel and prior to the review, a set of programmatic questions with sufficient breadth and depth that cover the purpose and objectives of the review.
- Introduces the panel members to the audience at the start of the review.
- Facilitates the question and answer session at the end of each presentation.
- Leads the panel discussion on the day's proceedings at the end of each day and suggests any changes or modifications to the remaining schedule.
- Determines a schedule for producing review products.
- Provides a summary detailing observations and recommendations on the structure of the review.
- Presents their preliminary findings to the PO director on the last day of the review.
- Compiles all of the individual reviewer reports into a single document for use by the PO director and program managers. The chair will prepare a personal summary outlining the program review proceedings (e.g., what happened, salient issues) and the recurring themes or notable exceptions during presentations or in panel members' reports. The panel chair will distribute the written report to the PO director by the predetermined schedule that was included in the charge to the panel.

Review panel members:

Each member of the review panel will use the information provided by the PO and any ensuing discussion to develop written independent observations, evaluation, and recommendations on the portfolio of activities covered by the scope of the review. The panel members should review the briefing book prior to the review and use the questions provided to them as part of the charge to guide their evaluation. All panel members must certify in advance that they have no conflicts of interest related to the program or the evaluation and are objective and impartial to the evaluation results.

PO working group

Developing an ad hoc working group plays an important role in involving staff in the review and giving them a sense of ownership throughout the process. The working group, in concert with and under direction from the PO director, is responsible for:

- Articulating the purpose and format of the review.
- Identifying qualified individuals to serve on the review panel.
- Drafting questions for the panel to consider as part of the charge to the panel.
- Developing a briefing book for the review.
- Developing the PO's written response to the reviewers' reports and recommendations.

4.0 Procedures

External Reviews can be conducted through a number of means, including: contracted reviews, leveraging a federal advisory committee (e.g., the Hydrographic Services Review Panel, U.S. IOOS Advisory Committee, National Academy of Sciences review), or blue ribbon panels. Any review should meet the following guidelines.

Establishing the Charge

The charge to the reviewers puts in writing the purpose of the review; the program evaluation criteria of performance, relevance, and impact; specific questions or topics to be addressed; the format and broad topics of the review; anticipated products; and likely outcome of the review.

Panelists and Their Selection

Choose panelists that represent an appropriate, diverse cross section of technical expertise and affiliations (federal, non-federal, industry, non-governmental organizations, etc.). Reviewers should be well established in their field. The slate of reviewers will be approved by the NOS AA.

Preparation for the Review

Format, scope, and logistics: NOS POs will have the flexibility to decide the dates, scope, and format of the review (e.g., virtual or in person). The NOS AA will review the general approach and scope of the review. The NOS PO is responsible for any costs associated with the review, including venue and invitational travel.

Briefing book: Reviewers will be provided with a briefing book well in advance of the review, which will include: the charge to the external review panel and specific questions the program is asking, background information on the PO, legislative drivers and funding instruments for portfolio work, summaries of major program accomplishments, as well as resumes or biographies of key staff and all presenters.

Conducting the Review

The PO will present to the panel data and information relevant to the program mission area being reviewed. The review can be virtual or in person and typically lasts 3-5 days, including travel to and from the meeting site (if in person).

Panelists' Reports of Findings and Recommendations

A target date should be set for the final report from the panelists as part of the charge and/or the schedule initially provided by the PO. Individual reviewer reports should be compiled by the panel chair in a document for use by the PO director. Unless the review is using a federal advisory committee that is in full compliance with FACA rules, a consensus document should not be provided by the panel. The final report will be used for planning future program activities, informing future office strategic planning, and improving the performance of current and near-term projects. The review should be shared and communicated to PO leadership and staff.

The PO is required to promptly respond to the review report with improvement actions they intend to take. The NOS AA should be briefed on the recommendations made by the panel as well as the follow-up actions to be completed by the PO during an informational briefing. The PO response should be approved by the NOS AA prior to public release.

The PO director should consider the recommendations and follow-up actions during the program's next strategic plan and annual planning cycle. A follow-up briefing with NOS leadership should be scheduled approximately one year after the response document is released to the panelists to review completed actions. More frequent briefings should be scheduled if immediate action is required. Additional follow-up can be scheduled during the PO director's monthly check-in with the NOS AA.