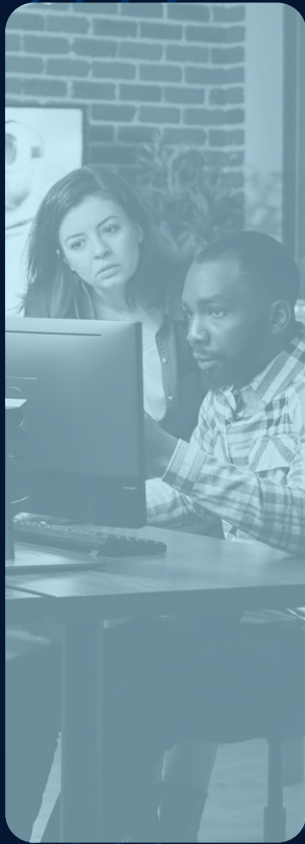


State Evidence-Based Budgeting Guide

5 Steps for Investing in What Works



Introduction

State governments invest over \$1 trillion each year to meet the needs of vulnerable populations.¹ But those taxpayer dollars don't always produce the desired outcomes. In fact, economic mobility and overall well-being across the country is [largely stagnant](#). Fortunately, there are an increasing number of [evidence-based solutions](#) that can deliver results for all Americans, and with the right tools and budgeting systems state government leaders can invest in these solutions and harness the power of their states' spending.²

This is starting to happen across the country and the political spectrum. But more can and should be done to ensure states' investments yield better support and increased economic mobility for all Americans. Results for America's State Evidence-Based Budgeting Guide is designed to help state government leaders — including governors, legislators, legislative staff and agency leaders — build and leverage data and evidence in budgeting and make investing in what works the “new normal.” The guide:



Outlines five action steps for defining and prioritizing evidence in state budget systems and evaluating the impact of these investments; and



Highlights how leading state government leaders have implemented these steps to advance economic mobility.

Have questions about evidence-based budgeting or need help implementing the action steps in this guide? Results for America — a national nonpartisan nonprofit — offers pro bono technical assistance to state government leaders. Email states@results4America.org to learn more. States can earn certification through the [Investing in What Works State Standard of Excellence](#) by implementing the five action steps here.

Please let us know if your state government has taken any of the steps outlined below, but are not yet currently featured in this document. We look forward to hearing from you!

¹ US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2021/econ/local/public-use-datasets.html>. Includes funds from state and federal sources expended by state governments.

² Government and philanthropy-led evidence clearinghouses identify over [20,000](#) evidence-based solutions. Results for America's [Economic Mobility Catalog](#) draws from seven of these clearinghouses and provides case studies and detailed information on evidence-based interventions in K-12 education, workforce development and post-secondary education, early childhood, and other economic mobility areas.

Evidence-Based Budgeting Action Steps

By implementing the following five action steps, state government policymakers can invest in solutions that are proven to be effective or are under evaluation, and that are more likely to advance economic mobility and well-being for residents.

Strategy	Action Steps
Clearly Define Evidence	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Establish a statewide definition of evidence of effectiveness
Prioritize Evidence in State Budgeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none">2 Implement budget instructions and templates that collect evidence information3 Set statewide evidence-based budgeting targets4 Provide evidence indicators in public budget documents5 Summarize items signed into law that support evidence-based interventions

Clearly Define Evidence

For policymakers to have a shared understanding of which interventions are “evidence-based,” they must have a shared definition of evidence of effectiveness. Clearly defining “evidence” is therefore a key step towards including evidence standards in budgeting. In a broad sense, evidence of effectiveness refers to all the evaluations, analyses and other work showing how well a program or policy worked in achieving its goals.³



Why it matters: By determining what counts as evidence, state leaders can consider the merits of budget and policy proposals against those standards.

³ “Program” means an activity, strategy, intervention, practice or policy that has defined core features.

A robust evidence definition should include criteria for the quality of evidence, as well as for what the evidence must show, including:

- Details about what types of studies will be considered, such as randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies that meet specified quality benchmarks.
- The types of outcomes that must be improved, and/or the size or duration of favorable impacts on those outcomes.

State government leaders can develop their own evidence definitions that work for their state context. Alternatively, they can draw from existing definitions, such as those established in federal laws and regulations, or those used in other states.

Action Step

1



Establish a statewide definition of evidence of effectiveness.

Before drafting a new or revised statewide evidence definition, review how other states are defining and using evidence can help government leaders determine how best to define evidence for their context.

- [Appendix A](#) provides a complete list of state and federal evidence definitions. Nine states have defined evidence of effectiveness in their state budgeting process.
- [Appendix B](#) provides guidance for a deeper review of the definitions.
- Results for America's [Evaluation Policy Guide](#) (pages 14-15) provides potential review questions to help assess whether existing definitions align with current best practices.



Maryland and Tennessee are two leading examples of states that have defined evidence of effectiveness in their budgeting processes.

The Maryland Department of Budget and Management's (MDBM) fiscal year 2026 [Operating Budget Submission Requirements](#), define evidence-based and evidence-building as follows:

- **Evidence-based:** meaning there is evidence from an experimental or quasi-experimental study that a key program component has been effective in improving a relevant outcome with similar populations or in similar settings.
- **Evidence-building:** a program planning to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental study on a key program component.

The Tennessee Office of Evidence and Impact uses an [evidence framework](#) to standardize language and classify programs based on the level of evidence supporting the program. See [Appendix A](#) for a summary of all nine of the state definitions.

Prioritize Evidence in State Budgeting

Once a definition of evidence has been established, it can be used to determine which programs and interventions to prioritize for funding. State decision-makers can prioritize funding for programs that meet the established definition of “evidence-based,” as well as those that meet their criteria for evidence-building or agree to undergo an evaluation that meets the criteria for evidence-building.



Why it matters: Prioritizing evidence in state budgeting helps ensure that resources are allocated towards proven or promising approaches that are backed by research, increasing the likelihood that the program will achieve its goals and improve outcomes.

Action Steps

2

Implement budget instructions and templates that collect evidence information.



Standardized budget templates and instructions set requirements for how agencies will include evidence of effectiveness in budget proposals. To embed evidence into the budget development process, state policymakers can add a default field for evidence collection on statewide internal budget documents.

