Next Steps in the White House Evidence and Innovation Agenda

Council of Economic Advisers

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White House Evidence and Innovation Agenda

• What is it?
  • Smarter, more innovative, and more accountable government
  • Expand the approaches that work best, fine-tune the ones that get mixed results, and shut down those that are failing

• How is it implemented?
  • The Budget process – priority given to requests that demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based evaluation
  • Interagency collaboration – foster and develop a culture of learning and innovation
Motivation

• Fiscal Climate

• We need to be making smarter investments

• Evaluation needs to be part of a program from the beginning

• Prioritizing based on evaluation
What Have We Learned?

• Leveraging Administrative Data
  – The College Scorecard

• High-Quality, Low-Cost Evaluations and Iterative Experimentation
  – Applied Behavioral Research at the Treasury Department

• Hawaii’s Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) Program
  – Measured outcomes using administrative data already collected for other purposes (at a total cost of $150,000)
  – HOPE group members were 55% less likely than control group members to be re-arrested after one year
What Have We Done?

• Outcome-Focused Grant Design
  – Unique opportunity to strengthen the use of evidence at all levels of government

• Pay for Success
  – Government pays only when measurable results are achieved

• Tiered-evidence
  – Different levels of funding for different levels of evaluation
  – Over time, interventions move up tiers as evidence becomes stronger
  – Already in place at several agencies
What Have We Done? (2)

- **Strengthen Agencies’ Capacity to Use Evidence**
  - Agency-wide Evaluation Plans
  - DOL Chief Evaluation Office

- **Common Evidence Guidelines**
  - Facilitate evaluation contracting, information collection clearance, and creation of research clearinghouses

- **Cross-agency Learning Networks**
  - SBA, USDA, and Commerce, with guidance from OMB and CEA, are working to find more robust ways to evaluate the impact of Federal business technical assistance programs
What Have We Done? (2)

• “What Works” Clearinghouses
  – DOJ: CrimeSolutions.gov
  – DOL: Clearinghouse of Labor Evaluation and Research
  – HHS: National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Some Challenges – Evidence Agenda

• Rigorous evaluations take time and money

• A body of work, not just one evaluation, is needed to assess whether programs or intervention strategies are having desired effects on outcomes

• Directing funding to “what works” entails new program designs
  – Particularly challenging in block grant programs
Challenges to Using Administrative Data for Evaluation

- Designing administrative data sets to facilitate low cost evaluations
  - Requires new upfront investments
  - Program administrators may not consider the need to involve evaluators in database design decisions

- Few opportunities to change existing data systems

- Challenges to linking data sets
What’s Next?

• FY15: Propose new evaluations using rigorous techniques (RCT, careful quasi-experimental designs)

• New ways to harness data to improve agency results

• New proposals for high-quality, low-cost evaluations

• Expand or improve use of outcome-focused grant designs

• Strengthening agency evaluation capacity