

13. BUILDING AND USING EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS

Introduction

January 2024 marked the five-year anniversary of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act; Public Law 115-435), and the third year since the Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking. Much has been accomplished in this short time, including further development of a Federal evidence and evaluation infrastructure that reaches both across Government and within agencies. The Administration is using evidence to advance key priorities and has undertaken new and groundbreaking efforts to further develop the evidence ecosystem. The Budget sustains and enhances investments in evidence-based programs, demonstrating the Administration's commitment to using evidence for responsible investments in America. The Budget also supports agency capacity to build and use evidence through targeted investments in key areas.

Despite this notable progress, work remains to achieve the full potential of an evidence-based Government. Leaders at all levels must increase their demand for and use of evidence so that it becomes a routine part of decision-making and implementation. More of Government must embrace a true learning mindset, which means asking tough questions, considering new possibilities, and testing and innovating to uncover more effective and efficient paths. The world continues to change and evolve rapidly, and as new priorities emerge, the Federal Government must be capable of building and using the evidence needed to address the challenges facing the Nation. Evidence-based policymaking is on an upward trajectory in the United States, but this work has always been a long-term proposition as both evidence-building and evidence application matures and spreads. The Government should celebrate its progress, while also recognizing what remains undone and continuing to push forward for the kind of government Americans deserve. Evidence generation and use are not optional activities, and investing in evidence should not be seen as competing with other priorities or jeopardizing programmatic outcomes. Rather, relying on evidence to inform decision-making at all levels is a way to ensure that the Government optimizes its choices and best serves the American people.

The Federal Evidence and Evaluation Infrastructure

Implementation of the Evidence Act across the Federal Government has contributed to a stronger, more coordinated evidence and evaluation infrastructure. This includes the introduction of strategic evidence planning processes, the development of evaluation policies, and the appointment of senior leaders and leadership bodies re-

sponsible for agencies' evaluation functions. Importantly, this infrastructure serves to improve coordination agency-wide, while acknowledging and strengthening the distributed structure that fosters capacity building within component offices or directorates, incorporates program-specific subject matter expertise, and ensures independence in evidence generation. While the Evidence Act requires that the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies designate Evaluation Officers and develop agency-wide Learning Agendas, Annual Evaluation Plans, and Evaluation Policies, many small or independent agencies, in addition to a number of components within CFO Act agencies, have adopted these roles and activities as well.

Over a remarkably short period of time, Federal agencies have established the leadership, processes, and routines needed to build up the systems and structures required by Title I of the Evidence Act. While opportunities remain to meet the Act's ambitious goals, the groundwork has been laid to increase and improve the generation and use of evidence in policymaking. The [Evaluation.gov website](#) provides a unified access point for the key components of this new evidence and evaluation infrastructure, ensuring transparency and information sharing. The central elements of the systems and structures include:

- **Learning Agendas.** A [Learning Agenda](#) is a multi-year strategic evidence-building plan. By thinking strategically about evidence needs, agencies can prioritize those questions that, when answered, can inform consequential decisions and high-priority functions, while limiting ad hoc and uncoordinated analytic efforts and the associated inefficient use of scarce resources. The process of developing the Learning Agenda (i.e., engaging stakeholders, reviewing available evidence, developing questions, planning and undertaking evidence-building activities, disseminating and using results, and refining questions based on the evidence generated) may be equally, if not more, beneficial than the resulting document itself. Agencies execute their Learning Agendas through the initiation and conduct of the identified evidence-building activities to build the evidence needed to inform programs, policies, regulations, and operations. Learning Agendas also signal priority evidence needs to the broader research community.
- **Annual Evaluation Plans.** The [Annual Evaluation Plan](#) describes the significant evaluation activities that each agency plans to conduct in the subsequent fiscal year. The Annual Evaluation Plan primarily includes those activities that meet the Evidence Act's definition of evaluation, "an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended

to assess their effectiveness and efficiency.” Agencies define which evaluations are considered “significant,” generally focusing on evaluations that address priority questions on the Learning Agenda, are noteworthy in scope or alignment with Administration or agency priorities, or are required by statute. The annual process of planning for and identifying significant evaluations provides opportunities to improve coordination and ensure adequate lead time to plan for complex studies, including necessary data access and/or data collection.

- *Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis (“Capacity Assessment”).* Every four years, as part of the preparation of each agency’s Strategic Plan, the Evaluation Officer, in conjunction with the Statistical Official, Chief Data Officer, and other agency personnel, leads the effort to conduct and provide an assessment of the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis efforts of the agency. Agencies completed their first *Capacity Assessments* in 2022, and a number of agencies have developed annual processes to review and update their assessment. The Capacity Assessments serve to identify and inform areas of strength and areas in need of further development in order to align organizational evidence-building capacity to agency evidence needs. For many agencies, the initial Capacity Assessment provides a baseline against which agencies are able to monitor changes over time as they further build capacity.
- *Evaluation Policies.* Nearly all of the 24 CFO Act agencies, as well as a number of small or independent agencies, have issued agency-wide *evaluation policies* that align with the evaluation standards articulated in *OMB Memorandum M-20-12, Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices*. These standards include relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, and ethics. Many agencies have also incorporated an equity standard that integrates the definition from *Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,”* to ensure the use of equitable evaluation methods.
- *The Evidence Team at OMB.* This team of senior-level subject matter experts, situated within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Office of Performance and Personnel Management, coordinates and supports evidence-building and use across the Federal Government with a particular focus on program evaluation. Through supporting the Evaluation Officer Council, engaging with the Federal evaluation community, and developing guidance and resources, the *Evidence Team* advances the goal of better integrating evidence and rigorous evaluation in budget, management, operational, and policy de-

cisions. The Team leads implementation of Title I of the Evidence Act, executes a range of cross-agency evidence-building projects, and leads efforts in areas like evaluation procurement and hiring to support and improve the Federal evaluation ecosystem.

