Evidence and Data Job Aid

What is Evidence and Data?

OSBM views "**evidence**" broadly as quantitative or qualitative facts and information that show how likely a belief is to be true. For example, a meta-analysis might show that a training program will likely increase employment rates by 5 percentage points; or a randomized controlled trial (RCT) might estimate that a service has no meaningful benefit. The strongest evidence generally comes from a variety of high quality, credible sources.

When evidence is not available, data may suggest why a change is needed and how it could address the problem. "**Data"** is information, such as measurements or statistics, used as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation. Data might show that the average employee can process 20 permit applications per month, indicating that five FTEs are required to process 100 monthly applications.

Sources of Evidence and Data

Sources of Evidence

Evidence is typically generated through program evaluations, high quality research (such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses), and RCTs. Clearinghouses gather and organize existing evidence on interventions/services in the social policy arena. The Pew Charitable Trusts compiled a list of clearinghouses, available here, for the following policy areas: aging and disability, behavioral health & healthcare, criminal and juvenile justice, economy, environment, transportation, and education.

Figure 1 shows the relative strength of different types of evidence, from weakest at the bottom of the pyramid to the strongest at the top.

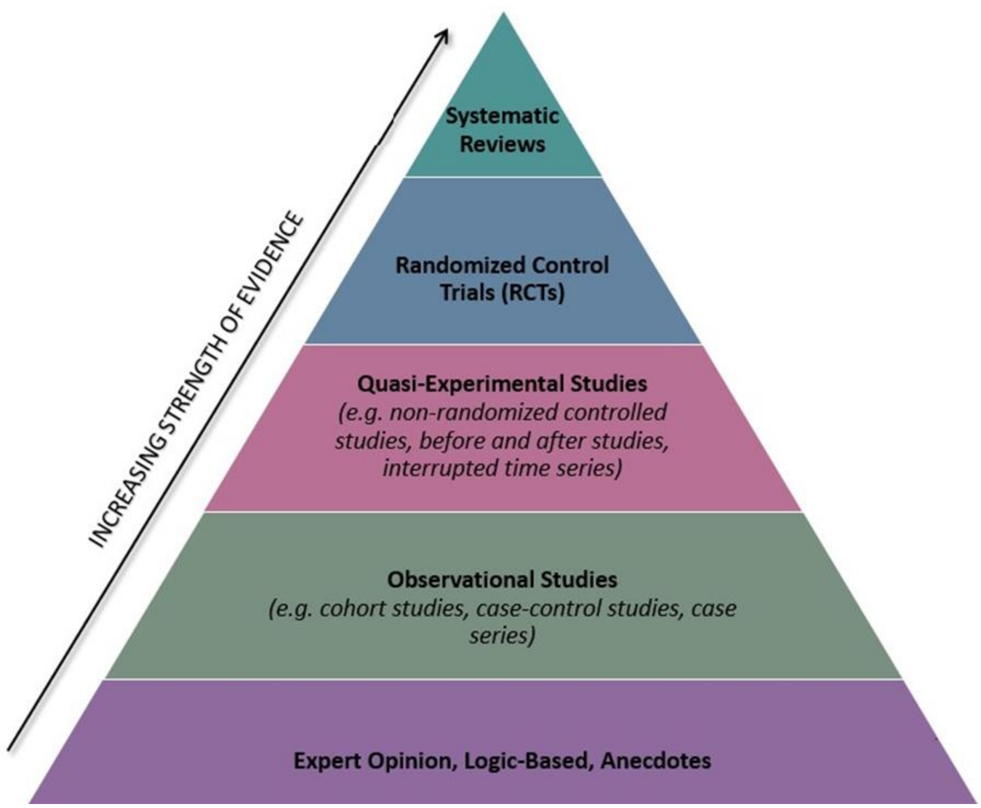

Figure 1: Evidence Hierarchy Pyramid

The top three categories (systematic reviews, RCTs, and quasi-experimental studies) are more likely to show causation.