Legislative and executive branch leaders can request or require additional, relevant documentation, such as performance or fiscal impact data, that informs budget decisions.

Ten states have developed and are using standard budget templates and instructions that include a default field for evidence collection. (CO, CT, MD, MN, NM, OH, TN, NC, RI, and UT).



New Mexico and Tennessee are leaders in defining and prioritizing evidence in the budgeting process.

- Each year, the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) issues budget instructions that provide [guidance](#) for agencies for budget expansions and evidence-based programs as promulgated by the LFC's [Legislating for Results](#) framework.
- Through budget instructions for agencies, the Tennessee Office of Evidence and Impact and the Budget Division within the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration direct agencies to invest in programs and initiatives [supported by evidence and research](#) to improve results and return on investment.

See [Appendix C](#) for summaries of how other states are standardizing budget templates and instructions to include the evidence and evaluation plans behind budget requests.



Set statewide evidence-based budgeting targets.

State government leaders can ensure that budgets support evidence-based programs by requiring a specific percentage of funding be used for evidence-based or evidence-building programs. One way to do this is by creating set-asides within programs requiring that a percentage of the program's funds be invested in evidence-based solutions.



Oregon and Tennessee are the only states that have state-wide evidence-based budgeting targets

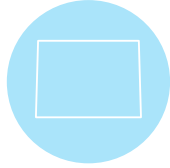
A [2003 Oregon law](#) defining evidence-based also directs certain agencies, such as the Oregon Department of Corrections and the Oregon Youth Authority, to spend at least 75% of state funds for evidence-based programs, to analyze costs and benefits, and to compile a biennial program inventory with results from funded programs.

4



Provide evidence indicators in public budget documents.

In addition to collecting evidence information, it's important that evidence information be shared and used throughout the budget process and budget decision-making.



In both Colorado and Minnesota, evidence indicators are used in public budget documents to inform budget decision-making.

In Minnesota, evidence indicators are also included in the [Governor's Budget Recommendations](#). For example, the MN [Education budget recommendation](#) includes a section for evidence-based practices, like the state's free school meals program. Similarly, in Colorado, the [Governor's 2023-24 budget](#) request links to evidence summaries and plans to build evidence through evaluation.

State government leaders can also adopt policies or practices requiring budget documents, wherever practicable, to discuss how proposals will advance economic mobility and improve outcomes for those in need.

Four states currently collect information on how budget proposals will address the needs of people who are experiencing unfavorable outcomes (CO, MN, NC, and OR).

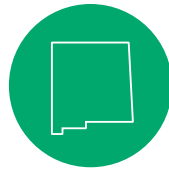
Colorado's Governor's Budget Guidance includes a section on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in their [FY23-24 Budget Instructions](#) to state agencies. In FY 2023-24, departments were required to complete a "Promoting Equitable Outcomes" subsection in the Decision Item template. The Budget Instructions emphasize that it is important that every department and the Governor's Office explicitly consider equity gaps in existing funding and opportunities to use requested budget funds to reach historically underserved populations. See [Appendix D](#) for summaries of how other states are considering economic mobility in their budget documents.

5



Summarize items signed into law that support evidence-based interventions.

Once budgets and laws have been enacted, state government leaders can communicate the evidence base behind those decisions through summaries or other public documentation.



Minnesota and New Mexico are two leading examples of states that have summarized information on the evidence basis of items signed into law.

Beginning in 2023, the Minnesota Management and Budget office began publishing an Evidence Based Policies tab on the [Current Enacted Biennial Budget dashboard](#) to summarize new evidence-based funding: \$2.68 billion for 168 new practices/ programs, representing 27.9% of new proposals approved that year.

The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee publishes a [post session review](#) providing information on evidence-based items signed into law or vetoed. Budget guidelines provide additional information on consideration of evidence and outcome.



Building Evidence: Next Steps to Support Evidence-Based Budgeting

To implement and sustain evidence-based budgeting practices outlined above, states have adopted strategies to invest in their capacity to learn what works through evaluations and to build government capacity to prioritize evidence-based budgeting.

Build Evidence Through Evaluations

An evaluation is a systematic process for measuring and understanding the effects of a program, policy or practice. Evaluations help build evidence of effectiveness and can be used to support funding decisions. Conducting evaluations is more likely to become standard procedure if a state or state agency has a clear evaluation policy. For example, Tennessee's [Office of Evidence and Impact's](#) evaluation initiative involves three components: managing the statewide learning agenda, enabling program evaluations, and communicating evidence.

Evaluations can be done throughout the life of a program.



A **formative or theory-based evaluation** occurs before a program begins and to assess its design, feasibility, and theoretical framework, ensuring it is well-structured to achieve its intended outcomes.



A **process or implementation evaluation** occurs during the program's delivery to inform continuous improvements.



An **outcome or impact evaluation** takes place after a program to determine the degree to which the program met its intended goals.

Why it matters: Evaluating program effectiveness can help state decision-makers do their work by providing a “feedback loop” of information showing whether a program was implemented appropriately and if government investments made the expected difference.

The goal of conducting evaluations and establishing an evaluation policy is to drive policy and program change based on evidence of what works. Evidence-based funding decisions are crucial to this change process. For such decisions to become routine, funding processes must ask for evidence of effectiveness and/or request evaluations.

To learn more about developing an evaluation policy and strategies for integrating evaluation results into budget, policy and management decisions, see [Results for America's Evaluation Policy Guide](#).

State government leaders can examine agencies' evaluation policies and ask about evidence-building opportunities throughout the budget development and decision-making process.

Action Steps



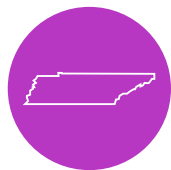
Assess how evaluations currently inform funding decisions.

State government leaders can examine if state agencies regularly report new or additional investments in impact evaluations. For example, the Minnesota Management and Budget office's [Impact Evaluation Unit](#) produces high-quality evidence about the impact of state-funded programs. State laws direct MMB to partner with agencies to examine the impact of human service investments.



Set targets for the percentage of funding for evaluations and/or the number of programs to evaluate.

