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ONE HUNDRED THIRD CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS

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October 20, 1993

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Honorable Ivan Selin
Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20555

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Committee on Government Operations is conducting a comprehensive review of program evaluation efforts by the Federal Departments and agencies. Although I am familiar with the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-11 efforts and recognize its merit for collecting information, the Committee is interested in a more complete view of the status of program evaluation in the Federal government than can be obtained in a formal circular.

In general, the Committee is concerned that chief executives of Federal agencies do not currently have the analytic resources to conduct independent evaluations of their component programs. As a result, agencies may not be able to adequately provide the outcome or effectiveness of a program in order for Congress and the Executive Branch to make policy decisions.

In order to better understand program evaluation efforts across the Federal Government, I would appreciate any further information you could provide the Committee on this issue. For definitional purposes, I have attached Circular A-11 for reference. However, when preparing this request I encourage you to provide information beyond A-11 that the Committee may find helpful.

Please provide the following information about your agency, and its major component's, program evaluation efforts:


1. The amount of funding that has been provided by the agency for program evaluation for FY 1994, and the projected amount of funding for FY 1995.
2. The current amount of full-time staff assigned to conducting program evaluations and to whom they report. Please report if the amount of staff is expected to change in the next fiscal year.

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CORRESPONDENCE PDR

3. The amount and type of program evaluation units that exist. Specify if there currently is a systematic, planned, ongoing effort to evaluate programs, and where this operation exists within the agency.
4. Specify the types of studies that have been conducted, and that are planned for the future. (Please use the definitions from Circular A-11--47.2).
5. Explain how program evaluation studies are used and who uses them. For example, are they used by the sponsor of the study, Congressional Committees, the OMB, etc. Are they used to make policy decisions, perform Congressional oversight, allocate program budgets?
6. Explain the effects, if any, of the three percent administrative costs cut ordered by the President on current and future program evaluation efforts in the agencies.
7. Explain OMB's general role and attitude about program evaluation efforts both in the past, and today. Is there room for improvement? If improvements can be made, please specify how. Again, please look beyond its role with Circular A-11 guidance.

Thank you for your assistance and attention to this matter. I would appreciate receiving your reply by November 22, 1993. If you have any questions concerning this letter, please feel free to contact me, or have your staff contact Ms. Laurie Cody of the Committee staff, at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,


John Conyers, Jr.
Chairman

Enclosure

Information on Program Evaluation

47.1. General.

Information on program evaluation activities and on agencies' program evaluation agenda is required for review and oversight of ongoing and planned activities and the resources devoted to them. It is used to assist in program planning and monitoring, in assessing program results, and in determining future funding levels.

47.2. Definitions.

Program evaluation is a formal assessment, through objective measurement and systematic analysis, of the manner and extent to which Federal programs (or their component) achieve intended objectives. For reporting purposes, program evaluation activities include:

- formal studies, surveys, and analyses used to determine program effectiveness;
- systematic assessment of demonstration programs;
- design, development, and field testing of new program evaluation methodologies;
- testing of weapons systems;
- synthesis and further analysis of results obtained by several previous program evaluation efforts; and
- collection of initial data to assist in evaluation design and provide a baseline for subsequent evaluations.

The following activities are excluded:

- design, development, and operation of general data systems or management information systems;
- continuing collection of routine data and general purpose statistics;
- prospective analyses of the probable costs and benefits of existing or proposed policies where programs have not yet been implemented;
- basic research and studies intended to increase or foster general knowledge development, but not expected to be used primarily in policy and management decisions;
- routine, day-to-day monitoring of program operations;
- productivity measurement;
- management evaluations of operational efficiency; and
- compliance audits.

47.3. Coverage.

These requirements apply to all cabinet agencies, Action, Agency for International Development, Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, General Services Administration, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Science Foundation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Personnel Management, Railroad Retirement Board, Small Business Administration, and United States Information Agency.

47.4. Materials required.

An original and two copies of the following information are required, in the format of exhibit 47, with the initial budget submission:

- a schedule identifying resources for program evaluation activities, including a brief narrative justification for the funding levels requested; and
- a program evaluation agenda listing major current activities and upcoming plans for evaluation activities.

(1) *Schedule on program evaluation resources.*—Agencies are required to report budget authority, outlay, and FTE data associated with program evaluation activities for PY-BY. Reports will identify resources for these activities by bureau, as well as totals for the agency as a whole. Budget authority and outlays devoted to contracts, grants (e.g., grants to States for evaluations of demonstration programs), and in-house costs (including FTE costs) for program evaluation activities will be reported separately. Amounts devoted to department-level program evaluation activities (i.e., those conducted by a central staff office) should be separately identified. In addition to a justification of BY funding levels, the narrative should include a brief description of significant changes in funding levels for the period reported.

Revised materials, reflecting final budget decisions, should be submitted promptly after such decisions have been made.

(2) *Program evaluation plans and agenda.*—Agencies will provide an agenda that describes major program evaluation activities currently underway or planned. Agencies should consult with their OMB representative in development of their multi-year evaluation plans and agenda.

In developing the agenda, agencies should consider appropriate subjects for evaluation, such as:

- significant new programs;

- programs structured in law and/or administered as "true" demonstrations (i.e., intended for consideration for expansion);
- significant (stable-sized or growing) programs for which little up-to-date or high quality data on the impact on recipients or on net cost are available;
- programs substantially duplicative of other programs in the administering or another agency; and

- significant programs with major reauthorizations in the next five years.

A joint evaluation with another agency may be appropriate, where there are duplicative programs in different agencies.