External and Internal Reviewer Guide

2021-2022

Northwestern | PROGRAM REVIEW

PURPOSE OF PROGRAM REVIEW

As an institution, Northwestern University has had a longstanding commitment to continuous improvement, and Program Review is an important mechanism towards that goal. The purpose of Program Review is to assess each unit's quality and effectiveness, to stimulate planning and improvement, and to encourage strategic development in ways that further the unit's priorities as well as those of the schools and the University in general. Program Review provides valuable insight to University leadership on unit performance and the outcomes serve as key inputs to University-wide strategic planning and decision-making.

The reviews are an important source of external feedback about the strengths and weaknesses of units and serve as a constructive base for future improvement; they are intended to be a catalyst for the unit to chart and seek change. The reviews cumulatively provide input to University-wide priority setting and serve as an important tool for the Deans and faculty for school-level planning. They are also a pivotal means of communication and accountability within the unit, with the Dean/line Vice President, with central administration involved in Program Review (President, Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Vice President for Research, Dean of The Graduate School, and Vice Provost for Administration), and with the Board of Trustees.

This guide provides details on the role of the external and internal reviewers in Northwestern's Program Review process. For a description of the review process, please see the Program Review Procedures and Rationale document.

ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL REVIEWER

Each visit is conducted by the review team, which consists of two or more external reviewers and at least two internal reviewers. The external and internal reviewers are responsible for thoroughly reviewing the full set of review materials and will conduct all meetings together throughout the review visit. The external and internal reviewers form the review team and participate in the review in tandem. While the external reviewers are responsible for writing the report, the internal reviewers are responsible for presenting on the review visit and recommendations to the Program Review Council following the visit. After the presentation, the internal reviewers help to ensure that the input from the Program Review Council is incorporated into actionable recommendation language for the unit's Implementation Agreement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In the course of the Program Review process, reviewers are privy to sensitive information in the form of data, survey results, reports, and discussions. The intention of Program Review is not to publicly criticize a unit if problems are discovered but rather to resolve issues and build a mindset of continuous improvement. Thus, judiciously maintaining confidentiality—both regarding individual perspectives that are shared with the review team, as well as findings and recommendations—is an integral aspect and expectation of the Program Review process. **Therefore, anything the review team hears or discusses throughout the course of the review (prior, during, and after) should be considered confidential and not shared with others outside the scope of the review process.** Confidentiality is of particular importance during group meetings, and it should be re-emphasized to the participants that they should not share remarks or information with anyone else.

We recommend that the review team reminds participants of their confidentiality before each meeting, using language similar to the following: *Please be mindful that anything you say in the course of the discussion will be kept confidential. Opinions expressed will not be attributed to an individual, and will only be reported in summary form in the outcomes of the review. For group meetings, attendees should respect the confidentiality of participants in the meeting and going forward.*

External reviewer reports are made available to members of the unit (excluding any confidential addenda as necessary), the Dean/line Vice President, central administration, and the Board of Trustees. The Program Review Office does not share Program Review materials with others outside these groups without the unit's express permission. However, units may choose to share their review materials (for example, many units find that sharing the report findings with the unit's advisory board or potential strategic partners can be beneficial), but the Program Review Office recommends that this sharing be done only with a sense of consensus in the unit.

Occasionally, reviewers may have friends or colleagues who are curious about the review team's findings and may try to engage the review team in conversation. On rare occasions, newspaper reporters have contacted reviewers trying to get information about particular units. Thus, as stated above, reviewers should not discuss the review with others outside the unit, the review team, the Program Review Council, or the Program Review Office.

This expectation of confidentiality exists not only while the review is being conducted, but also once the review has been completed.

EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

One of the primary strengths of the Program Review process is its history of inviting expert external reviewers to review the units. The role of the external reviewer is viewed as that of a "field expert" with a wealth of knowledge about the issues particular to the discipline or administrative field. The external reviewers are asked to provide insight and feedback on issues and trends particular to the discipline/field, with a specific focus on how the unit at Northwestern can strategically improve their standing in the field. The external reviewers are also responsible for writing the final report and recommendations, which is explained in further detail in the External Reviewers' Report section.

Because of their expertise in the specific discipline or field, the external reviewers are relied on by members of the unit to understand the key issues facing the unit in the context of the field. Thus, the external reviewers should take the lead regarding which issues to discuss during the interviews. They are also highly encouraged to consider issues raised by the internal reviewers, who may have a deeper understanding of organizational and administrative structure of Northwestern.

