

Managing for Success: Elevating Evaluation

The Forum for Youth Investment's 2017 report, *Managing for Success: Strengthening the Federal Infrastructure for Evidence-based Policymaking*, reviewed the current landscape of offices, interagency collaborations, policies and other mechanisms which produce and use evidence at the federal level and recommended ways to strengthen and better coordinate this infrastructure. The report was meant to serve as a complement to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking, particularly in terms of its recommendations on increasing agency capacity to use evidence.

The Forum's report received input from the Cross-Agency Learning Community on Federal Investments in Research and Evaluation, a group of federal officials in agencies focused on research and evaluation related to children and families. The Forum also conducted research on the status of each building block for its landscape scan of current efforts. The recommendations for this report were further informed by interviews with current and former federal agency staff as well as White House officials spanning five administrations and a bipartisan set of organizations involved with evidence-based policymaking.

The twenty five recommendations were organized into three overarching categories: integrating multiple types of evidence into decision-making processes, elevating evaluation and focusing on revenue-neutral approaches to scaling the use of evidence. This issue brief will examine the report's third subset of recommendations: revenue-neutral approaches to scaling evidence use.

The Problem

The Forum's landscape scan found that, in general, the infrastructure supporting evaluation appears to be less robust than the infrastructure supporting statistics, data and performance improvement. Its leadership positions are less prominent, its interagency coordinating bodies are less formalized, its best practices are less codified and its legislative foundations are less sturdy. This is not to say that there have not been improvements over the past five years: the Department of Labor has greatly increased its capacity for evaluation through its Chief Evaluation Office, an office which was also highlighted in the Commission's report's chapter on agency capacity. Still, evaluators and the evidence-based community have much work to do in order to strengthen the infrastructure for evaluation across the federal government and ensure that federal staff are producing the evidence needed by policymakers.

The Commission on Evidence-based Policymaking also identified the lack of evaluation capacity as a challenge for the federal government writing that "[evaluation] functions are less institutionalized in many Federal departments." The Commission further noted that "strengthening the program evaluation function within the Federal government is an important first step in expanding evidence building." The report suggested that individual offices like the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation within the Administration for Children and Families as well as more partnerships with external research and intermediary organizations could serve as potential avenues moving forward. With the Commission's findings and further backing from the numerous experts who were consulted in the *Managing for Success* report, the Forum came up with several recommendations to elevate evaluation. The Forum was pleased to note that some of these recommendations are similar to those made by the Commission.

Recommendations

Evidence-based policymaking will only succeed if the government is producing both more and better evidence and using it. The current infrastructure for evidence does not adequately support evaluation and weakens the ability of career staff to use a type of evidence that is very useful to them. The Forum recommended ten changes that could help the federal government elevate evaluation.

Five of the recommendations touch on similar suggestions from the Commission. First, the commission recognized the need for the Office of Management and Budget to better coordinate work among the federal departments. The Forum believes that a federal chief evaluation officer could play a role in supporting this coordination work should the position be created. Similarly, a formalized Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy could support efforts to enhance evaluation capacity among the agencies and ensure that this work is coordinated across agencies. While the Commission recommends that each department establish a Chief Evaluation Officer, the Forum recommends that agencies create or enhance Chief Evaluation Offices. Both reports recognize the need for evaluation to be better funded at the federal level and reference the 1 percent program set-aside as a possible mechanism for this. Finally, both reports also mention tiered evidence initiatives as something policymakers should explore further.

In addition to these similar recommendations, the Forum also recommended that any guidebooks detailing principles and best practices for evaluation be published or further developed. The Forum also noted that Congress could play a role in formalizing the evaluation infrastructure as too much of the current infrastructure lacks codified legal authorities. Finally, the Forum recommended publicizing evaluations in a public-facing website in order to further their impact to nongovernmental partners.

Evaluation must be elevated if the federal government is ever going to truly embrace evidence-based policy. These recommendations, in conjunction with the Commission's, should provide a step forward.

Recommendations		
White House Leadership Positions	Interagency Coordinating Bodies	Agency-level Offices and Actions
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.	The Interagency Council on Evaluation should be formalized through an executive order or legislation.	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	Policies governing the creation and use of evidence	Mechanisms helping States and Localities
Publish the emerging principles and practices for federal evaluation agencies. Develop a set of principles and practices for using administrative data for evaluations.	Congress, in partnership with OMB, should codify key components of the evaluation infrastructure.	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.

For more information and to read the whole report, visit:

<http://www.forumfyi.org/managingforsuccess>.



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