2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

CRITERIA	MCC	ED	USAID	ACF	AmeriCorps	USDOL	USHUD	ACL	SAMHSA
TOTAL SCORE (100 points possible)	84 ★★★	82 ★★★	80 ★★★	71 ★★★	71 ★★★	69 ★★★	68 ★★★	67 ★★★	64 ★★★
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)	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	5
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 possiblea)	7	9	10	10	8	7	10	10	8
3. Resources:** Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21? (10 points possible)	9	5	7	7	10	5	6	9	10
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)	6	8	10	6	5	10	10	7	8
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)	7	8	8	6	6	5	6	8	5
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)	6	10	6	8	7	9	3	5	5
7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes to foster innovation that improved impact of its programs in FY21? (7 points possible)	7	6	7	6	5	5	6	4	4
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)	15	15	10	7	13	8	9	7	8
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)	10 [1]	7	7 [1]	6	3	7	4	4	7 [2]
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)	8	5	6	6	6	4	5	4	4

** Meeting this criteria requires both federal agency and congressional action.
[1] 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.
[2] SAMHSA only administered four non-competitive grants in FY21. Therefore, Results for America applied a scored based on these four grants.
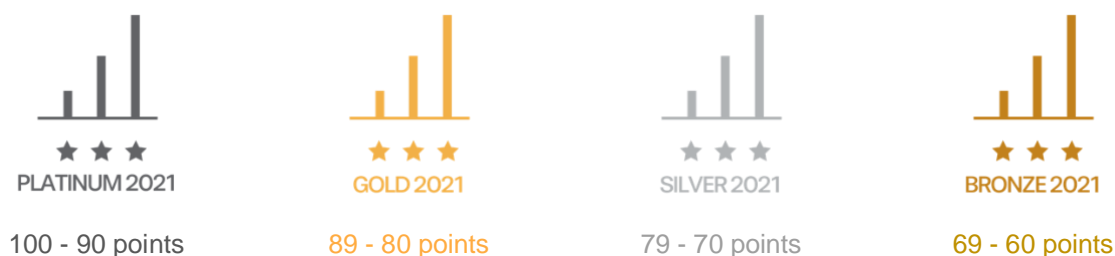
Certification Level

PLATINUM 2021   GOLD 2021   SILVER 2021   BRONZE 2021

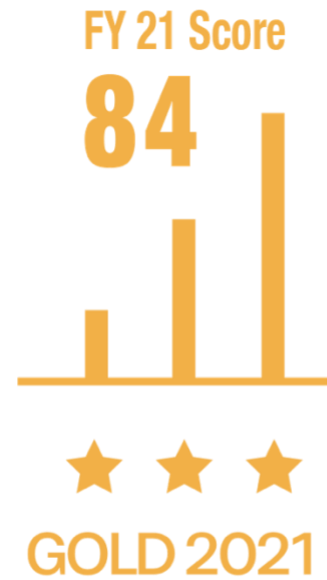**About the Results for America 2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard: Methodology**
Results for America's *2021 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence* (Federal Standard of Excellence) highlights how nine federal agencies, which oversaw more than $286 billion in federal investments 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:

PLATINUM 2021	GOLD 2021	SILVER 2021	BRONZE 2021
★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★	★ ★ ★
100 - 90 points	89 - 80 points	79 - 70 points	69 - 60 points

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.

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

FY 21 Score

84

★ ★ ★

GOLD 2021

MILLENNIUM
CHALLENGE CORPORATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

Millennium Challenge Corporation

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

As a foreign assistance agency, accountability is core to the **Millennium Challenge Corporation's** (MCC) organizational culture. This culture is reinforced by MCC's evaluation leaders who oversee the agency's performance, research, and evaluation activities. This commitment is further supported by the agency's robust investment in research and evaluation: 2.2% of the agency's budget, or $17.6 million in FY21.

Beyond monitoring, MCC has increased its focus on sharing research and evaluation information with country partners, development assistance organizations, and the general public in recent years. This approach equips stakeholders to make better use of evidence-based approaches and accelerate results. Specifically, in 2021, MCC will launch a new MCC Evidence Platform that provides a one-stop, virtual data enclave for users to access and use public- and restricted-use data. The Platform encourages research, learning, and reproducibility and connects datasets to analytical products across the portfolio.

The Evidence Platform will also host the Evaluation Briefs, launched in FY19, which distill key findings and lessons learned from MCC's independent evaluations. As of October 2021, MCC has published 107 Evaluation Briefs, which are also published in local country languages. As of 2021, MCC will produce Evaluation Briefs for each evaluation moving forward, and is in the process of writing Evaluation Briefs for the backlog of all completed evaluations.

MCC is working to strengthen its evidence frameworks for research and evaluation. Further, the agency has named climate inclusion & gender as key priorities for the agency, and is working to incorporate the existing women's economic empowerment learning agenda to include evidence generation and utilization around gender and inclusion (in addition to women's economic empowerment) in MCC's programming.

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?

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Managing Director serves as the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) Evaluation Officer. The Managing Director is a career civil service position with the authority to execute M&E's budget, an estimated $17.6 million in due diligence funds in FY21, with a staff of 28 people. In accordance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, MCC designated an Evaluation Officer.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The Director of Product Management in the Office of the Chief Information Officer is MCC's Chief Data Officer. The Chief Data Officer manages a staff of six and an estimated FY21 budget of $1 million in administrative funds. In accordance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, MCC designated a Chief Data Officer.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act Implementation and improve, and evaluate the agency's major programs?

The MCC Evaluation Management Committee (EMC) oversees decision-making, integration, and quality control of the agency's evaluation and programmatic decision-making in accordance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act. The EMC integrates evaluation with program design and implementation to ensure that evaluations are designed and implemented in a manner that increases their utility, to both MCC and in-country stakeholders as well as external stakeholders. The EMC includes the agency's evaluation officer, Chief Data Officer, representatives from M&E, the project lead, sector specialists, the

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?**

economist, and gender and environmental safeguards staff. For each evaluation, the EMC has between 11-16 meetings or touchpoints, from evaluation scope-of-work to final evaluation publication. The EMC plays a key role in coordinating MCC's Evidence Act implementation.

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

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

MCC's Independent Evaluation Portfolio is governed by its publicly available Policy for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). This Policy requires all programs to develop and follow comprehensive M&E plans that adhere to MCC's standards. The Policy was revised in March 2017 to ensure alignment with the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016. Pursuant to MCC's M&E policy, every project must undergo an independent evaluation.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

Every MCC investment must adhere to MCC's rigorous Policy for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) that requires every MCC program to contain a comprehensive M&E Plan. For each investment MCC makes in a country, the country's M&E plan is required to be published within 90 days of entry-into-force. The M&E Plan lays out the evaluation strategy and includes two main components. The monitoring component lays out the methodology and process for assessing progress towards the investment's objectives. The evaluation component identifies and describes the evaluations that will be conducted, the key evaluation questions and methodologies, and the data collection strategies that will be employed. Each country's M&E Plan represents the evaluation plan and learning agenda for that country's set of investments.

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

7

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

In an effort to advance MCC's evidence base and respond to the Evidence Act, MCC is implementing a learning agenda around women's economic empowerment (WEE) with short- and long-term objectives. The agency is focused on expanding the evidence base to answer these key research questions:

- How do MCC's WEE activities contribute to MCC's overarching goal of reducing poverty through economic growth?
- How does MCC's WEE work contribute to increased income and assets for households—beyond what those incomes would have been without the gendered/WEE design?
- How does MCC's WEE work increase income and assets for women and girls within those households?
- How does MCC's WEE work increase women's empowerment, defined through measures relevant to the WEE intervention and project area?

These research questions were developed through extensive consultation within MCC and with external stakeholders. Agency leadership has named inclusion and gender as a key priority. As such, the agency is considering how to expand the WEE learning agenda to include evidence generation and utilization around gender and inclusion (in addition to women's economic empowerment) in MCC's programming.

MCC is also increasingly enabling learning agendas and strategies with its partner countries. In MCC's compact with Liberia, a key program focused on institutional reform and strengthening of the Liberia Electricity Corporation. In recognition of learning in their on-the-job training strategies, the team won top awards for advancements in learning strategy creation and best learning program supporting a change transformation business strategy. These awards recognize the innovation and excellence in the strategies and design deployed in the program, as well as the results achieved.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

MCC publishes each independent evaluation of every project, underscoring the agency's commitment to transparency, accountability, learning, and evidence-based decision-making. All independent evaluations and reports are publicly available on the new MCC Evidence Platform. As of August 2021, MCC had contracted, planned, and/or published 209 independent evaluations. All MCC evaluations produce a final report to present final results, and some evaluations also produce an interim report to present interim results. To date, 117 Final Reports and 36 Interim Reports have been finalized and released to the public.

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

In FY21, MCC also continued producing Evaluation Briefs, an MCC product that distills key findings and lessons learned from MCC's independent evaluations. MCC will produce Evaluation Briefs for each evaluation moving forward, and is in the process of writing Evaluation Briefs for the backlog of all completed evaluations. MCC expects to have Evaluation Briefs for every published evaluation by the end of 2021. As of October 2021, MCC has published 107 Evaluation Briefs.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that includes information about the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

MCC is currently working on a draft capacity assessment in accordance with the Evidence Act. Additionally, once a compact or threshold program is in implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) resources are used to procure evaluation services from external independent evaluators to directly measure high-level outcomes to assess the attributable impact of all of MCC's programs. MCC sees its independent evaluation portfolio as an integral tool to remain accountable to stakeholders and the general public, demonstrate programmatic results, and promote internal and external learning. Through the evidence generated by monitoring and evaluation, the M&E Managing Director, Chief Economist, and Vice President for the Department of Policy and Evaluation are able to continuously update estimates of expected impacts with actual impacts to inform future programmatic and policy decisions. In FY21, MCC began or continued comprehensive, independent evaluations for every compact or threshold project at MCC, a requirement stipulated in Section 7.5.1 of MCC's Policy for M&E. All evaluation designs, data, reports, and summaries are available on MCC's Evaluation Catalog.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?
MCC employs rigorous, independent evaluation methodologies to measure the impact of its programming, evaluate the efficacy of program implementation, and determine lessons learned to inform future investments. As of August 2021, about 32% of MCC's evaluation portfolio consists of impact evaluations, and 68% consists of performance evaluations. All MCC impact evaluations use random assignment to determine which groups or individuals will receive an MCC intervention, which allows for a counterfactual and thus for attribution to MCC's project, and best enables MCC to measure its impact in a fair and transparent way. Each evaluation is conducted according to the program's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan, in accordance with MCC's Policy for M&E.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

9

(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

3.1 ____ (Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

MCC invested $17.6 million on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 2.2% of the agency's $800 million FY21 budget (minus staff/salary expenses).

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

MCC budgeted $17.6 million on monitoring and evaluation in FY21, an increase of $1.5 million compared to FY20 ($16.1 million total).

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

In support of MCC's emphasis on country ownership, MCC also provides substantial, intensive, and ongoing capacity building to partner country Monitoring and Evaluation staff in every country in which it invests. As a part of this, MCC provides training and ongoing mentorship in the local language. This includes publishing select independent evaluations, Evaluation Briefs, and other documentation in the country's local language. The dissemination of local language publications helps further MCC's reach to its partner country's government and members of civil society, enabling them to fully reference and utilize evidence and learning beyond the program. MCC also includes data strengthening and national statistical capacity as a part of its evidence-building investments. This agency-wide commitment to building and expanding an evidence-based approach with every partner country is a key component of MCC's investments.

10

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Millennium Challenge Corporation | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

As a prime example of this work, MCC continues to implement a first-of-its-kind evaluation partnership in its Morocco investment. MCA-Morocco, the local implementing entity, signed MCC's first Cooperation Agreement, a funded partnership within a country program, under the new Partnership Navigator Program Partnership Solicitation process. This first MCA-driven partnership agreement is bringing Nobel prize-winning economic analysis approaches from MIT and Harvard to partner with a Moroccan think tank to create an Employment Lab to conduct rigorous research into Moroccan labor market programs and policies. This research is coupled with training and capacity building to key Moroccan policymakers to promote evidence-based decision-making.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

6
(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

MCC's strategic plan, "NEXT: A Strategy for MCC's Future," lays out five specific goals and priority actions for deepening and expanding impact and meeting the challenges of the new landscape of global poverty and development. Additionally, agency leadership has named three strategic priorities for the agency: climate-smart investments; inclusion and gender; and private sector engagement.

In an effort to track and aggregate evidence across its entire portfolio, MCC has implemented a common indicators structure across the seven sectors in which it invests: energy; land and property rights; education; water, sanitation, and irrigation; health; roads and transport infrastructure; and agriculture. In all MCC countries, projects in these sectors capture evidence across a common set of indicators to allow MCC to build an agency-wide evidence base around its investments.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

MCC is committed to using high-quality data and evidence to drive its strategic planning and program decisions. The Monitoring and Evaluation plans for all programs and tables of key performance indicators for all projects are available online by compact and threshold program and by sector, for use by both partner countries and the general public. Prior to investment, MCC performs a Cost-Benefit Analysis to assess the potential impact of each project, and estimates an Economic Rate of Return (ERR). MCC uses a 10% ERR hurdle to more effectively prioritize and fund projects with the greatest opportunity for maximizing impact. MCC

12

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

then recalculates ERRs at investment closeout, drawing on information from MCC's monitoring data (among other data and evidence), to test original assumptions and assess the cost effectiveness of MCC programs. In an effort to complete the evidence loop, MCC now includes evaluation-based cost-benefit analysis as a part of its independent final evaluation. As a part of the independent evaluation, the evaluators analyze the MCC-produced ERR and associated project assumptions five or more years after investment close to understand if and how the benefits actually accrued. These evaluation-based ERRs add to the evidence base by better understanding the long-term effects and sustainable impact of MCC's programs.

In addition, MCC produces periodic reports that capture the results of MCC's learning efforts in specific sectors and translate that learning into actionable evidence for future programming. Once MCC has a critical number of evaluations in a given sector, the agency endeavors to draw portfolio-wide learning from that sector in the form of Principles into Practice reports. In FY21, MCC published a new Principles into Practice report on its research related to learning in the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector: Lessons from Evaluations of MCC Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Programs. MCC is also currently working on forthcoming Principles into Practice reports on its general education and evidence-based scorecard selection process.

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

MCC continues to implement and expand a new reporting system that enhances MCC's credibility around results, transparency, learning, and accountability. The Star Report and its associated quarterly business process captures key information to provide a framework for results and improve the ability to promote and disseminate learning and evidence throughout the compact and threshold program lifecycle. For each compact and threshold program, evidence is collected on performance indicators, evaluation results, partnerships, sustainability efforts, and learning, among other elements. Critically, this information is available in one report after each program ends. Each country will have a Star Report published roughly seven months after completion. Continual learning and improvement is a key aspect of MCC's operating model. MCC continuously monitors progress towards compact and threshold program results on a quarterly basis using performance indicators that are specified in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan for each country's investments. The M&E Plans specify indicators at all levels (process, output, and

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
  Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
  (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

outcome) so that progress towards final results can be tracked. Every quarter each partner country submits an Indicator Tracking Table that shows actual performance of each indicator relative to the baseline that was established before the activity began and the performance targets that were established in the M&E Plan. Key performance indicators and their accompanying data by country are updated every quarter and published online. MCC management and the relevant country team review this data in a formal Quarterly Performance Review meeting to assess whether results are being achieved and integrate this information into project management and implementation decisions.

In FY21, MCC also launched an exciting new interactive sector-level learning product: Sector Results and Learning pages. Sector Results and Learning pages are interactive web pages that promote learning and inform program design by consolidating the latest monitoring data, independent evaluation results, and lessons from the key sectors in which MCC invests. Critically, this information is now publicly available, in one place, for the first time. An interactive learning database allows practitioners to efficiently retrieve past learning to inform new programs. MCC has published Sector Results and Learning pages for the WASH and transportation sectors. Pages that focus on Agriculture and Irrigation, Education, Energy, and Land will become available throughout 2021.

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

In FY21, MCC is continuing to develop a strategic data plan. As detailed on MCC's Digital Strategy and Open Government pages, MCC promotes transparency to provide people with access to information that facilitates their understanding of MCC's model, MCC's decision-making processes, and the results of MCC's investments. Transparency, and therefore open data, is a core principle for MCC because it is the basis for accountability, provides strong checks against corruption, builds public confidence, and supports informed participation of citizens.

As a testament to MCC's commitment to and implementation of transparency and open data, the agency was again the highest-ranked U.S. government agency in the 2020 Publish What You Fund Aid Transparency Index for the sixth consecutive Index. In addition, the U.S. government is part of the Open Government Partnership, a signatory to the International Aid Transparency Initiative, and must adhere to the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act. All of these initiatives require foreign assistance agencies to make it easier to access, use, and understand data. All of these actions have created further impetus for MCC's work in this area, as they establish specific goals and timelines for adoption of transparent business processes.

Additionally, MCC convenes an internal Data Governance Board, an independent group consisting of representatives from departments throughout the agency, to streamline MCC's approach to data management and advance data-driven decision-making across its investment portfolio.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

MCC makes extensive program data, including financials and results data, publicly available through its Open Data Catalog, which includes an "enterprise data inventory" of all data resources across the agency for release of data in open, machine readable formats. The Department of Policy and Evaluation leads the MCC Disclosure Review Board process for publicly releasing the de-identified microdata that underlies the independent evaluations on the MCC Evidence Platform, following MCC's Microdata Management Guidelines to ensure appropriate balance in transparency efforts with protection of human subjects' confidentiality.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

MCC's new MCC Evidence Platform offers a first-of-its-kind virtual data enclave for users to access and use public- and restricted-use data. The Platform encourages research, learning, and reproducibility and connects datasets to analytical products across the portfolio. In addition to the Evidence Platform, which links and provides access to all of MCC's microdata from evaluation packages, MCC's Data Analytics Program (DAP) enables enterprise data-driven decision-making through the capture, storage, analysis, publishing, and governance of MCC's core programmatic data. The DAP streamlines the agency's data lifecycle, facilitating increased efficiency. Additionally, the program promotes agency-wide coordination, learning, and transparency. For example, MCC has developed custom software applications to capture program data, established the infrastructure for consolidated storage and analysis, and connected robust data sources to end user tools that power up-to-date, dynamic reporting and also streamlines content maintenance on MCC's public website. As a part of this effort, the Monitoring and Evaluation team has developed an Evaluation Pipeline application that provides up-to-date information on the status, risk, cost, and milestones of the full evaluation portfolio for better performance management.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

MCC's Disclosure Review Board ensures that data collected from surveys and other research activities is made public according

16

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

to relevant laws and ethical standards that protect research participants, while recognizing the potential value of the data to the public. The board is responsible for: reviewing and approving procedures for the release of data products to the public; reviewing and approving data files for disclosure; ensuring de-identification procedures adhere to legal and ethical standards for the protection of research participants; and initiating and coordinating any necessary research related to disclosure risk potential in individual, household, and enterprise-level survey microdata on MCC's beneficiaries.

The Microdata Evaluation Guidelines inform MCC staff and contractors, as well as other partners, on how to store, manage, and disseminate evaluation-related microdata. This microdata is distinct from other data MCC disseminates because it typically includes personally identifiable information and sensitive data as required for the independent evaluations. With this in mind, MCC's Guidelines govern how to manage three competing objectives: share data for verification and replication of the independent evaluations, share data to maximize usability and learning, and protect the privacy and confidentiality of evaluation participants. These Guidelines were established in 2013 and updated in January 2017. Following these Guidelines, MCC has publicly released 117 de-identified, public use, microdata files for its evaluations and evidence studies. MCC also has 25 Disclosure Review Board-cleared, restricted data packages that it can make accessible on the new MCC Evidence Platform. MCC's experience with developing and implementing this rigorous process for data management and dissemination while protecting human subjects throughout the evaluation life cycle is detailed in Opening Up Evaluation Microdata: Balancing Risks and Benefits of Research Transparency. MCC is committed to ensuring transparent, reproducible, and ethical data and documentation and seeks to further encourage data use through its new MCC Evidence Platform.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

Both MCC and its partner in-country teams produce and provide data that is continuously updated and accessed. MCC's website is routinely updated with the most recent information, and in-country teams are required to do the same on their respective websites. As such, all MCC program data is publicly available on MCC's website and individual MCA websites for use by MCC country partners, in addition to other stakeholder groups. As a part of each country's program, MCC provides resources to ensure data and evidence are continually collected, captured, and accessed. In addition, each project's evaluation has an Evaluation Brief that distills key learning from MCC-commissioned independent evaluations. Select Evaluation Briefs have been

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

posted in local languages, including Mongolian, Georgian, French, and Romanian, to better facilitate use by country partners.

MCC also has a partnership with the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), referred to as the Data Collaboratives for Local Impact (DCLI). This partnership is improving the use of data analysis for decision-making within PEPFAR and MCC partner countries by working toward evidence-based programs to address challenges in HIV/AIDS and health, empowerment of women and youth, and sustainable economic growth. Data-driven priority setting and insights gathered by citizen-generated data and community mapping initiatives contribute to improved allocation of resources in target communities to address local priorities, such as job creation, access to services, and reduced gender-based violence. DCLI's impact is being extended through a new partnership in Côte d'Ivoire. MCC, Microsoft, and others are partnering to develop a Women's Data Lab and Network program. The program will empower women-owned or women-led small and medium enterprises and female innovators and entrepreneurs with digital and data skills to effectively participate in the digital economy and grow their businesses.

<u>**6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:**</u>
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score
6
(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

For each investment, MCC's Economic Analysis (EA) division undertakes a Constraints Analysis to determine the binding constraints to economic growth in a country. To determine the individual projects in which MCC will invest in a given sector, MCC's EA division combines root cause analysis with a cost-benefit analysis. The results of these analyses allow MCC to determine which investments will yield the greatest development impact and return on MCC's investment. Every investment also has its own set of indicators as well as standard, agency-wide sector indicators for monitoring during the lifecycle of the investment and an evaluation plan for determining the results and impact of a given investment. MCC's Policy for Monitoring and Evaluation details MCC's evidence-based research and evaluation framework. Per the Policy, each completed evaluation requires a summary of findings, now called the Evaluation Brief, to summarize the key components, results, and lessons learned from the evaluation. Evidence from previous MCC programming is considered during the development of new programs. Per the Policy, "monitoring and evaluation evidence and processes should be of the highest practical quality. They should be as rigorous as practical and affordable. Evidence and practices should be impartial. The expertise and independence of evaluators and monitoring managers should result in credible evidence. Evaluation methods should be selected that best match the evaluation questions to be answered. Indicators should be limited in number to include the most crucial indicators. Both successes and failures must be reported."

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?
MCC uses a rigorous evidence framework to make every decision along the investment chain, from country partner eligibility to sector selection to project choices. MCC uses evidence-based selection criteria, generated by independent, objective third parties,

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

to select countries for grant awards. To be eligible for selection, World Bank-designated low- and lower-middle-income countries must first pass the MCC – a collection of 20 independent, third-party indicators that objectively measure a country's policy performance in the areas of economic freedom, investing in people, and ruling justly. An in-depth description of the country selection procedure can be found in the annual report.

6.3 Did the agency have a *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

MCC is a leader in the production of evidence on the results of its international development programs. As a data-driven agency, MCC invests in evidence-generating activities, such as due diligence surveys, willingness to pay surveys, and independent evaluations. MCC has more room to lead, however, in the accessibility and usability of its evidence. Since 2013, MCC has shared the data, documentation, and analysis underlying its independent evaluations. In terms of accessibility of evaluation materials, users have noted that MCC's central evaluation and data repository, the Evaluation Catalog, is hard to navigate.

Recognizing that transparency is not enough to achieve accountability and learning, MCC has developed the MCC Evidence Platform. The Evidence Platform will offer first-of-its-kind study and data access and usability and encourage the utilization of its vast library of evidence. MCC will invite researchers--from students to experienced professionals--to use the data and documentation provided here to reproduce and build upon MCC's evidence base to drive development effectiveness for, and beyond, MCC.

The MCC Evidence Platform will share:
- Studies--Users may search by studies to find all the related data and documentation associated with each study. Study Types include: Independent Evaluations, Monitoring, Constraints Analysis, Willingness to Pay, Due Diligence, Country-led Studies, and Other Studies.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

- Documentation--Users may search by specific documentation associated with MCC-funded studies. This documentation is shared as specific Knowledge Products Types, including: Design Report, Baseline Report, Interim Analysis Report, Final Analysis Report, MCC Learning Document, Evaluation-based Cost-Benefit Analysis, and Questionnaires.
- Data Packages--Users may search by specific data packages associated with MCC-funded studies. Data Package Type includes: Round (Baseline, Interim, Final), Public, Restricted-Access

The MCC Evidence Platform will encourage the use of MCC's data, documentation, and analysis as global public goods to support mutual accountability for the agency and its country partners, and to encourage learning from measured results.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

As described above, the new MCC Evidence Platform was intentionally designed and launched with utilization at its core. The Platform specifically encourages users to take MCC learning and evidence and apply and reproduce it for new learning. The Platform will then aim to also share new learning based on published MCC evidence. As a part of this comprehensive approach, Evaluation Briefs continue to be a cornerstone to promoting utilization across audience groups. Enhanced utilization of MCC's vast evidence base and learning was a key impetus behind the creation and expansion of the Evaluation Briefs and Star Reports. A push to ensure sector-level evidence use has led to renewed emphasis of the Principles into Practice series, with recent reports on the transport, education, and water & sanitation sectors.

MCC has also enhanced its in-country evaluation dissemination events to ensure further results and evidence building with additional products in local languages and targeted stakeholder learning dissemination strategies.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 7 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

7.1 Did the agency engage *leadership and staff* in its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

MCC supports the creation of multidisciplinary country teams to manage the development and implementation of each compact and threshold program. Teams meet frequently to gather evidence, discuss progress, make project design decisions, and solve problems. Prior to moving forward with a program investment, teams are encouraged to use the lessons from completed evaluations to inform their work going forward.

MCC recently launched its second-ever internal Millennium Efficiency Challenge (MEC) designed to tap into the extensive knowledge of MCC's staff to identify efficiencies and innovative solutions that can shorten the compact and threshold program development timeline while maintaining MCC's rigorous quality standards and investment criteria. This year MCC is seeking to implement proposed innovations around making the compact development process more efficient, among other challenges.

7.2 Did the agency have programs to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

MCC's approach to development assistance hinges on its innovative and extensive use of evidence to inform investment decisions, guide program implementation strategies, and assess and learn from its investment experiences. As such, MCC's Office of Strategic Partnerships offers an Annual Program Statement (APS) opportunity that allows MCC divisions and country teams to tap the most innovative solutions to new development issues. In FY21, the Monitoring and Evaluation division, using MCC's APS and traditional evaluation firms, continues to pilot partnerships with academics and in-country think tanks to leverage innovative, lower cost data technologies across sectors and regions. These include:

<u>7. Innovation:</u> **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

- using satellite imagery in Sri Lanka to measure visible changes in investment on land to get early indications if improved land rights are spurring investment
- leveraging big data and cell phone applications in Colombo, Sri Lanka to monitor changes in traffic congestion and the use of public transport; independently measuring power outages and voltage fluctuations using cell phones in Ghana, where utility outage data is unreliable, and where outage reduction is a critical outcome targeted by the Compact;
- and using pressure loggers on piped water at the network and household levels to get independent readings on access to water in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

These innovations in evidence generation have been ever-more critical in the past year given the inability to do many data collection activities in person. MCC has utilized local data collection and better technology to maintain evidence generation. For example, MCC partnered with the University of Colorado on their use of satellite connected sensors on water kiosks built by the Sierra Leone Threshold Program's Water Project. MCC partnered with a consortium of the University of Colorado and SweetSense Inc. technology firm to collect high frequency monitoring data using emerging and cost-effective technologies to understand the state of water service from the water kiosks constructed by the project. The partnership provided significant flexibility to collaboratively shape how available technology can suit MCC's monitoring needs, including in data-challenged environments. It also offered an example of how other MCC water projects can capitalize on the use of similar technology tools to collect more reliable data more frequently.

MCC regularly engages in implementing test projects as part of its overall compact programs. A few examples include: (1) in Morocco, an innovative pay-for-results mechanism to replicate or expand proven programs that provide integrated support; (2) a "call-for-ideas" in Benin for information regarding potential projects that would expand access to renewable off-grid electrical power; and (3) a regulatory strengthening project in Sierra Leone that includes funding for a results-based financing system.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

Although MCC rigorously evaluates all program efforts, MCC takes special care to ensure that innovative or untested programs are thoroughly evaluated. In addition to producing final program evaluations, MCC is continuously monitoring and evaluating all programs throughout the program lifecycle, including innovation efforts, to determine if mid-program course-correction actions are necessary. This interim data helps MCC continuously improve its innovation efforts so that they can be most effective and

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

impactful. Although 32% of MCC's evaluations use random-assignment methods, all of MCC's evaluations – both impact and performance – use rigorous methods to achieve the three-part objectives of accountability, learning, and results in the most cost-effective way possible.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence- based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

15

(out of 15 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

MCC awards all of its agency funds through two competitive grants:
1. the compact program ($651.0 million in FY21; eligible grantees: developing countries) and
2. the threshold program ($31 million in FY21; eligible grantees: developing countries).

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

For country partner selection, as part of the compact and threshold competitive programs, MCC uses 20 different indicators within the categories of economic freedom, investing in people, and ruling justly to determine country eligibility for program assistance. These objective indicators of a country's performance are collected by independent third parties.

When considering granting a second compact, MCC further considers whether countries have (1) exhibited successful performance on their previous compact; (2) improved Scorecard performance during the partnership; and (3) exhibited a continued commitment to further their sector reform efforts in any subsequent partnership. As a result, the MCC Board of Directors has an even higher standard when selecting countries for subsequent compacts. Per MCC's policy for Compact Development Guidance (p. 6): "As the results of impact evaluations and other assessments of the previous compact program become available, the partner country must use this data to inform project proposal assessment, project design, and implementation approaches."

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence- based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Per its Policy for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), MCC requires independent evaluations of every project to assess progress in achieving outputs and outcomes and program learning based on defined evaluation questions throughout the lifetime of the project and beyond. As described above, MCC publicly releases all these evaluations on its MCC Evidence Platform and uses findings, in collaboration with stakeholders and partner countries, to build evidence in the field so that policymakers in the United States and in partner countries can leverage MCC's experiences to develop future programming. In line with MCC's Policy for M&E, MCC projects are required to submit quarterly Indicator Tracking Tables showing progress toward projected targets.

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

MCC uses evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in all its competitive grant programs as noted above.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

MCC's $540 million Senegal Compact (2010-2015) funded the $170 million Irrigation and Water Resources Management Project to improve the productivity of the agricultural sector in certain agricultural-dependent areas of northern Senegal. The project rehabilitated or built 266 km of irrigation and drainage infrastructure, constructed a 450-hectare perimeter, mapped irrigated land, and trained officials to better administer land. The project was based on the theory that improved irrigation and land rights increase agricultural investment, productivity and ultimately household income. Five years after the completion of the project, the evaluation found:
● The irrigation infrastructure that the project built and rehabilitated remains in good condition, but routine weed clearance and dredging is not keeping pace with what is needed, which may reduce water available for farming.
● The irrigation infrastructure that the project built and rehabilitated remains in good condition, but routine weed clearance and dredging is not keeping pace with what is needed, which may reduce water available for farming.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence- based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

- The irrigation infrastructure that the project built and rehabilitated remains in good condition, but routine weed clearance and dredging is not keeping pace with what is needed, which may reduce water available for farming.

From the evidence collected for this evaluation, MCC learned that large-scale irrigation projects, especially for smallholder farmers, may have difficulty meeting the economic rate of return (ERR) 10% hurdle rate. However, soft-side interventions, such as farmer trainings, and a strong focus on the market can boost farm incomes and the ERR. MCC is applying this lesson by supporting farmer services in Niger.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

As described above, MCC develops a Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Plan for every grantee, which describes the independent evaluations that will be conducted, the key evaluation questions and methodologies, and the data collection strategies that will be employed. As such, grantees use program funds for evaluation.

MCC's Policy for Monitoring and Evaluation stipulates that the "primary responsibility for developing the M&E Plan lies with the MCA [grantee] M&E Director with support and input from MCC's M&E Lead and Economist. MCC and MCA Project/Activity Leads are expected to guide the selection of the indicators at the process and output levels that are particularly useful for management and oversight of activities and projects." The M&E policy is intended primarily to guide MCC and partner country staff decisions to utilize M&E effectively throughout the entire program life cycle in order to improve outcomes. All MCC investments also include M&E capacity-building for grantees.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence- based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

MCC does not administer non-competitive grant programs (relative score for criteria #8 applied).

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 8 points)

Millennium Challenge Corporation

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

MCC has established a Policy on Suspension and Termination that lays out the reasons for which MCC may suspend or terminate assistance to partner countries, including if a country "engages in a pattern of actions inconsistent with the MCC's eligibility criteria," by failing to achieve desired outcomes such as:

- A decline in performance on the indicators used to determine eligibility;
- A decline in performance not yet reflected in the indicators used to determine eligibility; or
- Actions by the country which are determined to be contrary to sound performance in the areas assessed for eligibility for assistance, and which together evidence an overall decline in the country's commitment to the eligibility criteria.

Of 62 compact selections by MCC's Board of Directors, including regional compacts, 15 have had their partnerships or a portion of their funding ended due to concerns about country commitment to MCC's eligibility criteria or a failure to adhere to their responsibilities under the compact. MCC's Policy on Suspension and Termination also allows MCC to reinstate eligibility when countries demonstrate a clear policy reversal, a remediation of MCC's concerns, and an obvious commitment to MCC's eligibility indicators, including achieving desired results.

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

In a number of cases, MCC has repurposed investments based on real-time evidence. In MCC's first compact with Lesotho, MCC cancelled the Automated Clearing House Sub-Activity within the Private Sector Development Project after monitoring data determined that it would not accomplish the economic growth and poverty reduction outcomes envisioned during compact development. The remaining $600,000 in the sub-activity was transferred to the Debit Smart Card Sub-Activity, which targeted expanding financial services to people living in remote areas of Lesotho. In Tanzania, the $32 million Non-Revenue Water Activity was re-scoped after the final design estimates on two of the activity's infrastructure investments indicated higher costs that would significantly impact their economic rates of return. As a result, $13.2 million was reallocated to the Lower Ruvu Plant Expansion Activity, $9.6 million to the Morogoro Water Supply Activity, and $400,000 for other environmental and social activities. In all of these country examples, the funding is either reallocated to activities with continued evidence of results or returned to MCC for investment in future programming.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

For every investment in implementation, MCC undertakes a Quarterly Performance Review with senior leadership to review, among many issues, quarterly results indicator tracking tables. If programs are not meeting evidence-based targets, MCC undertakes mitigation efforts to work with the partner country and program implementers to achieve desired results. These efforts are program- and context-specific but can take the form of increased technical assistance, reallocated funds, and/or new methods of implementation. For example, MCC reallocated funds in its compact with Ghana after the country failed to achieve agreed-upon policy reforms to ensure the sustainability of the investments. Upon program completion, if a program does not meet expected results targets, MCC works to understand and memorialize why and how this occurred, beginning with program design, the theory of change, and program implementation. The results and learning from this inquiry are published through the country's Star Report.

MCC also consistently monitors the progress of compact programs and their evaluations across sectors, using the learning from this evidence to make changes to MCC's operations. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, MCC is currently implementing the Abidjan Transport Project that builds on critical learning from 16 completed roads projects. MCC learned that projects must be

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

selected based on a complete road network analysis and that any transport program must address policy and institutional issues in the transport sector up front to ensure sustainability of road investments. As such, the Abidjan Transport Project will focus on the rehabilitation of up to 32 kilometers of critical roadway and adjoining infrastructure in the central corridor of Abidjan, and will invest in educational and training resources for road asset management, develop road asset and safety resources and management tools, and develop mechanisms to support more efficient use of road maintenance funds.

In Morocco, MCC is implementing a Workforce Development Activity that builds on the results and learning from 11 completed technical and vocational education and training (TVET) investments. MCC synthesized learning from past TVET programs and concluded that MCC's TVET investments should have two primary goals: placing graduates in higher-income jobs and supplying the private sector with in-demand skills. Based on this learning, the Morocco Compact's Workforce Development Activity aims to increase the quality and relevance of TVET by supporting private-sector driven governance as well as construction/rehabilitation of 15 training centers, together with targeted investments in policy reform of the sector. This activity is also investing in improvements to job placement services through a results-based financing mechanism as well as improvements to the availability and analysis of labor market data.

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

FY 21 Score

82

★ ★ ★

GOLD 2021
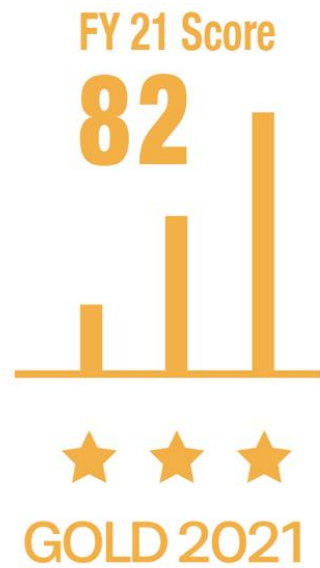
U.S. Department of Education

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

The **U.S. Department of Education** (ED) has been a long-time leader in evidence-based policy. Convening key personnel from across the Department has been a driver of ED's efforts to use information about what works to drive decision-making. This engagement of important staff has continued with the implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act) where the Evidence Leadership Group, ED Data Governance Board, the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, Office of the Chief Data Officer, Grants Policy Office, Office of Evidence-Based Practices and State and Grantee Relations, the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), and other units lead the Department's Evidence Act implementation. According to evaluation.gov, ED has published an Annual Evaluation Plan for FY22 and will be releasing a Learning Agenda in February 2022.

Beyond Evidence Act implementation, the Evidence Leadership Group helps program staff to use evidence in grantmaking in programs across the agency, including support of the Departments legislation: the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA has been a key driver of increased evidence use in states across the country (including in Nevada as detailed in a 2019 Results for America case study). ED's five largest grant programs require some form of an evaluation report on a yearly basis to build evidence, demonstrate performance improvement, and account for the utilization of funds. The Department's What Works Clearinghouse, through its evidence reviews, Intervention Reports, and Practice Guides, plays a key role in helping teachers, leaders, and researchers identify and apply evidence-based interventions.

ED also provides robust technical assistance through the Regional Education Laboratories and Comprehensive Centers, which help states and districts build and use evidence. In 2020, the 10 RELs collaborated to produce a series of evidence-based COVID-19 resources and guidance on teaching and learning in a remote environment and on how to address other issues that have arisen for schools as a result of the pandemic.

Another example of ED's support to states and districts includes the state longitudinal data systems grant administered by IES, which in FY21 provided up to $1 million over three years for states and local education agencies to better gather, analyze, and evaluate data about student performance. ED is focused on efforts to disaggregate outcomes by race and other demographics and to communicate those results to internal and external stakeholders. For example, to facilitate clear and open reporting on the implementation of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic

Security (CARES) Act, in Q1 of FY21, the Office of the Chief Data Officer launched the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Transparency Portal, allowing ED to track performance, hold grantees accountable, and provide transparency to taxpayers and oversight bodies. Moving into FY22, the portal will include other disaggregated student data collected through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund program such as the number of students that participated in various activities to support learning recovery or acceleration for subpopulations disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The department should proceed with its Evidence Act and OPEN Data Government Act implementation, based on forthcoming White House Office of Management and Budget guidance.

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?**

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

U.S. Department of Education

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Commissioner for the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) serves as the Department of Education (ED) evaluation officer. ED's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), with a budget of $642 million in FY21, is primarily responsible for education research, evaluation, and statistics. The NCEE Commissioner is responsible for planning and overseeing ED's major evaluations and also supports the IES Director. IES employed approximately 150 full-time staff in FY21, including approximately 25 staff in NCEE.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

USED has a designated Chief Data Officer (CDO). The Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development's (OPEPD) Office of the Chief Data Officer (OCDO) has grown from a staff of 12 two years ago to a staff of 33 FTE and detailees today. The Evidence Act provides a framework for OCDO's responsibilities, which include lifecycle data management and developing and enforcing data governance policies. The OCDO has oversight over ED's information collections approval and associated OMB clearance process. It is responsible for developing and enforcing ED's open data plan, including management of a centralized comprehensive data inventory accounting for all data assets across ED. The OCDO is also responsible for developing and maintaining a technological and analytical infrastructure that is responsive to ED's strategic data needs, exploiting traditional and emerging analytical methods to improve decision making, optimize outcomes, and create efficiencies. These activities are carried out by the Governance and Strategy Division, which focuses on data governance, lifecycle data management, and open data; and the Analytics and Support Division, which provides data analytics and infrastructure responsive to ED's strategic data. The current OCDO budget reflects the importance of these activities to ED leadership, with

35

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?

S&E funding allocated for data governance, data analytics, open data, and information clearances.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

The EO, CDO, and SO meet monthly for the purposes of ensuring ongoing coordination of Evidence Act work. Each leader, or their designee, also participates in the PIO's Strategic Planning and Review process. In FY21, the CDO is the owner of Goal 3 in ED's strategic plan: "Strengthen the quality, accessibility, and use of education data through better management, increased privacy protections and transparency." Leaders of the three embedded objectives come from OCDO, OCIO, and NCES.

The Evidence Leadership Group (ELG) supports program staff that run evidence-based grant competitions and monitor evidence-based grant projects. It advises ED leadership and staff on how evidence can be used to improve ED programs and provides support to staff in the use of evidence. It is co-chaired by the Evaluation Officer and the OPEPD Director of Grants Policy. Both co-chairs sit on ED's Policy Committee (described below). The SO, EO, CDO, and Performance Improvement Officer (PIO) are ex officio members of the ELG.

The ED Data Governance Board (DGB) sponsors agency-wide actions to develop an open data culture and works to improve ED's capacity to leverage data as a strategic asset for evidence building and operational decisions, including developing the capacity of data professionals in program offices. It is chaired by the CDO, with the SO, EO, and PIO as ex officio members.

The ED CDO sits in OPEPD and the Evaluation Officer (EO) and the Statistical Official (SO) sit in the Institute for Education Sciences (IES). Both OPEPD and IES participate in monthly Policy Committee meetings which often address evidence-related topics. OPEPD advances the Secretary's policy priorities including evidence, while IES is focused on (a) bringing extant evidence to policy conversations and (b) suggesting how evidence can be built as part of policy initiatives. OPEPD plays leading roles in the formation of ED's policy positions as expressed through annual budget requests, grant competition priorities, including evidence. Both OPEPD and IES provide technical assistance to Congress to ensure evidence appropriately informs policy design.

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

FY21 Score
9
(out of 10 points)
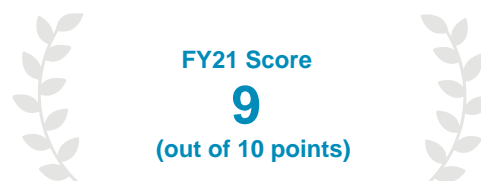
U.S. Department of Education

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d)).

The Department's Evaluation Policy is posted online at ed.gov/data and can be directly accessed here. Key features of the policy include the Department's commitment to: (1) independence and objectivity; (2) relevance and utility; (3) rigor and quality; (4) transparency; and (5) ethics. Special features include additional guidance to ED staff on considerations for evidence-building conducted by ED program participants, which emphasize the need for grantees to build evidence in a manner consistent with the parameters of their grants (e.g., purpose, scope, and funding levels), up to and including rigorous evaluations that meet WWC standards without reservations.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

The Department's FY22 Annual Evaluation Plan is posted at https://www.ed.gov/data under "FY22 Evidence-Building Deliverables." The FY23 Plan will be posted there in February 2022, concurrent with the release of the President's Budget.

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

The Department submitted its FY22-FY26 Learning Agenda in concert with its FY22-FY26 Strategic Plan to OMB in September 2021. The previous version is available here. In August 2021, ED published a Federal Register notice seeking comment on key topics within the Learning Agenda and will continue to seek stakeholder feedback on the document. ED will publish its Learning Agenda in February 2022 as part of the Agency's Strategic Plan.

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

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

IES publicly releases all peer-reviewed publications from its evaluations on the IES website and also in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Many IES evaluations are also reviewed by its What Works Clearinghouse. IES also maintains profiles of all evaluations on its website, both completed and ongoing, which include key findings, publications, and products. IES regularly conducts briefings on its evaluations for ED, the Office of Management and Budget, Congressional staff, and the public.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 3115, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

The Department submitted its FY22-FY26 Capacity Assessment in concert with its FY22-FY26 Strategic Plan to OMB in September 2021. ED will publish its FY22-FY26 Capacity Assessment in February 2022 as part of the Agency's Strategic Plan.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

The IES website includes a searchable database of planned and completed evaluations, including those that use experimental, quasi-experimental, or regression discontinuity designs. All impact evaluations rely upon experimental trials. Other methods, including matching and regression discontinuity designs, are classified as rigorous outcomes evaluations. IES also publishes studies that are descriptive or correlational in nature, including implementation studies and less rigorous outcomes evaluations.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score
5
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

3.1 _____ invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

ED invested $228 million in high-quality evaluations of federal programs, evaluations as part of field-initiated research and development, technical assistance related to evaluation and evidence-building, and capacity-building in FY21. This includes work awarded by the Regional Educational Laboratories ($55.6 million), NCEE's Evaluation Division ($48.5 million), NCER Efficacy and Effectiveness Trials ($65.9 million), SBIR Phase II Projects ($10.1 million), NCSER Efficacy Trials ($30.4 million), and NCSER Replication Trials ($17 million).

Account	FY21 (in millions)	FY20 (in millions)
Federal program evaluations (planned acquisitions; NCEE)	$48.5	$56.4
REL Program (planned acquisitions; NCEE)	$55.6	$83.9
NCER Efficacy and Effectiveness Trials (any type)	$65.9	$46.7
IES SBIR Phase II Projects	$10.1	$7.2
NCSER Efficacy Trials	$30.4	$32.7
NCSER Replication Trials	$17.0	$14.8
Total	**$227.5**	**$241.7**

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

This represents 0.49% of the agency's $46 billion FY21 discretionary congressional appropriation, not including the accounts listed below.

Calculation	FY21 (in 000s)	FY20 (in 000s)
Discretionary Appropriation	73,486,533	72,701,214
Discretionary Student Financial Assistance	(25,545,352)	(24,520,352)
Howard University	(251,018)	(240,018)
Gallaudet University	(140,361)	(137,361)
National Technical Institute for the Deaf	(81,500)	(79,500)
American Printing House for the Blind	(34,431)	(32,431)
ED Salaries and Expenses	(430,000)	(430,000)
FSA Salaries and Expenses	(878,943)	(878,943)
Agency Discretionary Total	46,124,928	46,382,609
Evaluation Total	227,500	241,700
Percent	**0.49%**	**0.52%**

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

ED does not have a specific budget solely for federal program evaluation. Evaluations are supported either by required or allowable program funds or by ESEA Section 8601, which permits the Secretary to reserve up to 0.5% of selected ESEA program funds for rigorous evaluation. The decrease in funds dedicated to federal program evaluations represents a combination of natural variation in resource needs across the lifecycle of individual evaluations and the need to slow some activities in response to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

Account	FY21 (in millions)	FY20 (in millions)	FY19 (in millions)
Federal program evaluations (planned acquisitions; NCEE)	$48.5	$56.4	$53.5
Total	**$48.5**	**$56.4**	**$53.5**

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

In June 2021, IES announced its most recent state-focused grant program, *ALN 84.305S: Using Longitudinal Data to Support State Education Recovery Policymaking.* As part of this program, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) supports state agencies' use of their state's education longitudinal data systems as they and local education agencies reengage their students after the disruptions caused by COVID-19. State agencies can apply for these grants, on their own or in collaboration with other organizations, to support research to inform their decisions regarding issues, programs, and policies related to learning acceleration and recovery. The maximum award is $1 million over three years. To date, SLDS has awarded more than $721 million to 51 states and territories.

The Regional Education Laboratories (RELs) provide extensive technical assistance on evaluation and support research partnerships that conduct implementation and impact studies on education policies and programs in ten geographic regions of the U.S., covering all states, territories, and the District of Columbia.

Comprehensive Centers provide support to states in planning and implementing interventions through coaching, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and ongoing direct support. The State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-Based Practices Center provides tools, training modules, and resources on implementation planning and monitoring.

41

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Education

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

ED's current FY18-22 Strategic Plan includes two parallel goals, one for P-12 and one for higher education (Strategic Objectives 1.4 and 2.2, respectively), that focus on supporting agencies and educational institutions in the identification and use of evidence-based strategies and practices. The OPEPD ELG co-chair is responsible for both strategic objectives. An FY22-26 Strategic Plan is under development and will be released in February 2022.

All Department Annual Performance Reports (most recent fiscal year) and Annual Performance Plan (upcoming fiscal year) are located on ED's website.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

The Grants Policy Office in the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (OPEPD) works with offices across ED to ensure alignment with the Secretary's priorities, including evidence-based practices. The Grants Policy Office looks at where ED and the field can continuously improve by building stronger evidence, making decisions based on a clear understanding of the available evidence, and disseminating evidence to decision-makers. Specific activities include: strengthening the connection between the Secretary's policies and grant implementation from design through evaluation; supporting a culture of evidence-based practices; providing guidance to grant-making offices on how to integrate evidence into program design; and identifying

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

opportunities where ED and field can improve by building, understanding, and using evidence. The Grants Policy Office collaborates with offices across the Department on a variety of activities, including reviews of efforts used to determine grantee performance.