During the budget development process, decision-makers can require or encourage relevant agencies to report on their evaluation plans, including the percentage of discretionary funding being used for evaluations or the number of programs that will be evaluated. In general, Results for America recommends at least 1% of program funds to be used for evaluation.



Three states have statewide evaluation policies with evaluation targets ([Minnesota](#), [Tennessee](#), and [Washington](#)). Tennessee is an example of a state that leads in developing an evaluation policy with evaluation targets.

As part of the [FY23 budget](#), Tennessee allocated [\\$1.5 million](#) in recurring state dollars for rigorous program evaluations to support evidence building. Programs ready for evaluation are identified in the [program inventory](#) process, in partnership with the Office of Evidence & Impact, and agencies are connected with external research partners who conduct the program evaluation. See [Appendix F](#) for summaries of how states are setting evaluation policies and targets.



Establish and evaluate pilot projects.

Pilot projects enable testing for effectiveness on a small scale and for learning and improvement to guide a larger-scale implementation. Questions to assess the impact of pilot projects can include:

- Was the program successfully developed and initiated?
- Did the pilot project achieve its stated goals?
- If it did not achieve its goals, do these negative results provide information about where to focus next?



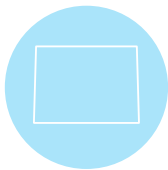
Texas is an example of a state that leads in establishing and evaluating pilot projects.

States can also consider developing “default” policies that incorporate evaluation into pilot projects. For example, in 2023, Texas lawmakers [enacted](#) legislation that established a workforce development career education and training evaluation pilot program. The legislation requires collection of evaluation data and an analysis, including job placement performance and attainment of a self-sufficient wage.



Promote evidence-building and innovation for promising programs.

State policymakers can promote evidence-building by creating innovation funds that support pilot projects and evaluations. Innovation funds are grant programs that provide resources for a variety of interventions in order to test, identify and scale what works, including both new ideas and strategies with a long success record.



Three states (Colorado, New Mexico and North Carolina) have created innovation funds that support pilot projects and evaluations.

Colorado’s [Office of State Planning and Budgeting](#) (OSPB) administers approximately \$500,000 annually in competitive grants for [program implementation or evaluation of outcomes](#).

Build Evidence Through Governance and Capacity-Building

State government leaders have taken steps to build government capacity to implement evidence-based budgeting. As described below, states have adopted evidence-based governance structures and capacity-building practices.

Action Step

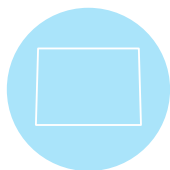


Establish evidence-based governance structures and capacity-building practices that prioritize evidence-based budgeting.

Evidence-Based Governance Structures. While building budgets, developing and reviewing bills, and analyzing budget proposals, decision-makers in the state legislature, governor’s office and state agencies can incorporate evidence-based practices into their jobs and routines. For example, during the budget development process, decision-makers can ask agency and research staff questions about the evidence behind their requests, such as:

- How are you defining evidence?
- What is the evidence that this approach will work?
- What outcomes are we seeking to achieve for whom and how will we know we have achieved them?

Questions like these help make evidence-based policymaking and budgeting an expected part of how the government conducts business. Similarly, when developing or considering new legislative proposals, government leaders can ensure that [key terms](#) – such as evidence-based program and evidence-building program – are defined in budget documents.

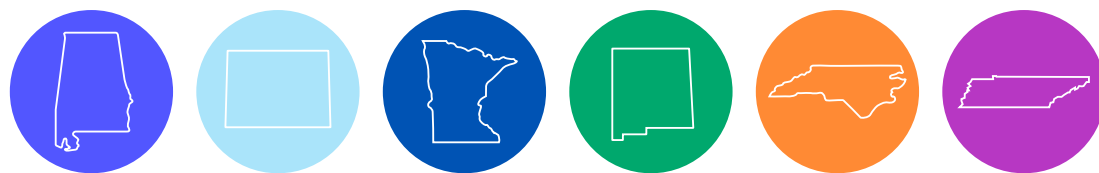


Three states have established formal evidence-based governance structures and practices that prioritize evidence-based budgeting. Colorado, New Mexico and Ohio

For example, Ohio's [Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget Guidance](#) initiated Results-Focused Budgeting which requires agencies requesting funds for new or expanding programs to provide additional information in their budget request to the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). To facilitate agency adoption of Results-Focused Budgeting, training was developed for OBM budget analysts, the Governor's policy staff, senior fiscal and program staff of cabinet agencies, and cabinet directors. Results-focused information provided in the agency budget requests informed discussions that built the Governor's executive budget proposal and the testimony before the legislature in support of the budget. See [Appendix E](#) for summaries of other states' evidence-based governance structures.

Capacity-Building Practices. To help increase capacity for building and using evidence and practicing evidence-based budgeting, some state governments are [establishing partnerships](#) with university-based researchers. For example, North Carolina's [Office of Strategic Partnerships](#) builds and enhances collaborative networks of public officials, research partners, and partners from philanthropy and the nonprofit sector.

State government leaders can also establish dedicated offices, commissions or committees to evaluate budget proposals for evidence of effectiveness. Central budget or evidence teams can support legislative and executive branch fiscal analysts to develop evidence-based proposals.



Six states have formed teams and offices or established state agencies to guide evidence-based budget decisions. ([Alabama](#), [Colorado](#), [Minnesota](#), [New Mexico](#), [North Carolina](#), and [Tennessee](#))

For example, the [Alabama Commission on the Evaluation of Services](#) helps lawmakers incorporate evidence into funding and policy decisions. Tennessee's [Office of Evidence and Impact](#) offers an example for guiding evidence-based decisions at the state agency level.

Putting it All Together: Evidence Frameworks and Continuums

The steps listed above can be implemented separately or as part of a comprehensive evidence-based policymaking framework.

An evidence framework or continuum is a tool to categorize practices, policies and programs based on the level of evidence that exists to demonstrate their effectiveness. Frameworks may also include training and curricula for legislative and executive branch staff to learn about and apply evidence-based policymaking tools in the budgeting and policy process.

Frameworks are useful for steering funds toward programs that are effective, as well as for helping identify programs where more information is needed and where to invest funds in new evaluations.