- *Evaluation Officers.* All CFO Act agencies have identified *Evaluation Officers* to lead the implementation of Title I of the Evidence Act across the organization and improve agency coordination of and capacity for evaluation. These senior leaders serve as their agency’s champion for evaluation, responsible for advancing and advising on program evaluation across their respective agencies. Consistent with OMB guidance, Evaluation Officers are expected to have demonstrated, senior-level technical expertise in evaluation methods and practices.
- *Evaluation Officer Council.* The *Evaluation Officer Council* (EOC), chaired by the OMB Evidence Team Lead, convenes monthly to bring together Evaluation Officers and their deputies. Through the EOC, members exchange knowledge; consult with and advise OMB on issues that affect evaluation functions including evaluator competencies, program evaluation practices, and evaluation capacity building; coordinate and collaborate on areas of common interest (including development of deliverables required under Title I of the Evidence Act); and serve in a leadership role for the broader Federal evaluation community.
- *Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy (ICEP).* Co-chaired by an agency representative on a rotating basis and a representative from the OMB Evidence Team, the mission of *ICEP* is to enhance the value and contributions of Federal evaluations to improve Government operations and delivery of Government services. ICEP members are Federal employees who are technical experts in one or more aspects of evaluation. ICEP provides skilled consultation through office hours, host professional development opportunities, and develop and share resources to support the Federal evaluation community.

More information on the evidence and evaluation infrastructure can be found in *OMB Memorandum M-19-23, Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance* and *OMB Memorandum M-21-27, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans*.

Sustaining and Enhancing Investments in Evidence-Based Programs in the 2025 Budget

One of the important aspects of the evidence framework is using the best available science and data to inform resource allocation decisions. Evidence-based policies and programs are the expectation, essential to the Nation’s democracy in a time of limited resources. The examples here demonstrate the value of investments in evidence-building by showcasing how that evidence

has informed policies to improve the lives of Americans. While the process of building a robust evidence base may take time, when those findings are translated into action, programs are more effective and the public can trust in Government's ability to bring about its intended goals. The 2025 Budget demonstrates the Administration's commitment to investing in evidence-based programs and policies across a range of Federal agencies and functions, even with caps on discretionary spending. The following are a few examples of such 2025 investments:

- Evidence has informed many programs and activities underway to support the Administration's goal of protecting and expanding access to high-quality health care and creating healthier communities. Improving the health and well-being of all Americans is a whole-of-Government effort, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) plays a central role. The Budget invests in several evidence-based programs at HHS, including its investments supporting teen pregnancy prevention. The President's Budget includes \$101 million for the Teen Pregnancy Prevention program which has been the subject of rigorous evaluations since 2010, and it will continue to build the evidence base on these approaches. Reflecting a robust *evidence portfolio*, these evaluations have included impact studies of new and innovative approaches, as well as replication studies of programs previously showing positive outcomes. Importantly, the President's Budget does not fund the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program, which uses an abstinence-only approach that prior evidence has shown to be ineffective in reducing the incidence of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, in adolescents.
- Reflecting the evidence in the area of early childhood and maternal well-being, the President's Budget includes \$600 million to support the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program, which provides funding for States, territories, and tribal entities to implement evidence-based home visiting programs and to continue to build evidence. The birth of a child and the immediate years following can be challenging for any parent. Decades of literature have demonstrated home visiting is a strategy that can improve outcomes across vital domains like child development, school readiness, maternal health, child health, and reductions in maltreatment. MIECHV builds on the decades-long portfolio of evidence on effective approaches in early childhood home visiting. This robust *literature* documents that home visits as an intervention approach to work with families and young children can lead to improved outcomes across domains such as child development and school readiness, maternal health, child health, and reductions in child maltreatment. As noted above, efforts continue to build and add to this rigorous evidence base.
- Understanding and implementing effective workforce development strategies based on rigorous evi-

dence are central to the Administration's approach to supporting the American workforce. At the Department of Labor (DOL), the President's Budget continues to invest in *evidence-based workforce development programs*. These investments include \$388 million for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment Grants program, as well as a \$335 million investment in Registered Apprenticeships. Also at DOL, the President's Budget includes an investment of \$50 million in the Sectoral Employment through Career Training for Occupational Readiness (SECTOR) program, reflecting the strong evidence base on sector strategies, which have demonstrated an ability to improve employment outcomes for low-income workers. Sector-based training programs target key sectors of the economy with high local demand. Several rigorous evaluations found evidence that sector-based programs, such as *Project Quest* and *Year Up*, result in large and enduring impacts on worker earnings. Evidence suggests that programs that employ strategies such as sector-specific training across job types or provide participants with non-occupational support services may increase overall program effectiveness. Finally, the 2025 Budget includes enhanced levels of funding for DOL's Strengthening Community College (SCC) and Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO) interventions, both of which show promising evidence of effectiveness and help further build the evidence base.

