12.   BUILDING AND USING EVIDENCE TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT EFFECTIVENESS

The *Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking* called on Federal agencies to use the best science and data available for decision-making, and to build more evidence when it does not exist to tackle complex, dynamic public policy challenges. Efforts to restore trust in Government can succeed only if Government programs deliver results for the American people and do so effectively and equitably. The use of rigorous evidence on what works and investments that build evidence where it is lacking underpin the Federal Government's ability to design and implement programs that are equitable, effective, and accountable. To ensure that the Government delivers on its commitments to all Americans, the Federal Government has an obligation to bring evidence to bear on decision-making and to evaluate what is working, for whom, and under what circumstances.

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018,[1] or Evidence Act, has advanced the Federal Government's ability to produce and use data for more effective decision-making. However, the law itself did not provide agencies with funding to stand up or expand the functions or capabilities necessary to carry out its vision, nor did it clarify how agencies are expected to fund evidence-planning and building activities, including those needed to support the new statutory framework for program evaluation. The Administration has demonstrated its commitment to executing on the Evidence Act through investments in evidence and evaluation priorities. As described in this chapter, the Budget includes new and sustained investments necessary for agencies to establish and staff the evaluation function, plan and execute evidence-building activities that employ high-quality evaluation methods, and deliver on evidence-based policymaking. Chapter 9, "Leveraging Federal Statistics to Strengthen Evidence-Based Decision-Making," describes evidence-building investments in statistical infrastructure and data within the Federal statistical system.

Implementing the Evidence Act represents a fundamental shift toward a more holistic reliance on evidence across the Government; it is not a compliance or reporting exercise. This was reflected in agency development and publication of the plans and assessments required under Title I of the Evidence Act—the multiyear Learning Agenda, the Annual Evaluation Plan, and the Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research and Analysis ("Capacity Assessment")—in a way that fulfills their purpose as strategic, evidence-building plans. To fully realize this shift, however, requires agencies to also develop processes and practices that establish habitual and routine reliance on evidence across agency functions and demand new or better evidence when it is needed.

Building and using evidence is most useful when done in service of other priorities, not as a separate activity distinct from core functions. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) remains focused on delivering a future in which agencies use all available evidence to make better program, operational, and administrative decisions, build evidence where it is lacking, and ultimately serve the American people more effectively.

A key marker of a culture of evidence is thinking about evidence needs and building in data and evaluation activities from the start. This allows us to invest resources in strategies with a high likelihood of success and helps us learn from these investments to inform future decision-making. This is particularly the case for large new investments, such as those spurred by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP),[2] Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA),[3] and Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA).[4] Across Administration priorities, we aim to ensure that evidence is used during the entire lifecycle of program development and implementation, and that we generate evidence to facilitate learning and improvement from these investments.

Recent Progress in Advancing Evidence

Government-Wide Progress and Administration Accomplishments to Date

The Evidence Act recognized the need for agency-level leadership to effectively implement the law's requirements and establish evaluation as a critical agency function. CFO Act agencies, as well as many small or independent agencies and agency components, have responded by establishing Evaluation Officers in a senior leadership position with the responsibility for working with other senior leaders to implement the law's many activities. OMB has convened the *Evaluation Officer Council* (EOC) since 2019, providing a forum for these evaluation leaders to share lessons learned, exchange information, discuss challenges, and coordinate on solutions. The Council supports an annual workshop series to build evaluation capacity across the Government and contributes members' expertise to initiatives led by other evidence Councils. The Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy, a formal technical workgroup of the EOC, builds on this work by convening evaluation experts with a variety of methodological and topical expertise to support the Federal evaluation community through technical assistance, papers and tools, and professional development opportunities for staff. The OMB Evidence Team also hosts and organizes an online internal-to-Government Community

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[1] Public Law 115-435.

[2] American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Public Law 117-2.

[3] Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Public Law 117-58 (2021).

[4] Public Law 117-169 (2022).

Key Administration accomplishments to advance evidence:

- The President issued a *Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-based Policymaking* to reaffirm and strengthen the commitment to making decisions based on the best available evidence and data.

- Each Federal Agency has published its first-ever *Learning Agenda* and *Capacity Assessment* and a second *Annual Evaluation Plan*; these are available on *Evaluation.gov*, providing visibility and transparency for Federal evidence-building.