ED is focused on efforts to disaggregate outcomes by race and other demographics and to communicate those results to internal and external stakeholders. For example, in Q1 of FY21, OCDO launched the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Transparency Portal at covid-relief-data.ed.gov, allowing ED to track performance, hold grantees accountable, and provide transparency to taxpayers and oversight bodies. The portal was updated in June 2021 to include Annual Performance Report (APR) data from CARES Act grantees allowing ED and the public to monitor support for students and teachers and track progress of the grantees. The portal content displays key data from the APRs, summarizing how the CARES Act funds were used by states and districts from March through September 2020, and by institutions of higher education from March through December 2020. The APR forms for the next data collection in FY22 provide Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) grantees with the opportunity to further disaggregate the data collected on the ESF funds. For example, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) form asks for counts of students that participated in various activities to support learning recovery or acceleration for subpopulations disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Categories include students with one or more disabilities, low-income students, English language learners, students in foster care, migratory students, and students experiencing homelessness, and five race/ethnicity categories.

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

As part of its performance improvement efforts, senior career and political leadership convene quarterly in ongoing Performance Review (QPR) meetings. As part of the QPR process, the Performance Improvement Officer leads senior career and political officials in a review of ED's progress towards its two-year Agency Priority Goals and four-year Strategic Goals. In each QPR,

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
   Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

assembled leadership reviews metrics that are "below target" and brainstorm potential solutions--and celebrates progress toward achieving goals that are "on track" for the current fiscal year.

The Department conducted after-action reviews after the FY19 and FY20 competition cycles to reflect on successes of the year as well as opportunities for improvement. The reviews resulted in process updates for FY21. In addition, the Department updated an optional internal tool to inform policy deliberations and progress on the Secretary's policy priorities, including the use of evidence and data.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Education

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

The ED Data Strategy--the first of its kind for the U.S. Department of Education--was released in December of 2020. It recognized that we can, should, and will do more to improve student outcomes through more strategic use of data. The ED Data Strategy goals are highly interdependent with cross-cutting objectives requiring a highly collaborative effort across ED's principal offices. The Strategy calls for strengthening data governance to administer the data it uses for operations, answer important questions, and meet legal requirements. To accelerate evidence-building and enhance operational performance, it requires that ED make its data more interoperable and accessible for tasks ranging from routine reporting to advanced analytics. The high volume and evolving nature of ED's data tasks necessitate a focus on developing a workforce with skills commensurate with a modern data culture in a digital age. At the same time, safely and securely providing access for researchers and policymakers helps foster innovation and evidence-based decision making at the federal, state, and local levels.

Goal 4 of the Data Strategy calls for ED to "Improve Data Access, Transparency, and Privacy." Objective 1.4 under this goal is to "Develop and implement an Open Data Plan that describes the Departments efforts to make its data open to the public." Improving access to ED data, while maintaining quality and confidentiality, is key to expanding the agency's ability to generate evidence to inform policy and program decisions. Increasing access to data for ED staff, federal, state, and local lawmakers, and researchers can help ED make new connections and foster evidence-based decision making. Increasing access can also spur innovations that support ED's stakeholders, provide transparency about ED's activities, and serve the public good. ED seeks to improve user access by ensuring that open data assets are in a machine-readable, open format and accessible via its comprehensive data inventory. ED will better leverage expertise in the field to expand its base of evidence by establishing a

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

process for researchers to access non-public data. Further, ED will develop a cohesive and consistent approach to privacy and enhance information collection processes to ensure that Department data are findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable.

ED continues to wait for Phase 2 guidance from OMB to understand required parameters for the open data plan. In the meantime, USED continues to release open data; the department soft launched the Open Data Platform in September 2020 and publicly released it in December 2020.

ED launched a public transparency portal in November 2020 disclosing expenditures and grantee performance data for the Education Stabilization Fund authorized under the CARES Act and subsequent authorities.

ED continues to draft its open data plan. When finalized, the plan will conform to new requirements when OMB Phase 2 guidance is released. If guidance is received soon, ED will publish its open data plan in FY22 within the agency's Information Resource Management Strategic Plan.

ED's FY18-22 Performance Plan outlines strategic goals and objectives, including Goal #3: "Strengthen the quality, accessibility and use of education data through better management, increased privacy protections and transparency." This currently serves as a strategic plan for ED's governance, protection, and use of data while it develops the Open Data Plan required by the Evidence Act. The plan includes a metric on the number of data assets that are "open by default" as well as a metric on open licensing requirements for deliverables created with Department grant funds.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

The Open Data Platform (ODP) at data.ed.gov is the ED's solution for publishing, finding, and accessing our public data profiles. This open data catalog brings together the Department's data assets in a single location, making them available with their metadata, documentation, and APIs for use by the public. The ODP makes existing public data from all ED principal offices accessible to the public, researchers, and ED staff in one location. The ODP improves the Department's ability to grow and operationalize its comprehensive data inventory while progressing on open data requirements. The Evidence Act requires government agencies to make data assets open and machine-readable by default. ODP is ED's comprehensive data inventory satisfying these requirements while also providing privacy and security. ODP features standard metadata contained in Data

46

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

Profiles for each data asset. Before new assets are added, data stewards conduct quality review checks on the metadata to ensure accuracy and consistency. As the platform matures and expands, ED staff and the public will find it a powerful tool for accessing and analyzing ED data, either through the platform directly or through other tools powered by its API. The 309 data profiles included in ODP, encompassing over 3,500 individual data sets, will add to the 619 entries the Department already has in the Federal Data Catalogue once ODP takes over the data inventory feed in Q1 of FY22.

The ED Data Inventory (EDI) was developed in response to the requirements of M-13-13 and initially served ED's external asset inventory. It describes data reported to ED as part of grant activities, along with administrative and statistical data assembled and maintained by ED. It includes descriptive information about each data collection along with information on the specific data elements in individual data collections.

Information about Department data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has historically been made publicly available online. Prioritized data is further documented or featured on ED's data page. NCES is also leading a government-wide effort to automatically populate metadata from Information Collection Request packages to data inventories. This may facilitate the process of populating EDI and comprehensive data inventory.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement?

As ED collaboratively took stock of organizational data strengths and weaknesses, key themes arose and provided context for the development of the ED Data Strategy. The Strategy addresses new and emerging mandates such as open data by default, interagency data sharing, data standardization and other principles found in the Evidence Act and Federal Data Strategy. However, improving strategic data management has benefits far beyond compliance; solving persistent data challenges and making progress against a baseline data maturity assessment offers ED the opportunity to close capability gaps and enable staff to make evidence-based decisions.

One of the first priorities for the ED Data Governance Board (DGB) in FY21 was to assess the current state of data maturity at ED. In early 2020, OCDO held "discovery" meetings with stakeholders from each ED office to capture information about successes and challenges in the current data landscape. This activity yielded over 300 data challenges and 200 data successes that provided a wealth of information to inform future data governance priorities. The DGB used the understanding gained of the

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

ED data landscape during the discovery phase to develop a Data Maturity Assessment (DMA) for each office and the overall enterprise focusing on data and related data infrastructure in line with requirements in the Federal Data Strategy 2020 Action Plan. Data maturity is a metric that will be measured and reported as part of ED's Annual Performance Plan. Several of these activities have been supported by ED's investment in a Data Governance Board and Data Governance Infrastructure (DGBDGI) contract.

The Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Transparency Portal at covid-relief-data.ed.gov collects and reports survey data from grantees receiving funds for emergency relief from the COVID-19 pandemic and connects it with administrative data from usaspending.gov, College Scorecard, IPEDS, Common Core of Data, and ED's G5 grants administration system. In February 2021, ED's OCDO completed its first collection of annual performance reports (APRs) from state agencies and institutions of higher education that received CARES Act grants. OCDO created a data collection doorway in the portal to enable grantees to submit APRs on funding to institutions of higher education, State Education Agencies, and Governor's Offices. Working in partnership with the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), OCDO was able to achieve a 99.7% response rate from almost 4,900 higher education grantees and 100% response rate from State Education Agency grantees and Governor's Offices grantees, ensuring comprehensive data on the use of funds to support student learning during the pandemic. An in-depth data quality review resulted in new technical assistance to grantees to improve reporting. The portal was updated in June 2021 to include APRs and data quality flags. OCDO and ED program offices continue to work with grantees to resolve data quality issues. ED also created internal dashboards customized to OPE, OESE, and policy leader needs for monitoring grant performance and outcomes.

ED has also made concerted efforts to improve the availability and use of its data with the release of the revised College Scorecard that links data from NCES, the Office of Federal Student Aid, and the Internal Revenue Service. With recent updates in Q1 of FY21, the College Scorecard team improved the functionality of the tool to allow users to find, compare, and contrast different fields of study more easily, access expanded data on the typical earnings of graduates two years post-graduation, view median parent PLUS loan debt at specific institutions, and learn about the typical amount of federal loan debt for students who transfer. OCDO facilitated reconsideration of IRS risk assumptions to enhance data coverage and utility while still protecting privacy. The Scorecard enhancement discloses for prospective students how well borrowers from institutions are meeting their federal student loan repayment obligations, as well as how borrower cohorts are faring at certain intervals in the repayment process.

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

IES continues to make available all data collected as part of its administrative data collections, sample surveys, and evaluation work. Its support of the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) Initiative has helped to develop a common vocabulary, data model, and tool set for P-20 education data. The CEDS Open Source Community is active, providing a way for users to contribute to the standards development process.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

IES is collaborating with an outside research team to conduct a proof of concept for multi-party computing. The Department's general approach is to replicate an existing data collection that involves securely sharing PII across a number of partners using the MPC framework.

The Disclosure Review Board (DRB), the EDFacts Governing Board, the Student Privacy Policy Office (SPPO), and SPPO's Privacy Technical Assistance Center and Privacy Safeguards Team all help to ensure the quality and privacy of education data. In FY19, the ED Data Strategy Team also published a user resource guide for staff on disclosure avoidance considerations throughout the data lifecycle.

In FY20, the ED DRB approved 59 releases by issuing "Safe to Release" memos. The DRB is in the process of developing a revised Charter that outlines its authority, scope, membership, process for dispute resolution, and how it will work with other DRBs in ED. The DRB is also developing standard operating procedures outlining the types of releases that need to be reviewed along with the submission and review process for data releases. The DRB is currently planning to develop information sessions to build the capacity of ED staff focusing on such topics as disclosure avoidance techniques used at ED, techniques appropriate for administrative and survey data, and how to communicate with stakeholders about privacy and disclosure avoidance.

In ED's FY18-22 Performance Plan, Strategic Objective 3.2 is to "Improve privacy protections for, and transparency of, education data both at ED and in the education community." The plan also outlines actions taken in FY18. ED's Student Privacy website assists stakeholders in protecting student privacy by providing official guidance on FERPA, technical best practices, and the answers to Frequently Asked Questions.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data-consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

ED's new Open Data Platform makes Department data easily accessible to the public. Data is machine-readable and searchable by keyword in order to promote easy access to relevant data assets. In addition, the ODP features an API so that aggregators and developers can leverage Department data to provide information and tools for families, policy makers, researchers, developers, advocates and other stakeholders. ODP will ultimately include listings of non-public, restricted data with links to information on the privacy-protective process for requesting restricted-use access to these data.

ED's Privacy Technical Assistance Center (PTAC) responds to technical assistance inquiries on student privacy issues and provides online FERPA training to state and school district officials. FSA conducted a postsecondary institution breach response assessment to determine the extent of a potential breach and provide the institutions with remediation actions around their protection of FSA data and best practices associated with cybersecurity.

The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) administers a restricted-use data licensing program to make detailed data available to researchers when needed for in-depth analysis and modeling. NCES loans restricted-use data only to qualified organizations in the United States. Individual researchers must apply through an organization (e.g., a university, a research institution, or company). To qualify, an organization must provide a justification for access to the restricted-use data, submit the required legal documents, agree to keep the data safe from unauthorized disclosures at all times, and to participate fully in unannounced, unscheduled inspections of the researcher's office to ensure compliance with the terms of the License and the Security Plan form.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides free online training on using its data tools to analyze data while protecting privacy. Distance Learning Dataset Training includes modules on NCES's data-protective analysis tools, including QuickStats, PowerStats, and TrendStats. A full list of NCES data tools is available on their website.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Education

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

ED has an agency-wide framework for impact evaluations that is based on ratings of studies' internal validity. ED evidence-building activities are designed to meet the highest standards of internal validity (typically randomized control trials) when causality must be established for policy development or program evaluation purposes. When random assignment is not feasible, rigorous quasi-experiments are conducted. The framework was developed and is maintained by IES's What Works Clearinghouse™ (WWC). WWC standards are maintained on the WWC website. A stylized representation of the standards can be found here, along with information about how ED reports findings from research and evaluations that meet these standards.

Since 2002, ED--as part of its compliance with the Information Quality Act and OMB guidance--has required that all "research and evaluation information products documenting cause and effect relationships or evidence of effectiveness should meet that quality standards that will be developed as part of the What Works Clearinghouse" (see Information Quality Guidelines).

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

ED employs the same evidence standards in all discretionary grant competitions that use evidence to direct funds to applicants that are proposing to implement projects that have evidence of effectiveness and/or to build new evidence through evaluation. Those standards, as outlined in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR), build on ED's What Works Clearinghouse™ (WWC) research design standards.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

ED's What Works Clearinghouse™ (WWC) identifies studies that provide valid and statistically significant evidence of effectiveness of a given practice, product, program, or policy (referred to as "interventions"), and disseminates summary information and reports on the WWC website.

The WWC has published more than 600 Intervention Reports, which synthesize evidence from multiple studies about the efficacy of specific products, programs, and policies. Wherever possible, Intervention Reports also identify key characteristics of the analytic sample used in the study or studies on which the Reports are based.

The WWC has published 27 Practice Guides, which synthesize across products, programs, and policies to surface generalizable practices that can transform classroom practice and improve student outcomes.

Finally, the WWC has completed more than 11,000 single study reviews. Each is available in a searchable database.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

ED has several technical assistance programs designed to promote the use of evidence-based practices, most notably IES's Regional Educational Laboratory Program and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Comprehensive Center Program. Both programs use research on evidence-based practices generated by the What Works Clearinghouse and other ED-funded Research and Development Centers to inform their work. RELs also conduct applied research and offer research-focused training, coaching, and technical support on behalf of their state and local stakeholders. Their work is reflected in Strategic Plan Objectives 1.4 and 2.2.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

Often, those practices are highlighted in WWC Practice Guides, which are based on syntheses (most recent meta-analyses) of existing research and augmented by the experience of practitioners. These guides are designed to address challenges in classrooms and schools.

To ensure continuous improvement of the kind of TA work undertaken by the RELs and Comprehensive Centers, ED has invested in both independent evaluation and grant-funded research. The REL Program is currently undergoing evaluation, and design work for the next Comprehensive Center evaluation is underway. Addition, IES has awarded two grants to study and promote knowledge utilization in education, including the Center for Research Use in Education and the National Center for Research in Policy and Practice. In June of 2020, IES released a report on How States and Districts Support Evidence Use in School Improvement, which may be of value to technical assistance providers and SEA and LEA staff in improving the adoption and implementation of evidence-based practice.

Finally, the ED developed revised evidence definitions and related selection criteria for competitive programs that align with ESSA to streamline and clarify provisions for grantees. These revised definitions align with ED's suggested criteria for states' implementation of ESSA's four evidence levels, included in ED's non-regulatory guidance, Using Evidence to Strengthen Education Investments. ED also developed a fact sheet to support internal and external stakeholders in understanding the revised evidence definitions. This document has been shared with internal and external stakeholders through multiple methods, including the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education ESSA technical assistance page for grantees.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 7 points)

U.S. Department of Education

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

In FY19, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) made strategic investments in innovative educational programs and practices and administered discretionary grant programs. In FY19, the Innovation and Improvement account received $1.035 billion. ED reorganized in 2019, consolidating the Office of Innovation and Improvement into the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. To lead and support innovation within the reorganized OESE, ED created the Evidence-Based Policy (EBP) team. EBP teams work within OESE and with colleagues across the agency to develop and expand efforts to inform policy and improve program practices.

The Innovation and Engagement Team in the Office of the Chief Data Officer promotes data integration and sharing, making data accessible, understandable, and reusable; engages the public and private sectors on how to improve access to the Department's data assets; develops solutions that provide tiered access based on public need and privacy protocols; develops consumer information portals and products that meet the needs of external consumers; and partners with OCIO and ED data stewards to identify and evaluate new technology solutions for improving collection, access, and use of data. This team led the ED work on the ESF transparency portal, highlighted above, and also manages and updates College Scorecard. The team is currently developing ED's first Open Data Plan and a playbook for data quality at ED.

7.2 Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

A team of analysts within the Evidence-Based Practices unit (EBP) in OESE works to support the use of evidence and data in formula and discretionary grantmaking. This unit promotes evidence consistent with relevant provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). EBP supports offices as they

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

seek ways to meaningfully incorporate evidence and data routinely as part of their grantmaking agenda and to operationalize the ESSA evidence framework for strengthening the effectiveness of ESEA investments within OESE programs. This unit engages with offices to support internal capacity by convening staff for review and discussion of the most recent and relevant resources to support the use of evidence internally and by ED grantees and responding to individual office requests for resources and information related to generation and use of evidence within their programs. Offices in OESE also invite members of the EBP to share and discuss available resources with their grantees at various grantee convenings.

The Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program is ED's primary innovation program for K-12 public education. EIR grants are focused on validating and scaling evidence-based practices and encouraging innovative approaches to persistent challenges. The EIR program incorporates a tiered-evidence framework that supports larger awards for projects with the strongest evidence base as well as promising earlier-stage projects that are willing to undergo rigorous evaluation. Lessons learned from the EIR program have been shared across the agency and have informed policy approaches in other programs.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

ED's Experimental Sites Initiative is entirely focused on assessing the effects of statutory and regulatory flexibility in one of its most critical programs: Title IV Federal Student Aid programs. FSA collects performance and other data from all participating institutions, while IES conducts rigorous evaluations--including randomized trials--of selected experiments. Recent examples include ongoing work on Federal Work Study and Loan Counseling, as well as recently published studies on short-term Pell grants.

The Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, ED's primary innovation program for K-12 public education, incorporates a tiered-evidence framework that supports larger awards for projects with the strongest evidence base as well as promising earlier-stage projects that are willing to undergo rigorous evaluation.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

15

(out of 15 points)

U.S. Department of Education

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

ED's top five program accounts based on actual appropriation amounts in FY21 are:
1. TRIO ($1.097 billion; eligible applicants: eligible grantees: institutions of higher education, public and private organizations)*;*
2. Charter Schools Program ($440 million; eligible grantees: varies by program, including state entities, charter management organizations, public and private entities, and local charter schools)
3. GEAR UP ($368 million; eligible grantees: state agencies; partnerships that include IHEs and LEAs)
4. Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSL) ($200 million; eligible grantees: local education agencies, partnerships between state and local education agencies; and partnerships between nonprofit organizations and local educational agencies);
5. Comprehensive Literacy Development Grants ($192 million; eligible grantees: state education agencies).

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

ED uses evidence of effectiveness when making awards in its largest competitive grant programs.
- The vast majority of TRIO funding in FY21 was used to support continuation awards to grantees that were successful in prior competitions that awarded competitive preference priority points for projects that proposed strategies supported by: moderate evidence of effectiveness (Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math and Science); or evidence that demonstrates a rationale (Student Support Services). Additionally, ED will make new awards under the Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Centers programs. These competitions provide points for applicants that propose a project

56

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

- with a key component in its logic model that is informed by research or evaluation findings that suggest it is likely to improve relevant outcomes.
- Under the Charter Schools Program, ED generally requires or encourages applicants to support their projects through logic models--however, applicants are not expected to develop their applications based on rigorous evidence. Within the CSP program, the Grants to Charter School Management Organizations for the Replication and Expansion of High-Quality Charter Schools (CMO Grants) supports charter schools with a previous track record of success.
- For the 2021 competition for GEAR UP State awards, ED used a competitive preference priority for projects implementing activities that are supported by moderate evidence of effectiveness. For the 2021 competition for GEAR UP Partnership awards, ED used a competitive preference priority for projects implementing activities that are supported by Promising evidence.
- The TSL statute requires applicants to provide a description of the rationale for their project and describe how the proposed activities are evidence-based, and grantees are held to these standards in the implementation of the program.
- The Comprehensive Literacy Development (CLD) statute requires that grantees provide subgrants to local educational agencies that conduct evidence-based literacy interventions. ESSA requires ED to give priority to applicants that meet the higher evidence levels of strong or moderate evidence, and in cases where there may not be significant evidence-based literacy strategies or interventions available, for example in early childhood education, encourage applicants to demonstrate a rationale.

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

The Evidence Leadership Group (ELG) advises program offices on ways to incorporate evidence in grant programs through encouraging or requiring applicants to propose projects that are based on research and by encouraging applicants to design evaluations for their proposed projects that would build new evidence.

ED's grant programs require some form of an evaluation report on a yearly basis to build evidence, demonstrate performance improvement, and account for the utilization of funds. For examples, please see the annual performance reports of TRIO, the Charter Schools Program, and GEAR UP. The Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program is required by ESSA to conduct

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

a national evaluation. The Comprehensive Literacy Development Grant requires evaluation reports. In addition, IES is currently conducting rigorous evaluations to identify successful practices in TRIO-Educational Opportunities Centers and GEAR UP. In FY19, IES released a rigorous evaluation of practices embedded within TRIO-Upward Bound that examined the impact of enhanced college advising practices on students' pathway to college.

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

The Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program supports the creation, development, implementation, replication, and taking to scale of entrepreneurial, evidence-based, field-initiated innovations designed to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students. The program uses three evidence tiers to allocate funds based on evidence of effectiveness, with larger awards given to applicants who can demonstrate stronger levels of prior evidence and produce stronger evidence of effectiveness through a rigorous, independent evaluation. The FY21 competition included checklists and PowerPoints to help applicants clearly understand the evidence requirements.

ED incorporates the evidence standards established in EDGAR as priorities and selection criteria in many competitive grant programs.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

The EIR program supports the creation, development, implementation, replication, and scaling up of evidence-based, field-initiated innovations designed to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students. IES released The Investing in Innovation Fund: Summary of 67 Evaluations, which can be used to inform efforts to move to more effective practices. ED is exploring the results to determine what lessons learned can be applied to other programs.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

In 2016, ED released non-regulatory guidance to provide state educational agencies, local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, educators, and partner organizations with information to assist them in selecting and using "evidence-based" activities, strategies, and interventions, as defined by ESSA, including carrying out evaluations to "examine and reflect" on how interventions are working. However, the guidance does not specify that federal competitive funds can be used to conduct such evaluations. Frequently, though, programs do include a requirement to evaluate the grant during and after the project period.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Education

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

ED's largest non-competitive programs based on actual appropriation amounts in FY21 are:
1. Title I Grants to LEAs ($16.5 billion; eligible grantees: state education agencies);
2. IDEA Grants to States ($12.9 billion; eligible grantees: state education agencies);
3. Supporting Effective Instruction State Grants ($2.1 billion; eligible grantees: state education agencies);
4. Impact Aid Payments to Federally Connected Children ($1.34billion; eligible grantees: local education agencies);
5. 21st Century Community Learning Centers ($1.3 billion; eligible grantees: state education agencies).

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

ED worked with Congress in FY16 to ensure that evidence played a major role in ED's large non-competitive grant programs in the reauthorized ESEA. As a result, section 1003 of ESSA requires states to set aside at least 7% of their Title I, Part A funds for a range of activities to help school districts improve low-performing schools. School districts and individual schools are required to create action plans that include "evidence-based" interventions that demonstrate strong, moderate, or promising levels of evidence.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

ESEA requires a National Assessment of Title I– Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. In addition, Title I Grants require state education agencies to report on school performance, including those schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement.

Federal law (ESEA) requires states receiving funds from 21st Century Community Learning Centers to "evaluate the effectiveness of programs and activities" that are carried out with federal funds (section 4203(a)(14)), and it requires local recipients of those funds to conduct periodic evaluations in conjunction with the state evaluation (section 4205(b)).

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the implementing office for IDEA grants to states, has revised its accountability system to shift the balance from a system focused primarily on compliance to one that puts more emphasis on results through the use of Results Driven Accountability.

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

Section 4108 of ESEA authorizes school districts to invest "safe and healthy students" funds in Pay for Success initiatives. Section 1424 of ESEA authorizes school districts to invest their Title I, Part D funds (Prevention and Intervention Programs for Children and Youth Who are Neglected, Delinquent, or At-Risk) in Pay for Success initiatives; under the section 1415 of the same program, a State agency may use funds for Pay for Success initiatives.

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

States and school districts are implementing the requirements in Title I of the ESEA regarding using evidence-based interventions in school improvement plans. Some States are providing training or practice guides to help schools and districts

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

identify evidence-based practices.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

In 2016, ED released non-regulatory guidance to provide state educational agencies, local educational agencies (LEAs), schools, educators, and partner organizations with information to assist them in selecting and using "evidence-based" activities, strategies, and interventions, as defined by ESSA, including carrying out evaluations to "examine and reflect" on how interventions are working. However, the guidance does not specify that federal non-competitive funds can be used to conduct such evaluations.

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 8 points)

U.S. Department of Education

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

The Department works with grantees to support implementation of their projects to achieve intended outcomes. The Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) explains that ED considers whether grantees make "substantial progress" when deciding whether to continue grant awards. In deciding whether a grantee has made substantial progress, ED considers information about grantee performance. If a continuation award is reduced, more funding may be made available for other applicants, grantees, or activities.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes

The Department conducts a variety of technical assistance to support grantees to improve outcomes. Department staff work with grantees to assess their progress and, when needed, provide technical assistance to support program improvement. On a national scale, the Comprehensive Centers program, Regional Educational Laboratories, and technical assistance centers managed by the Office of Special Education Programs develop resources and provide technical assistance. The Department uses a tiered approach in these efforts, providing universal general technical assistance through a more general dissemination strategy; targeted technical assistance efforts that address common needs and issues among a number of grantees, and

10. Repurpose for Results: **In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?** (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

intensive technical assistance that is more focused on specific issues faced by specific recipients. The Department also supports program-specific technical assistance for a variety of individual grant programs.
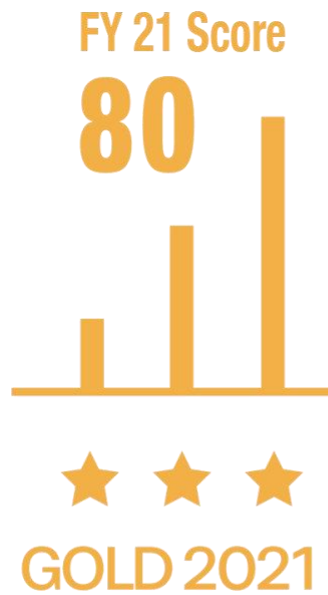
RESULTS FOR AMERICA

FY 21 Score

80

★ ★ ★

GOLD 2021

UNITED STATES AGENCY · INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT · USAID

U.S. Agency for International Development

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

2021 **INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE**
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

In compliance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, the Administrator of USAID designated the Agency's Evaluation Officer (AEO) through an internal Executive Message that was shared with the Agency on June 4, 2019.

USAID's AEO is a senior staff member who works directly with the LER Director, who, in conjunction with the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER) in the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) helps the Agency build a body of evidence from which to learn and adapt programs. The LER Director has the authority, staff, and budget to ensure agency evaluation requirements are met, including that all projects are evaluated at some level, and that decision-making is informed by evaluation and evidence. The LER Director oversaw approximately 40 staff and an estimated $6.5 million budget in FY20.

USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL) aligns policy, resources, and evidence-based programming. It elevates evaluation as a source of evidence, through the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research (LER), by focusing on the Agency's ability and capability to generate, manage, and use evidence. The office performs a leadership role in the implementation of Title 1 of the Evidence Act, including the creation and development of the Agency Learning Agenda, the Annual Evaluation Plan, and assessment of how USAID staff manage and use evidence in implementing policies and strategies. In 2021, the office is undertaking a process of revising the Agency Learning Agenda to incorporate priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The Chief Data Officer (CDO) serves as the USAID Chief Data Officer. The CDO reports to the Chief Information Officer in the Bureau for Management. In compliance with the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, the Administrator of USAID

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?

re-affirmed the designation of the Chief Data Officer through an internal Executive Message that was shared with the Agency on June 4, 2019. The CDO manages the USAID Data Services team which focuses exclusively on improving the usage of data and information to ensure the Agency's development outcomes are supported and enhanced by evidence. The CDO's team includes four direct hire data science and IT professionals along with a budget for contract professionals who provide a comprehensive portfolio of data services in support of the Agency's mission. The CDO oversaw approximately 80 staff and an estimated $18.7 million budget in 2021. The CDO is a senior career civil servant, and the USAID Data Services team is regularly called upon to generate products and services to support the Agency's highest priorities. USAID also invests in other complementary positions including the Chief Innovation Officer, Chief Geographer, Chief Economist, Chief Scientist, and other key roles that enhance the use of evidence across the agency.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical official, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act Implementation and improve, and evaluate the agency's major programs?

The Agency uses several governance structures and processes currently and will be updating these in accordance with OMB guidance related to the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act. Some notable current examples include:

A. **Data Board:** In September 2019, USAID established a Data Administration and Technical Advisory (DATA) Board, as mandated by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) and subsequent guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Memoranda M-19-18 and M-19-23. The DATA Board acts as USAID's data governance body. It serves as a central venue for seeking input from Agency stakeholders regarding data-related priorities and best practices to support Agency objectives. The DATA Board informs data-related policy, procedures and standards for the Agency. The DATA Board supports the work of the Agency Evaluation Officer by directing data services to facilitate evaluations. In addition to the Agency Evaluation Officer, Chief Data Officer and Statistical Official, its membership includes the Performance Improvement Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Technology officer, the Senior Agency Official for Privacy and the USAID Geographer as well as broad representation from across the Agency including overseas Missions. The USAID Chief Data Officer, Agency Evaluation Officer, and Statistical Official confer regularly to coordinate policy and activities.

B. **Management Operations Council:** USAID also uses a Management Operations Council (MOC) as the platform for Agency leadership to assess progress toward achieving the strategic objectives in USAID's Strategic Plan and cross-agency priority goals and additional management issues. Established in 2014, the MOC provides Agency-wide leadership for initiatives and investments to reform USAID business systems and operations worldwide. The MOC also provides a platform for senior

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?

leaders to learn about and discuss improving organizational performance, efficiency, and effectiveness. The Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Management and the Agency's Chief Operating Officer co-chair the MOC. Membership includes, among others, all the Agency's Chief Executive Officers (e.g., Senior Procurement Executive, Chief Human Capital Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Information Officer, Performance Improvement Officer and Project Management Improvement Officer). Depending on the agenda, it also includes the Chief Data Officer, Agency Evaluation Officer, and the Agency Senior Statistical Official.

C. **Weekly/Monthly Meetings between the Chief Data Officer, Chief Evaluation Officer, and Statistical Official**: USAID established a standing meeting among the CDO's team and leadership from the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research which manages Agency requirements on performance monitoring, evaluation and organizational learning. As this meeting pre-dated the first Chief Data Officer council and Chief Evaluation Officer council meetings, it was critical for information sharing and addressing priorities. The CDOs team also maintains an internal dashboard which is shared with the Evaluation Officer and Statistical Official to help track progress against milestones on an ongoing basis.

D. **Privacy Council Meetings**: USAID holds monthly Privacy Council meetings to address necessary actions and raise any privacy and confidentiality concerns. Representation includes the Senior Agency Official for Privacy, the Agency Statistical Official, and the Chief Privacy Officer, among others.

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

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

The agency-wide USAID Evaluation Policy, published in January 2011, updated in October 2016, and in April 2021, incorporates changes that better integrate with USAID's Program Cycle Policy and ensure compliance with the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA), and the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. The 2021 changes to the evaluation policy updated evaluation requirements to simplify implementation and increase the breadth of evaluation coverage, dissemination, and utilization.

It also establishes new requirements that will allow for the majority of program funds to be subjected to external evaluations. The requirements include the following (1) at least one evaluation per intermediate result (IR) defined in the operating unit's strategy; (2) at least one evaluation per activity (contracts, orders, grants, and cooperative agreements) with a budget expected to be $20 million or more; and (3) an impact evaluation for any new, untested approach, anticipated to be expanded in scale and scope. The main way these requirements are communicated is through the USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) 201.

The Evaluation Policy requires consultation with in-country partners and beneficiaries as essential, and that evaluation reports could include sufficient local contextual information. To make the conduct and practice of evaluations more inclusive and relevant to the country context, the policy requires that evaluations will be consistent with institutional aims of local ownership through respectful engagement with all partners, including local beneficiaries and stakeholders, while leveraging and building local capacity for program evaluation. As a result, the policy expects that evaluation specialists from partner countries who have appropriate expertise will lead and/or be included in evaluation teams. In addition, USAID focuses its priorities within its sectoral programming on supporting partner government and civil society capacity to undertake evaluations and use the results generated. Data from the USAID Evaluation Registry indicated that annually, about two-thirds of evaluations, were conducted by teams that included one or more local experts. Also, while local experts may be included in the team composition, it is still a

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

rarity to have a local expert as the evaluation team lead for conducting USAID evaluations.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

USAID has produced an agency-wide Annual Evaluation Plan for FY22. This plan also fulfills the Evidence Act requirement that all Federal Agencies should develop an Annual Evaluation Plan, which describes the significant evaluation activities the agency plans to conduct in the fiscal year following the year in which it is submitted. The plan contains 35 significant evaluations that each address a question from the Agency-wide Learning Agenda; performance evaluations of activities with budgets of $40 million or more; impact evaluations; and ex-post evaluations.

USAID has an agency-wide evaluation registry that collects information on all evaluations planned to commence within the next three years (as well as tracking ongoing and completed evaluations). Currently, this information is used internally and is not published. To meet the Evidence Act requirement, in March 2021, USAID published its Annual Evaluation Plan for FY22 on the Development Experience Clearinghouse. A draft agency-wide evaluation plan for FY23 will also be submitted in the Agency's draft Annual Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report submitted to OMB in September 2021.

In addition, USAID's Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research works with bureaus to develop internal annual Bureau Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plans that review evaluation quality, and evidence building and use within each bureau, and identify challenges and priorities for the year ahead.

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

USAID's agency-wide learning agenda was first established in 2018, prior to the passing of the Evidence Act. The initial set of questions, titled the Self-Reliance Learning Agenda, were developed through a strongly consultative process with internal and external stakeholders and represented the Agency's priority learning needs related to the Journey to Self-Reliance. Throughout implementation of the learning agenda, USAID has continued to engage external stakeholders through learning events, invitations to share evidence, and by making learning agenda products and resources publicly available on USAID.gov.

71

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

As priorities shift, it is essential that the Agency Learning Agenda adapts to continue to meet the learning needs of the Agency. The Agency Learning Agenda is undergoing a revision process to incorporate new Agency priorities and align with the FY22-26 Joint Strategic Plan. A number of policy areas have been identified for inclusion are COVID-19, climate, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). Although USAID is still determining where to focus learning efforts, the Agency Learning Agenda is committed to furthering generation and use of evidence to inform agency policies, programs, and operations related to DEI and other critical areas.

Stakeholder consultations with internal and external stakeholders are central to the revision process. Consultations aim to capture a small, prioritized set of Agency learning needs related to Agency policy priorities, and to identify opportunities for collaboration with key stakeholders on this learning. The Agency Learning Agenda team is consulting Mission staff from across all of the regions in which USAID operates and Washington Operating Units to capture a diversity of internal voices. Consultations with external stakeholders include a selection of congressional committees, interagency partners (e.g. Department of State), other donors, think tanks, nongovernmental researchers, and development-focused convening organizations. Revisions to the Agency Learning Agenda will incorporate feedback gathered through these stakeholder consultations, inputs from the Joint Strategic Planning process with the Department of State, and a stocktaking of learning agenda implementation to-date to result in a prioritized set of questions that will focus Agency learning on top policy priorities.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

To increase access and awareness of available evaluation reports, USAID has created an "Evaluations at USAID" dashboard of completed evaluations starting from FY16. The dashboard includes an interactive map showing countries and the respective evaluations completed for each fiscal year, starting from FY16. Using filters, completed evaluations can be searched by operating unit, sector, evaluation purpose, evaluation type, and evaluation use. The dashboard also has data on the percent of USAID evaluations that include local evaluation experts on the evaluation team that conducted the evaluation. The information for FY20 is being finalized, and will be used to update the dashboard. The dashboard has also served as a resource for USAID Missions. For example, in USAID/Cambodia and USAID/Azerbaijan, the dashboard was used to provide annotated bibliographies to inform the design of civic engagement activities.

In addition, all final USAID evaluation reports are published on the Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), except for a small number of evaluations that receive a waiver to public disclosure (typically less than 5% of the total completed in a fiscal year). The process to seek a waiver to public disclosure is outlined in the document Limitations to Disclosure and Exemptions to Public

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

Dissemination of USAID Evaluation Reports and includes exceptions for circumstances such as those when "public disclosure is likely to jeopardize the personal safety of U.S. personnel or recipients of U.S. resources."

A review of evaluations as part of an Equity Assessment report to OMB (in response to the Racial and Ethnic Equity Executive Order) found that evaluations that include analysis of racial and ethnic equity are more likely to be commissioned by USAID's Africa Bureau, and USAID Programs in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Liberia, Ghana, Uganda, Malawi, Indonesia, India, Cambodia, Kosovo, and Colombia. Reports on agriculture, education, and health programs most often utilize the words race and ethnicity in the evaluation findings.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

USAID recognizes that sound development programming relies on strong evidence that enables policymakers and program planners to make decisions, improve practice, and achieve development outcomes. As one of the deliverables of the Evidence Act, USAID submitted an interim Capacity Assessment to OMB in September 2020. This report provided an initial overview of coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis functions and activities within USAID. The report demonstrates that evaluations conducted by operating units cover the range of program areas of USAID foreign assistance investment. Economic growth, health, and democracy, human rights, and governance, accounted for more than three-quarters of evaluations completed by the Agency in FY19.

In addition, USAID has commissioned a Capacity Assessment in response to the Evidence Act requirements. The assessment is using a four-phased approach: assessment design, implementation and analysis, reports, and communication/ dissemination. USAID is currently in Phase 3, which involves developing a Maturity Model to assess the Agency's capacity to generate, manage, and use evidence.

USAID staff also review evaluation quality on an ongoing basis and review the internal Bureau Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plans referenced in 2.2 above. Most recently, USAID completed a review of the quality of its impact evaluations. The review assessed the quality of all 133 USAID-funded IE reports published between FY12-19. In addition, there are several studies that have looked at parts of this question over the previous several years. These include GAO reports, such as Agencies Can Improve the Quality and Dissemination of Program Evaluations; From Evidence to Learning: Recommendations to Improve Foreign Assistance Evaluations;

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

reviews by independent organizations like the Center for Global Development's Evaluating Evaluations: Assessing the Quality of Aid Agency Evaluations in Global Health - Working Paper 461; and studies commissioned by USAID such as the Meta-Evaluation of Quality and Coverage of USAID Evaluations 2009-2012. These studies generally show that USAID's evaluation quality is improving over time with room for continued improvement.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

USAID uses rigorous evaluation methods, including randomized control trials (i.e. assignment studies) and quasi-experimental methods for research and evaluation purposes. For example, in FY20, USAID's Development Innovation Ventures (DIV), funded 10 impact evaluations, nine of which used randomized control trials.

DIV makes significant investments using randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental evaluations to provide evidence of impact for pilot approaches to be considered for scaled funding. USAID is also experimenting with cash benchmarking --using household grants to benchmark traditional programming. USAID has undertaken five randomized control trials (RCT) of household grants or "cash transfer" programs, three of which compare more traditional programs against household grants.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 3 Resources

**||.RESULTS
★★★ FOR AMERICA**

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
   (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance,
   rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

3.1 ____ (Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

USAID invested at least $192.2 million in FY20 and prior year money on a combination of evaluations completed in FY20, evaluations that are ongoing during FY20, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 1.02% of the agency's $18.8 billion FY20 budget.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

In FY20, USAID operating units invested approximately $57.8 million in FY20 and prior year money on 152 evaluations that were completed in that fiscal year. Another 180 evaluations were ongoing in FY20 (many spanning more than one year in duration) with total ongoing evaluation budgets estimated at $127.8 million. LER's budget for evaluation technical assistance and evaluation capacity-building in FY20 was $6.6 million, coming to a total of $192.2 million. This represents 1.02% of the Agency's $18.8 billion FY19 budget.[1] This total does not include evaluation capacity building done by other Agency offices or field Missions or other research, studies, analysis or other data collection that is often used for evaluation, such as USAID's investment in the Demographic

---

[1] Source for FY21 Agency budget: FY 2021 Congressional Budget Justification (p. 2). Bilateral Economic Assistance total ($24,500,700,000) minus State's Global Health Programs ($5,720,000,000) is $18,780,700,000.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

Health Survey or some of the assessments done by third-parties across USAID's innovation portfolio. It also does not include funding by agency sub-components for evaluation technical assistance.

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

While specific data on this is limited, USAID estimates that investment in contracts or grants that provide support to build local organizational or governmental capacity in data collection, analysis, and use could be as high as $250 million.

For example, USAID's Data for Impact (D4I) activity helps low- and middle-income countries--primarily in sub-Saharan Africa--to increase their capacity to use available data and generate new data to build evidence for improving health programs, health policies, and for decision-making. D4I's goal is to help low-resource countries gather and use information to strengthen their health policies and programs and improve the health of their citizens.

In another example, the MEASURE Evaluation project, funded by USAID, has a mandate to strengthen health information systems (HIS) in low-resource settings. The Project enables countries to improve lives by strengthening their capacity to generate and use high-quality health information to make evidence-informed, strategic decisions at local, subregional, and national levels.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

USAID partners with the U.S. Department of State to jointly develop and implement clear strategic goals, strategic objectives, and performance goals, which are articulated in the FY18-22 U.S. Department of State - USAID Joint Strategic Plan (JSP). USAID and the Department of State have commenced development of the FY22-26 JSP to incorporate new strategic themes. As part of the planning process issues of racial equity, diversity, and inclusion are being considered under both management-oriented and programmatic goals. The FY22-26 JSP will include a section on evidence-building and USAID and Department of States' respective learning agendas will be included in the annex.

The Agency measures progress towards its own strategic goals, strategic objectives, and performance goals using data from across the Agency, including from annual Performance Plan and Reports (PPRs) completed by operating units, and uses that information to report on performance externally through the Annual Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (APP/APR) and the Agency Financial Report.

To aggregate and track performance in key sectors, USAID works with the U.S. Department of State to develop and manage over 100 standard foreign assistance indicators that have common definitions and defined collection methods. Once finalized, USAID publishes illustrative indicator data on a publicly available website known as Dollars to Results. Finally, USAID reports on Agency Priority Goal (APG) and Cross Agency Priority (CAP) goal progress on www.performance.gov.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

Most of USAID's innovation or co-created programs and those done in partnerships reflect a data-driven "pay for results" model, where milestones are agreed by all parties, and payments are made when milestones are achieved. This means that, for some programs, if a milestone is unmet, funds may be re-applied to an innovation or intervention that is achieving results. This rapid and iterative performance model means that USAID more quickly understands what is not working and can move resources away from it and toward what is working.

Approaches such as prizes, Grand Challenges, and ventures can also be constructed to be "pay for results only" where interventions such as "Development Impact Bonds" are used to create approaches where USAID only pays for outcomes and not inputs or attempts only. The Agency believes this model will pave the way for much of USAID's work to be aligned with a "pay for results" approach. USAID is also piloting the use of the impact per dollar of cash transfers as a minimum standard of cost-effectiveness for applicable program designs. Most innovations funded at USAID have a clear "cost per impact" ratio.

Additionally, USAID Missions develop Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs) with clear goals and objectives and a Performance Management Plan (PMP) that identifies expected results, performance indicators to measure those results, plans for data collection and analysis, and regular review of performance measures to use data and evidence to adapt programs for improved outcomes. USAID also promotes data-informed operations performance management to ensure that the Agency achieves its development objectives and aligns resources with priorities. USAID uses its Management Operations Council to conduct an annual Strategic Review of progress toward achieving the strategic objectives in the Agency's strategic plan.

To improve linkages and break down silos, USAID continues to develop and pilot the Development Information Solution (DIS)--an enterprise-wide management information system that will enable USAID to collect, manage, and visualize performance data across units, along with budget and procurement information, to more efficiently manage and execute programming. USAID is currently in the process of world-wide deployment of the performance management module with almost half of its operating units now live in the system.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

USAID's Program Cycle policy (ADS 201.3.2.18) requires that Missions conduct at least one portfolio review per year that focuses on progress toward strategy-level results. Missions must also conduct a CDCS mid-course stocktaking at least once during the course of implementing their Country Development Cooperation Strategy, which typically spans five years.

USAID developed an approach to explicitly ensure adaptation through learning called Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA). It is incorporated into USAID's Program Cycle guidance (ADS 201.3.5.19) where it states: "Strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management link together all components of the Program Cycle." Through CLA, USAID ensures its programming is coordinated with others, grounded in a strong evidence base, and iteratively adapted to remain relative throughout implementation.

The CDOs team maintains an internal dashboard which is shared with the Evaluation Officer and Statistical Official to help track progress against milestones on an ongoing basis. This helps ensure that data needs are being met and achieving intended results.

In addition to this focus through its programming, USAID has two senior bodies which oversee Enterprise Risk Management, and meet regularly to improve the accountability and effectiveness of USAID programs and operations through holistic risk management. USAID tracks progress toward strategic goals and annual performance goals during data-driven reviews at Management Operations Council meetings. Also, through input from the Management Operations Council, an annual Agency-wide customer service survey, and other analysis, USAID regularly identifies opportunities for operational improvements at all levels of the Agency as part of its operational learning agenda as well as the agency-wide learning agenda. The initial set of learning questions under the Agency learning agenda included four questions that focused on operational aspects of the agency's work which influence everything from internal policy, design and procurement processes, program measurement, and staff training. As the Agency Learning Agenda is being revised, the focus on including key operational questions to support continuous improvement remains.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 5 Data

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score
8
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

USAID's data related investments and efforts are guided by its Information Technology Strategic Plan. This includes support for the Agency's Development Data Policy, which provides a framework for systematically collecting Agency-funded data, structuring the data to ensure usability, and making the data public while ensuring rigorous protections for privacy and security. In addition, this policy sets requirements for how USAID data is documented, submitted, and updated. Guidance for USAID's Open Data Policy may be seen in the User Guide, FAQs, and Help Videos.

In 2020 USAID revised the Development Data Policy to require development activities to create and submit data management plans before collecting or acquiring data. The Development Data Library (DDL) is the Agency's repository of USAID-funded, machine readable data, created or collected by the Agency and its implementing partners. The DDL, as a repository of structured and quantitative data, complements the DEC which publishes qualitative reports and information. The Agency's data governance body, the DATA Board, is guided by annual data roadmaps that include concrete milestones, metrics, and objectives for Agency data programs. USAID also participates and leads in global compilations of data across the industry including the Global Innovation Exchange and in response to COVID-19. USAID also has a variety of stakeholder engagement tools available on USAID's Development Data Library, including: Open Data Community Questions and video tutorials on using DDL.

People-level indicators for development data are normally disaggregated by sex (male, female), sometimes by age and occasionally by other demographic markers. Development data rarely includes transgender, gender non-conforming, or non-binary disaggregation.

80

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

In many countries it may be politically complicated or potentially unsafe to collect this data or data that asks about racial or ethnic identity. However, data can often be disaggregated by geographic location, region, or state, which can be mapped with other demographic data to build a picture of geographic disparities. Country expertise can then be applied to analyze racial and ethnic equity dimensions, as described in ADS 205.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

Launched in November 2018 as part of the Development Information Solution (DIS), USAID's public-facing Development Data Library (DDL) provides a comprehensive inventory of data assets available to the Agency. DDL has posted the Data Inventory as a json file since 2015. Following the passage of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, and in preparation for specific guidance expected in the upcoming release of Phase 2 guidance for the Act, USAID will make any necessary changes to its Comprehensive Data Inventory and continue reporting with quarterly updates as required. The DDL's data catalog is also harvested via JavaScript on an ongoing basis for further distribution on the federal Data.gov website. Currently 456 USAID data assets are available to the public via USAID's DDL, a 17% increase over last year.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

The USAID Data Services team--located in USAID's Management Bureau's Office of the Chief Information Officer (M/CIO)--manages a comprehensive portfolio of data services in support of the Agency's mission. This includes enhancing the internal and external availability and ease-of use of USAID data and information via technology platforms such as the AidScape platform broadening global awareness of USAID's data and information services, and bolstering the Agency's capacity to use data and information via training and the provision of demand-driven analytical services.

The Data Services Team also manages and develops the Agency's digital repositories, including the Development Data Library (DDL), the Agency's central data repository. USAID and external users can search for and access datasets from completed evaluations and program monitoring by country and sector.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

USAID staff also have access to an internal database of over 100 standard foreign assistance program performance indicators and associated baseline, target, and actual data reported globally each year. This database and reporting process, known as the Performance Plan and Report (PPR) promotes evidence building and informs internal learning and decisions related to policy, strategy, budgets, and programs.

