Resource

Evidence–Based Policymaking Scan Highlights

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Related Topic: **Center for Results-Driven Governing**

Evidence can help officials from all branches of government strategically target resources to programs and policies that are effective, promote innovation, improve transparency in budgeting and build and sustain a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Over the past several years, state leaders have enacted numerous legislative or executive actions to advance evidence-based policymaking. In response to requests for a one-stop compilation of state policies, the Governing for Results Network partners from CSG, NCSL and The Policy Lab at Brown University have compiled an evidence-based policymaking (EBP) scan across the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Its purpose? To catalog state evidence policies, such as evidence guidelines for agencies, evidence-based budgeting and definitions of key evidence terms through legislation, executive order or other policy document. Our scan of state actions suggests state actions have clustered around a few areas in recent years: enhanced integration of performance measures and evidence into the budgeting process; implementation of evidence scales or frameworks; and recently, actions that embed data and evidence into state spending processes and decisions for American Rescue Plan Act funds.

Below we synthesize key findings in these clusters. A dozen state action steps, highlighted in text boxes, continue to build upon a foundation of core principles articulated in NCSL's 2020 publication, The ABC's of Evidence-Informed Policymaking.

Agree Upon and Codify Standards and Terms Used to Describe Evidence

Having clear definitions for evidence-based policymaking terms provides a framework for making budget decisions based on program effectiveness. As described in the EBP scan, some states (Colorado and Mississippi) have defined terms in legislation, while others (Minnesota, New York and North Carolina) have defined evidence terms through less formal approaches. For example, Minnesota

Management and Budget's "What is Evidence? " webpage defines evidence and qualifying evaluations, and links to the department's evaluation policy.

EBP Action #1: Clearly define evidence terms—including what's meant by an evidence-based or research-based program.

Build Consensus Across Branches of Government.

To engage stakeholders and facilitate buy-in among legislative and executive branch stakeholders, some states have established cross-branch offices or advisory groups to identify priority areas for evidence-based reforms and to evaluate the performance of state programs and investments. For example:

- Alabama lawmakers passed legislation in 2019 to create a Commission on the Evaluation of Services. Co-chaired by executive and legislative branch leaders, the commission evaluates state services and advises the legislature and governor on program evaluation and resource allocation.

- In 2018, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper created the Advisory Committee on Performance Management. Comprised of government employees, legislators and outside experts, the committee is tasked with advising the governor on new performance management initiatives and legislation, and strategies for increasing evidence-based policy efforts.

- The Legislative Finance Committee in New Mexico launched a "LegisStat" initiative to engage legislative leadership and state agencies in ongoing, data-driven performance reviews.

EBP Action #2: Establish a performance management advisory committee, charged with drafting legislation and/or recommendations for bolstering evidence (e.g., Virginia and North Carolina).

EBP Action #3: Run a LegisStat process, a series of formal meetings focused on discussion and troubleshooting of performance metrics (New Mexico).

Commit Resources to Generating and Using Quality Data and Research.

States have taken steps to improve access to reliable data, share data across state agencies and increase staff capacity to analyze and distill meaningful data for policymakers. Among these steps, some have established a centralized and nonpartisan staff or government unit with knowledge about

research methods and evidence-based budgeting, while others have created and funded positions, such as chief data officers. For example:

- In 2019, Arkansas lawmakers created the Data-Sharing and Data-Driven Decision-Making Task Force, comprised of legislator members, and created a chief data officer position.

- Connecticut lawmakers in 2018 created the Data Analysis Technology Advisory Board and established the position of Chief Data office within the Office of Policy and Management.

- Iowa lawmakers in 2019 appropriated funds to the Office of the Chief Information Officer to develop a dashboard that serves as single source of agency performance measures. Agencies post departmental performance plans and strategic plans along with other state data.

- Minnesota's 2022 budget funds impact evaluations for opiate epidemic response grants.

- Established in 2019, Tennessee's Office of Evidence and Impact uses data to inform decision-makers.

EBP Action #4: Fund positions to generate data and ensure its meaningful use in policymaking and budgeting. This could include hosting a fellowship program for embedding and recruiting scientists into state agencies and legislature (California, New Jersey).

Direct Resources to Programs, Policies and Practices That Are Backed By Research—and Encourage Promising Ones to Build a Research Base.

Several states have developed tiered grant programs (Colorado, New York and North Carolina), an evidence continuum (Colorado, Tennessee, and Minnesota as discussed above) or other frameworks that give preference to programs with strong evidence while also providing an opportunity for new or untested programs to develop research that demonstrates their results. For example:

- Colorado's evidence continuum and Tennessee's Office of Evidence and Impact's evidence framework provides a process for describing the evidence supporting a program currently, and how a program can move along the continuum with evaluation and implementation support.

- In 2021, the North Carolina General Assembly created a $500,000 grant program state agencies can use to conduct research to inform policy and program decisions or to partner with the Office of State Budget and Management or a third party to evaluate program success.

In recent months, some states have allocated, or announced plans to allocate, ARPA funds to evaluate programs. For example, Connecticut's state recovery plan specifies that the state's evidence-building strategy will support the allocation of resources for evaluation and data analysis.

EBP Action #5: Set and use an evidence scale or framework within the budget process (e.g., Colorado, Louisiana, Mississippi, Rhode Island, Tennessee).