- OMB issued *Memorandum M-21-27, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans*, to strengthen guidance on Title I of the Evidence Act and highlight for agency leadership the importance of a culture of evidence.

- Many agencies established their first public-facing *Evaluation Policy* to outline how program evaluations will adhere to the Government-wide standards of relevance and utility, independence and objectivity, rigor, transparency, and ethics.

- OMB published the first-ever *President's Management Agenda Learning Agenda* in order to foster evidence-building to inform Government-wide management practices.

- OMB and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) launched the Year of Evidence for Action, including a virtual *Evidence Summit* and eleven *Evidence Forums* in order to help bridge the gap between the Federal and external research and evaluation communities.

- In *IIJA Implementation Guidance*, OMB encouraged the use of funds for evaluation within Federal agencies and among award recipients in order to ensure that Government is measuring the effectiveness of these investments.

- OSTP published the *Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+* Equity in order to document the priority evidence questions that the Federal Government needs to answer to advance equity for and improve the well-being of LGBTQI+ people.

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of Practice, which features curated resources—including reports, toolkits, presentations, and workshops—for the Federal evaluation community on topics related to Evidence Act Title I implementation, program evaluation, and evidence more generally. The resource page on *Evaluation.gov* provides an opportunity for the public to access many of these resources.

This year, OMB partnered with the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to launch the *Year of Evidence for Action* to support agencies as they turn from planning to doing in implementing their Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. The kickoff Summit and series of Evidence Forums brought Federal leaders together with experts from non-profits and academic organizations to share leading practices from Federal agencies to generate and use research-backed knowledge to advance better, more equitable outcomes for all of America. The discussions aimed to strengthen and develop new strategies and structures to promote consistent evidence-based decision-making inside the Federal Government, while increasing connection and collaboration among researchers, knowledge-producers and decision-makers inside and outside of the Federal Government. *Readouts* from the Forums are available on Evaluation.gov.

This year also saw the launch of a new interactive Learning Agenda Question *Dashboard* on Evaluation.gov to provide a critical first step in helping agencies and external researchers engage more effectively with one another. While agencies are making great progress in executing their evidence-building activities, there remain many unanswered priority questions and opportunities to engage the external research community. As described in *OMB Memorandum M-21-27*, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans, building an evidence culture requires institutionalizing both the demand for and generation of evidence while also making the available evidence easier to find and use. The dashboard is one step in this direction by making it easy for external partners and members of the public to explore where evidence is most needed, allowing those external to Government to consider how their own research can be most policy-relevant and how they might collaborate with Federal agencies to build evidence in priority areas. Through the dashboard, users can search all agency Learning Agenda questions by agency, topic, and mission/operational focus. A forthcoming Research Portal will share concrete opportunities for the external research community to engage directly with Federal agencies in support of their evidence-building needs. This platform will facilitate collaborative applied research and evaluation while building capacities for policy-relevant evidence generation and use.

It is clear that an evidence mindset has begun to take hold, not only within agencies covered by the Evidence Act's requirements, but also for whole-of-Government priorities, including the President's Management Agenda and Executive Orders, and major crosscutting investments

such as those included in ARP, IIJA, and IRA. This can be seen in the development of cross-Government Learning Agendas, including the President's Management Agenda Learning Agenda and the American Rescue Plan Equity Learning Agenda, which offer more opportunities for the external research community to contribute learning and expertise to answer priority cross-Government questions. They also provide an important venue for agencies to work together to help answer these tough questions.

The Administration has also implemented new strategies for identifying and investing in inter-agency evidence-building, through guidance that requires improved coordination and engagement across leaders and teams to ensure that evidence has a seat at the table as Government-wide initiatives are conceptualized and planned. For example, OMB's implementing guidance (*OMB Memorandum M-22-12*, Advancing Effective Stewardship of Taxpayer Resources and Outcomes in the Implementation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) for IIJA states that "agencies must design programs with clear goals and objectives, consistent with statutory requirements and informed by an understanding of the people they are meant to serve, draw from the best available data and evidence about effective strategies for similar programs and investments." Agencies were directed to build capacity, including staff to engage in evidence-building and use, and were encouraged to include language in funding notices requesting that applicants allocate funding in their budgets for personnel and data infrastructure needs to support performance management and program evaluation.

