

SECTION 290 – EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

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Summary of Changes

Refines and updates prior guidance on how agencies make and publish off-cycle updates to Agency Learning Agendas. Refines and updates requirements for agency monitoring and reporting on their progress implementing activities in the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan.

290.1 To which agencies does this section apply?

This section is a requirement for CFO Act agencies and is strongly encouraged for all others.

290.2 How do the requirements in this section apply to sub-agencies, bureaus, and divisions within CFO Act agencies?

While the requirements in this section apply to CFO Act agencies, it is OMB's expectation, as noted in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and reiterated in [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), that the evidence plans discussed here (i.e., Learning Agenda, Annual Evaluation Plan, and Capacity Assessment) reflect activities across the agency (i.e., the entire Cabinet-level Department). To that end, the activities of sub-agencies, bureaus, and divisions within a CFO Act agency should be reflected in these documents. Thus, OMB expects that these sub-agencies, bureaus, and divisions be actively engaged in the process to meet these requirements. Additionally, as noted in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), OMB strongly encourages sub-agencies, operational divisions, or bureaus of CFO Act agencies, as well as non-CFO Act agencies, to develop and implement similar evidence plans that tie into and are consistent with, but are not limited by, the agency-wide plans, as appropriate. For sub-agencies, operational divisions, or bureaus of CFO Act agencies that are already undertaking these evidence activities, the Evidence Act requirements should be used to strengthen or uphold their current processes, as well as tie into and inform agency-wide efforts.

290.3 What is the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (i.e., the "Evidence Act"), and what is its relationship to the Federal Performance Framework?

The [Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018](#) (or "Evidence Act") advances data and evidence-building functions in the Federal government by statutorily mandating Federal evidence-building activities, open government data, and confidential information protection and statistical efficiency. The Evidence Act addresses about half of the recommendations of the bipartisan Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking and was enacted into law on January 14, 2019 as Public Law 115-435. Many of the Evidence Act's provisions support the Federal Performance Framework, and the Act emphasizes the need for collaboration and coordination of agency staff and activities in order to achieve successful implementation. Two of the Act's provisions (the Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis) modify what is required in agency strategic plans, and one provision (the Annual Evaluation Plan) adds a new requirement concurrent with the performance plan cycle.

290.4 What new positions were created by the Evidence Act?

The Evidence Act created three new positions: Chief Data Officers (all agencies), Evaluation Officers (CFO Act agencies), and Statistical Officials (CFO Act agencies).

290.5 What is the role of agency Evaluation Officers, and how does the agency designate and notify OMB of the designation?

The Evaluation Officer is responsible for playing a leading role in overseeing the agency's evaluation activities, Learning Agenda, Annual Evaluation Plan, Capacity Assessment, and information reported to OMB on evidence, as well as collaborating with, shaping, and making contributions to other evidence-building functions within the agency. The Evaluation Officer is responsible for providing technical and methodological leadership to assess, improve, and advise evaluation activities across the agency. For agencies that are less mature in their evaluation activities, or for those agencies without additional evaluation expertise distributed throughout the agency, or for those agencies with a centralized enterprise-

wide evaluation function, the Evaluation Officer may also be responsible for conceptualizing, prioritizing, designing, and executing the agency's evaluation activities in addition to coordinating the Annual Evaluation Plan. Each agency must have one Evaluation Officer to serve in this role for the agency as a whole (e.g., the entire Cabinet-level department). In addition, where appropriate, OMB strongly recommends that agencies consider building capacity in operational divisions, bureaus, or sub-agencies within the agency that also may have a need for an evaluation officer, with the agency-level official providing technical leadership and coordination across those officials.

Per [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), Evaluation Officers "must adhere to scientific integrity principles, demonstrate a learning and improvement orientation to the building and use of evidence, and have substantive expertise in evaluation methods and practices." As described in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#), the Evaluation Officer must be appointed without regard to political affiliation and possess "demonstrated, senior-level technical expertise in evaluation methods and practices ... [and] appropriate expertise in the culture, disciplines, and policy areas of the agency." More specifically, OMB has determined that the role should be filled by a senior career employee with the skills and expertise to maintain principles of scientific integrity throughout the evaluation process, ensure adherence to the agency evaluation policy, and maintain the evaluation standards in [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#). Critically, the Evaluation Officer must also have sufficient time and resources to lead and execute this work, which requires limiting, to the extent practicable, the number of other roles that the Evaluation Officer is tasked to fill.

Specifically, the Evaluation Officer serves as:

- Agency champion for, and educates agency staff and leaders about, evaluation, including what program evaluation is, the value of conducting evaluations, how to discern high-quality evaluation from other types of analyses, and the importance of evaluation as a strategic investment;
- Senior advisor to agency leaders on issues of evaluation policy and practice, such as designing and undertaking evaluations, interpreting results, and integrating evaluation findings into day-to-day agency operations, management processes, budgeting, strategic planning, and other decisions;
- Senior agency contact on evaluation for agency-wide and cross-cutting evaluation efforts, both with interested parties and other stakeholders and in coordination with senior officials responsible for other agency functions, including the official responsible for implementing privacy policy, the Chief Data Officer, the Chief Information Officer, the Statistical Official, the Performance Improvement Officer, additional evaluation and analysis units and personnel in the agency, and others as appropriate;
- Participant in the agency's Chief Operating Officer-led efforts to review progress on Agency Priority Goals and other management priorities to ensure that evidence is included and used appropriately;
- Member of the agency Data Governance Body; and
- Member of the interagency Evaluation Officer Council.