The United States is a signatory to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). The standard links an activity's financial data to its evaluations. Partner country governments as well as other initiatives and websites can pull these data into their respective systems. This helps officials oversee the coordination and management of incoming foreign aid, and serves as an effective tool in standardizing and centralizing information about foreign aid flows within a country. This data can be ingested to reduce and streamline USAID's own reporting efforts, freeing up resources for other endeavors. Further, by streamlining reporting to these partner country systems and other websites, USAID is promoting efficiency in data collection, improving the quality of data, reducing the time needed to publish updated information, as well as providing timely information to inform analysis, future decisions, and policy-making. USAID continues to improve and add to its published IATI data, and is looking into ways to utilize these data as best practice--including using it to populate partner country systems, fulfill transparency reporting as part of the US commitment to the Grand Bargain, and make decisions internally, including based on what other development actors are doing by using the Development Cooperation Landscape tool. In FY20, USAID began reporting additional data to IATI in alignment with IATI's COVID-19 reporting guidance in order to share financial and descriptive information about USAID's COVID-19 activities.

USAID continues to pursue better communicating data insights. USAID's Geocenter uses programmatic and demographic data linked with geospatial data to inform decision-making, emphasizing mapping to identify gaps in service provision and inform resource provision and decision-making (for example, to compare gender-based violence (GBV) "hotspots" and access to relevant support services; and to identify geographies and communities disparately impacted by natural disasters).

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

USAID's Privacy Program and privacy policy (ADS 508) direct policies and practices for protecting personally identifiable information and data, while several policy references (ADS303maz and ADS302mbj) provide guidance for protecting information to ensure the health and safety of implementing partners. USAID's Development Data Policy (ADS Chapter 579) details a data publication process

82

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

that provides governance for data access and data release in ways that ensure protections for personal and confidential information. As a reference to the Development Data Policy, ADS579maa explains USAID's foreign assistance data publications and the protection of any sensitive information prior to release. USAID applies extensive statistical disclosure control on all public data before publication or inclusion in the DDL.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

While specific data on this is limited, USAID does invest in contracts or grants that provide support to build local organizational or governmental capacity in data collection, analysis, and use. In addition, to date, 526 USAID data assets are available to the public via USAID's DDL, a 44% increase over last year. These assets include microdata related to USAID's initiatives that provide partner countries and development partners with insight into emerging trends and opportunities for expanding peace and democracy, reducing food insecurity, and strengthening the capacity to deliver quality educational opportunities for children and youth around the globe. Grantees are encouraged to use the data on the DDL, which provides an extensive User Guide to aid in accessing, using, securing and protecting data. The Data Services team conducts communication and outreach to expand the awareness of websites with development data, how to access it, and how to contact the team for support. In addition, the Data Services team has developed a series of videos to show users how to access the data available. The dataservices@usaid.gov mail account responds to requests for assistance and guidance on a range of data services from both within the Agency and from implementing partners and the public.

Starting in 2020 Data Services' Data Literacy Training series added equitable and accessible themes woven throughout the series, including: definitions of equitable data and accessible data; guiding principles for collecting data in ways that are equitable and inclusive; and guiding questions to determine whether shared/visualized data is equitable and accessible. These learning opportunities are designed for both internal and external audiences and will be available on public-facing web pages in late 2021 or early 2022.

<u>6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:</u>
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score
6
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

USAID has developed a draft agency-level evidence framework to clarify evidence standards for different decisions, including those related to funding. The draft was shared for voluntary comment, and is being further updated. Once finalized, it will be published as a suggested help guide for USAID staff and continue to be refined and updated as needed.

USAID's evidence standards are embedded within its policies and include requirements for the use of evidence in strategic planning, project design, activity design, program monitoring, and evaluation. USAID has a Scientific Research Policy that sets out quality standards for research across the Agency. USAID's Program Cycle Policy requires the use of evidence and data to assess the development context, challenges, potential solutions, and opportunities in all of USAID's country strategies. Specific programs, such as the Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) use evaluation criteria based on evidence of causal impact, leading to scaling which innovations work for greater cost effectiveness. As USAID's flagship open innovation program, DIV helps to find, test, and scale innovative solutions to any global development challenge from anyone, anywhere. By backing proven innovations, driven by rigorous evidence and ongoing monitoring, USAID's DIV program has proven to impact millions of lives at a fraction of the usual cost. Based on recent research announced in October 2020, the early portfolio of DIV grants (covering 2010-2012) has produced $17 in social benefit per every dollar spent by USAID. This research was led by Dr. Michael Kremer, a Nobel Prize-winning economist who is part of DIV's team. Further, GAO found in their December 2019 report Evidence-Based Policymaking: EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING Selected Agencies Coordinate Activities, but Could Enhance Collaboration that USAID reflects leading practices for

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

collaborating when building and assessing evidence. DIV's evaluation criteria is based on its three core principles as further outlined in its annual grant solicitation (DIV Annual Program Statement): (1) Evidence of Impact; (2) Cost-Effectiveness; and (3) Pathways to Scale.

1. Evidence of Impact

DIV supports the piloting and rigorous testing of innovations and helps those innovations that have successfully demonstrated impact to transition to scale. DIV looks for different indicators of impact depending on the stage of financing that the applicant is seeking and on whether the innovation has a public or commercial pathway to scale.

Public Pathway to Scale: To support later-stage innovations to transition to scale with public financing, including by government or philanthropic funding, DIV requires applicants to show rigorous evidence of causal impact on improving the lives of people living in poverty. DIV does not require applicants for earlier-stage awards for piloting and testing of innovations to show rigorous evidence of causal impact and will issue awards for earlier-stage innovations to help innovations get to the point at which they have this rigorous evidence of impact. Measurement of impact can encompass either final outcomes or impacts that can be taken as worthwhile objectives per se (e.g., reducing infant mortality). Measurement of impact can also encompass improvements to intermediate outcomes on the causal chain for solutions that have been previously demonstrated to have a causal impact on final outcomes (e.g., increasing vaccination rates, which have an existing evidence base of causal impact on improved health).

Commercial Pathway to Scale: To support later-stage innovations to transition to scale commercially, DIV requires applicants to show evidence of long-run market viability. DIV typically accepts customer willingness to pay the full costs of the innovation as such evidence. DIV does not require applicants for earlier-stage awards for piloting and testing to show such evidence and will issue awards for earlier-stage innovations to get to the point where they have this evidence. For example, an applicant may use a Stage 1 award to gather evidence on consumer reaction to and willingness to pay for the product. As an applicant progresses to higher stages of financing, DIV expects the applicant to demonstrate an increasingly compelling case for long-run market viability. In addition, DIV requires applicants at all stages to show stage-

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

appropriate data on usage, or in some situations on proxies for social outcomes that track how the innovation is improving the lives of people living in poverty.

2. Cost-Effectiveness.

DIV seeks innovations that deliver more development impact per dollar than existing alternative solutions. Cost-effectiveness is a function of both cost and impact and does not mean that an innovation is the cheapest solution. Instead, an innovation can increase its cost-effectiveness either by reducing its cost or by increasing its impact. DIV recognizes that costs of an innovation at scale may be different than costs generated through earlier testing phases, so applicants should provide data around current and projected costs.

3. Pathways to Scale.

DIV's ultimate goal is to support impactful development solutions that will scale to improve the lives of at least a million people in a financially sustainable manner. Accordingly, innovations must have a potential pathway to scale through commercial scaling, public sector scaling, or scaling through a hybrid of the two. DIV recognizes that innovations can take a variety of pathways to scale but expects that they will be financially sustainable and ultimately grow without continued DIV support. For more information on the terms "pathways to scale" and "financial sustainability," see the glossary at the end of this APS.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

USAID has a draft agency-level evidence framework to clarify evidence definitions, principles and approaches for different decisions, including those related to funding. The framework has been posted for review and comment by external stakeholders.

In addition, there are specific types of programs at the sub-agency level that do use evidence framework or standards to make funding decisions. For example, the Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) uses a tiered funding approach to find, test, and scale evidence-

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

based innovations. DIV's grants include: Stage 1 for piloting (up to $200,000); Stage 2 for testing (up to $1,500,000); Stage 3 for scaling (up to $15,000,000); and "evidence grants" (up to $1,500,000) for research to determine causal impact of certain interventions. In particular for Stage 2 grants, DIV requires evidence of impact that must be causal and rigorous--the grantee must either have rigorous underlying evidence already established, use this funding to run an evaluation with an evaluation partner, or run an evaluation with its own funding during the grant period. There must be significant demonstrated demand for the innovation.

DIV's evaluation criteria for its funding is based on its three core principles as further outlined in its annual grant solicitation ([DIV Annual Program Statement](#)): (1) Evidence of Impact; (2) Cost-Effectiveness; and (3) Pathways to Scale. DIV's expectations vary by stage, but every awardee must report against a set of pre-negotiated key performance indicators. Most DIV grants are fixed amount awards, a unique type of federal grant instrument that is tailor-made for pay-for-results approaches. Fixed amount awards are structured by paying for milestones achieved, which emphasizes performance (not just compliance) and reduces some administrative burden for all parties (see 2 CFR 200.201(b)).

6.3 Did the agency have a *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

USAID does have an Agency-wide repository for development information (including evaluation reports and other studies) which is available to the public at the [Development Experience Clearinghouse](#). In addition, USAID uses the [International Initiative for Impact Evaluations](#) (3ie) [database of impact evaluations](#) relevant to development topics (including over 4,500 entries to date), [knowledge gap maps](#), and [systematic reviews](#) that pull the most rigorous evidence and data from across international development donors. 3ie also houses a collection of [institutional policies and reports](#) that examine findings from its database of impact evaluations on overarching policy questions to help policymakers and development practitioners improve development impact through better evidence.

USAID's [Agency Programs and Functions](#) policy designates technical bureaus responsible for being the repository for latest information in the sectors they oversee; prioritizing evidence needs and taking actions to build evidence; and disseminating that evidence throughout the agency for those sectors. Several USAID bureaus and sectors have created user friendly tools to disseminate information on evidence-based solutions. These include, but are not limited to:

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
   (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

   - CLIMATELINKS: A global knowledge portal for climate change and development practitioners
   - EDUCATION LINKS: Shares innovations and lessons learned on implementation of the USAID Education Policy
   - Natural Resources Management and Development Portal
   - URBANLINKS: USAID's sharing platform for resources on sustainable urban development

   USAID also led a data-harmony initiative across the industry with other countries called the Global Innovation Exchange which surfaces, validates, and shares a repository of over 16,000 development relevant solutions across all actors, players and locations.

   Finally, USAID recently applied Natural Language Processing Text Analysis to analyze unstructured data from the previous ten years of Evaluation Reports published by USAID and identify countries which used specific language and terminology related to racial and ethnic equity. This review included 1,208 evaluation reports and 2,525 final contractor/grantee reports that were available on USAID's public Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC) and converted to machine readable format. To develop an algorithm to find the most relevant information, the team consulted with experts from across the agency working on inclusive development and DEIA issues to develop a lexicon of terms that together with other factors were tested and found to identify relevant documents.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and reapplication of evaluation findings and other evidence?

   USAID's approach to Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) helps ensure that evidence from evaluation of USAID programming is shared with and used by staff, partners, and stakeholders in the field. USAID requires a dissemination plan and post-evaluation action plan for each evaluation, and USAID field staff are encouraged to co-create evaluation action plans with key stakeholders based on evaluation evidence. USAID collects examples through the CLA Case Competition, held annually, which recognizes implementers, stakeholders, and USAID staff for their work generating and sharing technical evidence and learning from monitoring and evaluation. It is another way that the Agency encourages evidence-based practices among its stakeholders.

2021 **INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE**

.ıl| **RESULTS**
★★★
FOR **AMERICA**

**U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 6 Common Evidence Standards/
What Works Designations**

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
   (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

   USAID also periodically holds large learning events with partners and others in the development community around evidence including, but not limited to, Evaluation Summits, engagement around the Agency Learning Agenda, and Moving the Needle. These gatherings are designed to build interest in USAID's evidence, build capacity around applying that evidence and learning, and elicit evidence and learning contributions.

   USAID created and led the "Million Lives Collaborative" coalition, with more than 30 partners, which has identified more than 100 social entrepreneurs who have at least a million customers in order to share the learning that this successful cohort has had and better inform how USAID funding can assist more social entrepreneurs to grow successfully and rapidly. This unique learning platform brings donors, funders, governments, and the entrepreneurial community to the table together to learn and iterate on our approaches.

   USAID recently published the Evaluations at USAID Dashboard, which provide evidence of evaluation use by Missions, and opportunities for peer learning.

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 7 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

7.1 Did the agency engage *leadership and staff* in its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

The U.S. Global Development Lab became the Innovation, Technology, and Research Hub (ITR) under the new Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI). DDI became operational within USAID on November 16, 2020. DDI is USAID's central resource for providing world-class technical assistance to its Missions. DDI's cross-cutting, global perspective will enable the Agency to anticipate and respond to evolving trends and issues, catalyze innovation and broaden our partnership base. DDI comprises four Centers and five Hubs. The Centers serve as USAID's leaders for technical assistance in democracy and governance, economics and market development, education, energy, environment, human rights, and infrastructure. The Hubs provide Missions with expert guidance and training on cross-cutting development priorities, including gender equality, innovation, technology and research, private-sector engagement, and partnerships with diverse organizations, such as local and faith-based groups.

Specifically, the ITR Hub serves as a central point for promoting and building capacity for innovation throughout development and national security strategies across USAID, the U.S. Government, and the international community. This includes helping to centrally coordinate the Agency's innovation-related work with entrepreneurs, implementing partners, universities, donors, and others to test and scale innovative solutions and approaches to development problems around the world. In addition to finding and supporting innovative solutions, the ITR Hub also works with other USAID Bureaus and Independent Offices to promote a culture of innovation across the Agency to enable it to be a more innovative organization itself. For example, this includes building internal capacity, skills, and outside-the-box thinking to structure and provide our funding in more creative and effective ways (e.g., using fixed amount awards as a grant instrument to pay for outcomes, not just inputs).

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

For innovations specific to a particular sector, Agency leadership has supported technical staff in surfacing groundbreaking ideas, such as how the Bureau for Global Health's Center for Innovation and Impact (CII) used open innovation approaches to issue the Saving Lives at Birth Grand Challenge and identify promising, life-saving maternal and newborn health innovations.

7.2 Did the agency have programs to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

In FY20, USAID released its first Digital Strategy, moving to a "Digital by Default" position and USAID's innovative approaches have helped get more than 40 million people in the developing world digital access. USAID's New Partnerships Initiative (NPI) will allow USAID to work with a more diverse range of partners, strengthen existing partner relationships, and provide more entry points for organizations to work with the Agency. The principles behind NPI are outlined in the Agency's first-ever Acquisition and Assistance (A&A) Strategy.

USAID and its partners have launched 41 innovative programming approaches including prizes, ventures, challenges, and Grand Challenges for Development since 2011. Across the Grand Challenges portfolio, partners have jointly committed over $535 million ($155 million from USAID) in grants and technical assistance for over 528 innovators in 107 countries. To date, more than $614 million in follow-on funding has been catalyzed from external sources, a key measure of success.

USAID's investment in state-of-the-art geo and information intelligence centers mean that any program has the ability to leverage geospatial analysis and critical data sets to drive innovative solutions based on evidence and data. With over 20 programs experimenting with Artificial Intelligence and machine learning, and USAID's strong work on digital finance and connectivity, the Agency is using technology to drive our programs farther and faster. USAID has also completed more than 1,500 Global Development Alliances, leveraging private sector in-kind or financial investments.

In addition, the Center for Innovation and Impact (CII)--the Bureau for Global Health's dedicated innovation office--takes a business-minded approach to fast-tracking the development, introduction, and scale-up of health innovations that address the world's most important health challenges, and assessing and adopting cutting-edge approaches (such as using unmanned aerial vehicles and artificial intelligence).

Feed the Future Partnering for Innovation partners with agribusinesses to help them commercialize and scale new agricultural innovations to help improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers, increasing their productivity and incomes. To date the program has

91

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

worked with 59 partners in 20 different countries, investing more than $43 million in new technologies and services, and leveraging nearly $100 million in private sector investment. The program has helped commercialize over 118 innovations, which resulted in an estimated $99 million in sales. It has its own Innovation site that partners can easily see and connect with promising innovations and research.

Finally, USAID was honored when the co-founder and Scientific Director of USAID's Development Innovations Venture (DIV) program, Dr. Michael Kremer received the 2019 Nobel prize for economics, along with Dr. Esther Duflo and Dr. Abhijit Banerjee. Some of his work that led to this honor was connected to USAID's DIV program. DIV values rigorous testing methods such as impact evaluations or robust market tests to measure the impact of USAID innovations. Evidence of clear and measurable outcomes helps demonstrate what is working and what is not. Solutions that demonstrate rigorous evidence of impact can then be scaled to other contexts. Through the DIV program, Dr. Kremer helps USAID use evidence-based approaches to take small risks, identify what works, and scale those approaches to provide greater impact. Since 2010, the DIV program has made 225 grants to find, test, and scale evidence-based innovations directly affecting more than 55 million lives across 47 countries. Based on Dr. Kremer's and others research announced in October 2020, the early portfolio of DIV grants (covering 2010-12) has produced $17 in social benefit per every dollar spent by USAID.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Innovations Program (MERLIN) is a USAID endeavor designed to support the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) and is now a part of the Learning, Evaluation and Research (LER) office within PPL. Formerly, the MERLIN program was part of the U.S. Global Development Lab which became the Innovation, Technology, and Research (ITR) Hub within the new DDI Bureau. The MERLIN program works to innovate on traditional approaches to monitoring, evaluation, research and learning. While innovative in themselves, these approaches can also be better suited to evaluating an innovation effort. Two examples of MERLIN activities include Developmental Evaluation, which aims to provide ongoing feedback to managers on implementation through an embedded evaluator, and Rapid Feedback, which allows implementers to test various methods to reach certain targeted results (more quickly than through traditional midterm or final evaluations). Both of these approaches allow adaptive management during implementation to improve program impacts.

Many of the agency's programs such as Grand Challenges and Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) have been reviewed by formal audit and other performance and impact interventions. DIV uses a tiered funding approach to find, test, and scale evidence-based innovations. DIV's grants include: Stage 1 for piloting (up to $200,000); Stage 2 for testing (up to $1,500,000); Stage 3 for

2021 **INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE**
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 7 Innovation

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

scaling (up to $15,000,000); and "evidence grants" (up to $1,500,000) for research to determine causal impact of certain interventions. In particular for Stage 2 grants, DIV requires evidence of impact that must be causal and rigorous – the grantee must either have rigorous underlying evidence already established, use this funding to run an evaluation with an evaluation partner, or run an evaluation with its own funding during the grant period. There must be significant demonstrated demand for the innovation.

DIV's evaluation criteria for its funding is based on its three core principles as further outlined in its annual grant solicitation (DIV Annual Program Statement): (1) Evidence of Impact; (2) Cost-Effectiveness; and (3) Pathways to Scale. DIV's expectations vary by stage, but every awardee must report against a set of pre-negotiated key performance indicators. Most DIV grants are fixed amount awards, a unique type of federal grant instrument that is tailor-made for pay-for-results approaches. Fixed amount awards are structured by paying for milestones achieved, which emphasizes performance (not just compliance) and reduces some administrative burden for all parties (see 2 CFR 200.201(b)).

DIV supports innovative solutions across all countries and development sectors in which USAID operates, including education, agriculture, water, energy, and economic development. Since 2010, DIV has provided more than $149 million for 225 grants in 47 countries, reaching more than 55 million beneficiaries.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
10
(out of 15 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

USAID's top five program accounts based on actual appropriation amounts in FY20 are:
1. International Disaster Assistance ($4.40 billion; eligible grantees: any U.S. or non-U.S. organization, individual, nonprofit, or for-profit entity that meets the requirements described in ADS 303);
2. Migration and Refugee Assistance ($3.43 billion; eligible grantees: any U.S. or non-U.S. organization, individual, nonprofit, or for-profit entity that meets the requirements described in ADS 303);
3. Development Assistance ($3.4 billion; eligible grantees: any U.S. or non-U.S. organization, individual, nonprofit, or for-profit entity that meets the requirements described in ADS 303);
4. Global Health (USAID) ($3.16 billion; eligible grantees: any U.S. or non-U.S. organization, individual, nonprofit, or for-profit entity that meets the requirements described in ADS 303);
5. Economic Support Fund ($3.05 billion ADS 303).

See the U.S. Foreign Assistance Reference Guide for more information on each of these accounts. More information can also be found in the FY2021 Congressional Budget Justification (page 2 and 3, column 4). USAID generally does not limit eligibility when awarding grants and cooperative agreements; eligibility may be restricted for an individual notice of funding opportunity in accordance with the procedures in ADS 303.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

USAID is committed to using evidence of effectiveness in all of its competitive contracts, cooperative agreements, and grants, which comprise the majority of the Agency's work. USAID's Program Cycle Policy ensures evidence from monitoring, evaluation and other sources informs funding decisions at all levels, including during strategic planning, project and activity design, procurement and implementation.

USAID's Senior Obligation Alignment Review (SOAR) helps to ensure the Agency is using evidence to design and approve funding for innovative approaches to provide long-term sustainable outcomes and provides oversight on the use of grant or contract mechanisms and proposed results.

USAID includes past performance to comprise 30% of the non-cost evaluation criteria for contracts. As part of determining grant awards, USAID's policy requires an applicant to provide a list of all its cost-reimbursement contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements involving similar or related programs during the past three years. The grant Selection Committee chair must validate the applicant's past performance reference information based on existing evaluations to the maximum extent possible, and make a reasonable, good faith effort to contact all references to verify or corroborate how well an applicant performed.

For assistance, as required by 2 CFR 200, USAID also does a risk assessment to review an organization's ability to meet the goals and objectives outlined by the agency. Internal procedures for conducting the risk assessment are found in ADS 303.3.9, with guidance on how to look for evidence of effectiveness from potential grantees. Per the ADS, this can be done through reviewing past performance and evaluation/performance reports such as the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System (CPARS).

Even though there is no federal requirement (as there is with CPARS), USAID also assesses grantee past performance for use when making funding decisions (detailed in ADS 303, p. 66). Per USAID's ADS 303 policy, before making an award of any grant or cooperative agreement the Agreement Officer must state in the memorandum of negotiation that the applicant has a satisfactory record of performance. When making the award, the Agreement Officer may consider withholding authority to proceed to the next phase of a grant until provided evidence of acceptable performance within a given period.

95

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

USAID was recognized by GAO in its recent report published on September 5, 2018, Managing for Results: Government-wide Actions Needed to Improve Agencies' Use of Performance Information in Decision Making (GAO-18-609SP) as one of four agencies (out of 23 surveyed) with proven practices for using performance information. USAID was also the only CFO Act agency with a statistically significant increase in the Agency Use of Performance Information Index since 2007.

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Grantees report on the progress of activities through documentation such as Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plans, periodic performance reporting, and external and internal evaluation reports (if applicable). These reports help USAID remain transparent and accountable and also help the Agency build evidence of what does and does not work in its interventions. Any internal evaluation undertaken by a grantee must also be provided to USAID for learning purposes. All datasets compiled under USAID-funded projects, activities, and evaluations are to be submitted by grantees to the USAID Development Data Library. All final evaluation reports must also be submitted to the Agency's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC), unless they receive a waiver to the USAID's public dissemination requirements. These are rare and require the concurrence of the Director of the Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research.

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

USAID is actively engaged in utilizing evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds. For example, Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) uses a tiered funding approach to find, test, and scale evidence-based innovations. DIV's grants include: Stage 1 for piloting (up to $200,000); Stage 2 for testing (up to $1,500,000); Stage 3 for scaling (up to $15,000,000); and "evidence grants" (up to $1,500,000) for research to determine causal impact of certain interventions. In particular for Stage 2 grants, DIV requires evidence of impact that must be causal and rigorous--the grantee must either have rigorous underlying evidence already established, use this funding to run an evaluation with an evaluation partner, or run an evaluation with its own funding during the grant period. There must also be significant demonstrated demand for the innovation.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

DIV's evaluation criteria for its funding is based on its three core principles as further outlined in its annual grant solicitation (DIV Annual Program Statement): (1) Evidence of Impact; (2) Cost-Effectiveness; and (3) Pathways to Scale. DIV's expectations vary by stage, but every awardee must report against a set of pre-negotiated key performance indicators. Most DIV grants are fixed amount awards, a unique type of federal grant instrument that is tailor-made for pay-for-results approaches. Fixed amount awards are structured by paying for milestones achieved, which emphasizes performance (not just compliance) and reduces some administrative burden for all parties (see 2 CFR 200.201(b)).

DIV supports innovative solutions across all countries and development sectors in which USAID operates, including education, agriculture, water, energy, and economic development. Since 2010, DIV has provided more than $149 million for 225 grants across 76 countries, reaching more than 55 million beneficiaries. Based on recent research announced in October 2020 led by Nobel Prize-winning economist and DIV advisor, Dr. Michael Kremer, the early portfolio of DIV grants (covering 2010-12) has produced $17 in social benefits per every dollar spent by USAID.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

USAID's Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) specifically emphasizes rigorous evidence for causal impact in its official grant solicitation (DIV Annual Program Statement (APS), page 4): "DIV supports the piloting and rigorous testing of innovations and helps those innovations that have successfully demonstrated impact to transition to scale. DIV looks for different indicators of impact depending on the stage of financing that the applicant is seeking and on whether the innovation has a public or commercial pathway to scale." DIV's evaluation criteria is based on its three core principles as further outlined in its APS: (1) Evidence of Impact; (2) Cost-Effectiveness; and (3) Pathways to Scale.

Fenix offers expandable, lease-to-own, solar home systems (SHS) financed through ultra-affordable installments over mobile money. In 2016, DIV partnered with USAID's Scaling Off-Grid Energy team to support Fenix's expansion from Uganda into Zambia, a nascent and largely underserved market. By the end of the DIV award, Fenix was the leading SHS company in Zambia. In 2017, Fenix was acquired by ENGIE, a multinational electric utility company, and expanded into four new countries--Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Mozambique. Fenix has delivered clean, affordable energy to 3.5 million people across six countries in Africa.

97

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

EarthEnable is a social enterprise that has developed durable adobe floor replacements for traditional dirt floors. EarthEnable flooring minimizes exposure to bacteria and parasites--particularly for children--and is 70% less expensive than other clean floor alternatives. Early investments by DIV supported EarthEnable to test different business models and scale up operations, expanding their geographic reach and enabling them to serve lower-income households. To date, EarthEnable has replaced more than 5,000 dirt floors and served over 20,000 people in Rwanda and Uganda.

In 2013, DIV funded a randomized control trial to evaluate evidence for causal impact of the program, Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), implemented by Pratham, an Indian NGO. While progress has been made to help more children attend school, millions of students are not actually learning at their grade level. In response, TaRL helps lagging students catch up by teaching to their skill level rather than to their age or grade. The approach works by dividing children (generally in Grades 3 to 5) into groups based on learning needs rather than age or grade. It dedicates time to basic skills rather than focusing solely on the curriculum. And it regularly assesses student performance, not just end-of-year examinations. In 2017, DIV further partnered with J-PAL Africa, UNICEF, USAID/Zambia, and the Zambian Ministry of General Education to scale TaRL across Zambia. To date, DIV's support has helped catalyze more than $25 million in additional funding beyond USAID to scale the TaRL model to 12 countries across Africa.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

USAID's Program Cycle Policy states that "[f]unding may be dedicated within a project or activity design for implementing partners to engage in an internal evaluation for institutional learning or accountability purposes."

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

USAID does not administer non-competitive grant programs (relative score for criteria #8 applied)

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Agency for International Development | Criteria 10 Repurpose for Results

| RESULTS
| FOR AMERICA

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score
6
(out of 8 points)

U.S. Agency for International Development

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

Based on the USAID Rapid Feedback (RF) approach USAID/Cambodia mission and implementers developed a Theory of Change, conduct implementation research, and rapid experiments on Social and Behavior Change Communication (SBCC) for communities and for donors. The Cambodia Children's Trust (CCT) had been working at the community level to discourage families from sending their children to Residential Care Institutions. The mission also supported Friends International (FI) which had been working with donors to encourage behavior change on their support to RCIs. Both implementers adopted action plans based on the results: CCT used the findings to streamline the Social Behavior Change Campaigns (SBCC) before rolling it out to more villages; and FI used the RF findings to inform use of SBCC beyond paid social media.

USAID shifts funds away from ineffective grantees. For example, the Securing Water for Food Grand Challenge is designed with a Technical Assistance Facility to consult and work with grantees to identify specific growth barriers, and then connect them with vetted service providers that bring expertise and capabilities to help these grantees overcome their strategic barriers. The Technical Assistance Facility provides tailored financial and acceleration support to help these grantees improve their market-driven business development, commercial growth, and scaling.

If a grantee is unable to meet specific performance targets, such as number of customers or product sales, further funding is not granted (per the terms of the grant), and the grantee is re-categorized into the program's group of unsuccessful alumni. The Securing

100

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

Water for Food Grand Challenge used milestone-based grants to terminate 15 awards that were not meeting their annual milestones and shifted that money to both grants and technical assistance for the remaining 25 awards in the program.

Also, USAID's INVEST program is designed for constant feedback loops around the partner performance. Not only are under-performing partners dropped, but new partners can be added dynamically, based on demand. This greatly increases USAID's new partner base and increases the performance standard across the board.

USAID's Business Ecosystem Project (BEP), implemented by Palladium Group, is designed to increase private sector investment in strengthening domestic supply chains and workforce development in North Macedonia. BEP's initial strategy was to mobilize corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds from investors and large international corporations toward the project's goal, but it quickly became evident that such investments would be neither strategic nor sustainable. To achieve a lasting impact on North Macedonia's business ecosystem, BEP partnered with companies that were better positioned to recognize the link between local economic development and their own business interest. BEP learned from its local partners and adapted its private sector engagement (PSE) strategy to target small, medium, and large enterprises that were more dependent on domestic supply chains and workers. BEP no longer focuses only on foreign direct investment (FDI) companies with CSR budgets, but approaches all companies that have a real economic incentive to invest in local supply chains and workforce development. This approach was more effective and allowed BEP to co-invest in a diverse range of supply chain and workforce development initiatives, first as a proof of concept and later at scale.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

USAID/Food for Peace's Sustainable Action for Resilience and Food Security (Sabal) is a five-year program in Nepal, implemented by Save the Children and a consortium of partners. Sabal's goal is to improve food security and resilience in targeted districts in Nepal by improving livelihoods, health and nutrition, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation. Sabal utilized collaborating, learning and adapting (CLA) approaches such as pause and reflect, M&E for learning, and adaptive management to be able to adapt to the changing context. In 2015, there were devastating earthquakes, which necessitated geographic program expansion and then, two years later, there were budget cuts, which meant ending implementation in those expansion areas. At that time, CLA approaches were utilized to identify sustainability strategies, assess the level of self-reliance among community groups,

10. Repurpose for Results: **In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?** (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

tailor interventions based on the data, and gain consensus and buy-in among internal staff, consortium partners, and the local government. As a result, Sabal registered high-performing community groups with the government and linked these groups with local resources and leaders. At the same time, Sabal identified poor performing groups and built their capacity through targeted trainings and community capacity building.

USAID's Regional Health Integration to Enhance Services in Eastern Uganda (RHITES-E) Activity (2016-2021), implemented by IntraHealth International and its partners, supports the Government of Uganda's health "surge" strategy to find new HIV positive patients and enroll them in care and treatment. The data and results from RHITES-E's first quarter performance review showed the Activity was way behind its target. The Activity leadership and USAID decided to shift from a "business as usual" attitude to applying collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) approaches to draw on and analyze existing data, from a USAID dashboard, to reflect on findings with key stakeholders and fill identified needs and gaps to improve surge efforts. By the end of the fiscal year 2017, the Activity had improved its surge performance resulting in better results and outcomes and shifted in its culture to be a learning organization. Together with stakeholders, staff identified ineffective approaches such as mass HIV testing and developed and implemented new strategies to include screening of clients before testing for efficient and effective identification and linkage of new HIV positive clients into care and treatment.

USAID's Empleando Futuros (Employing Futures) program, an at-risk youth program, was launched in Honduras in 2016. During its first year, a pause and reflect event found a significant number of drop-outs and the need to strengthen the program's response to better meet the needs of youth and the labor market. USAID and its implementing partner, Banyon Global, applied USAID's Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) Framework and tools to establish a framework for strategic pause and reflect events throughout the year, strengthen the program's performance monitoring system, and develop an online platform for tracking program participants' progress. These changes helped the implementer to revisit the program's underlying assumptions and theory of change, learn continuously, and inform evidence-based decisions. Preliminary findings suggest that the program has fewer dropouts, capacity of local systems and partners has been strengthened, and private sector engagement has improved.

FY 21 Score
71

★ ★ ★
SILVER 2021

ACF

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES • USA

Administration for Children and Families (HHS)

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

Even prior to the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act), the **Administration for Children and Families** (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services invested in a robust approach to infuse data and evidence in budget, policy, and management decisions. ACF was among the first of federal agencies to publicly release an agency-wide evaluation framework with its FY12 policy "to govern [the agency's] planning, conduct, and use of evaluation." The agency's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation leads the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) and oversees an evaluation team of 70 staff. In FY21, ACF had a total research and evaluation budget of $175 million.

ACF's long-standing expertise in research and evaluation helps provide support to grantees on evaluation, evidence-building, data-driven innovation, and implementation of evidence-based programs. One example of this capacity building is through the agency's efforts to support culturally responsive evaluation. The new African American Child and Family Research Center is intended to lead and support research on the needs of African American populations served by ACF. Another example is the TANF Data Innovation Project that supports cohorts of states to improve the effectiveness of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs by helping them better leverage human services data. In FY21, the agency published findings from a TANF Data Innovation Needs Assessment to improve agency technical assistance while supporting states with linking data for evidence building.

In FY21, the HHS annual evaluation plan features planned evaluations related to three ACF priority learning questions on TANF and job retention; quality of Head Start programs and the experiences of children and families in the programs; and programs for child safety and well-being. These activities are helping states and grantees improve program and service delivery for children, families, and parents across the country.

ACF's Head Start competitive grant program considers grantee past performance as a condition of continued funding through the Head Start Designation Renewal System. In two smaller grant programs, Personal Responsibility Education Program and Sexual Risk Avoidance Education, grantees must

implement evidence-informed or research-based interventions. The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) enables states to use federal funds to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements through the provision of evidence-based services. ACF sponsors an independent systematic review to designate programs as evidence-based and eligible for federal funds.

To advance the agency's investments in evidence-based policymaking, Results for America recommends that ACF consider expanding the program areas covered by robust evidence clearinghouses to better identify what works. RFA recommends that Congress increase funding for research and evaluation activities, including the recruitment of data and evaluation staff and experts, even through statutory changes.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Children and Families | Criteria 1 Leadership

.ıll **RESULTS**
★★★ **FOR AMERICA**

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?

FY21 Score
9
(out of 9 points)

Administration for Children and Families

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation at the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) serves as the Administration for Children and Families Chief Evaluation Officer. The Deputy Assistant Secretary oversees OPRE, which supports evaluation and other learning activities across the agency. ACF's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation oversaw a research and evaluation budget of approximately $175 million in FY21. OPRE has 70 federal staff positions; OPRE staff are experts in research and evaluation methods and data analysis as well as ACF programs, policies, and the populations they serve. In August 2019, the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation was named the Chief Evaluation Officer of HHS.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The HHS Chief Information Officer serves as the HHS Chief Data Officer. In August 2019, the HHS Chief Information Officer was named the acting Chief Data Officer of HHS. In September of 2019, the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families designated the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation as the primary ACF member to serve on the HHS Data Council, the body responsible for advising the HHS Chief Data Officer on implementation of Evidence Act activities across HHS.

Additionally, in 2016, ACF established a Division of Data and Improvement (DDI) providing federal leadership and resources to improve the quality, use, and sharing of ACF data. The Director of DDI reports to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation and oversees work to improve the quality, usefulness, interoperability, and availability of data and to

106

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Children and Families | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?

address issues related to privacy and data security and data sharing. DDI has 12 federal staff positions and an FY21 budget of approximately $7.5M (not including salaries).

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

As of September 2019, ACF's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation serves as the primary ACF representative to HHS' Leadership Council, Data Council, and Evidence and Evaluation Council--the HHS bodies responsible for implementing Evidence Act activities across HHS. These cross-agency councils meet regularly to discuss agency-specific needs and experiences and to collaboratively develop guidance for department-wide action.

Within ACF, the 2016 reorganization that created the Division of Data and Improvement (DDI) endowed ACF's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation with oversight of the agency's strategic planning; performance measurement and management; research and evaluation; statistical policy and program analysis; synthesis and dissemination of research and evaluation findings; data quality, usefulness, and sharing; and application of emerging technologies to improve the effectiveness of programs and service delivery. ACF reviews program office performance measures and associated data three times per year in sync with the budget process; OPRE has traditionally worked with ACF program offices to develop research plans on an annual basis and has worked to integrate the development of program-specific learning agendas into this process. In addition, OPRE holds both regular and ad hoc meetings with ACF program offices to discuss research and evaluation findings, as well as other data topics.

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

FY21 Score
10
(out of 10 points)

Administration for Children and Families

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

ACF's evaluation policy confirms ACF's commitment to conducting evaluations and using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice. ACF seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. ACF established the evaluation policy in 2012 and published it in the Federal Register on August 29, 2014. In late 2019, ACF released a short video about the policy's five principles and how ACF uses them to guide its work.

As ACF's primary representative to the HHS Evidence and Evaluation Council, the ACF Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation co-chairs the HHS Evaluation Policy Subcommittee--the body responsible for developing an HHS-wide evaluation policy. HHS released its Department-wide evaluation policy in 2021.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

In accordance with OMB guidance, ACF contributed to the HHS-wide evaluation plan. The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) also annually identifies questions relevant to the programs and policies of ACF and proposes a research and evaluation spending plan to the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families. This plan focuses on activities that OPRE plans to conduct during the following fiscal year.

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

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

In accordance with OMB guidance, HHS is developing an HHS-wide evidence-building plan. To develop this document, HHS asked each sub-agency to submit examples of their agency's priority research questions, potential data sources, anticipated approaches, challenges and mitigation strategies, and stakeholder engagement strategies. ACF drew from its existing program-specific learning agendas and research plans, has contributed example priority research questions, and has anticipated learning activities for inclusion in the HHS evidence-building plan. The HHS evidence-building plans set to be released in early 2022 as a part of the HHS strategic plan.

In 2020, ACF released a research and evaluation agenda, describing research and evaluation activities and plans in nine ACF program areas with substantial research and evaluation portfolios: Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Sexual Risk Avoidance, Child Care, Child Support Enforcement, Child Welfare, Head Start, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood, Home Visiting, and Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency.

In addition to fulfilling requirements of the Evidence Act, ACF has supported and continues to support systematic learning and stakeholder engagement activities across the agency. For example:

- Many ACF program offices have or are currently developing detailed program-specific learning agendas to systematically learn about and improve their programs—studying existing knowledge, identifying gaps, and setting program priorities. For example, ACF and HRSA have developed a learning agenda for the MIECHV program, and ACF is supporting ongoing efforts to build a learning agenda for ACF's Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) programming.

- ACF will continue to release annual portfolios that describe key findings from past research and evaluation work and how ongoing projects are addressing gaps in the knowledge base to answer critical questions in the areas of family self-sufficiency, child and family development, and family strengthening. In addition to describing key questions, methods, and data sources for each research and evaluation project, the portfolios provide narratives describing how evaluation and evidence-building activities unfold in specific ACF programs and topical areas over time, and how current research and evaluation initiatives build on past efforts and respond to remaining gaps in knowledge.

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

- ACF works closely with many stakeholders to inform priorities for its research and evaluation efforts and solicits their input through conferences and meetings such as the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency, the National Research Conference on Early Childhood, and the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium Annual Meetings; meetings with ACF grantees and program administrators; engagement with training and technical assistance networks; surveys, focus groups, interviews, and other activities conducted as a part of research and evaluation studies; and through both project-specific and topical technical working groups, including the agency's Family Self-Sufficiency Research Technical Working Group. ACF's ongoing efforts to engage its stakeholders will be described in more detail in ACF's forthcoming description of its learning activities.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

ACF's evaluation policy requires that "ACF will release evaluation results regardless of findings...Evaluation reports will present comprehensive findings, including favorable, unfavorable, and null findings. ACF will release evaluation results timely--usually within two months of a report's completion." ACF has publicly released the findings of all completed evaluations to date. In 2020, OPRE released over 130 research publications. OPRE publications are publicly available on the OPRE website.

Additionally, ACF develops and uses research and evaluation methods that are appropriate for studying diverse populations, taking into account historical and cultural factors and planning data collection with disaggregation and subgroup analyses in mind. Whenever possible, ACF projects report on subgroups. Recent examples include the Parents and Children Together (PACT) Evaluation substudy of program strategies and adaptations used by selected responsible fatherhood programs serving Hispanic fathers, and the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AI/AN FACES) which has been fielded to capture information on the characteristics, experiences, and development of Head Start children and families in Region XI, which predominantly serves AIAN children and families. In February 2021 OPRE released a brief on Methods, Challenges, and Best Practices for Conducting Subgroup Analysis.

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

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 3115, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

In accordance with OMB guidance, ACF is contributing to an HHS-wide capacity assessment, which is set to be released in early 2022 as a part of the HHS strategic plan. In order to support these and related efforts, OPRE launched the ACF Evidence Capacity Support project in 2020. The Evidence Capacity project provides support to ACF's efforts to build and strengthen programmatic and operational evidence capacity, including supporting learning agenda development and the development of other foundational evidence through administrative data analysis.

Given the centrality of data capacity to evidence capacity, ACF has also been partnering with the HHS OCDO to develop and pilot test a tool to conduct an HHS-wide data capacity assessment, consistent with Title II Evidence Act requirements. In support of specifically modernizing ACF's Data Governance and related capacity, ACF launched the ACF Data Governance Consulting and Support project. The Data Governance Support project is providing information gathering, analysis, consultation, and technical support to ACF and its partners to strengthen data governance practices within ACF offices, and between ACF and its partners at the federal, state, local, and tribal levels.

ACF has also sought to build capacity to support culturally responsive evaluation, including sponsorship of the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families and the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center, and development of "A Roadmap for Collaborative and Effective Evaluation in Tribal Communities." ACF also has a new grant opportunity for an African American Children and Families Research Center, which is intended to lead and support research on the needs of African American populations served by ACF and promising approaches to promote social and economic well-being among low-income African American populations, further providing leadership on culturally competent research that can inform policies concerning low-income African American populations and foster significant scholarship regarding the needs and experiences of the diverse African American population throughout the nation.

ACF also continues to support the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts as follows:

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

Coverage: ACF conducts research in areas where Congress has given authorization and appropriations. Programs for which ACF is able to conduct research and evaluation using dedicated funding include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Health Profession Opportunity Grants, Head Start, Child Care, Child Welfare, Home Visiting, Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood, Personal Responsibility Education Program, Sexual Risk Avoidance Education, Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Runaway and Homeless Youth, Family Violence Prevention Services, and Human Trafficking services. These programs represent approximately 85% of overall ACF spending.

Quality: ACF's Evaluation Policy states that ACF is committed to using the most rigorous methods that are appropriate to the evaluation questions and the populations with whom research is being conducted and feasible within budget and other constraints, and that rigor is necessary not only for impact evaluations, but also for implementation/process evaluations, descriptive studies, outcome evaluations, and formative evaluations; and in both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Methods: ACF uses a range of evaluation methods. ACF conducts impact evaluations as well as implementation and process evaluations, cost analyses and cost benefit analyses, descriptive and exploratory studies, research syntheses, and more. ACF also develops and uses methods that are appropriate for studying diverse populations, taking into account historical and cultural factors and planning data collection with disaggregation and subgroup analyses in mind. ACF is committed to learning about and using the most scientifically advanced approaches to determining effectiveness and efficiency of ACF programs; to this end, OPRE annually organizes meetings of scientists and research experts to discuss critical topics in social science research methodology and how innovative methodologies can be applied to policy-relevant questions.

Effectiveness: ACF's Evaluation Policy states that ACF will conduct relevant research and disseminate findings in ways that are accessible and useful to policymakers, practitioners, and the diverse populations that ACF programs serve. OPRE engages in ongoing collaboration with ACF program office staff and leadership to interpret research and evaluation findings and to identify their implications for programmatic and policy decisions such as ACF regulations and funding opportunity announcements. For example, when ACF's Office of Head Start significantly revised its Program Performance Standards--the regulations that define the standards and minimum requirements for Head Start services--the revisions drew from decades of OPRE research and the recommendations of the OPRE-led Secretary's Advisory Committee on Head Start Research and Evaluation. Similarly, ACF's Office of Child Care drew from research and evaluation findings related to eligibility redetermination, continuity of subsidy use, use of funds dedicated to improving the quality of programs, and other information

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

to inform the regulations accompanying the reauthorization of the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

Independence: ACF's Evaluation Policy states that independence and objectivity are core principles of evaluation and that it is important to insulate evaluation functions from undue influence and from both the appearance and the reality of bias. To promote objectivity, ACF protects independence in the design, conduct, and analysis of evaluations. To this end, ACF conducts evaluations through the competitive award of grants and contracts to external experts who are free from conflicts of interest; and, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Planning, Research, and Evaluation, a career civil servant, has authority to approve the design of evaluation projects and analysis plans; and has authority to approve, release, and disseminate evaluation reports.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

ACF's Evaluation Policy states that in assessing the effects of programs or services, ACF evaluations will use methods that isolate to the greatest extent possible the impacts of the programs or services from other influences and that for causal questions, experimental approaches are preferred. As of April 2021, at least 20 ongoing OPRE projects included one or more random assignment impact evaluations. To date in FY21, OPRE has released RCT impact findings related to Health Profession Opportunity Grants and TANF job search assistance strategies.

OPRE's template for research contracts includes a standard task for stakeholder engagement, which states that "involving stakeholders in the evaluation may increase understanding, acceptance, and utilization of evaluation findings… Where appropriate, stakeholders should have the opportunity for input at multiple phases of a project…accomplished in a transparent way while safeguarding the objectivity and independence of the study." Four OPRE projects focused on early childhood programs that serve American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) families are exemplars of using a stakeholder engaged approach at each stage of the research cycle to understand and co-create knowledge: Tribal Early Childhood Research Center (TRC), AIAN Family and Childhood Experiences Survey (FACES) 2015, Multi-Site Implementation of Evaluation of MIECHV with AIAN Families (MUSE), and AIAN FACES 2019. Additionally, a planned solicitation for FY22, Advancing Contextual Analysis and Methods of Participant Engagement in OPRE (CAMPE), will explore how OPRE can further incorporate participatory methods and analysis of contextual factors into research and evaluation projects.

113

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Children and Families | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)
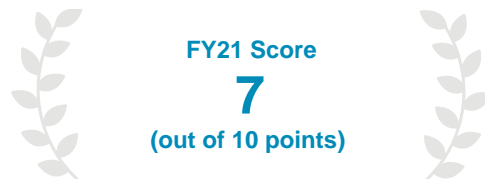
Administration for Children and Families

3.1 _____ (Name of agency) invested $_____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

The Administration for Children and Families invested approximately $209 million in evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing approximately 0.3% of the agency's approximately $60.9 billion FY21 budget.

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation posts all new procurements in the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) Small Business Customer Experience (SBCX) database, engages in the Request for Information (RFI) process through the General Services Administration (GSA) schedule and the Program Support Center (PSC) Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) procurement vehicle, sends all new work to OSDBU for review, and has provided training to OPRE staff on procurement vehicles that specifically support small businesses with a race equity lens (e.g., minority-owned small businesses, Latino-owned small businesses, tribally-owned Native American Concerns).

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)
In FY21, the Administration for Children and Families has an evaluation budget of approximately $209 million, a $1 million increase from FY20.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Children and Families | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
  (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

ACF provides evaluation technical assistance to grantees to:
- Support sites participating in federal evaluations (for example projects supporting Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0 and Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0 grantees and Regional Partnership Grants grantees);
- Support grantees who are conducting their own local evaluations (for example projects supporting Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees, Personal Responsibility Education Program grantees, MIECHV grantees (in collaboration with HRSA), Tribal MIECHV grantees, Child Welfare Community Collaborations grantees, and YARH grantees; and ACF staff directly supporting Section 1115 child support demonstration grantees);
- Provide general capacity building support (for example the TANF Data Innovation Project and the Center for States) and capacity for culturally competent research (for example the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center, the National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, and the planned African American Children and Families Research Center)
- Provide guidance to encourage state MIECHV awardees to develop their own learning agendas.

ACF also strengthens the data capacity of grantees through:
- Technical assistance with management information systems, such as the Participant Accomplishment and Grant Evaluation System (PAGES) system for Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) and Tribal HPOG grantees and the Information, Family Outcomes, Reporting, and Management (nFORM) system for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees
- Supporting grantee ability to monitor data quality and performance through projects like Personal Responsibility Education Program Studies of Performance Measures and Adulthood Preparation Subjects (PREP PMAPS) and Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Performance Analysis Study (SRAE PAS)

ACF also supports evidence capacity across the agency by preparing promising programs and interventions to advance to the next level of evidence. ACF has supported this work through projects like Supporting Evidence Building in Child Welfare; Next Steps for Rigorous Research on Two-Generation Approaches; and Building Evaluation Capacity in TANF: Implementing, Replicating, and Scaling Up Evidence-Informed Interventions to Promote Employment and Self-Sufficiency. The latter project will also document the landscape of current or previous evaluation TA activities in human services program contexts, what

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Children and Families | Criteria 3 Resources

|| RESULTS
★★★
FOR **AMERICA**

3. Resources: **Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?**
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

can be learned from other fields that have examined this question, and what lessons can be drawn to inform future federal evaluation capacity-building efforts.

