

# 2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

## CRITERIA



### TOTAL SCORE (100 points possible)



**1. Leadership:** Did the agency have senior staff members with the authority, staff, and budget to build and use evidence to inform the agency's major policy and program decisions in FY21? (9 points possible)

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**2. Evaluation and Research:** Did the agency have an evaluation policy, evaluation plan, and learning agenda, and did it publicly release the findings of all completed program evaluations in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**3. Resources:** Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:** Did the agency implement a performance management system, and did it frequently use data and evidence to improve outcomes in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**5. Data:** Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality data – consistent with strong privacy protections – to improve outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of its programs and grantees in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:** Did the agency use a common evidence framework to inform its research and funding decisions; prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and promote evidence-based interventions in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**7. Innovation:** Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes to foster innovation that improved impact of its programs in FY21? (7 points possible)

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**8. Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs:** Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its competitive grant programs in FY21? (15 points possible)

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**9. Use of Evidence in Non-Competitive Grant Programs:** Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness when allocating funds from its non-competitive grant programs in FY21? (10 points possible)

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**10. Repurpose for Results:** In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, interventions, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (8 points possible)

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<sup>\*\*</sup> Meeting this criteria requires both federal agency and congressional action.

<sup>1</sup> USAID and MCC only administered competitive grant programs in FY21. Therefore, for both agencies, Results for America applied scored criteria #9 by applying their relevant score from criteria #8.

<sup>2</sup> SAMHSA only administered four non-competitive grants in FY21. Therefore, Results for America applied a scored based on these four grants.

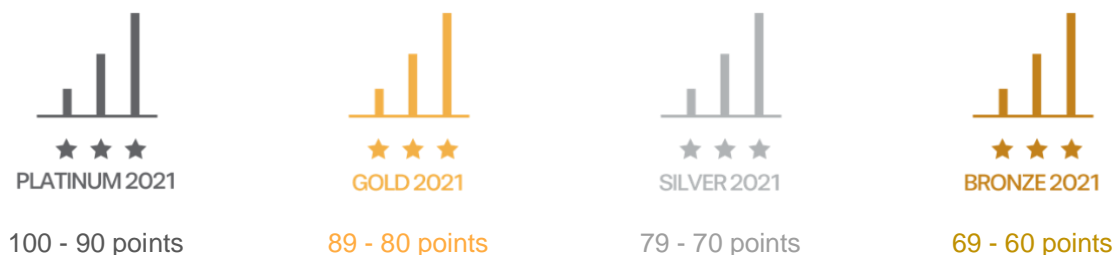
Certification Level



## About the Results for America 2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard: Methodology

Results for America's [2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence](#) (Federal Standard of Excellence) highlights how nine federal agencies, which oversaw more than \$286 billion in federal investments in FY2021, are building the infrastructure necessary to use evidence and data in their budget, policy, and management decisions.

In 2021, for the first time, Results for America is using the following certification levels, along with scores, to recognize the evidence and data efforts at the nine federal agencies highlighted in the 2021 Federal Standard of Excellence:



When reviewing the information and scores in the 2021 Federal Standard of Excellence, it is important to note that:

- Results for America developed the standard's criteria and scoring structure in close consultation with more than 100 current and former federal government officials and key stakeholders from all across the country.
- The purpose of the standard is to educate members of the general public as well as public, private, and nonprofit sector leaders on how federal departments and agencies are currently using evidence, data, and evaluation to invest taxpayer dollars in what works.
- Results for America gave the federal departments and agencies included in the standard multiple opportunities to review and comment on the content and presentation of the information included in it. Results for America greatly appreciates their willingness to help develop the Federal Standard of Excellence and their continued commitment to making the federal government as effective and efficient as possible. Since Results for America recognizes the complexity of federal practices, policies, and programs into a single cross-agency Federal Standard of Excellence, Results for America exercised its best judgment and relied on the deep expertise of leaders both within and outside of the federal government during the development of the Federal Standard of Excellence.
- Results for America would like to thank its [Federal Advisory Committee Members](#) for their guidance in the development and review of this year's federal standard.
- Results for America released nine previous versions of the Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence, formerly entitled as the Invest in What Works Index, in [June 2013](#), [September 2013](#), [May 2014](#), [March 2015](#), [April 2016](#), [October 2017](#), [November 2018](#), [October 2019](#), and [December 2020](#).

## Federal Agencies Are Using Data and Evidence to Drive an Equitable Recovery

### *Newly Released 2021 Federal Invest in What Works Standard of Excellence Recognizes Nine Federal Agencies*

November 4, 2021

WASHINGTON, DC – At an event today with senior White House, Congressional, and federal agency leaders, Results for America released the [2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence](#), which highlights the progress that nine leading federal agencies have made in implementing the Evidence Act and using evidence and data to improve the impact of federal investments.