The Evaluation Officer also oversees or conducts:

- Assessments of the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, objectivity, scientific integrity, and balance of the portfolio of evaluations, policy research, and ongoing evaluation activities of the agency, in consultation with other methodologists, such as the Statistical Official, when appropriate;

- Improvement of agency capacity to support the development and use of evaluation, coordinate and increase technical expertise available for evaluation and related research activities within the agency, and improve the quality of evaluations and knowledge of evaluation methodology and standards;
- Implementation of [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#), Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices;
- Establishment and implementation of an agency evaluation policy that affirms the agency's commitment to conducting evaluations and using evidence from evaluations to inform policy and practice. The policy will provide interested parties both internal and external to the agency with a clear understanding of the expectations related to key principles, such as evaluation relevance and utility, rigor, independence and objectivity, transparency, and ethics;
- Required coordination, development, and implementation of the plans required under section 312 of the Evidence Act:
 - Learning Agenda (evidence-building plan) included as part of the Agency Strategic Plan;
 - Annual Evaluation Plan, submitted in conjunction with the Annual Performance Plan and Strategic Review; and
 - Capacity Assessment, included as part of the Agency Strategic Plan.
- Development of new, or improvement of existing, processes to integrate evaluation findings into agency decision-making and other functions;
- Management of agency's evaluation policies that uphold and adhere to the program evaluation standards in [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#) to ensure the scientific integrity, quality, and accountability of the agency's evaluation activities; and
- Use and dissemination of evaluation results throughout the agency and to the public, as appropriate.

Agencies must provide any changes to their designated Evaluation Officer to OMB via email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov and update their agency's [https://\[agency\].gov/data](https://[agency].gov/data) webpage accordingly.

290.6 Who supports the work of the agency Evaluation Officer?

The work of the Evaluation Officer is supported by the Statistical Official and Chief Data Officer, as well as program staff; other evaluation, statistics, analysis, data, enterprise risk management, and performance units and personnel in the agency; policy staff; regulatory staff; privacy and information law and policy personnel; and agency leadership. Further, it is OMB's expectations that staff throughout the agency, including sub-agencies, bureaus, and divisions, will meaningfully support the work of the Evaluation Officer as they fulfill the requirements laid out in this section. In addition, consistent with OMB M-20-12, agencies should have evaluation staff with appropriate expertise carrying out and overseeing program evaluations.

290.7 What is a Learning Agenda (i.e., "Evidence-Building Plan")?

The Learning Agenda (i.e., the Evidence-Building Plan) is a systematic plan for identifying and addressing policy questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of the agency. It identifies, prioritizes, and establishes strategies to develop evidence to answer important short- and long-term strategic questions (i.e., questions about how the agency meets its missions, including about how programs, policies, and regulations function both individually and in combination) and operational questions (i.e., questions about the agency's operations like human resources, grant-making, and internal processes). OMB expects that an agency's Learning Agenda will include questions that address current Administration priorities, as well as long-standing challenges and future priorities that may emerge. The question being asked should drive the choice of method(s), and OMB expects that agencies use all types of evidence – program evaluation, performance measurement, policy analysis, or foundational factfinding – to answer questions on their learning agendas. Agencies are also reminded that Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) is a form of knowledge that can and should inform Federal Government decision making where appropriate, including in answering questions on the Learning Agenda and as part of activities on Annual Evaluation Plans.¹ Agencies should review [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#) for more information about the variety of methodological approaches that agencies are encouraged to consider as they develop their activities to answer questions on the Learning Agenda. For the purposes of implementing the Evidence Act, a Learning Agenda does not refer to the professional development plans for employees' human capital development.

The process of developing the Learning Agenda (i.e., engaging stakeholders, reviewing available evidence, developing questions, planning and undertaking evidence activities, disseminating and using results, and refining questions based on the evidence generated) may be equally if not more beneficial than the resulting document itself. This process is one of collective learning and continuous improvement, hence the "learning" framework in the document's name. The Learning Agenda should be a flexible, iterative document that is revisited at least annually, and there is no single approach or format that will be effective for every agency. For agencies with more mature evidence-building efforts, and which may already have comprehensive research plans, research roadmaps, enterprise learning agendas, or evaluation strategic plans, the Learning Agenda may highlight and prioritize existing efforts. However, a Learning Agenda should not simply restate existing portfolios of work. For agencies with emerging evidence-building functions, the Learning Agenda may emphasize and help coordinate efforts to design and implement new evidence building activities.

A Learning Agenda is a strategic evidence-building plan. By thinking strategically about evidence needs, agencies can limit ad hoc and uncoordinated analytic efforts and the associated inefficient use of scarce resources, instead prioritizing those questions that, when answered, can inform consequential decisions and high-priority functions. Once the Learning Agenda is developed, agencies should execute the identified evidence-building activities that, in turn, will inform and shape subsequent priority questions, and build the evidence needed to inform programs, policies, regulations, and operations. These documents are intended to be actionable guides, and OMB expects agencies to undertake the evidence-building activities included in them to the extent possible, recognizing that circumstances change, appropriations may be unknown, and some activities are best suited to external partnerships. The Learning Agenda complements, but is distinct from research and development planning for the purposes of building the portfolio of fundamental knowledge and can also complement an agency's submission to the Unified Agenda of Federal Regulatory and Deregulatory Actions regulatory planning process and published agenda by clearly documenting how an agency intends to build and use evidence to support its proposed regulatory actions.