Building Evidence Through Cross-Government Learning Agendas

The *President's Management Agenda (PMA) Learning Agenda* marks the first systematic effort to instill an evidence-informed approach to advancing the crosscutting management priorities laid out in the President's Management Agenda. The PMA Learning Agenda galvanizes the Federal evaluation community as well as external academics and public management researchers to work together to generate the evidence needed to guide PMA implementation. Specifically, the Learning Agenda raises the critical questions for building the evidence base on how to strengthen and empower the Federal workforce, how to deliver programs and services effectively and build trust, and how to advance equity and support underserved communities. By articulating these evidence needs, the PMA Learning Agenda aims to reinforce a focus on learning, bridge silos, and catalyze innovation beyond the Federal Government.

Among the many advancements the Administration has made to build evidence and evaluation planning into the core work of administering funding is the support for evidence-building and use in implementing the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP). Even as agencies moved quickly to implement ARP provisions, they took a number of steps to prioritize identifying and applying the best available evidence in designing their programs. For example, the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) integrated

clear expectations around the use of evidence and evaluation in the compliance and reporting *guidance* for the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. The Department of Agriculture (USDA) conducted a robust stakeholder engagement process and drew on the strong evidence base for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program effectiveness to identify the specific mix of innovations to introduce or pilot as part of WIC Modernization efforts. Similarly, the ability to implement Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) relied on the rigorous evaluation of summer EBT that USDA conducted in 2016. Agencies have also worked together to capitalize on their relative strengths in capacity and expertise. Treasury and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are working collaboratively to implement an evaluation of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, and agencies (Treasury, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and USDA) have partnered with the General Services Administration's (GSA) Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) on ARP program evaluations, many of which bring an emphasis on equity.

To further complement this work, and contribute to a robust portfolio of evidence, the OMB Evidence Team and OES are working together to lead a national evaluation conducted by an independent contractor. The research questions driving the ARP National Evaluation are informed by the *ARP Equity Learning Agenda* and will lead to a systematic look at the contributions of over 30 selected ARP-funded programs toward achieving equitable outcomes. With the support of the White House ARP Implementation Team as well broad agency support through an Agency Expert Team, this study will describe ARP program planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts, including the integration of equity across these areas. It will also analyze the effectiveness of ARP program implementation, particularly with respect to advancing equity through both in depth evaluations and targeted analyses for a subset of selected programs.

In January 2023, the Administration released the *Federal Evidence Agenda on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals (LGBTQI+) Equity* under the auspices of the National Science and Technology Council's Subcommittee for Equitable Data in response to Executive Order 14075, "Advancing Equality for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Individuals." This document provides a roadmap for Federal agencies to continue to build the evidence needed to advance equity for and improve the health and well-being of LGBTQI+ people. Importantly, the Federal Evidence Agenda includes a Learning Agenda to Advance LGBTQI+ Equity, which includes a series of 13 over-arching learning questions across four thematic areas (Health, Healthcare, and Access to Care; Housing Stability and Security; Economic Security and Education; and Safety, Security, and Justice) with more specific learning questions within these areas. Federal agencies will use the Federal Evidence Agenda to develop and im-

plement their sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics (SOGI) Data Action Plans to build the evidence needed. The Federal Evidence Agenda on LGBTQI+ Equity also highlights priority questions for external researchers to contribute to the Federal Government's efforts to continue to build evidence to advance equity for LGBTQI+ people.

The Administration recognizes that an evidence-based Government must also build and use evidence across key priorities, including advancing equity, improving customer experience, developing the Federal workforce, and promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Across these priorities, we need to ensure that evidence is used as efforts and approaches are developed, and that evidence is intentionally and thoughtfully generated to facilitate learning and improvement. To facilitate this work, the Administration has emphasized the importance of evidence-building, including evaluation, in its guidance and Executive Orders. For example, the Executive Order 14058, "*Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government*" includes a specific requirement that High-Impact Service Providers conduct assessments of their work, including rigorous program evaluation (Section 6) and to engage with key evidence-building colleagues, including the Evaluation Officer Council.