Appointment
For each review, at least two outside experts are invited to review the unit, with additional reviewers added as needed based on the size and breadth of the unit. The knowledge and objectivity of the external reviewers are core strengths of the Program Review process.

The leader of the unit under review works with the unit's faculty/staff to identify individuals to serve as potential outside experts. Each unit is asked to nominate eight to ten leaders in their field who represent the best programs and are from highly reputable institutions or industry as appropriate. Units may also delineate candidates by their areas of expertise and ask that the team be comprised of reviewers from specific subfields to ensure coverage of all areas within the unit. The Program Review Office may request additional nominations given feedback from central administration and line administration or due to scheduling constraints.

The list of potential external reviewers is then reviewed by central administration (President, Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Vice President for Research, Dean of The Graduate School, and Vice Provost for Administration) and the Dean/line Vice President to ensure that there is consensus on the appropriateness of these individuals to serve as reviewers. Final selection and scheduling of reviewers is the responsibility of the Program Review Office.
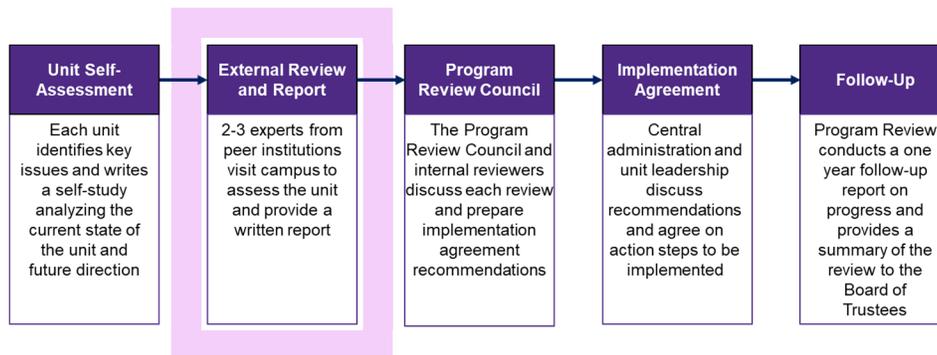
INTERNAL REVIEWERS

Internal reviewers are integral to a successful and credible Program Review process. As a complement to the external reviewers, the role of the internal reviewers is to serve as a resource to the external reviewers and provide a lens on the unique context of the Northwestern environment. The internal reviewers serve in an advisory capacity for the external reviewers and participate in all of the interviews to provide context on the Northwestern environment.

Appointment
Faculty members and administrators (for administrative unit reviews) are invited to participate in the process as internal reviewers based on nominations from Deans and senior level administrators, with the opportunity for the unit head to provide input on the team composition. Members of the internal review team cannot be members of the unit under review (including joint and courtesy appointments) and must also be free of any other potential conflicts of interest. Deans/line Vice Presidents and unit heads review all potential candidates and provide input as to preferred reviewers, as well as identify individuals with conflicts of interest. For administrative unit reviews, internal review teams include at least one administrator. Program Review ultimately has the responsibility to appoint internal reviewers.

PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

Unit Self-Assessment	External Review and Report	Program Review Council	Implementation Agreement	Follow-Up
Each unit identifies key issues and writes a self-study analyzing the current state of the unit and future direction	2-3 experts from peer institutions visit campus to assess the unit and provide a written report	The Program Review Council and internal reviewers discuss each review and prepare implementation agreement recommendations	Central administration and unit leadership discuss recommendations and agree on action steps to be implemented	Program Review conducts a one year follow-up report on progress and provides a summary of the review to the Board of Trustees

The following is an overview of the Program Review process that details the role of the review team. In addition, the Program Review Office is available to consult with the reviewers on any issue that might arise before or during the course of the review and to provide assistance or additional information whenever possible.

I.   Prior to the Review Visit
A. <u>Background Materials</u>

Approximately one month before the review visit, the external and internal reviewers will receive a packet of review materials prepared by the unit under review. The background materials typically include the following: Key Issues, Self-Study, Faculty/ Staff Survey Results, Data Profile, and any supplementary materials. If the review team feels critical data is missing, they can request assistance in obtaining data from the Program Review Office. The review team should be familiar with the background materials and note any areas to explore further during the visit. The review team is also provided with the materials from the unit's prior review, if available.

