

**Procedures for Reviewing NCHS Programs:  
National Survey of Family Growth**  
Board of Scientific Counselors  
October 2007, February 2008

**A. Overview and Guiding Principles**

NCHS intends to periodically review its programs to assure the continuing vitality of the Center's efforts. The specific goals of these reviews are to examine the current status, scientific quality, and responsiveness of each program within the context of its mission.

The review should:

1. take into account future availability of financial and staffing resources focusing on the effectiveness of the program's use of current and expected resources, especially during periods in which prospects for funding increases in the near term are limited;
2. emphasize forward-thinking and future planning rather than current or past program efforts and achievements to ensure that NCHS remains a vital part of the Nation's health information infrastructure;
3. conduct an interactive review that obtains needed information through both written documentation and in person interaction with program staff.

The final report should address the program's strengths, weaknesses, and future threats and opportunities with emphasis on scientific quality and the program's responsiveness to the user community.

This document is intended to provide general guidelines for the review process. It is understood that review teams will have flexibility in how they perform their tasks. Each review team may prioritize some areas for greater emphasis given the purpose and scope of the program under review.

## B. Questions to consider in conjunction with nine review criteria

The review criteria outlined below is intended to guide the reviewers in terms of the program's adherence to general principles of sound science and the requirements of federal statistical agencies as set out in the CNSTAT's Principles and Practices, OMB's Data Quality Guidelines, and OMB's Standards for Statistical Surveys.

The Program and Its Process:	Scope of the evaluation		
	<i>Current status/ future plans</i>	<i>Scientific quality</i>	<i>Responsiveness to users' needs</i>
<i>Capacity/Resources</i>	1	4	7
<i>Information Products</i>	2	5	8
<i>Efforts to Improve</i>	3	6	9

**The reviewers may use the questions outlined below as a guide for their deliberations. As noted above, each review needs to be tailored to the particular program and its overall mission. Thus some areas may receive greater emphasis than others. However, the review team should not limit their focus too narrowly.**

### 1. Capacity/Resources

- Is the program's budget being spent efficiently on current activities?
- Are personnel resources being used effectively?
- Are appropriate high quality personnel being recruited and retained?
- Are current staffing levels appropriate?
- Does the program have the right mixture of professional expertise?
- Does program staff collaborate with other federal or state agencies and if so how?
- How does the program fit within NCHS and the Federal statistical system (i.e., CDC, and other federal agencies)?

### 2. Information Products

- What are the program's principal products?
- Are the reports generated by the program appropriate for the content of the data collection system and mission of the program?
- Are the program's products meeting user expectations in terms of quality, timeliness, usability, etc.?
- Are there definable and measurable quality standards set for each program product?

- Is there an ongoing attempt to improve timeliness of the program's data products?
- Is there an ongoing effort within the program to review user satisfaction of its products?

### 3. Efforts to Improve

- Are there existing mechanisms to maintain and improve the scientific quality of program activities?
- Are there existing mechanisms for strategic planning of future activities?
- Are there incentives for staff to conduct long range planning?
- Are there ongoing efforts to evaluate and improve the quality of data and information products produced by the program?

## **C. Report to the Board of Scientific Counselors (BSC)**

A preliminary report of the review should be submitted to the BSC prior to the submission of the final report. This preliminary report will be scheduled for discussion in a meeting of the full BSC. In this meeting the program staff will have an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may be present in the preliminary report. The final report, which should include a set of prioritized recommendations, will be submitted subsequent to the Board discussion and will reflect the discussion of the preliminary report by the BSC.

## NSFG Specific Review Questions

### 1. Capacity/Resources:

The report suggests that the NSFG has succeeded at reaching the goal of continuous administration, under the constraint of limited resources (6 FTEs, 6 contractors, 40 interviewers). It is possible though that while this may lead to program efficiencies, it may also lead to trade offs as it relates the development of new survey questions and questionnaire design work.

#### Initial Questions:

- What are the tradeoffs, if any, of this new process? Does the staff think the advantages outweigh any disadvantages?
- What is the impact this new process on retaining staff and contractors?
- Does the staff meet periodically with peers from the Census Bureau, AHRQ and other federal survey agencies to compare what they are doing with other federal survey efforts or to create a sounding board for ideas as they move forward with the implementation of the NSFG?

### 2. Information Products

The report focuses on using the web and the research community as key avenues for disseminating the survey data. It is possible though that the agency may need to step out of the traditional dissemination box and ask what is the profile of new information users and where do we need to go to respond to new users of our products.

#### Initial Question:

- Is the NSFG considering how people will use information in the next five to 10 years? Are the data dissemination plans in sync with it e.g. GIS data, social marketing, state/local health department planning, etc.?
- How is the staff involved in the reports produced? What is the staff input into the topics chosen, how much time is spend on report production? How is it split among the staff?
- Is the organization attending to the changing technology of data access, e.g. improving security while making the data accessible to more users?

### 3. Efforts to improve the survey

Quite bit of effort has been placed on improving the design and execution of this survey. What processes are used for continuous quality improvement?

Initial Questions:

- What mechanisms are used by project management to focus on the continuous development of the research team, the methodological enterprise and the data collection process?
- While response rates are presently good, has the Branch developed plans if they start to degrade?
- What is the value added by the addition of men?
- What kinds of other modifications or improvements has the NSFG considered, e.g.
  - Is it possible to expand upward the age range of the respondents?
  - Has the NSFG considered interviewing couples?
  - Given the rapidly changing and improving methods of biomarker collection, has consideration been given to adding biomarkers to the NSFG in the future?
  - Can the NSFG link to birth records?
  - Can interviews be conducted in additional languages beyond English and Spanish?

#### 4. Outreach to user community

Considerable efforts have been made to be more responsive to the needs of data users.

Initial Questions:

- What is the process for getting input from users, co-funders, and other study directors? What were the suggestions that evolved from the agency outreach activities that were discussed on page 10(items 3)?
- How are the needs and priorities of the co-funders determined and ranked?
- How have data users/researchers responded to the design changes between cycles 5 and 6?
- What was the follow up of the Nov 2008 meeting with regards to item 2\_ possible

contract options?

- Has the NSFG reached out to other possible funding sources such as the CDC Injury Center or Maternal and Child Health?

5. Additional questions

- How does the NSFG fit within the other programs of NCHS? As part of the Division of Vital Statistics, how does it contribute to the mission of the Division in explaining birth and pregnancy rates?