The following states use evidence frameworks in their budget systems:

- [Minnesota Evidence Ratings](#)
- [Tennessee Evidence Framework](#)
- [Colorado Steps to Building Evidence](#)
- [New Mexico's Evidence Definitions](#)


Additional Results for America Resources

Results for America has a number of resources to help state government leaders invest in the programs and policies most likely to improve lives in their communities. You can find them on [our website](#) and below:

- [Evidence Definitions](#)
- [Invest in What Works State Standard of Excellence](#)
- [Education Evidence-Based Spending Guide](#)
- [Workforce Evidence-Based Spending Guide](#)
- [Evidence-Based Grantmaking Checklist](#)
- [Economic Mobility Catalog](#)


Appendix A: Federal and State Evidence Definitions (Action Step 1)


State Evidence Definitions

State	Definitions
<p data-bbox="203 472 321 499"><u>Colorado</u></p> 	<p data-bbox="415 472 763 499"><u>Colorado State Law</u> defines:</p> <ul data-bbox="440 527 1421 762" style="list-style-type: none"> • “Evidence-based decision-making” as “the intersection of the best available research evidence, decision-makers’ expertise, constituent needs, and implementation context.” • “Best available research evidence” as the weight of the research evidence from the most rigorous and relevant studies available regarding a program or practice, which studies are identified using a systematic process.” <p data-bbox="415 787 755 814">Evidence Continuum</p> <ol data-bbox="440 829 1437 1854" style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strong Evidence: meaning at least two evaluation reports have demonstrated that an intervention or strategy has been tested nationally, regionally, at the state-level, or with different populations or locations in the same local area using a well-designed and well-implemented experimental design evaluation (i.e., Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)) or a quasi-experimental design evaluation (QED) with statistically matched comparison (i.e., counterfactual) and treatment groups. See CLEAR.dol.gov for full definitions of strong or moderate study design. The overall pattern of evaluation findings must be consistently positive on one or more key workforce outcomes. The evaluations should be conducted by an independent entity external to the organization implementing the intervention. 2. Moderate Evidence: meaning at least one evaluation report has demonstrated that an intervention or strategy has been tested using a well-designed and well-implemented experimental or quasi-experimental design showing evidence of effectiveness on one or more key workforce outcomes. The evaluations should be conducted by an independent entity external to the organization implementing the intervention. 3. Preliminary Evidence: meaning at least one evaluation report has demonstrated that an intervention or strategy has been tested using a well-designed and well-implemented pre/post-assessment without a comparison group or a post-assessment comparison between intervention and comparison groups showing evidence of effectiveness on one or more key workforce outcomes. The evaluation may be conducted either internally or externally. 4. Pre-preliminary Evidence: meaning there is program performance data for the intervention showing improvements for one or more key workforce outputs or outcomes.

<p><u>Illinois</u></p> 	<p>Evidence-Based: Programs or interventions that have undergone multiple rigorous evaluations which demonstrate the efficacy of the program’s theory of change and theory of action.</p>
<p><u>Maryland</u></p> 	<p>Evidence-Based: meaning there is evidence from an experimental or quasi-experimental study that a key program component has been effective in improving a relevant outcome with similar populations or in similar settings.</p> <p>Evidence-Building: a program planning to conduct an experimental or quasi-experimental study on a key program component.</p>
<p><u>Minnesota</u></p> 	<p>Evidence Ratings and Definitions:</p> <p>Proven Effective: A Proven Effective service or practice offers a high level of research on effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest. This is determined through multiple qualifying evaluations outside of Minnesota or one or more qualifying local evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>Promising: A Promising service or practice has some research demonstrating effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest. This may be a single qualifying evaluation that is not contradicted by other such studies but does not meet the full criteria for the Proven Effective designation. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>Theory Based: A Theory Based service or practice has either no research on effectiveness of research designs that do not meet the above standards. These services and practices may have a well-constructed logic model or theory of change. This ranking is neutral. Services may move up to Promising or Proven Effective after research reveals their causal impact on measured outcomes.</p> <p>Mixed Effects: A Mixed Effects service or practice offers a high level of research on the effectiveness of multiple outcomes. However, the outcomes have contradictory effects. This is determined through multiple qualifying studies outside of Minnesota or one or more qualifying local evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>No Effect: A service or practice rated No Effect has no impact on the measured outcome or outcomes of interest. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>Proven Harmful: A Proven Harmful service or practice offers a high level of research that shows program participation adversely affects outcomes of interest. This is determined through multiple qualifying evaluations outside of Minnesota or one or more qualifying local evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p>

<p><u>Mississippi</u></p> 	<p>Mississippi statute (27-103-159), enacted in 2014, defines an evidence-based program as an intervention program that has had multiple site randomized controlled trials across heterogeneous populations demonstrating that the program is effective for the population and that does not have an equivalent or more probative body of rigorous evaluation demonstrating its ineffectiveness.</p> <p>The legislation requires certain agencies to inventory programs for use in the budget process. The law directs agencies to categorize programs based on these definitions and recommends that staff consult guidelines from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy program catalog.</p>
<p><u>New Mexico</u></p> 	<p>Evidence Definitions</p> <p>“Evidence-based” means that a program or practice:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. incorporates methods demonstrated to be effective for the intended population through scientifically based research, including statistically controlled evaluations or randomized trials; 2. can be implemented with a set of procedures to allow successful replication in New Mexico; and 3. when possible, has been determined to be cost beneficial; <p>“Research-based” means that a program or practice has some research demonstrating effectiveness, but does not yet meet the standard of evidence-based; and</p> <p>“Promising” means that a program or practice, based on statistical analyses or preliminary research, presents potential for becoming research-based or Evidence-based;</p>
<p><u>North Carolina</u></p> 	<p>Tiered Levels of Evidence</p> <p>Proven Effective: A service or practice that is proven effective offers a high level of research on effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest. This is determined through multiple qualifying evaluations outside of North Carolina or one or more qualifying North Carolina-based evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi experimental designs.</p> <p>Promising: A promising service or practice has some research demonstrating effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest. This may be a single qualifying evaluation that is not contradicted by other such studies but does not meet the full criteria for the proven effective designation. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>Theory-Based: A theory-based service or practice has no research on effectiveness of research designs that do not meet the standards for “promising” or “proven</p>