- The Department of Education (ED) continues to invest in evidence-based strategies. The Budget proposes to double the investment in Postsecondary Student Success Grants from \$50 million to \$100 million, part of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). These programs fund grants to implement, scale, and rigorously evaluate evidence-based activities to support data-driven decisions and actions to improve student outcomes. In particular, funding through this program may be used to expand student access to *evidence-based support services* such as academic advising, mentoring, and tutoring to increase overall college attainment and completion rates. In addition, the Budget funds a \$200 million investment, \$50 million above 2023 enacted levels, for Full Service Community Schools (FSCS), which requires grantees to implement evidence-based activities, evaluate the effectiveness of their projects, and comply with any evaluations of FSCS conducted by the Institute of Education Sciences. Existing *literature* demonstrates that Full Service Community Schools successfully advance academic achievement and improve student attendance by implementing a common set of evidence-based practices. The Budget sustains support at \$43 million for School Climate Transformation Grants at ED, which funds evidence-based activities. These grants to State Educational Agencies and Local Educational Agencies are intended to develop and adopt, or expand to more schools, multi-tiered systems of

support, such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, that guide the selection, integration, and implementation of evidence-based practices for improving school climate and supporting student social and emotional well-being.

- The Budget also invests \$940 million, \$50 million above 2023 enacted levels, for English Language Acquisition (ELA) grants, which help implement evidence-based practices that improve outcomes for English learners. The Budget sustains funding for the American History and Civics Education program, which funds grants that promote evidence-based instructional methods and professional development programs in American history, civics and government, and geography, particularly those methods and programs that benefit students from low-income backgrounds and underserved students. And finally, the Budget sustains funding in Javits Gifted and Talented Education grants, which by statute, give priority awards to projects that include evidence-based activities or that develop new information to improve the capacity of schools to operate gifted and talented education programs or to assist schools in identifying and serving underserved students.
- The Budget includes \$4 billion for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Continuum of Care program, which incentivizes grantees to commit to using the evidence-based Housing First approach. The Housing First approach emphasizes rapid placement and stabilization of people experiencing homelessness in permanent housing without imposing service participation requirements or pre-conditions and is proven to offer greater long-term housing stability, especially for people experiencing chronic homelessness, who have higher service needs. The evidence supporting the effectiveness of these strategies draws on over two decades of *research and evaluation*, including randomized controlled trials. In 2016, results from HUD's *Family Options Study* found that "assignment to the SUB [permanent housing subsidies] group more than halved most forms of residential instability, improved multiple measures of adult and child well-being, and reduced food insecurity." More recently, a 2020 *systematic review* of Housing First programs lends further support to the effectiveness of this approach for decreasing homelessness.
- The Budget invests in critical nutrition assistance programs administered by the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) that are informed by a robust portfolio of evidence. Recent efforts in outreach and to modernize the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) have contributed to increased program enrollment and participation. The President's Budget funds WIC at \$7.697 billion this year to fully fund participation in the program. To address unanticipated growth in the program, the Budget includes an emergency contingency fund

that will pay out additional funds when there are unanticipated cost pressures. The strong *evidence base* supporting the benefits of WIC for critical maternal and child health outcomes underscores the importance of protecting this program. Strong evidence also demonstrates the value of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program for Children (Summer EBT), which the Congress authorized as a permanent program in December 2022. *Evaluators* using random assignment to test the impact of these benefits on food insecurity found that the benefits contributed to significant reductions to very low food security among children. The Budget supports Summer EBT benefits and State and Indian Tribal Organization administrative expenses to launch implementation of this new benefit.

Supporting Agency Capacity to Build and Use Evidence

Generating a robust evidence base that can be used to inform major policy initiatives and associated investments requires ongoing, consistent investments in the capacity and infrastructure needed to enable that work. To that end, the President's Budget directs funds to sustain and, in key areas, enhance agency capacity to carry out evidence-building activities and rigorous evaluations. In addition to financial resources, agencies require skilled leadership and staff, continued investments in generating quality and timely data, improvements in data availability and data sharing, and robust knowledge management systems that ensure decisionmakers can tap into available data and evidence.

The Budget includes investments to sustain and build critical capacity for evidence in agencies, including for qualified staff, specific evaluation efforts, and related activities. This capacity is essential to building evidence on Administration priorities and overarching strategies to deliver for the American public. For example, at the Department of Justice, the President's Budget continues and enhances prior commitments to build critical capacity to support program evaluation activities, and includes funding for an Evidence Lead within the Justice Management Division to continue the Department's progress in implementing and executing activities from its Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plans. The 2025 Budget also includes investments at the Department of the Treasury for staffing and other capacity dedicated to program evaluation activities. At the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the President's Budget continues prior commitments to build critical capacity to support program evaluation activities, includes funding for priority evaluations of the Paid Parental Leave Program and implementation of the new Postal Service Health Benefits Program, and sustains staffing with qualified evaluators to execute these activities. Similarly, the President's Budget sustains critical research and evaluation resources at HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research at 2024 Budget levels. This signifies the importance of maintaining HUD's research capacity to build and use evidence to inform housing and community development

programs and policy. The Budget also proposes \$2.6 million for a new independent program evaluation fund at the Department of the Interior (DOI), which will allow DOI to execute rigorous evaluations to build evidence in priority areas.

