FAQs on Submitting Programs for Consideration

The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) invites submission of programs for consideration as evidence-based recidivism reduction programs or productive activities. If you have a question not answered below, send a brief email with your question to: FSAProgramSubmissions@bop.gov. Relevant questions and answers will be added to these FAQs, as needed. Questions about the review status of programs will **not** be answered.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

What is required for a program to qualify as an "evidence-based recidivism reduction program" (EBRR) or a "productive activity" (PA)? Under the First Step Act, an EBRR is defined as "either a group or individual activity that has been shown by empirical evidence to reduce recidivism or is based on research indicating that it is likely to be effective in reducing recidivism" and "is designed to help prisoners succeed in their communities upon release from prison." FSA §3635(3) (internal markings omitted). A PA is defined as "either a group or individual activity that is designed to allow prisoners determined as having a minimum or low risk of recidivating to remain productive and thereby maintain a minimum or low risk of recidivating." FSA §3635(5). In order to qualify as an EBRR or a PA, a program must meet the above definitions set forth in the First Step Act.

Who can submit a program for consideration? Any interested individual or group associated with a program they believe could be substantiated as an EBRR or PA is invited to submit an application package. The BOP will accept submissions from an individual or group related to the program in a developer, publisher, researcher, author, vendor, or other role.

What needs to be submitted for a complete application? Each program submission must contain a completed Program Submission Form and at least one, but no more than three, program studies.

Where should program applications be submitted? Complete program submission packages can be emailed to FSAProgramSubmissions@bop.gov. This email address can also be used to submit general questions about the process. Questions about specific programs, studies, and/or review status **will not** be answered.

Hard copy submission packages can be sent to:
     FSA Program Submissions
     320 First Street NW
     400 Building, Room 3015
     Washington D.C. 20524

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Who will review the submitted program and productive activity studies? The BOP has engaged an independent, outside group without conflicts of interest to support the development and execution of the program review process.

What additional criteria, besides the definitions in the First Step Act, will be evaluated when considering whether to add a new EBRR or PA to the BOP catalogue of programs? The primary consideration is the evidence supporting the program. BOP will also consider other factors, such as whether the program meets an agency need and whether it duplicates or conflicts with existing offerings.

How will BOP weigh those criteria? The primary factor being considered is evidence for the program. If that is established, the BOP will also ensure the other criteria are satisfactorily addressed. Any program or activity approved for consideration under the FSA will be assessed in light of security procedures, BOP protocols, BOP mission requirements, practicality, and resource availability.

Is the fact that a program can be run by volunteers considered during the review process? Yes. We are evaluating the quality of the program itself. Costs associated with the program are rolled into this evaluation, which includes any training required. Thus, a program that does not include training costs for BOP staff will be rated more favorably than one that requires our staff be specially trained to deliver it. Because the process allows the person sending the submission to include an entire package, the fact that it can be offered by volunteers should be noted. This may increase its value in some cases. Finally, a program could theoretically be accepted without a decision on who delivers it, and in some cases, qualified volunteers could then offer it.

If a submission does not qualify as an EBRR, will it automatically be considered for PA or will it have to resubmit? The independent, external organization will conduct a thorough review of each program and assess how it rates on each of the evaluation items. BOP will then look across those domains and consider it first as an EBRR. If it does not meet that threshold, it may be considered for addition as a PA. Many programs may not have the research to be EBRR yet but, if they are cost efficient and meet a need of the inmate population, could still be of value to BOP as PAs. You will not have to re-submit to have a program considered as a PA.

Can a PA become an EBRR? Any program can be re-considered as an EBRR if research support develops at any time in the future such that the programs meets the definition of an EBRR. We monitor the literature to determine when new studies may support or disprove the effectiveness of various correctional interventions.

Can current EBRR or PA be led by volunteers? Every program submission should specify delivery requirements/qualifications. While the majority of EBRR and PA are led by BOP staff, in some cases appropriately trained volunteers also deliver them. An example of this is Alcoholics Anonymous. Volunteers are also involved in the delivery of some faith-based EBRR programs where they serve as mentors and are critical to delivering the program.

Can religious programs be considered as EBRR or PA and taken to earn time credits? Yes, under the FSA, "faith-based classes or services" that otherwise meet the definition for EBRR or PA programming will qualify for time credits as approved by BOP in the same manner as other approved non-faith based programming.

How long will it take BOP to review a submission? When and how will I receive notification about the status of my submission? The review completion time will depend on the complexity and completeness of the submission package, as well as the number of external programs submitted to BOP at the same time. The independent, external organization will share information about its review of the program with BOP, who will make decisions about programs at least quarterly. Submitters will receive written notification once review of their program is complete.

SUBMISSION QUESTIONS

How many research studies need to be submitted with the program application? Each program submission must contain at least one, but no more than three, program studies.

Will other studies be considered for evidence review if they were not submitted? A brief search will be conducted to identify any additional research on the effectiveness of a program that is available in the public domain, and which may be more current or be based on a more rigorous study design to provide evidence. In addition, any studies providing a statistical analysis of effects *across studies* (i.e., meta-analyses) will be included if not previously identified or if updated since an original review.

What does a "non-experimental" research study" mean? In the research world, there are all kinds of different study designs; the best evidence is gleaned from meta-analyses or randomized controlled trials. Quality evidence can be obtained from other designs as well. On this continuum of research quality, non-experimental designs mean there is not as much control over extraneous variables. These studies may follow a single subject or use pre and posttest groups without matching or controlling for other characteristics. Conclusions drawn from these kinds of studies are not as strong as those taken from higher quality research designs.

What does "Study designs rated 4 will not be considered for evidence review because they are not study designs that can provide evidence" [found on the Program Submission Form] mean? Simply that if a submitter selects item O, #4, non-experimental, there have been no research studies done that can used to validate the program's base of evidence, so that it can be evaluated as an EBRR. It may still ultimately be considered at a PA. Only research study designs that are experimental or quasi-experimental will be considered for evidence review.