Agency Progress and Accomplishments

Since the Evidence Act was enacted in January 2019, agencies have made notable progress meeting the law's requirements, including advancing their ability to build and use evidence and supporting the new statutory system for program evaluation. In spring 2022, these efforts culminated in agencies publishing their first-ever Learning Agendas and Capacity Assessments, as well as their FY 23 Annual Evaluation Plans. These evidence plans are now available on agency websites and *linked centrally* on Evaluation.gov. Whether an agency had a program evaluation function prior to the Evidence Act or not, this has resulted in transparency on evidence plans, changes and advancements to this work, and awareness of gaps that had not previously been identified.

While a few agencies had a Learning Agenda prior to the Evidence Act, these were typically not available to the public (such as in the case of the Department of Labor's (DOL) learning agenda) and did not provide detail on the proposed approaches, data, and potential challenges. These elements are now expected to be made transparent for all agencies. Some agencies have been internally planning their evaluation activities annually for decades, but none had a public Annual Evaluation Plan that outlined specifics on the anticipated evaluations that would support significant evidence-building priorities. The Evidence Act also required all agencies to conduct a Capacity Assessment to examine its capacity across evaluation, statistics, research, and other analytic functions.

As the *Capacity Assessments* demonstrate, agencies with more mature and long-standing evidence, statistical, data, and evaluation functions were better positioned to implement the Evidence Act. For example, HUD's long-standing practice of developing and publishing their "Research Roadmap" allowed them to utilize their established practice to craft an agency-wide Learning Agenda. For a number of other agencies, the Evidence Act has catalyzed the creation of previously absent capabilities. For example, several agencies lacked a central evaluation function prior to the Evidence Act, including the Department of the Interior (DOI), Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS), among others. Following enactment of the Evidence Act, OPM has made significant progress to stand up an evaluation function. The agency now has a full-time Evaluation Officer and two full-time equivalent (FTE) employees supporting evaluation across the agency. To support these efforts, the President's Budget includes funding for an additional FTE to further enhance OPM's capacity to build evidence around the Federal workforce and personnel policies. Other agencies, including the Department of Transportation, are in the process of establishing a central office to manage these functions and are hiring both dedicated leadership and support staff with demonstrated evaluation expertise to lead the work of Evidence Act implementation and evaluation in the coming years. The President's Budget acknowledges more investment is needed to build and strengthen evaluation capacity, and examples of other key investments are discussed in this Chapter.

The Department of Homeland Security is another leading example of agency progress. In 2022, DHS launched a pilot process to explore how the agency can use evidence planning to strengthen program design and planning. The pilot process involves DHS determining how the proposed activities are expected to lead to the anticipated goals and outcomes; where evidence exists to support the logic model; and where sufficient evidence does not exist, determine what strategies are needed to understand if results are achieved, including if it is appropriate and feasible to evaluate the program. This is an important internal DHS planning exercise that is a collaboration among the Evaluation Officer, financial assistance policy and oversight office, grants administration office, and program offices. Building this into standard operating procedures has and will continue to be instrumental in identifying Learning Agenda questions, possible areas where evaluation may be needed, and where performance management and reporting on results can be strengthened. DHS continues to replicate this practice in 2023 for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), US Citizenship and Immigration Services, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, the Science and Technology Directorate, and for policy areas where building evidence on what works is crucial, such as grants to prevent domestic terrorism and violence.

How the 2024 Budget Advances an Evidence-Based Government in Federal Agencies

The Budget includes a number of investments to increase evidence-based policymaking, sustains critical existing evidence investments, acknowledges where there

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A mature evaluation function at an agency goes above the Evidence Act requirements, and includes practices such as:

- An Agency Evaluation Officer that is a member of the Senior Executive Service or similarly situated senior leader and brings the requisite evaluation skills based in social sciences training and experience

- Evaluation-skilled staff supporting the Evaluation Officer in coordinating enterprise-wide to develop agency Learning Agendas and evaluation plans

- Funding for independent evaluation contracts, with robust and diversified funding support from departmental management and program accounts

- Active engagement in the Evaluation Officer Council, Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy, and Federal interagency evaluation communities

- Ongoing collaboration with leadership throughout the agency

- Professional development support for evaluation staff to increase and/or maintain their expertise in evaluation methodologies, tools, and theories

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is a need for more evidence capacity, and supports programs that demonstrate evidence of effectiveness. The Budget makes targeted investments to support these activities; agencies must also build in costs for data collection, evidence-building, and evaluation planning and execution from the start, not as an afterthought, as they implement new and existing programs.

