Learning Agendas & Evidence to Inform Programs and Policies

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Overview

• Latest update on Federal evidence-based policy activity

• Ways agencies can strengthen their use of evidence
  ➢ Use systematic process for evaluation plans and learning agendas
  ➢ Have an Evaluation Policy Statement
  ➢ Incorporate evidence into Performance Plans, Strategic Plans, and Budget submissions and justifications

• Urban Institute Federal Evaluation Forum
  ➢ Webinars, workshops, conferences
  ➢ https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/evidence-based-policy-capacity
Guidance, laws

- Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act 2010 (following GPRA and PART) (Strategic Priorities and Cross-agency Priorities)
- Several OMB Guidances (2009-2017)
  - Evidence-based budget submissions
  - Evidence and innovation emphasis
  - Use of statistical and administrative data for statistical activities (including evaluations) (M-14-06)
- White House Budget Documents (FY 2010-2017; FY2018 and FY2019)
- Report of the Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission (9/2017)
- OMB Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Foreign Assistance Agencies (2/2018)
- *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018*
- OMB’s draft *Federal Data Strategy Action Plan* (2019) [Federal Register notice issued by the Department of Commerce (84 FR 25730)]
Evidence = Program Evaluation + Performance Monitoring + Research & Statistical Analysis (+Experiential)
Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act & Draft Data Action Plan

• **Learning Agenda.** Requires a multi-year “systematic” plan (Learning Agenda) to identify and address key research/evaluation questions related to policies, programs, regulations; and with input from stakeholders.

• **Evaluation Plan.** Requires an “evaluation plan” about how the key questions will be addressed; broad definition of “evaluation.”

• **Senior Chief Officers.** Requires each agency to have an Evaluation Officer and a Statistical Officer (in the statistical unit) who, among other duties coordinate in developing the learning agenda and evaluation plan; requires a Chief Data Officer for data access and privacy.

• **Data Access and Privacy.** Requires federal data be publicly available (as the default) with privacy and confidentiality provisions; and develop, maintain and update a data inventory.

• **Evidence Capacity.** Agency activities (e.g., plans, clearinghouses) and cross-agency coordination (e.g., data access, data synchronization, open data, joint studies and evaluation).

***NO SINGLE WAY THAT ALL AGENCIES MUST PROCEED***
## General types of evaluations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Evaluation</th>
<th>Recognizable Features</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Net Impact Analysis</td>
<td>Causal impact; Random assignment; control group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quasi/non-experimental Net Impact Analysis</td>
<td>Causal impact; multivariate statistical modeling; comparison group(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost-Benefit/Cost-effectiveness Analysis</td>
<td>Cost analysis, ROI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistical, Performance and Outcome Analysis</td>
<td>Program outcome analysis and performance measurement; participant tracking; statistical simulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementation &amp; Process Analysis/Implementation Science</td>
<td>Field-based organizational analysis; program and service descriptions; observational analysis; surveys; qualitative &amp; quantitative analysis</td>
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Many Agencies Have Evaluation or Research Policy Statements

• Principles now common across agencies:
  • Rigor
  • Relevance
  • Transparency
  • Independence
  • Ethics

• Agency-tailored (department-wide or sub agency):
  • Concise (e.g., ~1 page)
  • Agreed upon/cleared
  • Consistent application agency-wide

• Urban Institute report on strengthening evidence culture in federal agencies (agency policy statement examples on p.8)
  https://www.urban.org/research/publication/building-evidence-culture-and-capacity-federal-agencies
Sample Learning Agenda Components

- **Multi-year Learning Agenda** required and included in agency’s strategic plan
  - Can be developed subagency and rolled up to agency
  - Within the agency or subagency can update annually to remain relevant, reprioritize, etc.

- **Learning Priorities**: key topics/issues/questions for research or evaluation (~ 3-5 per subagency/agency), e.g.:
  - A. Performance issues (e.g., factors associated with particular outcomes for particular agency or program)
  - B. Program operational issues (e.g., impact/effectiveness of particular strategies/services/programs; exploratory studies)
  - C. Special initiatives (e.g., effect of new or proposed initiative or program; background analysis)
  - D. Evidence-building issues (e.g., cross-agency data sharing, analytic skills, topical briefings, TA/training, data access, data synchronization, methods, coordination)
Evaluation Plan Outline/Categories

• Annual Evaluation Plan specifies studies and evaluations that are planned to address priority questions in the Learning Agenda

• Agency Evaluation Plan to be included in Performance Plan but subagencies can (and should) have evaluation plans.

• Sample Outline/Categories of studies for evaluation plan:

  I. **Statistical and Analytic Studies** (e.g., economic/demographic statistical analysis, simulations, evaluability assessments, implementation evaluations, background analysis)

  II. **Performance Analysis** (e.g., statistical analysis of activity, outputs/outcomes, performance and metrics)

  III. **Basic Evaluations** (e.g., descriptive statistical analysis of program activities, trends, costs, services, performance/organizational assessments)

  IV. **Impact Evaluations** (causal [net] impact studies, experimental or non-experimental, clinical trials)

  V. **Capacity-building Activities** (e.g., logic models, open data principles, learning agendas, methodological skills, data integration/synchronization, evidence-based clearinghouses, research registries/archives, staff seminars, internships, evaluation TA, cross-departmental collaborations)
Ways to Obtain Stakeholder Input for Evaluation Plans/Agendas

• Internal stakeholders
  - Collaborative effort of program/operational offices and evaluation specialists (webinars, requests for priorities/interests)
  - Field office input (either at initial stage or to review drafts)
  - Agency leadership input

• External stakeholders
  - Congressional committees; OMB offices (retain inquiries)
  - Research/academic community (Request for Information, webinars)
  - Public comment (e.g., Request for Information, or public notice of draft plan in Federal Register)
  - Optional contractor assistance to obtain and compile stakeholder input
Ways to Include Evidence in Budgeting

• Agency/program budget requests
  ➢ Include a chapter (or section) in your budget submission to OMB
  ➢ Cite relevant findings from research or evaluation for new budget requests
  ➢ Indicate evidence-building when possible
  ➢ Consider tiered funding for discretionary grants when possible (e.g., higher grant amounts for scale-up replication of evidence-based strategy; basic grant amount for innovation with rigorous evaluation to test concept or effectiveness)

• Budget requests for evaluations and analysis
  ➢ Include an evidence chapter in budget submission
  ➢ Include an evidence chapter in Strategic Plan
  ➢ Align evaluations to strategic priorities
  ➢ Consider cross-agency priorities and cross-agency evidence-building (e.g., data synchronization/data access)
  ➢ Consider budget request for capacity-building (e.g., clearinghouses, fellowships, staff development, data analytics/sciences)
  ➢ Consider creative/flexible funding mechanisms (e.g., set asides, IAAs)
Urban Institute Federal Evaluation Workshop Series

- Facilitates an exchange of information across agencies to share lessons and practices
  - Building evidence
  - Expanding rigorous analysis
  - Using results of evaluations and evidence in decision-making and management
  - Strengthening an evidence culture

- Sessions cover issues at different points on the continuum
- Options to participate via Webinar or phone
Information and Contact

- Demetra Nightingale  dnightingale@urban.org
- Urban Institute web site  https://www.urban.org/
- Evidence Capacity-building page  https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/evidence-based-policy-capacity