ACF also publishes resources such as 1) The Program Manager's Guide to Evaluation to provide guidance to programs planning and implementing evaluations, and 2) the Continuous Quality Improvement Toolkit, which helps MIECHV awardees and others work with local agencies to build capacity in CQI. The toolkit features examples from home visiting but may also be helpful for audiences from other early childhood and human service programs. ACF recently began work to adapt existing ACF evaluation TA resources and develop new evaluation TA resources to more effectively build the evaluation capacity of the diverse stakeholders that ACF serves.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
   Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
   (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 10 points)
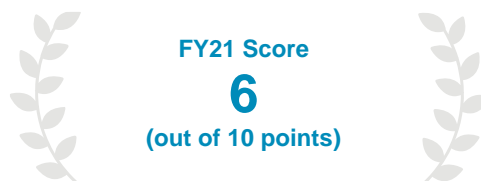
Administration for Children and Families

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

Every four years, HHS updates its Strategic Plan, which describes its work to address complex, multifaceted, and evolving health and human services issues. ACF was an active participant in the development of the FY18-FY22 HHS Strategic Plan, which includes several ACF-specific objectives. HHS is starting the process of developing an updated FY22-FY26 HHS Strategic Plan, and ACF will be an active participant in this process. ACF regularly reports on progress associated with the current objectives as part of the FY21 HHS Annual Performance Plan/Report, including the ten total performance measures from ACF programs that support this Plan. ACF performance measures primarily support Goal Three: "Strengthen the Economic and Social Well-Being of Americans Across the Lifespan." ACF supports Objective 3.1 (Encourage self-sufficiency and personal responsibility, and eliminate barriers to economic opportunity), Objective 3.2 (Safeguard the public against preventable injuries and violence or their results), and Objective 3.3 (Support strong families and healthy marriage, and prepare children and youth for healthy, productive lives) by reporting annual performance measures. ACF is also an active participant in the HHS Strategic Review process, which is an annual assessment of progress on the subset of ten performance measures that ACF reports on as part of the HHS Strategic Plan.

In April 2021, the Assistant Secretary for ACF announced the launch of the implementation of an ambitious agency-wide equity agenda and named the Associate Commissioner of the Administration for Children Youth and Families as lead for the implementation of the Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

Federal Government.

4.2 Did the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

OPRE currently reviews all ACF funding opportunity announcements and advises program offices, in accordance with their respective legislative authorities, on how to best integrate evidence into program design. Similarly, program offices have applied ACF research to inform their program administration. For example, ACF developed the Learn Innovate Improve (LI2) model--a systematic, evidence-informed approach to program improvement--which has since informed targeted TA efforts for the TANF program and the evaluation requirement for the child support demonstration grants.

ACF programs also regularly analyze and use data to improve performance. For example, two ACF programs (Health Profession Opportunity Grants & Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs) have developed advanced web-based management information systems (PAGES and nFORM, respectively) that are used to track grantee progress, produce real-time reports so that grantees can use their data to adapt their programs, and record grantee and participant data for research and evaluation purposes.

ACF also uses the nFORM data to conduct the HMRF Compliance Assessment and Performance (CAPstone) Grantee Review: a process by which federal staff and technical assistance providers assess grantee progress toward and achievement in meeting programmatic, data, evaluation, and implementation goals. The results of the CAPstone process guide federal directives and future technical assistance.

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

ACF program areas take tailored approaches to continuous improvement and rapid learning, taking into account cultural factors, wherever appropriate. For example, ACF:

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
  Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
  (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

- Provides continuous quality improvement (CQI) resources specifically for child welfare agencies and home visiting grantees;
- Provides CQI training and technical assistance for Tribal home visiting grantees, Tribal TANF-Child Welfare Coordination grantees, TANF, and Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) grantees;
- Is exploring how child care and Head Start programs can institutionalize CQI using a Breakthrough Series Collaborative approach;
- Launched two learning collaboratives: 1) the Engaging Fathers and Paternal Relatives: A Continuous Quality Improvement Approach in the Child Welfare System and 2) the Tribal Home Visiting Institute (TEI) to implement and evaluate an adapted version of Breakthrough Series Collaborative;
- Developed a Learn Innovate Improve model that has been used with TANF programs and is using rapid cycle evaluation methods to help Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education (HMRE) grantees address critical implementation challenges and test promising practices to address them

ACF also administers Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSFRs) to ensure that state child welfare systems are in conformity with federal child welfare requirements; to gauge the experiences of children, youth, and families receiving state child welfare services; and to assist states in enhancing their capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes. The reviews are structured to help states identify strengths and areas needing improvement within their agencies and programs, States determined not to have achieved substantial conformity in all the areas assessed must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan addressing the areas of nonconformity.

119

5. **Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Children and Families

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

ACF's Interoperability Action Plan was established in 2017 to formalize ACF's vision for effective and efficient data sharing. Under this plan ACF and its program offices will develop and implement a Data Sharing First (DSF) strategy that starts with the assumption that data sharing is in the public interest. The plan states that ACF will encourage and promote data sharing broadly, constrained only when required by law or when there are strong countervailing considerations.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

In 2020, ACF released a Compendium of ACF Administrative and Survey Data Resources. The Compendium documents administrative and survey data collected by ACF that could be used for evidence-building purposes. It includes summaries of twelve major ACF administrative data sources and seven surveys. Each summary includes an overview, basic content, available documentation, available data sets, restrictions on use, capacity to link to other data sources, and examples of prior research. It is a joint product of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in ACF, and the office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition, in 2019 OPRE compiled the descriptions and locations of hundreds of OPRE-archived datasets that are currently available for secondary analysis and made this information available on a single webpage. OPRE continues to regularly update this website with current archiving information. OPRE regularly archives research and evaluation data for secondary analysis, consistent with the ACF evaluation policy, which promotes rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

in the conduct of evaluation and research. This new consolidated web page serves as a one-stop resource that will help to make it easier for potential users to find and use the data that OPRE archives for secondary analysis.

In 2020 ACF launched the ACF Data Governance Consulting and Support project, which is providing information gathering, analysis, consultation, and technical support to ACF and its partners to strengthen data governance practices within ACF offices, and between ACF and its partners at the federal, state, local, and Tribal levels. Initial work will focus particularly on data asset tracking and metadata management, among other topics.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

ACF has multiple efforts underway to promote and support the use of documented data for research and improvement, including making numerous administrative and survey datasets publicly available for secondary use and actively promoting the archiving of research and evaluation data for secondary use. These data are machine readable, downloadable, and de-identified as appropriate for each data set. For example, individual-level data for research is held in secure restricted use formats, while public-use data sets are made available online. To make it easier to find these resources, ACF released a Compendium of ACF Administrative and Survey Data and consolidated information on archived research and evaluation data on the OPRE website.

Many data sources that may be useful for data linkage for building evidence on human services programs reside outside of ACF. In 2020, OPRE released the Compendium of Administrative Data Sources for Self-Sufficiency Research, describing promising administrative data sources that may be linked to evaluation data in order to assess long-term outcomes of economic and social interventions. It includes national, federal, and state sources covering a range of topical areas. It was produced under contract by MDRC as a part of OPRE's Assessing Options Evaluate Long-Term Outcomes (LTO) Using Administrative Data project.

Additionally, ACF is actively exploring how enhancing and scaling innovative data linkage practices can improve our understanding of the populations served by ACF and build evidence on human services programs more broadly. For instance, the Child Maltreatment Incidence Data Linkages (CMI Data Linkages) project is examining the feasibility of leveraging administrative data linkages to better understand child maltreatment incidence and related risk and protective factors. Also, in August 2021, OPRE

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

published a brief presenting findings from the 2019 TANF Data Innovation Needs Assessment. This survey of state TANF agencies was designed to understand state strengths and challenges in linking and analyzing administrative data for program improvement. Findings from the Needs Assessment informed technical assistance provided to states through ACF's TANF Data Collaborative. Information from the brief may be helpful to states, policymakers, and other funders in helping to support states in linking data for the purpose of evidence building.

ACF actively promotes archiving of research and evaluation data for secondary use. OPRE research contracts include a standard clause requiring contractors to make data and analyses supported through federal funds available to other researchers and to establish procedures and parameters for all aspects of data and information collection necessary to support archiving information and data collected under the contract. Many datasets from past ACF projects are stored in archives including the ACF-funded National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN), the ICPSR Child and Family Data Archive, and the ICPSR data archive more broadly. OPRE has funded grants for secondary analysis of ACF/OPRE data; examples in recent years include secondary analysis of strengthening families datasets and early care and education datasets. In 2019 ACF awarded Career Pathways Secondary Data Analysis Grants to stimulate and fund secondary analysis of data collected through the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Study, Health Professions Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Impact Study, and HPOG National Implementation Evaluation (NIE) on questions relevant to career pathways programs' goals and objectives. Information on all archived datasets that are currently available for secondary analysis is available on OPRE's website.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

ACF receives privacy and security guidance from both the ACF and HHS Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO). Between these two offices, there are several policies and practices in place to assure all ACF data are protected and all incidents are handled appropriately. The requirements are supported by auditing mechanisms and a privacy and security training program.

In 2014, ACF developed a Confidentiality Toolkit that explains the rules governing confidentiality of ACF data connected to many programs, provides examples of how confidentiality requirements can be addressed, and includes sample memoranda of understanding and data sharing agreements. In 2020, ACF launched the ACF Privacy and Confidentiality Analysis and Support project. This project is currently in the process of updating the Toolkit for recent changes in statute, and to provide real-world

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

examples of how data has been shared across domains—which frequently do not have harmonized privacy requirements—while complying with all relevant privacy and confidentiality requirements (e.g. FERPA, HIPPA). These case studies will also include downloadable, real-world tools that have been successfully used in the highlighted jurisdictions.
In addition, the project is exploring creating and maintaining a compendium of existing Privacy and Confidentiality laws for use by ACF staff.

ACF also takes appropriate measures to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of individuals contributing data for research throughout the archiving process, consistent with ACF's core principle of ethics. Research data may be made available as public use files when the data would not likely lead to harm or to the re-identification of an individual, or through restricted access. Restricted access files are de-identified and made available to approved researchers either through secure transmission and download, virtual data enclaves, physical data enclaves, or restricted online analysis.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

ACF undertakes many program-specific efforts to support state, local, and tribal efforts to use human services data while protecting privacy and confidentiality. For example, ACF's TANF Data Innovation Project supports innovation and improved effectiveness of state TANF programs by enhancing the use of data from TANF and related human services programs. This work includes encouraging and strengthening state integrated data systems, promoting proper payments and program integrity, and enabling data analytics for TANF program improvement. Similarly, in 2020 OPRE awarded Human Services Interoperability Demonstration Grants to Georgia State University and Kentucky's Department of Medicaid Services. These grants are intended to expand data sharing efforts by state, local, and tribal governments to improve human services program delivery, and to identify novel data sharing approaches that can be replicated in other jurisdictions. ACF anticipates awarding another round of Interoperability Demonstration grants in FY22. Also in 2019, OPRE in partnership with ASPE began a project to support states in linking Medicaid and child welfare data at the parent-child level to support outcomes research. Under this project, HHS will work with two to four states to enhance capacity to examine outcomes for children and parents who are involved in state child welfare systems and who may have behavioral health issues. Of particular interest are outcomes for families that may have substance use disorders, like opioid use disorder. Specifically this project seeks to develop state data infrastructure and increase the available de-identified data for research in this area.

123

<u>**6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:**</u>
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score
8
(out of 10 points)

Administration for Children and Families

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

ACF has established a common evidence framework adapted for the human services context from the framework for education research developed by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Science Foundation. The ACF framework, which includes the six types of studies delineated in the ED/NSF framework, aims to (1) inform ACF's investments in research and evaluation and (2) clarify for potential grantees' and others' expectations for different types of studies.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

While ACF does not have a common evidence framework across all funding decisions, certain programs do use a common evidence framework for funding decisions. For example:
- The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) enables states to use funds for certain evidence-based services. In April 2019, ACF published the Prevention Services Clearinghouse Handbook of Standards and Procedures, which provides a detailed description of the standards used to identify and review programs and services in order to rate programs and services as promising, supported, and well-supported practices.
- The Personal Responsibility Education Program Competitive Grants were funded to replicate effective, evidence-based program models or substantially incorporate elements of projects that have been proven to delay sexual activity, increase condom or contraceptive use for sexually active youth, and/or reduce pregnancy among youth.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

Through a systematic evidence review, HHS selected 44 models that grantees could use, depending on the needs and age of the target population of each funded project.

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

ACF sponsors several user-friendly tools that disseminate and promote evidence-based interventions. Several evidence reviews of human services interventions have disseminated and promoted evidence-based interventions by rating the quality of evaluation studies and presenting results in a user-friendly searchable format. Current evidence reviews include: 1) Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness (HomVEE) Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness, which provides an assessment of the evidence of effectiveness for early childhood home visiting models that serve families with pregnant women and children from birth to kindergarten entry; 2) The Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, a user-friendly website that reports on "projects that used a proven approach or a promising approach in moving welfare recipients into work, based on independent, rigorous evaluations of the projects" and allows users to search for interventions based upon characteristics of the clients served by the intervention; and 3) ACF's Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse, whose easily accessible and searchable website allows users to find information about mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services, in-home parent skill-based programs, and kinship navigator services designated as "promising," "supported," and "well-supported" practices by an independent systematic review.

Additionally, most ACF research and evaluation projects produce and widely disseminate short briefs, tip sheets, or infographics that capture high-level findings from the studies and make information about program services, participants, and implementation more accessible to policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders. For example, the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) project released a series of nine short briefs to accompany the implementation and early impact reports that were released for each of the nine PACE evaluation sites.

6.4 Did the agency promote the utilization of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

ACF's evaluation policy states that it is important for evaluators to disseminate research findings in ways that are accessible and useful to policymakers, practitioners, and the communities that ACF serves and that OPRE and program offices will work in partnership to inform potential applicants, program providers, administrators, policymakers, and funders through disseminating evidence from ACF-sponsored and other good quality evaluations. OPRE research contracts include a standard clause requiring contractors to develop a dissemination plan during early project planning to identify key takeaways, target audiences, and strategies for most effectively reaching the target audiences. OPRE's dissemination strategy is also supported by a commitment to plain language; OPRE works with its research partners to ensure that evaluation findings and other evidence are clearly communicated. OPRE also has a robust dissemination function that includes the OPRE website, including a new blog, an OPRE e-newsletter, and social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

OPRE also hosts an annual "Evaluation and Monitoring 101" training for ACF staff to help agency staff better understand how to design, conduct, and use findings from program evaluation and performance monitoring, ultimately building the capacity of agency staff and program offices to use evaluation research and data analysis to improve agency operations.

OPRE biennially hosts two major conferences, the Research and Evaluation Conference on Self-Sufficiency (RECS) and the National Research Conference on Early Childhood (NRCEC) to share research findings with researchers and with program administrators and policymakers at all levels. OPRE also convenes the Network of Infant and Toddler Researchers (NITR) which brings together applied researchers with policymakers and technical assistance providers to encourage research-informed practice and practice-informed research; and the Child Care and Early Education Policy Research Consortium (CCEEPRC) which brings together researchers, policymakers, and practitioners to discuss what we are learning from research that can help inform policy decisions for ACF, States, Territories, localities, and grantees and to consider the next steps in early care and education (ECE) research.

The Children's Bureau (CB) sponsors the recurring National Child Welfare Evaluation Summit to bring together partners from child welfare systems and the research community to strengthen the use of data and evaluation in child welfare; disseminate information about effective and promising prevention and child welfare services, programs, and policies; and promote the use of data and

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
    Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

evaluation to support sound decision-making and improved practice in state and local child welfare systems.

ACF also sponsors several:
- Research centers which advance research and translate findings to inform practice, including the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center and the Center for Research on Hispanic Children & Families; and
- Resource websites, including the Child Welfare Information Gateway, Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative, and a forthcoming website for Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees to support grantee access to program-relevant research and evidence.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 7 points)

Administration for Children and Families

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

In late 2019, ACF stood up a customer experience initiative to enhance ACF's delivery and administration of human services. This initiative focuses on ways to improve the experiences of both grantees and ACF employees. In 2020, ACF named a Chief Experience Officer (CEO) to lead these efforts. To date, the CEO has led efforts to understand and improve upon the experiences of ACF grantees receiving funding from multiple HHS operating divisions, evaluate and address the challenges that organizations face in applying for competitive grants, and develop an internal tool for ACF teams to assess and improve upon their capability to provide excellent technical assistance to ACF grantees. In 2021, ACF launched an Innovation Incubator initiative which began with a series of three Human-Centered Design trainings offered to ACF employees to equip staff with the skills and resources to identify problems, brainstorm ideas for improvement, and pilot solutions using an empathetic, "people-first" mindset. Participating staff also have access to the ACF Innovators community, a shared platform which supports interoffice idea generation and collaboration. ACF also has an ongoing Human-centered Design for Human Services (HCD4HS) project to explore the application of Human-centered Design across its service delivery programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

7.2 Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

ACF's mission to "foster health and well-being by providing federal leadership, partnership and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services" is undergirded by six values: dedication, professionalism, integrity, stewardship, respect, and excellence. ACF's emphasis on excellence, "exemplified by innovations and solutions that are anchored in available evidence, build knowledge and transcend boundaries," drives the agency's support for innovation across programs and practices.

128

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

For example, ACF's customer experience initiative is supporting the development of innovative practices for more efficient and responsive agency operations--improving how ACF understands and meets the needs of grantees and improving their capacity for service delivery. For example, ACF, in partnership with HRSA, convened a gathering of grantees who receive Head Start grants from ACF and federally qualified Health Center grants from HRSA to create opportunities for grantees to learn from one another and share best practices. ACF also helped a grantee analyze their data across both Head Start and Health Center programs to make operational improvements to their program.

ACF also administers select grant programs--through innovation projects, demonstration projects, and waivers to existing program requirements--that are designed to both implement and evaluate innovative interventions, as a part of an ACF-sponsored evaluation or an individual evaluation to accompany implementation of that innovation. For example:

- The Health Profession Opportunity Grants program was authorized as a demonstration program with a mandated federal evaluation. ACF is conducting a multi-pronged evaluation to assess program implementation, systems change resulting from HPOG programs, and outcomes and impacts for participants.
- ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement administers grant-funded demonstration projects and waivers including the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC) demonstration project; Digital Marketing grants; and Intergovernmental Case Processing Innovation Demonstration grants.
- ACF's Community Collaborations to Strengthen and Preserve Families grant program provides cooperative agreements that support the development, implementation, and evaluation of primary prevention strategies to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of families.

ACF projects that support innovation include:
- The Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency-Next Generation (BIAS-NG) project continues ACF's exploration of the application of behavioral science to the programs and target populations of ACF. BIAS-NG supports rigorous random assignment evaluations of behavioral economics interventions. Additionally, the Behavioral Interventions Scholars (BIS) grant program supports dissertation research that applies a behavioral science lens to research questions relevant to social services programs and policies and other issues facing low-income families.
- ACF's Human Centered Design for Human Services project is exploring the application of human centered design across ACF service delivery programs at the federal, state, and local levels.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

- ACF's Child Maltreatment Incidence Data Linkages (CMI Data Linkages) project is exploring how enhancing and scaling innovative data linkage practices can improve our understanding of child maltreatment incidence and related risk and protective factors.
- ACF's Promoting and Supporting Innovation in TANF Data project supports innovation and improved effectiveness of state TANF programs by enhancing the use of data from TANF and related human services programs.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

In addition to the list of ACF demonstration projects, innovation projects, and waiver programs with rigorous evidence activities built into their delivery (as described in sub-criteria 7.2), ACF also conducts rigorous research on other innovative human services.

The evaluations below are on-going rigorous evaluations conducted by ACF:
- ACF is conducting the Building Bridges and Bonds (B3) Evaluation, an impact study designed to test innovative, evidence-informed programming for fathers, with the goal of building practical evidence that can be used to improve services.
- ACF is also conducting the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) and the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) projects; these projects are conducting rigorous evaluations of the effectiveness of innovative programs designed to boost employment and earnings among low-income individuals.
- ACF is also conducting the Expanding Evidence on Replicable Recovery and Reunification Interventions for Families (R3) project to replicate an intervention, utilizing coaches for families engaged in the child welfare system due to parental substance use disorders, that demonstrates favorable parental recovery outcomes and shortens time to reunification. The R3 project will conduct a concurrent implementation and impact study.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 15 points)

Administration for Children and Families

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest competitive grant programs are:
1) Head Start ($10.7 billion; eligible applicants: public or private non-profit organizations, including community-based and faith-based organizations, or for-profit agencies);
2) Unaccompanied Children Services ($1.3 billion; eligible applicants: private non-profit and for-profit agencies);
3) Preschool Development Grants ($275 million; eligible applicants: states);
4) Healthy Marriage Promotion and Responsible Fatherhood Grants ($148.8 million; eligible applicants: states, local governments, tribal entities, and community-based organizations, both for profit and non-for-profit, including faith-based);
5) Transitional Living Program Runaway and Homeless Youth ($116.8 million; eligible applicants: community-based public and private organizations)

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

ACF reviewed performance data from the 2015 cohort of Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees (using the nFORM system) to set priorities, interests, and expectations for HMRF grants that were awarded in 2020. For example, because nFORM data indicated that organizations were more likely to meet enrollment targets and engage participants when they focused on implementing one program model, ACF's 2020 FOA, which led to 113 HMRF grant

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

awards in September 2020, mentioned specific interest in grantee projects, "that implement only one specific program model designed for one specific youth service population (p. 12)"

In its award decisions, ACF gave "preference to those applicants that were awarded a Healthy Marriage or Responsible Fatherhood grant between 2015 and 2019, and that (a) [were] confirmed by ACF to have met all qualification requirements under Section IV.2, The Project Description, Approach, Organizational Capacity of this FOA; and (b) [were] confirmed by ACF to have received an acceptable rating on their semi-annual grant monitoring statements during years three and four of the project period. [ACF gave] particular consideration to applicants that: (1) designed and successfully implemented, through to end of 2019, an impact evaluation of their program model, and that the impact evaluation was a fair impact test of their program model and that was not terminated prior to analysis; or (2) successfully participated in a federally-led impact evaluation" (p. 17).

ACF also evaluated HMRF grant applicants based upon their capacity to conduct a local impact evaluation and their proposed approach (for applicants required or electing to conduct local evaluations); their ability to provide a reasonable rationale and/or research base for the program model(s) and curriculum(a) proposed; and their inclusion of a Continuous Quality Improvement Plan, clearly describing the organizational commitment to data-driven approaches to identify areas for program performance, testing potential improvements, and cultivating a culture and environment of learning and improvement, among other things. Further, The Compliance And Performance reviews (CAPstone) entail a thorough review of each grantee's performance. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) sends a formal set of questions about grantee performance that the grant program specialists and TA providers answer ahead of time, and then they convene meetings where the performance of each grantee is discussed by OFA, OPRE, and the TA provider at length using nFORM data and the answers to the formal questions mentioned above.

The Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS) determines whether Head Start/Early Head Start grantees are delivering high-quality comprehensive services to the children and families that they serve. These determinations are based on seven conditions, one of which looks at how Head Start classrooms within programs perform on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation-based measure of the quality of teacher-child interactions. When the DRS deems grantees to be underperforming, grantees are denied automatic renewal of their grant and must apply for funding renewal through a standard open competition process. In the most recent language, grantees who are re-competing for Head Start funds **must** include a description of any violations, such as deficiencies,

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

areas of non-compliance, and/or audit finding in their record of Past Performance (p. 28). Applicants may describe the actions they have taken to address these violations. According to Head Start policy, in competitions to replace or potentially replace a current grantee, the responsible HHS official will give priority to applicants that have demonstrated capacity in providing effective, comprehensive, and well-coordinated early childhood education and development services and programs (see section 1304.20: Selection among applicants).

ACF manages the Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center (RHYTTAC), the national training and technical assistance entity that provides resources and direct assistance to the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) grantees and other youth serving organizations eligible to receive RHY funds. RHYTTAC disseminates information about and supports grantee implementation of high-quality, evidence-informed, and evidence-based practices. In the most recent RHYTTAC grant award, applicants were evaluated based on their strategy for tracking RHY grantee uptake and implementation of evidence-based or evidence-informed strategies. Additionally, as described in the FY21 Transitional Living Program funding opportunity announcement, successful applicants must train all staff and volunteers on evidence-informed practices and provide case management services that include the development of service and treatment plans employing evidence-informed strategies (p. 4 & 47).

ACF also evaluates Unaccompanied Children Services, Preschool Development Grants, and Runaway and Homeless Youth grant applicants based upon: their proposed program performance evaluation plan; how their data will contribute to continuous quality improvement; and their demonstrated experience with comparable program evaluation, among other factors.

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

ACF's template (see p. 14 in Attachment C) for competitive grant announcements includes standard language that funding opportunity announcement drafters may select to require grantees to either 1) collect performance management data that contributes to continuous quality improvement and is tied to the project's logic model, or 2) conduct a rigorous evaluation for which applicants must propose an appropriate design specifying research questions, measurement and analysis.

133

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

As a condition of award, Head Start grantees are required to participate fully in ACF-sponsored evaluations, if selected to do so. As such, ACF has an ongoing research portfolio that is building evidence in Head Start. Research sponsored through Head Start funding over the past decade has provided valuable information not only to guide program improvement in Head Start itself, but also to guide the field of early childhood programming and early childhood development. Dozens of Head Start programs have collaborated with researchers in making significant contributions in terms of program innovation and evaluation, as well as the use of systematic data collection, analysis and interpretation in program operations.

ACF's 2020 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Grants established required evidence activities by scope of grantee services (p.4). For example, large scope services (requesting funding between $1M-$1.5M) "must propose a rigorous impact evaluation (i.e., randomized-controlled trial (RCT) or high-quality, quasi-experimental design (QED) study)…and must allocate at least 15%, but no more than 20%, of their total annual funding for evaluation" (p.19) Regardless of their scope of services, all 2020 HMRF grantees must plan for and carry out continuous quality improvement activities (p.18) and conduct a local evaluation (p.18) or participate in a federally led evaluation or research effort (p. 22). ACF has an ongoing research portfolio building evidence related to Strengthening Families, Healthy Marriage, and Responsible Fatherhood, and has conducted randomized controlled trials with grantees in each funding round of these grants.

The 2003 Reauthorization of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act called for a study of long-term outcomes for youth who are served through the Transitional Living Program (TLP). In response, ACF is sponsoring a study that will capture data from youth at program entry and at intermediate- and longer-term follow-up points after program exit and will assess outcomes related to housing, education, and employment. ACF is also sponsoring a process evaluation of the 2016 Transitional Living Program Special Population Demonstration Project.

Additionally, Unaccompanied Children Services (p. 33), Preschool Development Grants (p. 30), and Runaway and Homeless Youth (p.24) grantees are required to develop a program performance evaluation plan.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

ACF's Personal Responsibility Education Program includes three individual discretionary grant programs that fund programs exhibiting evidence of effectiveness, innovative adaptations of evidence-based programs, and promising practices that teach youth about abstinence and contraception to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

To receive funding through ACFs Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) program, applicants must cite evidence published in a peer-reviewed journal and/or a randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental design to support their chosen interventions or models.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

As mentioned above, ACF is conducting a multi-pronged evaluation of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants Program (HPOG). Findings from the first cohort of HPOG grants influenced the funding opportunity announcement for the second round of HPOG (HPOG 2.0) funding. ACF used findings from the impact evaluation of the first cohort of HPOG grants to provide insights to the field about which HPOG program components are associated with stronger participant outcomes. For example, based on the finding that many participants engaged in short-term training for low-wage, entry-level jobs, the HPOG 2.0 FOA more carefully defined the career pathways framework, described specific strategies for helping participants progress along a career pathway, and identified and defined key HPOG education and training components. Applicants were required to more clearly describe how their program would support career pathways for participants. Based on an analysis, which indicated limited collaborations with healthcare employers, the HPOG 2.0 FOA required applicants to demonstrate the use of labor market information, consult with local employers, and describe their plans for employer engagement. The HPOG 2.0 FOA also placed more emphasis on the importance of providing basic skills education and assessment of barriers to make the programs accessible to clients who were most prepared to benefit, based on the finding that many programs were screening out applicants with low levels of basic literacy, reading, and numeracy skills.

ACF's Personal Responsibility Education Innovative Strategies Program (PREIS) grantees must conduct independent evaluations of their innovative strategies for the prevention of teen pregnancy, births, and STIs, supported by ACF training and

135

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

technical assistance. These rigorous evaluations are designed to meet the HHS Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence-Based Standards and are expected to generate lessons learned so that others can benefit from these strategies and innovative approaches.

In 2019, ACF awarded two child welfare discretionary grants to build knowledge of what works: (1) Regional Partnership Grants to Increase the Well-Being of, and to Improve the Permanency Outcomes for, Children and Families Affected By Opioids and Other Substance Abuse: these grants aim to build evidence on the effectiveness of targeted approaches that improve outcomes for children and families affected by opioids and other substance use orders. To this end, grantees will evaluate their local program; select and report on performance indicators that align with proposed program strategies and activities; and participate in a national cross-site evaluation that will describe outcomes for children, adults, and families enrolled in RPG projects as well as the outcomes of the partnerships. (2) Community Collaboratives to Strengthen and Preserve Families: these grants will support the development, implementation, and evaluation of primary prevention strategies to improve the safety, stability, and well-being of all families through a continuum of community-based services and supports. Projects will include both process and outcome evaluations.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

ACF's template (see p. 14 in Attachment C) for competitive grant announcements includes standard language instructing grantees to conduct evaluation efforts. Program offices may use this template to require grantees to collect performance data or conduct a rigorous evaluation. Applicants are instructed to include third-party evaluation contracts in their proposed budget justifications.

ACF's 2020 Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood (HMRF) Grants established required evidence activities by scope of grantee services (p.4). For example, large scope services (requesting funding between $1M-$1.5M) "must propose a rigorous impact evaluation (i.e., randomized-controlled trial (RCT) or high-quality, quasi-experimental design (QED) study)…and must allocate at least 15%, but no more than 20%, of their total annual funding for evaluation" (p.19) Regardless of their scope of services, all 2020 HMRF grantees must plan for and carry out continuous quality improvement activities (p.18) and conduct a local evaluation (p.18) or participate in a federally led evaluation or research effort (p. 22).

136

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

ACF's 2018 Preschool Development Grants funding announcement notes that "it is intended that States or territories will use a percentage of the total amount of their [renewal] grant award during years two through four to conduct the proposed process, cost, and outcome evaluations, and to implement a data collection system that will allow them to collect, house, and use data on the populations served, the implementation of services, the cost of providing services, and coordination across service partners."

ACF's rules (section 1351.15) allow Runaway and Homeless Youth grant awards to be used for "data collection and analysis."

Regional Partnership Grants (RPG) (p.1) require a minimum of 20% of grant funds to be spent on evaluation elements. ACF has supported the evaluation capacity of RPG grantees by providing technical assistance for data collection, performance measurement, and continuous quality improvement; implementation of the cross-site evaluation; support for knowledge dissemination; and provision of group TA via webinars and presentation.

Community Collaboratives to Strengthen and Preserve Families (CCSPF) grants (p.7) require a minimum of 10% of grant funds to be used on data collection and evaluation activities. ACF has supported the evaluation capacity of CCSPF grantees by providing technical assistance for developing research questions, methodologies, process and outcome measures; implementing grantee-designed evaluations and continuous quality improvement activities; analyzing evaluation data; disseminating findings; and supporting data use in project and organizational decision-making processes.

ACF also provides evaluation technical assistance to:
- Support grantees participating in federal evaluations (e.g., projects supporting grantees from Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0 and Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants 2.0); and
- Support grantees who are conducting their own local evaluations (e.g., projects supporting Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees, Personal Responsibility Education Program grantees, and YARH grantees.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
6
(out of 10 points)

Administration for Children and Families

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest non-competitive grant programs are:
1) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) ($16.4 billion; eligible entities: states);
2) Child Care and Development Fund (Block Grant and Entitlement to States combined) ($9.46 billion; eligible entities: states);
3) Foster Care ($5.8 billion; eligible entities: states);
4) Child Support Enforcement Payments to States ($4.4 billion; eligible entities: states);
5) Low Income Home Energy Assistance ($3.75 billion; eligible entities: states, tribes, territories).

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) (Division E, Title VII of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018), funded under the Foster Care budget, newly enables States to use Federal funds available under parts B and E of Title IV of the Social Security Act to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements through the provision of evidence-based mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services, in-home parent skill-based programs, and kinship navigator services. FFPSA requires an independent systematic review of evidence to designate programs and services as "promising," "supported," and "well-supported" practices. Only interventions designated as evidence-based will be eligible for federal funds.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

Most of ACF's non-competitive grant programs are large block grants without the legislative authority to use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds. Several programs do have performance-based payment incentive programs, however. For example, The Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments program, most recently reauthorized through FY21 as part of the Family First Prevention Services Act (Social Security Act §473A), provides incentive payments to jurisdictions for improved performance in both adoptions and legal guardianship of children in foster care. Additionally, the Child Support program (p. 6) has an outcome-based performance management system established by the Child Support Performance and Incentive Act of 1998 (CSPIA; Social Security Act § 458). Under CSPIA, states are measured in five program areas: paternity establishment, support order establishment, current support collections, cases paying towards arrears, and cost effectiveness. This performance-based incentive and penalty program is used to reward states for good or improved performance and to impose penalties when state performance falls below a specified level and has not improved.

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

TANF Grant Program: The TANF statute gives HHS responsibility for building evidence about the TANF program: "Evaluation of the Impacts of TANF - The Secretary shall conduct research on the effect of State programs funded under this part and any other State program funded with qualified State expenditures on employment, self-sufficiency, child well-being, unmarried births, marriage, poverty, economic mobility, and other factors as determined by the Secretary." (§413(a)). Since FY17, Congress has designated 0.33% of the TANF Block Grant for research, evaluation, and technical assistance related to the TANF Block Grant.

ACF has a long-standing and ongoing research portfolio in service of building evidence for the TANF Grant Program. ACF conducts research and evaluation projects in collaboration with TANF grantees, typically in areas where TANF grantees are facing challenges, innovating, or carrying out demonstration projects. This ongoing work includes building evidence around career pathways training programs, subsidized employment approaches, job search approaches, and employment coaching interventions. These are all program approaches used by state and county TANF grantees to meet their employment goals. ACF widely disseminates information from its research and evaluation activities to TANF grantees and provides extensive training and technical assistance.

139

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

ACF's TANF Data Innovation (TDI) project, launched in 2017, supports the innovation and improved effectiveness of state TANF programs by enhancing the use of data from TANF and related human services programs. In 2019, the TANF Data Collaborative (TDC), an initiative of the TDI project, conducted a needs assessment survey of all states and is now supporting a TANF agency Pilot program with 8 Pilot sites. To support state and local efforts and build strategic partnerships, Pilot agencies are receiving funding and intensive training and technical assistance.

Child Care Development Block Grant Program: While the Child Care Development Block Grant Act (p. 34) does not allocate funding for States to independently build evidence, the Act allows for up to 0.5% of CCDBG funding for a fiscal year to be reserved for HHS to conduct research and evaluation of the CCDBG grant program and to disseminate the key findings of those evaluations widely and on a timely basis. ACF manages this ongoing research portfolio to build evidence for the Child Care and Development Block Grant Program (CCDBG), conducting research and evaluation projects in collaboration with CCDBG grantees, typically in areas where CCDBG grantees are facing challenges, innovating, or carrying out demonstration projects. Major projects in recent years include the National Survey of Early Care and Education; assessment of evidence on ratings in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS); and several research partnerships between CCDF lead agencies and researchers. ACF widely disseminates information from its research and evaluation activities to CCDF grantees and provides extensive training and technical assistance.

Foster Care and Related Child Welfare Grant Programs: ACF administers several foster care and related child welfare grant programs that do not possess the funding authority for States to conduct independent evidence-building activities. Some of these programs have set-asides for federal research; the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999, for instance, sets aside 1.5% of the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood program (Chafee program) for evaluations of promising independent living programs.

As such, ACF has an ongoing research portfolio on the Title IV-E foster care grant program and related grant programs. ACF conducts research and evaluation in collaboration with child welfare grantees, typically focusing on areas in which grantees are facing challenges, innovating, or conducting demonstrations. Examples include strategies for prevention of maltreatment, meeting service needs, and improving outcomes for children who come to the attention of child welfare. Major projects include the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) and a Supporting Evidence Building in Child

140

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

Welfare project to increase the number of evidence-supported interventions grantees can use to serve the child welfare population.

ACF has begun work on conducting formative evaluations of independent living programs of potential national significance in preparation for possible future summative evaluations. This work builds off of the multi-site evaluation of foster youth programs, a rigorous, random assignment evaluation of four programs funded under the Chafee program completed in 2011.

Also, ACF's Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) formula grants, with a focus on supporting community-based approaches to prevent child abuse and neglect, are intended to inform the use of other child welfare funds more broadly.

Child Support Enforcement Research and Evaluation Grant Program: Section 1115 of the Social Security Act provides unique authority for research and evaluation grants to child support enforcement grantees to "improve the financial well-being of children or otherwise **improve the operation of the child support program**." For instance, ACF awarded Digital Marketing Grants to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services, and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents.

ACF continues to manage a broad child support enforcement research portfolio and administers a variety of research/evaluation components to understand more about cost and program effectiveness. Research and evaluation within the portfolio have consisted of 1) supporting large multi-state demonstrations which include random assignment evaluations (described in criteria question 7.4), 2) funding a supplement to the Census Bureau's Current Population survey, and 3) supporting research activities of other government programs and agencies by conducting matches of their research samples to the NDNH.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

States applying for funding from ACF's Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grant program must "demonstrate an emphasis on promoting the increased use and high quality implementation of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices." The Children's Bureau defines evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices along a continuum with four categories: Emerging and Evidence-Informed; Promising; Supported; and Well Supported. Programs determined to fall within specific program parameters will be considered to be "evidence-informed" or "evidence-based" practices (EBP), as opposed to programs that have not been evaluated using any set criteria. ACF monitors progress on the percentage of program funds directed towards evidence-based and evidence-informed practices.

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

In Section 413 of the Social Security act where Congress gives HHS primary responsibility for building evidence about the TANF program, Congress also commissions HHS to develop "a database (which shall be referred to as the "What Works Clearinghouse of Proven and Promising Projects to Move Welfare Recipients into Work") of the projects that used a proven approach or a promising approach in moving welfare recipients into work, based on independent, rigorous evaluations of the projects" (§413(g)). In April of 2020, ACF officially launched the Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse, a user-friendly website that shares the results of the systematic review and provides web-based tools and products to help state and local TANF administrators, policymakers, researchers and the general public make sense of the results and better understand how this evidence might apply to questions and contexts that matter to them.

Additionally, ACF has continued to produce findings from numerous randomized controlled trials providing evidence on strategies that TANF agencies can use such as subsidized employment, coaching, career pathways, and job search strategies. Ongoing ACF efforts to build evidence for what works for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals include the Building Evidence on Employment Strategies for Low-Income Families (BEES) project and the Next Generation of

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) project; these projects are evaluating the effectiveness of innovative programs designed to boost employment and earnings among low-income individuals.

ACF's Office of Child Care drew on research and evaluation findings related to eligibility redetermination, continuity of subsidy use, use of dollars to improve the quality of programs, and more to inform regulations related to Child Care and Development Block Grant reauthorization.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs are authorized as part of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). CAPTA promotes the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices that effectively strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. This includes efforts to improve the evaluation capacity of the states and communities to assess progress of their programs and collaborative networks in enhancing the safety and wellbeing of children and families. The 2020 Program Instruction for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) grant program states that CBCAP funds made available to states must be used for the financing, planning, community mobilization, collaboration, assessment, information and referral, startup, training and technical assistance, information management and reporting, and reporting and evaluation costs for establishing, operating, or expanding community-based and prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families and prevent child abuse and neglect, among other things.

Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 2014 says states are required to spend not less than 7, 8, and 9% of their CCDF awards ("quality funds") (for years 1-2, 3-4, and 5+ after 2014 CCDBG enactment, respectively – see 128 STAT. 1987) on activities to improve the quality of child care services provided in the state, including:
- 1B: Supporting the training and professional development of the child care workforce through…incorporating the effective use of data to guide program improvement (see 128 STAT 1988)

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

- 3: Developing, implementing, or enhancing a quality rating system for child care providers and services, which may support and assess the quality of child care providers in the State (A) and be designed to improve the quality of different types of child care providers (C) (see 128 STAT 1988)
- 7: Evaluating and assessing the quality and effectiveness of child care programs and services offered in the State, including evaluating how such programs positively impact children (see 128 STAT 1990)

ACF requires all CCDF lead agencies to annually report on how their CCDF quality funds were expended, including the activities funded and the measures used by states and territories to evaluate progress in improving the quality of child care programs and services. ACF released a Program Instruction for state and territorial lead agencies to provide guidance on reporting the authorized activities for the use of quality funds.

ACF also provides evaluation technical assistance to:
- support grantees who are conducting their own local evaluations (MIECHV grantees (in collaboration with HRSA), Tribal MIECHV grantees, and ACF staff directly supporting Section 1115 child support demonstration grantees); and
- build the evaluation capacity of grantees (e.g., the TANF Data Innovation Project, the Tribal Early Childhood Research Center, and the Center for States

144

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 8 points)

Administration for Children and Families

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018 only allows federal matching funds only for evidence-based prevention services offered by states, thereby incentivizing states to shift their spending from non-evidence based approaches.

For ACF's Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) of state child welfare systems, states determined not to have achieved substantial conformity in all the areas assessed must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan addressing the areas of nonconformity. ACF supports the states with technical assistance and monitors implementation of their plans. States must successfully complete their plans to avoid financial penalties for nonconformance.

The ACF Head Start program significantly expanded its accountability provisions with the establishment of five-year Head Start grant service periods and the Head Start Designation Renewal System (DRS). The DRS was designed to determine whether Head Start and Early Head Start programs are providing high quality comprehensive services to the children and families in their communities. Where they are not, grantees are denied automatic renewal of their grant and must apply for funding renewal through an open competition process. Those determinations are based on

145

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

seven conditions, one of which looks at how Head Start classrooms within programs perform on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation-based measure of the quality of teacher-child interactions. Data from ACF's Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES) and Quality Features, Dosage, Thresholds and Child Outcomes (Q-DOT) study were used to craft the regulations that created the DRS and informed key decisions in its implementation. This included where to set minimum thresholds for average CLASS scores, the number of classrooms within programs to be sampled to ensure stable program-level estimates on CLASS, and the number of cycles of CLASS observations to conduct. At the time the DRS notification letters were sent out to grantees in 2011, there were 1,421 non-tribal active grants, and of these, 453 (32%) were required to re-compete (p.19).

Findings from the evaluation of the first round Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program influenced the funding opportunity announcement for the second round of HPOG funding. Namely, the scoring criteria used to select HPOG 2.0 grantees incorporated knowledge gained about challenges experienced in the HPOG 1.0 grant program. For example, based on those challenges, applicants were asked to clearly demonstrate--and verify with local employers--an unmet need in their service area for the education and training activities proposed. Applicants were also required to provide projections for the number of individuals expected to begin and complete basic skills education. Grantees must submit semi-annual and annual progress reports to ACF to show their progress in meeting these projections. If they have trouble doing so, grantees are provided with technical assistance to support improvement or are put on a corrective action plan so that ACF can more closely monitor their steps toward improvement.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

In an effort to create operational efficiencies and increase grantee capacity for mission-related activities, ACF implemented a process in 2019 in which the grants management office completes annual risk modeling of grantee financial administrative datasets, which helps identify organizations that would benefit from targeted technical assistance. The grants management

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

office provides TA to these grantees to improve their financial management and help direct resources toward effective service delivery.

As mentioned in 10.1, states reviewed by a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and determined not to have achieved substantial conformity in all the areas assessed must develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan addressing the areas of nonconformity. ACF supports the states with technical assistance and monitors implementation of their plans. ACF also provides broad programmatic technical assistance to support grantees in improving their service delivery, including the Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative. The Collaborative is designed to help public child welfare agencies, Tribes, and courts enhance and mobilize the human and organizational assets necessary to meet Federal standards and requirements; improve child welfare practice and administration; and achieve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children, youth, and families. ACF also sponsors the Child Welfare Information Gateway, a platform connecting child welfare, adoption, and related professionals as well as the public to information, resources, and tools covering topics on child welfare, child abuse and neglect, out-of-home care, adoption, and more.

FY 21 Score

71

★ ★ ★

SILVER 2021

AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

Over the past several years, **AmeriCorps** has been the federal government's leader on evidence-based investing. In FY21, the agency's flagship grant program, AmeriCorps State and National, invested the majority of its grants in interventions with a moderate or strong evidence base. The allocation of 68% of funds to evidence-based grantees in FY21, a 17% increase from FY20, constitutes a major achievement and is delivering real impact in communities across the country.

This milestone is a result of the agency's approach to grantmaking which provides preference to grantees that propose evidence-based programs. In 2021, the agency also released a new toolkit to help grantees prepare to scale effective evidence-based interventions, determine if interventions are ready for scaling, and ensure that scaled interventions produce meaningful outcomes. Through this toolkit, the agency is supporting the field to embrace evidence-based practices, build robust evidence, while also building their capacity to compete in the evidence-based market.

The Office of Research and Evaluation provides critical support in increasing the agency's evidence-based investments. The Office created resources to help the national service field identify and implement evidenced-based interventions and also provided individualized technical assistance to grantees to help them evaluate their efforts.

Along the way, the Office of Research and Evaluation also continued to build the overall capacity of the agency by developing key resources such as the Strategic Evidence Plan and Evidence Exchange. The agency's learning officer and other colleagues in the Office led the development of a concept paper for a National Service Equity, Evidence, and Innovation Fund to guide the use of data and evidence to advance equity. Finally, although a non-CFO Act agency, AmeriCorps hired its first Chief Data Officer, which will support Evidence Act and enhance agency wide data practices and policies.

To advance the agency's investments in evidence-based policymaking, AmeriCorps should address its need for an updated and comprehensive suite of data practices, policies, and processes that allow the agency to strategically leverage and incorporate national datasets into decision-making processes.

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?

FY21 Score
8
(out of 9 points)
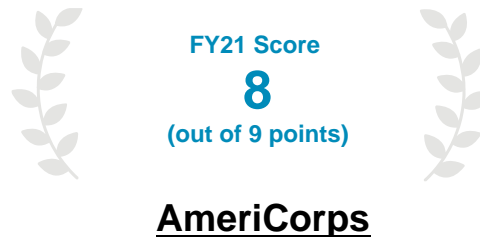
AmeriCorps

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Director of the Office of Research & Evaluation serves as the AmeriCorps evaluation officer. The Director of Research and Evaluation (R&E) oversees R&E's FY21 $4 million budget and a staff of 13. On average, the agency has invested ~$1 million in the Office of Research and Evaluation staff over the past eight years. More information about R&E can be found here.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

AmeriCorps hired a new Chief Data Officer (CDO) in FY21. The CDO will address long standing data priorities including building the agency's data analytics capacity as well as developing a process/structure to ensure coordination and collaboration across data integrity/management, data for performance and data for research and evaluation.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

AmeriCorps has a Research & Evaluation Council that meets monthly to assess progress in implementing the agency's learning agenda and evaluation plan. Members of the Council include the Director of R&E, the CIO/CDO, the Chief of Staff, as well as the Chief of Program Operations and the Chief Operating Officer.

150

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

FY21 Score

8

(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

AmeriCorps has an evaluation policy that presents five key principles that govern the agency's planning, conduct, and use of program evaluations: rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

In FY19, AmeriCorps finalized and posted a five year, agency-wide strategic evaluation plan. AmeriCorps is in the process of updating its learning agenda (strategic evidence plan) to align with the agency's FY22-26 strategic plan.

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

AmeriCorps uses the terms learning agenda, evaluation plan, and strategic evidence-building plan synonymously. AmeriCorps has a strategic evidence plan that includes an evergreen learning agenda. The plan has been updated and submitted to OMB for review and comment. In addition, the draft document has been shared with AmeriCorps State and National State Commissions who will have an opportunity to provide feedback for the remainder of 2021. Additionally, the agency is devising a plan to engage external stakeholders in commenting on the revised learning agenda.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

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

All completed evaluation reports are posted to the Evidence Exchange, an electronic repository for evaluation studies and other reports. This virtual repository was launched in September 2015.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

A comprehensive portfolio of research projects has been built to assess the extent to which AmeriCorps is achieving its mission. As findings emerge, future studies are designed to continuously build the agency's evidence base. R&E relies on scholarship in relevant fields of academic study; a variety of research and program evaluation approaches including field, experimental, and survey research; multiple data sources including internal and external administrative data; and different statistical analytic methods. AmeriCorps relies on partnerships with universities and third party research firms to ensure independence and access to state of the art methodologies. AmeriCorps supports its grantees with evaluation technical assistance and courses to ensure their evaluations are of the highest quality and requires grantees receiving $500,000 or more in annual funding to engage an external evaluator. These efforts have resulted in a robust body of evidence that national service allows: (1) national service participants to experience positive benefits, (2) nonprofit organizations to be strengthened, and (3) national service programs to effectively address local issues (along with a suite of AmeriCorps resources for evaluations).

