RESULTS FOR AMERICA

State Evidence-Based Grantmaking Guide

April 2025

Introduction

State governments collectively invest over $1 trillion each year in taxpayer funds.[1] When those funds are spent on programs and services that have been shown to deliver positive outcomes for residents, they can have a significant positive impact on individual and community well-being. However, when state government funding is not linked to evidence of effectiveness, it is less likely that these investments will produce the desired outcomes. Fortunately, there are an increasing number of evidence-based solutions that have been shown to deliver positive results, and using the right tools and systems for grantmaking, state government leaders can invest in these solutions and harness the power of their state's spending.[2]

Evidence-based grantmaking is becoming increasingly common in states across the country and the political spectrum. Since 2020, state governments have awarded roughly $2.6 trillion dollars through 105 evidence-based grant programs administered by 69 state agencies across 36 states. But more can and should be done to ensure states' investments yield better results for all Americans. The Results for America (RFA) State Evidence-Based Grantmaking Guide is designed to help state government leaders — including governors, legislators, legislative staff and agency leaders — build and leverage evidence and data in spending and make investing in what works into the "new normal." This guide is designed for all state agencies and governmental bodies in all policy areas (including but not limited to education, workforce, health, etc.) that have grantmaking authority.

This guide:

☑ **Outlines 3 action steps for defining and prioritizing evidence in state government grantmaking and evaluating the impact of these investments; and**

✏ **Highlights how state government leaders have implemented these steps to improve economic mobility outcomes.**

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[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 have identified over 2,000 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.

Have questions about evidence-based grantmaking 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, in part, by implementing the three action steps here. The State Standard of Excellence sets a national standard — a "north star" — for the capacity and infrastructure state governments need to consistently and effectively use evidence and data in budget, policy, and management decisions to deliver better results that improve opportunities for all residents.

We do this work confidentiality, objectively, and independently. RFA has never applied for any government funds - we also have never requested or received any funds from government grantees.

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

Results for America also offers specific guides for:

- State Evidence-Based Budgeting

- State Education Evidence-Based Spending

- State Workforce Evidence-Based Spending

As well as the following resources:

- Honor Roll of State Grant Programs that Define and Prioritize Evidence of Effectiveness

- Economic Mobility Catalog

- Evaluation Policy Guide

Note on Legislative Research: Legislative research for this guide was conducted using Plural, a platform for tracking and analyzing policy developments across all 50 states and Congress.

3 Steps for Evidence-Based Grantmaking

By implementing the following 3 action steps, state government leaders can leverage their grantmaking to invest in solutions that are proven to be effective and that are more likely to improve economic mobility and overall well-being for residents and communities.
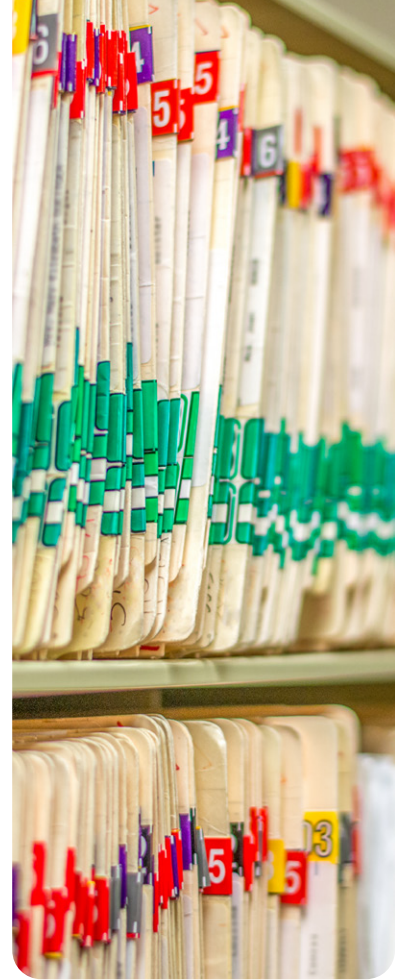
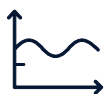| Acton Step	Strategy	Implementation
1 **Clearly Define Evidence**	**Option 1** Establish General Qualifying Criteria	State government grantmakers can create or adopt a general definition of evidence.
	Option 2 Use Specific Ratings from Clearinghouse(s)	State government grantmakers can point to categories of evidence-based programs featured in a trusted clearinghouse or clearinghouses.
	Option 3 Specify Program(s) and/or Core Components	State government grantmakers can name a specific evidence-based program that has been rigorously evaluated.
2 **Apply the Definition of Evidence in Order to Prioritize the Use of Evidence**	**Option 1** Require the Use of Evidence	State governments and agencies can include language in notices of funding opportunities (NOFOs) and requests for proposals (RFPs) specifying that proposals must use approaches that are evidence-based (according to the state's evidence definition).
	Option 2 Reward the Use of Evidence	State governments and agencies can award points to grant applications that meet the appropriate evidence definitions.
3 **Update Grant Policies and Templates to Make Evidence a Default Priority**	Build Infrastructure to Define and Prioritize Evidence	State governments and agencies can update their policies, procedures and/or templates for Requests for Proposals (RFPs) to include clear guidance on evidence expectations.

