Using Evidence for Program and Policy Decisions

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Overview

• Vision, definitions, and concepts
• Latest update on Federal evidence-based policy activity
• Ways agencies can strengthen their use of evidence
  ➢ Have an Evaluation Policy Statement
  ➢ Establish/review evaluation offices’ responsibilities
  ➢ Use systematic process for evaluation plans and learning
  ➢ Promote adoption of evidence-based strategies
  ➢ Incorporate evidence into 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
Vision, definitions, and concepts

- 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)
- *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* (passed Senate 11/2017)
- OMB Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Foreign Assistance Agencies (2/2018)
Latest developments

• Commission recommendations
• *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* (pending)
• White House FY 2018 and FY 2019 Budgets
Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Recommendations

- 22 Recommendations in 4 categories
  - Secure access to private and confidential data
  - Modernize data security for evidence/research purposes
  - Implement a National Secure Data Service for research/evidence use
  - Strengthen Federal evidence-building capacity (5 recommendations)
    - Chief Evaluation Officer in each department
    - Develop learning agendas in departments to generate and use evidence
    - Improve coordination and cross-agency evidence activities
    - Align administrative processes (e.g., PRA, ICR, procurement) to facilitate generation of evidence
    - Ensure sufficient resources to implement these recommendations
“Foundations” Act

- Strengthen data privacy and security protections
- Streamline data access for research and evaluation
- Assign in every department a senior officer for data stewardship
- Clarify federal statistical, responsibilities, policies; and increase public information and trust
- Establish a committee to advise on the National Secure Data Service
- Establish Chief Evaluation Officers in every department
- Develop “learning agendas” to identify evidence-building priorities and needs
- Coordinate evidence-building activities across government
Evidence = Program Evaluation + Performance Monitoring + Research & Statistical Analysis (+Experiential)
### Types of Departmental-level Evaluation Offices

| Broad Evaluation Office (mid-size and small departments) | **Responsibility**: Provides expertise, coordination & guidance on evaluation policies and activities department-wide; funds/directs many evaluations; develops plan/agenda; dissemination  
**Autonomy**: Office leads an independent evaluation-only (or primarily) office and dedicated evaluation staff  
**Funding**: Dedicated funding for evaluation staff and evaluations  
**Sub agency role**: Sub agencies may also have evaluation offices and $ |
|---|---|
| Coordinating Evaluation Office (large departments) | **Responsibility**: Provides expertise, coordination & guidance on evaluation policies and activities department-wide; funds/directs few if any evaluations  
**Autonomy**: Office leads an evaluation-only (or primarily) office; small staff; helps establish planning/agenda and dissemination processes  
**Funding**: Minimal if any dedicated funding for evaluation  
**Sub agency role**: Sub agencies have main responsibility and $ for evaluations |
| Facilitating Evaluation Office | **Responsibility**: Provides expertise, coordination & guidance on evaluation policies & activities department-wide; funds/directs few if any evaluations; helps establish planning/agenda & dissemination processes  
**Autonomy**: Office and staff have evaluation responsibilities and other related responsibilities (e.g., planning, policy, performance, budgeting)  
**Funding**: Minimal if any dedicated funding for evaluation  
**Sub agency role**: Sub agencies have main responsibility and $ for evaluations |
Evaluation Policy Statement

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

• Principles:
  ➢ Rigor
  ➢ Relevance
  ➢ Transparency
  ➢ Independence
  ➢ Ethics

• New report on strengthening evidence culture (agency policy statement examples on p.8)
  https://www.urban.org/research/publication/building-evidence-culture-and-capacity-federal-agencies

• CDC’s TREND Statement, Evidence Continuum, research Compendia
Develop learning agendas/evaluation plans

- Systematic plans for evaluations and other research and analysis
- Multi-year, updated annually (working document for internal use)
- Can include capacity-building activities also
- Process can be tailored for each department or sub agency
  - Department-wide plan or agency plans
  - Complement strategic plans and/or operating plans and performance metrics
  - Coordination across agencies helps strengthen plans
- Stakeholder input
  - Within-agency stakeholders (program and evaluation/research unit collaboration)
  - External stakeholders
  - Public comment
Sample Learning Agenda Outline

I. **Priorities:** ~ 3-4 key topics/issues/questions for research or evaluation, e.g.:
   A. Performance issues (e.g., factors associated with particular outcomes for particular agency)
   B. Program operational issues (e.g., effectiveness of particular strategies/services/programs)
   C. Special initiatives (e.g., effect of new or proposed initiative or program)
   D. Effectiveness of proven practice

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

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

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

V. **Exploratory Studies** (e.g., evaluability assessments, implementation evaluations, background analysis, economic/demographic statistical analysis, simulations)

VI. **Capacity-building Activities** (e.g., logic models, 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
Polling Question #1

Does your office or agency have a formal process for obtaining input to the evaluation plan/learning agenda from internal CDC stakeholders?

