

Measuring and Assessing the Use of Evidence

Speaker Biographies

Rekha Balu is the director of federal equity initiatives and co-vice president of the Office of Race and Equity Research at the Urban Institute, where she leads research and policy programs that deploy analytics and evidence to inform federal agencies on how to advance equity. Dr. Balu joined Urban from MDRC, where she was a senior fellow and director of the Center for Applied Behavioral Science. She launched a portfolio of studies and designed interventions tackling challenges in human services, K-12 education, and the transition to postsecondary education. She has partnered with federal agencies and grantees around the country to help them base their decisions on data and evidence. In 2019, as a fellow with the Office of Evaluation Sciences in the US General Services Administration, she developed trainings, intervention designs, and field trials for federal agencies.

Brittany J. Borg was selected as the chief of the Strategy and Evaluation Division (SED) in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on Jan. 2, 2022. She also serves as USCIS' Chief Evaluation Officer. Previously, Borg served as director of the Analysis and Evaluation Division at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), where she coordinated and implemented the SBA's first Enterprise Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan, evaluated and analyzed SBA programs, served as SBA's Statistical Official, and oversaw economic analysis for policies and regulations. Before the SBA, Borg worked with New York City's Department of Small Business Services, where she designed and implemented monitoring and evaluation plans for agency economic development oversight and grants and researched and analyzed new initiatives. She also worked with the New York City Business Improvement Districts, designing and conducting research to support policy advocacy and business development. Before her work in New York City, Borg volunteered with the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic. Borg holds master's degrees in Economics and in International Political Economy & Development from Fordham University and a Bachelor of Science in Finance from Minnesota State University.

Diana Epstein is the Evidence Team Lead at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Evidence Team develops government-wide program evaluation policies, sets evidence building priorities, and leads efforts to improve Federal agency capacity to build and use evidence. In her role, Diana supports implementation of Title 1 of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act), chairs the Evaluation Officer Council, and provides technical assistance on evidence and evaluation activities for a broad range of Federal agencies and functions. She was previously a research and evaluation manager at the Corporation for National and Community Service, and before that she worked as a program evaluator and policy analyst at Abt Associates, the American Institutes for Research, and the RAND Corporation. She has a B.S. in applied math-biology from Brown University, an MPP from the Goldman School at UC Berkeley, and a Ph.D. from the Pardee RAND Graduate School.

Calvin Johnson is the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Research, Evaluation and Monitoring for the Office of Policy Development and Research at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. He serves as one of the principal advisors to HUD leadership on research, demonstration, and evaluation activities and oversees a broad evaluation portfolio to include projects exploring the impact of housing on non-housing outcomes – economic self-sufficiency, health and wellness, and educational achievement. His portfolio includes demonstrations, evaluations, and research covering a range of topics including

housing discrimination, homelessness, aging in place, disaster resilience/recovery, community planning and development, and building science and technology.

Batia Katz is a research analyst in the Center on Labor, Human Services, and Population, where she researches workforce development. Katz's previous research experience includes studying the science labor market, the impact of personality traits on employment outcomes, and gender and family in the workforce. Katz graduated with high honors from Haverford College, where she earned a BA in economics.

Demetra Smith Nightingale is an Institute fellow and director of the Federal Evidence Forum at the Urban Institute and was the chief evaluation officer at the US Department of Labor from 2011 to 2016. She conducts research on employment, labor, welfare, and other social and economic policies and programs and teaches a graduate course in program evaluation at George Washington University. She also previously taught a graduate course in program evaluation at Johns Hopkins University. She is the author or coauthor of five books and numerous articles, a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration, and serves on many task forces and advisory panels. She received her doctorate in public policy from the George Washington University.

Kathryn Oliver is a social scientist with interests in how evidence is made and used in public policy, particularly around theorizing this relationship and evaluating interventions which seek to improve evidence use. She is currently seconded to the UK Government Office for Science, where she works closely with funders and science advisors to improve the science system, and with Annette Boaz co-directs the Transforming Evidence initiative, a global collaborative seeking to bring together learning and practice from different sectors and disciplines to improve research on evidence use.

Natalie Palugyai was appointed Secretary of the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency by Governor Newsom on July 14, 2021. She is the first Latina to serve as California Labor Secretary. In her role, Natalie serves as the Governor's cabinet advisor on labor issues and employment programs for workers and businesses throughout California. Natalie oversees the state departments and boards that enforce labor laws, including minimum wage and occupational safety standards, provide state disability and unemployment insurance benefits, fund workforce training and apprenticeship programs, combat wage theft, protect injured workers, and arbitrate public sector contract disputes. Natalie is a nationally recognized thought leader in public sector business transformation, strategy, and implementation with over 20 years of experience in federal government and higher education. She has spent almost half of her public service career within the U.S. Department of Labor where she served first as a compliance officer with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs and most recently as a Senior Management Advisor for the Secretary of Labor under President Barack Obama's Administration. In addition to her work on worker protection and enforcement strategy, Natalie launched and formalized the department's first integrated performance management accountability system, resulting in concrete improvements to both operational performance and organizational engagement. Prior to leading the Labor & Workforce Development Agency, Natalie served as Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives at Johns Hopkins University, where she led the university's Global Operations Initiative, establishing both governance frameworks and corporate structuring strategies in support of academic and research expansion globally. Natalie received her Bachelor's degree in International Studies and Sociology from the University of Miami in 1998. She earned her Master in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School in 2005.

Lauren Supplee is the Senior Program Officer at the William T. Grant Foundation. Lauren leads the Foundation's initiatives on improving the use of research evidence and its Institutional Challenge Grants program. She is a key member of the Foundation's program team where she participates in setting program directions, developing and implementing new initiatives, and reviewing grants. Previously, Lauren was the Deputy Chief Operating Officer and Senior Scholar in early childhood research at Child Trends, a nonpartisan research center focused on children and their families. Her research focuses on evidence-based policy, early childhood home visiting and other parenting programs, prevention science, and implementation research. Prior to joining Child Trends, she worked for 10 years in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the federal Administration for Children and Families, including four years as the director of the Division of Family Strengthening. She serves on the Boards of Society for Prevention Research and DC's Family and Youth Initiative, as well as on the National Evaluation Advisory Board of Project Evident. She received her Ph.D. in educational psychology with a specialization in family-focused early intervention services from Indiana University.