Action Step 1: Clearly Define Evidence

1

In order to implement a holistic evidence-based approach to grantmaking, state government leaders first need to specify what counts as **"evidence-based"**. Adopting a clear definition of evidence is a critical first step to using evidence in grantmaking decisions. A general definition of evidence should include criteria for the quality of evidence, as well as for what the evidence must demonstrate, including details about what types of evaluations will be considered, such as randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental studies that meet specified quality benchmarks. The definition should also specify the types of outcomes that must be improved, whether impacts were evaluated in similar populations or in similar settings, and/or the size or duration of favorable impacts on those outcomes, if applicable.

Why it matters: By clearly defining what counts as evidence, state government leaders can evaluate a grant program's likelihood of success based on shared standards.

States interested in pursuing evidence-based grantmaking have many things to consider when defining what counts as evidence. There are three options state government officials can choose from when defining evidence: establishing general qualifying criteria, using specific ratings from clearinghouses, or specifying programs and/or core components.

Option 1: Establish General Qualifying Criteria

The broadest approach is for a grantmaker to create or adopt a general definition of evidence. A state government or agency could directly borrow a state or federal definition, adapt another state's definition and/or a federal definition, or develop a new definition. See Federal, State & Local Evidence Definitions for a list of definitions and criteria used by states and federal agencies. Building on the strong foundation of evidence definitions already in use, Results for America has also developed a definition of "evidence-based".

Examples

Nevada: The Nevada Department of Education's 2020 Nevada Ready grant program defines evidence-based programs by using the specific criteria established in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

New Mexico: New Mexico's legislature defined what the state considers "evidence-based" in law. Specifically, the state's Accountability in Government Act (1999) defines "evidence-based" as a program or practice that: (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.

Benefits of this approach:

- This approach is the most comprehensive and flexible.

- This approach could encourage innovation by allowing for programs that have not yet been evaluated to be proposed (ideally with plans to evaluate their effectiveness and implementation).

Trade-offs of this approach:

- This approach requires grantees and grantmakers to have the capacity and expertise to determine whether a proposed program meets the criteria specified.

Option 2: Use Specific Ratings from Clearinghouse(s)

State government grantmakers can point to categories of evidence-based programs featured in a trusted clearinghouse or clearinghouses (e.g., by saying "evidence-based" refers to a program with "strong" or "proven" evidence in Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog). See Appendix A for a list of evidence clearinghouses.

Examples

Georgia: The Georgia Department of Human Services' Promoting Safe and Stable Families program requires applicants to use evidence-based practices listed in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, and enforces this by requiring that proposals have a rating of 1 (well supported) to 3 (promising) by that clearinghouse.