The Key Issues give the external and internal reviewers an overview of challenges that will be addressed in the Self-Study, and which the unit believes are critical for framing its future strategy. The Self-Study provides both a broader and deeper narrative about the unit's current strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Faculty/ staff survey results provide a venue for each unit member to share their perspective; this opportunity is particularly useful in larger units, where all unit members may not be able to meet individually with the review team. For administrative units, customer feedback surveys are also administered to allow a wide range of constituents to provide feedback on the unit's services.

The Data Profile is compiled by the <u>Institutional Research Office</u> for academic departments or by a resource in the school or unit when units maintain separate databases. The Data Profile provides metrics on the unit's key performance indicators, ideally as a trend over the past ten years. Administrative units are responsible for providing metrics on the composition and performance of the unit.

The Program Review Office coordinates the hard copy and/or electronic delivery of all background materials, which are prepared with the assistance of the unit.

B. Logistics

Travel Arrangements for In-Person Visits

For external reviewers visiting campus, the Program Review Office will make hotel, ground transportation, and meal reservations. Generally, the external reviewers make their own flight arrangements (and are later reimbursed), as each reviewer is most familiar with their own schedule and airline preferences, although the Program Review Office can also book flights by request. Please note that only economy class airfare can be reimbursed, per university policy. The external reviewers are asked to provide the Program Review Office with their travel information to ensure that the meeting schedule is coordinated around flight times and that return transportation to the airport is arranged. The Program Review Office is also available to assist internal reviewers with accommodations to allow their full participation (e.g., parking, hotel accommodations for those with long commutes).

Video-Conferencing Arrangements for Virtual Visits

For review visits that cannot be held in-person, the review visit will be conducted virtually via Zoom. Generally, the virtual review visit is spread across a three-day period. To accommodate the various time zones of reviewers, the meetings will typically start in the late morning and end in the late afternoon (central time).

II. **The Review Visit**
The on-site review visit is generally two days in length, consisting of an evening dinner followed by a day and a half of meetings. For virtual visits, the meetings are typically spread across three days. If there are particular scheduling needs for the reviewers or the unit that do not fit the typical schedule, these should be addressed at the time that visit dates are confirmed.

During the visit, the external reviewers should plan to lead the interviews, as they are most familiar with the field of the unit under review. To make maximum use of highly qualified external reviewers, internal reviewers should pose questions during the review meetings around the field expertise of the external reviewers (e.g., How does a unit rank in a particular research field? Are the areas into which the unit is expanding on the cutting edge of the discipline? Is the unit making noticeable progress in improving the quality of its program, faculty, and students?) The external reviewers are responsible for writing the report, while the internal reviewers are available to advise and provide guidance, particularly on the culture, structure, and strategy of Northwestern. The Program Review Office does not appoint any external reviewer to chair the review team or lead the writing of the report.

PROGRAM REVIEW PROCESS

The review team receives the draft review visit schedule (prepared by the unit and the Program Review Office) and can provide suggestions on others that should be included, if gaps are identified. While recognizing that the staffing of each unit is somewhat unique, the following table summarizes the individuals the review team should plan to meet with during the course of the review.

	TYPICAL REVIEW PARTICIPANTS					
	Unit Members	Unit Leadership	Stakeholders	Collaborators	Line Administration	University Leadership
Academic	Faculty	Chair	Undergraduates, Graduate students, Postdocs, Residents	Faculty in collaborating departments or centers	Dean	President, Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Vice President for Research, Dean of The Graduate School, Vice Provost for Administration
Administrative	Staff	Director or Vice President	Faculty, staff, and student customers	Staff in collaborating units	Line Vice President	

A. <u>Meetings with Unit Leadership</u>
   The review team generally begins their campus visit with a meeting with the unit leader. This is the unit leader's opportunity to identify any issues or areas of emphasis, as well as for the review team to ask any questions that may have arisen from reading the background materials. The review team also meets with the unit leader at the conclusion of the campus visit to answer any additional questions that arose during the visit or clarify any matters of interest to the reviewers. This concluding meeting also provides the review team with the opportunity to preview the review findings with the unit head.

B. <u>Meetings with Unit Members</u>

The review team meets with as many tenure-line faculty members as possible (for academic units) or with as many professional staff as possible (for administrative units). Depending on the size and structure of the unit, these meetings may be conducted with small groups or individually. As time permits, and if appropriate, the review team may also meet with teaching track faculty or lecturers. These meetings are intended to allow the members of the unit to vet issues on their minds, as well as for the reviewers to explore the critical issues or questions identified from the initial assessment of the unit's materials. Although every attempt is made to schedule the campus visit when all key individuals of the unit will be available, the review team may be requested to participate in a remote meeting if key individuals are unavailable. Alternatively, the internal reviewers may conduct meetings with those individuals prior to the visit.

