Next Steps in the White House Evidence and Innovation Agenda

Council of Economic Advisers

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White House Evidence and Innovation Agenda

- What is it?

    - Smarter, more innovative, and more accountable government

    - Expand the approaches that work best, fine-tune the ones that get mixed results, and shut down those that are failing

- How is it implemented?

    - The Budget process – priority given to requests that demonstrate a commitment to evidence-based evaluation

    - Interagency collaboration – foster and develop a culture of learning and innovation

Motivation

- Fiscal Climate

- We need to be making smarter investments

- Evaluation needs to be part of a program from the beginning

- Prioritizing based on evaluation

What Have We Learned?

- ## Leveraging Administrative Data
  - The College Scorecard

- ## High-Quality, Low-Cost Evaluations and Iterative Experimentation
  - Applied Behavioral Research at the Treasury Department

- ## Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE) Program
  - Measured outcomes using administrative data already collected for other purposes (at a total cost of $150,000)
  - HOPE group members were 55% less likely than control group members to be re-arrested after one year

What Have We Done?

- ## Outcome-Focused Grant Design
  - Unique opportunity to strengthen the use of evidence at all levels of government

- ## Pay for Success
  - Government pays only when measurable results are achieved

- ## Tiered-evidence
  - Different levels of funding for different levels of evaluation
  - Over time, interventions move up tiers as evidence becomes stronger
  - Already in place at several agencies

What Have We Done? (2)

- ## Strengthen Agencies' Capacity to Use Evidence
  - Agency-wide Evaluation Plans
  - DOL Chief Evaluation Office

- ## Common Evidence Guidelines
  - Facilitate evaluation contracting, information collection clearance, and creation of research clearinghouses

- ## Cross-agency Learning Networks
  - SBA, USDA, and Commerce, with guidance from OMB and CEA, are working to find more robust ways to evaluate the impact of Federal business technical assistance programs

What Have We Done? (2)

- "What Works" Clearinghouses
  - DOJ: CrimeSolutions.gov

  - Ed: What Works Clearinghouse

  - DOL: Clearinghouse of Labor Evaluation and Research

  - HHS: National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

Some Challenges – Evidence Agenda

- Rigorous evaluations take time and money

- A body of work, not just one evaluation, is needed to assess whether programs or intervention strategies are having desired effects on outcomes

- Directing funding to "what works" entails new program designs
  - Particularly challenging in block grant programs

Challenges to Using Administrative Data for Evaluation

- Designing administrative data sets to facilitate low cost evaluations
  - Requires new upfront investments
  - Program administrators may not consider the need to involve evaluators in database design decisions

- Few opportunities to change existing data systems

- Challenges to linking data sets

What's Next?

- FY15: Propose new evaluations using rigorous techniques (RCT, careful quasi-experimental designs)

- New ways to harness data to improve agency results

- New proposals for high-quality, low-cost evaluations

- Expand or improve use of outcome-focused grant designs

- Strengthening agency evaluation capacity