

ETHICS PROGRAM INSPECTION REPORT

Agency: Federal Communications Commission

Report No.: 19-26I

Date: June 20, 2019

Period Covered by Review: January 1, 2018 – December 31, 2018

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF
GOVERNMENT ETHICS


Preventing Conflicts of Interest
in the Executive Branch

1.0 AGENCY DATA		
EMPLOYEES		
1.1	Number of full-time agency employees.	1,445
1.2	Number of PAS public financial disclosure reports required to be filed.	6
1.3	Number of non-PAS public financial disclosure reports required to be filed.	77
1.4	Number of confidential financial disclosure reports required to be filed.	832
ETHICS PROGRAM		
1.5	Title of Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO).	General Counsel
1.6	Grade level of DAEO.	SES
1.7	Title of Alternate DAEO (ADAEO).	Assistant General Counsel
1.8	Grade level of ADAEO.	GS-15
1.9	Title of the primary, day-to-day ethics program administrator.	Assistant General Counsel
1.10	Grade level of the primary, day-to-day ethics program administrator.	GS-15
1.11	Current number of full-time ethics officials.	7
1.12	Current number of part-time ethics officials.	1
1.13	Number of reporting levels between the DAEO and the agency head.	1
COMMENTS		
None		

2.0 LEADERSHIP					
COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS			Yes	No	N/A
2.1	OGE has received an up-to-date designation from the agency head naming the DAEO. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.107(a).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.2	OGE has received an up-to-date designation from the agency head naming the ADAEO. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.107(a).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
COMMENTS					
None					

3.0 PUBLIC FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE (OGE Form 278e, OGE Form 278-T)					
COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS			Yes	No	N/A
The agency has written policies and procedures in place governing: <i>See</i> 5 U.S.C. app. IV, § 402(d)(1).					
3.1	• Collection of public financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.2	• Review/evaluation of public financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.3	• Public availability of public financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.4	The agency can demonstrate that late filing fees are collected or, where appropriate, waivers are issued when public filers do not timely file financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.5	Public financial disclosure reports are securely maintained. <i>See</i> OGE/GOVT-1.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

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3.6	Public financial disclosure reports are retained in accordance with the retention requirements. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.603(g)(1).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.7	There is reasonable assurance that the lead human resources official or designee promptly (no later than 15 days after appointment) notifies the DAEO of all appointments to positions that require incumbents to file public financial disclosure reports. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.105(a)(1).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.8	There is reasonable assurance that the lead human resources official or designee promptly (no later than 15 days after termination) notified the DAEO of terminations of employees in positions that require incumbents to file public financial disclosure reports. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.105(a)(2).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DATA ANALYSIS		%		
3.9	Percentage of sampled non-PAS new entrant reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(b).	15%		
3.10	Percentage of sampled non-PAS annual reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(a).	96%		
3.11	Percentage of sampled non-PAS termination reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(e).	91%		
3.12	Percentage of sampled non-PAS public financial disclosure reports reviewed within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	35%		
3.13	Percentage of sampled non-PAS public financial disclosure reports certified within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	35%		
3.14	Percentage of sampled PAS annual reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(a).	100%		
3.15	Percentage of sampled PAS termination reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.201(e).	100%		
3.16	Percentage of sampled PAS annual and termination reports reviewed within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	100%		
3.17	Percentage of sampled PAS annual and termination reports certified within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	100%		
COMMENTS				
(3.9) OGE examined the 13 non-PAS new entrant public financial disclosure reports required to be filed in 2018. Only two of the reports were filed timely. (3.12 – 3.13) The Commission’s ethics officials only reviewed and certified 17 of the 49 non-PAS public financial disclosure reports required to be filed in 2018 within 60 days of receipt.				