EBP Action #6: Appropriate funds for competitive evaluation grants—or evaluation funds—for supporting rapid impact evaluations within the budget cycle (Colorado, North Carolina).

Embed Evidence Into State Budgeting Processes and Decisions.

For decades, states have enacted policies that incorporate evidence and performance information into the budgeting process. For example, since 1983, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, a nonpartisan public research group, has conducted policy research for the state legislature. The institute works with legislators, legislative and state agency staff, and policy experts to ensure that studies answer pertinent policy questions.

States continue to implement evidence-based budgeting practices, including use of evidence guidelines, to share critical information with policymakers about a program's effectiveness and to improve procedures for prioritizing funds. For example:

- In 2021, Colorado lawmakers passed SB 284, which requires agencies and the Office of State Planning and Budgeting to use consistent evidence definitions in budget requests. The legislation appropriated funds to add legislative staff to review agency budget proposals and established procedures to incorporate evidence-based research into the state budget process.

- In 2021, Minnesota lawmakers required agencies to include performance data in budget proposals. New and increased funding proposals must present proposed performance measures that can be used to assess if the funding accomplishes its goals.

- Rhode Island's evidence guidelines integrate an evidence scale ranking into the budget process, and points to clearinghouse tools, such as the Pew Results First Clearinghouse and Social Programs That Work, for determining whether the initiative has been rigorously evaluated.

- In 2021, Utah lawmakers passed HB 326 which requires the Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst and the Governor's Office of Budget and Planning to develop performance standards and recommend them as part of the state budget for the legislature's approval.

- In 2014, Mississippi lawmakers passed HB 677 which requires agencies to measure all of their programs on an evidence scale as part of the budget process. They recommend consulting with guidelines from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy.

EBP Action #7: Update budget templates to include evidence justifications and/or return on investment for budget proposals (e.g., Colorado, Rhode Island).

EBP Action #8: Allocate ARPA funds for program evaluations and/or evaluation set-asides.

Foster a Culture of Continued Learning.

By clearly defining terms, engaging stakeholders, and embedding evidence into the policy and budget process, state leaders are taking steps to build a culture of evidence and continued learning. Tennessee's Office of Evidence and Impact was created to foster "a culture of data and evidence-based policymaking and budgeting," a mission it seeks to accomplish through evidence-based budgeting, a program inventory, and enterprise data analytics.

Other state efforts focus on delivering evidence training for legislative and executive branch stakeholders. For example, North Carolina's Office of Strategic Partnerships, housed in the Office of State Budget and Management, hosts "Monthly Connects," a series of virtual panel discussions on a range of topics, such as strategies for building equity into partnerships.

EBP Action #9: Create a dedicated office charged with advancing the state's research agenda (e.g., Alabama, D.C., Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee and Pennsylvania).

EBP Action #10: Develop personnel solutions for building evidence capacity. Includes directing HR to review and update social science position descriptions (e.g., D.C. created data scientist, user experience designer positions).

EBP Action #11: Host or partner with external entities to develop and deliver a performance management academy, ongoing trainings or credentialing to build government EBP capacity.

Garner Support Through Clear Communication and Messaging.

States have taken a variety of steps, including development of real-time dashboards and agency report cards, to ensure that research findings are accessible and meaningful to policymakers and address key policy objectives.

- The District of Columbia registered a pre-analysis plan for evaluating its police body-worn camera program and presented the plan for feedback across a diverse set of public meetings and with an interactive website designed for lay audiences

- Minnesota Management and Budget's inventory of programs assigns color-coded ratings of effectiveness for over 400 publicly funded programs and services. Users can filter data by area of interest (e.g., criminal justice or early childhood), outcome measured, population and rating type (e.g., proven effective, promising and theory-based).

- New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee created a dashboard report and agency report cards to synthesize performance data and facilitate focused discussions on evidence-based initiatives.

EBP Action #12: Register a pre-analysis plan for evaluating a program and present the plan for feedback in public meetings and with an interactive website for lay audiences.

Conclusion

States continue to advance evidence-based policymaking through a wide array of legislative and executive actions that advance the use of evidence in state policymaking and improve the culture of how policy decisions are made. Reflecting ARPA's provisions, several states have adopted policies to evaluate programs and ensure that time-limited investments accomplish long-term gains.

Related Resources

Updated June 22, 2023

NCSL Grants Will Help States Launch Nonpartisan Science Policy Fellowships

Funds available through NCSL's Science Policy Fellowship Planning Grant Initiative will support state efforts to promote evidence-based policymaking by enhancing lawmakers' access to science and technology research.

Center for Results-Driven Governing

> *State Legislatures News*

Updated June 08, 2023

State Science Policy Fellowship Planning Grant Initiative

The Center for Results-Driven Governing at the National Conference of State Legislatures, with support from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, is offering up to eight grants in two rounds of funding to support the planning and development of state science policy fellowship programs. The request for proposals for the first round of funding opens in June 2023; round two is expected to open in June 2024.

Center for Results-Driven Governing

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Integrating Evidence and Data in the Policymaking Process through Science Policy Fellowships

Science and technology fellowship programs allow policymakers direct access to researchers and their networks and provide opportunities for scientists and engineers to contribute to policy discussions.

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