C. <u>Meetings with Other Stakeholders and Collaborators</u>

For academic units, and as appropriate, the review team also meets with groups of undergraduate students, graduate students, post-doctoral students, residents, and fellows (as relevant). For administrative units, the review team generally meets with a cross-section of the unit's constituents. As time and the size of the unit permits, meetings with heads of related schools, units, programs, or centers may also be scheduled.

D. <u>Meeting with Line Administration</u>

The review team meets with the Dean/line Vice President to which the unit reports. The purpose of this meeting is to understand the overall strategy of the larger organization in which the unit is situated, and to ensure the priorities of the unit are coordinated with the priorities and strategies of the larger entity within which it functions. This meeting also serves as an opportunity for the reviewers to present their preliminary findings that will be in the final report.

E. <u>Meeting with Central Administration</u>

At the end of the visit, the review team meets with members of central administration involved in program review; invited participants include the President, Provost, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, Vice President of Administration and Planning, Associate Vice President of Program Review, Dean of The Graduate School, Vice President for Research, Vice Provost for Administration, and others as appropriate. The purpose of this meeting is for the reviewers to provide members of central administration with a preview of the major findings from the review.

III. **External Reviewer Report**
Within two weeks of the conclusion on the visit, the external reviewers are asked to provide a report with a set of written recommendations for the unit to improve and achieve its strategic goals. The report is the responsibility of the external review team, though internal reviewers should be available to the external reviewers via email for any additional follow up questions after the review as the report is being constructed. This section provides guidance to the external review team in preparing their report.

A. Process
There is not a chair or lead of the review team – the expectation is that all external reviewers will participate equally in writing the report and recommendations. Some teams have found it helpful to designate one individual at the time of the campus visit as the one responsible for finalizing and submitting the report. The report should be submitted electronically (in Word format) directly to the Program Review Office within two weeks of the conclusion of the review. The Program Review Office will manage the distribution of the report to unit leadership, line administration, and central administration.

B. Body of the Report
Although there is not a prescribed format, the report should include the following:
   i. Executive summary of the report
   ii. Discussion of the findings and recommendations for change
   iii. Summary list of the recommendations at the end of the report

The main body of the report can be organized in whatever manner is most suitable for the unit and its issues. Some reports discuss issues and recommendations in the body, while others only discuss issues and save recommendations for the end. *While either style is appropriate, all recommendations should be summarized at the end, even if they are given in the body of the report.*

The external reviewers are encouraged to be as candid as possible in the main report, as this transparency allows for the necessary discussions to occur within the unit.

C. Recommendations
Recommendations should be action-oriented and desired results should be measurable, specifying what is to be done and by whom, as well as the timeframe for accomplishing it. It is reasonable to make recommendations to University leadership or other people outside the unit. The recommendations from the report are used to develop the Implementation Agreements and follow-up reports and should be drafted in a manner to reflect that. If there is discussion, then the actual recommendation should be highlighted in boldface or italics. The following are sample recommendations:

i. Given upcoming retirements, the Department needs to develop a strategic plan to hire around its core strengths. Strategic planning efforts should consider:

      a. Relationship of Department to existing and potential collaborators within the University

      b. Identifying and accounting for significant ways in which the field may evolve

ii. The Department chair should work with the faculty to improve collaborative efforts among faculty of all ranks. Collaboration could be improved between basic and clinical researchers as well as between full-time and contributed service faculty. The current model of two separate Departmental sections with little interaction between them should be corrected.

iii. Foster connections with other units throughout the University. The Department would benefit from increased interactions with cognate Departments within the School, as well as from connections between scholars exploring similar research pursuits. In addition to serving the Department's research portfolio, increased connections throughout the University could also help to engage a larger community of students.

D. <u>Confidential Addendum</u>
While the majority of reports do not include one, external reviewers have the option to add a confidential addendum. This addition is appropriate for any sensitive recommendations, particularly those relating to specific individuals. The addendum should identify who should see it (e.g., the Department Chair, Dean/Vice President, and/or central administration). The Program Review Office can advise on the best way to incorporate such an addendum.

