



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this evaluation to determine what system(s) of controls the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has in place to engage with and manage the recommendations and advice from its science and research (S&R) federal advisory committees (FACs) and whether this system of controls is effective.

FACs are an important tool for building consensus and providing scientific input and recommendations from the agency's diverse customers, partners and stakeholders. We reviewed the EPA's eight S&R FACs, which had a combined fiscal year (FY) 2015 operating budget of more than \$8 million. These FACs created 84 products from FY 2013 through FY 2015, and we randomly selected and analyzed 13 of these products to determine the effectiveness of the EPA's system of controls to manage FAC recommendations. This report does not address the EPA's implementation of FAC recommendations.

This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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EPA Has Adequate Controls to Manage Advice From Science and Research Federal Advisory Committees, but Transparency Could Be Improved

What We Found

The EPA has an adequate system of controls to engage with and manage the recommendations and advice from its eight S&R FACs. The 1972 Federal Advisory Committee Act establishes procedures for the management of FACs, which are outlined in the agency's 2012 *Federal Advisory Committee Handbook* developed by the Office of Resources, Operations and Management (OROM).

Designated Federal Officers (DFOs) are the primary EPA representatives who manage FAC activities. The *Federal Advisory Committee Handbook* states that DFOs are responsible for working closely with EPA program officials to obtain and track responses to FAC recommendations. OROM and the agency's Committee Management Officer provide training to DFOs, but training materials do not highlight the importance of DFOs publishing responses online or tracking the status of FAC recommendations.

Science plays an integral role in the EPA's mission. The EPA has an adequate system of controls to manage recommendations from its science and research federal advisory committees.

Overall, we found the EPA's system of controls to manage the recommendations and advice from S&R FACs to be effective. We determined effectiveness by assessing whether (1) the agency responded to each FAC product we reviewed, including detailing how it would address any recommendations; (2) the agency tracked the status of each FAC recommendation; and (3) the FAC chairs expressed satisfaction with how the agency utilizes and manages the FACs. The EPA provided direct responses to 10 of 13 FAC products in our review sample and posted these responses online. The agency could improve transparency by posting all responses online. The three products that did not receive direct responses from the agency were addressed at the program office level. The agency addressed each recommendation in all 13 products. However, we found that program offices typically track the status of recommendations, rather than the DFOs. In addition, while FAC chairs were generally satisfied with the agency's management of their committees, several noted suggestions to improve the membership and meeting processes.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

To strengthen the agency's system of controls and improve public transparency, we recommend the Office of Administration and Resources Management (which houses OROM) update the *Federal Advisory Committee Handbook* to direct DFOs to keep FAC websites current with all agency responses, and to track the status of FAC recommendations; direct the FAC Division's Directors or their designees to collect feedback from FAC chairs on a regular basis; and update the FAC training materials as applicable. The agency agreed with all recommendations, and corrective actions are pending or have been completed.