

Summary Comparison of *the Promise of Evidence-Based Policymaking* — and — *Managing for Success: Strengthening the Federal Infrastructure for Evidence-based Policymaking*

On September, 7th, 2017, two reports were released detailing how the federal government creates and uses evidence to inform decision-making.

The Promise of Evidence-Based Policymaking was released by the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (“the Commission”), which was created by the bi-partisan Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2016. This report included recommendations on:

- How the Federal government can provide the infrastructure for secure access to data;
- The mechanisms to improve privacy protections and transparency about the uses of data for evidence building; and
- The institutional capacity to support evidence building.

Managing for Success, Strengthening the Federal Infrastructure for Evidence-Based Policymaking was released by the Forum for Youth Investment (“the Forum”). This report included:

- A working model of the building blocks for the federal infrastructure for evidence-based policymaking;
- A landscape scan that presents a detailed status of each of these building blocks; and
- Recommendations to strengthen the infrastructure by (1) integrating multiple types of evidence into decision-making processes, (2) elevating evaluation and (3) focusing on revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence.

Managing for Success was designed to be complimentary to the work of the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking. As outlined in this summary comparison of the two reports, *Managing for Success* reinforces and, in places, extends the Commission’s recommendations for strengthening federal evidence-building capacity.

Managing for Success also tackles one area the Commission did not: advancing revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence. This can be done by shifting funding from programs that evidence suggests do not work to programs that evidence suggests do work, *for the same population and issue area*. This can also be done by using evidence to spend the exact same amount of money on the exact same program but to encourage or require changes to the program that will make it more efficient and effective.

The Forum’s hope is that *Managing for Success*, in conjunction with the Commission’s findings, will help the federal government continue to improve the building blocks of its infrastructure for evidence and, in so doing, help ensure evidence is funded adequately, developed rigorously, and used effectively. This will in turn help policymakers become better informed, more effective, and more efficient at delivering results for the American people.

Coordinating Evidence-Building Activities

Recommendations from the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking

REC. 5-3: The Congress and the President should direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to coordinate the Federal government’s evidence-building activities across departments, including through any reorganization or consolidation within OMB that may be necessary and by bolstering the visibility and role of interagency councils.

Selected excerpts

“A lack of coordination across government for evidence building leads to unnecessary burden and cost from duplicative data collection, missed opportunities for programmatic collaboration, and a less robust response to a crosscutting policy or programmatic question”

"Because OMB is the hub of evidence and information policy in the Federal government, the Commission finds that fragmentation of its evidence-building functions hampers its ability to sufficiently prioritize and coordinate evidence building"

"Efficiently implementing evidence-building activities across government requires a strong coordination function to address cross-cutting research and policy questions, minimize duplicative efforts, and reduce the burden on the public”

"The capacity of OMB to effectively coordinate the Federal evidence-building community has been complicated by the ways in which the roles of these offices have evolved over time, resulting in confusion or inconsistent guidelines for agencies."

"As the demand for evidence to support the policymaking process continues to grow, the operational silos within OMB will likely only become more constraining for the timely production of evidence across government."

"The Congress and the President should encourage Federal departments to inventory the units responsible for various evidence-building activities to ensure that each unit is recognized and operating in concert with other units engaging in evidence-building activities."

Related Recommendations in Managing for Success

Component of infrastructure	Integrating multiple types of evidence into decision-making processes
White House leadership positions	The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) deputy director for management should align the work of the federal chief performance officers, the chief statistician, the U.S. chief technology officer (in his or her role overseeing data), the federal chief information officer (in his or her role with Project Open Data), and the chief evaluation officer (if such a position is created).
Interagency coordinating bodies	The OMB deputy director for management/chair of the President’s Management Council, or a similar-level official, should align the various interagency coordinating bodies that are focused on specific types of evidence.
Agency-level offices and actions	Agencies should integrate multiple types of evidence into agency decision-making processes in ways that protect independence, transparency, and rigor.
Guidebooks detailing principles and best practices	Identify common themes across the full range of types of evidence activities and include them consistently in each guidebook.
Policies governing the creation and use of evidence	Congress, in partnership with OMB, should craft policies that provide a clearer vision for how multiple types of evidence should be integrated into decision-making processes, including putting in place safeguards to preserve the independence of those who create, compile, and present evidence. Congress and OMB should implement the Commission on Evidence-based Policymaking’s recommendations.
Mechanisms helping states and localities	Create a network of Using What Works Centers to help states and localities integrate multiple types of evidence into decision making. Create an evidence.gov Web site comprising the full complement of types of evidence that are currently siloed in sites like FedStats, data.gov, and performance.gov.

Increasing Resources and Capacity

Recommendations from the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking

REC. 5-1: The President should direct Federal departments to increase capacity for evidence building through the identification or establishment of a Chief Evaluation Officer, in addition to needed authorities to build a high performing evidence-building workforce.

REC. 5-5: The Congress and the President should ensure sufficient resources to support evidence-building activities about Federal government programs and policies.