OSBM's evidence continuum (Figure 2) details the levels of evidence that might support a change in services or practice. Note that there may be limited or no evidence supporting a proposal, especially if the change has never been attempted. In such cases, agencies should present data and their theory of how it will work, and they should strongly consider allocating funds to evaluate the change and build evidence to inform future decisions. The presence of evidence does not always signify a program's effectiveness since the evidence may prove the program to have harmful effects or be ineffective.

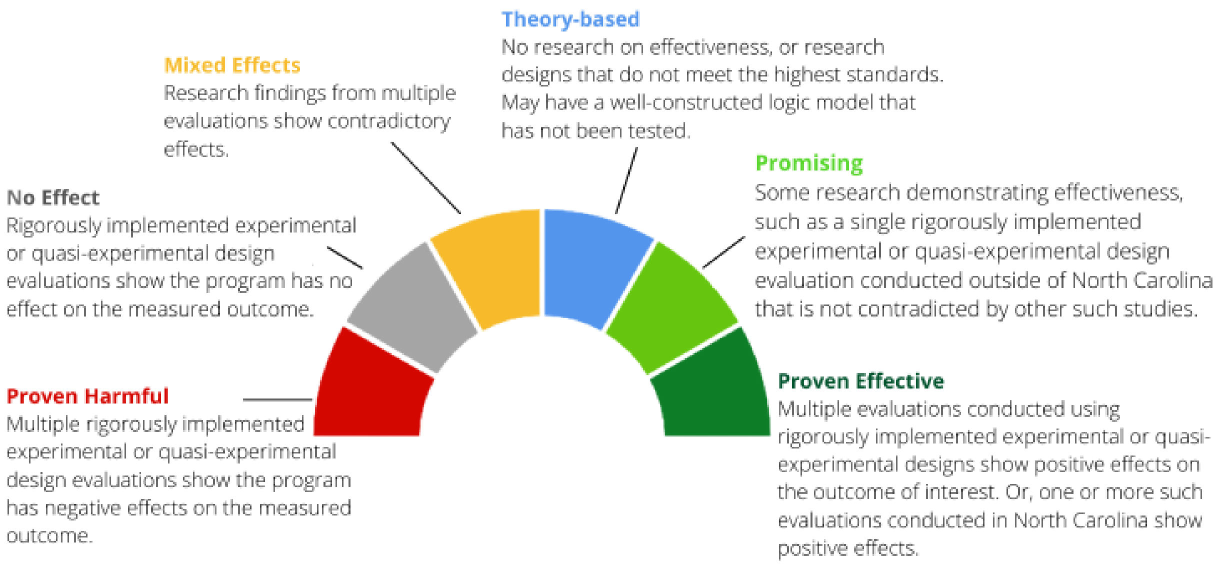

Figure 2: OSBM's Evidence Continuum

Sources of Data

Data can be internal or external. Data sources include administrative data, other government entities, trade associations, surveys and focus groups, and program performance and monitoring data. OSBM budget development analysts can collaborate with agencies to understand how internal data might be leveraged within change budget requests.

Incorporating Evidence and Data into Budget Requests

Evidence and Data in ABC Lists

ABC List column F asks, "What is the problem this request seeks to solve?" Use evidence and data to demonstrate need and define the problem here. Agencies could also use this space to share how they will measure efficacy and effectiveness of the change once implemented. All of this should provide enough context to answer the following three questions:

- What is the problem, and why is it a problem?
- How will this request solve the problem?
- What program performance measures will be used to measure efficiency and/or effectiveness?

Agencies don't need to include all supporting evidence and data in the ABC List, but they should be prepared to discuss it in OSBM-Agency meetings and share the sources that support these claims. If agency staff would like assistance with finding or determining which evidence and/or data can support their requests, they should also ask OSBM analysts for guidance in those meetings.