Sustaining or Enhancing Long-Standing Evaluation Functions

In addition to offering strong support to those agencies that are continuing to grow their evaluation functions, the Budget recognizes that the Evidence Act requirements were new for all agencies, and even those with mature evidence-building and evaluation functions in place prior to the law's enactment need continued investment and support. The Budget sustains or enhances funding for evaluation offices or units that pre-date the Evidence Act, including for evaluation activities at the Department of Education's (ED) Institute of Education Sciences; several parts of HHS, including the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research; USDA's Food and Nutrition Service; DOL's Chief Evaluation Office; GSA's OES; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and AmeriCorps. The Budget includes an investment in dedicated staff to support the Evaluation Officer at the Social Security Administration (SSA), in order to ensure that the agency completes the activities on its Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plans. It also includes modest investments to advance professional development opportunities for DOL and SSA's research and evaluation staff. At HHS, the Budget continues to support evidence and evaluation activities in ASPE. The Budget includes significant support for the research, evaluation, and demonstration activities that HUD conducts, as well as resources targeted specifically to eviction-prevention programs and

HUD-wide technical assistance. It also includes continued investments at the US Agency for International Development in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning for implementation of the Evidence Act and associated evidence-building activities, including evaluation.

Investing Further in Evidence Capacity and Evaluation Officer Leadership

An evidence culture requires robust capacity across the Government and within agencies. Leadership is critical, including both leaders with evaluation expertise and the support from agency leaders focused on other programmatic or operational functions. While the Administration is making progress through Government-wide initiatives and agency-specific milestones, much work remains, in part due to a lack of highly skilled evaluators in agencies. This includes vacancies in Evaluation Officer positions or the assignment of Evaluation Officer responsibilities to a senior executive who is already responsible for multiple other roles.

As OMB Memorandum M-21-27 underscores, agencies are expected to fill the role of Evaluation Officer with someone who brings superior skills and demonstrated expertise, and who has the time and resources needed to lead and execute the Learning Agenda and evaluation activities across their agency. Without qualified Evaluation Officers who have sufficient time to devote to the role, agencies miss opportunities to leverage the value of evaluation in supporting mission-critical work. Agencies that have established this leadership position are better positioned to meet the challenges of identifying, prioritizing, and addressing their agency's most critical evidence needs. Many agencies have begun to create an evaluation function where it did not previously exist, or where it lacked the necessary capacity to even minimally execute the function. The President's Budget recognizes where increased emphasis on the evaluation function is needed at agencies to fulfill the promise of Title I of the Evidence Act and targets enhanced support to advance this work,

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Advancing Evaluation Capacity at FEMA

The Budget includes multiple new FTEs with specialized evaluation expertise to coordinate and collaborate across FEMA in both preparedness and response program areas to maximize evidence and evaluation planning and action to inform program improvements, rigorously assess results, and identify evidence gaps and needed improvements. The vision for an evaluation function at FEMA includes staffing these positions with program evaluation experts that can plan and execute evaluations that align with program evaluation standards, as outlined in OMB Memorandum M-20-12 and DHS' agency evaluation policy. To execute on this vision, the FEMA Evaluation Officer and program offices will be coordinating closely to set aside a portion of administrative and other available funds to support priority evaluations or other evidence-building activities. The Budget includes a number of items to further establish an enterprise-wide evaluation capacity at FEMA. With the selection of a full-time evaluation expert leader to serve as the FEMA Evaluation Officer, these new positions and the current capacity lay the foundation for robust evidence and evaluation planning at FEMA. For DHS, the Budget also includes program evaluation specialists to support CISA's and DHS' Evaluation Officers.

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institutionalize their evaluation policies, and embed rigorous evidence and evaluation planning.

Investing in Qualified Evaluators

In addition to the importance of the Evaluation Officer role, agencies need highly qualified technical evaluation staff to plan and execute priority evidence-building activities. Across agencies, evaluation staff are responsible for conceptualizing and designing evaluations, including identifying methodological options, preparing solicitation requests for third-party independent evaluations, reviewing technical proposals, overseeing contracted evaluation projects, conducting technical reviews, and interacting with technical evaluators and expert technical work group members. Federal evaluators must also build and maintain collegial relationships with other stakeholders in their agency to accomplish their goals, including career staff who lead the programs being evaluated, procurement and contracting officials, attorneys, performance and statistical staff, and career and political leadership. Maintaining relationships with staff in the Federal programs addressed by the evaluation is a particularly essential role. For these reasons, Federal evaluator positions at all professional levels need to be filled with highly capable evaluators.