Maryland: The Maryland Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism's NOFO for grants focused on service and volunteerism prioritizes applicants proposing evidence-based interventions from the AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange that are rated as having moderate or strong evidence.

Tennessee: Tennessee's Office of Criminal Justice Programs require grantees to use recognized programs that are rated as "Highest Rated" or "Second Highest Rated" according to the Results First Clearinghouse.

Benefits of this approach:

- This approach is still fairly specific and relatively simple to administer. It should be easy to assess whether applicants have met the criteria by confirming whether the proposed program aligns with models from the clearinghouse(s) and reviewing the rating(s) given.

- This approach is fairly flexible, as clearinghouses contain many evidence-based programs meant to address a wide array of issues.

Trade-offs of this approach:

- This approach is dependent on outside expertise (by the people administering the clearinghouse(s) and keeping them up-to-date).

- This approach does not necessarily encourage innovation, as only programs already listed in the clearinghouse(s) are eligible.

Option 3: Specify Program(s) and/or Core Components

Another approach is for a state government grantmaker to name a specific evidence-based program that has been rigorously evaluated (for example, you could say a grant will be used to fund a program based on the model of the Nurse Family Partnership — or the core elements that make Nurse Family Partnership "work"). This approach *implicitly* defines what counts as "evidence-based" by funding specific evidence-based models that have been rigorously evaluated. This definition typically applies to one narrow area of policy (e.g. a particular special needs education program). States can go a step further and provide respondents with a menu of specific strategies, program models, or approaches to choose from. They may also allow respondents to propose other evidence-based approaches that are not included on the menu.

Examples

Michigan: Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services released an RFP for evidence-based services for youth in the justice system that named several program models (specifically, Multisystemic Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy for Problem Sexual Behaviors, and Functional Family Therapy) and applicants were required to choose one of those models to implement.

Tennessee: In 2022, the Tennessee Department of Education defined and prioritized evidence of effectiveness in two grant programs, All Corps and Summer Programming. The All Corps program funds the implementation and strengthening of high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring programs for students, which is an evidence-based approach. The Summer Programming grant funds summer learning programs intended to prevent summer learning loss, and such programs are generally well supported by evidence, though specific programs may be more or less effective.

Benefits of this approach:

- This approach is the most specific, and simplest to administer. It should be easy to assess whether applicants have met the criteria.

Trade-offs of this approach:

- This approach is not very flexible, as it can only be applied to one program/ issue area at a time. It also requires the grantmakers to already possess a good understanding of the available options in order to choose a specific program to implement.

- This approach does not always leave room for innovation, as a specific model has already been chosen.

Caution!

A program's name, alone, does not tell you if it is evidence-based. For example, if an applicant proposes to implement a "high impact tutoring" program, you will need to assess what that means. There is strong evidence that the most effective tutoring programs have specific elements including:

- Tutoring is conducted at school, during normal school hours, in three or more sessions per week for at least 30 minutes each.

- Tutoring is conducted by teachers or professional tutors who are well trained and supervised rather than by volunteers, peers, or parents.

- Tutoring is conducted one-on-one or in very small groups, with a tutor-student ratio of 1:4 or less (ideally 1:3).

If the tutoring program proposed does not have those elements, then it may be a misnomer to call it "high impact tutoring". Grantmakers will want to ensure that programs being called the same thing as an evidence-based program model actually contain all the core elements of that program model, and that applicants are capable of implementing those features.

On the other hand, a program could have all of the elements of a "high impact tutoring" program that has been demonstrated to work, but have an entirely different name. In that case, applicants will need to be very clear about what evidence-based model(s) their program seeks to replicate or adapt.

Action Step 2: Apply the Definition of Evidence in Order to Prioritize the Use of Evidence

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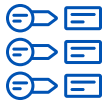
Once a definition of evidence has been established, state government grantmakers can use that definition to prioritize funding for programs that meet the established criteria for evidence-based. This can be done by the state government electing to either **require** or **reward** grant-funded activities that use evidence.