Evidence and Data in WS-IIs, WS-II-EZs, and WS-IIIs

The WS-II and WS-II-EZ Narrative Tab asks several questions about each change budget request. The WS-II-EZ has only two questions, while the WS-II includes additional narrative fields to justify more complex requests. Following are the form questions and bulleted prompts that agencies should answer <u>as appropriate</u> to describe and document the case for change budget requests.

Expansion Prompts for both WS-II and WS-II-EZ

1. What problem or need is being addressed?
   - Why is this a problem? When and how did this become a problem?
   - How does the issue affect workload or service delivery?
   - Why is this expansion request necessary? What could result if the problem is not addressed?
   - *Note inflationary or cost pressures that inhibit maintaining current service or operations levels.*

2. Describe your request, including the specific activities, functions, and services provided and a timeline for expenditures and positions (if any).
   - Document agency cost estimates and explain the methodology for reaching those totals.
   - For pilot programs, how will the pilot sites be selected?
   - For existing program expansions, describe the current program status, including current budget and staffing information.
   - If equipment or vehicles are requested, describe the need. Do more cost-effective alternatives exist? If so, why are they inadequate?

Additional Expansion Prompts for WS-II Only

3. What alternatives have been considered or previously attempted to address the issue?
   - What solutions have been attempted with existing resources? Why were they unsuccessful?
   - What alternative solutions were considered but not implemented, and why? Including evidence and data supporting this decision.
   - What existing programs within the department or in another state agency could be redeployed or leveraged as partners to meet this need?

4. How will the request improve outcomes for the public, the quality of government services, and/or government efficiency?
   - What are the anticipated outcomes?
   - Describe the anticipated benefits, including the size and scope of the benefits.
   - If this is an existing program, service, or activity, what are the outcomes to date? How will this request improve upon those outcomes?

5. Why does the agency believe the proposed change will achieve the expected outcome? Are the anticipated outcomes supported by any of the following? Please describe and attach or include references to relevant materials.
   - Evidence from rigorous research that identifies the change caused by the intervention,
   - Findings from a program evaluation or analysis of internal or external data,
   - Industry standards or best practices,
   - Professional judgement, or
   - Successful implementation in another state(s).

6. How will the outcomes be measured and how will the agency recognize success?

- What data will be used to evaluate changes in outcomes?
- Are there existing baseline measures to track against future performance?
- What portion of requested funds will be used to evaluate success or build the evidence base for the program or service?

Reduction Prompts

1. Summary of proposed reduction
    - What specific activities, functions, or programs will the agency reduce, eliminate, or shift to receipt-supported?
    - How were these activities identified for reduction, elimination, or a shift in funding source? Is this reduction in accordance with the priorities in your agency's strategic plan?
    - Does this request require statutory changes or special provisions? If yes, provide an explanation of what statutory changes or special provision components may be needed.

2. If the activity has been identified for reduction based on program outcomes or inefficiencies, describe any past efforts to increase the efficiency or effectiveness of the activities or program.
    - Have there been prior attempts to improve or eliminate the program? If so, please describe.
    - Are there existing programs within the department or in another state agency that could be redeployed or leveraged as partners to achieve these outcomes?

3. How will the request affect outcomes for the public, the quality of government services, or government efficiency?
    - What are the anticipated outcomes of the proposed reduction?
    - Who will be affected by this reduction?
    - Does the reduction result in increased costs to individuals, other state agencies or units of local government?

Examples

1. An agency could support a $75,000 R request for an application specialist with the following data:
    - The agency expects 50 more applications per week in FY 2023-24 due to a change in law and growing program demand.
    - An internal agency analysis found that the five current application specialists process an average of 50 applications per week per person.
    - Without the additional position, the agency will not meet program requirements.
    - The agency budgets similar positions at $75,000 per year.

2. An agency could support a request for a professional development program by citing a meta-analysis that finds similar training programs increase employment rates by five percentage points. It could then show how the proposed program is significantly similar to those in the meta-analysis. The agency could also describe a randomized controlled trial (RCT) that finds this type of program reduces both audits and misuse of funds.