Y, N, DK, N/A

Does your office or agency have a formal process for obtaining input to the evaluation plan/learning agenda from external stakeholders?

Y, N, DK, N/A
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)

- **Evaluation budget requests**
  - 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
  - Consider capacity-building (not just evaluations) (e.g., clearinghouses, fellowships, staff development, data analytics/sciences)
  - Consider creative/flexible funding mechanisms (e.g., set asides, IAAs)
Polling Question #1

Does your agency or office have a chapter or section on evidence in your annual Budget Submission?

Y, N, D/K
Disseminate evidence on proven practices with: Catalogs, Inventories, Clearinghouses (e.g., CDC’s Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness)

- Catalogs and Inventories of Agency-funded Research (e.g., study, authors, reports; some abstracts, some new studies); no ratings

- Archives and Bibliographic Records of Research; no ratings

- Library Portals; no ratings

- Evidence-based Clearinghouses, with standards, guidelines and ratings; syntheses/collaboratives—Strength of Evidence and Evidence of Effectiveness (per CDC Continuum)

- Registries/directories/indices of research studies and reports (e.g., “proven strategies” or models based on evidence); usually with ratings; meta-analytics
Examples of Research Registries/Directories/Indices—useful for evaluators

• Evidence-based Registries of programs or strategies based on proven strategies and models evidence of effectiveness (evidence-based registries)
  - Example: Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE)
    https://homvee.acf.hhs.gov/About-Us/5/Executive-Summary/20/2

• Study Registries of designs (before and/or after completion of the study)
  - Example: ClinicalTrials.gov directory of clinic trials/research studies of designs and, later, results https://clinicaltrials.gov/
  - Example: Campbell/Cochrane Collaborations registries of rigorous meta analysis at design stage, following standards before analysis, then publication https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/library.html
Examples of Archives—for general use

• Bibliographic Records of Research Studies (e.g., study, authors, design, study type, publication, data bases; some with new studies listed and designs) no ratings
  ➢ Example: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC)
    https://eric.ed.gov/
  ➢ Example: U of Maryland Inspection and Compliance Research Archive
  ➢ Example: Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS)
Examples of Evidence Library Portals—useful for practitioners

- Library Portals/Hubs with evidence-informed entries, **abstracts, publications**, evaluation guidance and TA (e.g., for practitioners, researchers, or others); no ratings
  - Example: USAID’s Development Experience Clearinghouse
  - Example: Self Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse
    https://www.opressrc.org/about-ssrc
  - Example: Workforce Systems Strategies
    https://strategies.workforcegps.org/
Examples of Evidence-based Clearinghouses with ratings—useful for adopting proven practices & evidence building

- Evidence-based Clearinghouses, with evidence reviews, ratings and standards (methodological rigor and effectiveness)
  - Examples: Crime Solutions Example: WWC
    https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/
  - https://www.crimesolutions.gov/
  - Examples: CLEAR https://clear.dol.gov/

- Syntheses and Systematic Reviews
  - Example: Campbell Collaboration (published reports from registered evidence-review study designs)
    https://www.campbellcollaboration.org/
Quality Standards for Ratings of Evidence Strength in Clearinghouses

• Research Design Quality:
  ➢ Clarity of study questions (e.g., causality or non-causal)
  ➢ Clarity of conceptual framework or logic model
  ➢ Evidence/theoretical base
  ➢ Appropriate Evaluation design (experimental, quasi-experimental, replicated)

• Analytic Approach Quality:
  ➢ Outcome/impact measures
  ➢ Sampling (e.g., sample size, sample selection method, baseline equivalency, stratification, attrition)
  ➢ Data collection methods (e.g., instrumentation, follow-up)
  ➢ Analytic methods (e.g., internal/external validity, modeling, subgroup analysis)
  ➢ Operational setting/context (e.g., implementation science, fidelity)

• Strength of Evidence/Outcomes:
  ➢ Positive, negative, or “null” impacts
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