¹ For additional information on Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge, please see "Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Federal Decision Making" available at [111521-OSTP-CEO-ITEK-Memo.pdf \(whitehouse.gov\)](#).

290.8 How, and how often, should an agency update its Learning Agenda?

As noted in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and reiterated in [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), agencies must review and assess their Learning Agendas at least annually, and OMB will use the Evidence Submission referenced in Section [51.9](#) to ensure that agencies have met this requirement, including timelines for any planned updates. As agencies review their Learning Agendas, OMB expects that they update them as needed to reflect progress toward answering the agency's priority questions, shifting agency priorities, changing contexts within which the agency operates, input from interested parties, and emergent needs. These updates to the Learning Agenda could include revisions to priority questions, the addition of new questions, and summaries of new or available evidence generated that led the agency to revise its priority questions or develop new ones (as needed). The Learning Agenda should be updated to reflect the status of evidence-building activities described in the Learning Agenda or Annual Evaluation Plans (if applicable) with links to or summaries of evidence generated, if appropriate and available (see section [290.19](#)). Finally, agencies may use these updates as an opportunity to discuss how they have continued to engage interested parties and affected communities, sometimes known as stakeholders, including, for example how their input informed the development of new or revisions to existing priority questions.

OMB requires that agencies revisit their Learning Agendas annually and anticipates that this process will likely lead to updates to the Learning Agendas at some point(s) over the four-year Strategic Planning Cycle (see section [290.22](#)). However, when an agency determines that updates are needed, they are not required to rewrite or draft an entirely new Learning Agenda annually. Similarly, while part of agency strategic plans, OMB recognizes that the Learning Agenda can be updated independently from strategic plans. OMB does not expect that updates to the Learning Agenda will also require updates to the full Strategic Plan document (see section [230.19](#) for information on how to update the Strategic Plan). Finally, agencies have flexibility as to how they publish updates (if needed) to their Learning Agendas, including, for example, through an updated document or as a separate document that reflects updates.

If any agency determines that it is desirable to publish updates to its Learning Agenda, the agency shall submit these updates to OMB for review and clearance no less than 45 days before publishing. The updates to the Learning Agenda shall be submitted to OMB via the Submission Portal, and agencies must also alert OMB via email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov. The final updates to the Learning Agenda should be posted on the agency's website. In addition, agencies should provide the link to the updates to OMB via email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov and via an online form shared with Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB for inclusion on the [evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov) website.

290.9 How does the Learning Agenda relate to the agency Strategic Plan?

The Evidence Act requires that the Learning Agenda is part of the agency's strategic plan, covers the same four-year period, and addresses priority questions across the entire agency (i.e., the entire Cabinet-level Department). The Learning Agenda and strategic planning processes should leverage and inform each other. This linkage ensures that Learning Agenda questions are aligned with strategic goals and objectives, thereby making the resulting evidence relevant and timely for agency needs. Developing the documents together allows evidence to inform strategy from the outset.

Further, the Evidence Act modified the requirements for agency strategic plans and requires that strategic plans include a "description of the program evaluations used in establishing or revising general goals and objectives, with a schedule for future program evaluations to be conducted, and citations to relevant provisions of the plans [Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan] required under Section 312." While agency strategic plans were previously required to describe how program evaluation supported development of goals, the Evidence Act provides another link between these evidence-building plans (i.e.,

the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan) and the agency strategic plan and requires an agency's strategic planning narratives to reference activities in the evidence-building plans. 5 U.S.C. § 306 (a)(8).

As reaffirmed in [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), the Learning Agenda must be a standalone component of the agency strategic plan. Agencies may include it as an appendix, separate chapter of, or document referenced in and posted along with, the strategic plan. If an agency chooses to include the Learning Agenda as an appendix or separate referenced document, they must summarize the Learning Agenda somewhere in the body of the strategic plan (see [210](#)). Elements of the Learning Agenda must also be woven throughout the strategic planning narrative, for example by referencing priority questions and their associated evidence-building activities in the context of describing the relevant strategic priority or by describing how the Learning Agenda will build evidence in key areas of the strategic plan where evidence is lacking.

290.10 How does the Learning Agenda relate to agency obligations under Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review?

The Learning Agenda fully complements Executive Order 12866 (E.O.) and will support agencies in fulfilling their obligations under the E.O. The Evidence Act requires that agencies' learning agendas include "policy questions relevant to...regulations of the agency." Under [Executive Order 12866, Regulatory Planning and Review](#), agencies are directed to adhere to a set of principles for regulatory policymaking. Agencies should read the principles articulated in E.O. 12866 as fully consistent with the requirement to include priority policy questions about regulations in their Learning Agenda. Further, the principles laid out in E.O. 12866 provide a framework for agencies to use as they think about how to address and include priority regulatory questions on their Learning Agenda. For example, one principle states that agencies should base decisions on the best reasonably obtainable scientific, technical, economic, and other information concerning the need for, and consequences of, the intended regulation (Section 1(b)(7)). To that end, agencies should use the Learning Agenda as an important tool to help them build evidence to gather that best reasonably obtainable information. Additionally, fully assessing both the costs and the benefits of the intended regulation as obligated by the E.O. (Section 6, (a)(3)), requires objective evidence and data. To support future cost-benefit analyses, agencies should include questions on their Learning Agenda related to the measurement and comparison of actual costs with anticipated costs prior to implementation of a regulation.

