

Equal Opportunity Planning Committee (EOPC)

Instructions for EOPC Reviewers

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the EOPC review process. The instructions below outline the process and provide the necessary tools to conduct a thorough review of proposals and program evaluations. Embedded in the document are links to specific sections of the EOPC website that will help you prepare for the review.

The recommendations you make regarding funding (or refunding) EOPC programs through either the proposal or program evaluation component of the review process will provide invaluable feedback to project directors on improving their programs. We believe this team process is very important to conducting an objective and thorough review of EOPC programs.

Outline of EOPC Proposal and Program Evaluation Process

The EOPC proposal and program evaluation process begins with the annual scheduling of EOPC proposal and program evaluation teams, which occurs each May. After review teams have been scheduled, EOPC proposal training will occur in the fall to give proposal writers an opportunity to better understand the process. A week to ten days prior to review team meetings, team members will receive a packet of proposals or program evaluations to read over and develop their initial impressions on the quality of the programs. A form to write down your thoughts on the programs will be provided in the packet. **It is critical that you review these documents beforehand and come to the team meeting prepared to share your thoughts with the rest of your team.** We recommend doing your preparation as soon as possible after you receive your packet because this review can take several hours.

During meetings, the main task of each review team is to develop a funding recommendation for each proposal or program evaluation and recommendations to improve the program. Funding recommendations are used by EOPC in making grant awards. Recommendations for program improvement are shared with program directors. One team member with some experience conducting EOPC reviews will be asked to facilitate the review process.

The first phase of the review process, which occurs in October and November, is a review of programs that have already been conducted based on program evaluations received from program directors. The critical questions for teams to address for their recommendations are how well was the program executed, e.g., does the program meet its stated objectives and, most importantly, does the Outcomes section comport well with the Evaluation Plan? Please carefully compare these two sections and, all things being equal, a program whose Outcomes section does not meet the criteria of the Evaluation Plan should not be considered as strong as one that does. Occasionally, the program evaluation may provide some information that could mitigate weak outcomes (such as some extenuating circumstances that came about and could not have been anticipated), but the outcomes should be the basis of all reviews of program evaluations. Recommendations eventually go to proposal review teams, and these teams are asked to strongly consider these recommendations in developing their own funding recommendations.

The second phase of the process, which occurs in January and February, evaluates proposals that request funding for the upcoming program cycle. Some proposals request renewal funding for

previously funded programs (EOPC programs can be renewed for up to five years, with each renewal occurring as a separate renewal proposal), while other proposals request funding for new programs. Like the first phase, the main tasks of review teams are to develop funding recommendations for EOPC and recommendations to improve programs for project directors. The most important criteria for a positive recommendation are the need for the program (Problem Statement), Goals that should lead to addressing this need, Objectives that are clear and measurable and, most importantly, an Evaluation Plan that proposes outcomes assessment that will demonstrate the success of the program. Also, when available (for renewal programs), the recommendation of the program evaluation review team should be strongly considered.

Special Areas of Emphasis

Outcomes Assessment

While the entire review process is important, some components are especially critical. The most critical component is outcomes assessment, which is reviewed under the Evaluation Plan and Outcomes sections, respectively, of EOPC proposals and program evaluations. The key question to ask when considering outcomes assessment is “What end result(s) does this program intend to accomplish (proposal) or actually accomplish (program evaluation)?”

Initially, this task can appear to be quite simple. For example, if you’re interested in helping students succeed at Penn State and a program has study sessions, academic-enhancement workshops, tutoring, and so on, then you’re undoubtedly helping them succeed, right? Unfortunately, it’s not quite so simple. For example, what constitutes “success”? Studying hard, getting tutoring, going to classes, and so on are not, per se, “success.” “Success” is measured by academic outcomes such as retention, grade-point averages, and graduation. Similarly, you can try to increase the diversity of faculty and staff through proactive recruiting such as attending recruiting fairs, utilizing résumé banks, and other efforts to attain your goals. However, until you actually bring new diverse employees to Penn State, you do not have “success.” Although activities should promote success, it’s important to understand that activities alone do not constitute success. An approach that places activities that should bring about success within the Evaluation Plan or Outcomes sections is not appropriate. Instead, the actual criteria for success should be in the Evaluation Plan (proposal), and the actual results based on these criteria should be in the Outcomes (program evaluation).

Assuming the criteria for success is appropriate, success should be defined as explicitly as possible in the Evaluation Plans and Outcomes. For example, for students entering science-based curricula, graduating is better than not graduating, but in most cases graduating with a science degree is a better measure of success than graduating with any other degree. Also, proposals should use the “quantitative” and “qualitative” sections correctly. EOPC defines “quantitative” very strictly, such as grade-point averages or graduation rates, which actually constitute success. For some proposals, such as those that seek to improve campus climate, a qualitative measure is more appropriate, such as climate surveys, pre- and post-program assessments, and so on, which are indirect measures of success.

