

How State Agencies Can Leverage the Federal Uniform Grants Guidance to Improve Outcomes for Residents

October 2024

Leading states are already improving outcomes for residents by defining, prioritizing and funding evidence-based policies and programs. The U.S. Office of Management and Budget recently released [updated Uniform Grants Guidance](#) and companion [Reference Guides](#) that support these efforts, providing new clarity about how states can invest federal grant dollars to expand their capacity to evaluate programs and build data systems. While individual grants still have specific requirements, the Uniform Grants Guidance lays out “least common denominator” rules, requirements and definitions that apply almost universally to new awards effective October 1, 2024.

This brief shares three strategies to help states leverage federal funds to build data and evaluation capacity and advance evidence-based policy and spending:

- 1 | [Propose evidence-based activities in federal grant applications.](#)
- 2 | [Include community engagement activities in your proposed budget.](#)
- 3 | [Propose funds for data and evaluation in grant applications.](#)

ACTIONABLE STRATEGIES FOR STATES

1 | **Propose evidence-based activities in federal grant applications.** Because [federal agencies must](#) “consider prioritizing Federal awards to applicants that propose evidence-based practices” in grant competitions, states that propose evidence-based strategies may receive stronger consideration (individual grants have specific processes and criteria).

- Results for America has identified a total of [98 federal grant programs at 11 federal agencies](#) and [79 state grant programs at 57 state agencies](#) that already invest in what works by defining and prioritizing evidence of effectiveness.
- Using your state’s definitions and framework for evidence will help to build and reinforce a culture of evidence and to align programs across the state. This is true even if a federal grant does not require or prioritize evidence-based proposals. See Results for America’s [Building a Culture of Evidence and Evaluation](#) for more insights.

STATES IN ACTION: TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Tennessee used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to pay for [evidence-based, small-group tutoring](#) for K-8 students.

STATES IN ACTION: CONNECTICUT OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Connecticut implemented an evidence-based [nurse home visiting grant program](#) that was jointly funded by the ARPA, the Preschool Development Grant, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Health Disparities Grant.

2

Include community engagement activities in your proposed budget. The revised guidance allows state grantees to pay for “participant support costs” related to [community engagement](#) activities without seeking prior approval. Make sure that these activities are provided for in your proposed budget and are adequate for both administrative costs and participant support costs. Participant support costs could include:

- Stipends
- Subsistence allowances
- Travel allowances
- Registration fees
- Temporary dependent care
- Per diem

STATES IN ACTION: MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (MDHHS)

Using a \$125,000 grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Accelerator Plan to Prevent Chronic Disease, MDHHS invested in community engagement, including hosting regional listening sessions, and is supporting an [evaluation of its work](#).

STATES IN ACTION: TEXAS JUVENILE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

In 2023, Texas received \$825,000 from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to [reduce youth incarceration rates](#) and expand access to evidence-based services by strengthening community-based systems of support. Through this grant, a community organization will lead engagement of justice-involved youth and families to center their voices and direct experiences in shaping solutions.

3

Propose funds for data and evaluation in grant applications. Unless a program contains unique restrictions, [federal grant funds may be used for data and evaluation](#) as either a direct or an indirect cost, as long as the funds pay for activities relevant to the grant. By writing funds for data and evaluation into your proposed budget, your state can “lock in” funds for these purposes. This approach helps identify adequate resources in advance and reduces the need to scramble to find funds or navigate difficult trade-offs after the project is already approved.

Data and evaluation activities could include investments like:

- **Analysis and evaluation staff.** Federal funds can pay for the employees needed to implement data-related activities, such as collecting, securing and analyzing data, among others. This includes staff time that supports relevant evaluation and performance activities.
- **Contracted evaluators.** Federal funds can support a contracted evaluation. This can include an evaluation specific to your project or one that covers a larger scope, of which your project is a part. For example, a project on high-quality tutoring may participate in a larger evaluation that looks at post-secondary achievement across a variety of factors.

- **Integrated data systems (IDS).** Federal funds can be used to build or maintain an IDS that would benefit your proposed project. This could include designing and testing a new system or ongoing costs like data management and analysis, security and other administrative costs.
- **A single data system.** Even if your systems are not integrated across programs, federal funds can still support data and evaluation activities. Funds might pay for case management systems, dashboards for serving clients or monitoring outcomes and other administrative system costs.
- **Performance management and reporting.** Federal funds can pay for a variety of activities related to performance management. For example, funds could pay for data collection and analysis for continuous quality improvement purposes, for dashboards that help track performance or manage program operations or for publishing performance information to the public.

STATES IN ACTION: NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY GOVERNOR'S CRIME COMMISSION (GCC)

GCC received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance through the [Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative \(CVIPI\)](#) in 2023. The state used these resources to identify and report performance measures related to the CVIPI activities and will ultimately use the performance measures to measure the impact of the evidence-based interventions on community violence.

STATES IN ACTION: INDIANA MANAGEMENT PERFORMANCE HUB (MPH)

Using funds from multiple federal programs, including Medicaid, MPH has incrementally [built up its data platform](#) and capacity over time.