

Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government

Building and Using Evidence



Blueprint Overview

This *Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government* (Blueprint) is an implementation guide for Results for America's [*Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence*](#) (State Standard of Excellence). The State Standard of Excellence sets a national benchmark for how state governments can use evidence and data to achieve better outcomes for their residents, whereas the Blueprint provides state governments with specific implementation strategies and actions for consistently and effectively using evidence and data in budget, policy, and management decisions.

Taken together, the State Standard of Excellence and Blueprint provide state governments with a set of comprehensive resources to:



Create a high-level roadmap for how they can increase their capacity to use evidence and data in their decision-making



Build capacity to foster and sustain an organizational culture focused on learning and results



Improve investments by using their evidence and data capacity to spend taxpayer dollars on evidence-based solutions that achieve better results for their residents

This Blueprint is designed for state government leaders in governors' offices, state budget offices, and within state agencies who are charged with making their state's critical budget, policy, and management decisions. The Blueprint describes explicit Strategies, detailed Actions, useful resources, and specific examples of leading practices to help state governments make progress on the State Standard of Excellence and improve results for their residents.

Blueprint Development

The Blueprint was developed with the assistance of senior staff from a bipartisan group of governors offices as part of the [*What Works Bootcamps*](#) training series hosted by Results for America and the National Governors Association to help advance evidence-based policymaking in state governments. Through a series of in-depth, facilitated learning sessions in 2019 and 2020, senior staff from more than a dozen governors' offices contributed their expertise to developing this Blueprint. As such, this Blueprint is a practical guide that reflects the collective experience of many of the country's most effective state government leaders.

Strategies for Delivering Results in State Government

The Blueprint is organized into the following Blueprint Themes, which are aligned with the State Standard of Excellence. Each Theme has three related Strategies, detailed Actions for executing these Strategies, and specific examples of how state governments have implemented these Actions.

Blueprint Theme	Blueprint Strategies	Relevant State Standard of Excellence Criteria
 Managing for Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Establish public, customer oriented, measurable strategic goals and metrics that reflect the governor's priorities. B. Create a systematic approach to managing results that aligns budget, policy, and legislative activities to advance the governor's statewide priorities and supports continuous learning. C. Promote a culture of using data and evidence to deliver results for customers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic goals 2. Performance management/continuous improvement
 Leveraging Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> D. Develop the vision, framework and governance for effectively collecting and using data across state agencies to improve programs and operations. E. Build talent in the governor's office and agencies to advance the state's vision for collecting and using data. F. Establish a roadmap for more integrated data usage that links program data across state activities through better process and technology, while ensuring strong privacy protocols. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Data leadership 4. Data policies/agreements 5. Data use
 Building and Using Evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> G. Create leadership structures to effectively build and use evidence across state programs and departments. H. Build the infrastructure to evaluate state programs through evaluation policies, evidence definitions, program inventories, and funding to support state leaders. I. Position the budget as a key tool to build state evaluation capacity and apply that capacity to focus resources on evidence-based investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Evaluation leadership 7. Evaluation policies 8. Evaluation resources 9. Outcome data 10. Evidence definitions and program inventory
 Investing for Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> J. Prioritize key areas for analysis and improvement based on statewide goals. K. Use data-driven tools and methods to preference evidence by spending on the most effective and cost-efficient programs and initiatives. L. Redirect grant dollars and contract spending towards interventions with evidence of effectiveness in order to deliver results and encourage innovation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Cost-benefit analysis 12. Use of evidence in grant programs 13. Innovation 14. Contracting for outcomes 15. Repurpose for results

Building and Using Evidence

Blueprint Strategies	Relevant State Standard of Excellence Criteria
<p>G. Create leadership structures to effectively build and use evidence across state programs and departments.</p> <p>H. Build the infrastructure to evaluate state programs through evaluation policies, evidence definitions, program inventories, and funding to support state leaders.</p> <p>I. Position the budget as a key tool to build state evaluation capacity and apply that capacity to focus resources on evidence-based investments.</p>	<p>6. Evaluation leadership</p> <p>7. Evaluation policies</p> <p>8. Evaluation resources</p> <p>9. Outcome data</p> <p>10. Evidence definitions and program inventory</p>

Data is a key tool for performance management but it can also play a valuable role in building longer term evidence about interventions that achieve the best outcomes. In order to take full advantage of data, it is important to have the evaluation infrastructure that allows empirical evidence to inform an administration's budget, management, and policy decisions. "Knowing what works" in a particular context (and what to fund) requires research and evaluation capacity both within and outside of government. Research and evaluation offices can conduct evaluations, build lasting collaborative research partnerships, and provide expertise on high-quality evidence-building activities. At their best, these evaluation offices engage residents to identify key priorities, especially how governments can build and use evidence to improve equity. Funding these capacities is essential and can be done through set-asides, carve-outs in program funds, and even budget line items. Embedding research infrastructure in government that is aligned with budgeting processes allows states to move towards results-focused spending.