To this end, the Budget provides funding to ensure that each CFO Act agency has at least some dedicated staff that have specialized evaluation experience to support the Evaluation Officer in planning and executing Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. The Budget includes additional evaluator positions at DHS, the Department of Commerce, DOI, the Department of Justice, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, SSA, Treasury, USDA, OPM, and VA. For example, the Budget includes two full-time evaluation specialized positions at NASA in order to have dedicated staff with expertise to support enterprise-wide program evaluation planning and execution. The Budget also makes once-in-a-generation investments to stand up evaluation functions in order to provide the

infrastructure to address priority areas where evidence has been lacking for decades. For example, the President's Budget includes a direct investment to build the capacity within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to build and use evidence, including program evaluation, to ensure that VBA is effectively delivering benefits to our Nation's veterans. At EPA, the Budget includes an additional $6 million and 5 FTE above the base request for evaluation work to support the duties of the Evaluation Officer in implementing the Title I of the Evidence Act. The Administration supports EPA's efforts to structure major funding activities to incorporate evaluation from the outset of those activities, including early integration of evidence into the IRA programs and a higher degree of planning to better target resources and expertise toward evidence-building priorities. The Budget also supports much-needed investments at DOI, including funding for three qualified program evaluators and $4.5 million for an independent program evaluation fund. At Treasury, the Budget also provides new FTE to increase capacity to support the Evaluation Officer, as well as funding for new data and evaluation staff at the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, and the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.

Investments in Evaluation-Focused Evidence-Building Activities

To fully realize the vision for evidence-based policymaking, the Federal Government requires expert and empowered leadership and staff as described above, and a robust evaluation infrastructure including dedicated funding for evaluations projects. As described in *OMB Memorandum M-20-12*, Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices, Federal agencies should establish the conditions that enable evaluators to operate with an appropriate level of independence from programmatic, regulatory, and policymaking activities. In order to produce credible information and maintain high-quality processes and products, evalu-

ations should be planned, implemented, and interpreted by qualified evaluators with relevant education, skills, and experience for the methods undertaken.

Agencies should use the variety of funding sources available across the agency for implementation of their Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans, among other evidence-building needs, including setting aside a portion of program and/or general departmental or administrative funds to plan and execute priority evaluations. One example is the proposal for the Congress to continue allowing the Department of Education to set aside funding for evaluations of higher education programs. This pooled evaluation authority, first provided in fiscal year 2022, would continue to permit ED to expand its ability to evaluate higher education programs, analogous to the evaluation set-aside in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for K-12 programs.

The Budget also continues essential authorities for evaluating and improving Federal programs. For example, the Budget maintains the authority for DOL to set aside up to 0.75 percent of appropriations so that there may be sufficient funds for conducting significant and rigorous evaluations, and it continues to provide DOL's Chief Evaluation Office the authority to carry out grants and demonstration projects to test innovative strategies for building evidence. The Budget also includes measures to further support these offices, such as the request for the Evaluation Funding Flexibility General Provision, which would give DOL's Chief Evaluation Office and Bureau of Labor Statistics and HHS's ASPE and OPRE the ability to use evaluation funds over a greater period of time to support strategic, long-term, and flexible evaluation planning.

The President's Budget includes proposals to execute evidence-building efforts on agencies' Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. For example, the Budget includes an investment at SSA to conduct an evaluation of the agency's outreach efforts with individuals potentially eligible for benefits. The Budget further builds on the 2023 Budget proposal for a cross-agency Equity in Procurement evaluation at the Small Business Administration, by providing $1.25 million for this project.

As is also highlighted in Chapter 9, the final report from the Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence Building included a recommendation that OMB, in coordination with the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, the Chief Data Officer Council, the Evaluation Officer Council, and other relevant Federal councils, develop a systematic approach to funding Evidence Act implementation. OMB will launch a cross-Government, comprehensive resource analysis, in collaboration with Council colleagues, during the remainder of 2023 and into 2024 in order to inform a comprehensive set of proposals to develop a consistent and sustainable mechanism for identifying and obtaining the resources needed for full Evidence Act implementation.