290.11 What is an Annual Evaluation Plan?

The Evidence Act requires agencies to 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. It should include "significant" evaluations that would help answer priority questions on the Learning Agenda and any other "significant" evaluations, such as those required by statute. The significance of an evaluation study should be defined by each agency and take into consideration factors such as the importance of a program or funding stream to the agency mission; the size of the program in terms of funding or people served; and the extent to which the study will fill an important knowledge gap regarding the program, population(s) served, or the issue(s) that the program was designed to address. Agencies must clearly state their criteria for designating evaluations as "significant" in their Annual Evaluation Plan. The Annual Evaluation Plan should include only those activities that meet the statutory definition of evaluation and each agency's definition of "significant." Please refer to section [200.22](#) and [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#) for the statutory definition of evaluation.

The Annual Evaluation Plan need not be limited to those evaluations that address Learning Agenda questions and may also include other significant evaluations. Furthermore, OMB expects that agencies may also undertake evaluations that are not included in the Annual Evaluation Plan, depending on how "significant" is defined. Evaluation activities included in the Annual Evaluation Plan should be those the

agency expects will begin, or be carried out partially or fully, in the associated fiscal year. Evaluation studies often span multiple years, so agencies can determine how best to capture ongoing activities as they develop the Annual Evaluation Plan each year.

OMB expects agencies to consider and describe progress and results from evaluation activities on prior years' Annual Evaluation Plans in the forthcoming fiscal year's Annual Evaluation Plan, as appropriate. For instance, to the extent that an evaluation is included across multiple Annual Evaluation Plans, the description and discussion of the evaluation should reflect progress and learning to date, including, for example, summaries of interim findings, publication of interim deliverables (as available), achievement of key milestones, or deviations from the original plan based on recent progress. When updating evaluations included on prior Annual Evaluation Plans, agencies have flexibility regarding the level of detail included, and are encouraged to link to publicly-available information or more detailed information on the agency's public website. The focus is on updates that inform or support the execution of the evaluation and retain the nature of the Annual Evaluation Plan as a forward-looking planning document. As discussed further in sections [290.12](#) and [290.22](#), OMB expects that findings from activities on prior Annual Evaluation Plans will be incorporated into other plans and processes.

290.12 How does the Annual Evaluation Plan relate to the annual Agency Performance Plan, annual Agency Performance Report, and annual Strategic Reviews?

The Evidence Act requires agencies to develop an Annual Evaluation Plan to be submitted in conjunction with the annual Agency Performance Plan. While there is no formal requirement that these plans and activities reference one another, OMB expects that the performance and evaluation activities undertaken by an agency should necessarily complement and inform each other, when appropriate.

For example, section [210.19](#) includes instructions to agencies to describe how evidence, including from program evaluations and other methods, was used to develop the annual Agency Performance Plan. Further, sections [240.12](#) and [240.14](#) describe the types of evidence that are appropriate to manage organizational performance and include in the annual Agency Performance Report, noting that program evaluation is a critical and important tool to help the agency assess its performance. The annual Agency Performance Report (section [240.27](#)) should include external assessments and notes that, "Agencies are expected to consider the available evidence, including any available evaluation results... and should determine when and how to complement performance measurement with evaluations." Section [260](#) highlights the importance of evaluations to understand outcomes and effectiveness as part of the Strategic Review process, but also notes how the review can inform opportunities where additional evaluations or other evidence are needed and could be included on an Annual Evaluation Plan, for instance. Collectively, the annual Agency Performance Plan, annual Agency Performance Report, and annual Strategic Review offer agencies the opportunity to incorporate findings from evaluation activities, including those described in prior Annual Evaluation Plans, as well as identify evaluations for future Annual Evaluation Plans, as appropriate.

290.13 What is the Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis that is required as part of the Evidence Act, and how should agencies update it?

The Evidence Act requires agencies to submit a Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis (hereinafter referred to as "Capacity Assessment") every four years as part of their Strategic Plans. Led by the Evaluation Officer, in conjunction with the Statistical Official, Chief Data Officer, and other agency personnel, this requires agencies to conduct and provide an assessment of the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of the statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis efforts of the agency. Thus, agencies shall assess their statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities against the following criteria:

- **Coverage:** what is happening and where is it happening?
- **Quality:** are the data used of high quality with respect to utility, objectivity, and integrity?
- **Methods:** what are the methods being used for these activities, do these methods incorporate the necessary level of rigor, and are those methods appropriate for the activities to which they are being applied?
- **Effectiveness:** are the activities meeting their intended outcomes, including serving the needs of stakeholders and being disseminated?
- **Independence:** to what extent are the activities being carried out free from bias and inappropriate influence?

For each of the areas of assessment - statistics, evaluation, research and analysis - OMB encourages agencies to consider the above criteria and think about how those criteria apply for each of these activities within the agency.

In considering the criterion above, agencies must also address the following as part of the Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis:

- A list of the activities (e.g., programs, initiatives, etc.) and operations (e.g., administrative and support tasks) of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed;
- The extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency;
- The extent to which the evaluation, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability;
- The extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and the corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches;
- The extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback; and
- The extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations.