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

Option 1: Require Use of Evidence

State governments can include language in notices of funding opportunities (NOFOs) and requests for proposals (RFPs) specifying that responses **must** use approaches that are evidence-based (according to the state's evidence definition).

Examples

Georgia: The Georgia Department of Human Services administers the states' Promoting Safe and Stable Families program. This program **requires** applicants to use evidence-based practices listed in the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, and enforces this by requiring that proposals have a rating of 1 (well supported) to 3 (promising) by that clearinghouse.

Michigan: The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services' RFP for programs that provide services for youth in the justice system **requires** applicants to choose one of several specific evidence-based program models that were selected by the grantmaker in advance (Multisystemic Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy for Problem Sexual Behaviors, or Functional Family Therapy).

Benefits of this approach:

- More likely to create better outcomes for communities by funding programs that have been demonstrated to work.

- Focuses funding on programs with a proven track record, potentially reducing wasteful spending on ineffective initiatives.

Trade-offs of this approach:

- This approach could be limiting, as it may exclude newer, smaller or less-resourced vendors who may be capable but lack documented evidence.

- This approach may be more resource intensive. Developing, implementing, and maintaining evidence-based programs may require significant resources, including time, expertise, and funding to ensure the program is implemented with fidelity to the evidence-based model.

Option 2: Reward the Use of Evidence

State governments can allocate points to grant applications that meet the appropriate evidence definitions. Points can be allocated either as a portion of total available points (for example, an RFP could say that "up to 15 out of 100 available total points are awarded to evidence-based programs") or as bonus or preference points (for example, an RFP could say that "up to 15 additional points could be awarded for evidence-based programs, outside of the normal 100 points that are awarded based on other criteria"). Agencies can also award more points for approaches that have higher quality evidence vs lower quality evidence.

Examples

Michigan: To allocate funds through its AmeriCorps grant program, the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity used the tiered evidence framework from the AmeriCorps Evidence Exchange to award preference points to proposals assessed as 'Moderate' or 'Strong' in the exchange.

Nevada: The Nevada Department of Education prioritized evidence-based grant programs by awarding points for proposals that meet the general definition and specific criteria of "evidence-based" as established in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Specifically, applicants are awarded points based on the evidence-tier for the program, with "strong" evidence garnering the maximum of 4 points.

Benefits of this approach:

- Allows for a wider range of applicants to participate while still giving an advantage to those with strong evidence backing their proposal.

- By awarding preference points, you motivate applicants to adopt practices that have demonstrated success, which can increase the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

Trade-offs of this approach:

- The scoring system becomes more complex, requiring clear criteria and consistent application in order to ensure fairness.

- While preference points allow for some flexibility, they might still inadvertently favor more established, traditional approaches over innovative ones. For example, innovative programs that lack extensive evidence might struggle to compete against well-documented solutions.

- Only invests a portion of available funds towards evidence-based programs, rather than all funding going to programs with evidence of achieving desired outcomes.

Note

Definitions of evidence can be applied and prioritized at different scales. For example, they may be applied and prioritized **across the whole state government,** meaning that all state agencies share the same framework and use the same strategy for encouraging the use of evidence. However, this could happen **at a specific state agency**, meaning that all grants administered by that agency use the same framework and strategies. Or, the definition may only apply to a **single grant**, meaning the approach is specific to one line of funding and does not apply elsewhere.