Building needed evidence requires resources, including staff and funding for program evaluation activities. However, effectively executing evidence-building activities relies upon a number of other factors that enable evidence generation and use, including having the necessary authorities to do this work. The 2025 Budget also continues essential authorities for evaluating and improving Federal programs. For example, the Budget maintains the authority for DOL to set aside up to 0.75 percent of appropriations so that there may be sufficient funds for conducting significant and rigorous evaluations, and it continues to provide DOL's Chief Evaluation Office the authority to carry out grants and demonstration projects to test innovative strategies for building evidence. The Budget also includes measures to further support evidence-building offices; it requests passage of an Evaluation Funding Flexibility general provision which would give DOL's Chief Evaluation Office and Bureau of Labor Statistics and HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families the ability to use evaluation funds over a greater period of time to support strategic, long-term, and flexible evaluation planning. The 2025 President's Budget expands Medicaid maternal health support services during the pregnancy and post-partum period by incentivizing States to reimburse a broad range of providers including doulas, community health workers, peer support initiatives, and nurse home visiting programs. Importantly, this new benefit is being coupled with rigorous program evaluation in order to assess the effects of these changes on maternal health and other key outcomes.

With respect to improvements in data availability and data sharing, the 2025 President's Budget makes critical investments in the data infrastructure needed to execute priority evidence-building activities. For example, the Budget increases investment for the Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, a preeminent source of longitudinal data on the economic well-being of American households, to ensure the stability and usefulness of this critical data source for future evidence-building opportunities. The Budget also invests in Department of Transportation data collections to inform road safety by improving understanding of the causal factors for large and medium truck crashes. The Administration also supports efforts to more effectively use administrative data for evidence-building, including employment and earnings data. Expanding secure access to critical data sources, like the National Directory of New Hires, among others, will unleash their full potential to help the Federal Government build the evidence it needs to better serve the American people. At OPM, the President's 2025 Budget sustains critical investments to build and enhance data systems and increase analytic

capacity to better use Federal workforce data. Federal human capital data are critical to understanding the Government's workforce, and to building evidence on how to attract, hire, develop, and retain the talent needed to deliver for the American people.

Leveraging Evidence to Improve Outcomes for the American People

In his first week in office, President Biden issued a *Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking*, stating that "it is the policy of my Administration to make evidence-based decisions guided by the best available science and data." At its heart, this Presidential Memorandum reflects the Administration's belief that in order to achieve its goals as a Federal Government, it must ground all of its work in science and facts. Evidence is not just a "nice to have," it is an essential component of all that the Government does, and it must leverage evidence in order to make progress on the Administration's priorities and for the Nation more broadly. This commitment to evidence is also demonstrated by requirements for the generation and use of data and evidence across the Administration's priorities. For example, Executive Order 13985 emphasizes the need for equitable data to support data-driven efforts to address equity, and *Executive Order 14058, "Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government,"* requires plans for rigorously testing whether changes lead to measurable improvements. Agencies are actively working to integrate evidence-building in their efforts to address key Administration priorities, including equity, customer experience and service delivery, infrastructure, and climate.

Over five years since the passage of the Evidence Act, there is growing enthusiasm and continued progress across the Federal Government to harness the law's call to build and use evidence to effectively serve all Americans. No place is that call more urgent and important than in supporting the mental health needs of those individuals who have served the Nation. Ensuring the health and well-being of veterans, particularly their mental health, is a priority for the Administration, and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is committed to building evidence on what works to meet the mental health needs of and prevent suicide among the Nation's veterans. As discussed in the Department's 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan and forthcoming 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan, VHA is executing a set of evaluations that all seek to answer the question, "What strategies work best to prevent suicide among veterans?" Three programs are being evaluated: the Veterans Sponsorship Initiative, a public-private partnership that connects transitioning service members/veterans to sponsors in their post-military hometowns to help with reintegration; the Caring Letters program, which provides letters to veterans following a call to the Veterans Crisis Line; and the Reach Out, Stay Strong, Essentials program, an evidence-based, telehealth intervention for preventing perinatal depression among racially and ethnically diverse low-income women at high

risk for perinatal depression. Through VHA's evaluations of the Veteran Sponsorship Initiative, the Caring Letters program, and the Reach Out, Stay Strong, Essentials program, VHA is demonstrating its dedication to building and using evidence to better serve those who have served.

The Administration is also committed to building evidence in areas that cut across agencies, including new and emerging priorities. Some of these evidence priorities have been articulated in cross-Government Learning Agendas, including the *President's Management Agenda Learning Agenda*, the *American Rescue Plan Equity Learning Agenda*, and the *Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity*. The questions from these Learning Agendas are displayed in the *Learning Agenda Questions Dashboard* on Evaluation.gov, along with all of agencies' individual Learning Agenda questions. Agencies are now doing the hard work of beginning to answer some of the questions on these cross-Government Learning Agendas to further build evidence on Administration priorities. As additional crosscutting priorities emerge, the development of a Government-wide Learning Agenda provides a productive mechanism to promote sustained engagement and collaboration in generating evidence to address some of the most complex challenges and new frontiers.