	<p>effective.” These services and practices may have a well-constructed logic model or theory of change that has not been tested. This ranking is neutral. Services may move to another category after research reveals their causal impact on measured outcomes.</p> <p>Mixed Effects: A mixed effects service or practice offers a high level of research on the effectiveness of multiple outcomes. However, the outcomes have contradictory effects, and there is not additional analysis to quantify the overall favorable or unfavorable impact of this service. This is determined through multiple qualifying studies outside of North Carolina or one or more qualifying North Carolina-based evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>No Effect: A service or practice with no effects has no impact on the measured outcome. It does not include the service’s potential effect on other outcomes. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p> <p>Proven Harmful: A service or practice that is proven harmful offers a high level of research that shows participation adversely affects outcomes of interest. This is determined through multiple qualifying evaluations outside of North Carolina or one or more qualifying North Carolina based evaluations. Qualifying evaluations use rigorously implemented experimental or quasi-experimental designs.</p>
<p><u>Oregon</u></p> 	<p>A <u>2003 Oregon law</u> provides a definition of evidence-based program as a program that “incorporates significant and relevant practices based on scientifically based research; and is cost effective”.</p> <p>The law states that the Oregon Department of Corrections, the Oregon Youth Authority, the Oregon Youth Development Division, and “the part of the Oregon Health Authority that deals with mental health and addiction issues” shall (1) spend at least 75% of state moneys that the agency receives for programs on evidence-based programs; (2) perform cost-benefit analyses; and (3) compile a biennial program inventory with results from funded programs.</p>
<p><u>Rhode Island</u></p> 	<p>Evidence Scale</p> <p>Proven Effective: A program or service that is “proven effective” has a high level of research on effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest, determined through multiple rigorous evaluations. Qualifying evaluations include studies such as randomized controlled trials and evaluations that incorporate strong comparison group designs. These programs have been tried and tested by many jurisdictions, and typically have specified procedures that allow them to be successfully replicated. We expect that very few budget requests will be “proven effective” — this is the highest evidence-based standard, and most programs have not yet been studied rigorously enough to achieve it.</p>

	<p>Promising: A “promising” program or service has some research demonstrating effectiveness, but not as much as would be required for a “proven effective” designation. This could include, for example, a single randomized controlled trial or evaluation with a comparison group design that is not contradicted by other studies, but not confirmed by multiple such evaluations. It could also include the existence of a robust body of outcome data that your agency, or another agency that delivers a similar program, has collected and analyzed about the program over time. We expect that some, but not many, budget requests will be “promising.”</p> <p>Theory-based: A “theory-based” program or service has no qualifying evaluations on effectiveness or conclusive randomized controlled studies. Typically, theory-based programs have been tested using less rigorous research designs that do not meet the standards outlined above but have a well-constructed logic model or theory of change. Often, theory-based requests are based on anecdotal evidence or expert opinions. We expect that most expansionary budget requests will be in the “theory-based” category. The best and most compelling of these requests will include a plan for study that would theoretically allow the intervention to move up the evidence scale within a designated time period.</p> <p>Evidence of Insufficient Impact or Unintended Effects: A program has “evidence of insufficient impact” if quality evaluations have measured no meaningful difference in outcomes between program participants and those in a comparison group. A program that regularly fails to reach its outcomes targets also falls into this category. A program has “evidence of unintended effects” if quality evidence suggests that it has a negative impact on outcomes for program participants. We expect that many proposals will involve programs that fall into this category.</p>
<p><u>Tennessee</u></p> 	<p>Evidence Framework</p> <p>Strong Evidence: Two or more rigorous evaluations support the program model.</p> <p>Evidence: At least one rigorous evaluation supports the program model.</p> <p>Outcomes: Data collected over time demonstrate a change or benefit for participants.</p> <p>Outputs: Process measures support continuous improvement.</p> <p>Logic Model: “If we do x, y, and z activities, then we expect to see a, b, and c results.”</p>

Federal Evidence Definitions

Agency	Definitions
<p data-bbox="183 327 337 359">AmeriCorps</p> 	<p data-bbox="415 327 1003 359"><u>AmeriCorps State and National Grant Program</u></p> <p data-bbox="415 388 1430 932">STRONG: The applicant has submitted up to two evaluation reports demonstrating that the same intervention described in the application has been tested nationally, regionally, or at the state-level (e.g., multi-site) using a well-designed and well-implemented experimental design evaluation (i.e., Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)) or a Quasi-Experimental Design evaluation (QED) with statistically matched comparison (i.e., counterfactual) and treatment groups. Alternatively, the proposed intervention’s evidence may be based on multiple (up to two) well-designed and well-implemented QEDs or RCTs of the same intervention described in the application in different locations or with different populations within a local geographic area. The overall pattern of evaluation findings must be consistently positive on one or more key desired outcomes of interest as depicted in the applicant’s logic model. Findings from the RCT or QED evaluations may be generalized beyond the study context. The evaluations were conducted by an independent entity external to the organization implementing the intervention.</p> <p data-bbox="415 961 1438 1388">MODERATE: The applicant has submitted up to two well-designed and well-implemented evaluation reports that evaluated the same intervention described in the application and identified evidence of effectiveness on one or more key desired outcomes of interest as depicted in the applicant’s logic model. Evidence of effectiveness (or positive findings) is determined using experimental design evaluations (i.e., Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT)) or Quasi-Experimental Design evaluations (QED) with statistically matched comparison (i.e., counterfactual) and treatment groups. The ability to generalize the findings from the RCT or QED beyond the study context may be limited (e.g., single-site.) The evaluations were conducted by an independent entity external to the organization implementing the intervention.</p> <p data-bbox="415 1417 1430 1808">PRELIMINARY: The applicant has submitted up to two outcome evaluation reports (nonexperimental) that evaluated the same intervention described in the application and yielded positive results on one or more key desired outcomes of interest as depicted in the applicant’s logic model. The outcome evaluations may either have been conducted internally by the applicant organization or by an entity external to the applicant. The study design must include pre- and post-assessments without a statistically matched comparison group or a post-assessment comparison between intervention and comparison groups. In some cases, a retrospective pre-post assessment may be considered, but its use must be justified in the text of the evaluation report.</p>

Education



Every Student Succeeds Act

Evidence-based refers to an activity, strategy, or intervention that

1. DEMONSTRATES A STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT EFFECT on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on
 - **STRONG** evidence from at least 1 well designed and well implemented experimental study;
 - **MODERATE** evidence from at least 1 well designed and well implemented quasi-experimental study; or
 - **PROMISING** evidence from at least 1 well designed and well implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
2. DEMONSTRATES A RATIONALE based on high quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and (II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.

