

**Added:**

**I. Policies**

- A. **Purpose of Program** – The CEAR Program fosters excellence in accountability reporting. It helps federal agencies improve their Performance and Accountability Reports and produce effective documents that integrate financial and program performance information, thereby enabling readers to evaluate government programs and their costs. The program has a dual purpose: (1) to review individual Performance and Accountability Reports and provide recommendations for improving their quality; and (2) to evaluate the Performance and Accountability Reports and publicly recognize the excellent reports by presenting a *Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting* to the agencies preparing those reports.

**Modified:**

- B. **Definition of “Excellence”** – Performance and Accountability Reports and the related standards for excellence are evolving. The additional content being added to the reports each year, as well as the increasing attention they are receiving, is stimulating a desire to continuously enhance the reports’ usability and usefulness. The CEAR Program’s Guidelines are updated annually to reflect new characteristics and thereby stimulate the continuing issuance of truly excellent reports. Moreover, the CEAR Program’s annual recognition of the excellent reports is based on the understanding that as experience grows and standards evolve, award-winning reports that do not continue to improve might not be award-winners in future years.

Under the CEAR Program, “excellence” means more than complying with all of the technical, statutory, and regulatory requirements for Performance and Accountability Reports. It means producing an informative document that achieves the goal of complete and fair reporting. It also means producing reports that:

- report accurately and candidly on the agency’s performance against its plan and goals
- are written in plain English with a minimum of technical terminology, and flows well
- integrates financial and program information, such that citizenry, Congress, and the media can see the cost of results achieved and how the agency has determined that this cost is the most effective use of available funds
- are readable and inviting to the intended audience
- reflect an effort and desire to continuously improve the agency’s performance and accountability reporting, i.e., there are minimum editorial problems, the agency is responsive to the prior year’s recommendations for improvement
- demonstrate coordination among the Chief Financial Officer, Program Managers, Inspector General, and other agency leaders in preparing an integrated report

- proactively approach the adoption of new accounting and reporting requirements, e.g., early adoption of Statements of Federal Financial Accounting Standards and OMB requirements

**Added to list of eligible Reviewers:**

1. **Performance Management Experts and Others** – Active and retired senior-level federal agency officials who are or were program managers and/or preparers of performance measurement reports/data as well as academicians, public interest group representatives, and others with a government program management background are eligible to be a reviewer.

**Added:**

- G. **Non-assignability of Reviews** – Individuals volunteering to be reviewers are expected to perform the reviews themselves. Although they may involve others in the review as a form of training or for other reasons, the reviewer cannot delegate to others the review and attendance at the meeting to discuss the results of the review.

**Added more to:**

**H. Confidentiality**

1. **Participating Agencies** – The names of the agencies participating in the CEAR Program shall be kept confidential. Agency names will be included in the program evaluation results summary only after the participating agency grants consent.
2. **Evaluation Results** – Specific evaluation results will be kept confidential and only released to the participating agency official indicated on the program application.
3. **Review Teams** – Program reviewers will be publicly thanked in AGA's publications and other public forums. AGA will not release the names of the specific review team members.

**Added:**

**II. Review Elements**

- A. **Review Guidelines** – The CEAR Guidelines identify each of the numerous items Congress or the Office of Management and Budget require for Performance and Accountability Reports, with the specific authority identified. They also identify other content that could improve a report's usefulness and usability. The content of the Guidelines is updated each year to reflect legislation pertaining to performance and accountability reporting, amendments to or new OMB directives, accounting standards becoming effective, etc. and the resulting reporting requirements. The Guidelines enable reviewers to consider the overall quality and content of the report (rather than dwell on the presence or absence of the individual elements). Reviewers read the Performance and Accountability Report and use the Guidelines primarily as a reminder of the expected content for a Performance and

Accountability Report.

**Added:**

- B. **Preparer Training** – Preparer training is provided each year during the late summer to assist entities in preparing their reports. This training presents a summary of the results of the prior year's CEAR program, any changes in the requirements for the PARs, and a draft of the Guidelines that will be used for the upcoming reviews. The filing fee will allow an entity to have 5 persons attend the Preparer Training at no charge.
- C. **Reviewer Training** –CEAR Reviewer Training is held close to the program report submission deadline. At this training, each reviewer will receive the Performance and Accountability Report he/she has been assigned to review and the associated documents. If a reviewer is unable to attend the CEAR Reviewer Training, or if the training is held prior to the report submission deadline, the reviewer will receive the Performance and Accountability Report and associated documents via mail.

**Added:**

- E. **Providing Recommendations for Improvement** – As reviewers read the Performance and Accountability Report using the Guidelines, they should note matters for which the presentation can be improved because the information is unclear, inconsistent, incomplete, too verbose, etc. For each such instance, the reviewer should prepare a clear and concise recommendation. In order for a recommendation to be useful for the agency, the recommendation must identify (1) the deficient condition, (2) the page number of the condition, (3) the specific change recommended, and (4) the reason why the change would be an improvement.
- F. **Agency Responsiveness** – As stated, the most recent recommendations and the agency's response will be given to reviewers for agencies that have previously submitted their Performance and Accountability Report for review. The reviewers are to refer to the letter and ascertain whether and how the agency has changed the current year's report (or that the matter to which the recommendation pertains is not part of the current year's report). A recommendation that is made for the current year's report because the previous recommendation was not addressed should indicate that it is a repeat of the prior year's recommendation.
- G. **Determining Excellence** – CEAR reviewers are responsible for deciding whether a Performance and Accountability Report meets the level of excellence that merits a *Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting*. In making the decision, the reviewer should consider the extent to and manner in which the report does or does not fulfill the Guidelines criteria. Significant weight should be given to criteria printed in bold face since they represent the most essential qualities of an excellent Performance and Accountability Report. Also, at the end of each section, the reviewer can summarize an overall impression with the section. This too should be considered.

- H. **Preliminary Vote Regarding *Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting*** – Reviewers should make a preliminary decision as to whether the *Certificate of Excellence* should be awarded. (See Section I.B “Definition of Excellence.”)
- I. **Synthesis of Recommendations, Outstanding Features and Votes** – The reviewer recommendations for improvement, comments about outstanding features and preliminary votes are forwarded to the CEAR Program Technical Director, via the AGA National Office, who ensures the documents are complete, and then synthesizes and consolidates all the recommendations for improvement and forwards them to the review team via AGA staff.
- J. **Review Team Meeting** – The review team meets as a group to (1) discuss each of the recommendations for improvement, (2) reach agreement on which recommendations for improvement should be forwarded to the agency, and (3) take a final vote on whether the *Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting* should be awarded.
- K. **Minimum Vote Required** – At the review team meeting, reviewers are encouraged to interact with each other to reach a unanimous vote. The vote for presenting the *Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting* must not have more than one individual voting not to present the award.
- L. **Preparation of Agency Materials** - The CEAR Program Technical Director incorporates changes resulting from the review team meeting, and prepares a transmittal letter. These materials are sent to the review team via AGA staff.
- M. **Fatal Flaw Review** – The review team verifies that all expected changes from the review team meeting have been incorporated in the recommendations and transmittal letter, and determines that the materials adequately represent the team consensus.