One leading example is the American Rescue Plan (ARP) National Evaluation, which aims to look systematically across a selected subset of ARP programs and provide an integrated account of whether, how, and to what extent their implementation served to achieve their intended outcomes, particularly with respect to advancing equity. The Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) at the General Services Administration (GSA) is supporting that work in partnership with the OMB Evidence Team, the ARP Implementation Team, and other agency partners. This study is a groundbreaking approach to addressing the need for cross-agency and cross-program collaboration to build evidence related to overlapping investments in communities toward shared goals. Based on extensive document reviews, robust engagement with agency program staff, and consultation with subject matter experts conducted during the first phase of this work, plans for three in-depth evaluations and four program-specific analyses have been developed. The in-depth evaluations will cover State coordination across ARP programs serving low-income families with children, equitable implementation of ARP housing programs, and integration of funding to increase equitable access to behavioral health crisis services. Program-specific analyses will explore equity and effectiveness of emergency housing vouchers, the effect of employee-targeted child care stabilization funds on labor market outcomes for child care workers, the effect of the postpartum Medicaid extension on enrollment, health care utilization, and outcomes for postpartum women, and how State spending on Medicaid home- and community-based services affected equitable access to services. Additionally, plans are underway for a public-facing user-friendly website that will bring together information about 32 ARP programs and related evidence-building

activities, as well as the evaluations and analyses conducted for the study.

Another example is the Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity, which includes a *Learning Agenda to Advance LGBTQI+ Equity*. The priority questions raised in this Learning Agenda cover such topics as health, healthcare, and access to care; housing stability and security; economic security and education; and safety, security, and justice. Together, these questions will help the Federal Government determine what additional evidence is needed to more effectively advance equity for and improve the well-being of LGBTQI+ people. Since the Administration released the Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity in January 2023, agencies have developed Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Data Action Plans that articulate how each agency will work strategically to build evidence on these priority questions outlined in the Federal Evidence Agenda. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau has proposed the American Community Survey (ACS) Methods Panel: 2024 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Test to conduct a test of SOGI questions on the ACS. The ACS is a critically important survey that provides detailed social, economic, housing, and demographic data about America's communities. It is widely used by Federal agencies and external researchers to answer critical questions. This is just one example, and as agencies continue to implement their SOGI Data Action Plans and build much needed evidence, the Government's understanding of effective strategies to advance LGBTQI+ Equity will continue to grow.

More broadly, evidence is being used to advance equity for all Americans in other contexts. For example, with equity as its through line, the *Analytics for Equity Initiative*, first announced during the *Year of Evidence for Action*, is now in progress. Led by the National Science Foundation in partnership with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), OMB, and other Federal agencies, the Initiative links interested researchers directly with Federal agencies seeking to answer research questions captured in their Learning Agendas in five equity-related research themes. The goal of this effort is to fund researchers to produce rigorous empirical evidence and research in equity-related topics aligned to agency Learning Agendas, so that Federal agencies and other organizations can increase the impact of equity-focused evidence-based strategies. Phase 1 projects were awarded in thematic areas that include equity of access to STEM research and education opportunities, environmental stressors and equity, equity in human services delivery and outcomes, health equity in the wake of climate change, and equity considerations for workplace safety and workers. The Budget supports continuation of Analytics for Equity, including Phase 2 projects that would fund researchers to conduct larger-scale research and analyses and develop research papers, evidence-based reports, memos, and policy papers discussing the potential implications of research findings for Federal programs.

New Efforts to Bolster the Evidence and Evaluation Landscape

Significant progress has been made to meet the Evidence Act's ambitions of strengthening the Federal evidence and evaluation landscape. As with any major paradigm shift, there is a need to build new routines and processes to reflect, take stock, and consider where further change is needed. For example, the increased focus on evaluation and its potential to meet priority evidence needs has highlighted opportunities for Government-wide solutions to improve access to the expertise that high quality evaluation requires. Similarly, as agencies improve their capacity to plan and conduct evaluations, senior leaders must be equipped to harness the evidence these evaluations produce and put the findings into action. The new and emerging activities described here are intended to meet these needs and continue to strengthen capacity across the Government for evidence-building and use.

Improving Agency Routines for Evidence Planning through Spring Briefings

In spring 2023, OMB initiated a new annual review process on evidence-building activities through Evidence Spring Briefings with each CFO Act agency. As described in OMB Circular No. A-11, Section 290, these Evidence Briefings provided an opportunity for agencies to:

- provide updates on the status of evidence-building activities included in their Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans;
- discuss progress made, challenges encountered, and changes to activities on those plans; and
- as available, share interim or final results of evaluations or other activities with OMB.

The Briefings reflected the Evidence Act's emphasis on working across functional siloes and brought together staff from across agencies and OMB. For example, from OMB, these briefings included program examiners, the Evidence Team members directly overseeing Evidence Act implementation, and staff responsible for related functions around performance and personnel management. For agencies, Evaluation Officers were encouraged to include relevant staff from their operating divisions or sub-agencies, and many chose to do so, allowing for deeper discussion of specific evaluations and other evidence-building projects. While following the direction noted in A-11, agencies worked collaboratively with OMB to develop agency-specific agendas, each tailored to the unique contexts, needs, and opportunities in each agency.