4.0 CONFIDENTIAL FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS		Yes	No	N/A
The agency has written policies and procedures in place governing: <i>See</i> 5 U.S.C app. IV, § 402(d)(1).				
4.1	• Collection of confidential financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2	• Review/evaluation of confidential financial disclosure reports.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.3	Confidential financial disclosure reports are securely maintained. <i>See</i> OGE/GOVT-2.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.4	Confidential financial disclosure reports are retained in accordance with the retention requirements. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.604.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.5	The agency’s OGE-approved alternative confidential financial disclosure system complies with plans approved by OGE. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.905(a).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6	There is reasonable assurance that the lead human resources official or designee promptly (no later than 15 days after appointment) notifies the DAEO of all appointments to positions that require incumbents to file confidential financial disclosure reports. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.105(a)(1).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	DATA ANALYSIS	%
4.7	Percentage of sampled confidential new entrant reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.903(b).	42%
4.8	Percentage of sampled confidential annual reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.903(a).	83%
4.9	Percentage of sampled reports reviewed within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	14%
4.10	Percentage of sampled confidential financial disclosure reports certified within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2634.605(a) and 2634.909(a).	14%
COMMENTS		
(4.7) OGE examined 19 confidential new entrant reports and found only 8 were filed timely. (4.9 – 4.10) OGE examined 43 confidential financial disclosure reports and found only 6 were reviewed and certified within 60 days of receipt.		

5.0 Notices to Prospective Employees				
	COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS	Yes	No	N/A
Written offers of employment for positions covered by the Standards of Conduct provide: <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.303.				
5.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A statement regarding the agency's commitment to government ethics. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice that the individual will be subject to the Standards of Conduct and the criminal conflict of interest statutes as an employee. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact information for an appropriate agency ethics office or an explanation of how to obtain additional information on applicable ethics requirements. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where applicable, notice of the time frame for completing initial ethics training. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where applicable, a statement regarding financial disclosure requirements and an explanation that new entrant reports must be filed within 30 days of appointment. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6	The agency has established written procedures for issuing the notice to prospective employees. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.303(c).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.7	The agency's written procedures are reviewed by the DAEO each year. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.303(c).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.8	The agency can demonstrate that there is an effective process for ensuring all covered employees receive the required information with their written offer of employment. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.303.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS				
None				

6.0 Notices to New Supervisors				
	COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS	Yes	No	N/A
The agency must provide each employee upon initial appointment to a supervisory position with: <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.306.				
6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact information for the agency's ethics office. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The text of 5 C.F.R. § 2638.103. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A copy of, a hyperlink to, or the address of a Web site containing the Principles of Ethical Conduct. 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other information the DAEO deems necessary. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6.5	The agency has established written procedures for supervisory ethics notices. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.306(d).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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6.6	The agency's written procedures are reviewed by the DAEO each year. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.306(d).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.7	The agency can demonstrate that there is an effective process for ensuring that new supervisors receive the required information within one year of appointment. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.306(b).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS				
(6.4) The DAEO did not deem it necessary to include additional information in the supervisory ethics notices.				

7.0 Initial Ethics Training						
COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS				Yes	No	N/A
Each new employee of the agency subject to the Standards of Conduct must complete initial ethics training. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304.						
7.1	The training presentation(s) addressed concepts related to conflicts of interest, impartiality, misuse of position and gifts. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(e)(1).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7.2	The agency provided new employees with either the following written materials or written instruction for accessing them: The summary of the Standards of Conduct distributed by the Office of Government Ethics or an equivalent summary prepared by the agency; provisions of any supplemental agency regulation that the DAEO determines to be relevant or a summary of those provisions; such other written materials as the DAEO determines should be included; instructions for contacting the agency's ethics officials. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(e)(2).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7.3	The agency has established written procedures for initial ethics training. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(f).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
7.4	The agency's written procedures are reviewed by the DAEO each year. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(f).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
DATA ANALYSIS				%		
7.5	Percentage of new employees who received initial ethics training. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304.	100%				
7.6	Percentage of new employees who received initial ethics training within three months of appointment. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(b).	100%				
COMMENTS						
None						