At the event, Acting White Office of Management and Budget Director Shalanda Young praised federal agencies for putting evidence and data at the center of their efforts to help drive an equitable recovery. **“We have to have one set of facts—and that’s what data and evidence and science bring us,”** Young said. **“We need to bring that to the construct of government.”**

The 2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence assesses how nine federal agencies – which oversaw more than \$286 billion in federal funds this year – are building the infrastructure necessary to use evidence and data in their budget, policy, and management decisions. Based on a review of [each agency’s progress](#), Results for America recognized:

- Three agencies as Gold Certified: the **Millennium Challenge Corporation**, the **U.S. Agency for International Development**, and the **U.S. Department of Education**;
- Two agencies as Silver Certified: the **Administration for Children and Families**, and **AmeriCorps**;
- Four agencies as Bronze Certified: the **U.S. Department of Labor**, the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**, the **Administration for Community Living**, and the **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**.

**“We are encouraged by these agencies’ efforts to use evidence and data to advance economic mobility and close racial gaps,”** said Michele Jolin, CEO and Co-Founder of Results for America. **“By building a culture of data-driven decision-making, they are accelerating the federal government’s ability to invest in what works and deliver better results for the American people.”**

#### Highlights of Progress Across the Nine Agencies

- **Major strides in investing in what works:** In 2013, the Federal Standard of Excellence recognized two federal agencies for prioritizing and defining evidence in five competitive and noncompetitive grant programs (which allocated \$3.2 billion). This year we are recognizing nine federal agencies for prioritizing and defining evidence in 33 competitive and noncompetitive grant programs (which allocated \$64.3 billion).

- **Leadership at all 9 agencies:** All nine agencies [designated](#) Evidence Act leaders who are helping coordinate agency-wide data, evidence, and evaluation activities.
- **4 agencies meeting the threshold for investing in evidence-building:** In FY21, four of the nine agencies invested at least 1% of their budgets in research and evaluation activities; MCC's FY21 investment exceeded 2%.
- **2022 should see more progress:** The Biden-Harris Administration has accelerated the evidence-driven efforts of federal agencies through [executive actions](#), Evidence Act [guidance](#), and American Rescue Plan Act [guidance](#) to help state and local governments maximize the impact of their recovery funds.

## Highlights of Progress at Each Agency

- [Administration for Children and Families](#) (ACF within HHS) helped build the capacity of grantees to support culturally responsive evaluation through centers and toolkits, and is developing a new [African American Children and Families Research Center](#) to support research on the needs of African American populations served by ACF.
- [Administration for Community Living](#) (ACL within HHS) expanded its research and evaluation team at the Office of Performance and Evaluation, and [produced research](#) to address COVID-related challenges such as [communications barriers](#) between patients who are deaf or hard of hearing and their health care providers due to mask usage.
- [AmeriCorps](#) hired a chief data officer to support Evidence Act implementation, and increased its investment in grantees with strong or moderate evidence to 68% in FY21 competitive grant dollars, a 17 percent increase from FY20.
- [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) (MCC) is expanding access to all its evaluations, research, publicly available datasets, and [Evaluation Briefs](#) through a new user-friendly Evidence Platform later this year, and is seeking to generate more evidence around inclusion and gender as part of its learning agenda.
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA within HHS): Through the Office of Behavioral Health Equity, SAMHSA grantees submit Disparity Impact Statements (DIS) to ensure SAMHSA programs are delivered through an equitable access, use, and outcomes framework.
- [U.S. Agency for International Development](#) (USAID) published an FY22 Annual [Evaluation Plan](#) outlining its significant evaluations, and is leveraging disaggregated data to analyze and respond to racial, ethnic, and other equity disparities.
- [U.S. Department of Education](#) (ED) expanded its data staff to support its chief data officer and Evidence Leadership Group (ELG), produced a series of evidence-based [COVID-19 resources](#), and shared [disaggregated data](#) to help inform efforts to support students with disabilities, English Learners, students experiencing homelessness, and others during the pandemic.
- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) (HUD) has coordinated its performance management, research, and learning activities through its [Annual Performance Plan](#) and [Research Roadmap](#), helped states and localities build their evidence capacity, and provided grantees [resources](#) to better understand and address racial disparities.
- [U.S. Department of Labor](#) (DOL) hired and appointed a chief innovation officer, a position left unfilled during the last administration, and three of its five largest competitive grants require grantees to provide information about their past performance and use of evidence-informed strategies in their grant applications.

## **Highlights of Areas Where More Progress Is Needed**

- Federal agencies should use their full authority to define and prioritize evidence in all of their competitive grant programs.
- Congress, the White House, and federal agencies should work together to define and prioritize evidence in all of their non-competitive grant programs.
- Congress, the White House, and federal agencies should work together to ensure that at least 1% of agency program funds are invested in evidence-building efforts.