Action Step 3: Update Grant Policies and Templates to Make Evidence a Default Priority

3

State governments can build an infrastructure that makes it easier — and more likely — for each grant opportunity to define and prioritize evidence. This includes updating RFP or NOFO templates, policies, and procedures to incorporate clear guidance on evidence expectations. For example, states can include a definition of evidence, specify preferred or required evidence-based models, and link to resources like evidence clearinghouses.
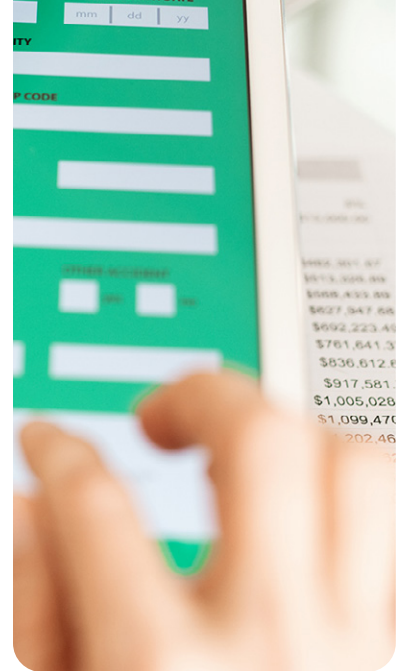
Why it matters: Making the use of evidence a standard part of the grantmaking process ensures that applicants and grantmakers will have a shared understanding of evidence, use the highest quality evidence available, and prioritize proposals that are the most likely to produce the desired outcomes.

Grant announcements should describe how evidence will be considered in the application review process, including any scoring criteria related to evidence use. Even when evidence isn't required, grantmakers can prompt applicants to describe the evidence supporting their proposals — such as citing studies, clearinghouse ratings, or explaining how their target population is similar to one studied. These default elements create consistency across funding opportunities and encourage more intentional use of evidence in program design and selection.

Note

These modifications can be made for a **single** RFP or grant program, but could also be done across an entire **agency** or **statewide**. States can require these modifications by law or through regulation.

Examples

Texas: All grants administered by the [Texas Workforce Commission](#) include resources for applicants to use, including relevant evidence definitions, an explanation for different rankings of evidence, links to relevant evidence clearinghouses, and a questionnaire for applicants to use to determine how their proposal will be rated on the evidence tier. Applicants are required to select the appropriate evidence tier for their proposal and provide documentation, including citations for the relevant program evaluation(s).

Maryland: The Maryland Governor's Office for Children's [ENOUGH Initiative](#) seeks to help end concentrated poverty through place-based interventions in high-need communities with up to $15 million in competitive grants that will prioritize interventions with evidence of effectiveness. The [Notice of Funding Opportunity](#) clearly explains how evidence will be prioritized (by awarding up to 5 bonus points for completing a table with the evidence of effectiveness for proposed strategies). The NOFO also provides resources for applicants to ensure their proposal is evidence-based. For example, the NOFO lists several specific evidence-based frameworks like [Collective Impact](#), [Targeted Universalism](#), the federal government's Places & People Thriving Approach, and the Urban Institute's [Upward Mobility Framework](#) that applicants can use to design their proposal.

California: In 2021, the California Department of Education's RFP for their [Reading Instruction and Intervention Grant](#) cites and explains the relevant definition of "evidence-based practices" and points applicants to relevant resources like the [What Works Clearinghouse](#) and the [Academic Intervention Tools Chart](#). The RFP also explains how evidence will be prioritized by providing scoring criteria, noting that up to 64 points (out of 132) are awarded based on evidence provided, and that up to 16 points are awarded to program designs that conduct rigorous evaluations to determine impacts on K–12 student achievement.

States have taken a variety of approaches to improve and increase the use of evidence in their grantmaking processes. For a full list of states, see Results for America's [Honor Roll of State Grant Programs](#).

How to Support the 3 Steps

Evidence-based grantmaking is a critical tool for ensuring that state government dollars are having the intended impact. However, a strong evidence-based grantmaking framework takes time and effort to create and maintain, so this section outlines a number of supporting activities and suggests ways for states and agencies to get started or improve evidence-based grantmaking efforts.