8.0 Annual Ethics Training						
COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS				Yes	No	N/A
Each calendar year, public filers, confidential filers, and certain other employees must complete ethics training which meets specified requirements. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2638.307 and 2638.308.						
8.1	The training presentation(s) addressed concepts related to financial conflicts of interest, impartiality, misuse of position and gifts. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2638.307(e)(1) and 2638.308(f)(1).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8.2	The agency provided employees with either the following written materials or written instruction for accessing them: The summary of the Standards of Conduct distributed by the Office of Government Ethics or an equivalent summary prepared by the agency; provisions of any supplemental agency regulation that the DAEO determines to be relevant or a summary of those provisions; such other written materials as the DAEO determines should be included; instructions for contacting the agency's ethics officials. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(e)(2).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8.3	The agency's annual ethics training complies with the formatting requirements for public filers, confidential filers, and certain other employees. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2638.307(d) and 2638.308(e).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
8.4	The agency's program for annual ethics training complies with the tracking requirements for public filers, confidential filers, and certain other employees. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2638.307(f) and 2638.308(g).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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8.5	The agency can demonstrate it has an effective process for ensuring covered public filers, other than those whose pay is set at Level I or Level II of the Executive Schedule, complete live annual ethics training at least once every two years. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.308(e)(2).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DATA ANALYSIS		Training Format		
		Live	Interactive	
Percentage of public filers who completed annual ethics training before the end of the calendar year. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.308(a).				
8.6	• Executive Schedule Level I and Level II. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.308(e)(1).	N/A	N/A	
8.7	• Other PAS and Equivalent. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.308(e)(2).	100%	0%	
8.8	• SES and Equivalent. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.308(e)(3).	0%	100%	
Percentage of confidential filers and certain other employees who completed annual ethics training before the end of the calendar year. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(d).				
8.9	• Employees required to file an annual confidential financial disclosure report. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(1).	0%	100%	
8.10	• Employees appointed by the President. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(2).	N/A	N/A	
8.11	• Employees of the Executive Office of the President. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(2).	N/A	N/A	
8.12	• Contracting officers described in 41 U.S.C. § 2101. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(3).	0%	100%	
8.13	• Other employees designated by the head of the agency. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(a)(4).	N/A	N/A	
COMMENTS				
(8.6 – 8.13) The Commission provides live annual ethics training to the five commissioners annually. All other employees receive interactive annual ethics training.				

9.0 ETHICS ADVICE AND COUNSELING

COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENT		Yes	No	N/A
9.1	Based on a sample collected by OGE, guidance provided by agency ethics officials to employees appears to be consistent with applicable laws and regulations. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.104(c)(4).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
COMMENTS				
None				

10.0 Special Government Employees (SGE) Serving on Advisory Committees and Boards

Confidential Financial Disclosure

10.1	Number of SGEs serving on Advisory Committees and Boards.	9
DATA ANALYSIS		%
10.2	Percentage of sampled confidential new entrant reports filed timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.903(b).	0%
10.3	Percentage of sampled reports reviewed within 60 days of receipt but not later than the SGE's first meeting. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	0%
10.4	Percentage of sampled reports certified within 60 days of receipt. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2634.605(a).	0%

Ethics Training

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COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS		Yes	No	N/A
Required ethics training must be provided to each SGE. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. §§ 2638.304 and 2638.307.				
10.5	The training presentation(s) addressed concepts related to conflicts of interest, impartiality, misuse of position and gifts. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(e)(1).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.6	The agency provided employees with either the following written materials or written instruction for accessing them: The summary of the Standards of Conduct distributed by the Office of Government Ethics or an equivalent summary prepared by the agency; provisions of any supplemental agency regulation that the DAEO determines to be relevant or a summary of those provisions; such other written materials as the DAEO determines should be included; instructions for contacting the agency's ethics officials. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(e)(2).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
DATA ANALYSIS		%		
10.7	Percentage of SGEs who received initial ethics training. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304.	0%		
10.8	Percentage of SGEs who received initial ethics training timely. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.304(b)(2).	0%		
10.9	Percentage of SGEs who received annual ethics training. <i>See</i> 5 C.F.R. § 2638.307(d)(2).	0%		
COMMENTS				
(10.1 – 10.9) The Commission's Ethics Office was unaware SGEs (unless exempted) are required to file new entrant confidential financial disclosure reports and receive ethics training annually. Therefore, no confidential financial disclosure reports were collected and no ethics training was provided in 2018.				

