Understanding and Improving Policymakers' Sensitivity to Program Impact

Last updated on May 12, 2021
Status
Draft

Pre-trial Fields

Trial Information

General Information

Title

Understanding and Improving Policymakers' Sensitivity to Program Impact

RCT ID

Initial registration date

Not yet registered

Last updated

Not yet registered

Location(s)

Country

United States of America

Region

Primary Investigator

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Other Primary Investigator(s)

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Additional Trial Information

Status

In development

Start date

2021-05-17

End date

2021-09-01

Keywords

Behavior, Governance

Additional Keywords

JEL code(s)

D9, I38, D63, C9

Secondary IDs

Abstract

When making decisions about which programs to implement, policymakers must assess impact in the face of bounded rationality constraints in processing relevant information.

These constraints may result in “under-sensitivity” to impact-relevant information about evidence-based programs, ultimately leading to support for less impactful interventions, compared to a utilitarian benchmark. This study uses a lab-in-the-field experiment among federal employees of the US government to explore and seek to improve sensitivity. We will first document any under-sensitivities in government decision making across three key program attributes relevant to impact: scope, outcome type, and effect persistence. The primary goal of this study is to test modes of presenting program information that increase sensitivity across these domains, in turn identifying techniques for researchers and evaluators to use to more effectively disseminate results of program evaluations.

External Link(s)

Sponsors & Partners

Partner(s)

Name

Office of Evaluation Sciences

Type

government

Url

https://oes.gsa.gov/

Experimental Details

Interventions

Intervention(s)

This project will leverage a lab-in-the-field survey experiment among federal employees in the US government. All survey respondents will be presented with descriptions of hypothetical programs and evaluation results and will estimate the maximum cost at which they would be willing to fund the program. We will vary the mode of presenting the information across programs. Specifically, respondents may see a program description presented with no additional framing ("baseline"); a description with an "impact calculator" that translates total program costs into the cost per person affected per year ("impact calculator"); or two similar descriptions presented together on one page ("side-by-side").

Intervention Start Date

2021-05-17

Intervention End Date

2021-09-01

Primary Outcomes

Primary Outcomes (end points)

The primary outcome of interest is participants' perceived program value, which is defined as the maximum cost at which the participant would e willing to fund the program, as identified in the experiment.

Primary Outcomes (explanation)

Secondary Outcomes

Secondary Outcomes (end points)

The secondary outcome of interest is self-reported confidence in one's valuation assessments, as a proxy for cognitive uncertainty.

Secondary Outcomes (explanation)

Experimental Design

Experimental Design

Different modes of presenting program information will be randomly assigned within participant. That is, respondents will see program descriptions presented using each of the "baseline" condition, the "impact calculator," and the "side-by-side" comparison, in random order. The programs shown for each condition as well as the calculated impact shown for each program will be randomly varied across participants.

Experimental Design Details

Randomization Method

The randomization will be implemented in Qualtrics

Randomization Unit

Conditions will be randomized within respondent.

Was the treatment clustered?

Yes

Experiment Characteristics

Sample size: planned number of clusters

500

Sample size: planned number of observations

3,000

Sample size (or number of clusters) by treatment arms

500

Minimum detectable effect size for main outcomes (accounting for sample design and clustering)

Supporting Documents and Materials

Documents

IRB

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS (IRBs)

IRB Name

Harvard University-Area Committee on the Use of Human Subjects

IRB Approval Date

2021-02-01

IRB Approval Number

IRB21-0002 (Note - this study was deemed Not Human Subjects Research)

Analysis Plan

Analysis Plan Documents

Post-trial Fields

Post-trial Information

Study Withdrawal

This trial has not been withdrawn.

Intervention

Is the intervention completed?

No

Is data collection complete?

Data Publication

Data Publication

Is public data available?

No

Is there a restricted access data set available on request?

Program Files

Program Files

Reports and Papers

Relevant Paper(s)

REPORTS & OTHER MATERIALS