While AmeriCorps is a non-CFO agency, and therefore not required to comply with the Evidence Act, including the mandated Evidence Capacity Assessment, the agency is procuring a third party to support analysis of the agency's evaluation, research, statistical and analysis workforce capacity.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

AmeriCorps uses the research design most appropriate for addressing the research question. When experimental or quasi-experimental designs are warranted, the agency uses them and encourages its grantees to use them, as noted in the agency evaluation policy: "AmeriCorps is committed to using the most rigorous methods that are appropriate to the evaluation questions and feasible within statutory, budget and other constraints." As of September 2021, AmeriCorps has received 46 grantee evaluation reports that use experimental design and 140 that use quasi-experimental design.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score
10
(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

3.1 ____ invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $_____ million FY21 budget.

AmeriCorps invested $8,500,000.00 on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 1.0% of the agency's $843,115,000 million FY21 operating budget.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

Congress allocated $4,000,000 to AmeriCorps for its evaluation budget. This is the same amount allocated in FY21.

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

R&E funds a contractor to provide AmeriCorps grantees with evaluation capacity building support ($500,000 of the $4,000,000 evaluation budget). R&E staff are also available to State Commissions for their evaluation questions and make resources (e.g., research briefs summarizing effective interventions, online evaluation planning and reporting curricula) available to them and the general public. AmeriCorps awards investment fund grants to State Commissions ($8.5 million in FY21, of which approximately one-third will be used for data and evidence capacity building activities based on prior year activities.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
   Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
   (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

AmeriCorps has submitted two drafts of the FY22-26 strategic plan (goals and objectives) to OMB and will finalize it by the end of calendar year 2021.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

Several data collection efforts were undertaken in FY21 for the primary purpose of continuous improvement and learning.
- The Office of the Chief Risk Officer conducted a risk assessment survey and an entity level controls survey. The risk assessment survey was conducted to identify any risks associated with managing the American Rescue Plan increases in agency funding. The findings were used to develop risk mitigation strategies. Similarly, findings from the entity level controls survey will be used to make improvements in organizational business processes needed to achieve the agency's mission.
- The Office of Research and Evaluation completed an internal evaluation focused on the successes and challenges of its new regional structure and staff positions. Lessons learned after a year of implementation will be used to improve organizational communication processes and have led to the decision to invest in a third-party workforce analysis.
- The agency conducted a staff survey focused on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in the workforce. These findings, as well as the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey findings, will be used by the CEO and COS to develop improvements in the agency's work environment.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

The agency's Chief Financial Officer has stood up a standing cross-agency meeting with the Offices of Human Capital, Information Technology, Risk, Research and Evaluation, as well as the Department Heads (Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer, Chief of Program Operations to ensure that the agency has a data-driven performance management system. Once the agency has approved performance indicators (as part of its final strategic plan) this meeting will be used to assess progress against strategic goals and their corresponding performance targets.

155

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

AmeriCorps has three policies related to managing the agency's data assets: Information Technology Management (policy 381), Information Technology Governance (policy 382) and Information Technology Data Management (policy 383).

The CIO, the CDO, and the Director of Research and Evaluation/Evaluation Officer will be working together in FY21 to reconstitute and reconvene the agency's Data Council and determine what kind of charter/agency policy may be needed for establishing the
role of the Council with regard to managing the agency's data assets. In essence, the role of the Council, under the direction of the CDO, will be to prioritize data asset management issues such as creating an annual Fact Sheet (so all externally facing numbers have a single authoritative source), creating a more user-friendly interface for the agency's data warehouse/data inventory, and keeping the agency' open data platform current.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

The agency's Information Technology Data Management Policy addresses the need to have a current and comprehensive data inventory. The agency has an open data platform.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

AmeriCorps has a data request form and an MOU template so that anyone interested in accessing agency data may use the protocol to request data. In addition, public data sets are accessible through the agency's open data platform. The agency's member exit survey data was made publicly available for the first time in FY19. In addition, nationally representative civic engagement and volunteering statistics are available, through a data sharing agreement with the Census Bureau, on an interactive platform. The goal of these platforms is to make these data more accessible to all interested end-users.

The Portfolio Navigator pulls data from the AmeriCorps data warehouse for use by the agency's Portfolio Managers and Senior Portfolio Managers. The goal is to use this information for grants management and continuous improvement throughout the grant lifecycle.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

The agency has a new Privacy Policy (policy 153) that was signed in FY20 and posted internally. The Information Technology Data Governance Policy addresses data security. The agency conducts Privacy Impact Assessments which are a privacy review of each of AmeriCorps' largest electronic systems which are then published online (click on the first 3 listings or PRISM).

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

AmeriCorps provides assistance to grantees, including governments, to help them access agency data. For example, AmeriCorps provides assistance on using the AmeriCorps Member Exit Survey data to State Service Commissions (many of which are part of state government) and other grantees as requested and through briefings integrated into standing calls with these entities.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

AmeriCorps uses the same standard scientific research methods and designs for all of its studies and evaluations following the model used by clearinghouses like Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse, the Department of Labor's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research, and the Department of Health and Human Services' Home Visiting Evidence of Effectiveness project.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

AmeriCorps has a common evidence framework for funding decisions in the Senior Corps and AmeriCorps State and National programs. This framework, which is articulated in the AmeriCorps State and National program notice of funding, includes the following evidence levels: pre-preliminary, preliminary, moderate, and strong.

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or a *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

The AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange is a virtual repository of reports and resources intended to help AmeriCorps grantees and other interested stakeholders find information about evidence- and research-based national service programs. Examples of the types of resources available in the Evidence Exchange include research briefs that describe the core components of effective

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

interventions such as those in the areas of education, economic opportunity, and health.

R&E also creates campaigns and derivative products to distill complex report findings and increase their utility for practitioners (for example, this brief on a study about the health benefits of Senior Corps). R&E has categorized reports according to their research design, so that users can easily search for experimental, quasi-experimental, or non-experimental studies, and those that qualify for strong, moderate, or preliminary evidence levels.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

AmeriCorps has an agency-wide approach to promoting the use of evidence-based practices by the field and employs a variety of strategies including evidence briefs, broad-based support to national service organizations, and targeted technical assistance to grantees. First, R&E creates campaigns and derivative products to distill complex report findings and increase their utility for practitioners (for example, this brief on a study about the health benefits of Senior Corps). Second, AmeriCorps has created user-friendly research briefs that describe the core components of effective interventions in the areas of education, economic opportunity, and health. These briefs are designed to help grantees (and potential grantees) adopt evidence-based approaches. Third, R&E funds a contractor to provide AmeriCorps grantees with evaluation capacity building support; R&E staff are also available to State Commissions for their evaluation questions and make resources (e.g., research briefs summarizing effective interventions, online evaluation planning and reporting curricula) available to them and the general public. Fourth, AmeriCorps funds and participates in grantee conferences that include specific sessions on how to incorporate evidence and data into national service programs. Fifth, as part of the AmeriCorps State and National FY20 application process, AmeriCorps provided technical assistance to grantees on using evidence-based practices through webinars and calls. R&E and AmeriCorps conducted a process evaluation of grantees with varied replication experiences to produce a series of products designed to help grantees implement evidence-based interventions (including a forthcoming article in The Foundation Review). SeniorCorps continues to encourage and support the use of evidence-based programs, as identified by the HHS's Administration for Community Living, by its grantee organizations.

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 7 points)

AmeriCorps

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading innovation efforts to improve the impacts of its programs?

The Office of Research and Evaluation hired a Learning Officer in FY21. The learning officer was a program office for the Social Innovation Fund. The learning officer and other colleagues in the Office of Research and Evaluation led the development of a concept paper for a National Service Equity, Evidence, and Innovation Fund. The purpose of the proposed fund includes:

To apply a developmental, tiered-grantmaking process to grow DEI organization's access and use of National Service into community solutions by either

- Replicating or expanding current Social Innovation Fund (SIF) moderate or strong evidence-based models augmented with National Service in underrepresented communities, or
- Taking current evidence-based and evidence-informed National Service models (ASN, AmeriCorps Seniors) and scaling culturally appropriate solutions that work into underrepresented communities
- Ensuring that evidence building is integrated in the process to guide and document progress.

The concept is informed by four agency programs, their expertise in process, award management and the body of evidence they have generated, combined with the entrepreneurial business ideas of incubator and accelerator designs. The agency plans to include this idea in its FY23 budget request and will use FY22 to further refine the ideas.

160

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

7.2: Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

AmeriCorps's Evidence Exchange includes a suite of scaling products on the evidence exchange to help grantees replicate evidence-based interventions.

AmeriCorps continued to learn from its evidence-based planning grant program which "awards evidence-based intervention planning grants to organizations that develop new national service models seeking to integrate members into innovative evidence-based interventions." AmeriCorps continued to learn from its research grantees, who receive grant funds to engage community residents and leaders in the development of new and innovative national service projects (more information available here). In addition to national service project development, these grants foster civic engagement through community research teams and build community capacity for using research to identify and understand local issues as well as identify possible solutions. Examples of these research-to-action projects include:

- A researcher at the University of Nevada worked with NCCC Pacific leaders to craft a series of local projects, like building sidewalks and community cleanups, emerging from her CBPR project with youth scientists working together to understand slow violence in their own communities as well as that of people experiencing homelessness in the area. The partnership between NCCC, the University of Nevada is quite strong and the local government is supportive of the work in the region. Early in 2020, housing had been donated by a local community organization and the NCCC team was assigned and scheduled to begin on April 21st but the work was placed on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recently, PI and ADP have resumed discussions about rescheduling the team's arrival.

- Researchers at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, State University Tech (Virginia Tech University), and Virginia Commonwealth University have brought together community partners and stakeholders in Martinsville, VA to address the local opioid crisis. They are using an evidence-based stakeholder engagement approach (SEED) that has led to successful outcomes in Martinsville. In Year 2, they collaborated with the Minnesota AmeriCorps state commission, ServeMinnesota, to replicate this project and approach with a focus on deploying AmeriCorps volunteers to meet

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

unmet service needs around the opioid crisis in Minneapolis. Because of the success in rural Virginia and Martinsville, this approach will be further replicated in another town in rural Virginia and another town outside Minneapolis.

- A researcher at Mississippi State University collaborated with NCCC Southern Campus to draft a concept paper for a NCCC team when COVID-19 struck--both agreed to table ideas for FAFSA support and ACT preparation until the crisis had subsided.

- A researcher Drew University successfully collaborated with a former senior New Jersey state government official on a concept paper for VISTAs to work with their community partner, Family Promise, to build the organization's capacity to work with local landlord's and people experiencing homelessness--a role identified through their grant funded research. They were awarded two VISTAs.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

As part of the evaluation of the Social Innovation Program, which was designed to identify and rigorously test innovative approaches to social service problems, AmeriCorps continues to receive evaluation reports from grantees. As of May 2020, AmeriCorps has received 129 final SIF evaluation reports, of which 31 (24%) were experimental designs and 74 (57%) were quasi-experimental designs. Further, the evidence-based planning grant program and the research grant program both seek to generate innovative national service models. The planning grants require an evaluation plan. The research grants use evidence to inform action planning and solutions.

The Office of Research and Evaluation initiated a third-party evaluation of the 2018 grant program cohort (all using community-based participatory action research method) to identify outcomes, including the outcomes of national service projects developed through participatory research. The evaluation is part of a larger Program Lifecycle Evaluation project and is one of the bundled evaluations initiated in FY21.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
13
(out of 15 points)

AmeriCorps

8.1 **What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?**

In FY21, AmeriCorps' largest competitive grant programs are the following two the agency operates:
1. AmeriCorps State and National program (excluding State formula grant funds) ($253,704,774; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, state governments, tribal governments, local governments, institutions of higher education);
2. Senior Corps RSVP program ($51,355,000; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, local governments).

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grants were integrated into the Office of Research and Evaluation in FY19.

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

AmeriCorps's AmeriCorps State and National grants program (excluding State formula grant funds), allocated up to 44 out of 100 points to organizations that submit applications supported by performance and evaluation data in FY21. Specifically, up to 24 points can be assigned to applications with theories of change supported by relevant research literature, program performance data, or program evaluation data; and up to 20 points can be assigned for an applicant's incoming level of evidence and the quality of the evidence. Further, in 2020 AmeriCorps prioritized the funding of specific education, economic opportunity, and health interventions with moderate or strong levels of evidence.

Since AmeriCorps' implementation of a scoring process that assigns specific points for level of evidence, the percentage of grant dollars allocated to strong, moderate, preliminary, and no evidence categories has shifted over time (see chart below), such that

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

more FY20 grant dollars were awarded to applicants with strong and moderate levels of evidence for proposed interventions, and fewer grant dollars were awarded to applicants with little to no evidence of effectiveness. Note that 68% of FY21 grant dollars versus 51% of FY20 grant dollars were invested in interventions with a strong or moderate evidence base.

Percentage of competitive AmeriCorps grant funds that support evidence-based projects	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21
Strong	20%	18%	26%	27%	34%	51%
Moderate	14%	11%	11%	14%	17%	17%
Preliminary	44%	45%	34%	31%	28%	15%
No evidence	22%	26%	29%	28%	21%	17%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In FY18, Senior Corps RSVP embedded evidence into their grant renewal processes by offering supplemental funding, "augmentation grants," to grantees interested in deploying volunteers to serve in evidence-based programs. More than $3.3 million of Senior Corps program dollars were allocated, over three years, toward new evidence-based programming augmentations. Grantees will be operating with their augmentations through fiscal year 2021.

In a survey completed in FY20, Senior Corps grantees reported that 4,043 volunteer stations and 20,320 volunteers (10% of all volunteers) were engaged in evidence-based programming.

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

AmeriCorps State and National grantees are required to evaluate their programs as part of the grant's terms and conditions.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

Grantees receiving more than $500,000 required to conduct an independent, external evaluation (see p. 23 of the FY21 notice of funding for a description of these requirements).

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant program (besides its five largest grant programs)?

AmeriCorps administers only two competitive grant programs, described above.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

AmeriCorps has summarized the accomplishments of its competitive grant programs in a series of research briefs that describe the core components of effective interventions in the areas of education, economic opportunity, and health. The education brief was used to justify the FY19 funding priority for evidence-based interventions in the AmeriCorps State and National competition. All interventions described in these briefs illustrate how AmeriCorps competitive grant recipients have achieved better outcomes and built knowledge about what works. The agency released four return-on-investment studies, all of which had positive findings.

- College Possible's College Access Program (Return on Investment Study: College Possible's College Access Program | AmeriCorps)
- Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP) (Return on Investment Study: Community Technology Empowerment Project | AmeriCorps
- Minnesota Reading Corps - Kindergarten (MRC) (Return on Investment Study: Minnesota Reading Corps - Kindergarten | AmeriCorps)
- AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program (Return on Investment Study: AmeriCorps Seniors Foster Grandparent Program and Senior Companion Program | AmeriCorps

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

AmeriCorps State and National grantees, including city, county, tribal, and state governments, are required to use their AmeriCorps funds to evaluate their programs. In FY21, AmeriCorps awarded $8.5 million for the Commission Investment Fund that supports State Commissions, which are typically housed within state government--approximately one third of these grants will focus on building the capacity of State Commissions and their grantees to collect and use performance and evaluation data.

AmeriCorps's Evidence Exchange includes a suite of scaling products on the evidence exchange to help grantees replicate evidence-based interventions.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

3

(out of 10 points)

AmeriCorps

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest non-competitive grant programs are:

1. AmeriCorps State formula grants program ($152,482,034 eligible grantees: states);
2. AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps (NCCC) ($32.5 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations);
3. AmeriCorps VISTA ($93 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, state, tribal, and local governments, institutions of higher education);
4. Senior Corps Foster Grandparents ($118 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organization, local governments)
5. Senior Corps Senior Companion Program ($50 million; eligible grantees: nonprofit organizations, local governments).

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

In FY18, Senior Corps Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Program embedded evidence into their grant renewal processes by offering supplemental funding, "augmentation grants," to grantees interested in deploying volunteers to serve in evidence-based programs. More than $3.3 million of Senior Corps program dollars were allocated, over three years, toward new evidence-based programming augmentations. Grantees will be operating with their augmentations through fiscal year 2021.

In a survey completed in FY20, Senior Corps grantees reported that 4,043 volunteer stations and 20,320 volunteers (10% of all volunteers) were engaged in evidence-based programming.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

In FY19, Senior Corps completed an evaluation with an independent firm to produce case studies and comparative analyses of select grantees that received an evidence-based programming augmentation to understand successes, challenges, and other issues. This report is being used to inform Senior Corps' approach to replicating this augmentation initiative, as well as the training/technical assistance needs of grantees.

Senior Corps and the Administration for Community Living have continued a dialogue about how to build and broaden the evidence base for various programs designed for older adults, particularly for aging and disability evidence-based programs and practices. AmeriCorps previously utilized ACL's list of evidence-based programs for its augmentation grants and is encouraging Senior Corps grantees to move toward more evidence-based programming.

For FY20, Senior Corps continued funding five demonstration grants, totaling $2,579,475, which authorize organizations to implement the Senior Corps program model with certain modifications to standard AmeriCorps policies. Demonstration grants allow Senior Corps to analyze potential policy changes.

AmeriCorps NCCC invested in a Service Project Database that provides staff access to data on all NCCC projects completed since 2012. The database thematically organizes projects, classifies project frameworks, and categorizes the outcomes of these service initiatives. NCCC is investing in an evaluation of NCCC's impact. This research project was initiated in FY18 and is focused on evaluating member retention, studying how NCCC develops leadership skills in its members and teams, and the program's ability to strengthen communities. Finally, NCCC will continue to invest in research grants to better understand the outcomes of its disaster response efforts.

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

AmeriCorps only administers five non-competitive grant programs, as described above.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

Senior Corps and the Office of Research and Evaluation completed a longitudinal evaluation of the Foster Grandparents and Senior Companion Programs in FY19 that demonstrated the positive health outcomes associated with volunteering. A 50 year retrospective review of the research conducted on Senior Corps programs was completed at the end of FY19 and was posted on the Evidence Exchange in FY20.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

AmeriCorps does not prohibit the use of formula dollars for evaluation but each State Commission may have its own guidelines. Further, formula grantees over $500,000 have to perform evaluations using their grant funds.

169

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 8 points)

AmeriCorps

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

AmeriCorps's AmeriCorps State and National denied funding to eleven FY21 applicants that requested $3,667,772 for new or recompete funding because they did not demonstrate evidence for the proposed program. These funds were reallocated and invested in applications with a demonstrated evidence base.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

AmeriCorps launched a grant management tool (the "Portfolio Navigator") that allows Portfolio Managers to access data about grantee organizations in real time to facilitate improved oversight and support.

AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation continued to invest $500,000 in evaluation technical assistance support for grantees which is available to all competitive AmeriCorps State and National grantees seeking to improve their ability to demonstrate empirically their effectiveness. FY19 investments targeted to grantees struggling to achieve outcomes

170

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

continued in FY20. More specifically, in FY20, the following ongoing support was provided to lower-performing grantees using reallocated FY19 program dollars:

- Two grantees required intensive evaluation technical assistance (TA) and are being closely monitored by AmeriCorps State and National. To ensure that two grantees are on track with implementing their evaluation plans, the grantees identified several milestones for their evaluation and with support have made progress in FY20.

- Tribal grantees have faced a variety of challenges in developing and implementing their evaluation plans. Through evaluation TA support, AmeriCorps hopes that the tribal grantees will receive the additional assistance needed to improve their plans. During FY20, 11 tribal grantees received TA to improve the quality of data collection and evaluation plans.

FY 21 Score

69

★ ★ ★

BRONZE 2021

U.S. Department of Labor

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

The **U.S. Department of Labor** (DOL) was one of the first agencies to create the position of a Chief Evaluation Officer, paving the way for the *Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act* (Evidence Act), which requires agencies to designate such a position in order to build a centralized capacity for research and evaluation. DOL's Evaluation Policy was also a model for federal guidance for agencies. Several examples of the long-standing federal leadership are demonstrated by DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR), a model federal evidence clearinghouse and DOL's commitment to publishing public use data for researchers' use. The data are generated from DOL-funded evaluations.

With the passage of the Evidence Act, DOL built on the important leadership of the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) by formalizing evidence leadership across the department, including the roles of the Statistical Official, Evaluation Officer, and Chief Data Officer (CDO), who leads the department's Data Board. The department publicly shared this information by developing a new website, dol.gov/evidence.

An important coordination brought about by the Evidence Act was to bring together evidence-building activities led by the Chief Evaluation Office and performance management activities and planning coordinated by the Performance Management Center. The aligned FY22-26 Strategic Plan and Evidence-Building Plans will be made available on the department's Evidence Hub at dol.gov/evidence in February 2022. An example of performance improvements include updates to the *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act* (WIOA) allows state and local governments to build their own performance infrastructure by using federal funds for data collection, performance management, research, and evaluation activities. WIOA encourages state and local governments to link funding to performance and evaluation data through performance-based grants and contracts.

Prior to 2021, the appropriation for evaluation was constant at $8 million, with the Secretary's given authority to transfer an additional set aside amount (up to 0.75%) from Department accounts to fund research and evaluations efforts led by CEO. Additionally, DOL

invests in evidence-based grantees through three competitive grant programs: Senior Community Service Employment Program, the National Farmworker Jobs Program, and the national YouthBuild program. Evidence-building benefits the public through responsible expenditures of taxpayer resources on effective practices. To advance its efforts, DOL should stabilize evidence-building investments to support improvements in the department's expansive policy and investment portfolios.

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?

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Chief Evaluation Officer serves as the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) evaluation officer. The Chief Evaluation Officer oversees DOL's Chief Evaluation Office (CEO), housed within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy (OASP), and the coordination of Department-wide evaluations, including office staff and leadership to interpret research and evaluation findings and to identify their implications for programmatic and policy decisions.

CEO is directly appropriated $8.04 million and then, may receive up to 0.75% from statutorily specified program accounts, based on the discretion of the Secretary. In FY19, that number was .03% of funds, or $3.3 million, bringing the spending total to $11.34 million. The FY20 number is not known yet, because the Secretary has not determined the set-aside amount.

CEO includes nine full-time staff plus a small number of contractors and one to two detailees at any given time. This staff level is augmented by staff from research and evaluation units in other DOL agencies such as the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), which has six FTE's dedicated to research and evaluation activities with which the CEO coordinates extensively on the development of a learning agenda, management of studies, and dissemination of results.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The Chief Data Officer serves as the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Chief Data Officer. Building on existing efforts initiated before the OPEN Government Data Act, the Secretary released a Secretary's Order (02-2019) directing the department to create a Chief Data Officer position and a data governance board to help realize the strategic value in data, as well as to establish, coordinate, and manage policy, processes, and standards for data management. The Chief Data Officer chairs DOL's data

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?

governance body, and leads data governance efforts, open data efforts, and associated efforts to collect, manage, and utilize data in a manner that best supports its use to inform program administration and foster data-informed decision-making and policymaking.

DOL has arranged for two permanent staff to support governance and open data efforts as well as compliance with the Evidence Act, the Federal Data Strategy, and DOL's data governance goals.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

DOL, through a Secretary's Order, has created a structure that coordinates and leverages the important roles within the organization to accomplish objectives like those in the Evidence Act. The Secretary's Order mandates collaboration between the Chief Data Officer, the Chief Performance Officer, Chief Evaluation Officer, Chief Information Officer, and Chief Statistical Officer. This has allowed DOL's Evidence Officials to more closely coordinate with both regular and ad hoc meetings. For example, in FY19, all four Evidence Officials reviewed DOL agency learning agendas and Evidence Act reports.

The Secretary's Order mandates a collaborative approach to reviewing IT infrastructure and data asset accessibility, developing modern solutions for managing, disseminating and generating data, coordinating statistical functions, supporting evaluation, research and evidence generation, and supporting all aspects of performance management including assurances that data are fit for purpose.

DOL continues to leverage current governance structures, such as the Chief Evaluation Officer continuing to play a role in the formation of the annual budget requests of DOL's agencies, recommendations around including evidence in grant competitions, and providing technical assistance to the Department leadership to ensure that evidence informs policy design. There are a number of mechanisms set up to facilitate this: The Chief Evaluation Officer traditionally participates in quarterly performance meetings with DOL leadership and the Performance Management Center (PMC). The Chief Evaluation Officer reviews agency operating plans and works with agencies and the PMC to coordinate performance targets and measures and evaluates findings; quarterly meetings are held with agency leadership and staff as part of the Learning Agenda process; and meetings are held as needed to strategize around addressing new priorities or legislative requirements.

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

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor
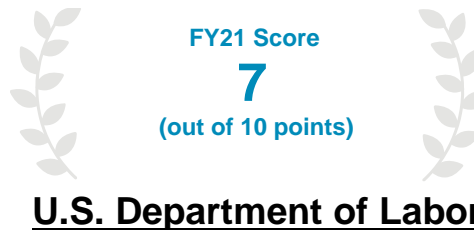
2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

DOL has an Evaluation Policy that formalizes the principles that govern all program evaluations in the Department, including methodological rigor, independence, transparency, ethics, and relevance. The policy represents a commitment to using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice. The policy states that "evaluations should be designed to address DOL's diverse programs, customers, and stakeholders; and DOL should encourage diversity among those carrying out the evaluations."

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) develops, implements, and publicly releases an annual DOL evaluation plan. The evaluation plan is based on the agency learning agendas as well as the Department's Strategic Plan priorities, statutory requirements for evaluations, and Secretarial and Administration priorities. As of August 2021, the Department is seeking public input and comment on the draft FY22-26 strategic and evaluation plans. The evaluation plan includes the studies the CEO intends to undertake in the next year using set-aside dollars. Appropriations language requires the Chief Evaluation Officer to submit a plan to the U.S. Senate and House Committees on Appropriations outlining the evaluations that will be carried out by the Office using dollars transferred to the CEO--the DOL evaluation plan serves that purpose. The evaluation plan outlines evaluations that the CEO will use its budget to undertake. The CEO also works with agencies to undertake evaluations and evidence building strategies to answer other questions of interest identified in learning agencies, but not undertaken directly by the CEO.

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

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

In FY21, the Department is developing its annual evaluation plan, building from individual agencies and learning agendas to create a combined document. DOL has leveraged its existing practices and infrastructure to develop the broad, four-year prospective research agenda, or Evidence-Building Plan, per the Evidence Act requirement. Both documents will outline the process for internal and external stakeholder engagement.

The draft FY22-26 Evidence-Building Plan identifies "Equity in Employment and Training Programs" and "Barriers to Women's Employment" as priority areas.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

All DOL program evaluation reports and findings funded by the CEO are publicly released and posted on the complete reports section of the CEO website. DOL agencies, such as the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), also post and release their own research and evaluation reports. Some program evaluations include data and results disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender, among others, where possible. DOL's website also provides accessible summaries and downloadable one-pagers on each study. CEO is also in the process of ramping up additional methods of communicating and disseminating CEO-funded studies and findings, and published its first quarterly newsletter in September 2020.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) has sponsored an assessment of DOL's baseline capacity to produce and use evidence, with the aim of helping the Department and its agencies identify key next steps to improve evidence capacity. CEO developed technical requirements and contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR)/IMPAQ International, LLC (IMPAQ) (research team) to design and conduct this independent, third-party assessment.
This assessment included the 16 DOL agencies in the Department's Strategic Plan. It reflects data collected through a survey of

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

targeted DOL staff, focus groups with selected DOL staff, and a review of selected evidence documents.

DOL's Evaluation Policy touches on the agency's commitment to high-quality, methodologically rigorous research through funding independent research activities. Further, CEO staff have expertise in research and evaluation methods as well as in DOL programs and policies and the populations they serve. The CEO also employs technical working groups on the majority of evaluation projects whose members have deep technical and subject matter expertise. The CEO has leveraged the FY20 learning agenda process to create an interim Capacity Assessment, per Evidence Act requirements, and is conducting a more detailed assessment of individual agencies' capacity, as well as DOL's overall capacity, in these areas for publication in 2022.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

DOL employs a full range of evaluation methods to answer key research questions of interest, including when appropriate, impact evaluations. Among DOL's active portfolio of approximately 50 projects, the study type ranges from rigorous evidence syntheses to implementation studies to quasi-experimental outcome studies to impact studies. Examples of current DOL studies with a random assignment component include an evaluation of a Job Corps' demonstration pilot, the Cascades Job Corps College and Career Academy. An example of a multi-arm randomized control trial was the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments evaluation, which assessed a range of strategies to reduce unemployment insurance duration and improve employment as well as wage outcomes.

3. Resources: **Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?**
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor
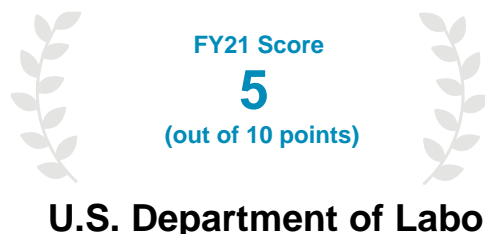
3.1 ____ (Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

The Department of Labor invested $8.04 million on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing .072% of the agency's $11.1 billion discretionary budget in FY21.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

CEO is directly appropriated $8.04 million and then, may receive up to 0.75% from statutorily specified program accounts, based on the discretion of the Secretary. In FY19, that number was .03% of funds, or $3.3 million, bringing the spending total to $11.34 million. The FY20 number is not known yet, because the Secretary has not determined the set-aside amount. CEO also collaborates with DOL program offices and other federal agencies on additional evaluations being carried out by other offices and/or supported by funds appropriated to other agencies or programs. In FY19, CEO oversaw approximately $9.94 million in evaluation and evidence building activities, and in FY18, CEO oversaw approximately $21 million in evaluation and evidence building activities. While in FY17, DOL's CEO oversaw an estimated $40 million in evaluation funding.

This amount only represents the dollars that are directly appropriated or transferred to the CEO. Additionally, many DOL evaluations and research studies are supported by funds appropriated to DOL programs and/or are carried out by other offices within DOL. In some programs, such as the America's Promise grant evaluation and the Reentry Grant Evaluation, evaluation set asides exceed 1% (2.9% and 2.8% respectively for these programs).

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
   (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

Grantees and programs that participate in DOL evaluations receive technical assistance related to evaluation activities and implementation such as the Evaluation and Research Hub (EvalHub). DOL agencies, like ETA, are also making a concerted effort to help states and local areas build evaluation capacity to meet the program evaluation requirements for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) through tools such as RESEA program evaluation technical assistance (RESEA EvalTA). A suite of evaluation technical assistance resources are being developed throughout FY20, including webinars and other tools and templates to help states understand, build, and use evidence. DOL's evaluation technical assistance webinar series for states has been posted online to the RESEA community of practice. This series will ultimately hold 11 webinars. To date, most of the posted webinars have been viewed by the field between 2,000-4,000 times. Additional RESEA EvalTA products are being developed and will be posted on the RESEA community of practice, the DOL Chief Evaluation Office's website, and in CLEAR, as appropriate.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

DOL's Performance Management Center (PMC) leads the development of DOL's four-year Strategic Plan (FY 2018-2022) and Annual Performance Report.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

Using a performance and budget system linked to component agencies' annual operating plans, PMC coordinates quarterly reviews of each agency's program performance to analyze progress and identify opportunities for performance improvements. Learning agendas updated annually by DOL agencies in collaboration with DOL's CEO include program performance themes and priorities for analysis needed to refine performance measures and identify strategies for improving performance. The annual Strategic Reviews with leadership include specific discussions about improving performance and findings from recent evaluations that suggest opportunities for improvement. Using a performance stat reporting and dashboard system linked to component agencies' annual operating plans, PMC coordinates quarterly reviews of each agency's program performance by the Deputy Secretary to analyze progress and identify opportunities for performance improvements.

In March 2021, DOL held the agency's first Summer Data Equity Challenge, awarding $10,000 - $30,000 to researchers studying the impact of DOL policies and programs on traditionally underserved communities. Awardees will use data to find gaps in DOL's knowledge and, ideally, propose practical solutions to fill those gaps and reduce disparities in outcomes.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
   Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
   (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

4.3 Did the agency have a continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

DOL's performance reporting and dashboard system support quarterly reviews of each agency's program performance by the Deputy Secretary to analyze progress and identify opportunities for performance improvements. These performance reviews connect to DOL's broader performance and evaluation activities. DOL's OCIO developed a new dashboard last year for agency leadership use only – the CXO Dashboard – to interactively assess progress on performance by providing instant access to key administrative data to enable data-driven decisions.

DOL leverages a variety of continuous learning tools, including the learning agenda approach to conceptualize and make progress on substantive learning goals for the agency, as well as DOL's Performance Management Center's (PMC) Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) Program, which supports agencies in efforts to gain operational efficiencies and improve performance. The program directs customized process improvement projects throughout the department and grows the cadre of CPI practitioners through Lean Six Sigma training.

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

DOL's open government plan was last updated in 2016, and subsequent updates are being considered after the formal release of the Federal Data Strategy and the Evidence Act.

DOL also has open data assets aimed at developers and researchers who desire data-as-a-service through application programming interfaces hosted by both the Office of Public Affairs and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Each of these has clear documentation, is consistent with the open data policy, and offers transparent, repeatable, machine-readable access to data on an as-needed basis. The Department is currently developing a new API v3 which will expand the open data offerings, extend the capabilities, and offer a suite of user-friendly tools.

The Department has consistently sought to make as much data available to the public regarding its activities as possible. Examples of this include DOL's Public Enforcement Database, which makes available records of activity from the worker protection agencies and the Office of Labor Management Standards' online public disclosure room.

The Department also has multiple restricted-use access systems which go beyond what would be possible with simple open-data efforts. BLS has a confidential researcher access program, offering access under appropriate conditions to sensitive data. Similarly, the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) has stood up a centralized research hub for evaluation study partners to leverage sensitive data in a consistent manner to help make evidence generation more efficient.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

The Department has conducted extensive inventories over the last ten years, in part to support common activities such as IT modernization, White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) data calls, and the general goal of transparency through data sharing. These form the current basis of DOL's planning and administration. Some sections of the Evidence Act have led to a different federal posture with respect to data, such as the requirement for data to be open by default, and considered shareable absent a legal requirement not to do so, or unless there is a risk that the release of such data might help constitute disclosure risk. Led by the Chief Data Officer and DOL Data Board, the Department is currently re-evaluating its inventories and its public data offerings in light of this very specific requirement and re-visiting this issue among all its programs. Because this is a critical prerequisite to developing open data plans, as well as data governance and data strategy frameworks, the agency hopes to have a revised inventory completed during FY21.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

DOL's CEO, Employment and Training Administration (ETA), and Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS) have worked with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to develop a secure mechanism for obtaining and analyzing earnings data from the Directory of New Hires. Since FY20, DOL has entered into interagency data sharing agreements with HHS and obtained data to support 10 job training and employment program evaluations.

Since FY20, the Department continued to expand efforts to improve the quality of and access to data for evaluation and performance analysis through the Data Analytics Unit in CEO, and through new pilots beginning in BLS to access and exchange state labor market and earnings data for statistical and evaluation purposes.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

DOL has a shared services approach to data security. In addition, the privacy provisions for BLS and ETA are publicly available online.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

The State Wage Interchange System (SWIS) is a mechanism through which states can exchange wage data on an interstate basis with other states in order to satisfy performance related reporting requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), as well as for other permitted purposes specified in the agreement. The SWIS agreement includes the U.S. Department of Labor's Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs (Title I) and Employment Service program (Title III); the Department of Education's Adult and Family Literacy Act program (Title II) and programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (as amended); and, the Vocational Rehabilitation program (Title IV). The Departments have established agreements with all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.
ETA continues to fund and provide technical assistance to states under the Workforce Data Quality Initiative to link earnings and workforce data with education data to support state program administration and evaluation. These grants support the development and expansion of longitudinal databases and enhance their ability to share performance data with stakeholders. The databases include information on programs that provide training and employment services and obtain similar information in the service delivery process.

ETA is also working to assess the completeness of self-reported demographic data, to inform both agency level equity priorities and future technical assistance efforts for states and grantees to improve the completeness and quality of this information. ETA incorporated into FOAs the requirement to make any data on credentials transparent and accessible through use of open linked data formats.

186

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

ETA has been working with the Department's OCIO to build new case management systems for its National and discretionary grantees known as the Grants Performance Management System (GPMS). In addition to supporting case management by grantees, GPMS supports these grantees in meeting WIOA-mandated performance collection and reporting needs, and to enable automation to ensure programs can continue to meet updated WIOA requirements. ETA is working to integrate GPMS into the Workforce Investment Performance System (WIPS) as programs onboard into GPMS to seamlessly calculate and report WIOA primary indicators of performance and other calculations in programs' quarterly performance reports (QPRs).

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score
9
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR) evidence guidelines, which describe quality standards for different types of studies, are applied to all independent evaluations, including all third party evaluations of DOL programs, determined eligible for CLEAR's evidence reviews across different topic areas. Requests for proposals also indicate these CLEAR standards should be applied to all Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) evaluations when considering which designs are the most rigorous and appropriate to answer specific research questions.

In addition, the DOL Evaluation Policy identifies principles and standards for evaluation planning and dissemination. Additionally, DOL collaborates with other agencies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)) to develop technological procedures to link and share reviews across clearinghouses.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

DOL uses the CLEAR evidence guidelines and standards to make decisions about discretionary program grants awarded using evidence-informed or evidence-based criteria. The published guidelines and standards are used to identify evidence-based programs and practices and to review studies to assess the strength of their causal evidence or to do a structured evidence review in a particular topic area or timeframe to help inform agencies what strategies appear promising and where gaps exist.

188

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

DOL's CLEAR is an online evidence clearinghouse. CLEAR's goal is to make research on labor topics more accessible to practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and the public more broadly, so that it can inform their decisions about labor policies and programs. CLEAR identifies and summarizes many types of research, including descriptive statistical studies and outcome analyses, implementation studies, and causal impact studies. For causal impact studies, CLEAR assesses the strength of the design and methodology in studies that look at the effectiveness of particular policies and programs. CLEAR's study summaries and icons, found in each topic area, can help users quickly and easily understand what studies found and how much confidence to have in the results.

CLEAR's search tool allows users to find studies based on target population, including race and other demographic characteristics.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

DOL promotes the utilization of evidence-based practices in a variety of ways. For example, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) maintains a user-friendly database and a community of practice, Workforce System Strategies (WSS) that highlights the use of evidence-based interventions and the Evaluation and Research Hub (EvalHub), respectively. WSS is a comprehensive database of over 1,400 profiles that summarize a wide range of findings from reports, studies, technical assistance tools and guides that support program administration and improvement. The EvalHub is a community of practice created to support evidence and evaluation-capacity building efforts within state workforce development programs. In another effort to promote evidence-based practices, ETA has supported an Applied Data Analytics program offered through the Coleridge Initiative for multiple teams from state workforce agencies. DOL agencies, like ETA, are also making a concerted effort to help states build evaluation capacity to meet the program evaluation requirements for the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program through tools such as RESEA program evaluation technical assistance (RESEA EvalTA).

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score
5
(out of 7 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

The Department of Labor's Chief Innovation Officer is responsible for efforts to use innovative technologies, partnerships and practices to accelerate the Department's mission. The Chief Innovation Officer reports to the Deputy Secretary and also serves as the Senior Advisor for Delivery for the department.

DOL's Chief Data Officer and Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) Data Analytics team developed a secure data analysis platform accessible to all DOL staff, pre-loaded with common statistical packages and offering the capability to access and merge various administrative data for analysis. DOL supports staff in executing limitless web-based A/B testing and other behaviorally-informed trials, with the shared service of the advanced Granicus platform's GovDelivery communications tool, including free technical support. This tool enhances the Department's ability to communicate with the public, such as through targeted email campaigns, and to adjust these communications, informed by testing and data, to increase engagement on relevant topics. The CEO also has developed toolkits and detailed resources for staff to effectively design behaviorally informed tests, shared on their new Behavioral Interventions website.

7.2 Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

The CEO uses a variety of communication tools to share rigorous research results, lessons learned, promising practices, and other implications of its research. These include internal briefings from independent contractors and researchers, a brownbag series that features evidence-based promising practices and results shared by DOL staff, for DOL staff, and an external expert seminar series featuring new findings or innovations in relevant areas of work. CEO staff consistently use research findings in the development of new research, and DOL agencies use findings to design and guide new discretionary grant programs, to refine performance measures for grantees, and to make decisions on compliance and enforcement practices.

190

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

DOL is strongly committed to promoting innovation in our policies and practices. For example, the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) competitive funding routinely funds innovative programming, since grantees typically bundle various program services and components to best meet the needs of the people being served by them in their local contexts. A particularly good example of where this innovation is happening is in the Administration's high priority area of apprenticeships. In FY19, ETA issued nearly $184 million in Scaling Apprenticeship Through Sector-Based Strategies grants to public-private partnerships to expand apprenticeships to healthcare, information technology and other industries. In FY20, ETA awarded nearly $100 million in Apprenticeship: Closing the Skills Gap grants. Additionally, ETA and CEO are conducting an evaluation of the American Apprenticeship Initiative, which since 2016 has provided $175 million in grants to 45 grantees across the nation.

In addition, CEO's Behavioral Insights team works with a number of DOL agencies on a continuous basis to identify and assess the feasibility of conducting studies where insights from behavioral science can be used to improve the performance and outcomes of DOL programs. The Wage and Hour Division's (WHD) Transformation Team is one such example where continuous improvement efforts are driving innovation. Their work has identified potential areas where behavioral interventions and trials may inform program improvement. CEO is also working across agencies--including WHD, ETA, Women's Bureau, Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS), Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), and International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB)--to identify and assess the feasibility of other areas where insights from behavioral science can be used to improve the performance and outcomes of DOL programs.

DOL has also built capacity for staff innovation through the Performance Management Center's Continuous Process Improvement (CPI) Program, an agency-wide opportunity which trains and certifies agency staff on Lean Six Sigma (LSS) methodologies through real-time execution of DOL process improvement projects. The program includes classroom sessions that prepare participants for LSS Black Belt certification examinations, including the American Society for Quality (ASQ) as well as DOL's own certification.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

DOL, through the annual Learning Agenda process, systematically identifies gaps in the use of evidence. Innovation is about filling known gaps via dissemination, further research, or generation of quick turnaround assessments, like those offered to the Department by CEO's Behavioral Insights Program.

191

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

DOL typically couples innovation with rigorous evaluation to learn from experiments. For example, DOL is participating in the Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) for innovative service delivery for disconnected youth which includes not only waivers and blending and braiding of federal funds, but gives bonus points in application reviews for proposing "high tier" evaluations. DOL is the lead agency for the evaluation of P3. A final report is available on the CEO's completed studies website.

DOL routinely uses Job Corps' demonstration authority to test and evaluate innovative and promising models to improve outcomes for youth. Currently, the CEO is sponsoring a rigorous impact evaluation to examine the effectiveness of one of these pilots, the Job Corps Experimental Center Cascades, with results expected in FY22.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
8
(out of 15 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest competitive grant programs and their appropriation amounts were:

1. Senior Community Service Employment Program (Approximately $405 million in continuation funds: eligible applicants are non-profit organizations, federal agencies, and tribal organizations)
2. State Apprenticeship Expansion, Equity and Innovation Grants (Approximately $99 million: eligible applicants are states)
3. National Farmworker Jobs Program (Approximately $94 million in continuation funds: eligible applicants are entities with an understanding of the problems of eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers; a familiarity with the agricultural industries and the labor market needs of the proposed service area; and the ability to demonstrate a capacity to administer and deliver a diversified program of workforce investment activities)
4. YouthBuild (Approximately $89 million: eligible applicants are public and private non-profit agencies)
5. Pathway Home (Approximately $61 million: eligible applicants are non-profit organizations with (501)(c)(3) status; public institutions of higher education; nonprofit postsecondary education institutions; state or local governments; any Indian or Native American entity eligible for grants under section 166 of WIOA; and for-profit businesses and business-related nonprofit organizations)

During the summer of 2021 ETA held a series of stakeholder listening sessions focused on grant equity in an effort to establish a baseline understanding of potential barriers to greater equity in the mix of grant applicants, peer reviewers, awardees, and

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

communities served. This information will help inform future grant making decisions.

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

The Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) YouthBuild applicants are awarded points based on past performance, viewing these metrics as important to demonstrating successful career outcomes for youth. As a pre-apprenticeship program that prepares young people for the construction industry and other in-demand industries, YouthBuild supports the evidence-based national strategy of apprenticeship. Other competitive grant programs that score applications for past performance and use of evidence-informed strategies are the Senior Community Service Employment Program and the National Farmworker Jobs Program.

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

All five of DOL's largest grant programs may be involved in evaluations designed by the Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) and the relevant DOL agencies. In each case DOL required or encouraged (through language in the funding announcement and proposal review criteria) grantees to use evidence-based models or strategies in grant interventions and/or to participate in an evaluation, especially to test new interventions that theory or research suggest are promising.

For example, DOL is conducting an evaluation of the Pathway Home grant program. This evaluation will build knowledge about the grant models and include the development of a feasibility and design options paper for implementation and impact evaluations. Additionally, DOL has recently launched a multi-year implementation study of the Senior Community Service Employment Program as well as other workforce programs for older workers to build the evidence base on these programs and identify future research options. There are options for more rigorous evaluations in the contract as appropriate.

194

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant program (besides its five largest grant programs)?

DOL includes requirements of demonstrated effectiveness in the allocation of funds, as well as the commitment to building new evidence in order to receive funds, both of which are of equal importance given the fact that many DOL-funded programs lack a sufficient body of evidence to only support those that are already evidence-based. For example, among recent Employment and Training Administration (ETA) competitive grant programs, this has involved requiring: (1) a demonstration of an approach as being evidence-based or promising for receipt of funds (i.e., Reentry Funding Opportunity Announcement) or for potential to receive additional funds (i.e., TechHire); (2) an independent third-party local or grantee evaluation with priority incentives for rigorous designs (e.g., tiered funding, scoring priorities, bonus scoring for evidence-based interventions or multi-site rigorous tests); or (3) full participation in an evaluation as well as rigorous grantee (or local) evaluations (i.e. American Apprenticeship Initiative and the Strengthening Community College Training Grants). Additionally, applicants for the International Labor Bureau's (ILAB) competitive funding opportunities are required to conduct and/or participate in evaluations as a condition of award.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

In 2015, DOL funded an evaluation of the 36-month Linking Employment Activities Pre-Release (LEAP) Program which included an implementation study of LEAP pilot programs that provided jail-based American Job Centers (AJCs) to individuals preparing to re-enter society after time in jail. The findings of the evaluation identified many promising practices for offering both pre- and post-release services and were published in 2018 (see the Final Report and Issue Brief Compendium). In 2020, DOL funded a 42-month Pathway Home Pilot Project and accompanying evaluation that builds on lessons learned from the LEAP program by providing workforce services to incarcerated individuals pre- and post-release. For example, the requirement in the Pathway Home grant for participants to maintain the same caseworker pre- and post-release, was suggested as a promising practice in the LEAP Implementation Study.

DOL funded a national evaluation of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program, which was a $1.9 billion initiative consisting of four rounds of grants, from 2011 to 2018. The grants were awarded to institutions of higher education (mainly community colleges) to build their capacity to provide workforce education and training

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

programs. The implementation study assessed the grantees' implementation of strategies to better connect and integrate education and workforce systems, address employer needs, and transform training programs and services to adult learners. The synthesis identified key implementation and impact findings based on a review of evaluation reports completed by grantees' third-party evaluators. The outcomes study examined the training, employment, earnings, and self-sufficiency outcomes of nearly 2,800 participants from nine grants in Round 4. Findings from these studies provide evidence-based practices and insights that are being applied to the new Strengthening Community College Initiative Funding Opportunity Announcement, as well as future DOL investments.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

DOL has a formal Evaluation Policy. Guidance on using funds to conduct and/or participate in program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation-building efforts can be found in each grant funding opportunity, and is a condition of many grants. The "Special Program Requirements" section of the respective grant funding opportunity notifies grantees of this responsibility. Generally, this section states: "As a condition of grant award, grantees are required to participate in an evaluation, if undertaken by DOL. The evaluation may include an implementation assessment across grantees, an impact and/or outcomes analysis of all or selected sites within or across grantees, and a benefit/cost analysis or assessment of return on investment. Conducting an impact analysis could involve random assignment (which involves random assignment of eligible participants into a treatment group that would receive program services or enhanced program services, or into control group(s) that would receive no program services or program services that are not enhanced).

DOL may require applicants to collect data elements to aid the evaluation. As a part of the evaluation, as a condition of award, grantees must agree to: (1) make records available to the evaluation contractor on participants, employers, and funding; (2) provide access to program operating personnel, participants, and operational and financial records, and any other pertaining documents to calculate program costs and benefits; (3) in the case of an impact analysis, facilitate the assignment by lottery of participants to program services (including the possible increased recruitment of potential participants); and (4) follow evaluation procedures as specified by the evaluation contractor under the direction of DOL, including after the period of operation. After

196

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

award, grantees will receive detailed guidance on ETA's evaluation methodology, including requirements for data collection. Grantees will receive technical assistance to support their participation in these activities.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest non-competitive grant programs at DOL are in the Employment and Training Administration:

1. Adult Employment and Training Activities ($862,649,000; eligible grantees: city, county, and/or state governments);
2. Youth Activities ($921,130,000; eligible grantees: city, county, and/or state governments);
3. Dislocated Worker Employment and Training formula grants ($1,061,553,000; eligible grantees: city, county, and/or state governments);
4. UI State Administration ($2,365,816,000; eligible grantees: city, county, and/or state governments);
5. Employment Security Grants to States ($670,052,000; eligible grantees: city, county, and/or state governments).