Use Grantmaking to Encourage Evidence-Building Activities

Sometimes, there is not an existing evidence base for a program, or the evidence base is limited or needs to be expanded to the intended population or context. Grant funding can encourage or require that programs be **"evidence-building"** or evaluated for impact and/or effective implementation. In that case, it's important to clearly define the criteria a program must meet to qualify as "evidence-building". Such criteria could include planning and conducting studies to evaluate whether a program caused improvement on an important outcome, conducting studies to establish how well the program has been implemented, and/or whether a program follows an "informed rationale" (clear reasoning, such as a theory of change, logic model or narrative description, that explains why a program is likely to improve important outcomes in similar contexts and for similar populations, based on research and input from participants and relevant stakeholders).

State grant leaders can prioritize evidence-building by taking the same steps as outlined in the above action steps. For example, states can use or adapt Results for America's definition of "evidence-building" to encourage grantees evaluate new programs. States can create "innovation funds"-grant programs that are specifically intended to support pilot projects and new program/implementation evaluations, by providing resources in order to test, identify and scale what works, including both new ideas and strategies with a long success record.

Examples

Colorado: Colorado's Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) administers approximately $500,000 annually in competitive grants for program implementation or evaluation of outcomes. Through this grant program, the state has invested approximately $3.7M in grants to support evidence-based policy.

Tennessee: In 2023, Tennessee allocated $1.5 million in recurring state dollars to support rigorous program evaluations and evidence building. Programs ready for evaluation are identified in the program inventory process, and agencies connect with external research partners to conduct the program evaluations.

An evaluation is a rigorous study on a given program meant to provide evidence about its impact or implementation. Such studies are a critical component of actively building evidence. Two important types of evaluations are impact evaluations and implementation evaluations.

- **Impact evaluations** are experimental or quasi-experimental studies that can be used to assess whether a program caused an improvement on one or more important outcomes in similar contexts and for similar populations.

- **Implementation evaluations** are qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods studies used to assess the implementation and delivery of a program. These evaluations assess how a program is running and whether it appears to be working as intended. Such evaluations can identify important factors such as barriers experienced during implementation, the cost of implementing a program, and/or other information that can be useful for program improvement and successful implementation.

A holistic approach to using evidence in grantmaking for your state or agency can help you move beyond relying on existing studies and support creating new, high quality evaluations for innovative programs or novel solutions to problems. See the Results for America Evaluation Policy Guide for more information.

Why it matters: Encouraging evidence-building through grantmaking helps states generate high-quality, relevant data on what works, for whom, and under what conditions. This approach strengthens future decision-making by expanding the evidence base, especially for innovative or context-specific programs that lack rigorous evaluation.

🎯 Set Expenditure Targets for Evidence-Based Grantmaking

In the context of state government grantmaking, there are two ways that targets for expenditures can be leveraged:

1. Requiring that a <u>certain number or percentage of grants</u>, themselves, be awarded to **evidence-based models** (for grants made by a specific agency, or for all agencies in a given state).

2. Encouraging or requiring that a <u>certain percentage of funding from a grant</u> (or even from all grants in a state/agency) be used for **evidence-building activities** (such as performing an impact evaluation).

Examples

Oregon: By statute, the Oregon Department of Corrections, Oregon Youth Authority, Oregon Youth Development Division, and the mental health/addiction divisions of the Oregon Health Authority all must spend at least 75% of that funding on evidence-based programs.

Tennessee: Since 2023, Tennessee Office of Evidence and Impact has implemented targets for the percentage of new funding requests dedicated to evidence-based programs.

Why it matters: Expenditure targets are a powerful tool for shifting dollars from programs that lack strong evidence and towards programs with a strong evidence base, ultimately increasing the likelihood of improving outcomes for residents in the state.

Embed Evidence in the Budget Process

State government budgeting is an important process where evidence-based models can be encouraged or mandated. 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). For more information, see Results for America's State Evidence-Based Budgeting Guide.

Why it matters: State government grantmaking is just one of many areas that can be improved by the use of a holistic, evidence-based approach. State government budgets are critical proclamations of a state's priorities. An evidence-based budget can support and enhance an evidence-based approach to grantmaking in a state.