RECOMMENDATIONS		
#	Element	RECOMMENDATION
1	3.9, 3.12-3.13	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Ensure public financial disclosure reports are filed, reviewed, and certified timely.</p> <p><u>AGENCY RESPONSE:</u> The Commission is committed to full and complete compliance with federal financial disclosure requirements. Historically, the Commission has an excellent track record in this regard, as prior OGE audits (2004 and 2015) identified very few issues with our existing efforts.</p> <p>After the retirement of our ADAEO at the end of 2017, the Ethics Program Manager and new Assistant General Counsel and ADAEO modified several ethics program work flow processes as part of ongoing efforts to modernize and improve the efficiency of the ethics program. While these updated work flow processes improved our efficiencies in some areas, our internal audit of our workflow processes identified potential areas for improvement in our financial disclosure collection, review, and certification processes. As a result, we have altered our work flow processes for financial disclosures accordingly. In addition to work flow changes, and as we mentioned during the program review process, we have assigned more staff members to assist with the financial disclosure program going forward, and we are expanding our ethics program staff in general. Our internal audit also highlighted our need for additional, timely information from our Human Resources team with regard to internal senior-level promotions, which directly impacts the timeliness with which we assign public financial disclosure reports. Accordingly, we have worked with our Human Resources team to identify new information sharing practices that will allow us to assign public financial disclosure reports in a timely manner. Finally, we note that all reports for which certification was outstanding at the beginning of the program review process have now been reviewed and certified.</p>
2	4.7, 4.9-4.10	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Ensure confidential financial disclosure reports are filed, reviewed, and certified timely.</p> <p><u>AGENCY RESPONSE:</u> Similar to our comment regarding the public financial disclosure review process in 2018, the confidential financial disclosure program can benefit from the findings in our internal audit. Following the audit, we have altered our work flow processes for financial disclosures accordingly. The additional staffing resources that we have allocated to our financial disclosure program as well as our ongoing discussions with our Human Resources team will assist us in taking the necessary steps to ensure timely</p>

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		filing and certification of our confidential financial disclosure reports. We note that all reports for which certification was outstanding at the beginning of the program review process have now been reviewed and certified.
3	10.2	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Collect outstanding 2018 confidential new entrant reports for SGEs serving on advisory committees and boards.</p> <p><u>AGENCY RESPONSE:</u> Most of the advisory committee SGEs active in 2018 ended their terms either before or shortly after this program review in which we obtained clarification from OGE on the requirement for annual new entrant filings for multi-year SGE appointments to advisory committees. Accordingly, it is not feasible for us to obtain the late filings from the SGEs at this point. Our advisory committee terms typically run for two years, and at the time that the program review occurred, the re-chartered advisory committees were going through the new nomination process for members, including potential SGEs. Assigning and collecting late confidential financial disclosure reports during this new nomination process would have caused confusion and could inadvertently suggest to the sitting SGEs that they were being reviewed for new appointments and the DFOs were prejudging their selection. All multi-year advisory committee SGEs appointed in 2018, 2019, and future years will be required to file annual new entrant financial disclosure forms and receive annual ethics training in their second and any additional year of service.</p>
4	10.2-10.4	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Ensure confidential financial disclosure reports are filed, reviewed, and certified timely for SGEs that are required to file.</p> <p><u>AGENCY RESPONSE:</u> As was discussed during the program review process, it has now been clarified to us that we are required to re-designate SGEs serving in multi-year appointments as new entrants for financial disclosure purposes for every calendar year of their appointment. Accordingly, we are working to identify the best method for ensuring that this annual filing requirement is met.</p>
5	10.5-10.9	<p><u>RECOMMENDATION:</u> Ensure SGEs receive timely ethics training that meets all relevant requirements.</p> <p><u>AGENCY RESPONSE:</u> Similar to the financial disclosure requirement for SGEs, our team is now clear that we are required to re-assign initial ethics training to SGEs serving in multi-year appointments. We are working to identify the most efficient method of doing so going forward.</p>
OGE COMMENTS		
		OGE will conduct a follow-up review in FY2020 to assess the effectiveness of the steps FCC has taken to address the recommendations in this report.