

Procedures for Reviewing NCHS Programs
Board of Scientific Counselors
October 2007

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 are 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.

I. 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.

Review of the State and Local Area Integrated Telephone Survey (SLAITS)

Because SLAITS is closely tied to the National Immunization Survey (NIS), i.e. the SLAITS platform is based on the NIS and is independent of NCHS, and agencies funding SLAITS are closely involved in the preparation of information products, the general guidelines discussed above may not all apply to SLAITS.

In addition, there are some particular issues/questions related to SLAITS that came up during the discussion of the program at the meeting of the BSC in September that should be addressed by the review. These topics are listed below in no particular order of preference.

1. How does SLAITS fit within the mission of NCHS?
2. Current and future funding of SLAITS (outside funding sources and NCHS contribution)?
3. Future of SLAITS and NIS? Are there other platforms for SLAITS if NIS disappears?
4. Selection of topics to be covered by the survey? How best to use SLAITS for emerging topics with policy relevance? Can SLAITS provide information otherwise unavailable?
5. What is the value-added of SLAITS in terms of information on children's health or other topics?
6. Are there possibilities for future collaboration with state agencies?
7. Who are the main users of SLAITS? Is there adequate awareness of data availability from SLAITS? How are the data distributed?
8. Although the review committee may not be in a position to address fully methodological challenges associated with telephone surveys, it may be necessary to pay some attention to this topic at least to the extent to which this methodology threatens the future of NIS and continued funding of SLAITS.
9. The review committee should also be briefed on current evaluation activities of NIS.