Human Services



Family First Prevention Services Act

WELL-SUPPORTED: A practice shall be considered to be a ‘well-supported practice’ if –

(I) the practice is superior to an appropriate comparison practice using conventional standards of statistical significance (in terms of demonstrated meaningful improvements in validated measures of important child and parent outcomes, such as mental health, substance abuse, and child safety and well-being), as established by the results or outcomes of at least two studies that –

- (aa) were rated by an independent systematic review for the quality of the study design and execution and determined to be well-designed and well-executed;
- (bb) were rigorous random-controlled trials (or, if not available, studies using a rigorous quasi-experimental research design); and
- (cc) were carried out in a usual care or practice setting; and

(II) at least one of the studies described in subclause (I) established that the practice has a sustained effect (when compared to a control group) for at least 1 year beyond the end of treatment.

SUPPORTED: A practice shall be considered to be a ‘supported practice’ if –

(I) the practice is superior to an appropriate comparison practice using conventional standards of statistical significance (in terms of demonstrated meaningful improvements in validated measures of important child and parent outcomes, such

as mental health, substance abuse, and child safety and well-being), as established by the results or outcomes of at least one study that –

- (aa) was rated by an independent systematic review for the quality of the study design and execution and determined to be well-designed and well-executed;
- (bb) was a rigorous random-controlled trial (or, if not available, a study using a rigorous quasi-experimental research design); and
- (cc) was carried out in a usual care or practice setting; and

(II) the study described in subclause (I) established that the practice has a sustained effect (when compared to a control group) for at least 6 months beyond the end of the treatment.




PROMISING PRACTICE: A practice shall be considered to be a ‘promising practice’ if the practice is superior to an appropriate comparison practice using conventional standards of statistical significance (in terms of demonstrated meaningful improvements in validated measures of important child and parent outcomes, such as mental health, substance abuse, and child safety and well-being), as established by the results or outcomes of at least one study that –

- (I) was rated by an independent systematic review for the quality of the study design and execution and determined to be well-designed and well-executed; and
- (II) utilized some form of control (such as an untreated group, a placebo group, or a waitlist study).

Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting

EVIDENCE-BASED: The model conforms to a clear consistent home visitation model that has been in existence for at least 3 years and is research-based, grounded in relevant empirically-based knowledge, linked to program determined outcomes, associated with a national organization or institution of higher education that has comprehensive home visitation program standards that ensure high quality service delivery and continuous program quality improvement, and has demonstrated significant, (and in the case of the service delivery model described in item (aa), sustained) positive outcomes, as described in the benchmark areas specified in paragraph (1)(A) and the participant outcomes described in paragraph (2)(B), when evaluated using well-designed and rigorous –

- (aa) randomized controlled research designs, and the evaluation results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal; or
- (bb) quasi-experimental research designs.

<p style="text-align: center;">Justice</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act</u></p> <p>EVIDENCE-BASED means a program or practice that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (A) is demonstrated to be effective when implemented with fidelity; • (B) is based on a clearly articulated and empirically supported theory; • (C) has measurable outcomes relevant to juvenile justice, including a detailed description of the outcomes produced in a particular population, whether urban or rural; and • (D) has been scientifically tested and proven effective through randomized control studies or comparison group studies and with the ability to replicate and scale; <p>PROMISING means a program or practice that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (A) is demonstrated to be effective based on positive outcomes relevant to juvenile justice from one or more objective, independent, and scientifically valid evaluations, as documented in writing to the Administrator; and • (B) will be evaluated through a well-designed and rigorous study, as described in paragraph (34)(D);
<p style="text-align: center;">Labor</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research</u></p> <p>HIGH: We are confident that the estimated effects are solely attributable to the intervention examined. Two types of studies can receive a high rating: (1) well-conducted RCTs that have low attrition and no other threats to study validity and (2) ITS designs with sufficient replication wherein the intervention condition is intentionally manipulated by the researcher.</p> <p>MODERATE: A moderate rating means we are somewhat confident that the estimated effects are attributable to the intervention studied, but there might be other contributing factors that were not included in the analysis. Research that meets the CLEAR guidelines for regression designs receives a moderate rating; this includes RCTs and ITS designs that do not receive a high rating.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Treasury</p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>American Rescue Plan State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds</u></p> <p>STRONG: Strong evidence means the evidence base that can support causal conclusions for the specific program proposed by the applicant with the highest level of confidence. This consists of one or more well-designed and well-implemented experimental studies conducted on the proposed program with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes.</p> <p>MODERATE: Moderate evidence means that there is a reasonably developed evidence base that can support causal conclusions. The evidence base consists</p>

of one or more quasi-experimental studies with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes or two or more non-experimental studies with positive findings on one or more intended outcomes. Examples of research that meet the standards include: well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental studies that compare outcomes between the group receiving the intervention and a matched comparison group (i.e., a similar population that does not receive the intervention).

PRELIMINARY: Preliminary evidence means that the evidence base can support conclusions about the program’s contribution to observed outcomes. The evidence base consists of at least one non-experimental study. A study that demonstrates improvement in program beneficiaries over time on one or more intended outcomes or an implementation (process evaluation) study used to learn and improve program operations would constitute preliminary evidence. Examples of research that meet the standards include: (1) outcome studies that track program beneficiaries through a service pipeline and measure beneficiaries’ responses at the end of the program; and (2) pre-and post-test research that determines whether beneficiaries have improved on an intended outcome.

