

## Program Evaluation Division

The Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) is the auditor of Minnesota state government. OLA examines the financial operations of state agencies and the performance of state-funded or state-authorized programs.\* OLA conducts audits, evaluations, and investigations, and it reports the results to the Minnesota Legislature.

### Mission

OLA's mission is to strengthen legislative oversight, improve accountability, promote good management, and enhance program effectiveness in state government.

### Goal

OLA's goal is to issue reports that are accurate, objective, timely, and useful.

### Nonpartisan

OLA provides state officials and the public with a valuable resource—reliable, nonpartisan information about the performance and financial condition of state government.

\* OLA is distinct from the Office of the State Auditor, a Constitutional office headed by an elected official. That office conducts audits of local governments.

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For more information about OLA, report copies, or a list of work in progress, visit:

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## Program Evaluation Division

The Program Evaluation Division was established in 1975. Legislators wanted to expand OLA's ability to examine the management of state agencies and the cost-effectiveness of state-funded programs. [\*Minnesota Statutes, 3.971, subd. 7\*](#), directs the division to:

...determine the degree to which the activities and programs entered into or funded by the state are accomplishing their goals and objectives, including a critical analysis of goals and objectives, measurement of program results and effectiveness, alternative means of achieving the same results, and efficiency in the allocation of resources.

## Legislative Audit Commission

OLA works with many legislators and legislative committees, but it directly reports to the Legislative Audit Commission. The commission is bicameral and bipartisan, with equal representation from the House and Senate and the two major political parties.

One of the commission's most important responsibilities is to appoint the Legislative Auditor, who serves a six-year term. The commission also approves topics for OLA to evaluate and may request specific audits or investigations.

## Program Evaluation Topic Selection

According to [\*Minnesota Statutes, 3.971, subd. 7\*](#), the Legislative Audit Commission (LAC) may direct the Legislative Auditor to evaluate any state or metropolitan department or agency, and "any program or activity established or funded, in whole or in part, by the state."

- The LAC solicits ideas from all legislators regarding potential programs for evaluation. Anyone may suggest a topic for program evaluation.
- The LAC Evaluation Subcommittee selects 15 evaluation topics for further consideration. Staff develop background papers on these topics.
- The LAC Evaluation Subcommittee selects 10 "semi-finalist" evaluation topics. OLA surveys all legislators to measure their interest in the semi-finalist topics.
- The Evaluation Subcommittee recommends five to seven topics for evaluation.
- The full LAC approves or modifies the Evaluation Subcommittee's recommendations.

In selecting topics, the LAC considers factors such as:

- Legislative interest
- State resources
- Potential for improvement

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## Evaluation Fieldwork

During fieldwork, evaluators interview agency staff and other stakeholders, observe operations, and collect and analyze data. OLA staff may conduct additional activities—such as literature reviews, surveys, or legal research—that are necessary to develop and support evaluation findings.

## Evaluation Reports

Evaluations may address a range of issues. For example, evaluations may examine compliance with the law, program outcomes, or operational efficiency. In its reports, OLA makes recommendations for improvement to both agency officials and the Legislature.

While the Legislative Audit Commission selects evaluation topics, evaluations are conducted independently by OLA's professional staff, and the resulting reports are solely the responsibility of OLA. Legislators do not review OLA reports before they are made public by the Office of the Legislative Auditor.

## Report Releases

OLA often releases its reports at meetings of the Legislative Audit Commission. In addition, OLA staff often present reports to House and Senate committees with jurisdiction over the agency or program reviewed.

## For Agencies or Others Subject to Examination

### Your Cooperation

State law requires organizations and individuals subject to OLA examination to cooperate fully with the office. That includes providing OLA staff with access to all data and documents, even those classified by law as "not public." If cooperation is not forthcoming, OLA has legal authority to compel cooperation through subpoenas.

Before OLA releases an evaluation report, your organization will have the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. OLA staff may make changes to the draft based on your comments to ensure accuracy and fairness. After changes have been made, your organization will be asked to write a response letter that will be published with the final report. In these cases, your organization will have the opportunity to respond after OLA's presentation.

### Follow Up

OLA may contact your organization several months after an evaluation has been completed to learn if the organization has made any changes in response to the evaluation.

## Recent Evaluation Reports

### 2024

*Department of Human Services Licensing Division: Support to Counties  
Grant Award Processes  
Metro Mobility  
Minnesota Housing Finance Agency: Down Payment Assistance  
Worker Misclassification*

### 2023

*Oversight of State-Funded Grants to Nonprofit Organizations  
RentHelpMN  
Southwest Light Rail Transit Construction: Metropolitan Council Decision Making  
Southwest Light Rail Transit Construction: Metropolitan Council Oversight of  
Contractors  
State Programs That Support Minnesotans on the Basis of Racial, Ethnic,  
or American Indian Identity  
Sustainable Building Guidelines*

### 2022

*Child Protection Removals and Reunifications  
Department of Commerce's Civil Insurance Complaint Investigations  
Emergency Ambulance Services  
Minnesota Department of Education's Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap  
Petroleum Remediation Program  
Unemployment Insurance Program: Efforts to Prevent and Detect the Use of  
Stolen Identities*

### 2021

*Board of Cosmetology Licensing  
Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC)  
Grant Program  
Driver Examination Stations  
MnDOT Workforce and Contracting Goals*

### 2020

*Compensatory Education Revenue  
Department of Human Rights: Complaint Resolution Process  
DHS Oversight of Personal Care Assistance  
Pesticide Regulation  
Public Utilities Commission's Public Participation Processes  
Safety in State Correctional Facilities*