IV.   After the Review Visit

A. Report Submission and Review
As soon as the report is received, the internal reviewers review the report and determine if they would like to add an addendum (in general, reports do not require an addendum; however, in some cases it may be appropriate and the internal reviewers can consider adding one). For example, it may be appropriate to add an addendum if there is a differing perspective of the internal reviewers on the recommendations, if additional information is made available after the review visit, or to provide context on the scope or practicality of the external reviewer's recommendations in the context of Northwestern.

The report is then made available to the unit leader for fact-checking. The unit head may not change any opinions or recommendations but may have factual statements corrected with a footnote if there are any errors. The unit is given a chance to provide a separate written response if they have serious concerns with the recommendations in the report.

The role of the external reviewers concludes with the submission of the report. The internal reviewers then present a summary of highlights from the report and the review to the Program Review Council, a group convened to discuss each review and ensure that the Implementation Agreements are actionable.

B. Honorarium and Reimbursement
Each external reviewer receives an honorarium for their participation in the process. Prior to or during the review visit, the Program Review Office will ask each external reviewer to complete a W9 form in order to register the individual as an independent contractor that can receive payment from the university. The Program Review Office will also have the external reviewers complete a "Contracted Services Form," which is required to process an honorarium payment. Once the external reviewers submit their report, their honoraria will be mailed to the address listed on their W9.

The Program Review Office covers all expenses for the visit; for in-person visits, the reviewers should save all receipts to submit after the review. The Program Review office will provide the external reviewers with a "Visitor's Travel Expense Form" that requires the reviewer's signature, and must accompany the associated receipts for expenses related to the visit to process reimbursements.

C. <u>Program Review Council Meeting</u>
The internal reviewers present the review findings, based on both the external reviewers' report and their experiences, to the Program Review Council. The Program Review Council is a group of faculty and senior administrators that oversee the program review process. The role of the Program Review Council is to ensure that a balanced and consistent process is followed for each unit's review.

  i. *Preparing for Discussion.* As it is expected that the Program Review Council has read the External Reviewers' Report, the internal reviewers should provide a brief overview of the general state of the unit and major issues, as well as highlight any differences in findings between the external and internal reviewers. The Program Review Council is also provided with the set of background materials prepared by the unit, but is not expected to be as familiar with the materials as the review team.

  ii. *During the Discussion.* The internal reviewers should prepare brief talking points on their overall findings and recommendations on the review visit, as well as allow time for general questions. Before addressing the specifics of the Implementation Agreement, Program Review Council members may have general questions about the unit or the review.

  The Program Review Council and internal reviewers will discuss each of the recommendations carefully to make sure that they are clear and consistent with the needs of the unit. While some recommendations for the unit may be reasonable for the field, they may not fit with University strategy or reality. The External Reviewers' Report will not be modified, but the recommendation language used in the Implementation Agreement will reflect any changes recommended by the Program Review Council. All changes to be made should be discussed and agreed upon by the Program Review Council in this meeting. Confidentiality throughout the process is extremely important. As these discussions are very candid, all information remains confidential outside of the meetings.

  iii. *Following the Discussion.* Based on the discussion, the Program Review Office will circulate a revised Implementation Agreement to ensure it captures the suggestions for the recommendations. The wording of the Implementation Agreement is important as it is used as the map for implementation and follow-up action between the unit head, Dean/line Vice President, and central administration.

  Approximately one year after the Implementation Agreement is finalized, the Program Review Office solicits a follow-up report from the unit, which is shared with central administration and the Board of Trustees.

D. Implementation and Follow-Up
    Following the Program Review Council meeting, the unit leader, Dean/line Vice President, and central administration discuss the Implementation Agreement and respond to the recommendations, outlining specific action plans. The Implementation Agreement captures the key recommendations, each party's response and commitment to next steps, and serves as the basis for the one-year follow-up.

E. Evaluation of Review Visit
    The Program Review process itself strives for continuous improvement. A survey is sent to each member of the review team after the final report is submitted. This evaluation is intended to assess the quality of the process (i.e., if the structure of the process was sufficient in providing meaningful insight for assessment), as well as satisfaction with the logistics (i.e., timely receipt of materials and other information, satisfactory accommodations). The Program Review Office greatly appreciates candor in this feedback so that it may continue to refine its processes. These evaluation forms are kept confidential. Composite results and trends in the evaluations may be used during the review cycle planning process and to improve the process for future reviews.