

Incentivizing Evidence-Informed Decision Making in Government

How are public sector officials incentivized to use evidence¹ routinely in their work, whether to inform major policies and decisions, design or alter programs, or guide implementation? The *Results for All Incentivizing Evidence-Informed Decision Making in Government* series highlights strategies, processes, and programs that government agencies around the world have used to create incentives for using evidence in government decision making.



Publishing Follow-Up Plans to Incentivize Evaluation Use in Mexico

National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL), Mexico

Why it was introduced:

- Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy ([CONEVAL](#), for its Spanish acronym) is an autonomous government entity tasked with measuring the state of national and subnational poverty in Mexico, and coordinating evaluations of programs related to the National Social Development Policy.
- However, CONEVAL recognized a lack of incentives to use its evaluation findings to create concrete and meaningful changes in social programs. That led to a collaboration with the Departments of Finance and Public Service to issue the Follow-Up Mechanism for the Use of Evaluations in 2008.

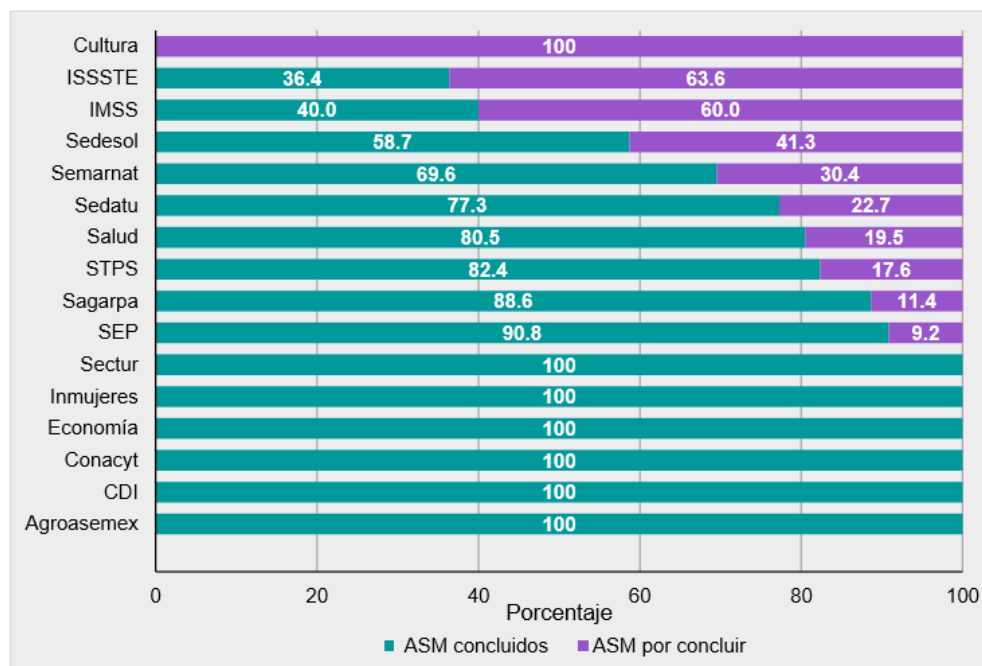
How it works:

- The mechanism is a formal process where stakeholders, including staff from the evaluation units inside the departments with the program being evaluated, as well as the program administrators and budget officers, jointly select the evaluation results and recommendations that they find most feasible and relevant for improving the program in question. After prioritizing program areas to address (called "aspects susceptible to improvement"), the stakeholders develop an action plan and a document making an institutional commitment to improve the program; the agency publishes both on their website, and CONEVAL disseminates an annual report detailing which agencies and programs followed this process and what actions they committed to.

¹ We define evidence broadly as the best information available to decision makers, which can include administrative and statistical data, research, evaluations, and citizen input.