In these 24 Briefings, agencies provided updates on putting evidence-building plans into action. Agencies listed hundreds of learning activities either completed or underway, including numerous evaluations, that had been initiated across agencies to address priority questions. The updates also described the many activities that were planned or in development, as well as questions where agencies were still working to identify specific projects or

activities to provide the evidence needed. With respect to implementing their Annual Evaluation Plans, agencies noted that most 2022 evaluations were either completed or well underway, with 2023 and 2024 evaluations in the planning phase. The types of evaluations being conducted varied across agencies, with a number of agencies starting with formative evaluations to inform design of anticipated outcome or impact evaluations. Agencies also underscored the numerous evaluations and studies underway that are not included in Annual Evaluation Plans because of how each agency has defined "significant"—an important nuance for those seeking to understand the full scope of Federal evaluation activity.

Many agencies emphasized how integrating evidence planning into strategic planning processes has improved understanding of and demand for evidence across the agency. Agencies noted that the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan development process provides opportunities for internal and external engagement and input, improves coordination and collaboration with agency components by "breaking down silos," and increases collaboration with other Evidence Act Officials, such as Chief Data Officers and Statistical Officials. A number of agencies described the work underway within agency components to develop component-specific Learning Agendas to guide their evidence-building activities, thus demonstrating the value that agency leadership and staff at all levels have found in participating in the strategic evidence planning process. Additionally, agencies described their process for revisiting, refining, and updating their Learning Agenda to reflect shifting priorities. Increased demand for evidence from policymakers and agency leadership was exemplified through requests for timely evidence to inform policy and program design, a strong push for disaggregated data to inform efforts related to equity, greater interest in evidence and data analysis to inform operational decisions, and a focus on grantee evaluation capacity and requirements for evidence-building.

The Briefings provided an opportunity for agencies to describe the critical investments that have been made in evidence-building and evaluation capacity, including key hires of qualified evaluators. Agencies underscored the importance of having skilled staff with strong education, training, and experience in program evaluation for making progress in implementing the agency's Learning Agenda and related evaluation activities. Agencies also described the various approaches taken to improve general understanding of evaluation, including staff development opportunities, launching evidence and evaluation communities of practice, and providing workshops and office hours. Agencies also pointed to investments in the development of information and data systems to improve data sharing, better align disparate data systems, and make available data more "legible." Agencies highlighted the need to make data and evidence accessible and understandable to leadership, which many agencies are working to address by building communication channels to support evidence use, including data and evidence dashboards and evidence repositories or "exchanges" where reports are made available.

The 2023 Evidence Spring Briefings were a critical moment for OMB and agencies to come together and take stock of progress on implementing activities on agency Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. This dedicated time to discuss evaluation and evidence-building across functional areas was useful in driving continued progress. OMB collected feedback from all briefing participants – in OMB and agencies – and the response was overwhelmingly positive, with near unanimous agreement that these briefings were helpful and that they should continue going forward. To that end, the August 2023 update of OMB Circular No. A-11 continued the requirement that agencies participate in an Evidence Spring Briefing in 2024.

Improving Agency Access to Evaluation Expertise

Agencies have long faced challenges in identifying and connecting with highly skilled contractors to meet critical evaluation needs. A multiyear partnership between the OMB Evidence Team and GSA to address this concern has led to an innovative solution: a *Program Evaluation Services Subgroup* on GSA's Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) to strengthen Federal infrastructure for high-quality program evaluation. The subgroup, which launched on July 20, 2023, under MAS Special Item Number (SIN) 541611, gathers together qualified, pre-vetted contractors that can be selected by Federal agencies to respond to requests for the design and execution of program evaluations. The subgroup helps agencies find qualified contractors for evaluations and related studies, which allows them to tap into the expertise needed for high-quality evaluations that meet Federal evidence-building needs. Contractor applications to the subgroup are reviewed by a panel of Federal evaluation experts, and those contractors with documented expertise and experience in program evaluation are invited to join. Federal agencies now can target solicitations for evaluations and evaluation-related projects to contractors with verified expertise in program evaluation, which should lead to higher quality evaluations and more useful information for agency leaders.

Another advance in the evidence and evaluation landscape is the development of the Evidence Project Portal on Evaluation.gov. The Evidence Project Portal is intended to help Federal agencies broaden their reach and connect with external researchers to address Learning Agenda questions or other key evidence needs. Through the Portal, agencies can more easily connect with the external research community, get help identifying external researcher talent with relevant expertise, and receive coaching on effective ways to describe and scope evidence-building projects. External researchers will be able to view well defined projects where Federal agencies are looking for support and connect directly with agency staff. GSA sponsored the first Portal project, which resulted in a successful match with a researcher, and more projects are in the pipeline for 2024 and beyond.

Qualified Evaluation Officers and program evaluation staff with the appropriate skills and technical expertise are essential to a healthy and high-functioning Federal evaluation ecosystem. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining

staff with program evaluation experience requires the right tools and a commitment to building and sustaining this critical workforce. Recognizing this, the OMB Evidence Team is developing an online library of evaluator position descriptions that will be available for all agencies to access. The library will also include sample language for program evaluation job postings at various GS-levels, and resources to assist agencies through their hiring process, including example interview questions and prompts for writing samples. This library will help agencies recruit and retain the qualified talent needed to design, oversee, and execute their program evaluation activities.

