Policy 51.212
Effective Date: November 15, 2026

TITLE: The AbilityOne Program Studies and Evaluations Program

1. PURPOSE.

To establish a policy framework for proposing, developing, approving, and executing studies and evaluations (pilot tests) in support of the AbilityOne Program (Program).

2. APPLICABILITY.

(a) This policy applies to the U.S. AbilityOne Commission (Commission) and designated central nonprofit agencies (CNAs) when studies or evaluations (as defined below) will be funded with Program Fee (in the case of the CNAs) or appropriated funds (in the case of the Commission).

(b) Studies are any projects (whether on the Procurement List (PL) or not), that are designed to gather information and research on:

i. Problems or challenges related to employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or have other significant disabilities;

ii. The development and adaptation of production (or service delivery) methods that would enable improved employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities, or

iii. Any other matters related to the efficient operation and modernization of the AbilityOne Program.

(c) Evaluations (pilot tests) involve new or existing products and services on the PL and are a demonstration (or method of testing) with metrics, designed to address one or more potential changes or solutions to:

i. Problems or challenges related to employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or have other significant disabilities;

ii. The development and adaptation of production (or service delivery) methods that would enable improved employment opportunities for individuals who are blind or have significant disabilities, or

iii. Any other matters related to the efficient operation and modernization of the AbilityOne Program.

(d) This policy pertains to new studies and evaluations starting or approved after the effective date of this policy.

(e) This policy does not apply to informational surveys not connected to an underlying study or evaluation. Additionally, surveys or preliminary research carried out for the sole purpose of exploring the feasibility of a potential study or evaluation are also exempt from the procedures described at section 7 of this policy.

3. AUTHORITY.

(a) 41 U.S.C. 8503(e), Javits-Wagner-O'Day (JWOD) Act

(b) 41 C.F.R. 51-2.2, Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled

4. DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS.

Definitions, abbreviations, and acronyms frequently used throughout this policy system are provided in U.S. AbilityOne Commission Policy 51.102, Definitions of Terms.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES.

(a) The Commission will:

i. Approve the evaluative criteria to be used for applicable studies and evaluations;

ii. Provide the strategic direction and programmatic priorities for the AbilityOne Program Studies and Evaluations Program; and

iii. Approve or disapprove, through written vote letter, all studies or evaluations in support of the AbilityOne Program, except when that authority has been delegated to the Executive Director.

(b) The Executive Director shall:

i. Provide general oversight for the administration of the AbilityOne Program Studies and Evaluations Program, delegating study-level or pilot test-level monitoring to senior Commission staff members as appropriate;

ii. Provide a recommendation to the Commission for any study or evaluation that requires a written vote letter;

iii. Approve or disapprove studies or evaluations within the approval authority of the Executive Director, in writing;

iv. Provide quarterly updates to the Commission on the status of all active studies and evaluations; and

v. Provide an annual report to the Commission on the status of all active and completed (within the last fiscal year) studies and evaluations.

(c) The General Counsel shall:

i. Determine the legal sufficiency of all studies and evaluations before such requests are submitted to the Commission or Executive Director for approval; and

ii. Ensure that all Commission-approved changes to policies based on the results of a completed study or evaluation are promptly implemented.

(d) The Director of Business Operations shall:

i. Support the voting process for those studies and evaluations that require Commission approval through a written vote letter; and

ii. Ensure that pilot test records are filed with the appropriate Procurement List Information Management System (PLIMS) administrative files.

(di) The CNAs shall:

i. Ensure that all CNA-initiated studies or evaluations are aligned with the Commission's Strategic Plan and have been properly coordinated with the Commission staff;

ii. Ensure that all requests to conduct studies and evaluations in support of the AbilityOne Program follow the procedures outlined in this policy;

iii. Execute studies and evaluations in a fair and equitable manner; and

iv. Report all findings and recommendations of all studies and evaluations initiated by and/or overseen by the CNA in accordance with the terms described in the Cooperative Agreement.

6. POLICY.

It is the policy of the Commission to not only improve the AbilityOne Program now, but to explore ways to improve the Program for the benefit of current and future participating employees. With that policy goal in mind, the priority for studies and evaluations in support of this Program will be given to projects that broaden and improve the career development opportunities for the greatest number of participating employees, and initiatives that promote the long-term interest and attractiveness of the AbilityOne Program throughout the Federal Government (e.g., best value, greater innovation, improved efficiency, etc.).

7. PROCEDURES.

(a) **Proposal Development Process** – The process for developing and seeking approval for a study or an evaluation is a multiphase process consisting of (1) the development stage, (2) the project review stage, and (3) the final decision. Before a project is initiated, the proponent must ensure that time has been built in to complete the vetting process before the anticipated start date. The standards for each phase are described as follows:

i. Proposal Development – The proponent of a study or evaluation (hereinafter referred to as a project) must complete a Project Proposal Form no later than 12 months before the start date of the project. Note: A proposal may be submitted less than 12 months before the start date on an exception basis for emerging initiatives where time is of the essence. The proposal must describe the purpose, oversight parameters, performance measures/metrics, and the goal(s) of the project. The Commission will consider the following types of proposals:

1. *CNA-Initiated or CNA-Sponsored*: Project proposals initiated by a CNA will go through the vetting process described in this policy and any additional terms outlined in its corresponding Cooperative Agreement. NPAs may also develop a project proposal, but any project proposed by an NPA must first be submitted to its designated CNA for initial consideration. If the CNA accepts the NPA's proposal, the project will be submitted to the Commission as a CNA-sponsored proposal. If a CNA rejects an NPA proposal, the CNA must provide a written decision letter to the NPA explaining the basis for rejection, suggestions on how to cure any defects (if possible), and the steps for submitting its project as a non-sponsored proposal.
2. *Non-Sponsored*: If a CNA rejects an NPA proposal, the NPA project may be resubmitted by the NPA to the Commission as a non-sponsored proposal. However, the Commission will only consider non-sponsored proposals if the NPA submission includes a CNA letter rejecting sponsorship, efforts to address CNA concerns (if possible), and that the proposal can be shown to have broad application (relevance) for the Program. Proposals that appear to address process issues limited to a specific NPA or a small group of NPAs will not be approved.
3. *Commission Interest*: The Commission staff may initiate a project proposal in accordance with the procedures in this policy. Commission projects must be submitted through and obtain concurrence from a Commission Director, before such projects are routed to the Director of Business Operations for review.

ii. Project Proposal Review –All proposals must be submitted to the Director of Business Operations or the Executive Director's designated point of contact. The Commission will accept and review project proposals during one of two designated review periods:

1. *Review Periods*.
   a. Winter Review: Proposal must be received no later than November 15, with a decision occurring no later than February 15.
   b. Summer Review: Proposal must be received no later than June 15, with a decision occurring no later than September 15.
   c. Extensions: The Executive Director, through a written memorandum, may extend the decision date for project proposals or give Commission members additional time for discussions.
2. *Standard of Review*.
   a. Timeliness: A submission submitted after the start of the review period deadline is considered untimely and will not be considered during the current review period. Untimely proposals will automatically be considered during the next review period, unless the proposal is withdrawn.

b. Completeness: The Project Proposal Form must be completed and contain enough information for the reviewing authority to determine project applicability. If a project is rejected for incompleteness, it will not be reconsidered during the review period in which it was rejected. However, corrections may be made for submission before the next review window. Minor technical corrections may be made and resubmitted during the same review period at the discretion of the Director of Business Operations.

c. Applicability: A project must meet the applicability standards described in Section 6(b) of this policy. Prioritization will be given to projects that directly support objectives described in the Commission's Strategic Plan. If a project is deemed "inapplicable," it is considered rejected. All applicable projects will be forwarded to the approval authority for consideration.

d. Conditions: If a project is otherwise acceptable, but the Director of Business Operations (or delegate) determines that additional safeguards are needed, the proposal will be forwarded to the approval authority with the additional conditions included. However, if the proponent of the proposal determines that the additional conditions are unacceptable, the proposal may be withdrawn at any point before a formal decision has been made.

iii. Approval Authority – The Executive Director is the approval authority for all projects except the following:

1. CNA-initiated or CNA-sponsored studies beyond the scope of the objectives described in the Cooperative Agreement. The Agreements Officer shall make the determination about which products are within the scope of the Cooperative Agreement.
2. Any Commission-based project if the anticipated cost is expected to be greater than $750,000 in appropriated funds. If the project is done in conjunction with another agency or a non-Governmental entity, only the agency's contribution will be considered for approval purposes.

iv. Decision Memo – All proposals requiring Commission approval shall be routed to the Commission via a decision document. The Commission shall issue a decision letter outlining whether the project is approved or rejected. Each decision letter shall, at a minimum, contain the following components:

1. A statement of approval or disapproval.
2. If disapproved by the Executive Director, the letter shall state the basis for disapproval. If the Commission disapproved the project through a written vote letter, a basis for disapproval may or may not be provided.
3. If approved:
   a. The length of the project
   b. Standards for measurement

c. Monitoring and oversight requirements

d. Reporting requirements and any other conditions

(b) **Project Completion** – Once a project is complete, the proponent must submit a final report to the Director of Business Operations within 60 days of the project completion date. The Director of Business Operations can extend the submission time by up to 60 days, but any extensions beyond that must be approved by the Executive Director.

(c) **Finalization and Publication** – A project may not be finalized and publicized as an "approved" AbilityOne project until the Director of Strategic Communications has reviewed the final product, and the Executive Director has approved the document for release.

8. EXCEPTIONS.

As stated in Section 2 of this policy, informational surveys (including data calls) that are unrelated to a project defined therein are not subject to the approval requirements of this policy. Projects funded by other than Program Fee are not subject to this policy.

Contributions by a CNA to third-party research in the field of blindness or disability employment up to a de minimis threshold may be reviewed and approved by the Executive Director on an off-cycle and/or expedited basis.

Other exceptions to this policy may be granted by the AbilityOne Commission Chairperson. However, exceptions to Section 7 (Procedures) are permitted with written approval from the Executive Director. Additionally, any responsibilities assigned to the Executive Director may also be delegated in accordance with Commission Policy 51.205, Delegation of Authority to Executive Director.

9. SUPERSESSION.

None.

APPROVED: Christina Brandt Signed: November 12, 2026
Christina Brandt
Chairperson