

EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

The NIH Executive Secretariat (ES) is located organizationally within the Immediate Office of the Director, NIH.

Mission

ES manages the flow of written communication to and from the NIH Director and Deputy Director. We screen, assign for information or action, and keep official records of correspondence involving

- the public,
- academia,
- Congress,
- the White House,
- foreign heads of state and their representatives,
- the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services,
- other government agencies,
- and NIH staff.

In addition, ES manages all congressional mail to senior staff members in the Institutes and Centers (ICs) and the Office of the Director (OD).

During the 2013 calendar year, ES managed over 10,000 new pieces of correspondence.

ES comprises an extensive information management continuum using electronic workflow (DDRMS) to

- assign correspondence within NIH;
- track the status of actions related to this correspondence;
- obtain digital signatures;
- manage the official records of the NIH Director and Deputy Director as required by the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and NIH;
- and respond to requests for information from Congress, members of the public (FOIAs), other Government entities, and related to legal matters.

Functions

“Honest broker” function

ES ensures that the NIH Director and Deputy Director have the benefit of all relevant trans-NIH points of view before signing documents that establish or affect NIH policy. We serve as a key information source for IC Directors and OD staff. ES ensures that the NIH Deputy Director clears or sees documents for the Director's signature before it goes to the Director.

Information Management Continuum

ES ensures completion of an appropriate response to any correspondence to the NIH Director and Deputy Director that requires one. When the appropriate response is a document for signature by the NIH Director or Deputy Director, ES ensures the accuracy and quality of that response by coordinating substantive review and clearance of the document by all involved NIH components and editorial review within ES. After the response has been sent, ES continues to manage the record of all documents signed by

the Director and Deputy Director and other important documents for their complete life cycle. If signed within an IC or OD office, that entity must maintain the files.

In an effort to constantly improve the way we do business, ES continues to employ the latest document management technology. We have been on the leading edge of this technology for the past decade.

Records Management

The ES continues to manage the documents described above by adhering to records management requirements as set forth by the NIH Records Management Officer, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). ES classifies each record according to a highly complex subject-index, determines the legal record retention period, and associates keywords in the electronic system of files (containing more than one million scanned pages). We maintain these electronic files and more than four million pages of paper files with the multiple purposes of serving the information needs of the NIH Director and his immediate staff. Accurate records management also provides the ability for ES to identify and produce documents, on behalf of the NIH Director, in response to congressional, FOIA, litigation, and other document search requests including those received from the Director or other NIH officials.

What Constitutes a Record? A Federal record is any documentary material, regardless of form, produced or received by a Federal agency or official in connection with the conduct of agency business that provides evidence of the functions, mission, organization, and activities of the agency.

Records include, but are not limited to:

- Questions or issues needing referral to other ICs, HHS, or other agencies
- Media issues or potential media issues
- Issues that require a decision
- NIH and its relation to outside organizations
- Opinions about a decision that affects ICs, Offices, or NIH in general
- Congressional real or potential issues
- Plans to collaborate efforts with other ICs, Government, or private entities
- Invitations to events
- Recommendations and updates on IC business, events, or issues
- Staffing or organizational issues
- Reports or updates on meetings attended
- Information about research initiatives
- Staffing or organizational issues

NIH Director's Speeches

ES coordinates the preparation of speeches for the NIH Director, working closely with OCPL staff. We assign a lead IC or OD Office to prepare talking points, briefing/background information, and/or slides that OCPL staff uses to draft speeches. In the past several years, ES has coordinated the preparation of over 100 speeches each year.

NIH Director's Meeting Materials

ES coordinates the preparation of briefing materials for a large portion of the NIH Director's meetings. We assign, collect, and coordinate meeting materials to ensure that the Director is fully prepared for his/her meetings with NIH staff, OS staff, staff from other Federal agencies, Congressional members and staffers, and public and professional organizations and constituencies.

"Invitation" Processing

Outreach to the ICs and OD Offices

To help ensure good communication with NIH staff involved in correspondence processing NIH-wide, ES holds semiannual meetings with all correspondence contacts to discuss new policies and procedures, identify and address issues as they arise, and collaboratively seek ways to improve processes. We also have periodic meetings on topics of special interest to the group, such as how to improve our electronic document workflow procedures. Our ES Web site at <http://execsec.od.nih.gov/> contains a number of resources for NIH-wide use.

Legislatively mandated reports to Congress

ES tracks, edits, reviews, clears, and submits—to Congress or to the Secretary for his transmittal—all NIH congressional reports except those required by Appropriations Committees. Although recently at the request of the Office of Budget, we have started tracking the Director's signature on these reports as well.

Archives Project

ES has been working with an outside contractor to digitize the more than four million pages of records stored in the subject files in the basement of Building 1. The objective is to make all permanent records electronically available.

NIH Director's personal written correspondence

ES drafts personal correspondence for the NIH Director, such as letters or memos requesting or following up on meetings; letters or memos intended to establish or maintain relationships with high-level officials in Government, academia, or the research community; or any other correspondence specifically requested by the Director that doesn't fall specifically within the purview of an IC or other OD Staff Office.

Announcements and other Communications to NIH Leadership or All NIH Staff

The ES drafts and clears with the relevant officials announcements by the NIH Director and Deputy Director of significant personnel appointments, transitions, etc. On announcements of this type, as well as announcements drafted by an IC or other OD Office, ES staff work closely with staff in the component or components involved to ensure release of information is coordinated with related actions.

Secretary's Monthly Report, Cabinet Report, White House Policy Calendar.

Weekly, ES contacts information offices and key staff NIH-wide to gather information on events and activities of significance that merits inclusion in the Cabinet Report, compiles them, and submits them to OS for this report. ES also gathers information monthly from the NIH Executive Committee for the Secretary's Monthly Report and the bi-weekly for the White House Policy Calendar. Each of these reports contains a bit of different information and is shared with a different set of staff at HHS and the White House. The ES sends specific instructions for each report.