Improving Leadership Understanding of, and Demand for, Evidence

The value of evidence is only realized when it is used to improve policies, programs, and operations and brought into the decision-making processes at all levels. That can only happen when agency leaders – both career and political – demand evidence and can understand and apply that information to their decisions. To foster a culture of evidence-based decision-making across the Federal Government, it is important to acknowledge the need to equip leaders at all levels with the skills to demand, understand, and apply complex evidence and data to achieve their mission. To address this need, the OMB Evidence Team has partnered with the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) at OPM to provide the Evidence-Based Decision-Making Leadership Academy (the Academy) for Senior Executives. Across six half-day sessions, the Academy aims to provide senior career leaders with the tools needed to ground their decision-making in the best available evidence while also building a learning culture within their agencies. The first cohort of the Academy, launched in November 2023, includes executives from nine different agencies who represent diverse functions, including budget and performance, legislative affairs, human capital, grants, and civil rights, among others. Demand for this initial pilot cohort far exceeded the available slots, which indicates that leaders see value in pursuing this kind of training. At the conclusion of the Academy, these Senior Executives will leave with an action plan for how they will apply what they have learned to advance evidence-based decision-making in their agencies.

Using evidence in decision-making requires an understanding of different forms of evidence and the types of questions they answer, including questions for the purpose of program evaluation. Too often evidence generation and use stall because agency staff at all levels – from leadership to frontline workers – do not fully understand the value that an approach like program evaluation can bring to their work. In response, OMB launched the *Federal Evaluation Toolkit*, a set of curated, technical resources to help Federal agency staff at all levels better understand evaluation – what it is, why it is important, and how it can help them execute their missions more effectively. There are many high-quality tools and resources available that provide guidance on all aspects of evaluation from planning to execution to dissemination and use. The Federal

Evaluation Toolkit pulls together a single set of curated, high-quality resources from across Federal agencies and external entities, making it easier for Federal staff to find the information they need. Hosted on [Evaluation.gov](https://evaluation.gov), the Federal Evaluation Toolkit covers such topics as Evaluation 101, the purpose of evaluation, working with evaluators, and using evaluation findings, and will be updated with new resources over time.

OMB is also committed to increasing the evaluation capacity of the Federal workforce in other ways, including through its long-running Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice Workshop Series. In place since 2017, this series of workshops highlights agency speakers sharing findings from recent evaluation studies, new analytic tools and methods, and discussions of agency evaluation policies. These workshops bring together evaluators and evaluation allies from across Federal agencies to learn from one another, share experiences and expertise, and strengthen the Federal evaluation community. Complementing these workshops are a series of professional development opportunities hosted by the ICEP, including networking events and topical workshops. Routinely drawing 100 to 150 participants to each session, these workshops have reached Federal staff across all CFO Act agencies and many small or independent agencies and cultivated a Community of Practice for hundreds of Federal evaluators. Participant feedback on the workshops consistently finds that attendees view the content as a helpful source of insights that will enhance their contributions to their own office. Together, these opportunities play an important role in elevating, educating, and nurturing the Federal evaluation workforce.

Future Directions for the Federal Evidence Agenda

As the Administration looks ahead and anticipates coming priorities for the Federal evidence agenda, there are a number of areas where it will be critical to demonstrate how agencies are delivering on their objectives and generating evidence that can inform policies to address complex challenges. There are emerging priorities associated with recent historic investments in technology and infrastructure that merit complementary historic prioritization of evidence-building and evidence utilization. Agencies also must prioritize and adopt new ways of learning that allow for faster and more responsive evidence generation. While examples from both Federal agencies and the private sector are helpful starting points, a broader cultural shift in the Government is needed to foster curiosity and a willingness to be as open about what is and, importantly, is not working.

Addressing Emerging Priorities

The Administration is embarking on a series of investments in industrial policy, including American semiconductor manufacturing, and posing new opportunities to assess the effectiveness of these investments and learn how to best target resources to achieve the shared goal of positioning U.S. workers, communities, and businesses for success in the 21st Century. To that end, in its

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the CHIPS Incentives Program – Commercial Fabrication Facilities, the National Institute of Standards and Technology included a commitment to conducting rigorous evaluation activities to assess the outcomes related to funds awarded under the NOFO for projects that aim to improve domestic production capacity, mitigate environmental impacts, and increase economic opportunity in communities.

The Administration is also committed to rebuilding America's critical infrastructure, and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Public Law 117-58) is a critical tool for directing investments in communities across the Nation in striving toward that goal. Doing this work requires a skilled workforce, and included in these investments are new and novel approaches to develop the workforce of the 21st Century. Agencies including the Departments of Commerce, Energy, and Transportation have launched programs that require awardees to implement such approaches as Registered Apprenticeships, job matching, training, and wraparound supports to advance workforce development in infrastructure sectors. As these infrastructure projects continue to take shape, learning about the impact and outcomes of these workforce development investments will be important for future efforts. Planning from the outset for implementation, outcome, and impact evaluations is critical to ensure that agencies are asking the right questions, gathering the right data, and carrying out rigorous analyses that can generate evidence with the widest possible relevance and usefulness.

More recently, [Executive Order 14110, "Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence,"](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-american-recovery-and-reinvestment-act-of-2009-executive-order-14110-safe-secure-and-trustworthy-development-and-use-of-artificial-intelligence) established a Government-wide approach to govern the development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) safely and responsibly, guided by a set of principles and priorities. As noted in the Executive Order, AI holds extraordinary potential for both promise and peril, and it is imperative that the Nation seeks to harness AI's potential for good, recognizing the many benefits it can deliver for the American people. However, realizing these benefits requires systematic examination of the extent to which the Federal Government's uses of AI achieve their intended outcomes and enable mission success. Agencies will need to ask – and answer – evaluation questions such as: what is the impact of using AI on improved teacher productivity, student learning, and patient outcomes, as compared to current activities? Agencies must also evaluate the impacts of AI as it is deployed to improve targeting of Government benefits and/or increase the reach of its programs.

