

DAY ONE PROJECT

Advancing Economic, Health, and
Racial Equity by Increasing the Use of
Evidence and Data

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Summary

As the United States continues to grapple with unprecedented economic, health, and social justice crises that have had a devastating and disproportionate effect on the very communities that have long struggled most, the next administration must act quickly to ensure equitable recovery. Improving economic mobility and increasing equity in communities furthest from opportunity is more urgent than ever.

The next administration must work with Congress to quickly enact a new round of recovery or stimulus legislation. State and local governments, school systems, and small businesses continue to struggle to respond to COVID-19 and the economic and learning losses that have accompanied the resulting closures. But federal resources are not unlimited and there is little time to spare - communities need positive results quickly. It is imperative, furthermore that the administration ensures that the dollars it distributes are used effectively and equitably. The best way to do so is to use existing evidence and data -- about what works, for whom, and under what circumstances -- to drive recovery investments.

Fortunately, the federal government has access to unprecedented evidence and data tools that can increase the speed and effectiveness of these urgent recovery and equity-building efforts. And where evidence or data do not exist, this unique moment affords an opportunity to build evidence about what does work to help communities recover and rebuild.

Thus, one of the first priorities of the next administration's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) should be helping agencies develop their capacity to use existing evidence and data and to build evidence where it is lacking in order to advance economic mobility across the country. OMB should also support federal agency efforts to assist state and local governments to build and use local evidence that can accelerate economic growth and help communities recover from the current crises.

Specifically, OMB should issue guidance directing federal agencies to: 1) define and prioritize evidence of effectiveness in their grant programs to help identify what works, for whom, and under what circumstances to advance economic mobility post-COVID; 2) set aside 1% of discretionary funding for evidence building, including evaluations, technical assistance and capacity building; 3) support state and local governments in using recovery funding to build their own data, evidence-building and evaluation capacity to help their communities rebuild; and 4) require that findings from 2021 evidence-building activities be incorporated into strategic plans due in 2022.

Challenge and Opportunity

The passage of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (“Evidence Act”) marked a major milestone in the development of federal agencies’ capacity and infrastructure to evaluate the impact of their programs; scale the use of data, evidence, and evaluation in the policymaking process; and increase public access to federally-held data. Notably, the law also requires OMB to build better use of evidence into its core operations. While the Evidence Act lays important groundwork for increasing the use of evidence-based policymaking, more action is required to ensure federal agencies build and use evidence and data to inform their fiscal and policy decisions.

For the Evidence Act to achieve its intended objectives, state and local governments must become true partners with federal agencies as they identify key research questions and carry out the analytical and evaluation activities required to learn what works to advance economic mobility and opportunity for different communities across the country. To date, implementation of the Evidence Act has focused heavily on evaluations that can be carried out at the federal level with federally-held data, and with limited stakeholder engagement or participant feedback. Moving forward, however, federal agencies have the opportunity to use the Evidence Act’s tools to expand their work by helping state and local governments promote innovation, continuous learning, and the scaling of proven solutions. OMB is in a unique position to guide agencies in undertaking this expanded work through regulatory and administrative reforms that do not require legislation.

The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has historically been the fulcrum for federal evidence-based policymaking, giving it a unique role in guiding agencies in the use of evidence and data to increase economic mobility. Given this position, it is essential that OMB increase the capacity of federal agencies to: (1) build and use evidence in ways that advance economic mobility across the country, and (2) assist state and local governments to build and use evidence for the same purpose.

Plan of Action

In order to increase the use of evidence and improve results, OMB should:

- **Define and Prioritize Evidence of Effectiveness:** Issue guidance to the 24 agencies covered by the Evidence Act requiring that they [define and prioritize evidence of effectiveness](#)¹ in all their discretionary competitive grant programs.
 - For example, in FY19 the Corporation for National and Community Service’s [AmeriCorps State and National](#) competitive grant program application allocated up to 16 points out of 100 to applicants proposing strategies supported by

¹ Results for America, *2020 Playbook: 17 Ways the Next President Can Accelerate Economic Mobility Using Evidence and Data* (2020), 10.

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rigorous evidence of effectiveness. As a result of this decision to define and prioritize evidence, [Minnesota Reading Corps](#), a program with strong evidence, was able to access additional funding and bring evidence-based reading instruction to 6,000 additional elementary school students.

- **Set Aside Funds to Support Learning and Evaluations:** Issue guidance to the 24 agencies covered by the Evidence Act requiring that they [set aside](#) no less than 1% of discretionary competitive grant program funds for evidence building, which includes evaluations, data systems, and capacity building.
 - For example, the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) invested 1% of its budget in evaluations in FY19, and two of the largest federal foreign assistance agencies, the [Millennium Challenge Corporation](#) and the [U.S. Agency for International Development](#), invested 3.7% and 1.2%, respectively, that same year.
- **Identify Impact Funds for State and Local Government Partnerships:** Ensure focused and dedicated funding for state and local capacity building by directing agencies to issue guidance clarifying that any funding disbursed through recovery legislation, including state fiscal stabilization funds, can be used by city, county, and state governments to build their data, evidence building, and evaluation capacity.
 - For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Development and Block Grant (CDBG) Program allows grantees to use their [administrative](#) (570.201(p)) and [program](#) (570.200(f)) funds for capacity building and technical assistance. Most grantees, however, do not know they have this option. Therefore, few spend their funds to learn whether the programs and activities on which they spend their CDBG dollars are working as intended.
- **Bolster Evidence Act Implementation:** Support aggressive implementation of the Evidence Act by ensuring that agencies incorporate findings from learning agendas, information from agency capacity assessments, and other evidence into their strategic plans due in February 2022 in order to inform future budget requests.
 - For example, to develop the current draft of its Evidence Act-mandated learning agenda, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) has expanded its research question generation and prioritization process to all programs operated by its programmatic principal offices. Moreover, to help ensure alignment of the learning agenda to the Department's strategic plan, its Evidence Leadership Group has been expanded to include a member from the Performance Improvement Office and work has begun to ensure that evidence needs are actively solicited from Strategic Plan Goal Teams. In 2020, the Department will build on this work by soliciting external stakeholder feedback into its Learning Agenda and Strategic Plan in 2020.

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These recommendations are a summary of the more extensive outline in Results for America's [Implementation Guide for the 2020 Transition Team](#),² which describes in greater detail how OMB can most effectively help the next administration develop, implement, and scale policies and programs through an evidence-based and data-driven approach.

Conclusion

The challenges and uncertainties that await the next administration are enormous. But, at the same time, the current state of affairs offers an opportunity to transform our nation's economic and social framework. We have to ensure that the investments we make in recovery legislation and other efforts to rebuild provide fair and equitable opportunity while advancing racial equity in real and measurable ways. To that end, the next administration should ensure that it implements economic recovery efforts in an evidence-based and data-driven manner. It should issue guidance to agencies requiring that they prioritize evidence about economic mobility in their grant programs, allocate funding for evidence-building activities, support evidence use in state and local recovery programs, and incorporate evidence into strategic planning. These efforts will help bring better near-term results for the people across the country most in need of support while simultaneously investing in long-term prosperity and opportunity.

² Results for America, *The Power of Evidence and Data to Advance an Equitable Economic Recovery: An Implementation Guide to the 2020 OMB Transition Team* (2020).

About the Authors



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About the Day One Project

The Day One Project is dedicated to democratizing the policymaking process by working with new and expert voices across the science and technology community, helping to develop actionable policies that can improve the lives of all Americans, and readying them for Day One of a future presidential term. For more about the Day One Project, visit dayoneproject.org.