Selected excerpts

"Strengthening the program evaluation function within the Federal government is an important first step in expanding evidence building"

"This recommendation directs Federal departments to establish the capacity to undertake the full range of evidence-building activities through internal human resource strategies and by leveraging partnerships with external partners."

"The commission received testimony suggesting that a Chief Evaluation Officer could assume responsibility for (1) establishing department-wide evaluation and research policies that encourage rigor, credibility, independence, and transparency; (2) coordinating and supporting technical expertise for evaluation and research within a department; and (3) identifying and setting priorities for departmental program evaluation and policy research"

"Departments face numerous pressures to respond to immediate and important requests that limit the ability to deploy staff or funding for evidence building. For example, prioritizing funding for new programs and initiatives may mean longstanding programs receive less attention for measuring or assessing program outcomes"

"the Congress and the President should enable the use of new set-aside authorities of up to 1 percent of program administration resources to support the full suite of evidence-building activities, including data collection and curation, policy-relevant research, and evaluation"

Related Recommendations in Managing for Success

Component of infrastructure	Elevating evaluation
White House leadership positions	Create a federal chief evaluation officer to play a role in advancing the creation and use of federal evaluations similar to the role played in advancing statistics by the chief statistician of the United States.
Interagency coordinating bodies	The Interagency Council on Evaluation should be formalized through an executive order or legislation.
Agency-level offices and actions	Agencies should create or enhance Chief Evaluation Offices. Agencies should invest at least 1 percent of program funds in evaluations. Agencies should double down on tiered evidence initiatives.
Guidebooks detailing principles and best practices	Publish the emerging principles and practices for federal evaluation agencies. Develop a set of principles and practices for using administrative data for evaluations.
Policies governing the creation and use of evidence	Congress, in partnership with OMB, should codify key components of the evaluation infrastructure.
Mechanisms helping states and localities	Create an evaluation.gov public-facing Web site compiling all evaluations conducted and/or funded by the federal government. Evaluation.gov should include an interface to search all federal clearinghouses at once.

Advancing Revenue-Neutral Approaches to Scaling the Use of Evidence

Recommendations from the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking

[None]¹

Related Recommendations in Managing for Success

Perhaps the most visible uses of evidence can be found in calls to increase funding for effective programs and in calls to decrease funding for ineffective programs. Both approaches, however, have drawbacks that limit the scale of evidence-based policymaking. The extent to which funding for effective programs can be increased is limited by the size of federal appropriations. Any effort to do across-the-board budget increases for every program that has a strong evidence base demonstrating success is neither possible nor practical. Therefore, using evidence to increase funding for effective programs can happen only at the margins.

On the other hand, using evidence to decrease funding for ineffective programs comes with drawbacks of its own. Champions of the population or issue the program sought to address will fight the proposed budget cut, arguing that even a program that is not great is better than no program at all.

Fortunately, there are two approaches to using evidence that are revenue neutral and therefore have the potential to be scalable.

The first is shifting funding from programs that evidence suggests do not work to programs that evidence suggests do work, *for the same population and issue area*. Transferring funds from programs that evidence suggests are ineffective to programs that evidence suggests are effective seems on its face to be a common-sense bipartisan approach that would lead to, as the Heritage Foundation puts it, “improved allocative efficiency.”²

Doing so will allow evidence-based policymaking to be scalable in a manner that could be pervasive across government because it (1) is not limited by the need to increase overall funding caps and (2) by showing advocates that this new way will get better results for the people and issues they care about, it significantly lowers the political backlash against evidence that generally accompanies its use in justifying budget cuts.

The second approach is to use evidence to spend the exact same amount of money on the exact same program but to encourage or require changes to the program that will make it more efficient and effective.

Component of infrastructure	Focusing on revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence
White House leadership positions	The OMB director for management/chief performance officer, chief statistician, U.S. chief technology officer, and chief information officer should create a culture of partnering with agencies to use evidence to help programs improve.
Interagency coordinating bodies	Each interagency coordinating body should convene members to develop jointly agreed-on methods for scaling the use of evidence through revenue-neutral approaches.
Agency-level offices and actions	Agencies should include revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence in their budget submissions to OMB.
Guidebooks detailing principles and best practices	Guidebooks should include information about not only how evidence should be created but also how it should be used— including when and how it could be best used to increase and decrease funding and for revenue-neutral approaches to improve programs.
Policies governing the creation and use of evidence	Congress should establish revenue-neutral approaches to scale the use of evidence. OMB’s annual budget guidance should promote revenue-neutral approaches to using evidence.
Mechanisms helping states and localities	Provide states and localities guidance and technical assistance for implementing revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence.

¹ This should not be interpreted as a criticism. Each report was distinct and covered different areas. For example, the Commission touches on many important subjects such as privacy that are not included in the Forum’s report.

² D.B. Muhlhausen, *Evidence-based Fiscal Discipline: The Case for PART 2.0* (2016), <http://www.heritage.org/budget-and-spending/report/evidence-based-fiscal-discipline-the-case-part-20>.