Results For America And Urban Institute Present

Evidence Capacity Assessments: Opportunities To Strengthen Agency Evidence Strategies

Federal Evidence Forum Workshop
May 15, 2020
Housekeeping

- Webinar is being recorded
- The recording and slides will be shared after the webinar
- All participants are muted
- Type your questions or comments into the QA box at any time. Be sure to include your name and organization
Building Evidence Capacity in Federal Agencies

Demetra Smith Nightingale
Urban Institute
Federal Evidence Forum Workshop
May 15, 2020
Overview

- Organizational capacity assessment generally
- Federal agency evidence capacity overall
- OMB guidance for assessing research, evaluation, statistics, and analysis capacity
- Summary and suggestions
What is an organizational capacity assessment?

- A systematic review and assessment of an organization’s staff, systems, functions, activities, and resources
- Results can be used to develop plans to strengthen capacity by:
  - Identifying strengths, challenges, gaps
  - Updating, modifying, or establishing functions, activities, procedures
What does a general organizational capacity assessment involve?

• No “cookie cutter” approach or tool
  • High quality assessment must be tailored to, and reflect, the organizational context (e.g., organizational structure, mission, resources, staffing, authority, experience, stage of development)

• Various approaches are used, such as:
  • Surveys of, or focus group discussions, with staff, colleagues, administrators, customers, users, internal and external stakeholders to gauge feedback and perspectives
  • Reviews of existing products (e.g., plans, evaluation reports, websites, data, documents, materials)
  • Formal organizational studies by an internal or external consultant or management specialist with agency knowledge
Evidence = Evaluation + Statistical Analysis + Other Research + Performance Management
What is federal evidence capacity broadly?

- **High caliber activities**: An agency’s ability to carry out strong, efficient, effective practices and activities for all types of evidence.

- **Contextual relevance**: Activities related to evaluation, research, data, statistics are in sync with the organizational context, which includes:
  - Evidence roles and responsibilities (e.g., at departmental vs. agency vs. subagency levels)
  - Resources (e.g., evaluation and data specialists vs. generalists; dedicated/appropriated funding vs. project funding)
  - Statutory mandates for evaluations and research
  - Organizational authority/structure (centralized federal operations vs. field operations; permanent program vs. grant programs)
  - Experience with evaluation and research in the evaluation offices, sub-agencies, and the field (stage of development)

- **Evidence culture**: A culture of evidence and learning exists or is developed throughout an agency; understanding the value of rigorous research to achieving mission(s)
OMB guidance for assessing capacity

- Assess capacity in the three key evidence areas: **statistics, evaluation, research & other analysis**
- Led by Evaluation Officer in conjunction with Statistical Officer, Chief Data Officer and others
- Use 5 general criteria in the assessment:
  - Coverage
  - Quality
  - Methods
  - Effectiveness
  - Independence
- Guidance lists a number of practices; opportunity for agencies to also assess other evidence-related functions
- Consider agency-specific context to build and strengthen quality and role of evidence—**no single framework or template**
Relevant OMB Documents

- Update to OMB Circular A-11, Part 6, Section 290 (Evaluation and Evidence-building Activities)
- M-19-18 (Federal Data Strategy Framework)
- M-19-23 (Phase 1 Implementation of the Evidence Act)
- M-20-12 (Program Evaluation Standards and Practices)
# Practices & Standards

## Evaluation, Research & Analysis

**Practices & Activities Categories**
- Build and maintain evaluation capacity
- Use expert consultation effectively
- Establish, implement, and widely disseminate an agency evaluation policy
- Pre-specify evaluation design and methods
- Engage key stakeholders meaningfully
- Plan dissemination strategically
- Take steps to ensure ethical treatment of participants
- Foster and steward data management for evaluation
- Make evaluation data available for secondary use
- Establish and uphold policies and procedures to protect independence and objectivity

**Standards & Principles:**
- Relevance and utility
- Rigor
- Independence and objectivity
- Transparency
- Ethics

## Statistics/Data, Research & Analysis

**Practices & Activities Categories**
- Building a culture that values data and promotes public use
- Governing, managing and protecting data
- Promoting efficient and appropriate data use

**Standards & Principles:**
- Ethical governance
- Conscious design
- Learning culture
Summary Points

• The main purpose of an evidence capacity assessment is to strengthen and institutionalize statistics, evaluation, research and analysis practices—to be more evidence-based and have a culture of evidence

• OMB guidance calls for an interim assessment approach in 2020. My suggestions:
  • Use this opportunity to consider how to strengthen your evidence policy and approaches--not just to meet OMB requirement
  • There is no single way or template for the 2020 capacity assessment—tailor it to the organization’s context
  • Not all practices necessarily must be assessed at once—set feasible priorities for this first phase and gauge your progress
Contact Information

Demetra Smith Nightingale
Institute Fellow
Urban Institute
dnightingale@urban.org

Urban Institute Federal Evaluation Forum Webpage:
https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/evidence-based-policy-capacity/federal-evaluation-forum
PANEL DISCUSSION

Kelly Fitzsimmons, Project Evident
Susan Jenkins, Administration on Community Living
Christina Yancey, US Department of Labor

Moderator: Jed Herrmann, Results for America
Q & A

Kelly Fitzsimmons, Project Evident
Susan Jenkins, Administration on Community Living
Christina Yancey, US Department of Labor

Moderators:
Jed Herrmann, Results for America
Molly Scott, Urban Institute
RESULTS FOR AMERICA AND THE URBAN INSTITUTE PRESENT

EVIDENCE CAPACITY ASSESSMENTS: OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN AGENCY EVIDENCE STRATEGIES

Urban Institute
Federal Evidence Forum Workshop
May 15, 2020