FAQ
Inspection and Evaluation
External Peer Review Program

Council of the
INSPECTORS GENERAL
on **INTEGRITY** *and* **EFFICIENCY**

What is a peer review?

A peer review is an independent, structured process by which experienced professionals review each other's work against stated standards. Offices of Inspector General (OIG) that conduct inspections and evaluations in accordance with CIGIE's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation* (Blue Book) **must** undergo an external peer review or modified peer review.

What does a peer review cover?

OIGs are assessed on their compliance with each of the standards designated by CIGIE's Inspections and Evaluations (I&E) Committee. The Blue Book standards currently covered by an external peer review include: (1) Quality Control, (2) Planning, (3) Data Collection and Analysis, (4) Evidence, (5) Records Maintenance, (6) Reporting, and (7) Followup. The OIG assigned to assess compliance, called the Reviewing OIG, determines whether an OIG's internal policies and procedures address each standard, and whether the reviewed reports generally complied with Blue Book standards and followed internal policies and procedures. The peer review covers reports that state the work was conducted in accordance with the Blue Book and that were issued by an OIG within the 3-year period.

Why is a peer review program important?

CIGIE's peer review program is designed to assure OIGs (and their stakeholders) of OIG compliance with covered Blue Book standards. External peer reviews provide a level of objectivity and independence in making this determination as well as a learning opportunity for both the OIG under review (Reviewed Organization) and the OIG conducting the external peer review.

When do peer reviews occur?

Each Reviewed Organization has a peer review once during a 3-year peer review cycle. Peer reviews are scheduled during 6-month periods that coincide with Semiannual Report time periods, e.g., the start or middle of a fiscal year.

Who conducts the peer review?

The assigned Reviewing OIG conducts the peer review. This OIG puts together a team that collectively possesses experience performing work under Blue Book Standards. A move from multi-OIG peer review teams (used for the first peer review cycle) to single-OIG peer review teams was approved in January 2020 by CIGIE's I&E Committee for subsequent peer review cycles. A single-OIG peer review approach mirrors how peer reviews are performed for audits and substantially simplifies scheduling of peer reviews.

What are the benefits of a peer review?

The Blue Book helps to ensure a level of quality, objectivity, and independence. Peer reviews are designed to assure OIGs and their parent agencies, Congress, and the public, that individual OIGs are adhering to these quality standards. Peer reviews provide objectivity and independence in making this determination, as well, as offer learning opportunities for both the Reviewed Organization and those conducting the reviews. For example, these reviews can help an OIG withstand challenges to its credibility by validating the OIG's objectivity and independence when conducting work. Peer reviewers are also exposed to different approaches for conducting work according to Blue Book standards, potentially leading to more robust practices across the OIG community.

Who schedules the peer review?

CIGIE's I&E Committee assigned the responsibility for establishing and managing the 3-year cycle peer review schedule to the I&E Peer Review Working Group (IEPRWG). The CIGIE *Guide for Conducting Peer Reviews of Inspection and Evaluation Organizations of Federal Offices of the Inspector General* (Guide) outlines the timeframe assigned for the peer review, including start dates and dates for issuance of final peer review reports. The IEPRWG categorizes OIGs and then assigns an OIG from the same category (small, medium, or large) to perform the review. OIGs should submit requests for scheduling changes via the form located here.

What happens first?

Approximately 60 days in advance of the peer review's start date, the IEPRWG will reach out to the Reviewing OIG and the Reviewed Organization to request the names and contact information for their designated points of contact (POCs) so that the two OIGs can start the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) coordination process. Both OIGs' primary and/or secondary POC will attend the peer review training/coordination session conducted by CIGIE. The OIGs should sign the MOU prior to the training/coordination session.

What happens at the CIGIE training session?

POCs from the Reviewing OIG and Reviewed Organization are encouraged to start coordinating on the work plan (Appendix F) prior to the start of the peer review training session. However, the POCs will have an opportunity to discuss application of standards and coordinate on the work plan and various logistics, such as documentation format and information technology systems access issues, at the training session. Training topics include the Blue Book standards and the Guide.

What circumstances warrant a modified peer review?

A modified peer review may be performed when an OIG did not issue any reports during the applicable 3-year period, maintains internal policies and procedures for performing work under Blue Book standards, and plans to perform such work in the future. An OIG may request a modified peer review here.

How does an OIG request a change to its peer review?

An OIG may request a change to its peer review by submitting a change request form found here. Using this form, an OIG may request the following changes: moving from an external to a modified peer review or vice versa, to be removed from the Peer Review schedule if the OIG did not issue any reports that cited Blue Book standards, an extension for issuing the final peer review report, a schedule modification, or any other general inquires to be considered by the IEPRWG.

REVIEWING OIG

How are reports selected for peer review?

