

Understanding Evidence Review Feedback

CNCS encourages Program Officers and State Commission staff to use evidence review feedback as a technical assistance tool for applicants. This document provides tips for understanding evidence review feedback and discussing it with applicants.

Evidence Review Process

The CNCS evidence review is composed of two distinct processes: 1) Assessment of evidence tier and evidence quality for scoring purposes during the application review process and 2) Review of evaluation reports for compliance with CNCS requirements. The latter was not part of the review criteria for the 2017 competition and thus does not affect the applicant's score.

Although both parts of the evidence review are conducted by external reviewers, they are two distinct processes. It is important to understand that some evidence tiers do not permit the submission of evaluation reports to justify evidence tier and quality. In cases where applicants in these tiers submitted evaluation reports to fulfill CNCS evaluation requirements, the studies were not considered in the assessment of the applicant's tier but were reviewed for compliance. Please refer to the *Notice of Funding Opportunity* for more information about the evidence tiers and allowable documents.

Feedback on Evaluation Requirements

The following fields appear on the evidence review forms:

- **Evaluation Required:** A “yes” here indicates that the applicant was required to submit an evaluation report to meet CNCS requirements.
- **Evaluation Submitted:** A “yes” or “no” indicates whether the required evaluation was submitted.
- **Type of Grantee:** This field indicates whether the applicant was a small or large grantee for purposes of compliance with CNCS evaluation requirements. Large grantees received an average of \$500,000 or more in CNCS funds per year during the previous grant cycle.

Depending on whether the applicant was a small or large grantee, the following fields are present:

Small/EAP Grantee Evaluation Requirements:

- **Internal or External Evaluator:** A “yes” here indicates that the evaluation was conducted by an internal or external evaluator as required. A “no” here indicates the requirement was not met.

- Process, Outcome or Impact Evaluation: A “yes” indicates that the evaluation was a process, outcome or impact evaluation as required. A “no” indicates the requirement was not met. This could mean that the submission was not a program evaluation or used some methodology other than a process, outcome, or impact evaluation methodology.
- At least one year of AmeriCorps program activity: A “yes” indicates that the evaluation collected data from at least one year of program activity as required. A “no” indicates the requirement was not met.
- An “NA” in any of the above fields indicates the grantee was not required to meet the requirement.
- Comments: Comments are provided if the applicant did not meet the evaluation requirements. These comments may provide more context or explanation for why a requirement was not met.

Large Grantee Evaluation Requirements

- External Evaluator: A “yes” indicates the evaluation was conducted by an external evaluator as required. A “no” indicates that the evaluator was not appropriately independent from the grantee organization, and that the requirement was not met.
- Impact Evaluation: A “yes” indicates the evaluation was an impact evaluation as required. A “no” indicates that the evaluation design used was not sufficient to determine the impact of the program (i.e. did not use an appropriate, valid comparison group), and that the requirement was not met.
- At least one year of AmeriCorps program activity: A “yes” indicates that the evaluation collected data from at least one year of program activity as required. A “no” indicates the requirement was not met.
- Alternative Evaluation Approach: A “yes” indicates that the grantee had an approved Alternative Evaluation Approach (AEA). In some cases, grantees with an approved AEA were not required to conduct an impact evaluation. Refer to the [AEA guidance](#) for more information.
- Type of AEA: This field indicates the type of AEA that was approved, if applicable. AEA's may be approved on the basis of structure, member development, timing, or replication. Refer to the AEA guidance for more information about the types of AEA's.
- AEA Conditions Met: A “yes” indicates that the grantee complied with the conditions of the approved AEA. A “no” indicates that the grantee did not comply with the conditions of the AEA. Each grantee’s AEA justification form,

which documents the conditions under which the AEA was approved, is a helpful resource for finding more information about a grantee's particular AEA.

- A “no” in any of the above fields indicates that the grantee's evaluation was not compliant. An “NA” in any of the above fields indicates the grantee was not required to meet the requirement.
- Previously Met Impact Evaluation Requirement: A “yes” here indicates that the grantee was not required to complete an impact evaluation because that requirement was met in a previous grant cycle.
- Comments: Comments are provided if the applicant did not meet the evaluation requirements. These comments may provide more context or explanation for why a requirement was not met.

Feedback on Evidence Tier and Quality

The following fields appear on the evidence review forms:

- Evidence Tier Claimed: This is the applicant's self-assessed evidence tier.
- Number of Studies Submitted: This is the number of studies submitted by the applicant.
- Number of Studies Assessed: This is the number of studies that were considered in the assessment of the applicant's evidence tier. As stated above, this number may be zero for some applicants even if their evaluation was assessed for compliance with evaluation requirements because some evidence tiers did not allow consideration of evaluation reports.
- Evidence Tier Assessed: This is the evidence tier assessed by external reviewers.
- Quality Rating: This is the quality of the evidence assessed by external reviewers. Quality includes how closely the intervention studied matches the applicant's proposed intervention, methodological quality and rigor, strength and consistency of findings, and how recently the study was conducted as described in the *Notice of Funding Opportunity*.
- Evidence Tier Justification: This narrative explains the external reviewers' evidence tier assessment.
- Quality Rating Justification: This narrative explains the evidence quality assessment.

Tips for Providing Technical Assistance

Some key points to discuss with applicants, if applicable, include:

- If the applicant did not meet CNCS requirements, why were these requirements not met? What must the applicant do (if funded) to meet CNCS requirements in the next grant cycle?
- If the applicant's self-assessed evidence tier differed from the reviewer's assessment, it may be helpful to walk through the [evidence checklist](#) with the applicant while referring to the feedback provided. For a refresher on evaluation designs, the applicant may refer to the CNCS core curriculum course [Overview of Evaluation Designs](#).
- Whatever the applicant's evidence tier or quality rating, it may be helpful to discuss what the applicant can learn about the strength and quality of its evidence base and/or responsiveness to the *Notice* based on the feedback provided.
- Applicants with no evidence or pre-preliminary evidence may find it helpful to review the CNCS core curriculum course [Laying the Groundwork for Your First Evaluation](#).