Appendix B: Draft Questions to Guide an Evidence Scan (Action Step 1)

Understanding the existing landscape of how state government leaders use evidence and data in the budgeting process is an important first step that can help to inform a state's EBP strategy. Collecting relevant and practical baseline information can guide a next step plan for strengthening evidence use and shifting funding towards evidence-based interventions.

State government leaders should conduct this evidence scan before developing a plan for implementing evidence-based budgeting. An evidence scan requires the participation of various stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and effective review. Key participants might include policy and budget advisors from the Governor's Office, budget analysts from the State Budget Office, departmental leadership, legislative representatives, and representatives from offices of performance management and evaluation. By involving a diverse group of stakeholders, the evidence scan process can ensure that a wide range of perspectives and expertise are considered, leading to more robust and effective budgeting decisions.

Key Questions

By asking the following questions, state government leaders can describe key stakeholders, issues and challenges related to evidence-building, as well as budgeting processes and routines that incorporate evidence.

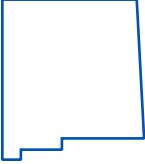




- Has my state defined evidence in statute or policy? If not, is there an informal or working definition that most stakeholders agree to when they refer to programs or practices that are “evidence-based?”
- What works — and what doesn't — with the existing definitions and use of evidence?
- Does the budget development process incorporate evidence? If so, how is evidence used to inform spending decisions? What changes could help improve the meaningful use of data and evidence to drive decisions?
- How do agencies define and apply evidence definitions? Has evidence been formally defined through statute or agency policy or documentation? Are there multiple definitions, a commonly used definition, or none?
- Do agencies catalog or inventory funded programs to show their evidence of effectiveness?
- Who and where are the trusted budget or policy research offices and stakeholders that analyze policies for effectiveness, fiscal impact and/or performance measurement? For example, the Colorado [Research and Evidence Team](#) in the Office of State Planning and Budgeting and the [Results Team](#) in Minnesota's Office of the State Budget Director lead the state's evidence-driven budgeting work. The Deputy Director for [Program Evaluation](#) in New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee leads the state's evidence-driven budgeting work.

Tennessee's Director of the [Office of Evidence and Impact](#) directs the state's work across agencies to ensure positive impacts through evidence-based budgeting, program inventories, and data analytics.

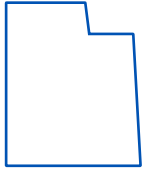
By conducting an evidence scan and following the steps outlined in this Evidence-Based Budgeting Guide, states can create a more efficient, effective, and accountable budgeting process that maximizes the impact of public funds and improves outcomes for their residents.

Appendix C: Standard Budget Templates and Instructions (Action Step 2)

State	Definitions
<p data-bbox="203 388 321 415">Colorado</p> 	<p data-bbox="415 388 1442 930">Since 2016, the Colorado Governor’s Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) has mandated evidence information in budget requests for the Governor’s annual proposal. OSPB provides annual guidance to state departments, stressing the use of data and evidence in the budget process, promoting transparency and informed decision-making. In 2024, the Colorado legislature modified the definitions and the process for incorporating evidence-based decision-making into budget decisions. The legislation allows the joint budget committee to consider a program’s evidence designation when determining the appropriate level of funding. It also requires agencies to participate in the evidence-based decision-making process, including investing in building evidence. State agencies can justify a program or practice evidence designation by providing a summary of the best available evidence, plans to evaluate the program or practice to build evidence regarding its effectiveness, and information about how the best available research evidence is connected to the budget request.</p>
<p data-bbox="203 1024 321 1052">Maryland</p> 	<p data-bbox="415 1024 1421 1287">The fiscal year 2026 operating budget submission requirements, issued by the Maryland Department of Budget and Management, highly encourage agencies to submit evidence information as part of budget enhancement requests. To determine if a program is evidence-based, agencies can use an agency-sponsored evaluation, evidence-based research clearinghouse, or other select resources. MDBM specifies which clearinghouses meet or exceed Maryland’s definition of “evidence-based.”</p>
<p data-bbox="196 1377 331 1404">Minnesota</p> 	<p data-bbox="415 1377 1421 1724">The Minnesota’s Governor Office and the Minnesota Department of Management and Budget (MMB) have directed agencies to include information about the evidence base for their budget proposals, a summary of evidence, citations, and amount to be spent on the activity. MMB provides a standard template and instructions for budget change requests for proposed increases, new one-time expenditures or substantial re-allocations or budget reductions. Previously a voluntary form, the Minnesota Management and Budget 2024-25 biennial budget instructions embeds a field for agencies to complete items they consider to be “evidence-based.”</p>





<p>New Mexico</p> 	<p>The 2019 Evidence and Research Based Funding Requests Act amended a 1999 law by defining four tiers of evidence and further requiring certain state agencies to “identify each sub-program as evidence-based, research-based, promising, or lacking evidence of effectiveness” and report on the amount allocated for each of these evidence tiers. Agencies are also required to report how they prioritized evidence- and research-based sub-programs within the budget request. Each year, the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) issues budget instructions that provide guidance for agencies for budget expansions and evidence-based programs as promulgated by the LFC’s Legislating for Results framework. See here for LFC’s instructions to agencies making significant expansion requests.</p>
<p>North Carolina</p> 	<p>The North Carolina Office of Strategic Partnerships in the Office of State Budget and Management develops budget instructions that request that proposals for new and expanded programs and services include evidence supporting the programs’ goals and outcomes. The instructions also emphasize proposals that align with the Governor’s strategic priorities, including advancing equity and diversity. See here for a budget justification form agencies use to describe and support each budget request.</p>
<p>Ohio</p> 	<p>Ohio’s Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget Guidance initiated Results-Focused Budgeting which requires agencies requesting funds for new or expanding programs to provide additional information in their budget request to the Office of Budget and Management. To demonstrate a program’s effectiveness, each program provided a simple logic model, proposed output and outcome measures, and data for those measures for fiscal years (FYs) 2019-2025. If funds were requested for an evidence-based program, agencies were asked to provide a summary of the findings of the evidence, along with the study citation and, if applicable, the rating given by an evidence clearinghouse.</p>
<p>Tennessee</p> 	<p>The Tennessee Office of Evidence and Impact and the Budget Division within the Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration have budget instructions that direct agencies to invest in programs and initiatives supported by evidence and research to improve results and return on investment. See here for a sample program cost increase request.</p>
<p>Rhode Island</p> 	<p>State law requires agencies to report on program evidence and performance when submitting budget requests to the Governor. Agencies are required to report on program evidence and performance when submitting budget requests, utilizing a tiered evidence scale (proven effective, promising, and theory-based). See here for the Office of Management and Budget’s FY 2026 Annual Budget Instructions.</p>