The Reviewing OIG typically selects a representative sample of reports issued by the Reviewed Organization covering the 1-year period prior to the start of the peer review. Reviewing the most recently issued reports provides the Reviewed Organization timely, useful information. However, the peer review covers reports issued during the applicable 3-year period. The Reviewing OIG may decide to select reports issued in the other 2 years to obtain a representative sample of reports. Considerations in report selection could include different categories or types of reports; reports with varying topics, lengths, or methodologies; or reports issued by different teams, divisions, components, or groups in the Reviewed Organization. The number of reports to be reviewed depends on the size of the Reviewed Organization, e.g., four reports for large Reviewed Organizations, three reports for medium Reviewed Organizations, and two reports for small Reviewed Organizations.

What can impact application of Blue Book standards?

The Reviewing OIG should consider the size and complexity of the Reviewed Organization's structure and work in applying the Blue Book standards. For example, small Reviewed Organizations that do not have formal, written internal policies and procedures should not automatically be considered noncompliant with Blue Book standards.

What guides the peer review?

The Guide provides detailed information to assist OIGs in conducting peer reviews. The Reviewing OIG should use the "Policies and Procedures Review Checklist" (Appendix D) to help guide its assessment of the Reviewed Organization's policies and procedures. The Reviewing

OIG should also use the "Report Review Checklist" (Appendix E) to help guide its assessment of the reviewed reports' compliance with the covered Blue Book standards and the associated internal policies and procedures. However, peer reviewers should refer to the Blue Book itself when determining whether the Reviewed Organization' internal policies and procedures are consistent with the covered Blue Book standards or the reviewed reports complied with these standards. The Reviewing OIG should adjust the checklist, as appropriate, based on its collective professional judgment. The Reviewing OIG should complete a checklist for each set of internal policies and procedures reviewed and a checklist for each report reviewed.

What does communication look like during the peer review?

The Reviewing OIG's POCs should maintain an open, continuous dialogue with the Reviewed Organization's POCs and should, to the extent possible, communicate issues or findings informally as early as possible with the Reviewed Organization's POCs.

REVIEWED ORGANIZATION

What are some ways to prepare for the peer review?

In advance, the Reviewed Organization can identify internal policies and procedures (including related supporting documents), prepare/update a cross-walk from the OIG's policies and procedures to the covered Blue Book standards, consider methods of document exchange and system access, compile a listing of I&E reports issued by the OIG that are eligible for selection, and designate primary and alternate POCs for handling arrangements and coordination with the Reviewing OIG POCs. Additionally, the Reviewed Organization should consider recommendations for the Reviewing OIG for the selection of reports for peer review, e.g., different categories or types of reports; reports with varying topics, lengths, or methodologies; or reports issued by different teams, divisions, components, or groups in the Reviewed Organization.

How are the final results from a peer review shared with the Reviewed Organization?

The formal reporting process includes an exit meeting; a draft Peer Review Report (with scope and methodology enclosure) and, if issued, a Letter of Comment. After the Reviewed Organization provides comments on the draft Peer Review Report and Letter of Comment, if issued, the Reviewing Organization issues the Final Peer Review Report and Letter of Comment, if appropriate.

What is included in the Peer Review Report?

The Peer Review Report provides the Reviewing OIG's overall conclusions as to the Reviewed Organization's general compliance with the covered Blue Book standards (regarding internal

policies and procedures, and for reports reviewed), and specific findings and recommendations, if any. The report includes findings that the Reviewing OIG determines are significant noncompliances with one or more of the covered Blue Book standards.

How are areas of disagreement resolved?

The Reviewing OIG and the Reviewed Organization are encouraged to resolve areas of disagreement prior to issuing the final Peer Review Report (and Letter of Comment, if issued). The Reviewing OIG and the Reviewed Organization may seek technical clarification, Blue Book interpretations, or general Blue Book assistance from subject matter experts on the IEPRWG, as needed. If disputes remain unresolved at the working level, they should be elevated first to the respective Assistant IGs or equivalent executives and then to the respective IGs for resolution. If both OIGs are still unable to resolve areas of disagreement, one or both IGs may submit the dispute to the Chairs of the I&E Committee. The I&E Committee will review the areas of disagreement and recommend an appropriate course of action to facilitate resolution of the dispute. If either OIG disagrees with the I&E Committee's recommendation, that OIG may appeal the I&E Committee's recommendation to the CIGIE Executive Council for mediation and final decision.

What if more time is needed to complete the peer review?

Reviewing OIGs have maximum flexibility in setting the review schedule. If additional time is needed to complete the review and issue the final report, the Reviewing OIG should request an extension from the I&E Committee. The request for an extension of the final report's issuance date is located here.

If you have questions or comments, please contact the IEPRWG at iepr@cigie.gov.