What it has achieved:

- Each year, CONEVAL tracks how many government departments participate in the follow-up mechanism, how many programs were evaluated, and how many programmatic “aspects susceptible to improvement” were identified in the action plans. From [2016-2017](#), for example, fifteen departments participated in the evaluations of 110 programs, identifying 480 aspects for improvement. Of those 480 items, action was completed within one year for 312, a 65% completion rate. However, many of the aspects for improvement have completion timelines that exceed one year, making yearly completion rates like the 65% underrepresent overall completion. More accurate is the fact that since the follow-up mechanism was established, action has been completed on 89.3% of the identified aspects for improvement, meaning that over the last decade, when stakeholders have reviewed the evaluation findings and committed to concrete actions to improve the programs in question, they have completed those programmatic improvements nearly 90% of the time.
- CONEVAL also publishes completion percentages for each government department each year. In the 2016-2017 cycle, four agencies had 100% completion rates: the National Institute of Women, the Ministry of Tourism, the Social Security Institute, and the Ministry of Work and Social Security. At the other end, the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Social Development had the worst follow up on evaluation findings, with less than 50% of the identified aspects susceptible to improvement translated into action to improve policy and practice.



2017-2018 improvement plan completion rates by department, as of March 2018. ([Source](#))

- While a less than 50% completion rate is clearly low, it's worth noting that departments have a choice in how they participate each year. They select which evaluations to conduct, which evaluation findings are most relevant, and set their own action items and plans. If one year they do not select any programmatic aspects for improvement, the mechanism is open to that; the fact that they are selecting aspects for improvement and writing action plans year after year, even if they do not complete action on every item, shows a willingness to take ownership of and use evaluation results. It also shows that government departments have made this process a yearly routine, and that they are institutionalizing and using it improve programs and build internal evaluation cultures.

What lessons were learned:

- The Follow-Up Mechanism creates a standard, step-by-step process that helps public officials review the program evaluations, identify the most relevant findings, and translate those findings into concrete actions to improve programs within a predetermined timeline. It helps officials decide what to do, who will do it, and when to do it.
- By making the results of evaluations, what program administrators intend to do with them, and action plan completion rates by department, available to the public, the Follow-Up Mechanism creates an incentive to use evaluations and follow through on commitments. especially since CONEVAL publishes the commitments and completion rates for each government department.
- Lastly, the Mechanism allows CONEVAL to demonstrate evidence of when evaluations are used to make concrete and transparent improvements to public programs, and how those improvements are expected to benefit Mexican citizens.

What comes next:

- Since Mexico is a federal republic, states have their own legislation requiring subnational entities to follow up on evaluation findings, though many states copy the federal mechanism. CONEVAL sometimes advises on these processes, but overall, accountability at the subnational level has been a challenge, with CONEVAL unable to oversee what happens with evaluations conducted at the subnational level.
- Another challenge is that during the course of the evaluation review, departments sometimes choose the aspects for improvement that are easiest to complete. Many are less willing to select action items that they see as challenging, risky, or requiring long-term effort. CONEVAL may need to find a way to encourage a shift in this behavior in order to spur larger and deeper programmatic improvements. CONEVAL also seeks to move beyond evaluating and improving one program at a time, to consider a set of coordinated programs or policies, though it is wary of the mechanism becoming overly bureaucratic.

Resources:

- Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, “Informe de Seguimiento a los Aspectos Susceptibles de Mejora de los Programas y Acciones Federales de Desarrollo Social 2016-2017: Balance Anual Sobre el Uso de las Evaluaciones.” Mexico City: CONEVAL, 2017.
<https://www.coneval.org.mx/Evaluacion/CMPE/Documents/Informe-ASM-2016-2017.pdf>
- de la Garza, Thania, and Niembro, Rasec, “Incentives in the Use of Evaluations as a Tool for Improving Public Policy.” From: Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, *Proceedings from the Third International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities*. New York: UNDP, June 2014. <http://www.nec2015.net/sites/default/files/NEC-proceedings-2013.pdf>
- Interview with Thania de la Garza, Director General, and Alonso De Erice Dominguez, Subdirector of Interinstitutional Coordination, CONEVAL, Mexico, December 13, 2017 and March 15, 2018.