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

A signature feature of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Pub. L. 113-128) is its focus on the use of data and evidence to improve services and outcomes, particularly in provisions related to states' role in conducting evaluations and research, as well as in requirements regarding data collection, performance standards, and state planning. Conducting evaluations is a required statewide activity, but there are additional requirements regarding coordination (with other state agencies and federal evaluations under WIOA), dissemination, and provision of data and other information for federal evaluations.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

WIOA's evidence and performance provisions: (1) increased the amount of WIOA funds states can set aside and distribute directly from 5-10% to 15% and authorized them to invest these funds in Pay for Performance initiatives; (2) authorized states to invest their own workforce development funds, as well as non-federal resources, in Pay for Performance initiatives; (3) authorized local workforce investment boards to invest up to 10% of their WIOA funds in Pay for Performance initiatives; and (4) authorized states and local workforce investment boards to award Pay for Performance contracts to intermediaries, community based organizations, and community colleges.

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Section 116(e) of WIOA describes how the state, in coordination with local workforce boards and state agencies that administer the programs, shall conduct ongoing evaluations of activities carried out in the state under these state programs. These evaluations are intended to promote, establish, implement, and utilize methods for continuously improving core program activities in order to achieve high-level programs within, and high-level outcomes from, the workforce development system.

The Employment and Training Administration sponsors the WorkforceGPS, which is a community point of access to support workforce development professionals in their use of evaluations to improve state and local workforce systems. Professionals can access a variety of resources and tools, including an Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort to help leaders improve their research and evaluation capacities. The WorkforceGPS includes links to resources on evaluation assessment readiness, evaluation design, and performance data, all focused on improving the public workforce system.

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) funds must be used for interventions or service delivery strategies demonstrated to reduce the average number of weeks of unemployment insurance a participant receives by improving employment outcomes. The law provides for a phased implementation of the new program requirements over several years. In FY19, DOL awarded $130 million to states to conduct RESEA programs that met these evidence of effectiveness requirements. Beginning in FY23, states must also use no less than 25% of RESEA grant funds for interventions with a high or moderate causal evidence rating that show a demonstrated capacity to improve outcomes for participants; this percentage

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

increases in subsequent years until after FY26, when states must use no less than 50% of such grant funds for such interventions.

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

Institutional Analysis of American Job Centers: the goal of the evaluation was to understand and systematically document the institutional characteristics of American Job Centers (AJCs), and to identify variations in service delivery, organization structure, and administration across AJCs.

Career Pathways Descriptive and Analytical Study: WIOA requires DOL to "conduct a multistate study to develop, implement, and build upon career advancement models and practices for low-wage healthcare providers or providers of early education and child care." In response, DOL conducted the Career Pathways Design Study to develop evaluation design options that could address critical gaps in knowledge related to the approach, implementation, and success of career pathways strategies generally, and in early care and education specifically. The Chief Evaluation Office (CEO) has recently begun the second iteration of this study. The purpose of this project is to build on the evaluation design work CEO completed in 2018 to build evidence about the implementation and effectiveness of career pathways approaches and meet the WIOA statutory requirement to conduct a career pathways study. It will include a meta-analysis of existing impact evaluation results as well as examine how workers advance through multiple, progressively higher levels of education and training, and associated jobs, within a pathway over time, and the factors associated with their success.

Analysis of Employer Performance Measurement Approaches: the goal of the study was to examine the appropriateness, reliability and validity of proposed measures of effectiveness in serving employers required under WIOA. It included knowledge development to understand and document the state of the field, an analysis and comparative assessment of measurement approaches and metrics, and the dissemination of findings through a report, as well as research and topical briefs. Though the authors did not find an overwhelming case for adopting either one measure or several measures, adopting more than one measure offers the advantage of capturing more aspects of performance and may make results more actionable for the different Title I, II, III, and IV programs. Alternatively, a single measure has the advantage of clarity on how state performance is assessed and fewer resources devoted to record keeping.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

The Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) RESEA grantees may use up to 10% of their grant funds for evaluations of their programs. ETA released specific evaluation guidance to help states understand how to conduct evaluations of their RESEA interventions with these grant funds. The goal of the agency guidance, along with the evaluation technical assistance being provided to states and their partners, is to build states' capacity to understand, use, and build evidence.

Section 116 of WIOA establishes performance accountability indicators and performance reporting requirements to assess the effectiveness of states and local areas in achieving positive outcomes for individuals served by the workforce development system's core programs. Section 116(e) of WOIA requires states to "employ the most rigorous analytical and statistical methods that are reasonably feasible, such as the use of control groups" and requires that states evaluate the effectiveness of their WOIA programs in an annual progress which includes updates on (1) current or planned evaluation and related research projects, including methodologies used; (2) efforts to coordinate the development of evaluation and research projects with WIOA core programs, other state agencies and local boards; (3) a list of completed evaluation and related reports with publicly accessible links to such reports; (4) efforts to provide data, survey responses, and timely visits for Federal evaluations; (5) any continuous improvement strategies utilizing results from studies and evidence-based practices evaluated. States are permitted to use WOIA grant funds to perform the necessary performance monitoring and evaluations to complete this report.

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 8 points)

U.S. Department of Labor

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

The Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) prospective YouthBuild and Job Corps grant applicants are selected, in part, based on their past performance. These programs consider the entity's past performance of demonstrated effectiveness in achieving critical outcomes for youth.

Reforming Job Corps provides an example of such efforts to repurpose resources based upon a rigorous analysis of available data. As part of this reform effort, DOL's FY20 budget request ends the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) involvement in the program, unifying responsibility in DOL. Workforce development is not a core USDA role, and the 25 centers it operates are overrepresented in the lowest performing cohort of centers.

A rigorous 2012 evaluation of the Trade Readjustment Assistance (TAA) Program demonstrated that workers who participated in the program had lower earnings than the comparison group at the end of a four-year follow-up period, in part because they were more likely to participate in long-term job training programs rather than immediately reentering the workforce. However, this training was not targeted to in-demand industries and occupations, and, as found in Mathematica's evaluation of the TAA program, only 37% of participants became employed in the occupations for which they trained. In the FY21 budget request, the

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

Department addresses these issues by continuing to propose reauthorization of the TAA program that focuses on apprenticeship and on-the-job training, earn-as-you-learn strategies that ensure that participants are training for relevant occupations.

DOL's FY20 budget request eliminates funding for the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). SCSEP has a goal of transitioning half of participants into unsubsidized employment within the first quarter after exiting the program, but has struggled to achieve even this modest goal.

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

The Department's Employment and Training Administration sponsors the WorkforceGPS, which is a community point of access to support workforce development professionals in their use of evaluations to improve state and local workforce systems.

Professionals can access a variety of resources and tools, including a learning cohort community to help leaders improve their research and evaluations capacities. The WorkforceGPS includes links to resources on assessment readiness, evaluation design, performance data all focused on improving the public workforce system.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

The **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** (HUD) has been a consistent leader in taking a strategic approach to research and evaluation. Even before agency learning agendas were required by the *Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Evidence Act* (Evidence Act), HUD's learning agenda, the Research Roadmap, linked the Department's performance management, research, and evaluation activities. With the Evidence Act in place, HUD has issued an updated Research Roadmap, informed by an exemplary stakeholder engagement process that the Department has developed over the years to identify key research questions from the field. In addition to HUD's robust research and evaluation portfolio, HUD remains a leader in federal performance management systems--for example, in FY21, the agency has engaged its Chief Financial Officer in performance monitoring. The Department has made strides in leveraging administrative data in a complementary relationship with evidence-building and program demonstration. Additionally, the department has increased its emphasis on generating interim reports during long-term impact evaluations.

Beyond using its own research to build evidence, HUD provides resources to help states and localities build their own capacity for using evidence and data. In FY20 and FY21, the Community Compass program provided $91 million for technical assistance to help grantees effectively use federal funding, including improving program management, evaluation, and performance measurement. Also in FY21, HUD offered $3.45 billion for the Department's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), in which funding for housing, community and economic development, and disaster recovery is designed to also build fiscal health and administrative capacity, such as capacity for data collection, analysis, and outcome tracking. The program authorizes recipients to use up to 20% of their allocations for administration and planning costs that may include evaluation-capacity building efforts and evaluations.

HUD has exemplary equity practices. For example, the department publishes foundational research to promote more equitable community development and housing policy via the HUD USER platform on issues such as housing discrimination and programs that increase economic opportunity for disadvantaged and underserved populations. Key findings of evaluations are disaggregated by effect size, population, and sub-group demographics. Additionally, as a part of the agency's COVID-19 response, HUD published a suite of racial equity housing resources, toolkits, and research to reduce overrepresentation of people of color experiencing homelessness.

To improve its evidence-building and knowledge about effective housing programs, HUD and congress should provide clear guidance for states and localities about leveraging the CDBG 20% set aside for evaluations, research, evidence-building, and data activities, as described above. The agency could also benefit from a set of department-wide evidence definitions, stemming from its existing evaluation policy, for research and funding purposes that create alignment and clarity on the spectrum of evidence-based practices.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The General Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Office of Policy Development & Research (PD&R) serves as the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) evaluation officer. HUD's Office of Policy Development & Research (PD&R) is led by an Assistant Secretary and the career General Deputy Assistant Secretary. PD&R comprises six offices, 165 staff including a team of field economists in HUD's 10 regional offices, and a budget of $105 million in FY21. The Assistant Secretary and Evaluation Officer ensures that evidence informs policy development through frequent personal engagement with other principal staff, the Secretary, and external policy officials including consultation with Congress, speeches to policy audiences, sponsorship of public research briefings, and policy implications memoranda.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

A senior career staff person in the Office of Policy Development & Research serves as the acting Chief Data Officer for HUD. The FY21 Appropriations provided funding to stand up the CDO's office with 13 staff. The PD&R General Deputy Assistant Secretary and Statistical Official are responsible for numerous data infrastructure functions such as the collection and analysis of national housing market data (including survey collaborations with the Census Bureau); developing income limits and factors to support program operations; advising and assisting program offices with the development and analysis of administrative data collections; and supporting data linkages and developing open data products from administrative data, including geospatial data products that are crucial for addressing housing and urban development policy challenges.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

PD&R continues to lead HUD's full implementation of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act*. All three of the key leadership positions required by the Act--the Evaluation Officer, Chief Data Officer, and Statistical Official--are held by members of the PD&R staff. PD&R staff have engaged and coordinated within the Department its evidence-building efforts, which in FY20 included developing HUD's learning agenda and conducting the first agency-wide assessment of evidence-building capacity. In FY21, HUD will be focused on establishing an enterprise data governance model, which will include a data governance board consisting of key decision-makers from across the agency, which will include the Evaluation Officer, Chief Data Officer, Statistical Official, and Performance Improvement Officer. HUD's enterprise data governance model will bring together evaluation, statistical, performance, and data activities and focus on growing the agency's evidence-based practices to improve HUD's organizational performance.

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

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

PD&R published a Program Evaluation Policy in 2016 that established core principles and practices of PD&R's evaluation and research activities. The six core principles are rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, ethics, and technical innovation.

In August 2021, PD&R updated the 2016 Program Evaluation Policy to address issues that have arisen since 2016 as well as stakeholder input received via a town hall that PD&R hosted discussing its experience with sponsoring and publishing evaluations. The new HUD Program Evaluation Policy expands the jurisdiction of the statement to all of HUD and includes principles and practices intended to ensure racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in PD&R's evaluation and research activities. The language related to equity was developed in coordination with the Department-wide Equity Assessment that HUD is undergoing in response to Executive Order #13985, *Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities.*

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

HUD's learning agendas, called the Research Roadmap, have served as agency-wide evaluation plans that list and describe research and evaluation priorities for a five-year planning period. HUD released the 2020 Roadmap Update in December 2020. Annual evaluation plans are developed based on a selection of Roadmap proposals, newly emerging research needs, and incremental funding needs for major ongoing research and are submitted to Congress in association with PD&R's annual budget requests. Actual research activities are substantially determined by Congressional funding and guidance. Under the Evidence Act, PD&R prepares public Annual Evaluation Plans informed by the new Research Roadmap to be submitted in conjunction with the Annual Performance Plan.

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

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

HUD's Research Roadmap has served as the Department's evidence-building plan and learning agenda for eight years, and a new Roadmap was developed in FY21. HUD's participatory process (see Appendix A of Research Roadmap: 2020 Update) engages internal and external stakeholders to identify research questions and other evidence-building activities to support effective policy-making. Stakeholders include program partners in state and local governments and the private sector; researchers and academics; policy officials; and members of the general public who frequently access the HUDuser.gov portal. Outreach mechanisms for Roadmap development include email, web forums, conferences and webcasts, and targeted listening sessions.

The 2020 Roadmap Update served as the Department's draft Learning Agenda under the Evidence Act. To finalize the Learning Agenda, PD&R staff will align foundational learning questions with HUD's new strategic plan and conduct an additional round of internal stakeholder engagement in FY21 focused on identifying priority research questions across the Department. HUD is also seeking input on the 2020 Roadmap via email and web forums. PD&R staff will coordinate with the team conducting the Department-wide Equity Assessment in response to the executive order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities to identify priority research questions and evidence gaps that emerge as part of the assessment. HUD's Equity Assessment has prioritized stakeholder engagement as an area for immediate analysis by all program offices. The equity assessment seeks to identify and utilize the knowledge--both lived and professional--of stakeholders who have been historically underrepresented in the Federal government and underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, federal policies and programs. Findings from this assessment will further inform HUD's long-term "equity transformation," which aims to sustainably embed and improve equity throughout all of HUD's work. HUD will release its long-term Action Plan to increase equity in decision-making and access to programs and benefits on January 20, 2022 pursuant to Executive Order #13985.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

PD&R's Program Evaluation Policy requires timely publishing and dissemination of all evaluations that meet standards of methodological rigor. Completed evaluations and research reports are posted on PD&R's website, HUDUSER.gov. Additionally, the policy includes language in research and evaluation contracts that allows researchers to independently publish results, even

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

without HUD approval, after not more than six months. HUD's publicly released program evaluations typically include data and results disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender, where the data permit such disaggregation. For example, in 2020 HUD expanded the detail of race and ethnicity breakouts in the Worst Case Housing Needs reports to Congress to the full extent permitted by the data. Executive summaries will highlight disparate impacts if they are found to be statistically significant; otherwise, such findings may be found in the main body of the report or its appendices.

PD&R is in the process of reorganizing our published research and enhancing our search capabilities on HUDUSER.gov. These steps are being implemented to enhance the usability of HUD's research resources for researchers, policymakers, and the general public.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

PD&R is HUD's independent evaluation office, with scope spanning all the Department's program operations. In FY20 PD&R led an effort to assess the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts, consistent with the values established in HUD's Evaluation Policy. The Research Roadmap: 2020 Update covers much of this content, and a formal Capacity Assessment process was designed by evaluation leaders in coordination with the Chief Data Officer and performance management personnel. The draft Capacity Assessment addresses updated content requirements of OMB Circular A-11 (2020) and includes primary data collection through an exploratory key informant survey of senior managers across the Department. The identified weaknesses in evidence-building capacity will become the focus of subsequent in-depth assessments and interventions to be integrated in the Department's next Strategic Plan.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

For decades, PD&R has been a federal leader in the use of random assignment and other rigorous methods for research and evaluation purposes. Examples of random-assignment program demonstrations found on HUDUSER.gov include landmark research in the Housing Allowance experiment, the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration, and the Family Options Demonstration. Ongoing random-assignment experiments include the Moving to Work Demonstration, Family Self-Sufficiency

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

Demonstration, the First-Time Homebuyer Education and Counseling demonstration, the Rent Reform Demonstration, and the Integrated Wellness in Supportive Housing Demonstration. (See the PD&R Biennial Report FY 2019–2020).

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Criteria 3 Resources

.ıl **RESULTS**
★★★ **FOR AMERICA**

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score
6
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

3.1 ____ **(Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.**

HUD invested $105 million on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 0.17% of the agency's $60.343 billion FY21 appropriation.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

For FY21, Congress appropriated $105 million for the Office of Policy Development and Research's Research & Technology account. FY21 funding was up $7 million from FY20, reflecting congressional support for the value of PD&R's research, evaluations, and demonstrations. This funding includes $59 million for core research activities; $13 million for research, evaluations, and demonstrations; and $33 million for technical assistance. The total represents an FY21 investment in evaluations and evidence amounting to 0.17 percent of HUD's $60.343 billion gross discretionary budget authority, net of salaries and expenses, for FY21. The funding for core research is used primarily for the American Housing Survey, other surveys, data acquisition, and research dissemination that support evaluation of HUD's mission activities in domains such as affordable housing and housing finance.

PD&R's FY21 appropriation of $36 million for Salaries and Expenses, up $8 million from FY20, also supports evidence in the form of PD&R's in-house research and evaluation program; economic analyses; data linkage initiatives; management of housing surveys, contract research, and evaluation; and the work of the Chief Data Officer.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
   (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

For FY20 and FY21, HUD made available $91 million in technical assistance funds to equip the Department's program partners with the knowledge, skills, tools, capacity, and systems to implement HUD programs and policies successfully and to provide effective oversight of federal funding. State and local governments and authorities are among the eligible recipients of technical assistance. Community Compass integrates technical assistance funding from four major HUD program areas to better reflect the cross-cutting nature of housing and community development challenges. Eligible technical assistance activities include training and tool development to help program partners improve program management, evaluation, and performance measurement, and the Community Compass program itself has an increased evidence-based focus for FY20 and FY21.

In FY21, HUD is offering nearly $10 million through its Distressed Cities technical assistance program that helps local units of government in cities and places experiencing persistent poverty and population loss build capacity for processes including financial management, data collection, analysis, and tracking outcomes. In selecting technical assistance providers, HUD will consider the provider's experience incorporating equity into technical assistance engagement activities and equity outcomes into engagement goals or deliverables (see Rating Factor 1, Prior Experience and Performance).

HUD operates a Section 4 Capacity Building grant program that in FY21 provides $46 million for national intermediaries, including $10 million for rural needs, to build capacity for functions including assessing needs, planning programs, and evaluation.

HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which provides formula grants to entitlement jurisdictions, increases local evaluation capacity. Specifically, federal regulations (24 CFR570.200) authorize CDBG recipients (including city and state governments) to use up to 20% of their CDBG allocations for administration and planning costs that may include evaluation-capacity building efforts and evaluations of their CDBG-funded interventions (as defined in 570.205 and 570.206).

HUD offers grants through its Research Partnerships program to support research that addresses current research priorities. The Department is especially interested in increasing participation of Minority Serving Institutions of higher education and Historically Black Colleges and Universities in this program. The FY21 NOFO also encourages research on topics related to equity in HUD's programs and policies.

214

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: **Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?**
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

HUD is conducting a Department-wide Equity Assessment in response to the e*xecutive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities*. One of the four areas prioritized as an immediate area for assessment is procurement. As part of this assessment, the team will examine HUD's efforts to strengthen evaluation capacity for minority and women-owned businesses, community-based evaluators, or nontraditional evaluation contractors. HUD will follow the Equity Assessment with an Equity Transformation Plan that seeks to embed and improve equity across all HUD's work.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
  Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
  (Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score
10
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

HUD's FY18–22 Strategic Plan, as amended by HUD's FY21 Annual Performance Plan, defines strategic objectives, priority outcome goals, and program metrics supporting each objective. Progress on program metrics is tracked through the Annual Performance Plan. In FY21, HUD began to develop a new Strategic Plan that will reflect enhanced support for evidence-building through integration with the Learning Agenda and structured Capacity Assessment as provided by the Evidence Act.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

HUD uses data and evidence extensively to improve outcomes and return on investment. The primary means are through PD&R's investments in data collection, program demonstrations and evaluations, and research guided by a multi-year learning agenda. HUD's extensive use of outcome-oriented performance metrics in the Annual Performance Plan; and senior staff oversight and monitoring of key outcomes and initiatives through quarterly performance management meetings that will be supported by a new CFO performance management module under development.

A HUD initiative to modernize technologies for using data to improve outcomes includes elements of intelligent automation and artificial intelligence, using advanced data analytics and visualization, and building electronic records management, intelligent data extraction, and electronic forms.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

In 2019, HUD expanded the Standards for Success data collection and reporting framework for discretionary grant programs to cover Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency Service Coordinator (ROSS) grants, Multifamily Housing Service Coordinator grants, and Multifamily Housing Budget-Based Service Coordinator Sites. The framework supports better outcomes by providing a more standardized performance measurement framework, better alignment with Departmental strategies, and more granular reporting to support analytics.

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

HUD's senior staff support continuous improvement and oversight and monitoring of key outcomes and initiatives through quarterly performance management meetings. These processes are supported by ongoing, significant investments in evidence-building as documented in the Annual Performance Plan and the iterative process of developing the Research Roadmap learning agenda, as well as development of a new performance management module by the Chief Financial Officer. Monitoring and analysis based on administrative data have a symbiotic and complementary relationship with structured evaluation and program demonstrations.

HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research also hosts ongoing Knowledge Collaboratives designed to support continuous learning and improve performance. Examples include a Data Knowledge Collaborative, an RCT Knowledge Collaborative, and a Knowledge Collaborative on Equity in Evaluation, as well as a new inter-office user group that shares information and tools for using statistical software effectively. For example, a recent meeting of the Knowledge Collaborative on random assignment experiments considered the topics of research preregistration and multiple hypothesis testing. The agenda for the meeting included discussions of the concepts of preregistration and multiple hypothesis testing and of the steps that HUD PD&R could take to encourage (or require pre-registration) of its research studies and guidance it could develop for contracted researchers regarding the multiple comparisons problem. The Knowledge Collaborative on Equity in Evaluation also recently worked on revising HUD's Evaluation Policy to incorporate considerations of equity throughout.

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

In FY21, HUD will develop a strategic data plan, which will include an open data policy. Currently, HUD's open data program includes existing assets including administrative datasets on data.hud.gov, spatially enabled data on the eGIS portal, PD&R datasets for researchers and practitioners, a robust partnership with the Census Bureau, U.S. Postal Service vacancy data, and health data linkages with the National Center for Health Statistics. HUD's public datasets are designed to allow analysis by race/ethnicity, gender, and other equity-related characteristics to the extent possible given the nature of the data and privacy constraints.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

HUD has extensive data sharing processes including public sharing, interagency sharing, and internal sharing, with each mode requiring specific controls and documentation. In FY21, HUD will review its existing data inventory and update it accordingly to produce a comprehensive data inventory. HUD will also revisit its data inventory schedule to ensure the agency is performing the activities necessary to develop and maintain a comprehensive data inventory.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

HUD has extensively promoted data access and data linkage, including the following approaches:

- An updated list of open data assets; numerous PD&R-produced datasets for researchers and practitioners, including tenant public use microdata samples, Picture of Subsidized Households, FMR and Income limits, Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) special tabulations of the American Community Survey; and an eGIS portal providing geo-identified open data to support public analysis of housing and community development issues using GIS tools. The eGIS portal is a comprehensive data source, covering the majority of HUD's programs and initiatives. New mappable data added to the eGIS portal in FY21 include locations of Federally Qualified Health Centers to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts related to public and assisted housing programs.

- Data linkage agreements with the National Center for Health Statistics and the Census Bureau to enhance major national survey datasets by identifying HUD-assisted households, with updates continuing in FY21; making available major program demonstration datasets in secure environments; and producing special open-access tabulations of census data for HUD's partners. The agreement with the Census Bureau includes three-way data matching between HUD tenant data, American Housing Survey data, and American Community Survey data.

- HUD has created a repository of properties, units and tenants that merge data across the various HUD rental assistance programs for use in research, evaluation and reporting. This allows for standardization and greater access to socio-demographic characteristics of HUD's clients.

- Engagement in cooperative agreements with research organizations, including both funded Research Partnerships and unfunded Data License Agreements, to support innovative research that leverages HUD's data assets and informs HUD's policies and programs. Data licensing protocols ensure that confidential information is protected.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

HUD's Statistical Official supports the Evidence Officer on issues related to protection of confidential data and statistical efficiency. HUD's Evaluation Policy specifies that HUD protects client privacy by adhering to the Rule of Eleven to prevent

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

disclosure from tabulations with small cell sizes. PD&R's data licensing protocols ensure that researchers protect confidential information when using HUD's administrative data or program demonstration datasets.

The Statistical Official collaborates with statistical agencies to create data linkages and develop data products that are machine-readable and include robust privacy protections. HUD has an interagency agreement with the Census Bureau to conduct the American Housing Survey and collaborates with Census staff to examine disclosure issues for AHS public use files and the potential for "synthetic" public datasets to support researchers in estimating summary statistics with no possibility of reidentifying survey respondents. Another interagency agreement allows the Census Bureau to link data from HUD's randomized control trials with other administrative data collected under the privacy protections of its Title 13 authority. These RCT datasets are the first intervention data added to Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (RDCs) by any federal agency. Strict RDC protocols and review of all output ensure that confidential information is protected, and the open data and joint support for researchers are currently facilitating seven innovative research projects at minimal cost to HUD.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

HUD has an updated list of open data assets, an open data program, numerous PD&R datasets for researchers and practitioners, and an eGIS portal providing geo-identified data to support public analysis of housing and community development issues related to multiple programs and policy domains using GIS tools. For example, HUD supports local governments in assessing and planning for housing needs by providing summary data files about HUD-supported public and assisted housing and about local housing needs. These accessible data assets have privacy protections. Researchers needing detailed microdata can obtain access through data licensing agreements.

HUDExchange offers numerous resources and training opportunities to help program partners use data assets more effectively. Additional technical assistance is offered through the program, a $91 million technical assistance program to equip HUD's customers with the knowledge, skills, tools, capacity, and systems to implement HUD programs and policies successfully and provide effective oversight of federal funding.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

In FY21, HUD will produce a study of the feasibility of HUD producing a national database of evictions that would be available to all levels of government and the general public to track and assess evictions, including eviction trends by race, gender, disability status, ethnicity, and age. If the study determines that such a database is feasible and if Congress funds its development, such a database will be an important tool for analyzing equitable treatment of renters.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score
3
(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

HUD's Program Evaluation Policy defines standards that prioritize rigorous methods for research and evaluation covering impact evaluations; implementation of process evaluations; descriptive studies; outcome evaluations; and formative evaluations; and both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It also provides for timely dissemination of such evidence to stakeholders. HUD updated the Program Evaluation Policy in August 2021 to address the rigorous inclusion of qualitative evidence and considerations related to equity.

HUD's Program Evaluation Policy commits HUD to using "the most rigorous methods that are appropriate to the evaluation question and feasible within budget and other constraints… Where feasible, research should employ a treatment group and a counterfactual …. For such causal questions, experimental approaches are preferred." The Policy also establishes standards for transparency: "HUD will release methodologically valid evaluations without regard to the findings. Evaluation reports must describe the methods used, including strengths and weaknesses, and discuss the generalizability of the findings. Evaluation reports must present comprehensive results, including favorable, unfavorable, and null findings."

The consequences of HUD's commitment to rigor may be seen in HUD's priority research projects:
* IWISH, a cluster-randomized health intervention at 40 treatment housing developments and 80 control housing developments

222

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
   Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
   (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

- The long-term follow-up to the Family Options Study, which randomized over 2000 homeless families to 4 treatment regimes.
- The Rent Reform Study, which randomized assisted non-elderly non-disabled households to two different rent structures in 4 sites.
- The First Time Homebuyer Education and Counseling Demonstration, which randomized more than 5,800 prospective first-time homebuyers from 28 large metropolitan areas.
- The Moving to Work Flexibilities study, which randomized 31 PHAs to partial deregulation versus status quo.
- The Family Self-Sufficiency demonstration, which randomized voucher holders at 18 sites and followed them for 7 years.
- The Rental Assistance Demonstration evaluation, which compared 24 RAD-conversion projects with 48 matched non-converted public housing projects on financial indicators and changes in the physical stock.
- The Voucher Mobility Demonstration, which will randomize 14,000 voucher holders in 9 sites to receive neighborhood mobility counseling (or not).

Further, HUD's commitment to independence (in the Evaluation Policy Statement) has led us to provide PII to dozens of independent research teams across the country, who match our data with other sources to measure the consequences of housing assistance for tenants of assisted housing. HUD's commitment to independence has also led us to long-term matching of our data with surveys sponsored by the National Center for Health Statistics, to monitor trends in disease conditions among the assisted population.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

HUD seeks to employ tiered evidence in funding decisions by embedding implementation and impact evaluations in funding requests for program initiatives, including major program demonstrations that employ random assignment methods. These include the Moving To Work Expansion demonstration, the Rental Assistance Demonstration, the Rent Reform Demonstration, the Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration, the Housing Counseling Demonstration, and the Family Options Demonstration, described above. Such trials provide robust evidence to inform scale-up funding decisions.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

HUD extended its standardized data collection and reporting framework, Standards for Success, to additional discretionary grant programs in FY19. The framework consists of a repository of data elements that participating programs use in their grant reporting, creating common definitions and measures across programs for greater analysis and coordination of services.

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

HUD provides resources and assistance to support community partners in evidence-based practice through the HUD Exchange web portal and through Community Compass technical assistance. PD&R provides the public, policymakers, and practitioners with evidence of what works through the Regulatory Barriers Clearinghouse and HUD USER, which is a portal and web store for program evaluations, case studies, and policy analysis and research. The evaluations of major program demonstrations provide rigorous evidence about effect sizes and variations in effects between key subgroups. Research available on HUD USER supports greater equity in housing and community development policy, including HUD's foundational research to measure the extent of housing discrimination and experimental demonstrations and other studies assessing how best to increase economic opportunity for disadvantaged and underserved populations. HUD USER also contains pages dedicated to HUD's most important research areas, including research on Family Homelessness, De-regulation in Public Housing, and Supportive Services for Older Adults.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

HUD provides resources and assistance to support community partners in evidence-based practice through the HUD Exchange web portal and through technical assistance. PD&R provides the public, policymakers, and practitioners with evidence of what works primarily through HUD USER, a portal and web store for program evaluations, case studies, and policy analysis and research; the Regulatory Barriers Clearinghouse; and through initiatives such as Sustainable Construction Methods in Indian Country and the Consumer's Guide to Energy-Efficient and Healthy Homes. This content is designed to provide current policy

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

information, elevate effective practices, and synthesize data and other evidence in accessible formats such as Evidence Matters. Through these resources, researchers and practitioners can see the full breadth of work on a given topic (e.g., rigorous established evidence, case studies of what has worked in the field, and new innovations currently being explored) to inform their work.

PD&R has increased emphasis on generating interim reports during long-term impact evaluations. Such interim reports provide practitioners with early findings about implementation practice and outcomes that can inform their own program designs. A recent example is the Interim Report from HUD's Supportive Services Demonstration, published in 2020. A second Interim Report from this study is forthcoming in 2021.

Community Compass technical assistance for urban, rural, and tribal partners is designed to facilitate understanding of community and housing development issues in a way that cuts across program silos. It supports them in evaluation, evidence-building, integrating knowledge management principles, and sharing practices.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation and labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

6

(out of 7 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

HUD has an Office of Innovation led by a Deputy Assistant Secretary that facilitates both routine innovation and improvements to departmental operations, services and working conditions. Examples of recent work include assessing the feasibility of modernizing HUD headquarters' energy and information system and creating a standardized Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) submission package. The Office of Innovation also organized a five-day Innovative Housing Showcase on the National Mall with federal and private sector partners in June 2019 to demonstrate new housing technology and discuss innovation barriers and opportunities. The entire local HUD staff was encouraged to attend and view the innovative technologies, and another Showcase with interagency participation is planned for 2021. The Office of Innovation is developing prize competitions to stimulate innovation in housing and HUD policy and programs.

Additionally, the Government National Mortgage Corporation, or Ginnie Mae, has several innovation teams and operates an Innovation Laboratory to advance the application of machine learning to strengthen operations. In 2021, the Office of Innovation is working with The Opportunity Project on a 2021 sprint on Analyzing Housing and Migration Trends Post-COVID 19. The purpose of the sprint is to develop data and visualizations to help stakeholders understand how housing needs have shifted during (and as a result of) the pandemic as some people moved away from employers and some industries collapsed or shifted to remote operations. The stakeholders that could benefit from these data and tools are public housing agencies, city and regional planners, housing developers, schools, state and local governments, and other federal agencies.

HUD administers five types of juried Secretary's Awards to encourage excellence in addressing housing and community development challenges: Public-Philanthropic Partnerships, Opportunity and Empowerment, Healthy Homes, Historic

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation and labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

Preservation, and Housing and Community Design. An Innovation in Affordable Housing Competition engages multidisciplinary teams of graduate students in addressing a specific housing problem developed by an actual public housing agency.

7.2 Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

HUD established the Office of Innovation in 2019 to advance innovation in several domains. The Office managed the 2019 Innovative Housing Showcase and is developing a similar Showcase for 2021 and prize competitions to stimulate innovation in housing and HUD policy and programs. HUD's Office of Innovation also recently worked with The Opportunity Project to improve communication between HUD's Envision Centers and their local stakeholders and is now working with the Opportunity Project to provide data and visualizations related to the housing industry impacts of the changes to the workplace and society post-COVID.

FY20 grants fund cooperative agreements for pre-competitive research in homebuilding innovations, with a similar program for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, for more affordable, energy efficient, resilient, and healthier housing. HUD seeks to engage the insights and creativity of HBCUs to advance problem-solving toward greater diversity and more equitable outcomes.

The Department promotes evidence-based innovation by using program demonstrations to experimentally test potential policy enhancements, which have included eight low-cost, behaviorally informed experiments using interagency data matching and assistance from the GSA Office of Evaluation Sciences. Other innovative research ideas from external stakeholders are supported by the Research Partnerships program. Competitive awards for Healthy Homes Technical Studies generate innovation in the evaluation and control of housing-related health and safety hazards.

An interagency agreement with the Census Bureau has made datasets from HUD's randomized control trials available for linkage with census data and administrative datasets. The RCT datasets are the first intervention data added to Federal Statistical Research Data Centers (RDCs) by any federal agency, and joint support is available to help researchers gain access and learn to use the restricted data successfully for innovative research, with seven projects currently underway.

HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration, which restructures the financing of the nation's public housing to address capital needs backlogs, has the additional innovative feature of providing tenants with a Choice Mobility option. Choice Mobility supports self-sufficiency by offering priority receipt of a Housing Choice Voucher providing freedom to move to neighborhoods with greater economic opportunities or better schools and amenities.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation and labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

HUD's regulation of manufactured housing production is guided by a federal advisory committee, the Manufactured Housing Consensus Committee, to provide increased ability for the industry to produce some of the nation's most innovative, safe, and affordable housing.

HUD has a Robotics Process Automation initiative devoted to freeing the workforce from low-value, repetitive work through software robotics solutions. Specialized computer programs known as "bots" automate and standardize repeatable business processes without costly investments in conventional automation. Planned efforts involving payroll, accounts receivable and payable, invoice processing, inventory management, report creation, and data migration have potential to shift over 50,000 hours of employee time from low-value to high-value work.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

PD&R is conducting numerous random-assignment program demonstrations to test new, innovative program models, as described in PD&R's biennial report and online: the Family Self-Sufficiency Demonstration, First-Time Homebuyer Education and Counseling Demonstration, Pre-Purchase Homeownership Counseling Demonstration, Support and Services at Home (SASH) Demonstration for elderly households, Supportive Services Demonstration for health services in elderly housing, Rent Reform Demonstration, Rental Assistance Demonstration, and the Small Area Fair Market Rent Demonstration.

HUD also is using random assignment and administrative data linkages to test the impact of education navigators on rates of application for federal student aid by young residents of public housing.

The Secretary's Awards competitions use expert juries who assess quantitative and qualitative information submitted by applicants to identify particularly creative solutions to challenging problems. A juried Innovation in Affordable Housing Competition engages multidisciplinary teams of graduate students in applying their creativity to addressing a specific housing problem developed by an actual public housing agency.

HUD's Office of Innovation is advancing innovation in several domains. In 2020 the office worked with The Opportunity Project to improve communication between HUD's Envision Centers and their local stakeholders and identified a solution that is in beta testing in 30 sites across the country. In 2021, the Office is again working with the Opportunity Project to provide data and visualizations related to the housing industry impacts of the changes to the workplace and society post-COVID.

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation and labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

In 2019, PD&R published an independent review of building technology innovation policies, programs, and strategies to increase the impact of federal research and development investments.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

9

(out of 15 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, HUD's five largest competitive grant programs are:
1. Continuum of Care ($2.656 billion; eligible grantees: state and local governments and coalitions)
2. Lead-Hazard Reduction ($357 million; eligible grantees: local governments)
3. Choice Neighborhoods Implementation ($182 million; eligible grantees: state and local governments; FY20 NOFA with funding allocated in FY21)
4. Indian Housing Block Grant – Competitive Grant Program ($95 million; eligible grantees: Native American tribal governments and tribal organizations)
5. Resident Opportunity and Self-Sufficiency Service Coordinator Program ($35 million; eligible grantees: Native American tribal governments and tribal organizations;, Public housing authorities/Indian housing authorities, nonprofits; resident associations)

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

The Continuum of Care program (CoC) provides homelessness assistance awards on the basis of system performance measures focused on outcomes and evidence of effectiveness. This includes up to 56 points (out of 200) for past "performance related to reducing homelessness" and four points for "reallocat[ing] lower performing projects to create new higher performing projects that are based on performance review of existing projects." Additionally, a precondition for Continuum of Care applicants

230

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

to be awarded FY19 expansion bonus funding was that they rank homeless assistance projects on the basis of how they improve system performance (p. 34).

The Lead Hazard Reduction Grant Program is designed to maximize the number of children under the age of six protected from lead poisoning by strategically targeting lead reduction efforts to neighborhoods where children are at greatest risk. The FY21 grants require grantees to use evidence-based lead hazard control methods, meet cost-savings, effectiveness, and grant compliance benchmarks, and gather pre- and post-treatment data to support and validate their investments. The application assigns 40 points (out of 102) based on grantees' organizational capacity and relevant experience. Past research showing large returns on investment supported HUD's decision to request a 24 percent increase in program funding for FY21, and HUD is funding studies using an implementation science framework to continue improving efficiency and efficacy of lead interventions.

The Resident Opportunity & Self-Sufficiency Service Coordinator (ROSS-SC) grant program is designed to assist residents of Public and Indian Housing make progress towards economic and housing self-sufficiency by removing the educational, professional and health barriers they face. For grantees applying for renewal funding, the application assigns up to 25 points (out of 45) for past performance, including the number of residents served and the grantee's effectiveness in spending down past funds. The application also assigns 20 points for soundness of approach, which includes the past performance of any subcontractors and the grantee's plans to track residents' progress. New applicants are also assessed on their relevant experience, capacity, and soundness of approach.

The Indian Housing competitive grant program was established to address issues of overcrowded and physically inadequate housing identified by a PD&R needs assessment completed in 2017, Housing Needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Tribal Areas. The FY21 grant application assigned 20 points (out of 102) based on grantees' organizational capacity and relevant experience. The grant application also assigns points for data supporting identified needs and past efforts to address identified needs.

8.3 **Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)**

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

As a condition of grant award, all HUD competitive grantees are required to cooperate (p. 5) in any HUD-sponsored research or evaluation studies.

The Continuum of Care program is supported by the National Homeless Data Analysis Project, which provides communities with resources to improve data collection and consistent reporting about individuals experiencing homelessness to support national Annual Homeless Assessment Reports.

HUD Lead Paint grantees are required to integrate evidence into their work by conducting clearance testing of all housing units treated. Technical studies provide evidence to improve lead hazard detection, evaluation, and control technologies, as well as implementation, and rigorous evaluation has demonstrated the large return on investment related to children's health from controlling lead hazards. All HUD-funded programs require recipients to submit, not less than annually, a report documenting achievement of outcomes under the purpose of the program and the work plan in the award agreement for accountability purposes and to build evidence of effective practices in the field.

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

HUD's Housing Counseling Grant Program ($37 million in FY20, as well as $12.5 million in supplemental grants) provides counseling services to tenants and homeowners. One of the program's main objectives is to "Distribute federal financial support to housing counseling agencies based on past performance." As such, the program allocates seven points (out of 100) for past performance based on the "the positive impacts that an Applicant's housing counseling services had on clients." HUD scores this item based on its own performance records.

HUD continues to extend the Standards for Success reporting framework to additional competitive grant programs, establishing a performance outcomes framework that will both drive performance and determine future funding recipients by providing strategically aligned performance metrics that are standardized and sufficiently granular to provide information on relative effectiveness.

232

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

The Continuum of Care (CoC) program is HUD's largest program targeted to adults and children experiencing homelessness. HUD awards COC funding to over 6,500 projects through a national competition. Policy priorities for the CoC program have focused on preventing and ending homelessness through access to permanent housing, including ending homelessness for veterans, families, youth, and people experiencing chronic homelessness. Over more than a decade, increased CoC effectiveness has been supported by Homeless Management Information Systems and evidence-based funding of increased permanent supportive housing. Between 2011 and 2020, the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness in families with children declined by 27%. After a steady decline for the first half of the last decade, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness increased by 42% from 2016-2020 and is back up to its highest level since 2008. At the same time however, the number of veterans experiencing homelessness declined by 43%. Following federal criteria, 78 communities and three states have effectively ended veteran homelessness.

HUD has taken a proactive role to address the racial disparities in rates of homeless by publishing resources and providing technical; assistance to grantees. For example, in 2019 HUD created the CoC Racial Equity Access Tool to help communities understand who is accessing their homeless service system and what outcomes those families and individuals are realizing. In 2020, HUD published a guide to Increasing Equity in the Homeless Response System Through Expanding Procurement, which provides communities with recommendations for allocating CARES Act funds to address racial and ethnic disparities in the homeless response system. More recently, responding to the finding 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) that African Americans have remained considerably overrepresented among the homeless population compared to the U.S. population, HUD published a rich set of racial equity resources, data toolkits, and research reports related to identifying disparities and implementing responses to address the overrepresentation of people of color in the homeless system.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

HUD operates a centralized evaluation program under the guidance of the evaluation officer. As a condition of grant award, all

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

HUD competitive grantees are required to cooperate in any HUD-sponsored research or evaluation studies and to provide program monitoring data. A number of program statutes do not authorize formal evaluation as an eligible activity for use of program funds. HUD also provides technical assistance to strengthen grantees' capacity for evaluation and performance management capacity.

The Continuum of Care FY19 homelessness assistance program NOFA offers one point for applicants who propose to use requested funds to improve their ability to evaluate the outcome of projects funded by the CoC Program and the Emergency Solutions Grant program (p. 39). There was no FY 2020 CoC Program Competition, HUD renewed all awards in recognition of the fact that communities have been and will continue to be consumed with COVID-19 response and have limited capacity to participate in the traditional CoC competition.

HUD intends to incorporate and disseminate best practices regarding racial equity identified in the ongoing equity assessment to external stakeholders as part of the agency's long-term equity transformation. HUD has already begun this process by publishing racial equity resources, data toolkits, and research reports related to identifying disparities and implementing responses to address the overrepresentation of people of color in the homeless system. One of these resources is a CoC Racial Equity Analysis Tool, which helps CoCs identify racial disparities in their system by presenting data on poverty rates by race and ethnicity, age, and veteran status at the CoC level of geography.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 10 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest non-competitive grant programs are:
1. Public Housing Formula Grants (Operating Expenses) ($4.84 billion; eligible applicants: Public housing authorities);
2. Public Housing Formula Grants (Capital Expenses) ($2.77 billion; Public housing authorities);
3. Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Administrative Fees ($2.16 billion; eligible applicants: State and local public housing agencies that administer Housing Choice Vouchers);
4. Community Development Block Grant Entitlement/Non-Entitlement ($3.45 billion; eligible applicants: entitlement cities and counties and state allocation agencies);
5. HOME Investment Partnerships ($1.35 billion; eligible applicants: participating jurisdictions).

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in its five largest non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

Although the funding formulas are prescribed in statute, evaluation-based interventions are central to each program. HUD uses evidence from a 2015 Administrative Fee study of the costs that high-performing PHAs incur in administering a HCV program to revise its approach to providing administrative fees that incentivize PHAs to improve outcomes in leasing and housing mobility. HUD has also used the results of its Landlord Taskforce to provide guidance to PHAs on working effectively with landlords and to propose policy and fee changes to ensure strong landlord participation in the new Emergency Housing Voucher program funded through the American Rescue Plan. In allocating $5 billion in Emergency Housing Voucher funding to

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

PHAs, HUD developed an allocation formula that considered (among other factors) evidence of PHA capacity to implement the program effectively and quickly.

HUD's funding of public housing is being radically shifted through the evidence-based Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which enables accessing private capital to address the $26 billion backlog of capital needs funding. Based on demonstrated success of RAD, for FY20 HUD proposed to transfer $95 million from the Operating Fund and Capital Fund to the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance fund to support RAD conversions. For FY21 HUD is proposing to remove the cap on the number of public housing developments to be converted to Section 8 contracts. HUD is beginning to evaluate RAD's impacts on children. HUD is also conducting a Rent Reform demonstration and a Moving To Work (MTW) demonstration to test efficiencies of changing rent rules and effects on tenant outcomes.

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Evidence-building is central to HUD's funding approach through the use of prospective program demonstrations. These include the Public Housing Operating Fund's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), the Public Housing Capital Grants' Rent Reform demonstration, and the Housing Choice Voucher program's Moving To Work (MTW) demonstration grants. As Congress moved to expand MTW flexibilities to additional public housing authorities (PHAs), HUD sought authority to randomly assign cohorts of PHAs to provide the ability to rigorously test specific program innovations.

Program funds are provided to operate demonstrations through the HCV account, Tenant-Based Rental Assistance. These include the Tribal HUD-VA Supportive Housing (Tribal HUD-VASH) demonstration of providing permanent supportive housing to Native American veterans and the FSS-Family Unification Program demonstration that tests the effect of providing vouchers to at-risk young adults who are aging out of foster care.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers are allocated in part on the administrative performance of housing agencies as measured by their past utilization of HUD-VASH vouchers in HUD's Voucher Management System (Notice PIH-2019-15 (HA)). The performance information helps ensure that eligible recipients are actually able to lease units with the vouchers that HUD funds. The HUD-VASH Exit Study documented that 87,864 VASH vouchers were in circulation in April 2017, contributing substantially to the 47-percent decline in the number of homeless Veterans since 2010.

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

To address a severe backlog of capital needs funding for the nation's public housing stock, the Rental Assistance Demonstration was authorized in 2011 to convert the properties to project-based Section 8 contracts to attract an infusion of private capital. The 2019 final report on the RAD evaluation showed that conversions successfully raised $12.6 billion of funding, an average of $121,747 per unit to improve physical quality and stabilize project finances. Based on the program's successes, the limit on the number of public housing conversions was increased to 455,000 units in 2018, nearly half of the stock, and HUD has been proposing to eliminate the cap. Additionally, HUD extended the conversion opportunity to legacy multifamily programs through RAD 2.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

Communities receiving HUD block grant funding through Community Development Block Grants, HOME block grants, and other programs are required to consult local stakeholders, conduct housing needs assessments, and develop needs-driven Consolidated Plans to guide their activities. They then provide Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Reports (CAPERs) to document progress toward their Consolidated Plan goals in a way that supports continued community involvement in evaluating program efforts.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

HUD's Community Development Block Grant program, which provides formula grants to entitlement jurisdictions, increases local evaluation capacity. Specifically, federal regulations (Section 24 CFR 570.200) authorize CDBG recipients (including city and state governments) to use up to 20% of their CDBG allocations for administration and planning costs that may include evaluation-capacity building efforts and evaluations of their CDBG-funded interventions (as defined in 570.205 and 570.206).

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 8 points)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

The Evaluation of the Housing First model of rehousing chronically homeless individuals with serious mental illness supported a policy shift toward first achieving housing stability to provide a platform for social services. Based on such evidence, HUD continues to encourage the use of more cost-effective rapid rehousing approaches combined with increased permanent supportive housing that is integrated with mainstream services provided by HHS, VA, and others. Additionally, a precondition for Continuum of Care applicants to be awarded FY19 expansion bonus funding was that they rank homeless assistance projects on the basis of how they improve system performance.

HUD created the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) to give public housing agencies a new tool to preserve and improve their public housing properties and address the backlog of deferred maintenance. RAD is an example of HUD allowing local agencies to shift funds from public housing to Section 8 programs to make cost effective use of those funds and preserve the affordable housing stock. Since the program's creation in 2012, public housing authorities have converted 1,390 projects covering 179,651 housing units under the RAD program. PD&R has funded a series of evaluations of RAD that have informed its implementation.

CDBG-DR (Disaster Recovery) is a large and growing program funded by emergency appropriations outside of HUD's regular

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

budgeting process. In FY18, HUD started promoting mitigation activities for disaster-prone communities, allocating $16 billion of the $28 billion in emergency disaster recovery funds for disaster mitigation in previously disaster-stricken communities. This policy shift was informed by evidence that vulnerability of communities to disasters is increasing even as frequency and severity of severe weather events might also be increasing, such that the National Institute of Building Sciences estimated that society saves $4 in future losses for every $1 spent on mitigation. HUD also drew on the evidence of mitigation pilots through the Hurricane Sandy Rebuild by Design competition and the National Disaster Resilience Competition. By investing in mitigation activities, rather than paying to rebuild existing infrastructure in its previous form, HUD shifted funds in order to help break the cycle of publicly-funded rebuilding and repeated loss.

HUD grant programs typically provide for recapture of funds that are not committed in a timely fashion, or that remain unexpended after the limits. Effective management by grantees can be especially crucial for timely completion of complex housing development projects, such as with the Capital Fund for public housing and Housing Trust Fund for states. Such funds are reallocated to more effective grantees. For the new $5 billion Emergency Housing Vouchers program, HUD will assess the performance of the public housing agencies (PHAs) implementing the program one year after each PHA receives its funding increment and may revoke or reallocate unissued vouchers from PHAs with substandard leasing performance.