Defining success should also involve setting specific thresholds for success. For example, it’s not enough simply to say “improve” or “increase” such that, for a student, faculty, or staff recruitment program, it is necessary to go beyond “increase the number of”; instead, define how

many individuals will come to Penn State as a result of the program. For other types of programs, such as retention of faculty/staff or graduation of students, defining success may require a more nuanced use of metrics. For these programs, it is necessary to try to define (even if it's just an educated guess) what the retention or graduation rate of a specific group might be without the program and then define how much that rate will rise based on conducting the program. Proposal writers should explicitly define both the baseline and the intended improvement in their Evaluation Plan, which is why control groups are encouraged for retention/graduation programs. If a control group is used, it is possible to define success for the program group by projecting the improvement of this group over a control group. If it is not possible to have a control group, then an educated guess based on prior experience would suffice to project a threshold for success among your program group. The same point is true for qualitative measures. If a pre-/post-program strategy is employed, the Evaluation Plan should project the expected increase sought after completing the program.

For more information on the material in this section, see the following sections of the EOPC website:

Tips for Writing Good EOPC Proposals - <equity.psu.edu/eopc/tips>

Evaluation Plan - <equity.psu.edu/eopc/evaluation-plan>

Goals, Objectives, Measures, and Approaches - <equity.psu.edu/eopc/objectives>

Budget

Review teams should carefully examine all budget documents in the proposal. The Proposed Summary Budget and Budget Notes give teams both a quick outline (Summary) and more detailed view (Budget Notes) of the budget. Summary and Budget Notes should agree with each other (i.e., line totals for each budget should be consistent). Teams should assess individual line items to determine that each line amount is reasonable given the goals and intended impact of the program. Teams should feel free to reduce or cut any line that members regard as incongruent with these factors or is generally excessive. Teams may cut the budget across all line items if they consider the overall funding amount to be disproportionate with the impact of the program. EOPC will only fund up to 50 percent of the program costs, with all other funding coming from unit or external sources. If proposals do not at least match EOPC funding with unit or external funding, EOPC funding must be proportionately reduced. Also, no expenditures (EOPC or unit/external) may be made for “giveaways” (such as buttons or T-shirts), research projects, and several other items (see <equity.psu.edu/eopc/overview> for a full listing).

For program evaluations, the Actual Expenditures Summary Budget indicates actual expenditures in comparison to the Proposed Summary Budget. All actual line expenditures should not exceed the amount originally proposed, including shifting expenditures from one line to another without prior approval from the EOPC office. The total of all actual expenditures should not be greater than the total of the unit and external actual expenditures.

Proposed Summary Budget - <equity.psu.edu/eopc/docs/budget.pdf>

Budget Notes Example - <equity.psu.edu/eopc/docs/budgetnotesex.pdf>

Appropriate Programs and Program Populations

For proposals, review teams should confirm that program goals are consistent with EOPC funding categories <equity.psu.edu/eopc/overview>, which are taken from the seven Challenges of *A Framework to Foster Diversity at Penn State: 2010–15* <equity.psu.edu/diversity-strategic-planning/docs/framework_2010_15.pdf> (team members are encouraged to become familiar with the *Framework* prior to the review). For example, EOPC does not fund “community development” projects; however, EOPC will fund educational programs for pre-college youth if a significant program goal is to encourage students to attend Penn State (*Framework* Challenge 3, Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Student Body). Teams should also ensure that the target population accords with the populations represented in the *Framework* and is defined using precise terminology (e.g., terms like “disadvantaged” or “underrepresented” can be ambiguous or have different meanings in different contexts).

For program evaluations, the task is to match the actual population with the target population. If the populations don’t match, sometimes EOPC will adjust program funding. For example, if a program was intended to fund twenty participants with some costs incurred on a per-participant basis (e.g., food or transportation) and if the program had fewer than twenty participants, then EOPC funds would need to be recovered post-program. On the other hand, some costs are fixed regardless of the number of participants (e.g., speaker fees), and these costs would not typically be recovered.

Conclusion

More information about the review process can be found at the EOPC website <equity.psu.edu/eopc/>. You will also find information about the proposal writing workshop that EOPC conducts each fall, which can be useful for both proposal writers and review team members. For help with specific questions, please contact Mike Blanco (mhb4@psu.edu, 814-863-7890, 214 Grange Building), Educational Equity staff support for EOPC.