

Evidence-Based Policy and Practice

The Forum for Youth Investment has a deep base of expertise in using evidence to drive policy and practice. We have had the privilege of partnering with the William T. Grant Foundation to manage learning groups of federal research agencies, school district-researcher partnerships, researchers studying how research is (and is not) used by policymakers and systems leaders, junior researchers of color, and a subset of federal Investing in Innovation Fund (I3) grantees.

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality stands as a national example of combining the best of continuous improvement processes and rigorous evaluations to create a scientific method of improving the quality of programs across an entire system. Through the Forum's Readiness Project, we have also compiled and synthesized the very best of what systems experts, science and society tell us that young people need to be ready for life.

How Public Policies can Advance the Use of Research Evidence for Program Improvement

Thanks to generous support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the W.T. Grant Foundation, the Forum is taking all that we have learned and driving it into the next generation of governmental policy innovations designed to use evidence to improve the quality of programs throughout a system.

Traditionally, when policymakers use research evidence to inform their decision making, they focus on a single question: "Did the program work?" If it did, funding will continue, or ideally be increased. If not, some policymakers will call for it to be cut or even eliminated. While the use of evidence to inform policy decisions is welcomed, the limitations of this "thumbs up, thumbs down" approach are becoming increasingly apparent. Such approaches lead to policymakers avoiding using evidence, killing programs before they have the chance to evolve and improve, sidelining programs that may well be good but have not been rigorously evaluated, scaling programs without knowing which programmatic elements can and cannot be cut to

contain costs, and/or casting aspersions on an entire funding stream when some bad apples lead to poor average affects.

"Funding what works" is a relatively straightforward process. You look up which programs have the best evaluations, and provide them the most funding. "Helping programs improve based on the best available evidence" is more challenging. It requires careful use of incentives that encourage program implementers to improve their practice, coupled with technical assistance that enables them to do so.

Over the course of this year, the Forum will be:

- Releasing papers on evidence-based policymaking
- Hosting meetings for federal career staff to learn and share about building and using evidence to inform effective social policy
- Continuing to secure and support champions to advance federal, state and local policies that use evidence to improve child- and family-serving public agencies, including child welfare and juvenile justice agencies.

Opportunities to Join Us

Do you know of any policies the Forum should take a look at? Want to help us develop new model policy language? Know of any policymakers who might be interested in being the first in the nation to use the next generation of governmental policy innovations for using evidence to improve programs across an entire system? Let us know. We would love to work with you!



Interested in learning more? Please contact Thaddeus Ferber (thaddeus@forumfyi.org) and, based upon your interest, he'll connect you with the right person on the team.