These specific requirements tie directly to the statutory criteria and address elements such as coverage (i.e., the list of activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated or analyzed) and effectiveness (i.e., the extent to which these activities meet the needs of the agency and appropriately balance across those needs). In addition, these requirements touch on important areas like dissemination of findings from statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities (i.e., does the agency have processes and procedures in place to make sure findings are disseminated?), as well as the agency's capacity to use these findings (i.e., does the agency have processes, procedures, and trained staff in place to use the findings

to support agency learning, improvement, and decision-making?). As agencies assess their capacity in the areas of coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence, it is important to consider not only whether and how the agency is doing those activities, but also whether they have staffing, infrastructure, and processes to do so. In that sense, this Capacity Assessment should be holistic, considering the agency's current capacity, but also what future capacity might be needed.

The Capacity Assessment is expected to provide agencies with a baseline against which they can measure improvements to coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of their statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities. The Capacity Assessment will provide senior officials with information needed to improve the agency's ability to support the development and use of evaluation, coordinate and increase technical expertise available for evaluation and related research activities within the agency, and improve the quality of evaluations and knowledge of evaluation methodology and standards.

In conducting the assessment, agencies should draw on existing OMB guidance and policies, including, but not limited to:

- [OMB Memorandum M-21-27, Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans;](#)
- [OMB Memorandum M-19-23, Phase I Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance;](#)
- [OMB Memorandum M-20-12, Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices;](#)
- [OMB Memorandum M-19-15, Improving Implementation of the Information Quality Act;](#)
- [OMB Memorandum M-18-04, Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines for Federal Departments and Agencies that Administer United States Foreign Assistance;](#)
- [Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies;](#) and
- [OMB Statistical Policy Directives.](#)

In developing the Capacity Assessment, OMB encourages agencies to use a format, process, and structure that best meets their specific context. There is no template or specific format for this document, but OMB expects that each agency's assessment will include discussion and analysis of the five criteria (i.e., coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence) for their statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities, including those specific components listed above. The Capacity Assessment must be a standalone component of the agency strategic plan. Agencies may include it as a separate section, chapter, appendix of, or document referenced in and posted along with, the strategic plan. If an agency chooses to include the Capacity Assessment as an appendix or separate referenced document, they must summarize the Capacity Assessment somewhere in the body of the strategic plan.

While there is no formal requirement that agencies update their Capacity Assessments outside of the strategic planning cycle, OMB encourages them to do so, as appropriate, given their context and needs. The Capacity Assessment provides a critical baseline against which agencies can measure improvements to their statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities. Agencies should use and apply the information generated to make the improvements needed to enhance their capacity in these areas. Agencies should use updates to the Capacity Assessment to both describe how they are building capacity to address gaps

identified in the original document and to identify new or emerging gaps in capacity. OMB is also interested in understanding how and to what extent agencies use the results of evidence-building activities, including those on the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plans, to inform programs, policies, and operations, and agencies may consider addressing this as part of any updates to the Capacity Assessment. Agencies may also use updates to reflect changes in capacity, including, for example, in whether and to what extent the evidence-building activities of the agency meet its needs. While the Capacity Assessment published in FY 2022 gives agencies a baseline, revisiting that baseline and systematically re-assessing capacity against it allows agencies to fully realize the benefits of this Evidence Act requirement.

If an agency chooses to publish updates to its Capacity Assessment, it must submit its draft updates for OMB review and clearance no less than 45 days prior to posting. An agency should do so via the [MAX.gov submission portal](#) and an email notification to OMB at Evidence@omb.eop.gov to indicate that the draft updates have been submitted. Agencies should post their final updates to the Capacity Assessment on their respective agency websites and provide the link to OMB via an email to Evidence@omb.eop.gov and an online form (link to be provided to Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB) for inclusion on the evaluation.gov website.

290.14 How do the Learning Agenda, Annual Evaluation Plan, and Capacity Assessment relate to one another?

While the Learning Agenda, Annual Evaluation Plan, and Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis are independent documents, the nature of their contents necessitates that they have complementary relationships with one another.

Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. The Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan are distinct, but complementary, documents. While OMB expects that there will necessarily be some overlap between these two documents, perfect overlap is neither expected nor required. The Annual Evaluation Plan should include only those evaluation activities that meet the statutory definition of evaluation (see [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#) for further explanation) and each agency's definition of "significant." The Annual Evaluation Plan need not be limited to those evaluations that address Learning Agenda questions, and it can and should address other significant evaluations. Moreover, OMB expects that agencies will also undertake evaluations that are not in the Annual Evaluation Plan. Conversely, OMB expects that the activities an agency includes on its Learning Agenda to answer priority questions will include both evaluation and non-evaluation activities, such as performance measurement, foundational fact finding, and policy analysis. As noted in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and reaffirmed in [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), the questions to be answered must drive the methods to be used (and not vice versa), and OMB expects that some questions on the Learning Agenda are most appropriately answered by methods other than program evaluation. Thus, the Learning Agenda should include activities beyond those significant evaluations on the Annual Evaluation Plan.

There is also a timing consideration with these documents. While the Annual Evaluation Plan focuses on the activities that an agency plans to undertake in the fiscal year following the fiscal year in which the plan is submitted, the Learning Agenda is a longer-term document that covers the full period of the strategic plan (i.e., not less than four years). Depending on how and how often an agency updates its Learning Agenda, "significant" evaluations listed on Annual Evaluation Plans published in the middle of the time period covered by the Learning Agenda (e.g., FY 2024 and FY 2025), may not be reflected in the published Learning Agenda. However, OMB expects that agencies will use findings from activities in their Annual Evaluation Plans to inform the Learning Agenda, and vice versa. [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#) includes a graphic that clearly describes the relationship between these documents.

Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment. While the Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment are both components of the agency strategic plan, they are distinct documents with different purposes and content. However, the nature of each necessitates that they complement one another. For instance, the Learning Agenda will highlight the activities an agency plans to undertake to answer its priority questions. The Capacity Assessment, through its analysis of the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities, necessarily provides information about the extent to which the agency has the capacity to undertake the activities outlined in the Learning Agenda, as well as other evidence-building activities. OMB expects, for instance, that the activities discussed in the Learning Agenda might likewise appear in the Capacity Assessment as part of the discussion of current capacity or capacity needed in the future.

Annual Evaluation Plan and Capacity Assessment. The Annual Evaluation Plan and Capacity Assessment are distinct documents that serve different purposes. However, as with the Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment discussed above, the nature of each of these two documents necessitates that they complement one another. For instance, the Annual Evaluation Plan includes the "significant" evaluations that an agency plans to undertake in the following fiscal year. This information may also be covered as part of the list of "activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed" required in the Capacity Assessment. Similarly, the Annual Evaluation Plan requires agencies to discuss their plans to disseminate and use the findings from the significant evaluations included in the plan. OMB expects that this information may serve as one input to the agency's assessment of its capacity to disseminate and use information resulting from its statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis activities as required in the Capacity Assessment. Thus, as is true of the relationship between other documents described here, OMB expects there will be some overlap in portions of the documents.

290.15 What are the requirements for engaging interested parties on the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan?

Per [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), OMB expects agencies to engage a diverse array of interested parties as they develop the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan. Agencies should engage these parties from the outset so that they can help shape the priority questions being asked or the study design, as appropriate, rather than waiting until the data needed to support the activity is being analyzed. OMB expects that agencies engage with internal staff who oversee the designs, processes, operations, or programs being discussed in the plan; other evaluation, statistics, analysis, data, enterprise risk management, and performance units and personnel in the agency; policy staff; regulatory staff; privacy and information law and policy personnel; and agency leadership. The Evidence Act requires engagement with the public, State and local governments, and representatives of non-governmental researchers for the Learning Agenda. Other key partners include OMB itself, recipients of Federal awards, Congress, industry and trade groups, the academic and non-profit communities, Tribal governments, and the communities and individuals that the agency ultimately serves. Agencies should systematically and thoughtfully consider (e.g., through mapping exercises) how to identify and engage with specific parties in ways that provide value for both the agency and those engaged.

Agencies should engage interested parties and the public in a manner, and using methodology, that is transparent, accessible, generates trust, and provides opportunities for meaningful input. To the extent possible, agencies should rely on existing activities and requirements, in accordance with applicable law and policy. As noted in [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#) and [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), potential approaches to engagement include Requests for Information published in the Federal Register, sustained community engagement, participatory research methods, listening sessions or focus groups, technical working groups, one-on-one consultations, and thorough consideration of the lived experiences of those affected by agency policies. OMB acknowledges that employing these methods effectively may require review and clearance under the Paperwork Reduction Act. OMB encourages agencies to use available

flexibilities, as appropriate, for these purposes, including those outlined in OMB's [Memorandum](#) from the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs entitled "Flexibilities under the Paperwork Reduction Act for Compliance with Information Collection Requirements," (July 22, 2016).

Agencies are reminded that meaningful engagement with the public and interested parties is not limited to development of the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plans. Engaging with diverse, interested parties is beneficial as agencies move from planning to action and implement the activities outlined in these evidence plans. Robust engagement throughout the lifecycle of evidence generation and use promotes continued transparency, helps to ensure that the evidence generated is relevant for interested and affected parties, and may support broad use of findings. Approaches for engaging with interested parties should be described in the Annual Evaluation Plan and updates to the Learning Agenda, if appropriate.

290.16 How does OMB Guidance, including OMB Memorandum M-20-12 (*Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices*), and OMB Memorandum M-21-27 (*Evidence-Based Policymaking: Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans*), affect Evidence Act activities and plans?

Agencies shall adhere to OMB guidance on standards and practices as they implement evidence-building activities, including program evaluation. [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#), "Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices," provides program evaluation standards and practices to guide agencies in developing and implementing evaluation activities, evaluation policies, and in hiring and retaining qualified staff. These standards inform both specific evaluations and the broader set of evaluation activities, including those in the Annual Evaluation Plan and other evaluations undertaken to address Learning Agenda priorities.

The standards are:

- *Relevance and Utility*: Federal evaluations must address questions of importance and serve the information needs of stakeholders in order to be useful resources.
- *Rigor*: Federal evaluations must produce findings that Federal agencies and their stakeholders can confidently rely on, while providing clear explanations of limitations.
- *Independence and Objectivity*: Federal evaluations must be viewed as objective in order for stakeholders, experts, and the public to accept their findings. Evaluators should operate with an appropriate level of independence from programmatic, regulatory, policymaking and stakeholder activities.
- *Transparency*: Federal evaluations must be transparent in the planning, implementation, and reporting phases to enable accountability and help ensure that aspects of an evaluation are not tailored to generate specific findings.
- *Ethics*: Federal evaluations must be conducted to the highest ethical standards to protect the public and maintain public trust in the government's efforts.