Create leadership structures to effectively build and use evidence across state programs and departments.

Actions

- Hire a [Chief Evaluation Officer](#) or Chief Learning Officer to provide leadership on an overall approach to [evaluation and learning](#)  People
- Build [cross-department and cross-functional teams](#) to ensure the right breadth of perspective is leveraged to address top administration priorities  People  Policy
 - Provide the appropriate level of authority, responsibility, and resources to these leaders and teams so they can properly execute

Blueprint Strategies in Practice



MASSACHUSETTS

Chief Strategy and Research Officer

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's [Office of Planning and Research](#) is led by a [Chief Strategy and Research Officer](#) who is responsible for improving the use of data and research findings to influence policy and program decision-making.

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 6](#)).



OHIO

Office of Research, Evaluation and Advanced Analytics

The Director of the Ohio Department of Education's [Office of Research, Evaluation and Advanced Analytics](#) helps educational leaders across the state use evidence through [resources](#) and a [clearinghouse](#).

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 6](#)).



TENNESSEE

Office of Evidence and Impact

Tennessee's [Office of Evidence and Impact](#), founded in 2019, supports the state's [evidence-based budgeting](#) and program inventories through evidence reviews and technical assistance on developing evidence-building evaluations and activities.



Build the *infrastructure to evaluate state programs* through evaluation policies, evidence definitions, program inventories, and funding to support state leaders.

Actions

- Develop policies that promote and guide the use of data and evidence in program development and assessment, including the public release of reports  **Policy**
 - Consider developing an explicit "[learning agenda](#)" for the capture of data across programs, so that performance management efforts go beyond just tracking outcomes to focus more broadly on learning and analysis; identify ways to seek community input on the learning agenda so that it reflects the needs of a diverse group of stakeholders
- Build a [program inventory](#) of all efforts by area (e.g. criminal justice, mental health, child welfare) to enable better comparison and evaluation  **Infrastructure**
- Create [clear definitions and tiers of evidence](#) (e.g. evidence-based vs. data-supported, etc.) to better communicate within departments, the public, and the legislature about what is working and what is not  **Policy**
- Engage outside experts, such as [university-based researchers](#), to enhance internal capacity for research and [evaluation of programs](#)  **People**



Blueprint Strategies in Practice



MINNESOTA

Evaluation Policy, Evidence Definitions, and Clearinghouse

In partnership with The Pew Results First Initiative, Minnesota Management and Budget [inventoried](#) nearly 500 publicly-funded interventions and rated their evidence of effectiveness in a clearinghouse. To support the ongoing focus on funding evidence-based programs and interventions, Minnesota Management and Budget released an [evaluation policy](#) to govern evaluations, which specifically mandates the release of all completed evaluation reports regardless of findings. Minnesota Management and Budget also [defines evidence](#) for research, evaluation, and funding purposes.

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 7](#)).



CALIFORNIA

Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare

The California Department of Social Services created an [Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#), which [allows](#) child welfare providers and professionals to identify, select, and implement evidence-based child welfare practices. In addition, the Clearinghouse provides [guidance and support for program implementation](#). The Clearinghouse's numerical [rating scale](#) categorizes programs into six tiers of evidence and uses a [relevance scale](#) as a complement to the scientific rating scale to demonstrate applicability for client populations.

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 10](#)).



TENNESSEE

Education Research Alliance

The [Tennessee Education Research Alliance](#) (TERA) is a formal research partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education and Vanderbilt University's Peabody College of Education. Led by seven full-time staff and guided by a steering committee and advisory council, the Department and the University have co-developed a [research agenda](#) that allows the University to [conduct research](#) on a variety of issues.

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 7](#)).



