

GUIDANCE TO SUPERVISORS FOR PROPOSING A PROGRAM EVALUATION TOPIC FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

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AUTHORITY

The County Board rules (§7.13(7)) give the Executive Committee the authority and responsibility “in conjunction with the office of the county board, (to) oversee program reviews and audits conducted by county board staff or contractors, and review the results thereof.” The Executive Committee initiates this process by soliciting proposals for program evaluation topics from County Board supervisors via each of the County Board standing committees and then making a selection from the topics proposed. Ideally, the Executive Committee selects a topic by the end of the calendar year to allow time for the evaluation process to conclude with findings and recommendations before the County Board submits its budget for the following year.

ROLE

The County Board Office Sustainability and Program Evaluation Coordinator’s role is to take the annual program evaluation topic selected and prioritized by the Executive Committee and manage the process from drafting the RFP to final presentation of results.

PURPOSE

Program evaluations are conducted not just to respond to a perceived problem with county programs, operations, or policies; they are a good general practice for providing current, comprehensive information on emerging and innovative local government policymaking and practices. The County Board Office uses the program evaluation process to evaluate topics within the county’s jurisdiction and to gather findings and recommendations that inform future County Board policy and budget decisions.

PROCESS

After the Executive Committee selects the final evaluation topic from the proposals submitted by supervisors, the process includes:

- Working with the Chair and the County Board Supervisor(s) who proposed the selected topic to refine the objective, scope, timeline, and deliverables for the evaluation;
- Drafting the RFP;
- Working with relevant Dane County department staff to gather useful input from them regarding the program evaluation topic for the RFP, and to facilitate their collaboration throughout the evaluation process;

- Working with the Chair of the Executive Committee to select supervisors and staff to participate in the vendor/consultant selection process, as appropriate;
- Convening and working with selected staff and supervisors, as appropriate, to do initial and final review and scoring of submitted vendor/consultant proposals;
- Scheduling interviews of preliminary vendor/consultant selections, when interviews are required;
- Convening and staffing the internal team that conducts the interviews of the vendor/consultant, when interviews are required;
- Communicating the final vendor/consultant selection recommendations are made to the Executive Committee;
- Drafting and negotiating the terms of the contract for purchase of services;
- Drafting resolutions relevant to the contract, when required, and shepherding them through the standing committees to the County Board;
- Convening and facilitating the internal staff and supervisor work team to provide input throughout the program evaluation process;
- Serving as the project manager and liaison between the vendor/consultant and Dane County personnel;
- Working with the selected vendor/consultant to manage every aspect of the program evaluation from contract start to the final presentation of findings to the County Board.

DEVELOPMENT /SCOPING OF EVALUATION TOPICS

Supervisor or standing committee proposals submitted to the Executive Committee for consideration as a program evaluation topic should include:

- 1) A description of the scope (what, who, when, where—which programs, functions, departments/people affected, etc.);
- 2) The potential benefit to Dane County government of doing the evaluation (what questions or concerns will this evaluation address, what is the board's jurisdiction, and what will this information help the County Board do?)
- 3) Whether a report and recommendation from the program evaluation is sought to influence the next year's budget period (RFPs for program evaluations must go out by early January in order to be able to inform the upcoming budget).

A few things to note:

- It is the responsibility of supervisors who propose a program evaluation topic to **work with staff** to develop the scope and timeline and to **consult with the relevant standing committee and department staff** to ensure that they are aware of critical operational details that might affect the success of the proposed program evaluation. One approach is to discuss with your standing committee chair placing program evaluation topics on the standing committee agenda for committee members and relevant department staff to review ideas and for the committee to select which ideas to move forward to Executive Committee.

- In some cases, the Executive Committee Chair will select one or more supervisors to participate with select staff on a proposal evaluation team to review RFP responses, score proposals, and, in some cases, interview finalists for the project. It is the responsibility of the proposal evaluation team to take the role seriously, to attend to information about the program evaluation when received, and to alert the Executive Committee Chair and the Program Evaluation Coordinator immediately to any concerns they have.
- **For program evaluations that are budget-sensitive**, i.e., where the outcome of the evaluation will be used to inform the budget decision-making process for the next year, RFPs for the evaluation must go out no later than early January. Therefore, any program evaluation topics intended to inform the coming budget year should be selected and approved by the Executive Committee by November or December of the previous year. This allows time for the RFP process, contractor selection and contract drafting, and for the evaluation to be completed with findings and recommendations in time for the next budget requests.
- Topics selected and approved after January are not guaranteed to have an evaluation complete in time for budget consideration for the following year. Program evaluation topics selected later in the year should be done with the understanding that they might not affect budgeting for the upcoming year, but for two years down the road. This approach allows the proposing supervisor to spend more time gathering advance information about the topic from department staff, allows the Executive Committee some flexibility in deliberating on the topics, and allows for strategic phasing of projects. For example, depending on the scope and complexity, an evaluation selected and initiated in mid-2025 would likely affect the 2027 budget rather than the 2026 budget.

Where possible, encourage collaborative project development in advance of the proposal to Executive Committee

In general, the most successful evaluation proposals are those where the supervisor(s)/standing committee proposing the topic spends more time in advance talking with the staff of the departments or programs they are proposing to evaluate *before* making their proposal to the Executive Committee.

This allows the proposing supervisor(s)/standing committee to find out what, if anything, is being done currently in the department or program to address the question(s) they are trying to answer through the proposed program evaluation. In some cases, it might make sense to wait on proposing a program evaluation until the outcome of similar activities already underway within a department is clear.

Another reason why communicating with the department in advance makes sense is that departments can help anticipate the best timing for the project that will allow for their full participation and availability as an information resource. The department and staff can also provide information about what data they can make available to the vendor/consultant. This helps with developing the timing of the RFP in a way that makes

it possible for the department to collaborate and assist with the evaluation process. Department staff are usually very cooperative and helpful in gathering information for data requests, scheduling their staff for interviews, etc., if they are given enough advance notice.

Our office also communicates with relevant department staff as a part of the RFP drafting process to gather additional input given the scope developed by the County Board Office, but this should also happen at the topic proposal stage.

Thank you for your consideration of these guidelines. I would be happy to discuss this further with any interested supervisor(s) to ensure we have a process that works effectively and optimizes the benefits of this process for the County Board.

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