Change Management

Getting started with, and enhancing, an evidence-based grantmaking framework involves change. In order to support your state's ongoing efforts, consider the following suggestions for change management.

- **Provide clear guidance and address inquiries from stakeholders about evidence-based grantmaking processes.**

    → Cite Statewide Evidence Definitions: Wherever possible, reference the statewide definition of "evidence-based" and "evidence-building" (if applicable) and share these definitions with stakeholders. This can help create alignment and clarity around the terms used.

→ Explain Evidence-Building Proposals: For proposals focused on evidence building, note how they will be used to inform future decision-making. This can help policymakers see the long-term value of evidence-building work.

- **Highlight specific evidence-based proposals:** Research shows that decision-makers are 22% more likely to support a proposal when it's labeled as evidence-based. If you're using slides or handouts, consider visually marking evidence-based or evidence-building proposals with a clear key.

- **Summarize all evidence-based investments in your state/agency:** At regular intervals, provide summary statistics on evidence-based programming, such as the percentage of new investments that are evidence-based or the total dollar amount of base investments being shifted to evidence-based programs.

  → Create a summary document: Include a standalone or summary document listing just the evidence-based or evidence-building proposals. This could be as detailed as a full program inventory or as simple as a list of qualifying programs.

Examples

Minnesota: Starting in 2023, Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) annually publishes a high level summary of funding for evidence-based policies on their Current Enacted Biennial Budget dashboard, which summarizes evidence-based funding.

New Mexico: The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee publishes a post session review providing information on evidence-based items that were signed into law or vetoed after each legislative session.

Tennessee: Tennessee developed a statewide program inventory that is based on the Tennessee Evidence Framework. The inventory provides a comprehensive list of state-funded programs in the budget, including information on whether those programs are supported by rigorous evidence. It also includes information about the services provided and insight into the evidence that is tied to the program's desired outcomes.

→ Link proposals to impact: Whenever possible, tie your proposals to outcomes or impact. For example, "By implementing X program, research suggests participants are 12% more likely to achieve Y."

Why it matters: Evidence-based grantmaking is an ongoing process with many stages and components, so taking a big picture approach to supporting it is important.

Define Outcomes in Grants

Ultimately, evidence-based grantmaking is about improving **outcomes**. Grants should be created with outcomes in mind from the very beginning. An RFP should define the outcomes you're intending to produce and ensure that applicants describe the inputs, activities, and outputs that will lead to those outcomes.

Examples

Ohio: In 2020, the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio (WDBCO) released performance-based RFPs for their job center operator and their career services provider. The RPSs defined outcomes through specifying performance metrics and assigning each of the five metrics a baseline measure as the minimum level of performance required to begin receiving bonus payments, and each metric accounts for 9% of the total direct operational costs. Note: the long term impacts of this program are still being evaluated.

Florida: Duval County Public Schools (FL) used an outcomes-based contracting model to implement a high impact tutoring program in 2023. This case study includes information on how the district implemented the contracting model and the "rate card" Duval used for pricing various outcomes. Note: the long term impacts of this program are still being evaluated.

Why it matters: When states clearly define their desired program outcomes, they can more effectively communicate purpose, align efforts across stakeholders, and allocate resources toward measurable goals. This clarity strengthens transparency, supports ongoing evaluation and improvement, and lays the groundwork for outcomes-based partnerships and contracting.

Outcomes are the long-term effect(s) of a grant (or program). This is synonymous with impact.

Outcomes are not the same as outputs. Outputs are the immediate specific products delivered by a program.

For a childhood health program, an output might be "The number of children enrolled in the program", while an outcome might be "Reduced number of school days missed from asthma attacks".

Performance Management

Performance management is a key aspect of any evidence-based grantmaking framework. Even grants with a strong evidence base in their favor can fail to deliver results if there are problems with implementation. Measuring the performance of grant programs allows for problems to be identified, understood, and addressed.