Acting on Available Evidence

The President's Budget also proposes investments in those programs and areas where evidence already exists. Investing in promising and evidence-based pro-grams is central to the Administration's commitment to an evidence-based Government. The budget highlights examples of programs and policy areas where evidence has already led to action, and where further investments are being made. For example, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program provides funding for States, territories, and tribal entities to implement evidence-based home visiting programs. MIECHV includes funding for evaluation to continue building the evidence base. MIECHV is a critical program serving expectant and new parents with children up to kindergarten age who live in communities at higher risk for poor maternal and child health outcomes.

The Budget also includes $165 million at ED to expand an existing postsecondary retention and completion grants program that provides competitive grants to States, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions of higher education to implement or expand evidence-based, statewide, and institutional level retention and completion reforms that improve student outcomes, including retention and completion rates, transfers from two- to four-year institutions, and employment outcomes. The requested increase would more than triple the number of grantees and would strengthen evaluation of the projects by executing the program as a tiered-evidence competition, under which interventions with a higher level of evidence could be scaled up with larger grants.

At DOL, the Budget continues to invest in evidence-based programs, including $335 million to expand investments in Registered Apprenticeship programs that have been shown to improve employment outcomes and will provide greater opportunities for women to enter Registered Apprenticeship and nontraditional occupations. In addition, the Budget includes $550 million for Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA). By law, States are required to use no less than 25 percent of RESEA funds for interventions or service delivery strategies with strong causal evidence showing a demonstrated capacity to improve employment and earnings outcomes for program participants.

How the 2024 Budget Makes Government-Wide Evaluation Investments

To maximize efficient use of Federal funding available for evaluation and ensure implementation is undertaken by highly qualified staff, the Administration is taking actions to create an environment where agencies can plan and execute high-quality evaluations that align with the program evaluation standards and practices set out in OMB Memorandum M-20-12. In addition to critical investments in agency evaluation functions and evidence-building activities, the Budget includes Government-wide investments in evaluation to address unmet crosscutting needs.

Crosscutting Solutions

Even when agencies have open positions for evaluation experts, they face many barriers to hiring qualified staff. OMB and OPM continue to explore options for accelerating hiring through processes such as Subject Matter Expert

Qualification Assessment and central hiring actions. The Budget also establishes a $1 million cross-Governmental Program Evaluation Fellowship Program to be housed at the Administration for Children and Families at HHS. The Fellowship would build on successful fellowship models, such as the White House Leadership Development Program, and would place specialized evaluation experts at agencies that need support to accelerate implementation of the evaluation function. The Administration will also support efforts by the Evaluation Officer Council to plan for a Program Evaluation Corps, which would recruit program evaluators into the civil service and place them in agencies that lack sufficient evaluation capacity.

In 2014, the OMB Data-Driven Innovation (DDI) Fund received $2 million in no-year appropriations "for projects that enable Federal agencies to increase the use of evidence and innovation in order to improve program results and cost-effectiveness by utilizing rigorous evaluation and other evidence-based tools." Through the DDI fund, OMB has executed transfers to other agencies and hosted expert detailees to tackle cross-Government evidence-building priorities and advance evaluation capacity Government-wide. Examples of DDI-funded initiatives include launching and testing the Pay-for-Success funding model; identifying evaluation principles and practices in a National Academies workshop (later incorporated into OMB Memorandum M-20-12); strengthening performance management and evaluation in DOL and ED regulations and guidance for employment and training programs; establishing the Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy; and developing tools for agencies to implement Learning Agendas (a leading practice codified in the Evidence Act). The Administration is using the small amount of remaining funds to deliver new ways to benefit agencies Government-wide through high-quality evaluations. This includes enhancing the accessibility and useability of a Government-wide Federal Evaluation Toolkit, carrying out rigorous evaluations of telework and remote work, and supporting the CDC in updating its widely-used evaluation framework for public health.