*Position the **budget** as a key tool to build state evaluation capacity and apply that capacity to focus resources on evidence-based investments.*

Actions

- Develop a budget decision-making process that preferences [requests with evidence](#) and/or data about quantifiable outcomes (i.e. not just counting inputs and outputs) Policy
 - Consider a [rubric](#) that increases the priority of a specific request based on the level of evidence for the program, while also creating space for new programs that do not yet have an evidence base, but do have strong data that demonstrates quantifiable outcomes
- Create a standard funding allocation to build the state's capacity to [evaluate programs](#) (e.g. 1% with a cap on the total amount); this is especially relevant for new programs where it is important to [design the evaluations](#) and metrics that will be used to measure the success of the initiative Policy
- Ensure the new budget process is integrated into the broader systematic approach to managing results, so that priorities and learnings from different parts of the governor's office and agency leadership are not siloed Infrastructure
- Engage with the legislature to [refine the new budget process](#) People
 - Clarify terms such as "[evidence-based](#)" vs. "data informed" to ensure consistency and clear communication



Blueprint Strategies in Practice

COLORADO

Budget Instructions



Colorado's FY 2020–2021 [budget development instructions](#) (pp. 10–12) prioritize new program requests "based on the evidence and body of research supporting the program's effect on desired outcomes and proposed implementation plan." In the FY 2020–2021 budget cycle, the state applied an [evidence continuum](#) to budget requests and used that criteria to inform resource allocation decisions.

MINNESOTA

Guidance for New and Expanded Programs



Minnesota Management and Budget issued [guidance](#) on how to report outcome data. In addition, the state also used evidence to [inform funding decisions](#) resulting in [\\$87 million in new or expanded evidence-based programming](#) in the FY 2020–2021 budget.

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 10](#)).

NORTH CAROLINA

Budget Office Reform



In 2018, North Carolina [redesigned its budget process](#) to increase the use of evidence-based decision-making. As a result, the [2019–2021 budget development instructions](#) require that agency requests "for new or expanded programs or services must include evidence and research supporting the program's effect on desired outcomes."

More information: 2019 State Standard of Excellence ([Criteria 9](#)).





What Could This Look Like Over Time?

Building and Using Evidence



Wins

By following the actions above and building over time, states should aim to achieve wins along the way to galvanize internal and external support. Here are some sample wins, though there are many other types of achievements that states could use to mark their progress.

SHORT-TERM WINS

- Broadly adopted [evidence definitions](#) across state government (such as in [Colorado](#))
- Designate/hire a chief evaluation officer to lead and coordinate evaluation activities (such as in [Minnesota](#))
- Develop a clear structure for coordinating evaluation and evidence activities across agencies, which could include the state legislature (See [Alabama's Commission on Evaluation Services](#))

MID-TERM WINS

- Create learning agendas (statewide and at agencies)
- Develop an evaluation policy aligned with evidence definitions (see Minnesota Management and Budget's [evaluation policy](#))
- Build relationships with institutions and organizations that can provide external research capacity (such as the research-practice partnership model of the [Tennessee Education Research Alliance](#))
- Make evidence and evaluations publicly available through a clearinghouse or inventory (such as the California [Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#))

LONG-TERM WINS

- Create a strong state evaluation culture with centralized, agency, and external capacity (see State Education Agencies in [Mississippi](#), [Ohio](#), and [Massachusetts](#), which have created research and evaluation offices to lead and coordinate evaluation activities)
- Use tiered evidence structures that build evidence and encourage innovation (see the [Education Innovation and Research program](#) from the U.S Department of Education)
- Require evidence of effectiveness in [budget proposals](#), especially for newly proposed programs (see Minnesota Management and Budget [guidance](#) on making evidence-based budget proposals)

About Results for America

Results for America

Results for America is helping decision-makers at all levels of government harness the power of evidence and data to solve our world's greatest challenges. Our mission is to make investing in what works the "new normal," so that when policymakers make decisions, they start by seeking the best evidence and data available, then use what they find to get better results.

Invest in What Works Policy Series

This *Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government* is part of Results for America's Invest in What Works policy series launched in 2012 to help local, state, and federal policymakers harness the power of evidence and data to increasingly shift taxpayer dollars toward results-driven, evidence-based solutions.

For Further Information

Please contact Results for America (info@results4america.org) for additional information about the Strategies and Actions contained in this Blueprint or for assistance with implementing these strategies in your state.



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Cover image courtesy of [Utah Capitol Preservation Board](#).