Performance measures are an extension of the contract outcomes discussed previously. Metrics create accountability by allowing you to measure whether vendors are realizing your vision of success. Grant RFPs should include information about performance measures, key data points that will be used to track how a grant program is meeting its goals. These metrics should be based on the desired outcomes identified for the grant.

Why it matters: Effective performance management improves a program's overall outcomes by serving as a means through which states can monitor progress towards goals, provide feedback to program leaders, and support continuous improvement and adjust program activities where the program is not on track to meet its goals.

Sample Language for Grant Performance Management Section

- As part of [government/department/agency]'s commitment to improved outcomes, [government/department/agency] seeks to actively and regularly collaborate with awarded vendors to enhance contract management, improve results, and adjust service delivery based on learning what works.

- Reliable and relevant data is necessary to drive service improvements, facilitate compliance, inform trends to be monitored, and evaluate results and performance. As such, [government/department/agency] reserves the right to request/collect other key data and metrics from vendors.

- Describe how your government will actively and consistently work with the vendor to track progress, flag challenges, and design course corrections to achieve the contract's goals. Specify communication required with the government, including when data and information should be delivered, how frequently, and in what format (e.g., performance reports).

Seek Community Input

In order to consistently deliver positive results for all residents, states should seek community input as part of their grantmaking activities. To be effective, a program must start with an understanding of the challenges faced by the people it's being designed to serve. Engaging community members who have firsthand experience with those challenges is essential for adequately defining the challenge and possible solutions. Affected community members can provide insights and questions not readily apparent to government or community leaders, offering nuanced perspectives on real-life impacts and opportunities for improvement.

All relevant groups should have the opportunity to provide input. Achieving this in practice often requires targeted outreach efforts, as well as working to elevate voices that are often overlooked. In order to encourage grants that are responsive to local community needs, grantmakers should:

1. Engage with relevant communities prior to the RFP phase to ensure the needs of those who are most impacted are considered and will be met by the grant program. This early and ongoing community engagement allows grantmakers to identify community needs and barriers, and shape program goals, design, implementation, and evaluation.

2. Ensure the RFP requires applicants to demonstrate their understanding of the community being served and their unique needs and barriers. This allows grantmakers to prioritize

applicants with a demonstrated understanding of local needs, which may include prior experience serving that population or similar populations.

3. Require or provide preference points to applicants that propose an evidence-based model found to be effective for the community being served or ones that incorporate an evaluation component to build such evidence.

4. Require or provide preference points for applicants that propose to collect data on demographic characteristics, and report on experiences, outcomes, and impacts for the community being served.

Examples

Texas: The Texas Department of Youth and Family Services' 2023 Community Youth Development Program requires applicants to complete a Community Strengths and Needs Assessment (CSNA) that includes recommended grant activities based on community input.The program encourages youth involvement in the development of the CSNA and requires that the CSNA is made publicly available.

Washington, D.C.: Washington, D.C.'s Office of the State Superintendent of Education's High Impact Tutoring Grant Program awards up to 5 points (out of 100) to applications that will serve schools and non-school sites with larger proportions of at-risk students and English learners or that are focused on students with disabilities, students involved in the juvenile justice system, or students who are one or more grade level behind (pages 8 and 13).

Why it matters: Community engagement throughout the grantmaking process can help ensure that grant funding is used for programs that are meeting community needs.

Appendix A:
List of Evidence-Based Program Clearinghouses

Issue Area	Clearinghouse Name
Clearinghouses Across Issue Areas	Results for America Economic Mobility Catalog The Results First Clearinghouse Database Arnold Ventures' Social Programs that Work
Early Childhood	U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse U.S. Department of Health and Human Services HomVee Clearinghouse Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA
K-12 Education	U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA
Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Development	U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA
Health and Well-Being	Institute of Behavioral Science Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development CA Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare
Housing	Results for America Economic Mobility Catalog— Housing and Community Development The Results First Clearinghouse Database Use search option to search for "Housing"
Justice/ Public Safety	U.S. Department of Justice Crime Solutions