Data Access and Infrastructure to
Support Evidence-Buidling

Credible evidence-building, including program evaluation, requires access to data, either existing or newly collected, that accurately captures the intended information and addresses the questions of interest. Leveraging existing administrative and statistical data can provide significant cost efficiencies, but requires additional skills and capacity. Strategic, cost-efficient evidence-building relies on strong data governance that facilitates data discovery, assessing fitness/suitability of the data for the intended purpose, data access, data protection, and use of existing statistical, program, or other administrative data to enable and support secondary uses, including for program evaluation. Agencies continue to innovate, improve, and build the data infrastructure, capacity, and governance to carry out the goals of the Evidence Act. Although much progress has been made, there is still work to be done to organize evidence-building, data management,

and data access functions to ensure an integrated and direct connection to evidence needs. Chapter 9 describes how the Federal statistical system is expanding its long-standing capacity to produce and make accessible data for evidence-building as the recognized statistical agencies and units work together to implement Title III of the Evidence Act. Evaluation Officers, in collaboration with Statistical Officials, Chief Data Officers, Senior Agency Officials for Privacy, Chief lnformation Security Officers, and other relevant officials, have a role in fostering data management in order to successfully support agencies to deliver on Learning Agenda and evaluation plan priorities.

Top Implementation Priorities for the Year Ahead

Now that the Government has ambitious plans in place to build evidence in key priority areas, we must collectively turn our attention to executing on these plans. Successful execution is critical if we are to effectively build, strengthen, and empower a culture of evidence across the Federal Government. Agency leaders have a critical role in the following actions:

- *Act on evidence within agencies and across the Government.* This includes: (1) focusing agencies' attention on executing the studies identified on their multiyear Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans, (2) collaborating across agencies and Government-wide on priority, crosscutting evidence-building needs, and (3) ensuring that results are shared widely and made available in timely and useable ways for decision-makers.

- *Embed evidence use in core agency functions.* Agencies must generate high-quality evidence and ensure that evidence is brought to the decision-making table. Leaders and staff must use evidence to inform the planning and implementation of agency programs, operations, regulations, and management activities.

- *Build evaluation in from the start of new programs and identify evidence opportunities within existing programs.* Funding announcements and program implementation should not be disconnected from agency evidence-building plans. Each action agencies take to act on appropriated funds is an opportunity to assess if funding strategies are advancing agency missions and goals, and to examine what is known to work, for whom, and under what circumstances, and where critical evidence gaps still exist. Agencies should integrate a strong focus on evidence and evaluation in key Administration priorities, including equity and customer experience.

- *Increase agency capacity to build evidence for use in decision-making.* This includes: (1) acting on new and proposed investments in evaluation and other evidence-building activities, (2) prioritizing available resources for FTE to support these functions, including staff to build evidence and translate evidence for decision-makers, (3) leveraging Govern-

ment-wide solutions for procuring evaluation services and hiring qualified evaluators, (4) supporting evidence and evaluation training for staff and the use of shared resources and tools, and (5) encouraging evidence training for agency executives and increased engagement by agency leaders in communicating evidence use as a priority.

- *Expand support for the Federal evaluation community through engagement and collaboration with the external research community.* This includes: (1) launching a new Research Portal on Evaluation.gov in support of both agency-specific and crosscutting Learning Agenda questions, (2) continued partnership between OMB and OSTP to further the goals of the Year of Evidence for Action, and (3) building new communities of practice between researchers and agencies to support priorities on the President's Management Agenda.

Conclusion

The past year, the Administration has made continued progress across all Federal agencies toward realizing the vision of a fully evidence-based Federal Government.

Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans are now public, and agencies are pivoting from planning to execution. The Budget makes critical investments to build evaluation capacity where it is most needed so that all agencies have at least some skilled evaluators to do this work. However, capacity remains limited in many agencies, and this is an opportune time for evaluators and similarly trained social scientists to consider a career as a Federal civil servant. The Government needs this technical expertise in order to realize the vision of routinely building and using evidence to inform mission delivery and internal operations. In addition, there has never been a better time for external academics and researchers to align their own work to the priorities that the Federal Government has laid out, and for philanthropy to consider how it can help support this work. We face many challenges as a nation, and we are asking hard and honest questions about how to best address them. Partnering together across sectors is the only way that this work can be accomplished at the scale it is needed. This is the moment to demonstrate to the American people that their Government uses data and relies on facts, and in doing so can rebuild the trust that is fundamental to our democracy.