Preference points used by competitive programs favor grantees that provide evidence of successful outcomes and strategies. The Continuum of Care program awards points that shift funds toward grant applications that have demonstrated better outcomes, that rank and fund better-performing projects, and that take over programs from small and struggling recipients. As noted in the notice of funding: "To encourage CoC mergers and mitigate the potential adverse scoring implications that may occur when a high performing CoC merges with one or more lower performing CoC(s), HUD will award up to 25 bonus points to CoCs that completed a merger..."

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

240

10. Repurpose for Results: **In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?** (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

Through the Community Compass technical assistance program, HUD offers numerous prepared training opportunities as well as in-depth program assistance for grantees or program recipients needing intensive, tailored assistance or long-term capacity-building support to remediate challenges and achieve their potential as HUD program partners.

HUD has proposed to use Public Housing operating funds set aside for receivership of troubled housing authorities more proactively to address the needs of high-risk PHAs before they go into receivership, including through competitive grants for PHAs that are troubled, substandard, at-risk, or insolvent to help preserve affordable housing for the future. The Real Estate Assessment Center collects extensive data on physical condition, finances, and management to determine PHA status, and field staff have expertise to identify risk factors and useful corrective actions.

FY 21 Score

67

★ ★ ★

BRONZE 2021

Administration for Community Living (HHS)

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

The **Administration for Community Living** (ACL), an operating division within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, first participated in the *2018 Invest in What Works Federal Standard of Excellence*, and has since accelerated its efforts to build an organizational culture focused on performance and research.

ACL's centralized capacity for performance, research, and evaluation is housed in the Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE). The Director of OPE serves as the agency's evaluation and performance officer with responsibility for coordinating *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* (Evidence Act) implementation within the operating division. The OPE Director also serves on the HHS data council, HHS Data Governance Board, and Federal Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy. In 2021, OPE gained more staff and capacity to support learning and research. As part of its growing efforts to increase the agency's evidenced-based policy capacity, OPE provides staff training on evidence-based grantmaking, which will enhance the agency's ability to invest in better results and outcomes.

Of particular note, ACL is committed to implementing the Evidence Act even though, because of its status as a component of a CFO Act agency, it is not mandated to do so. In 2020-2021, the agency made major strides in meeting the requirements of the Evidence Act by issuing a FY23 Evaluation Plan, developing an Interim Learning Agenda, participating in the development of an HHS-wide Evidence Capacity Assessment, and drafting a primer on data governance (akin to the Data Governance Body that sets and enforces priorities for managing data as a strategic asset required by the Evidence Act). The agency is also using National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health and Healthcare to inform its evaluation framework. This growing investment in, and capacity for, research and evaluation will benefit the agency as it continues to execute its mission to serve aging populations across the country.

These efforts to build evidence are also expanded on through the ACL's grants. ACL supports evidence-building activities through non-competitive grants, which aim to gather and report best practices in the Caregiver Support Services program; improve service delivery through the State Councils on Developmental Disabilities planning processes; and adapt and scale evidence-based programs for children and older adults with disabilities through the RESILIENCE Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. During the pandemic, the agency's focus and emphasis on learning was applied to the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, which produced research on the

access challenges face coverings pose for the deaf and hard of hearing as well as recommendations to better support those with hearing impairments.

In future years ACL will continue to focus on improving evidence-based grantmaking strategies as formal practices in ACL competitive and non-competitive grant awards.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Community Living | Criteria 1 Leadership

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?**

FY21 Score

9

(out of 9 points)

Administration for Community Living

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Director of the Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE) serves as the Administration for Community Living (ACL) evaluation officer. OPE, which oversees the agency's performance and evaluation work, has six full time staff positions and three full-time onsite contractors. In FY21 it had a budget of approximately $13.6 million. The Director of OPE has the education, skill, and experience to meet the Evaluation Officer requirements listed in the Evidence Act and routinely gauges the coverage, quality, methods, consistency, effectiveness, independence, and balance of the portfolio of evaluations, policy research, and ongoing evaluation activities of the agency and assesses agency capacity to support the development and use of evaluation. The Director is also the designated ACL Performance Officer.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The Director of the Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE) serves as the Administration of Community Livings' Chief Data Officer. OPE, which oversees the agency's performance and evaluation work, has six full time staff positions and three full-time onsite contractors. In FY21 it had a budget of approximately $13.6 million. The Director of OPE leads ACL's Data Governance Body, including facilitating collaborative activities among the numerous actors with responsibilities and needs for data within the agency and has demonstrated training and experience in data management, governance, collection, analysis, protection, use, and dissemination and fulfills the aspects of this role which are relevant to ACL. These include coordinating with ACL's CIO and Chief Privacy Officer on use, protection, dissemination, and generation of data to ensure that the data needs of the agency are met; ensuring that agency data conform with data management best practices; engaging agency employees, the public, and contractors in using public data assets; and encouraging collaborative approaches on improving data use. The Director of OPE

245

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Community Living | Criteria 1 Leadership

|...| **RESULTS**
***
FOR **AMERICA**

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?

serves as the agency liaison to other federal entities through, for example, serving as the ACL representative to the HHS data council, and serving on the Federal Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy as well as the HHS Data Governance Board.

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

The Director of ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation serves the functions of evaluation officer, chief data officer, and performance officer. In order to coordinate activities relevant to these positions, the OPE Director and staff coordinate the support, improvement, and evaluation of agency programs through implementation of an agency performance strategy, learning agenda, annual agency wide evaluation plan, and the National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. The structure requires semi-annual meetings with ACL leadership and management staff and annual consultation with all program managers. In FY19 ACL instituted a council to improve ACL's data governance and quality, including the development of improved processes and standards for defining, collecting, reviewing, certifying, analyzing, and presenting data that ACL collects through its evaluations, grant reporting, and other administrative data collections. Taken together, this robust governance structure ensures cohesive collection and use of evidence across ACL regarding program performance, evaluation, and improvement and to ensure that data are gathered, processed, and curated so as to produce evidence that program staff and agency leadership use for program and operational improvement. As an operating division without a statistical unit, ACL does not have a statistical officer.

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

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

ACL's public evaluation policy confirms ACL's commitment to conducting evaluations and using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice. ACL seeks to promote rigor, relevance, transparency, independence, and ethics in the conduct of evaluations. The policy addresses each of these principles. The policy was updated in 2021 to better reflect OMB guidance provided in M-20-12 and to more explicitly affirm ACL's commitment to equity in evaluation.

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

ACL's agency-wide evaluation plan was submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in support of HHS' requirement to submit an annual evaluation plan to OMB in conjunction with its Agency Performance Plan. ACL's annual evaluation plan includes the evaluation activities the agency plans related to the learning agenda and any other "significant" evaluation, such as those required by statute. The plan describes the systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of programs, projects, and processes as a basis for judgments, to improve effectiveness, and/or inform decision-makers about current and future activities.

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

Based on the learning agenda approach that ACL adopted in 2018, ACL published a learning agenda in FY20. In developing the plan, ACL engaged stakeholders through meetings with program staff and grantees as required under OMB M-19-23. Most meetings with stakeholder groups, such as through conference sessions, were put on hold for 2020 due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. In 2021, ACL did communicate with stakeholder groups to contribute to ACL's learning activities. These included

247

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

working with members of the RAISE Family Caregiving Advisory Council and a range of stakeholders to inform changes to the 2021 data collection under the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants. In 2021, ACL also released a request for information (RFI) directed to small businesses to solicit research approaches related to ACL's current research priorities.

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

ACL releases all evaluation reports as well as interim information such as issue briefs, webinar recordings, and factsheets based on data from its evaluation and evidence building activities.

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

Staff from the Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE) play an active role HHS's capacity assessment efforts serving on the Capacity Assessment and learning agenda Subcommittees of the HHS Evidence and Evaluation Council. ACL's self-assessment results were provided to HHS to support HHS' ability to submit the required information to OMB. ACL's self-assessment results provided information about planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback; and carrying out capacity-building activities in order to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations. Based on this information, in 2021 ACL focused on developing educational materials for ACL staff and data improvement tools for ACL grantees. In 2021 the ACL Data Council published a guide to evaluation system change initiatives, and additional documents to promote responsible data usage: Data Quality 201:Data Visualization and Data Quality 202: Data Quality Standards. While designed initially for ACL staff, they are available on the ACL website and have been promoted through several industry conferences.

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

Starting in 2020 and continuing into 2021, ACL is funding contracts to design the most rigorous evaluations appropriate to measure the return on investment of Aging Network, the extent to which ACL services address social determinants of health, and the value of volunteers to ACL programs. ACL typically funds evaluation design contracts, such as those for the Older Americans Act Title VI Tribal Grants Program evaluation and the Long Term Care Ombudsman Evaluation, that are used to determine the

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

most rigorous evaluation approach that is feasible given the structure of a particular program. While the Ombudsman program is full coverage programs, where comparison groups are not possible, ACL most frequently uses propensity score matching to identify comparison group members. This was the case for the Older Americans Act Nutrition Services Program and National Family Caregivers Support Program evaluations and the Wellness Prospective Evaluation Final Report conducted by CMS in partnership with ACL.

ACL's National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) funds the largest percentage of ACL's RCTs at 151 out of 659 (23%) of research projects employing a randomized clinical trial (RCT)To ensure research quality, NIDILRR adheres to strict peer reviewer evaluation criteria that are used in the grant award process. In addition, ACL's evaluation policy states that "In assessing the effects of programs or services, ACL evaluations will use methods that isolate to the greatest extent possible the impacts of the programs or services from other influences such as trends over time, geographic variation, or pre-existing differences between participants and non-participants. For such causal questions, experimental approaches are preferred. When experimental approaches are not feasible, high-quality quasi-experiments offer an alternative." ACL is in the process of implementing a method for rating each proposed evaluation against OMB's Program Evaluation Standards and Practices as defined in OMB M-20-12.

2021 **INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE**
Administration for Community Living | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
   (Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

9

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

3.1 ____ (Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

ACL invested $18.7 million on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing .81% of the agency's $2.3 billion FY21 enacted budget.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation (OPE) budget for evaluation was $13.6 million in FY21 and there were no significant changes to the evaluation budget since the previous year. The bulk of OPE's evaluation funds are based on a set-aside required in Title II, section 206, of the Older Americans Act, "From the total amount appropriated for each fiscal year to carry out title III, the Secretary may use such sums as may be necessary, but not to exceed 1⁄2 of 1 percent of such amount, for purposes of conducting evaluations under this section, either directly or through grants or contracts." In addition, in 2017 ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation established a mechanism that allows ACL programs not covered by the OAA set-aside to transfer funds to OPE to be able to support evaluations of their programs. In 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, OPE added approximately $1.0 million, $1.7 million, $3.2 million, $1.2 million, and $2.3 million from these programs to its evaluation budget respectively.

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

ACL primarily provides information resources to grantees to build their evaluation and evidence building capacity. Staff record trainings on evaluation topics, including an overview of performance measurement. ACL also has several resources and TA

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Administration for Community Living | Criteria 3 Resources

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

centers that focus on evidence building including one contract dedicated to improving performance data provided by Older Americans Act Title III, VI, and VII grantees that offers live and prerecorded webinars and a range of manuals and TA supports. ACL also published toolkits for strategic planning, data quality, performance measures, logic model development, and more. ACL provides technical assistance to grantees related to using evidence-based programs and building evidence. For example, the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging (NRC) provides different programs and approaches that deliver nutrition-related home- and community-based services (HCBS) administered through grants to the 56 states and territories. Access to Respite Care and Help (ARCH) provides training and technical assistance to the Lifespan Respite Network with a focus on performance measurement, sustainability, best practices, and research. The National Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Center supports grantees as they implement evidence-based interventions and innovative practices designed to empower and assist caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease and related disorders.

In an effort to better support Older Americans Act Title VI Native American Programs grantees with their data needs, OPE created several tools for grantee use. One tool is a template for collecting program satisfaction survey data from both nutrition and caregiver clients about the services they are receiving. This template is customizable, has a user guide and an excel spreadsheet for easy data tabulation and visualization as it creates charts from the entered data. OPE also worked to create an infographic for Title VI grantees to use by plugging in their own data (into an excel template with the help of a user guide) from a variety of sources they have ready access to so that they might create a two page visual document to share with stakeholders to showcase the services they are providing to their communities. OPE also created a Title VI Data Tracking Workbook, built with grantee input to help grantees track their data on a daily basis. This workbook provides monthly and quarterly statistics, as well as produces an annual roll up of data. Based on grantee feedback it has some customization built in and has a budget feature to help grantees manage their income and expenditures--data that ACL does not currently collect for this program. OPE has held webinars and trainings and question sessions on all of these tools in an effort to make them more user friendly for grantees and to encourage wide adoption of these tools for grantee use.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

As part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Annual Performance Plan and Report, ACL reports on the following two HHS Agency Priority Goals: (1) Increase the success rate of the Protection and Advocacy Program's individual or systemic advocacy, thereby advancing individuals with developmental disabilities' right to receive appropriate community based services, resulting in community integration and independence, and have other rights enforced, retained, restored and/or expanded; and (2) Improve dementia capability of long-term support systems to create dementia-friendly, livable communities (Lead Agency ACL). ACL's outcomes measures are available, by program, in its annual Congressional Budget Justification, and include measures of program efficiency. ACL submits annual reports to congress from its Administration on Disability, the Administration on Aging, and National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. ACL contributes other department-wide reports to congress such as the HHS Report to Congress on Minority Health.

4.2 Did the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?
ACL employs a moderate approach for analyzing evidence to find ways to improve return on investment that addresses multiple parts of the agency. In FY20, as part of its ongoing effort to ensure that agency funds are used effectively, ACL funded a 3-year contract, focused on ACL's Administration in Aging, to identify approaches to measure how and to what extent parts of the Aging Network leverage Older Americans Act funds to increase their available resources as well as how the Aging Network uses resources to measure and improve the quality of services available/provided. NIDILRR conducts research as part of their new employment research agenda to continue development of return-on-investment models that can be used by Vocational

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:
Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

Rehabilitation agencies to optimize the services they provide. In addition, in January 2021 ACL announced a new phase for the Innovative Technology Solutions for Social Care Referrals challenge competition. This is in addition to those launched in 2020 (Innovative Solutions to Address the direct Support Professional Crisis, Mental Health Challenge, Disability Employment Challenge). The goal of all the prize competitions is to encourage effective and efficient methods for meeting ACL's mission and improving services to its target populations. ACL also recently published the results of a study measuring the economic value of volunteerism for Older Americans Act programs.

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

As part of ACL's performance strategy and learning agenda approach OPE staff present performance data to ACL leadership several times a year. In addition, ACL leadership reviews performance data as part of the budget justification process that informs program funding decisions. OPE staff conduct annual meetings with ACL staff to report performance measure data and results to discuss methods for incorporating performance and evaluation findings into funding and operational decision-making. As part of annual evaluation planning efforts, staff from ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation consult with ACL center directors to identify evaluation priorities and review proposed evaluation approaches to ensure that the evaluation questions identified will provide information that will be useful for program improvement. Two projects started in late 2020 with the goal of improving agency performance are a study of how the services provided by ACL grantees influence the social determinants of health (SDOH) and an evaluation of how ACL supports grantee use of evidence-based programs that are required under Title IIID of the Older Americans Act. In 2021 ACL began using the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care to inform its evaluation framework. Specifically, ACL funded this project to explore the extent to which ACL grantees employ CLAS Standards in their service delivery processes, particularly their responsiveness to cultural practices, language and communication needs, LGBTQ+ needs, and health literacy. ACL also funded a study to examine the use and financial value of volunteers to its programs. In addition to a final report ACL also developed an effective practice guide to help grantees use volunteers effectively.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

As an operating division of a CFO Act Agency, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ACL is not required to have its own strategic data plan and utilizes HHS's data strategy. In 2016, ACL implemented a Public Access Plan as a mechanism for compliance with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy's public access policy. The plan focused on making published results of ACL/National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) funded research more readily accessible to the public; making scientific data collected through ACL/NIDILRR-funded research more readily accessible to the public; and increasing the use of research results and scientific data to further advance scientific endeavors and other tangible applications. In 2019, ACL created a council to improve ACL's data governance, including the development of improved processes and standards for defining, collecting, reviewing, certifying, analyzing, and presenting data that ACL collects through its evaluation, grant reporting, and administrative performance measures. In 2020, its first year, the ACL Data Council produced an annotated bibliography to provide essential background information about the topic, a Primer to detail best practices in data governance specifically as they apply to ACL, a Data Quality 101 infographic to guide decision-making processes related to data quality. ACL also has an internal tracking sheet to measure ACL response to the Federal Data Strategy.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

ACL provides comprehensive public access to its programmatic data through its Aging, Independence, and Disability Program Data Portal (AGID). ACL also had two data inventories available to the public on the NARIC website. REHABDATA, a database

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

of rehabilitation and disability literature and the Online Program Directory contains NIDILRR's previously-funded, currently-funded, and newly-funded grants. ACL/NIDILRR has a public access plan that was first published in February 2016. Its purpose is to make available to the public peer-reviewed publications and scientific data arising from research funded in whole or part by ACL through the NIDILRR, to the extent feasible and permitted by law and available resources. The requirements outlined in this plan are being applied prospectively and not retrospectively. ACL is also creating an internal evidence inventory that staff will be able to use to search for relevant program performance and evaluation data by agency priority question.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation has access to all of ACL's performance and evaluation data and is able to link those data and advise programs about their availability and usability. In March 2019, ACL completed the ACL Data Restructuring (DR) Project to assess the data hosted on AGID, and to develop and test a potential restructuring of the data in order to make it useful and usable for stakeholders. In 2019, ACL awarded a follow-on contract to further integrate its datasets along the lines of conceptual linkages, and to better align the measures within ACL's data collections across the agency. ACL funded several grants to promote data linkage including the Grants to Enhance State Adult Protective Services awarded in FY19 to increase intra- and inter-state sharing of information on APS cases and the 2020 Empowering Communities to Reduce Falls and Falls Risk to develop robust partnerships, develop a result-based, comprehensive strategy for reducing falls and fall risks among older adults and adults with disabilities living in your community and directs grantees to consider CDC opportunities to broaden and improve the linkage between primary care providers and evidence-based community falls prevention programs supported by ACL.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

As an operating division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ACL follows all departmental guidance regarding data privacy and security. This includes project-specific reviews by ACL's Office of Information Resource Management (OIRM), which monitors all of ACL's data collection activities to ensure the safety and security of ACL's data assets. In FY19, ACL

<u>5. Data:</u> **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

awarded a contract to stand up a "Data Council" to enhance the quality, security, and statistical usability of the data ACL collects through its evaluation, grant reporting, and administrative data collections, and to develop effective data governance standards. NIDILRR's Model Systems' data centers have extensive standard operating procedures that are designed to secure data and protect personal and confidential information. Below are a few illustrative examples from the Model Systems' Data Centers

- The Burn Model System National Data and Statistical Center has a Burn Model Systems' procedures' page that lists all of the Standard Operating Procedures that grantees contributing to this database must follow.
- The Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems' National Data and Statistical Center has a Standard Operating Procedures' page that describes the procedures that all grantees contributing to this database must follow
- The Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems' National Data and Statistical Center has a page on Using the National Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems' Database. Descriptions of what constitutes "de-identified data" can be found on this page.

In addition to the Model Systems' data centers referenced above NIDILRR developed Part 2: Preparing Data and Documentation; this page and video is part of the larger training course that NIDILRR grantees must complete entitled NIDILRR Data Archiving and Sharing Training. Additional guidance is available on the ICPSR web page entitled Resources for National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) Grantees.
In addition, each funding opportunity announcement states that "a data and safety monitoring board (DSMB) is required for all multi-site clinical trials involving interventions" (see for example the FOA for Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP): Assistive Technology to Promote Independence and Community Living (Development) HHS-2019-ACL-NIDILRR-DPGE-0355).

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

ACL data sets are made publicly available through its AGID system. ACL staff provide technical assistance through presentations and ACL's technical assistance resource centers to grantees, including state, tribal, and local governments. The resource centers providing technical assistance include: the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging (NRC), the Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program (ADSSP) and the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service. This technical assistance includes annual workshops and presentations at the Title VI National Training and Technical Assistance Conference; training available through the ACL funded National Ombudsman Resource Center; and

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?** (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

the Disability and Rehabilitation Research Program (DRRP), which funds capacity building for minority research entities. In addition, NIDILRR has a number of resources to help the public access its data responsibly: The National Spinal Cord Injury Statistical Center, for example, has a pdf document entitled Using the National Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems Database. This same center also has an online Data Request Form that requestors need to complete before gaining access to data. The National Data and Statistical Center for the Traumatic Brain Injury Model Systems has a web page entitled How to obtain a dataset from the TBIMS. The Burn Model Systems' National Data and Statistical Center has a page with instructions on how to access Burn Model System data.

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

ACL defines evidence-based programs on its website. ACL's National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) has two principal frameworks that guide and inform the generation of new knowledge and products. The stages of research framework is used to guide, inform, and track the creation of new knowledge which in turn becomes part of the larger disability evidence base. The stages of development framework is used to guide, inform, and track the development of new products and technologies. Both of these frameworks are codified in federal regulations and are described on NIDILRR's Frameworks' page on the ACL website. The stages of research framework is codified in 45 CFR 1330.4 while the stages of the development framework codified in 45 CFR 1330.5.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

The Older Americans Act requires the use of evidence-based programming in Title III-D-funded activities: Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Services. In response, ACL developed a definition of the term evidence-based, and created a website containing links to a range of resources for evidence-based programs. This is a common evidence framework used for Older Americans Act funded activities. For programs that are not legislatively required to use evidence-based models, through its funding process ACL requires all programs to provide clear justification and evidence (where available) that proposed projects will achieve their stated outcomes. In 2018 ACL developed a tool to help a small number of program officers assess grantee progress towards the stated goals of their grants. Using the tool program officers have instituted corrective actions or required underperforming grantees to relinquish grant funds. ACL is developing similar tools for several other grant programs with the

258

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

intention of rolling out new guidance for program officers in 2023.

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or a user-friendly tool that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

ACL does not have a common evidence repository that applies across the entire agency. It publishes intervention summaries of aging and disability evidence-based programs and practices. ACL funds the Evidence-Based Program Review Council to identify new community programs that meet the criteria established by the Administration for Community Living/Administration on Aging (ACL/AoA) for evidence-based programs funded through the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-D. To support the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed programming, service providers can find out about evidence-based programs that serve people with dementia and their caregivers by consulting a white paper drafted with funds from ACL--Translating Innovation to Impact: Evidence-based interventions to support people with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers at home and in their communities. The Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center (MSKTC) has worked with NIDILRR's Model Systems grantees to develop and publish a variety of evidence-based factsheets about living with spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, or burn injury. ACL's Living Well demonstration program requires grantees to use evidence-based and innovative strategies to (1) improve access to and quality of community services, (2) reduce and mitigate abuse and neglect, and (3) support empowerment, self-determination, and self-advocacy.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

ACL works through its resource centers to help grantees use evidence to drive improvements in outcomes for older adults and individuals with disabilities. For example, with funding from ACL, the National Center on Aging (NCOA), in collaboration with the Evidence-Based Leadership Council, led an innovative vetting process to increase the number of programs available to ACL's aging network that meet the Title III-D evidence-based criteria. This process resulted in adding six new health promotion programs and three new programs for preventing falls. The Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program (ADSSP) funds

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21?
(Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

competitive grants to expand the availability of evidence-based services that support persons with Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD) and their family caregivers. Extensive evaluation of the National Chronic Disease Self-Management Education (CDSME) and Falls Prevention database helped generate important insights for potential new ACL applicants in preparing their applications using data-driven estimation procedures for participant and completion targets ACL also funded several grants, such as the Lifespan Respite Care Program: State Program Enhancement Grants and Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects (DRRP) Program: Chronic Disease Management for People with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) which are designed, in part, to develop an evidence base for respite care and related services and contribute to the evidence base upon which people with TBI and their health care providers can employ effective chronic disease management practices respectively. In addition, NIDILRR provides the Rehabilitation Measures Database (RMD) which is a Knowledge Translation on-line resource with succinct summaries of instruments relevant to rehabilitation populations that provides evidence-based summaries that include concise descriptions of each instrument's psychometric properties, reliability, validity, sensitivity, instructions for administering and scoring, and a representative bibliography with citations.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 7 points)

Administration for Community Living

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to learning innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

Agency leadership promotes innovation by requiring all program offices to explain, in their annual funding proposals, how the proposed use of funds will identify innovative practices. ACL also partially funds a Forum on Aging, Disability, and Independence which engages staff to foster discussions about innovation for coordinating and integrating aging and disability stakeholders. ACL also funds resource centers, such as the Engagement and Older Adults Resource Center which provides technical assistance and serves as a repository for innovations designed to increase the aging network's ability to tailor social engagement activities to meet the needs of older adults.

7.2 Did the agency have *initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?*

In FY21 all ACL Centers were involved in funding innovative work. ACL released several funding opportunity announcements (FOA) focused on the identification and implementation of innovative approaches to improve programming. These included funding opportunity announcements for the Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services - Community Research and the ACL/NIDILRR Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) Phase I. ACL also funded challenge competitions such as the ACL Social Care Referrals Innovation Challenge. In 2021, ACL funded a small study to identify the innovations and adaptations by grantees in the face of COVID-19. In 2022, ACL will more closely examine the most promising innovations to evaluate their effectiveness.

ACL is a funder of The John A. Hartford Foundation 2020 Business Innovation Award, which recognizes aging and disability community-based organizations (CBOs) for their innovative approaches to reducing health care costs and improving the well-being of older adults and people with disabilities through strategic partnership with health care entities.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

There are several funding streams that support innovation. The Older Americans Act, which funds ACL's Administration on Aging, allows ACL to use up to 1% of its appropriations for nutrition innovation demonstrations designed to develop and implement evidence-based practices that enhance senior nutrition. One result is that, consistent with the Administrator's focus on identifying new ways to efficiently improve direct service programs, ACL is using $3.5 million to fund nutrition innovations and test ways to modernize how meals are provided to a changing senior population. One promising demonstration (entitled Double Blind Randomized Control Trial on the Effect of Evidence-Based Suicide Intervention Training on the Home-Delivered and Congregate Nutrition Program through the Atlanta Regional Commission), currently being carried out by the Georgia State University Research Foundation, is an effort to train volunteers who deliver home-delivered meals to recognize and report indicators of suicidal intent and other mental health issues so that they can be addressed.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

The 2020 reauthorization of the Older Americans Act requires a new Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Center for the Aging Network and new demonstration programs to evaluate new strategies for the recruitment, retention, or advancement of direct care workers, and the soliciting, development, and implementation of strategies; and a demonstration to address negative health impacts associated with social isolation. Further, ACL has a number of model programs and demonstration grants that propose and test the use of innovative approaches. For example, ACL funded cooperative agreements for the development and testing of model approaches towards coordinated and comprehensive systems for enhancing and assuring the independence, integration, safety, health, and well-being of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in the community (i.e. Living Well Grants). While the evaluation of this program is not yet complete, initial findings about what works were integrated into the requirements of the funding announcement for the FY18 award cycle.

NIDILRR's research and development activities are guided by the Stages of Research Framework and the Stages of Development Framework. NIDILRR grantees conducting research projects must identify the stage of research their projects are in while grantees conducting development projects must identify the stage of development their projects are in. The stage a research project is in depends upon what is known and what is not known about a particular disability problem or topic. Research projects where relatively little is known, or the topic area is emerging, would be classified in the Exploration and discovery stage. Over time, as more becomes known, research projects progressively move into the Intervention Development phase. The next phase, known as Intervention Efficacy, means the stage of research during which a project evaluates and tests whether an

7. Innovation: **Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21?** (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

intervention is feasible, practical, and has the potential to yield positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The final stage, known as Scale-Up Evaluation, means the stage of research during which a project analyzes whether an intervention is effective in producing improved outcomes for individuals with disabilities when implemented in a real-world setting.

Similarly, the stage of development a development project is in also depends upon what is known or not known about a need that informs the design and development of a product. The proof of concept stage means the stage of development where key technical challenges are resolved. Stage activities may include recruiting study participants, verifying product requirements, implementing and testing (typically in controlled contexts) key concepts, components, or systems, and resolving technical challenges. The proof of product stage means the stage of development where a fully-integrated and working prototype, meeting critical technical requirements, is created. The proof of adoption stage means the stage of development where a product is substantially adopted by its target population and used for its intended purpose.

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
7
(out of 15 points)

Administration for Community Living

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest competitive grant programs are:

1. Centers for Independent Living ($116.2 million; eligible applicants: Nonprofits; Public and State controlled institutions of higher education)
   a. One of their largest competitive grants for was the Centers for Independent Living Training and Technical Assistance Grant
2. National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) ($113.0 million; eligible applicants: State, local, and tribal governments and nonprofits, public and State controlled institutions of higher education)
   a. NIDILRR's largest competitive grants are its
3. State Health Insurance Assistance Program ($52.1 million; eligible applicants: Unrestricted)
   a. One of the relevant NOFAs is for 2020 State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) Base Grant
4. Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act Programs (MIPPA) ($50 million; Eligible applicants are: Nonprofits; City or township governments; Public and State controlled institutions of higher education; Native American tribal; Public housing authorities/Indian housing authorities; Private institutions of higher education; Native American tribal organizations; Special district governments; County governments; State governments; and Independent school districts).
   a. A relevant NOFA is for the National Center for Benefits Outreach & Enrollment
5. University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service ($42.1 million; eligible applicants: entities in each State designated as UCEDDs to carry out the four core functions of interdisciplinary pre-service preparation and continuing education, community services, research, and information dissemination)

264

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in the five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

Independent Living (IL) NOFAs describe evaluation criteria including plans for technical assistance to enhance grant effectiveness and the provision of information developed about best practices (full announcement, p. 21). To continue receiving CIL program funding, eligible centers must provide evidence that they have previously had an impact on the goals and objectives for this funding.

Based on a strict interpretation of the phrase "evidence of prior effectiveness to make grant awards," NIDILRR currently does not use evidence of prior effectiveness to make grant awards. Instead, ACL makes these grant awards by largely relying on the expert evaluative judgments of ACL peer reviewers. Making grant awards by using peer review is a standard, and widely-accepted, evidenced-based practice. For example, see page 7 and page 19 of the full DPCP full announcement.

SHIP NOFAs describe evaluation criteria including plans to improve alignment of policies, processes, and procedures to program goals and increased accountability to program expectations at all levels (full announcement, p. 25).

MIPPA funds are awarded to State grantees and to the National Center for Benefits Outreach and Enrollment. To continue funding without restrictions, State grantees are required to submit state plans that ACL staff review for the specific strategies that grantees will employ to enhance efforts through statewide and local coalition building. The National Center applicants must describe the rationale for using the particular intervention, including factors such as evidence of intervention effectiveness. In 2019, the Center was awarded additional funding based on prior performance--specifically, assisting over 7.6 million individuals to identify over $29.6 billion in potential annual benefits.

University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research & Service (UCEDDs) are a nationwide network of independent but interlinked centers, representing an expansive national resource for addressing issues, finding solutions, and advancing research related to the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Applications are also reviewed based on their description of current or previous evidence of relevant experience (p. 30).

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence***? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)**

Independence Living/Centers for Independent living grants are required to show that they are working to "improve performance, outcomes, operations, and governance of CILs." (Full Announcement, p. 2). These include reports on "issues, goals, outcome measures, performance and compliance" (p. 6).

NIDILRR, and its grantees, are in the disability and rehabilitation evidence-building business. NIDILRR grantees generate new knowledge, on particular disability topics or develop new disability products which eventually becomes part of a larger evidence base. To generate this new knowledge, NIDILRR grantees must conduct a series of research and development activities that produce important outputs. These research and development activities are guided by the following two frameworks: The NIDILRR Stages of Research Framework, and the NIDILRR Stages of Development Framework. The NIDILRR Stages of Research Framework is published in 45 CFR 1330.4 while the Stages of Development Framework is published in 45 CFR 1330.5.

SHIP grantees are required to build and disseminate evidence of what works through documenting and promoting "knowledge, successes, and lessons learned within the SHIP network. This includes sharing ideas, products, and materials with other SHIP grantees, ACL, and the SHIP Technical Assistance Center" (Full Announcement, p. 5). They are required to report on specified performance measures, but also encouraged to provide additional evidence and data, such as data related to the cost changes as a result of enrollment in Medicare Part D and Medicare Advantage plans (PDP/MA-PD) (p. 7).

MIPPA Grant funds support the identification and dissemination of (i.e., practices built upon evidence of effectiveness) improving benefits outreach and enrollment.

A central purpose of UCEDD grants is the building and dissemination of evidence of what works. UCEDDs are a nationwide network of independent but interlinked centers, representing an expansive national resource for addressing issues, finding solutions, and advancing research related to the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Additionally, the UCEDD Annual Report requires grantees to submit information on progress made in the previous year towards achieving the projected goals (Full Announcement, p. 35). Grantees are also specifically asked to describe how innovative designs and methods are "based on evidence and can be replicated" (p. 28).

266

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

ACL requires that evidence of effectiveness is used in all award decisions. Grant officers attend training regarding ways to include information about evidence-building into funding opportunity announcements. This includes information about text that can be included in funding announcements: 1) describing requirements for developing measurable outcomes; 2) explaining how the inclusion of evidence and evidence building plans can be used to score grant applications; and 3) instructing grant reviewers regarding rating applicants' presentation of evidence and evidence building plans. The training was recorded and is available to all staff.

ACL's Alzheimer's Disease Programs Initiative (ADPI) translates and implements evidence-based supportive services for persons with ADRD and their caregivers at the community level. Award criteria include the extent to which applicants "describe partnerships, collaborations and innovative activities that will be implemented in support of goal/objective achievement, including the dementia specific evidence-based/evidence informed intervention(s) to be implemented in the project" (Full Announcement, p. 24).

The review criteria for the Lifespan Respite Care Program: State Program Enhancement Grants includes the applicant's description of "how the proposed project will build upon the accomplishments made in previous Lifespan Respite Care Program grants" (Full Announcement, p. 23).

The award for the National Paralysis Research Center requires successful applicants to provide evidence that individuals with paralysis and other disabilities will be actively and meaningfully engaged, and demonstrate experience and expertise in carrying out the kinds of activities required (Full Announcement, pp. 4-5).

As selection criteria for the National Technical Assistance Center on Kinship and Grandfamilies, points were awarded for demonstrating that they were based on "the most recent, relevant, and available information and knowledge (p. 20) and for demonstrating that staff, consultants, and partners possess the appropriate experience and expertise (Full Announcement, p. 22).

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

Prior to the development of visual scene displays by the NIDILRR-funded Augmentative and Alternative Communication Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (AAC-RERC), the only Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) option was traditional grid displays with isolated symbols presented in rows and columns. It was difficult for many adults with acquired conditions resulting in significant language and cognitive limitations to use these traditional grid displays. Visual Scene Displays (VSDs) offer an easier alternative to traditional grid displays. They go beyond standard pictures and symbols organized in rows and columns by providing information on the situation or context. Put more simply, VSDs are photos or pictures that people can use to communicate messages to others. These photos depict familiar scenes, objects or people--and users can touch "hot spots" on the photo to speak messages that relate to the pictured scene or object. For example, a person with aphasia might touch a hotspot on a picture of a sibling and say this is my sister. This additional information on the situation and context makes it easier for persons with complex communication needs to express their wants and needs and therefore enhances their ability to interact and participate with others in the community. Research from the AAC RERC and external researchers demonstrates the effectiveness of VSDs with adults with severe chronic aphasia, primary progressive aphasia, dementia, etc. As a result of the continued efforts of the AAC-RERC and their partners, this VSD technology has been successfully transferred to all of the major AAC manufacturers and app developers.

NIDILRR-funded grant activities regularly produce publications that use evidence to build knowledge and promote diversity and inclusion. This included recommendations for reducing barriers to access to healthcare that face coverings pose particularly to the deaf and hard of hearing. They also produced a mixed methods study identifying barriers to access to healthcare that individuals with disabilities face, and also identifying aspects of the Affordable Care Act which have improved enforcement of laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability.

ACL's Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program (ADSSP) encourages the translation of dementia-specific interventions for use in communities. Examples include: the Savvy Caregiver (evidence-based) psychoeducational intervention focused on training family caregivers about the basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to handle the challenges of caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease and to be an effective caregiver; Cuidando con Respeto (evidence-informed), Spanish version of the original Savvy Caregiver Program; and Savvy Caregiver Express (evidence-informed), a condensed version of the original Savvy Caregiver Program. ACL's requirement for inclusion of dementia specific evidence-based interventions is demonstrated in

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

the 2018 funding opportunity announcement entitled Alzheimer's Disease Programs to States and Communities.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

Funding opportunity announcements and grant reviews stress the need for strong performance measurement and evaluation. ACL's technical assistance centers--the National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging (NRC), the Alzheimer's Disease Supportive Services Program (ADSSP) and the University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service--promote the use and generation of evidence with ACL grantees. Grantees manuals also include information about the importance of and requirements for evaluation (see the Administration on Aging: Title VI Resource Manual). Staff of ACL's Office of Performance and Evaluation make presentations regarding the importance of evidence with regional staff who are in frequent contact with State grantees and at grantee conferences (see ACL Track: The ACL Older Americans Act (OAA) Performance System--Crossing the Finish Line and ACL/CMS Track: Raising the Bar in Medicaid HCBS & Community Inclusion--Showcasing Transformation presented at the 2019 home- and community-based services (HCBS) conference; ACL Track: Assuring the Health & Welfare of Medicaid HCBS Beneficiaries: Federal Findings, Investments, & Promising Practices in Systems Change and ACL Track: Innovative Housing & Health & Human Services Collaborations: A Game-Changer in Supportive Housing & Community Living presented at the 2018 HCBS conference).

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score
4
(out of 10 points)

Administration for Community Living

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest non-competitive grant programs are:

1. Nutrition Services, ($951.8 million; eligible applicants: States)
2. Home and Community Based Supportive Services ($392.6 million; eligible applicants: States);
3. Caregiver Support Services ($188.9 million; eligible applicants: States)
4. State Councils on Developmental Disabilities ($79 million; eligible applicants: States and nonprofits based in a State);
5. Developmental Disabilities Protection and Advocacy ($40.8 million; eligible applicants: State and nonprofits based in a States)

As these are based on formula grants, the funding amount distributed to the States and tribal organizations are not determined using evidence-based application processes. Rather, the States and tribal organizations are responsible for directing the funds to evidence-based programs and organizations.

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in the largest five non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

Authorizing legislation for ACL's largest non-competitive grant programs requires consideration of evidence-based programming as a requirement of funding. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 allows for the withholding of funding if (1) the Council or agency has failed to comply substantially with any of the provisions required by section 124 to be included in the State plan, particularly provisions required by paragraphs (4)(A) and (5)(B)(vii) of section 124(c), or with any of the

270

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

provisions required by section 125(b)(3); or (2) the Council or agency has failed to comply substantially with any regulations of the Secretary that are applicable." As a condition of funding non-competitive grandees are required to "determine the extent to which each goal of the Council was achieved for that year" and report that information to ACL.

States that receive Older Americans Act Home and Community-Based Supportive Services Title III-D funds are required to spend those funds on evidence-based programs to improve health and well-being, and reduce disease and injury. In order to receive funding, states must utilize programs that meet ACL's definition of evidence-based or are defined as evidence-based by another HHS operating division. Under the Older American Act, caregiver support programs are required to track and report on their use of evidence-based caregiver support services.

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

ACL's Nutrition Services provides grants for innovations in nutrition programs and services. These research projects must have the potential for broad implementation and demonstrate potential to improve the quality, effectiveness, and outcomes of nutrition service programs by documenting and proving the effectiveness of these interventions and innovations. They must also target services to underserved older adults with greatest social and economic need, and individuals at risk for institutional placement, to permit such individuals to remain in home and community-based settings. Consistent with the Administrator's focus on identifying new ways to efficiently improve direct service programs, ACL is using its 1% Nutrition authority to fund $3.5 million for nutrition innovations and to test ways to modernize how meals are provided to a changing senior population. One promising demonstration currently being carried out by the Georgia State University Research Foundation (entitled Double Blind Randomized Control Trial on the Effect of Evidence-Based Suicide Intervention Training on the Home-Delivered and Congregate Nutrition Program through the Atlanta Regional Commission) which has drawn widespread attention is an effort to train volunteers who deliver home-delivered meals to recognize and report indicators of suicidal intent and other mental health issues so that they can be addressed.

Under Home and Community-Based Services, FY12 Congressional appropriations included an evidence-based requirement for the first time. OAA Title III-D funding may be used only for programs and activities demonstrated to be evidence-based. The National Council on Aging maintains a tool to search for evidence-based programs that are approved for funding through OAA Title III-D.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

ACL's Caregiver Support Services builds evidence in a number of areas. These include a national survey of caregivers of older adult clients, gathering and reporting best practices regarding grandparents raising grandchildren, adapting and scaling evidence-based programs for children and older adults with disabilities through the RESILIENCE Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, and other similar efforts.

State Councils on Developmental Disabilities design five-year state plans that address new ways of improving service delivery. To implement the state plans, Councils work with different groups in many ways, including funding projects to show new ways that people with disabilities can work, play, and learn, and seeking information from the public and from state and national sources.

State Protection & Advocacy Systems encompass multiple avenues of protection and advocacy including specialization in individuals with developmental disabilities, assistive technology, voting accessibility, individuals with traumatic brain injury, and technical assistance. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 requires Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) grantees to report annually on progress achieved through advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities.

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

The 2020 reauthorization of the Older Americans Act requires that Assistive technology programs are "aligned with evidence-based practice;" that person-centered, trauma informed programs "incorporate evidence-based practices based on knowledge about the role of trauma in trauma victims' lives;" and that a newly authorized Research, Demonstration, and Evaluation Center for the Aging Network increases "the repository of information on evidence based programs and interventions available to the aging network, which information shall be applicable to existing programs and interventions, and help in the development of new evidence-based programs and interventions."

272

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

Since 2017, ACL has awarded Innovations in Nutrition grants to 11 organizations to develop and expand evidence-based approaches to enhance the quality and effectiveness of nutrition programming. ACL is currently overseeing five grantees for innovative projects that will enhance the quality, effectiveness, and outcomes of nutrition services programs provided by the national aging services network. The grants total $1,197,205 for this year with a two-year project period. Through this grant program, ACL aims to identify innovative and promising practices that can be scaled across the country and to increase the use of evidence-informed practices within nutrition programs.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

All funding opportunity announcements published by ACL include language about generating and reporting evidence about their progress towards the specific goals set for the funds. Grantee manuals include information about the importance of and requirements for evaluation. The National Ombudsman Resource Center, funded by ACL, provides self-evaluation materials for Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs (LTCOP) funded under Title VII of the Older Americans Act.

273

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 8 points)

Administration for Community Living

10.1 Did the agency have a policy for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

Because much of ACL's funding is based on non-competitive formula grants that cannot be reallocated to other programs or grantees, there is not an ACL-wide policy for this purpose. For several programs, such as most under the Older American Act, "entities such as states, U.S. territories, and tribal organizations are allotted funding based on a population-based formula factor (e.g., aged 55 and over, aged 60 and over, or aged 70 and over). Some statutory requirements for program funding allocations include a "hold harmless" provision, which guarantees that state or other entities' allotment will remain at a certain fiscal year level or amount, provided sufficient funding in a given year. ACL is working with GSA's Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) to test methods for improving outcomes for its congregate meals programs. Under the Older Americans Act, congregate meal sites are required to accept donations from meal recipients. But, there has been a concern regarding how to balance the collection of funds that can be used towards meal service and making meal recipients that cannot afford to donate uncomfortable, thus suppressing attendance. This study, expected to be completed in FY 2022, will offer concrete evidence to improve program operations.

10. Repurpose for Results: **In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes?**
(Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

While much of ACL's funding is based on noncompetitive formula grants, and therefore cannot be reallocated to other programs, evaluation staff work closely with program staff to identify ways to translate evaluation findings into technical assistance and other types of program support. For example, based on early results from an evaluation of the Tribal Grant program, ACL has developed new program support materials to improve the delivery of Tribal Caregiver programs.

ACL typically proactively provides technical assistance in order to help programs to be successful, rather than redirecting funding. For example, the State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP) is funding a national Technical Assistance center for this purpose.

FY 21 Score

64

★ ★ ★

BRONZE 2021

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

![SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration]

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

2021 Federal Standard of Excellence
Agency Snapshot

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has demonstrated a commitment to evidence-based grantmaking. In FY21, the agency actively participated in the Federal Standard of Excellence for the first time since FY19, when the agency opted not to participate. The agency described efforts to implement provisions of the Evidence Act in coordination with HHS's department-wide efforts. For example, SAMHSA has developed a learning agenda that is going through OMB clearance, contributed to HHS departmental evaluation plan, and an internal-facing evaluation policy, the Evaluation Policy and Procedure. Beyond that, the agency reported spending 1.8% of its FY21 agency budget on research, evaluation, and evaluation-related activities, among the highest percentages of the nine participating agencies.

Beyond these core and foundational evaluation activities, SAMHSA has developed guidance for its competitive grants. The Developing a Competitive SAMHSA Grant Application provides information applicants will likely need for each section of the grant application. The agency's five largest competitive grants require grantees to describe their evidence-based practices (EBPs). In addition, if applicants plan to implement services or practices that are not evidence-based, they must show that these services/practices are effective by citing research provided by the Evidence-Based Practice Resource Center. Similarly, the SAMHSA Community Mental Health Block Grant, a noncompetitive formula grant, still maintains a 10% set aside for evidence-based interventions to address the needs of individuals with early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders.

All SAMHSA grant programs require grantees to submit data on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation (among other demographic data). Finally, SAMHSA's surveys collect national data in these areas allowing SAMHSA's Office of Behavioral Health Equity, to utilize federal and community data to identify, monitor, and respond to behavioral health disparities.

In 2021, the Office of Behavioral Health Equity (OBHE) engaged in a renewed focus on racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. Through this office, grantees submit Disparity Impact Statements (DIS) to ensure SAMHSA programs are inclusive of underserved racial and ethnic

minority populations in their services, infrastructure, prevention, and training grants. The DIS framework is based on the principles of Access, Use, and Outcomes (Access: Who are the subpopulations being served by the program?; Use: What types of services does each subpopulation get?; and Outcomes: Given the specified outcomes of the program, how do these vary by subpopulations?). This OBHE office is poised to support the agency in advancing its equity agenda aligned with focus on evidence, research, and evaluation.

In the years prior to FY20, SAMHSA had a public-facing evaluation policy that governed research and evaluation activities across the agency. The agency should consider making its Evaluation Policy and Procedure (P&P) public to demonstrate SAMHSA's commitment to transparent and sophisticated approaches to research and evaluation. Further, SAMHSA should improve the Evidence-Based Practice Resource Center to resemble other national evidence clearinghouses that are designed with states and grantees users in mind to aid their selection and implementation of mental health and substance abuse evidence-based interventions.

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?

FY21 Score

5

(out of 9 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

1.1 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Evaluation Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 313)

The Director of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) Office of Evaluation serves as the agency's evaluation lead with key evaluation staff housed in this division. The Office of Evaluation (OE) is responsible for providing centralized planning and management of program evaluation across SAMHSA in partnership with program originating Centers. SAMHSA evaluations are funded from program funds that are used for service grants, technical assistance, and for evaluation activities. Evaluations have also been funded from recycled funds from grants or other contract activities, as described in the FY21 Congressional Justification. OE has focused on hiring to continue to build internal expertise to boost coordination of the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Evidence Act* implementation with the Program Centers and Policy Lab.

1.2 Did the agency have a senior leader with the budget and staff to serve as the agency's Chief Data Officer (or equivalent)? (Example: Evidence Act 202(e))

The Director of CBHSQ will serve as the Chief Data Officer (pending hiring). In Fiscal Year 2021, the Deputy Director of CBHSQ served as the Chief Data Officer with the Director of the Office of Evaluation within CBHSQ serving as liaison for the HHS Data Governance Group. CBHSQ is the government's lead agency for behavioral health data and research. In FY21, CBHSQ worked to increase technical expertise and fill staff and leadership vacancies to increase SAMHSA's capacity to build and use evidence-informed policies and programs.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 1 Leadership

|| RESULTS
★★★
FOR AMERICA

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?

1.3 Did the agency have a governance structure to coordinate the activities of its evaluation officer, chief data officer, statistical officer, performance improvement officer, and other related officials in order to support Evidence Act implementation and improve the agency's major programs?

In FY21, the CBHSQ Deputy Director met weekly with the evaluation officer, the lead statistician (Director of the Division of Surveillance and Data Collection) and the Director of the Office of Program Analysis and Coordination (OPAC) to ensure coordination in support of the Evidence Act Implementation, data dissemination and data quality. Since 2020, SAMHSA has been building its capacity to coordinate the activities for Evidence Act implementation by filling key vacancies and onboarding subject matter experts. CBHSQ and the National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Lab, an office within SAMHSA that is required to identify and disseminate evidence-based practices as well as to collaborate with CBHSQ, has worked closely on activities for the Data Governance Board during FY21. SAMHSA's OE began standardizing evaluation activities and protocols across SAMHSA during FY21 by soliciting input from its internal stakeholders, and will begin implementation of the feedback in FY22. This will include the development and implementation of a SAMHSA Evidence Act Governance Group. In addition, each Center in SAMHSA has formed a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) workgroup that meets regularly to use data to advance SAMHSA's efforts towards health equity and inclusion.

