REVIEW CRITERIA

NRC/IOM reports cover a broad range of topics and appear in a variety of different forms. Although no rigid set of criteria is likely to be applicable to all reports, reviewers may find the following questions useful in formulating their comments. (Separate sets of criteria are used for workshop reports/summaries and proceedings.)

1. Is the charge clearly described in the report? Are all aspects of the charge fully addressed? Do the authors go beyond their charge or their expertise?

2. Are the conclusions and recommendations adequately supported by evidence, analysis, and argument? Are uncertainties or incompleteness in the evidence explicitly recognized? If any recommendations are based on value judgments or the collective opinions of the authors, is this acknowledged and are adequate reasons given for reaching those judgments?

3. Are the data and analyses handled competently? Are statistical methods applied appropriately?

4. Are sensitive policy issues treated with care? If the report contains recommendations pertaining to the reorganization of an agency or the creation of a new institutional entity, is it specifically called for in the statement of task and are the advantages and disadvantages of alternative options, including the status quo, considered? If the report contains a budgetary recommendation, is it specifically called for in the statement of task?

5. Are the report’s exposition and organization effective? Is the title appropriate?

6. Is the report fair? Is its tone impartial and devoid of special pleading?

7. Does the summary or executive summary concisely and accurately describe the key findings and recommendations? Is it consistent with other sections of the report?

8. Are signed papers or appendices, if any, relevant to the charge? If the report relies on signed papers to support consensus findings or recommendations, do the papers meet criterion 3 above?

9. What other significant improvements, if any, might be made in the report?

In providing comments, reviewers are encouraged to distinguish issues they consider to be of general/major concern from other, less significant points.

Updated: March, 2014
GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW OF
NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL AND
INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE REPORTS

Any National Research Council (NRC) or Institute of Medicine (IOM) report (including meeting summaries, signed papers, letter reports, or other study products) must be reviewed by a diverse group of experts other than its authors before it may be released outside the institution. This independent, rigorous review is a hallmark that distinguishes the NRC/IOM from many other organizations offering scientific and technical advice on issues of national importance.

PURPOSE
The purpose of review is to assist the authors in making their report as accurate and effective as possible and to ensure that they and the NRC/IOM are credibly represented by the report published in both their names. Review not only fulfills the institutional obligation to exercise oversight, but also provides the authors with preliminary reactions from a diverse group of experts other than its authors before it may be released outside the institution. This independent, rigorous review is a hallmark that distinguishes the NRC/IOM from many other organizations offering scientific and technical advice on issues of national importance.

PROCESS
The report review process is overseen by the Report Review Committee (RRC), made up of approximately 30 members of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine. The process is managed by the division responsible for institutional oversight of the project. This division, in consultation with the RRC, appoints a group of independent reviewers with diverse perspectives on key issues considered in the report.

A draft report is sent to reviewers only after all authors have indicated that they are satisfied with its form and content. Reviewers receive the complete report (including front matter, preface, summary or executive summary, and all appendices), along with the statement of task and this brochure. Reviewers are asked to provide written comments on any and all aspects of the draft report, but to pay particular attention to the review criteria set forth in the final section of this brochure. The authors are expected to consider all review comments and to provide written responses, which are evaluated by the monitor (appointed by the RRC) and/or review coordinator (appointed by the division). A report may not be released to the sponsors or the public, nor may its findings be disclosed, until after the review process has been satisfactorily completed and all authors have approved the revised draft. Furthermore, once the review process has been successfully completed, no changes (other than minor editorial emendations) may be made to the approved text.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY
To encourage reviewers to express their views freely, the review comments are treated as confidential documents and are given to the authors of the report with identifiers removed. After submitting their comments, reviewers are asked to return or destroy the draft manuscript and to refrain from disclosing their comments or the contents of the draft. The names and affiliations of participants in the review process will be made public when the report is released (usually by acknowledgment in the printed report), but their comments remain confidential. Even after release of the report, reviewers should not divulge their comments or any changes made to the draft manuscript. These restrictions safeguard the integrity of the institutional review process.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE
The rationale for any findings, conclusions, and recommendations should be fully explained in the report. This explanation might include references to the literature, analysis of data, or a description of the pros and cons of the range of alternatives and the reasons for preferring a particular option. Failure to document conclusions and recommendations adequately is the most common shortcoming of draft reports. Of particular concern are recommendations calling for organizational changes or budgetary increases within government agencies, for adoption of specific legislation, or for additional work for the NRC/IOM. In general, such recommendations should be avoided unless specifically called for in the study charge.

SUMMARIES AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES
Every report with consensus findings and recommendations should have a brief summary or executive summary that clearly and concisely communicates the main messages of the report to the intended audiences, including non-experts and readers who do not read the full report. The summary or executive summary may not distort or go beyond the content of the report. It must clearly identify the study charge, but need not include all findings, conclusions, and recommendations. An executive summary may not exceed 1,000 words; a summary may be no longer than 5,000 words.

CONSENSUS AND DISSENT
NRC/IOM committees strive for consensus, but on rare occasion—despite extensive deliberations—one or more committee members may not concur with the views of the majority. Matters of disagreement should be addressed forthrightly in the report. As a final recourse, a committee member may choose to prepare a brief dissent (no more than 5,000 words) succinctly describing the issues of contention and the arguments in support of the minority view. This statement should be included as an appendix to the draft report, with reference to it in the introductory text and the table of contents. A dissent may not address issues outside the study charge, comment on the committee’s deliberations, misrepresent the majority’s views, or contain other inaccuracies. Any questions regarding the appropriateness of material included in a dissent are referred to the RRC co-chairs. Although reviewers’ comments on the statement are given to its author for consideration, no formal written response is required.