The practices are:

1. Build and Maintain Evaluation Capacity
2. Use Expert Consultation Effectively
3. Establish, Implement, and Widely Disseminate an Agency Evaluation Policy
4. Pre-Specify Evaluation Design and Methods

5. Engage Key Stakeholders Meaningfully
6. Plan Dissemination Strategically
7. Take Steps to Ensure Ethical Treatment of Participants
8. Foster and Steward Data Management for Evaluation
9. Make Evaluation Data Available for Secondary Use
10. Establish and Uphold Policies and Procedures to Protect Independence and Objectivity

The Program Evaluation Standards and Practices are designed to improve the quality and use of evaluation across Federal agencies, while recognizing that agencies must build policies, evaluation offices, and infrastructure that meet their distinct evaluation needs and responsibilities. As such, these standards and practices apply not just to Federal evaluation offices, but also have applicability to other Federal units that carry out or sponsor evaluation and to individual evaluators, including Federal evaluation staff, outside partners, and recipients of Federal awards that are performing work on behalf of the agency. [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#) Appendix B and C includes a more detailed explanation of the standards and practices.

OMB Memorandum M-21-27 reaffirmed the program evaluation standards and practices from OMB Memorandum M-20-12 and emphasized the importance of transparency and rigor across all types of evidence building. Importantly, OMB Memorandum M-21-27 requires agencies to consider equity throughout the lifecycle of evidence generation and use, regardless of methodological approach. The inclusion of equity as a through-line in these efforts will ensure that evidence-building activities yield high-quality insights and do not inadvertently perpetuate underlying biases. OMB expects agencies to include equity as a key consideration as they undertake the Evidence Act activities and processes outlined in this Section.

290.17 How do the functions of internal control processes performed by agency management and independent audits and evaluations conducted by an agency's Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office, or other external auditor differ from program evaluation as defined in M-20-12?

There are other important functions at agencies, such as internal control evaluations, that may be different in purpose and function from program evaluation. For example, internal controls follow frameworks established by OMB Circular A-123 and GAO's Green Book. However, in situations where agencies determine a need for program evaluation, which involves a different intellectual discipline and skillset than existing internal control processes, program evaluation should adhere to the principles established in [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#). The Evaluation Officer cannot be a member of the Inspector General's staff or located in the Inspector General's (IG) office, as established by [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#). While agency management staff responsible for implementing and evaluating the effectiveness of internal control systems play an important role in agency oversight and accountability, the Evaluation Officer required by the Evidence Act has a different function, and program evaluation serves a different purpose. When making decisions, agencies should use all available information at their disposal, including internal control reports, IG audits or IG evaluations, annual performance plans, strategic reviews, or program evaluations.

290.18 What is the agency Evaluation Policy and when must agencies submit it?

An agency's Evaluation Policy documents the standards and practices that govern all of an agency's program evaluation activities. An agency's Evaluation Policy, as required by the Evidence Act, must reflect and include the standards outlined in [OMB Memorandum M-20-12](#) and should identify concrete ways that the agency plans to implement and safeguard these standards. Importantly, agencies must ensure that these evaluation policies apply not only to Federal evaluation offices but also to other Federal units that carry out

or support evaluations and to individual evaluators, including Federal evaluation staff, outside partners, and recipients of Federal awards that are performing work on behalf of the agency.

At this time, agencies are expected to have published their Evaluation Policies. If an agency updates or changes its Evaluation Policy, it must notify OMB via email to Evidence@omb.eop.gov with a link to the updated Evaluation Policy, as well as complete the online form provided to Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB. Links to these policies will also be posted on the [evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov) website.

290.19 How and when should agencies update and publish their Learning Agendas, Annual Evaluation Plans, and Capacity Assessments?

Updates to the Learning Agenda: As noted in Section 290.8, when deemed desirable to publish an update, agencies must submit draft updates to their Learning Agendas to OMB via the [MAX.gov submission portal](https://www.max.gov) and alert OMB via email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov that the draft updates have been submitted for review and clearance. Agencies must submit these updates no less than 45 days before anticipated publication. Agencies should post their final updates to their Learning Agendas on their respective agency websites and provide the link to OMB via an email to Evidence@omb.eop.gov and an online form (link to be provided to Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB) for inclusion on the [evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov) website.

Annual Evaluation Plan: The FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan will cover "significant" evaluations planned for FY 2025. At a minimum, this plan shall describe "significant" evaluation activities for fiscal year FY 2025, including key questions for each planned "significant" evaluation study and key information collections or acquisitions the agency plans to begin. The draft FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan is due in September 11, 2023, with the final draft Plan due on January 12, 2024, and publication in February 2024. Agencies must submit these plans to OMB via [the MAX.gov submission portal](https://www.max.gov), should post their final FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plans on their respective agency websites, and should provide the link to OMB via an email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov and an online form (link to be provided to Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB) for inclusion on the [evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov) website.

