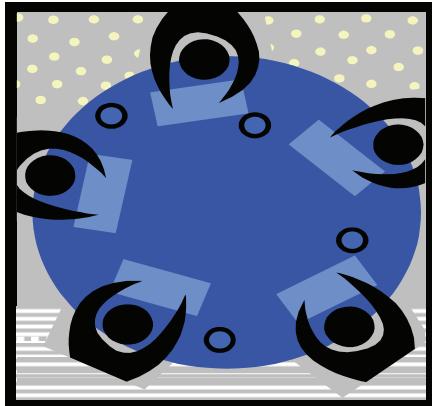


Inspection and Evaluation Committee

Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency

June 2009



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EXTERNAL QUALITY CONTROL REVIEWS FOR INSPECTION AND EVALUATION UNITS

This month's newsletter is focused on external quality control reviews for Inspection and Evaluation (I&E) units.

How it all started

In 2007, the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency I&E Committee discussed the possibility of external quality control reviews among I&E units throughout the Inspector General (IG) community. In 2008, the I&E Roundtable members were asked to complete a survey regarding their thoughts on the benefits and purpose of external reviews. Twelve I&E units responded.

What the surveys said

Eleven of twelve I&E units supported conducting external quality control reviews. Most units believed that participation should be voluntary and that reviews should focus primarily on (1) ensuring that report findings and recommendations are

supported and (2) ensuring that standards are followed. Most units also believed that the primary purpose of external reviews would be to give feedback to the reviewed I&E unit.

Test cases

Two external quality control reviews have been completed by members of the Roundtable: one of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and another of the Department of State (DOS). These test reviews were conducted at the invitation of DHS and DOS.

The reviews focused on whether DHS and DOS were meeting the "Quality Standards for Inspections." The first was conducted by three reviewers from three IG offices (the Department of Commerce, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)). The second review was conducted by HHS and VA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

For more information about any item in this newsletter or to contribute suggestions for future newsletters, please contact Anne Bracken at anne.bracken@oig.hhs.gov.

Before going onsite, the reviewers spent about 20 hours reviewing materials and meeting with DHS and DOS staff to determine the scope of the review and to gain an understanding of the office.

While onsite, the reviewers interviewed agency staff and conducted a more thorough document review. Throughout the process, the reviewers discussed their observations and, if necessary, spoke with the point of contact to confirm their observations and/or requested additional materials to confirm or refute those observations. Before leaving, the reviewers prepared a written summary and held an oral briefing with the head of the reviewed office. The reviewers spent about 32 hours onsite during a single week.

Both DHS and DOS made changes as a result of the external quality control reviews. DHS incorporated some of the reviewers' observations in its revised procedures manual. DOS used the report as part of the New Inspectors Training course and developed an electronic workpaper filing system.

Draft approach

The I&E Roundtable has circulated a draft external review approach. This approach recognizes that I&E units vary in size, scope, longevity, subject matter coverage, and placement within their respective Offices of Inspector General.

The proposed approach recognizes that participation in external quality control reviews is voluntary. Working to develop a voluntary peer review function within the I&E community is not intended to institutionalize a peer review function. The decision to participate, as reviewers or reviewees, will be left to the management of the individual units and/or their IGs.

The approach uses as its foundation the standards contained in the "Quality Standards for Inspections." Reviewers should have knowledge of and experience with applying these standards before they participate in a review. Before starting the review, the reviewers and reviewed office should establish a plan for conducting the review, detailing anticipated timeframes and time commitments; scope, content, and approach; and methods for sharing results. The reviewers and reviewed office

should agree on what sources will be consulted, what methods will be used to conduct the review, and how and with whom the results will be shared. The reviewers and reviewed offices also should discuss any specific desired goals and/or outcomes from the review.

Testing the draft approach

After an initial series of 3 to 5 reviews is completed, the I&E Roundtable will analyze the collective experiences. The analysis will include discussions with the reviewed offices and the reviewers. The goal will be to assess feasibility and identify burdens, benefits, costs, lessons learned, and, most importantly, best practices.

How to get involved

Please contact Anne Bracken at anne.bracken@oig.hhs.gov or (202) 260-4650 if your I&E unit would like to volunteer to test the draft external quality control review approach.