Utah






A [2021 Utah law](#) (updated in 2023) requires agencies to set at least one performance measure for passed and approved budget requests of more than \$500,000. The Utah Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst within the Utah State Legislature [specifies](#) that agencies should include performance notes — a statement of performance measures and information for legislation that creates or expands programs. These performance measures were reported to the [Governor’s Office of Planning and Budget](#) (GOPB) and to the [Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst](#) (LFA) within 60 days following the passage of the law. These include performance measures, the goals and impact of the new program or agency, benchmarks for measuring progress, and the performance measures that will be used to evaluate progress. Annually, agencies are required to report performance measures identified in the appropriations bills prior to October 1 to support preparation for the next budget cycle. Evidence of effectiveness is required through GOPB’s [budget request forms](#), with requests having to outline the “evidence-basis” for the associated program.




Appendix D: Budget Proposal Examples for Advancing Economic Mobility (Action Step 4)

State	Definitions
<p>Colorado</p> 	<p>Colorado’s Governor’s Budget Guidance includes a section on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in their FY23-24 Budget Instructions to state agencies. In FY 2023-24, departments were required to complete a “Promoting Equitable Outcomes” subsection in the Decision Item template. The Budget Instructions emphasize that it is important that every department and the Governor’s Office explicitly consider equity gaps in existing funding and opportunities to use requested budget funds to reach historically underserved populations.</p>
<p>Minnesota</p> 	<p>Minnesota’s 2024-25 biennial budget instructions direct agencies to prioritize proposals to reduce or eliminate inequities for people of color and Native Americans. The instructions also require agencies to consult with Minnesota Tribal governments and document actions taken to engage the public on the problem a budget proposal is trying to address. Agencies submitting budget changes must indicate if the proposal is designed to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.</p>
<p>North Carolina</p> 	<p>North Carolina’s 2024-2025 Budget Instructions emphasize proposals that align with the Governor’s strategic funding priorities, including advancing equal opportunities and diversity.</p>
<p>Oregon</p> 	<p>Oregon’s 2023-25 Budget and Legislative Concepts Instructions contains a Racial Equity Toolkit which provides worksheets for agencies to apply a racial equity lens to budget development process. Agencies are instructed to use the toolkit to set equity outcomes and strengthen their racial equity impact assessment for program budgets.</p>

Appendix E: Evidence-Based Governance Structures

State	Definitions
<p>Colorado</p> 	<p>In Colorado, executive branch agencies assign each program in their budget request form a level on the evidence continuum. Analysts in the Colorado Governor’s Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) review that information for each program’s evidence level and confirm the agency’s rating. If the OSPB disagrees, analysts work with the agencies to make changes and help them understand the reason for the discrepancy. The OSPB and the agencies then use the evidence rating details when briefing the governor and the legislature to demonstrate how well programs have achieved their outcomes.</p>
<p>Ohio</p> 	<p>Ohio’s Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Operating Budget Guidance initiated Results-Focused Budgeting which requires agencies requesting funds for new or expanding programs to provide additional information in their budget request to the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). To facilitate agency adoption of Results-Focused Budgeting, training was developed for OBM budget analysts, the Governor’s policy staff, senior fiscal and program staff of cabinet agencies, and cabinet directors. Results-focused information provided in the agency budget requests informed discussions that built the Governor’s executive budget proposal and the testimony before the legislature in support of the budget.</p>
<p>Minnesota</p> 	<p>New Mexico’s Legislative Finance Committee promotes data-driven decisions through the LegisStat initiative, a legislatively-driven performance improvement hearing process based on asking the “5 whys” questions to understand the root causes of performance problems. The process focuses on a core set of performance metrics, holds regular time slots for performance discussion with agency leadership (at least quarterly), follows up on action items from the last meeting, and reviews results for improvement. Example questions include: What do we know about the trends? What is the agency doing to proactively tackle the issue or challenge?</p>

Appendix F: State Evaluation Policies with Evaluation Targets

State	Definitions
<p>Minnesota</p> 	<p>Minnesota’s evaluation policy governs its use of evaluations and requires the public release of all completed evaluation reports regardless of findings. The policy also outlines key principles for evaluation: rigor, relevance, independence, transparency, and ethics. Once complete, evaluations become a part of Minnesota’s Inventory, which shows the evidence base for 730 state interventions, and allows for sorting based on level of evidence, service population, settings and outcomes.</p>
<p>Tennessee</p> 	<p>The Tennessee Office of Evidence and Impact recently launched an initiative, led by the Chief Evaluation Officer, to develop a current state analysis of evaluation activities and capacity across Tennessee’s executive branch, craft evaluation guidelines, develop a statewide learning agenda, and produce a curriculum and materials to train agencies to develop their own learning agendas in partnership with the Office of Evidence and Impact.</p> <p>As part of the FY23 budget, Tennessee allocated \$1.5 million in recurring state dollars for rigorous program evaluations to support evidence building. Programs ready for evaluation are identified in the program inventory process, in partnership with the Office of Evidence & Impact, and agencies are connected with external research partners who conduct the program evaluation. For FY23, 3.7% (of total dollars) of budgeted departmental requests were evidence-based. For FY24, 15.8% of budgeted requests were evidence-based.</p>
<p>Washington</p> 	<p>The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) is often directed by law to study the implementation and effectiveness of state programs as an objective evaluator independent of state agencies. WSIPP currently has ongoing legislatively directed work to examine the long-term costs and benefits of legalizing recreational cannabis, evaluate the effectiveness of Washington State’s Drug Offender Sentencing Alternative, and more. All projects on WSIPP’s research and evaluation plan are published on its Current Project Projects page.</p>



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