



Measuring Progress

A 2024 Survey of Federal Evaluation Officials

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) was a sweeping effort to enhance the government’s capacity to produce and use evaluations. The Evidence Act formally created evaluation officers at each of the 24 largest federal agencies. Subsequent guidance encouraged this capacity in all federal agencies. Evaluation officers, alongside the teams of federal evaluators who support them throughout agencies, have taken on the challenge of advancing and strengthening evidence-building cultures in their organizations. The evaluation community is making significant progress in building, growing, and enhancing its culture and capabilities following enactment of the Evidence Act.

Measuring Progress: 2024 Survey of Federal Evaluation Officials from the Data Foundation, in partnership with the American Evaluation Association, assesses the growth of evaluation capacity and practice in federal agencies. This online survey for evaluation officials was conducted in March and April of 2024, asking questions about experiences related to the implementation of the Evidence Act. The findings indicate significant progress in implementing the Evidence Act, although opportunities for further growth in evidence capacity remain for federal agencies.

Mission Success: The Evidence Act Works

The themes across survey responses reflect optimism and confidence that the Evidence Act moves their offices forward and in the right direction. The majority of evaluation officials find their offices to be moderately to highly successful in achieving their evaluation missions, which include a wide variety of objectives and responsibilities. Officials describe their missions ranging from fulfilling the requirements of the Evidence Act, to educating agency personnel and leaders about evidence, and promoting equity in evaluations. Officials also report a high level of confidence, believing strongly that the intended users of evaluation understand the purpose of evaluation findings and how to apply evidence in improving agency programs and services.

Of the nearly 90% of respondents who rated their organization as at least “somewhat” successful in achieving its evaluation mission, 44% found their organization “completely” or “a lot” successful in achieving its evaluation mission.

96%

Of respondents found success in their evaluation functions

83%

Of respondents said the Evidence Act helped them achieve their missions



Key Findings

The Evidence Act greatly enhances evaluation officials' activities and missions.

48% of evaluation officials report that the requirements of the Evidence Act aids their offices' ability to achieve evaluation missions, with another 35% reporting the Evidence Act helps "a little." Officials said that the Evidence Act helped to institutionalize the evaluation function in their agencies, bringing attention to their offices and helping make the case for resources.

Learning Agenda development encouraged evaluation use and growing evidence cultures.

Officials find the Learning Agenda formulation process to be complex, but educational to them and key stakeholders in their agencies. Officials also report that the process initiates increased collaboration and alignment between agency units.

Evaluation officials collaborate within and across agency units to support mission success.

61% of evaluation officials said they collaborate with program managers regularly, and between 40-50% regularly collaborate with other internal officials such as chief data officers and statistical officials, among others. Nearly 40% of evaluation officials also collaborate often with the White House Office of Management and Budget, increasing substantially since last surveyed.

Top Challenges

Resources insufficient in evaluation offices to fulfill mission in most activities.

Evaluation officials continue to report struggling with access to sufficient resources to implement the various aspects of their organizations' evaluation missions. Only between 20% to 35% of officials perceived resources to be "completely" or "a lot" sufficient in every evaluation mission area.

The influence of evaluation and evidence plans lags in agency budgeting.

41% of officials report evaluation findings as at best "somewhat" influential in agency budgeting, with zero saying findings are highly influential, despite findings being highly influential for strategic planning and operational decisions.

Evaluation officials and external stakeholders have room to improve engagement and form closer working relationships.

There is relatively little regular collaboration between officials and program partners (31%), the academic community (25%), and program beneficiaries (10%), among others. Evaluation officials work with congressional staff the least, with 76% of respondents reporting they do not collaborate with congressional staff at all.

Recommendations for Federal Evaluation Capacity

The findings of the survey suggest several key recommendations for those working to support the evaluation officers and leaders across the community:

CREATE STRATEGIC CAPACITY TO ENGAGE IN EVALUATION ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING TARGETED SUPPORT FOR EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT.

DEVELOP AND USE TOOLS FOR COLLABORATION WITH BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS TO ENABLE MORE EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT.

IMPROVE THE INTEGRATION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AND BUDGET FORMULATION WITH EVIDENCE PLANNING ACTIVITIES.

PROMOTE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF EVIDENCE ACT PRODUCTS, AND INCORPORATE AI CAPABILITIES.

While substantial progress has been made in federal evaluation practices and capacity, challenges persist in securing resources, building capacity, and sustaining evaluation priorities. The 2024 Survey of Federal Evaluation Officials offers important perspectives on progress and challenges in implementing the Evidence Act and advancing evidence-based decision-making, and on how to meet these challenges into the future.

The **Data Foundation** is a national non-profit that promotes open data and evidence-based policies to improve society. As a nonpartisan think tank, it conducts research, advocacy, and collaborative efforts to advance practical policies for accessible and trustworthy data.

The **American Evaluation Association** is a professional organization dedicated to advancing evaluation practices across various fields, including education, government, and independent consulting. It focuses on fostering best practices and professional development within the evaluation community.