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

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)
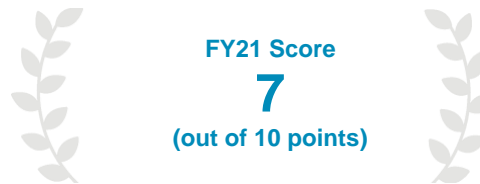
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

2.1 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation policy? (Example: Evidence Act 313(d))

Under the Evidence Act, federal agencies are expected to expand their capacity for engaging in program evaluation by not only designating evaluation officers and developing learning agendas but also producing annual evaluation plans, and enabling a workforce to conduct internal evaluations. In FY2020, SAMHSA developed a Standard Operating Procedure for Program Evaluations: Program Evaluation SOP and completed a capacity assessment and evaluation plan as part of an HHS-wide initiative.

SAMHSA's internal Evaluation Policy and Procedures (P and P), which functions as SAMHSA's agency-wide evaluation policy, is currently being updated. The P and P documentation is being updated in coordination with the Office of Behavioral Health Equity (OBHE), as OBHE supports efforts to reduce disparities in mental and/or substance use disorders across populations. OBHE is organized around key strategies:

1. The **data strategy** utilizes federal and community data to identify, monitor, and respond to behavioral health disparities.
2. The **policy strategy** promotes policy initiatives that strengthen the impact of SAMHSA programs in advancing behavioral health equity.
3. The **quality practice and workforce development strategy** expands the behavioral health workforce capacity to improve outreach, engagement, and quality of care for minority and underserved populations.
4. The **communication strategy** increases awareness and access to information about behavioral health disparities and strategies to promote behavioral health equity.

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

OBHE seeks to impact SAMHSA policy and initiatives by:

- Creating a more strategic focus on racial, ethnic, and LGBT+ populations in SAMHSA investments
- Using a data-informed quality improvement approach to address racial and ethnic disparities in SAMHSA programs
- Ensuring that SAMHSA policy, funding initiatives, and collaborations include emphasis on decreasing disparities
- Implementing innovative, cost-effective training strategies to a diverse workforce
- Promoting behavioral health equity at a national level
- Serving as a trusted broker of behavioral health disparity and equity information
- Providing consultations and presentations on issues related to behavioral health equity

2.2 Did the agency have an agency-wide evaluation plan? (Example: Evidence Act 312(b))

As part of the Evidence Act, agencies within HHS submitted a plan that lists and describes the specific evaluation activities the agency plans to undertake in the fiscal year following the year in which the evaluation plan is submitted (referred to as the HHS Evaluation Plan). The HHS Evaluation Plan and Evidence-Building Plan is organized based on priority areas drawn from HHS' Departmental Priorities, the proposed Strategic Plan goals, and proposed Agency Priority Goals. Currently, SAMHSA's evaluation plan is aligned with the Evidence Act. For FY22, the SAMHSA's research priority is: "How will SAMHSA collect, analyze, and disseminate data to inform policies, programs, and practices?" and has outlined four relevant objectives of the research.

SAMHSA, through its Office of Behavioral Health Equity, focuses on racial equity, diversity, and inclusion. As part of this work, each grantee is required to submit a DIS or Disparity Impact Statement, which requires grantee focus on access to, use of, and outcomes from SAMHSA-funded services as it applies to underserved communities.

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

2.3 Did the agency have a learning agenda (evidence-building plan) and did the learning agenda describe the agency's process for engaging stakeholders including, but not limited to the general public, state and local governments, and researchers/academics in the development of that agenda? (Example: Evidence Act 312)

SAMHSA submitted a learning agenda that is currently under review with HHS and OMB and not publicly available. In the learning agenda, SAMHSA highlights key evaluation studies that reflect the administration's priorities. In the learning agenda, SAMHSA highlighted the following evaluation activities:

- SAMHSA's Report to Congress on Garrett Lee Smith (GLS) Youth Suicide Prevention and Early Intervention Program.
- Summative Program Evaluations (e.g., Strategic Prevention for Prescription Drugs or SPF-Rx). This program is designed to prevent prescription drug misuse among youth aged 12 to 17 and adults aged 18 and older. The program is developed to respond to a critical priority area in SAMHSA's FY2019-FY2023 Strategic Planning Priority 1: Combating the Opioid Crisis through Expansion of Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Support Services).
- Performance Measurement of SAMHSA's discretionary grants (40-50 Program Profiles).
- Internal Formative Program Evaluations (e.g., Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness or PATH). The PATH evaluation report includes information on funding, staffing, numbers served/contacted and enrolled, client demographics, service provision and service referrals made and attainment. Data are submitted by the PATH providers via the SAMHSA PATH Data Exchange (PDX), though parts are to be provided through local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). The PATH grantees' State PATH Contacts (SPCs) approve the data submitted by their providers.
- Evidence Reviews (e.g., Evidence-Based Behavioral Practice (EBBP), which is a project at SAMHSA that creates training resources to help bridge the gap between behavioral health research and practice) (e.g. MOUD implementation in CJ settings).

2.4 Did the agency publicly release all completed program evaluations?

SAMHSA evaluations are funded from program funds used for discretionary grants, technical assistance, and evaluation activities. Evaluations have also been funded from funds previously designated for grants or other contract activities. A variety of

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

evaluation models are used including: evaluations funded by the Centers (PEP-C); evaluations funded by the Centers but directed outside of SAMHSA (Naloxone Education and Distribution Program - PDO); and those that CBHSQ directly funds and executes (PATH PDX). Evaluations require different degrees of independence to ensure objectivity and having modeling options afford SAMHSA the latitude to enhance evaluation rigor and independence on a customized basis.

Publicly available evaluations analyze data by race, ethnicity and gender, among other elements such as social determinants of health. SAMHSA strives to share program data whenever possible to promote continuous quality improvement. For example, SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) funds services for people with serious mental illness (SMI) experiencing homelessness annual data may be found online. Similarly, comparative state mental health data from block grants can be found on the SAMHSA data page through Uniform Reporting System output tables. Although not an evaluation, CBHSQ, in partnership with SAMHSA Centers, develops annual project profiles for selected discretionary grants (such as client demographics, changes in social determinants of health and pre/post changes in substance use) covering a set of performance indicators to track and monitor performance. For FY20 data, these profiles will be shared with grantees through the SPARS system. SAMHSA has publicly released the State Opioid Response (SOR) Grants program profile, and is conducting internal discussions regarding the release of FY2022 program profiles.

With SAMHSA's new Office of Behavioral Health Equity, the agency is in a unique position to be a leader in supporting culturally and linguistically appropriate evaluation to a diverse audience. SAMHSA is already sharing resources for evidence-based and culturally relevant interventions for the public--see Strategies and Lessons Learned (2011-2020).

2.5 Did the agency conduct an Evidence Capacity Assessment that addressed the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the agency's evaluation, research, and analysis efforts? (Example: Evidence Act 315, subchapter II (c)(3)(9))

As part of the HHS Evidence and Evaluation Council, all agencies conducted an internal capacity assessment. This assessment was included in the HHS report. In addition, SAMHSA shares resources for evidence-based and culturally relevant interventions – see Strategies and Lessons Learned (2011-2020).

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

2.6 Did the agency use rigorous evaluation methods, including random assignment studies, for research and evaluation purposes?

SAMHSA does not apply one strategy for all evaluations but employs a variety of models including performance monitoring, formative, process, and summative evaluations using primarily quantitative data and also mixed methods when appropriate and available. SAMHSA strives for a balance between the need for collecting data and the desire to minimize grantee data collection burden. For example, in FY21, an evaluation of SAMHSA's Naloxone Education and Distribution Program, used a mixed methods approach examining qualitative data from key informant interviews and focus groups coupled with SAMHSA's discretionary grant data collected through the SAMHSA Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS). Another example is a final report for SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework--Prescription Drug Misuse program (SPF-Rx) that included several sources of primary and secondary quantitative data (from SAMHSA, CDC, etc.) mixed with interviews all in response to three primary evaluation questions.

SAMHSA is in the process of updating its Program Evaluation SOP. In addition, SAMHSA has developed a draft evaluation plan that includes a dissemination strategy for each of its current evaluation projects recognizing that one size does not fit all. The plan is still under review.

SAMHSA is partnering with the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) to support the HEALing Communities Study (HCS), which is a research initiative that intends to enhance the evidence base for opioid treatment options. Launched in 2019, HCS aims to test the integration of prevention, overdose treatment, and medication-based treatment in select communities hard hit by the opioid crisis. This comprehensive treatment model will be tested in a coordinated array of settings, including primary care, emergency departments, and other community settings. Findings will establish best practices for integrating prevention and treatment strategies that can be replicated by communities nationwide.

SAMHSA has also supported the National Study on Mental Health, which intends to provide national estimates of mental health and substance use disorders among U.S adults ages 18 to 65. For the first time, the NSMH will include adults living in households across the U.S. as well as prisons, jails, state psychiatric hospitals and homeless shelters Data will be available in 2023.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical   assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

FY21 Score

10

(out of 10 points)
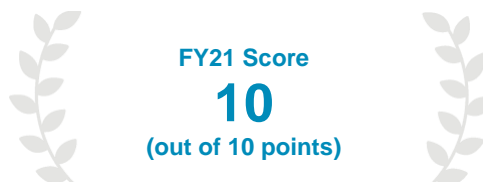
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

3.1 ___ (Name of agency) invested $____ on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing __% of the agency's $___ billion FY21 budget.

SAMHSA invested $106 million on evaluations, evaluation technical assistance, and evaluation capacity-building, representing 1.8 % of the agency's $5.9 billion FY21 budget. Information concerning the efforts to boost the share of spending on minority and women-owned businesses, community-based evaluators, or nontraditional evaluation contractors was not readily available.

3.2 Did the agency have a budget for evaluation and how much was it? (Were there any changes in this budget from the previous fiscal year?)

SAMHSA's FY21 evaluation budget is $135 million and it comes from the Public Health Service (PHS) Evaluations funds issued through annual appropriations. It is the same amount as FY 2020.

Within the PHS Act Sec. 1920 and 1921, SAMHSA is authorized to obligate 5% of the amounts appropriated for data collection and program evaluation under Sec. 1920 and for technical assistance, national database, data collection, and program evaluations under Sec. 1921. The FY21 consolidated appropriation limited the amount to $21 million for funding associated with Sec. 1920 and not more than 2% of SOR funding (2% of $1.5B or $30M) for funding associated Sec. 1921.

3. Resources: Did the agency invest at least 1% of program funds in evaluations in FY21?
(Examples: Impact studies; implementation studies; rapid cycle evaluations; evaluation technical   assistance, rigorous evaluations, including random assignments)

3.3 Did the agency provide financial and other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build their evaluation capacity (including technical assistance funds for data and evidence capacity building)?

SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center aims to provide communities, clinicians, policymakers, and others in the field with the information and tools they need to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. The Center lists nine technical assistance projects, two of which appear to provide financial or other resources to help city, county, and state governments or other grantees build evaluation capacity.

- The Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS) advances recovery supports and services for people with mental or substance use disorders and their families. The BRSS TACS website indicates it has provided training and technical assistance for building the capacity of peer-run, recovery community, and family organizations through evaluation, among six other topics.

- The National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth & Family Mental Health (NTTAC) provides states, tribes, and communities with training and technical assistance on children's behavioral health, with a focus on systems of care. NTTAC's Training and Technical Assistance activities for clinical best practices, wraparound services, and workforce development focus on evaluation, fidelity assessment, and quality assurance, among nine other topics.

All SAMHSA grantees (competitive and non-competitive) may designate set-aside funds for data collection, data report into SAMHSA's Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS) and individual evaluation activities. SPARS provides access to online data entry, reporting, technical assistance, and training resources to support grantees in reporting timely and accurate data to SAMHSA. There are multiple resources available to state and community grantees including a resource library with general and Center specific information on data collection, performance monitoring, disparities impact statements, and providing trauma informed care (to name just a few). A link to these resources is not available as access to these resources require that grantees enter the password protected website.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 10 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

4.1 Did the agency have a strategic plan with outcome goals, program objectives (if different), outcome measures, and program measures (if different)?

The SAMHSA Strategic Plan FY2019-FY2023 outlines five priority areas with goals and measurable objectives to carry out the vision and mission of SAMHSA. For each priority area, an overarching goal and series of measurable objectives are described followed by examples of key performance and outcome measures SAMHSA will use to track progress.

In addition, SAMHSA collects Disparity Impact Statements (DIS) from grantees to ensure SAMHSA programs are inclusive of underserved racial and ethnic minority populations in their services, infrastructure, prevention, and training grants. These populations have been underrepresented in SAMHSA grants.

The DIS is based on the framework of Access, Use and Outcomes:
- Access: Who are the subpopulations being served by the program?
- Use: What types of services does each subpopulation get?
- Outcomes: Given the specified outcomes of the program, how do these vary by subpopulations?

The DIS is a Secretarial Priority from the *Department of Health & Human Services' Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*. The objective is to "Assess and heighten the impact of all HHS policies, programs, processes, and resource

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

decisions to reduce health disparities. HHS leadership will assure that: … (c) Program grantees, as applicable, will be required to submit health disparity impact statements as part of their grant applications." The Secretarial Priority focused on underserved racial and ethnic minority populations (e.g., Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander; and American Indian/Alaska Native). SAMHSA's Office of Behavioral Health Equity also includes LGBTQ+ populations as an underserved, disparity-vulnerable group.

The standard Government and Performance Results Act (GPRA) data collected by the grantee are used to inform the access, use and outcomes questions. No new data are collected for the DIS. Disaggregating the data by subpopulations will help target gaps in who is included in the grant, what the differences in services provided across subpopulations are, and how outcomes differ across subpopulations.

4.2 Does the agency use data/evidence to improve outcomes and return on investment?

The Office of Evaluation in partnership with SAMHSA Program Centers, oversees the identification of a set of performance indicators to monitor SAMHSA programs in collaboration with program staff and the development of periodic program profiles for use in agency planning, program change, and reporting to departmental and external organizations. SAMHSA's Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS) serves as the mechanism for the collection of performance data from agency grantees. SAMHSA Program Centers staff examine data entered into SPARS on a regular and real-time basis to manage grant programs and improve outcomes. The data in SPARS is available in .csv file, via report or through data visualization (bar charts, etc).

In FY21, SAMHSA staff and grantees were able to view demographic data to compare clients by race, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. over time. On an annual basis, SAMHSA produces SPARS informed program and topical profiles to examine a program's performance. These profiles, to be shared with grantees for FY21, include disaggregate outcomes by race and other demographics as well as changes in behavior associated with their time in the grant program.

4. Performance Management/Continuous Improvement:

Did the agency implement a performance management system with outcome-focused goals and aligned program objectives and measures, and did it frequently collect, analyze, and use data and evidence to improve outcomes, return on investment, and other dimensions of performance in FY21?
(Examples: Performance stat systems, frequent outcomes-focused data-informed meetings)

4.3 Did the agency have continuous improvement or learning cycle processes to identify promising practices, problem areas, possible causal factors, and opportunities for improvement? (Examples: stat meetings, data analytics, data visualization tools, or other tools that improve performance)

Since April 2020, CBHSQ's Office of Evaluation has offered weekly technical assistance and training on data analysis, performance management and evaluation. These one-hour sessions offer opportunities for SAMHSA Program Center staff and CBHSQ to share challenges and opportunities faced by grantees, and strategize solutions. These sessions also offer an opportunity for cross-center collaboration and process improvement as project officers share and learn from officers managing programs in other centers. These cross-center meetings allow CBHSQ to learn about challenges in the field, technological challenges using SPARS, and opportunities to make the system more user-friendly. The Project officers often share grantee questions and concerns for discussion and joint problem solving. SAMHSA collects these questions to include in FAQ documents.

Since April 2020, every Wednesday, the Office of Evaluation offers a Center specific webinar covering selected grant programs and data visualizations providing a targeted approach to capacity building. These are designed for performance management of discretionary grants but Center and agency leadership are invited and have attended. These are internal to SAMHSA and not open to political leaders. For example, on the second Wednesday of each month, the Office of Evaluation focuses on the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment's grant programs to offer a deep dive into performance while also discussing efforts to increase data quality. The third Wednesday includes a focus on the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the fourth Wednesday focuses on programs funded through the Center for Mental Health Services.

SAMHSA has been modernizing the SPARS system to include data visualization and more useful performance management reports. The annual program profiles offer another opportunity for SAMHSA staff to work collaboratively to better understand the challenges facing grantees and allow for modifications and the development of technical assistance for continuous quality improvement. These two-page resource documents provide a snapshot of descriptive data on client-level demographics and activities completed in the previous year.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing   agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

5.1 Did the agency have a strategic data plan, including an open data policy? (Example: Evidence Act 202(c), Strategic Information Resources Plan)

The SAMHSA Strategic Plan FY19-23 outlines five priority areas to carry out the vision and mission of SAMHSA, including Priority 4: Improving Data Collection, Analysis, Dissemination, and Program and Policy Evaluation. This Priority includes three objectives: 1) Develop consistent data collection strategies to identify and track mental health and substance use needs across the nation; 2) Ensure that all SAMHSA programs are evaluated in a robust, timely, and high-quality manner; and 3) Promote access to and use of the nation's substance use and mental health data and conduct program and policy evaluations and use the results to advance the adoption of evidence-based policies, programs, and practices.

CBHSQ recently developed a data transfer agreement for a uniform and protected sharing of data, and will begin implementation in FY22.

SAMHSA's Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) is the lead Federal government agency for behavioral health data and research. As an OMB-recognized Federal Statistical Unit[2], CBHSQ adheres to all laws, regulations, and guidelines related to best practices of data dissemination and data stewardship, such Statistical Policy Directive Number Four[3]

---

[2] https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/omb/inforeg_statpolicy/bb-principal-statistical-agencies-recognized-units

[3] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2008-03-07/pdf/E8-4570.pdf

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing   agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

on data dissemination, the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act,[4] and the 2018 Evidence Act.[5] SAMHSA also adheres to strict scientific guidelines, as set forth in Statistical Policy Directive Number One[6] and our parent agency's (HHS) Scientific Integrity Principles.[7] Additionally, we explicitly state the agency's public commitment to scientific integrity.

CBHSQ uses a data transfer agreement for a uniform and protected sharing of data. This was updated in FY21. Additionally, as the main center within SAMHSA that collects, stewards, and disseminates data, CBHSQ is in the process of developing a short-term and long-term Strategic Data Plan. SAMHSA has in the past had an agency-wide "Strategic Plan and Data Strategy" that matches important agency priorities to data collected by SAMHSA. SAMHSA is also working with HHS on a department-wide data strategy including a data maturity model and policies for data governance and sharing.

Within CBHSQ, SAMHSA partners with the National Center for Health Statistics to offer access to individuals for restricted use data for research and evaluation purposes. This is a carefully controlled process designed to ensure data, and the individuals that provide the data, are protected.

The Office of Behavioral Health Equity within SAMHSA coordinates efforts to reduce disparities in mental and/or substance use disorders across populations. OBHE is organized around key strategies: data strategy, policy strategy, quality practice and workforce development strategy and communication strategy.

5.2 Did the agency have an updated comprehensive data inventory? (Example: Evidence Act 3511)

SAMHSA's Report and Dissemination site identifies seven data collections: the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH): Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS); National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services (N-SSATS); the

---

[4] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2007-06-15/pdf/E7-11542.pdf

[5] https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4174

[6] https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2014-12-02/pdf/2014-28326.pdf

[7] https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/open/pres-actions/scientifc-integrity-principles-12-19-11.pdf

5. Data: Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?
(Examples: Model data-sharing   agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

National Mental Health Services Survey (N-MHSS); Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN); Mental Health Client-Level Data (MH-CLD); and the Uniform Reporting System (URS). SAMHSA has also made numerous data collection and survey datasets publicly available at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive (SAMHDA), which include online analytic capabilities and downloadable datasets.

5.3 Did the agency promote data access or data linkage for evaluation, evidence-building, or program improvement? (Examples: Model data-sharing agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; downloadable machine-readable, de-identified tagged data; Evidence Act 3520(c))

The Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ) oversees data collection initiatives and provides publicly available datasets so that some data can be shared with researchers and other stakeholders while preserving client confidentiality and privacy.

In FY21, SAMHSA's CBHSQ built internal technical capacity for data collections and began the process of modernizing them. For example, the N-SSATS and N-MHSS have been combined into the National Substance Use and Mental Health Services Survey (NSUMHSS) in an effort to decrease burden and duplication of responses. In addition, CBHSQ, in partnership with the Center for Mental Health Services is now SAMHSA's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive (SAMHDA) which contains substance use disorder and mental illness research data available from CBHSQ's seven data collections for restricted and public use. SAMHDA promotes the access and use of SAMHSA's substance abuse and mental health data by providing public-use data files and documentation for download and online analysis tools to support a better understanding of this critical area of public health.

In addition, SAMHSA partners with the National Center for Health Statistics to make restricted use data available through the Research Data Center (RDC). The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) operates the Research Data Center (RDC) to allow researchers access to restricted-use data. For access to the restricted-use data, researchers must submit a research proposal outlining the need for restricted-use data. In FY21, many of the procedures for the application process moved in-house from NCHS and a CBHSQ RDC website was created.

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing   agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

Also, SAMHSA implements the Disparity Impact Statement (DIS). DIS is a Secretarial Priority from the Department of Health & Human Services' Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities (2011). The objective is to "Assess and heighten the impact of all HHS policies, programs, processes, and resource decisions to reduce health disparities. HHS leadership will assure that: … (c) Program grantees, as applicable, will be required to submit health disparity impact statements as part of their grant applications." The Secretarial Priority focused on underserved racial and ethnic minority populations, e.g., Black/African American; Hispanic/Latino; Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander; and American Indian/Alaska Native. SAMHSA's Office of Behavioral Health Equity also includes LGBT populations as underserved, disparity-vulnerable groups.

Through the SAMHSA Performance Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS), grantees and SAMHSA program staff monitor the performance of grantees and, when performance is below targets, provide technical assistance and support. This allows SAMHSA to support communities during the grant process. SAMHSA staff meet with grantees regularly to discuss progress and to examine data entered into SPARS ensuring a timely submission of data.

5.4 Did the agency have policies and procedures to secure data and protect personal, confidential information? (Example: differential privacy; secure, multiparty computation; homomorphic encryption; or developing audit trails)

The NSDUH survey has developed a statistical disclosure control technique called MASSC to protect confidentiality of the data. MASSC stands for Micro-Agglomeration, Substitution, Subsampling, and Calibration. It was a disclosure limitation methodology specifically developed for NSDUH to meet the requirements of CIPSEA. There is always a trade-off between disclosure risk and information loss. The goal of MASSC is to control the disclosure risks while minimizing the impact of the disclosure control measures on the quality of the data in a comprehensive and integrated manner. MASSC has been successfully used to create NSDUH public use files (PUFs) since 1999.

In addition to having a Confidentiality Officer within CBHSQ who ensures staff complete training and sign a confidentiality statement, SAMHSA offers a certificate of confidentiality (CC) that protects grantees from legal requests for names or other information that would personally identify participants in the evaluation of a grant, project, or contract. CBHSQ trains all staff in good data stewardship, whether the data is covered by CIPSEA or the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. 552a) and the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C.290aa(n)).

5. Data: **Did the agency collect, analyze, share, and use high-quality administrative and survey data - consistent with strong privacy protections - to improve (or help other entities improve) outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and/or the performance of federal, state, local, and other service providers programs in FY21?**
(Examples: Model data-sharing   agreements or data-licensing agreements; data tagging and documentation; data standardization; open data policies; data-use policies)

For the CBHSQ national data sets, SAMHSA uses multiple means to protect data and ensure the protection of personally identifiable information including encryption, multifactor identification (MASSC) and limiting access to data.

SAMHSA's Performance and Accountability and Reporting System (SPARS) hosts the data entry, technical assistance request, and training system for grantees to report performance data to SAMHSA. SPARS serves as the data repository for the Administration's three centers, Center for Substance Abuse and Prevention (CSAP), Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), and Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). In order to safeguard confidentiality and privacy, the current data transfer agreement limits the use of grantee data to internal reports so that data collected by SAMHSA grantees will not be available to share with researchers or stakeholders beyond SAMHSA, and publications based on grantee data will not be permitted.

5.5 Did the agency provide assistance to city, county, and/or state governments, and/or other grantees on accessing the agency's datasets while protecting privacy?

SAMHSA provides both public access and restricted use access to its datasets in a variety of ways. Specific examples are highlighted below.
- The Center of Excellence for Protected Health Information (CoE for PHI) is a SAMHSA funded technical assistance project designed to develop and increase access to simple, clear, and actionable educational resources, training, and technical assistance for consumers and their families, state agencies, and communities to promote patient care while protecting confidentiality.
- CBHSQ's various data collection's data are available (1) as pre-published estimates, (2) via online systems, and (3) as microdata files." A description of CBHSQ's products can be found under the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive page (SAMHDA).
- SAMHSA partners with the National Center for Health Statistics to make restricted use data available through the Research Data Center (RDC). The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) operates the Research Data Center (RDC) to allow researchers access to restricted-use data. For access to the restricted-use data, researchers must submit a research proposal outlining the need for restricted-use data. The proposal provides a framework for CBHSQ to identify potential disclosure risks and how the data will be used.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 6 Common
Evidence Standards/What Works Designations

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

FY21 Score

5

(out of 10 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

6.1 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *research and evaluation* purposes?

The SAMHSA Strategic Plan FY19-FY23 (pp. 20-23) outlines five priority areas to carry out the vision and mission of SAMHSA, including Priority 4: Improving Data Collection, Analysis, Dissemination, and Program and Policy Evaluation. This Priority includes three objectives: 1) Develop consistent data collection strategies to identify and track mental health and substance use needs across the nation; 2) Ensure that all SAMHSA programs are evaluated in a robust, timely, and high-quality manner; and 3) Promote access to and use of the nation's substance use and mental health data and conduct program and policy evaluations and use the results to advance the adoption of evidence-based policies, programs, and practices.

SAMHSA has informally incorporated qualitative data into its framework through the feedback received by the Project Officers and through annual narrative reports submitted by grantees. SAMHSA is in regular communication with grantees and the state/community programs regarding opportunities and challenges. SAMHSA is beginning to develop a more formal process in FY22 for incorporating qualitative feedback into its evaluation process.

Within this strategic plan, SAMHSA is committed to Behavioral Health Equity: the right to access quality health care for all populations regardless of the individual's race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or geographical location. This includes access to prevention, treatment, and recovery services for mental and substance use disorders. Advancing health equity involves ensuring that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. In

296

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 6 Common
Evidence Standards/What Works Designations

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

conjunction with quality services, equity involves addressing social determinants, such as employment and housing stability, insurance status, proximity to services, culturally responsive care--all of which have an impact on behavioral health outcomes.

6.2 Did the agency have a common evidence framework for *funding* decisions?

SAMHSA has universal language about using evidence-based practices (EBPs) that is included in its Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) also known as NOFO (or Notice of Funding Opportunity) also called Funding (entitled Using Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)). This language includes acknowledgement that, "EBPs have not been developed for all populations and/or service settings" thus encouraging applicants to "provide other forms of evidence" that a proposed practice is appropriate for the intended population.

Specifically, the language states that applicants should:
(1) document that the EBPs chosen are appropriate for intended outcomes;
(2) explain how the practice meets SAMHSA's goals for the grant program;
(3) describe any modifications or adaptations needed for the practice to meet the goals of the project;
(4) explain why the EBP was selected;
(5) justify the use of multiple EBPs, if applicable; and
(6) discuss training needs or plans to ensure successful implementation.

Lastly, the language includes resources the applicant can use to understand EBPs. Federal grants officers work in collaboration with the SAMHSA Office of Financial Resources to ensure that grantee funding announcements clearly describe the evidence standard necessary to meet funding requirements.

SAMHSA developed a manual, Developing a Competitive SAMHSA Grant Application, which explains information applicants will likely need for each section of the grant application. The manual has two sections devoted to evidence-based practices (p. 8, p. 26), including: 1) A description of the EBPs applicants plan to implement; 2) Specific information about any modifications

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 6 Common
Evidence Standards/What Works Designations

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

applicants plan to make to the EBPs and a justification for making them; and 3) How applicants plan to monitor the implementation of the EBPs. In addition, if applicants plan to implement services or practices that are not evidence-based, they must show that these services/practices are effective.

For the 10% set aside in the Mental Health Block Grant, states are directed to use evidence-based programs. SAMHSA provides guidance to states based on evidence. For First-Episode Psychosis (FEP), SAMHSA's recommendation is to develop a state FEP program based on the Coordinated Specialty Care model, as evaluated by NIMH. For example, FEP program OnTrackNY is an evaluated model that is recommended based on evidence of success (see question 9 for more information on the EBP supported for the Block Grants).

SAMHSA recognizes that one size does not fit all, therefore although grantees are encouraged to consider the EBP on the SAMHSA website, grantees must provide information on the EBP they play to implement. Their description should reference why each EBP is appropriate for the problem area addressed by the grant as well as the specific population(s) of focus. SAMHSA also asks for specific information about any modifications planned to make the EBPs and a justification for making these modifications as well as how the grantee will monitor the implementation of the EBPs to ensure they are implemented according to EBP guidelines.

The Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center provides communities, clinicians, policy-makers and others with the information and tools to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. The Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center (EBPRC) contains a collection of scientifically-based resources for a broad range of audiences, including Treatment Improvement Protocols, toolkits, resource guides, clinical practice guidelines, and other science-based resources. The retooled EBPRC neither accepts open submissions from outside program developers nor rates individual programs.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 6 Common
Evidence Standards/What Works Designations

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:
Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

6.3 Did the agency have a clearinghouse(s) or *user-friendly tool* that disseminated information on rigorously evaluated, evidence-based solutions (programs, interventions, practices, etc.) including information on what works where, for whom, and under what conditions?

The Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center provides communities, clinicians, policymakers, and others with the information and tools to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. In FY21, five additional EBP guides were added to the website sharing recommendations, evidence ratings, and reviews of interventions that offer insight into available evidence regarding the following priority issues: Telehealth for Treatment of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders, Substance Use Disorders Recovery with a Focus on Employment and Education, Treatment Considerations for Youth and Young Adults with Serious Emotional Disturbances and Serious Mental Illnesses and Co-occurring Substance Use, Use of Medication-Assisted Treatment in Emergency Departments and Treatment for Suicidal Ideation, Self-harm, and Suicide Attempts Among Youth and Prevention and Treatment of HIV Among People Living with Substance Use and/or Mental Disorders.

6.4 Did the agency promote the *utilization* of evidence-based practices in the field to encourage implementation, replication, and application of evaluation findings and other evidence?

SAMHSA promotes the utilization of evidence-based practices. Within grant applications, SAMHSA encourages innovation. For example, the FY20-21 Substance use block grant application includes the following language, "There is increased interest in having a better understanding of the evidence that supports the delivery of medical and specialty care including M/SUD services. Over the past several years, SAMHSA has collaborated with CMS, HRSA, SMAs, state M/SUD authorities, legislators, and others regarding the evidence of various mental and substance misuse prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. States and other purchasers are requesting information on evidence-based practices or other procedures that result in better health outcomes for individuals and the general population. While the emphasis on evidence-based practices will continue, there is a need to develop and create new interventions and technologies and in turn, to establish the evidence. SAMHSA supports states' use of the block grants for this purpose. The NQF and the IOM recommend that

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 6 Common
Evidence Standards/What Works Designations

6. Common Evidence Standards/What Works Designations:

Did the agency use a common evidence framework, guidelines, or standards to inform its research and funding purposes; did that framework prioritize rigorous research and evaluation methods; and did the agency disseminate and promote the use of evidence-based interventions through a user-friendly tool in FY21? (Example: What Works Clearinghouses)

evidence play a critical role in designing health benefits for individuals enrolled in commercial insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare. To respond to these inquiries and recommendations, SAMHSA has undertaken several activities. SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center assesses the research evaluating an intervention's impact on outcomes and provides information on available 43 resources to facilitate the effective dissemination and implementation of the program. SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center provides the information & tools needed to incorporate evidence-based practices into communities or clinical settings.

SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center (EBPRC) aims to provide communities, clinicians, policymakers, and others in the field with the information and tools they need to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. The Resource Center contains a collection of science-based resources, including Treatment Improvement Protocols, toolkits, resource guides, and clinical practice guidelines, for a broad range of audiences. As of June 2021, the Resource Center includes 150 items, including 15 data reports, 23 toolkits, 6 fact sheets, and 88 practice guides.

The Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC) Network engages with organizations and treatment practitioners involved in the delivery of mental health services to strengthen their capacity to deliver effective evidence-based practices to individuals, including the full continuum of services spanning mental illness prevention, treatment, and recovery support. The State Targeted Response Technical Assistance (STR-TA), known as the Opioid Response Network, was created to support efforts to address opioid use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery, and to provide education and training at the local level in evidence-based practices.

The Knowledge Application Program (KAP) supports the professional development of behavioral health workers and provides information and resources on best practices. Specifically, KAP provides substance use treatment professionals with publications that contain information on best treatment practices.

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 7 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

7.1 Did the agency have staff dedicated to leading its innovation efforts to improve the impact of its programs?

CBHSQ hired senior staff within the CBHSQ Office of the Director to focus on innovation, increasing efficiency, developing standard protocols, and developing a dissemination strategy for greater utilization of SAMHSA data (with a focus on encouraging visits to SAMHDA for data use). This work is ongoing.

7.2 Did the agency have initiatives to promote innovation to improve the impact of its programs?

Within SAMHSA grant programs, the agency encourages innovation from every state, territory and community applicant. For example, the FY20-21 Substance use block grant application includes the following language,

"*There is increased interest in having a better understanding of the evidence that supports the delivery of medical and specialty care including M/SUD services. Over the past several years, SAMHSA has collaborated with CMS, HRSA, SMAs, state M/SUD authorities, legislators, and others regarding the evidence of various mental and substance misuse prevention, treatment, and recovery support services. States and other purchasers are requesting information on evidence-based practices or other procedures that result in better health outcomes for individuals and the general population. While the emphasis on evidence-based practices will continue, there is a need to develop and create new interventions and technologies and in turn, to establish the evidence. SAMHSA supports states' use of the block grants for this purpose. The NQF and the IOM recommend that evidence play a critical role in designing health benefits for individuals enrolled in commercial insurance, Medicaid, and Medicare. To respond to these inquiries and recommendations, SAMHSA has undertaken several activities. SAMHSA's Evidence Based*

301

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

Practices Resource Center assesses the research evaluating an intervention's impact on outcomes and provides information on available 43 resources to facilitate the effective dissemination and implementation of the program. SAMHSA's Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center provides the information
& tools needed to incorporate evidence-based practices into communities or clinical settings."

Pursuant to the *21st Century Cures Act*, SAMHSA established the National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory (NMHSUPL), which promotes evidence-based practices and service delivery models through evaluating models that would benefit from further development and through expanding, replicating, or scaling evidence-based programs across a wider area. Specifically NMHSUPL:

- Identifies, coordinates, and facilitates the implementation of policy changes likely to have a significant effect on mental health, mental illness (especially severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorders), recovery supports, and the prevention and treatment of substance use disorder services;
- Works with CBHSQ to collect information from grantees under programs operated by the Administration in order to evaluate and disseminate information on evidence-based practices, including culturally and linguistically appropriate services, as appropriate, and service delivery models; and
- Carries out other activities as deemed necessary to continue to encourage innovation and disseminate evidence-based programs and practices.

7.3 Did the agency evaluate its innovation efforts, including using rigorous methods?

Grantees report innovation and use of evidence-based practices in their reports as required by SAMHSA. Information from these reports are included in rigorous evaluations when evaluations have been planned or used for performance management when a formal evaluation has not been scheduled.

In FY21, SAMHSA completed a rigorous evaluation of its innovative SPF-Rx program. Prescription drug misuse continues to be a critical public health problem in the United States (U.S.) and the SPF (or Strategic Prevention Framework) consists of five steps. SPF is a data-driven, systemic public health planning approach to substance use prevention that is theory-based and involves the implementation of evidence-based strategies. Grantees and subrecipients apply the overarching principles of cultural competence and sustainability throughout the dynamic SPF process. Between 2017-2021, 25 state and tribal SPF-Rx grantees received

7. Innovation: Did the agency have staff, policies, and processes in place that encouraged innovation to improve the impact of its programs in FY21? (Examples: Prizes and challenges; behavioral science trials; innovation labs/accelerators; performance partnership pilots; demonstration projects or waivers with rigorous evaluation requirements)

funding to focus on supporting high-need community efforts to implement evidence-based practices to prevent and reduce the misuse of prescription opioids. In FY21, an evaluation was completed and the findings from this evaluation informed SAMHSA of ways to better develop, assess, and manage its prescription drug misuse prevention programs. The cross site evaluation collected quantitative and qualitative data from three instruments: an annual implementation instrument (130 items collecting data on organization type, funding levels, assessment of capacity building and sustainability, strategic planning, prevention and intervention programming, and ongoing local evaluations); grantee level and community level outcomes module (two modules including data on PDMP use and prescribing patterns, opioid overdose events, etc); and grantee level interviews (qualitative data collected at baseline and at the end of the evaluation). Results of this evaluation were used to inform the next generation of SPF Rx grants.

The next evaluation of this SPF Rx program has been started with an evaluation plan drafted to include an examination of secondary data on matched communities for comparison of outcome data.

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

8

(out of 15 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

8.1 What were the agency's five largest competitive programs and their appropriations amount (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

In FY21, the five largest competitive grant programs are:

1. State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant ($1.5 billion; States, Existing USDA Cooperative Extension Grantees, and U.S. Territories, Tribes and tribal organizations are eligible to apply to set-aside funds only)
2. Children's Mental Health Services ($125 million; States, Tribes, Communities, Territories)
3. Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) ($109 million; States, Tribes, and Territories)
4. Targeted Capacity Expansion-Special Projects ($102 million; Domestic Public and Private Non-Profit Entities, States, Opioid Medication-Assisted SPF Rx Treatment Service Providers, Outpatient Substance Abuse Providers, Community Mental Health Centers, Federally Qualified Health Centers)
5. Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) ($250 million; Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, Community-Based Behavioral Health Clinics)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 8 Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to *allocate funds* in its five largest competitive grant programs? (e.g., Were evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Was evidence a significant requirement?)

As with all SAMHSA grants, the five largest competitive grants programs require applicants to include evidence-based practices and activities that are backed by science to their proposals. The allocation of funds is based on an application that includes a request for evidence of effective work in the area of reducing substance use and mental health disorders.

State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant requires grantees to describe their evidence-based service and practice. The grantee must describe how the EBP meets the population(s) needs and the outcomes to be achieved. The grantee must also indicate how their practice might be modified and reasons for such modifications.

Children Mental Health Services requires grantees to describe the evidence-based and culturally competent mental health services to children with SED.

Strategic Prevention Framework requires grantees to report on the number and percent of evidence-based programs, policies, and or practices that are implemented and describe the types of evidence-based interventions implemented at the community level. Additionally, grantees must coordinate with the Evidence-Based Practices Workgroups.

Targeted Capacity Expansion--Special Projects requires applicants to describe their proposed evidence-based service/practice. The grantee must describe how the EBP meets the population(s) needs and the outcomes to be achieved. The grantee must also indicate how their practice might be modified and reasons for such modifications.

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic Expansion Grants requires applicants to describe their proposed evidence-based service/practice. The grantee must describe how the EBP meets the population(s) needs and the outcomes to be achieved. The grantee must also indicate how their practice might be modified and reasons for such modifications.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 8 Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

8.3 Did the agency use its five largest competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Evaluating some of the largest competitive grant programs is in SAMHSA's evaluation plan. These evaluations will inform and enable SAMHSA to build evidence. One mechanism for this is through the grantmaking process. In some grants, SAMHSA includes additional terms and conditions that state, depending on the funding opportunity and grant application, a grantee may be asked to participate in a cross-site evaluation.

All grant programs at SAMHSA are required to submit data on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation (among other demographic data). In addition, SAMHSA's surveys collect national data in these areas allowing SAMHSA's Office of Behavioral Health Equity, to utilize federal and community data to identify, monitor and respond to behavioral health disparities.

8.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

All grant programs at SAMHSA are required to submit data on race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation (among other demographic data). In addition, SAMHSA's surveys collect national data in these areas allowing SAMHSA's Office of Behavioral Health Equity, to utilize federal and community data to identify, monitor and respond to behavioral health disparities.

8.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

Competitive grant programs are required to consider evidence-based practices in their application and are referred to the SAMHSA Evidence-based Practices Resources Center for tools they need to achieve better outcomes based on what works. An additional example might be found in SAMHSA's trauma and justice portfolio, which provided a comprehensive public health approach to addressing trauma and establishing a trauma-informed approach in health, behavioral health, human services, and related systems.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 8 Use of Evidence in Competitive Grant Programs

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

The intent of this initiative was to reduce both the observable and less visible harmful effects of trauma and violence on children and youth, adults, families, and communities. As part of this initiative, the SPARS team presented the video series, *A Trauma-Informed Approach to Data Collection*, with commentary from subject matter experts and clientele from the People Encouraging People (PEP) program in Baltimore, MD. This series advised grantees and GPOs about using a trauma-informed approach to collecting client-level data.

8.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

Grantees are encouraged to allocate grants funds for data collection, data analysis, and program evaluation. Some grantees hire external evaluators using grant funds to assist them in the evaluation process. For example, one funding announcement states, "Provide specific information about how you will collect the required data for this program and how the data will be utilized to manage, monitor and enhance the program." In addition, up to 20% of the total grant award for the budget period may be used for data collection, performance measurement, and performance assessment expenses.

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 9 Use of Evidence
in Non-Competitive Grant Programs

| RESULTS
FOR AMERICA

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

FY21 Score

7

(out of 10 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

9.1 What were the agency's five largest non-competitive programs and their appropriation amounts (and were city, county, and/or state governments eligible to receive funds from these programs)?

   In FY21, the four largest non-competitive grant programs are:

1. Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant Program ($1.8 billion; States, Territories, Freely Associated States, District of Columbia, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians of Minnesota)
2. Community Mental Health Services Block Grant ($758 million; States, Territories, Freely Associated States, and District of Columbia)
3. Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) ($65 million; States and Territories)
4. The Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (PAIMI) ($36 million; States and Territories)

9.2 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in its five largest non-competitive grant programs? (e.g., Are evidence-based interventions/practices required or suggested? Is evidence a significant requirement?)

The allocation of these state grants are based on formularies that include data provided by national data sets (including SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use and Health), population estimates, as well as estimates of substance use and mental health disorders.

2021 **INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 9 Use of Evidence
in Non-Competitive Grant Programs

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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?** (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

The Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant application requires recipients to describe and report on the evidence-based prevention programs to implement. Through the SABG, states should "identify, implement, and evaluate evidence-based programs, practices, and policies that have the ability to reduce substance use and improve health and well-being in all communities." Funds can also be used for program implementation fidelity training. It also asks recipients about the Evidence-Based Workgroup that helps identify evidence-based strategies and programs for implementation.

The Community Mental Health Services Block Grant application (p. 45) requires grant applicants to describe in their plans use of not less than 10 percent [JA6] of the MHBG funds to carry out evidence-based programs that address the needs of individuals with early serious mental illness, including psychotic disorders, regardless of the age of the individual at onset. Recipients are required to describe any existing and implemented evidence-based practices, how the state promotes evidence-based practices and details on data collection and program implementation strategies.

9.3 Did the agency use its five largest non-competitive grant programs to *build evidence*? (e.g., requiring grantees to participate in evaluations)

Information on how to use funds for data collection and evaluation is covered in the Block Grant application. Grantees are encouraged to allocate grants funds for data collection, data analysis and program evaluation. Some grantees hire external evaluators using grant funds to assist them in the evaluation process. In FY21, SAMHSA updated their application manual to include a section on developing goals and measurable objectives (see p. 38). Specifically, the document states, "To be able to effectively evaluate your project, it is critical that you develop realistic goals and measurable objectives. This chapter will provide information on developing goals and measurable objectives. It will also provide examples of well-written goals and measurable objectives."

Grantees in non-competitive grant programs are required to submit quantitative data to SAMHSA using reporting systems associated with their grant. For example, State Mental Health Agencies receive noncompetitive grants and compile and report annual data collected from SAMHSA's Community Mental Health Block Grant. More information on the URS or Uniform Reporting

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 9 Use of Evidence
in Non-Competitive Grant Programs

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

System can be found online. In this way, noncompetitive grant programs not only allow the sharing of data for research and evaluation but this allows grantees to explore data from other state grantees.

In the FY20-21 Block Grant Application, SAMHSA asks states to base their administrative operations and service delivery on principles of Continuous Quality Improvement/Total Quality Management (CQI/TQM). These CQI processes should identify and track critical outcomes and 72 performance measures, based on valid and reliable data, consistent with the NBHQF, which will describe the health and functioning of the mental health and addiction systems. The CQI processes should continuously measure the effectiveness of services and supports and ensure that they continue to reflect this evidence of effectiveness. The state's CQI process should also track programmatic improvements using stakeholder input, including the general population and individuals in treatment and recovery and their families. In addition, the CQI plan should include a description of the process for responding to emergencies, critical incidents, complaints, and grievances.

9.4 Did the agency use evidence of effectiveness to allocate funds in any other non-competitive grant programs (besides its five largest grant programs)?

The majority of SAMHSA grants are competitively awarded. SAMHSA only has four non-competitive grants which are included above.

As stated in the Block Grant application (p. 45): "States may implement models that have demonstrated efficacy, including the range of services and principles identified by National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) via its Recovery After an Initial Schizophrenia Episode (RAISE) initiative. Utilizing these principles, regardless of the amount of investment, and by leveraging funds through inclusion of services reimbursed by Medicaid or private insurance, states should move their system to address the needs of individuals with a first episode of psychosis (FEP). RAISE was a set of NIMH sponsored studies beginning in 2008, focusing on the early identification and provision of evidence-based treatments to persons experiencing FEP. The NIMH RAISE studies, as well as similar early intervention programs tested worldwide, consist of multiple evidence-based treatment components used in tandem as part of a Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) model, and have been shown to improve symptoms, reduce relapse, and lead to better outcomes. State shall expend not less than 10% of the MHBG amount the State receives for carrying out this section for each fiscal year to support evidence-based programs that address the needs of individuals with early serious

2021 INVEST IN WHAT WORKS FEDERAL STANDARD OF EXCELLENCE

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration | Criteria 9 Use of Evidence
in Non-Competitive Grant Programs

RESULTS FOR AMERICA

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? (Examples: Tiered-evidence frameworks; evidence-based funding set-asides; priority preference points or other preference scoring for evidence; Pay for Success provisions)

mental illness, including psychotic disorders, regardless of the age of the individual at onset. In lieu of expending 10% of the amount the State receives under 45 this section for a fiscal year as required a state may elect to expend not less than 20% of such amount by the end of such succeeding fiscal year."

9.5 What are the agency's 1-2 strongest examples of how non-competitive grant recipients achieved better outcomes and/or built knowledge of what works or what does not?

SOR Grantees have implemented evidence-based practices focused on safe prescribing, naloxone and medication for opioids use disorder to help support and build knowledge around the use of these EBPs.

Currently, State Opioid Response grantees are using funds to examine Fentanyl Test Strips. This recent change under the Biden-Harris Administration will help to build knowledge on the utility of these evidence-based practices.

9.6 Did the agency provide guidance which makes clear that city, county, and state government, and/or other grantees can or should use the funds they receive from these programs to conduct program evaluations and/or to strengthen their evaluation capacity-building efforts?

Information on how to use funds for data collection and evaluation is covered in the Block Grant application. Grantees are encouraged to allocate grants funds for data collection, data analysis and program evaluation. Some grantees hire external evaluators using grant funds to assist them in the evaluation process.

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

FY21 Score

4

(out of 8 points)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

10.1 Did the agency have policy(ies) for determining when to shift funds away from grantees, practices, policies, interventions, and/or programs that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes, and did the agency act on that policy?

As a matter of policy, SAMHSA uses the term "restricted status" to describe grant recipients that are financially unstable, have inadequate financial management systems, or are poor programmatic performers. Grants placed on restricted status require additional monitoring and have additional award conditions that must be met before funds can be drawn. SAMHSA adheres to HHS Grants Policy Statement, including the policy on suspension or termination, which states: "If a recipient has failed to materially comply with the terms and conditions of award, the OPDIV [Grant-Awarding Operating Division] may suspend the grant, pending corrective action, or may terminate the grant for cause" (p. II-89).

10.2 Did the agency identify and provide support to agency programs or grantees that failed to achieve desired outcomes?

The SAMHSA Performance Accountability and Reporting System allows SAMHSA staff to regularly monitor discretionary grant status as well as meet with grant program directors. If a grantee is falling behind or not meeting proposed targets, SAMHSA staff access the data in real time to provide the support or technical assistance needed to make sure the grantee does not fail. Given

10. Repurpose for Results: In FY21, did the agency shift funds away from or within any practice, policy, or program that consistently failed to achieve desired outcomes? (Examples: Requiring low-performing grantees to re-compete for funding; removing ineffective interventions from allowable use of grant funds; incentivizing or urging grant applicants to stop using ineffective practices in funding announcements; proposing the elimination of ineffective programs through annual budget requests; incentivizing well-designed trials to fill specific knowledge gaps; supporting low-performing grantees through mentoring, improvement plans, and other forms of assistance; using rigorous evaluation results to shift funds away from a program)

the important mission of SAMHSA, to reduce the impact of substance use and mental illness on America's communities, it is critical that struggling communities are identified early with the goal of continuous quality improvement and support.