Updates to the Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis: Agencies are encouraged to make updates to their Capacity Assessments, when appropriate. If an agency plans to publish updates to its Capacity Assessment, the agency shall submit its draft updates for OMB review and clearance no less than 45 days prior to posting. Agencies shall submit draft updates to the Capacity Assessment via the [MAX.gov submission portal](https://www.max.gov) and alert OMB via email at Evidence@omb.eop.gov to indicate that the draft updates have been submitted. Agencies should post their final updates to their Capacity Assessments on their respective agency websites and provide the link to OMB via an email to Evidence@omb.eop.gov and an online form (link to be provided to Agency Evaluation Officers by OMB) for inclusion on the [evaluation.gov](https://www.evaluation.gov) website.

The table below provides an updated timeline for developing and publishing these requirements. Agencies must submit all non-final documents for their Annual Evaluation Plans and updates to their Learning Agendas and Capacity Assessments, if appropriate, to OMB in Microsoft Word. Final documents should be published in a machine-readable format. Timelines for future years will be provided in subsequent OMB guidance.

Submission Date	Description/Deliverable	Submission Location
September 11, 2023	Agencies submit for OMB review: -Draft FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan	MAX Page "Submission Portal"

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Submission Date	Description/Deliverable	Submission Location
January 12, 2024	For OMB review and clearance, agencies submit final draft : -FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan	MAX Page "Submission Portal"
February, 2024	Publish : -FY 2025 Annual Evaluation Plan	Agency website/ Email link for each document to OMB at evidence@omb.eop.gov and update online form
45 Days Prior to Publication	For OMB review and clearance, agencies submit: -Draft Updates to the Learning Agenda -Draft Updates to the Capacity Assessment	MAX Page "Submission Portal" and email notification to evidence@omb.eop.gov
	Following OMB review and clearance, agencies publish: -Updates to the Learning Agenda -Updates to the Capacity Assessment	Agency website/ Email link for each document to OMB at evidence@omb.eop.gov and update online form
	Publish : -Updated Evaluation Policy	Agency website/ Email link for each document to OMB at evidence@omb.eop.gov and update online form
No later than May 15, 2024	Spring Evidence Briefing	N/A

290.20 What is OMB's role with respect to the plans in Title I of the Evidence Act?

OMB will support agencies with the Evidence Act (Title I) deliverables (i.e., the Learning Agenda; Annual Evaluation Plan; and Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research, and Analysis; and Evaluation Policy) described in section [290](#). OMB will:

- Work with agencies as they develop these documents, providing technical assistance, clarifying direction, and offering other support as needed;
- Review the agency's draft documents, and provide feedback to the agency on those documents as needed, such as whether they adhere to OMB guidance and statute, suggestions for improving the agency's ability to build and use evidence, or the extent to which they reflect the evidence and learning needs of the agency;
- Review the agency's plans, including updates to the Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment, prior to publication to confirm that prior OMB feedback has been considered, and that the final documents and planned activities align with Administration policy and priorities; and
- Monitor agencies' progress in generating and using evidence from the activities included in their Annual Evaluation Plans and Learning Agendas, as well as progress in addressing gaps identified in their Capacity Assessments.

290.21 What is the relationship between these activities and the agency's budget submission?

Budget submissions should be grounded in all available evidence. As agencies move from evidence planning to executing on those activities, OMB expects that they use findings generated from evaluations and other evidence-building activities included on the Annual Evaluation Plans and Learning Agendas to support budget requests, and OMB will look for supporting empirical evidence as it assesses agencies' proposals. In addition, agencies shall commit to building evidence in priority areas where it is lacking and to building capacity to undertake evidence-building, including by addressing gaps noted in the agency Capacity Assessment.

290.22 How should agencies monitor and report on their progress implementing activities included on the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan?

OMB expects agencies to continue their efforts to move these evidence plans towards execution – undertaking and accelerating the evidence-building activities included in them, and using the evidence generated to inform decision-making. To that end, agencies should be prepared to demonstrate progress in two areas: (1) status of evidence-building activities included on the plans; and (2) findings from completed studies, evaluations, or other evidence-building activities, when available and appropriate. Agencies have flexibility in how they demonstrate the above progress to OMB and are encouraged to use existing reports, plans, and processes as appropriate to their context and needs. For example, an agency may include findings from completed activities as part of its Annual Performance Report or Annual Performance Plan (section [290.12](#)), its budget justifications (section [290.21](#)), its annual Strategic Review (section [290.12](#)), or other reports and plans.

Additionally, agencies will be required to participate in a Spring 2024 briefing with OMB to provide updates on the status of evidence-building activities included on the Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans. This discussion will focus on progress made, challenges encountered, changes to activities on the plans, and other topics as determined by the agency in consultation with OMB. When there are interim or final results available, the agency should be prepared to share those as part of this discussion. This briefing is not intended to duplicate other reporting mechanisms, new plans, or updates to existing plans. Rather, the purpose of the briefing is to provide a focused opportunity for OMB and agencies to discuss progress and findings from evidence activities and the use of those findings. Following the Spring 2024 briefings, OMB will revisit the use of briefings to provide these updates and will adjust the process as needed.

Finally, agencies are reminded that OMB expects future iterations of the Learning Agenda to build on and refer to evidence generated in response to the prior multi-year Learning Agenda, just as Annual Evaluation Plans should build on progress made and reflect the evidence produced in prior plans, as appropriate. The figure below, which is included in [OMB Memorandum M-21-27](#), illustrates the four-year strategic planning and evidence planning cycles and shows how the evidence produced from undertaking activities on the Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan, as well as other relevant evidence-building activities not included on these plans, is used to update the Learning Agenda and draft the next fiscal year's Annual Evaluation Plan.

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