

EPA Peer Review Handbook: 4th Edition

Executive Summary

Background

The EPA Peer Review Handbook, first released in 1998 and last updated in 2006, has been instrumental in providing guidance for conducting peer review at the Agency. EPA's long history of peer review has been fundamental in developing the sound and defensible scientific and technical work products that support Agency decisions. The new 4th edition of the Peer Review Handbook reinforces the practice of peer review in EPA and represents a centralized source of guidance for staff and managers involved in planning and conducting peer reviews. This edition has undergone multiple levels of Agencywide review and has been vetted through the Agency's Science and Technology Policy Council.

The Handbook - What's New

- Reorganized to align with the Agency's peer review process
- Begins with a Roadmap section, containing flowcharts that provide easy navigation of the Handbook
- Emphasizes early involvement of managers in peer review decisions and provides tools for documenting these decisions
- Includes information on recent policies and policy changes
- Incorporates addendums and process changes (for contractor-managed peer review panels) put in place after 2006
- Provides examples of statements of work, charges, federal register notices and Conflict of Interest memoranda

Handbook Summary

The Peer Review Handbook is organized into the following areas:

1. A Roadmap, which assists readers in using the Handbook and determining where important peer review decisions need to be made and documented.
2. Chapters 1-2, which describe general peer review concepts and the roles and responsibilities of EPA managers and staff.
3. Chapters 3-7, which describe the overall peer review process at EPA.
4. Appendices, which provide examples for use in effectively implementing a peer review.

The introductory Roadmap section is a user-friendly summary of the overall peer review process at EPA. It includes flowcharts with steps that correlate to chapters within the Handbook, as well as tools for planning, tracking, and documenting decisions associated with a peer review.

Next, the Handbook covers each individual aspect of peer review, why it is important, and how it is to be conducted. Chapter 1 presents general peer review concepts and briefly discusses Agency guidelines and policies related to peer review. Chapter 2 outlines the roles and responsibilities of EPA staff and managers involved in peer review. Chapter 3 describes which scientific and technical work products may be subject to peer review and how to categorize these work products so they receive the appropriate level of peer review. Chapter 4 distinguishes between the different types and mechanisms of peer review, such as letter and panel reviews.

Chapter 5 reviews the process for selecting qualified peer reviewers and addresses the ethical considerations necessary for ensuring a credible peer review. Chapter 6 details the process for conducting and completing a peer review. Finally, Chapter 7 highlights the ways transparency and openness in peer review can be enhanced through public participation and reporting.

The Handbook ends with Appendices that include EPA's 2006 Peer Review Policy; the Office Management and Budget's 2004 Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review and examples of statements of work to obtain peer review services, peer review charges, federal register notices requesting public comment, and Conflict of Interest memoranda.