Promoting a Culture of Experimentation and Learning

Fully embracing evidence-based policymaking requires wide-scale adoption of experimentation and learning. True learning organizations are open to new ideas, unafraid to ask challenging questions, experiment with new ways of doing business, embrace data and results—no matter how surprising or uncomfortable—and make changes based on what has been uncovered. Several Federal agencies have a rich history of experimentation and learning in order to improve results. In some cases, this experimentation

is mandated by statute, enabling agencies to test different models and approaches and assess their outcomes using rigorous program evaluation. In many parts of the Government, however, agencies are still largely reluctant to experiment and embed regular evaluation in their operations and mission execution even when it is allowable and feasible. The hesitation is understandable; program leaders are often afraid of uncovering poor results or calling longstanding practices into question, and concerned about the consequences of sharing negative findings. A culture of experimentation challenges agencies to overcome inertia and biases that favor the status quo. When agencies adopt a learning and improvement mindset, the insights that result allow agencies to execute their missions and operations more effectively.

The Federal Government already has some leading examples to guide what experimentation and learning in agencies can look like. Authorized by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Public Law 111-148), the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation, known as the CMS Innovation Center or CMMI, was established to identify ways to improve healthcare quality and reduce costs in the Medicare, Medicaid, and Children's Health Insurance Program. It does this by launching models that test new ways to provide better and more affordable care and couples those models with rigorous evaluation to assess short-term impacts. Since its creation over 10 years ago, CMMI has tested more than 50 models, providing evidence on approaches to improving quality of care, and using that evidence to share lessons learned and best practices throughout the U.S. health care system. CMMI's approach of coupling innovation with rigorous evaluation is an example of how the Federal Government can use evidence to improve programs.

At DOL, activities are underway to leverage evidence to implement and test innovations in existing programs. For example, the Employment and Training Administration will soon launch the Sectoral Training for Low-Income Older Adults Demonstration. This Demonstration will test whether sectoral strategies, which have shown evidence of effectiveness in other populations, increase employment and earnings for older workers with low incomes, including from underrepresented populations. Using a rigorous randomized controlled trial, the Demonstration will test whether sector-focused occupational skills training plus on-the-job training (i.e., the innovation) is more effective in increasing employment and earnings compared to standard services offered through the traditional Senior Community Service Employment Program. In executing this Demonstration, DOL is using existing evidence to innovate and test, with the goal of improving outcomes for this critical population within the workforce.

Experimentation to test new ways of doing Government business is also reflected in the work of the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) at GSA. With a mission to build and use evidence to better serve the public, OES works directly with agencies to implement and test new programs or program changes often using experimental methods. A recent example of OES's work includes an evaluation of a new intervention in Idaho to increase applications to the Homeowner Assistance Fund, a pro-

gram operated by Treasury that provides funds to eligible homeowners to assist with mortgage payments and other qualified expenses related to housing and avoid housing displacement from the COVID-19 pandemic. A rapid evaluation showed that sending mailers to eligible individuals did not increase applications, enabling the State to make real-time decisions to shift resources away from these mailers to other forms of outreach. This example highlights how a willingness to test new approaches coupled with an openness to results – good or bad – can allow evidence to be used to improve the delivery of services for the American people.

Fundamentally, the Federal Government can serve communities and the American public better if agencies understand what is working well, what is not working well, and how agencies can do better. Regular and iterative experimentation will uncover new, effective approaches and support comprehensive understanding of what is and is not working as intended. At times, this approach will result in incremental improvements, while at other times, it may lead to a major change in direction with dramatic results. Integrating evaluation to enable continuous learning makes better use of taxpayer dollars by efficiently providing the insights needed to make small tweaks, system-wide adjustments, or, when warranted, wholesale change. However, adopting a culture of evidence throughout the Federal Government requires that leaders and staff feel safe questioning deeply-held assumptions, embracing experimentation, demanding regular measurement and analysis, taking time to understand results that may surprise them, and incorporating results into decisions as a matter of course. The Evidence Act provides statutory tools to create a framework for agencies to ask the tough questions that can drive this work through their Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. Future efforts should leverage these tools and their associated routines to help agencies normalize innovation and celebrate taking risks, while recognizing that failure often leads to novel insights, necessary adjustments, and beneficial changes.

Conclusion

Five years after passage of the Evidence Act and nearly three years since the Presidential Memorandum on evidence-based policymaking, OMB and agencies have made notable gains in building evidence and evaluation capacity. The Federal Government must continue the hard work, collaboration, and commitment to ensure that evidence is routinely integrated into mission delivery and operations. Emerging priorities and once-in-a-generation investments will also require attention, collaboration, and renewed commitments across the Federal evidence ecosystem. Moving from incremental progress to transformational change requires widespread adoption of a culture of learning and experimentation throughout the Federal Government. Embracing this culture is what drives progress in building evidence and using it to improve the lives of Americans and their communities. With a shared commitment to this work, the future of the Federal evidence agenda is bright.