

Case Study Summary: Evaluation Working Group

Background

Under the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies must develop and publicly share an Annual Evaluation Plan. A federal agency's Annual Evaluation Plan consists of the "significant" evaluations the agency plans to undertake in the fiscal year following publication of the plan.

To support the development of the Annual Evaluation Plan for fiscal year (FY) 2022, the General Services Administration (GSA) engaged stakeholders across the agency by establishing an Evaluation Working Group (EWG) in March 2020.

Purpose

The EWG offered direct feedback to GSA's Evaluation Officer (EO) regarding GSA's FY 2022 Annual Evaluation Plan and other Evidence Act deliverables, such as GSA's Evaluation Policy. The EWG members:

- ◆ Provided input and feedback on the criteria for "significant" evaluations;
- ◆ Applied the criteria to evaluation ideas collected from across the agency;
- ◆ Recommended evaluations for inclusion in the FY 2022 Annual Evaluation Plan; and
- ◆ Provided input on GSA's Evaluation Policy.

Structure and Schedule

In addition to the GSA EO, EWG membership consisted of 10 GSA employees. Members came from across the agency, representing the two major service components and five of the agency's twelve staff offices. The EO and her team identified and invited staff to participate who demonstrated the following characteristics:

- ◆ Interest in evaluation and learning to support agency-wide priorities and mission;
- ◆ Curiosity and passion about building and using evidence and data at GSA; and
- ◆ Expertise in GSA programs, including budget, or skills such as research, evaluation, data, or statistics.

The EWG schedule included three monthly, one-hour meetings between April and June 2020. Before the kickoff meeting, the EO shared reading materials with members (see the Appendix for links to suggested readings) that provided background on the Evidence Act, an overview of Annual Evaluation Plans, and sample evaluation policies.

Case Study Summary: Evaluation Working Group

- ▶ **Meeting One:** The EO used the first meeting to introduce the purpose of the EWG, discuss and obtain feedback on the definition of “significant” evaluations and criteria for GSA’s Annual Evaluation Plan, and discuss the development of a GSA Evaluation Policy.

After the meeting, the EO incorporated participant feedback into a draft definition of “significant” evaluations and the GSA Evaluation Policy outline. The EO then shared these materials with participants and encouraged them to provide additional feedback in advance of the second meeting.

- ▶ **Meeting Two:** The purpose of the second meeting was to review evaluations nominated by GSA staff against the criteria for “significant” evaluations, ultimately developing a recommendation for the EO on evaluations to include in the Annual Evaluation Plan.

- ▶ **Meeting Three:** In the final meeting, EWG participants discussed the final draft Evaluation Policy and supplemental implementation guidance and how to roll it out across GSA. The EWG also provided feedback on the working group model and how it can continue to engage the GSA community on the use of evidence and evaluations in the coming year.

Accomplishments

By the end of the third meeting the EO and her team, with support from the EWG, had developed:

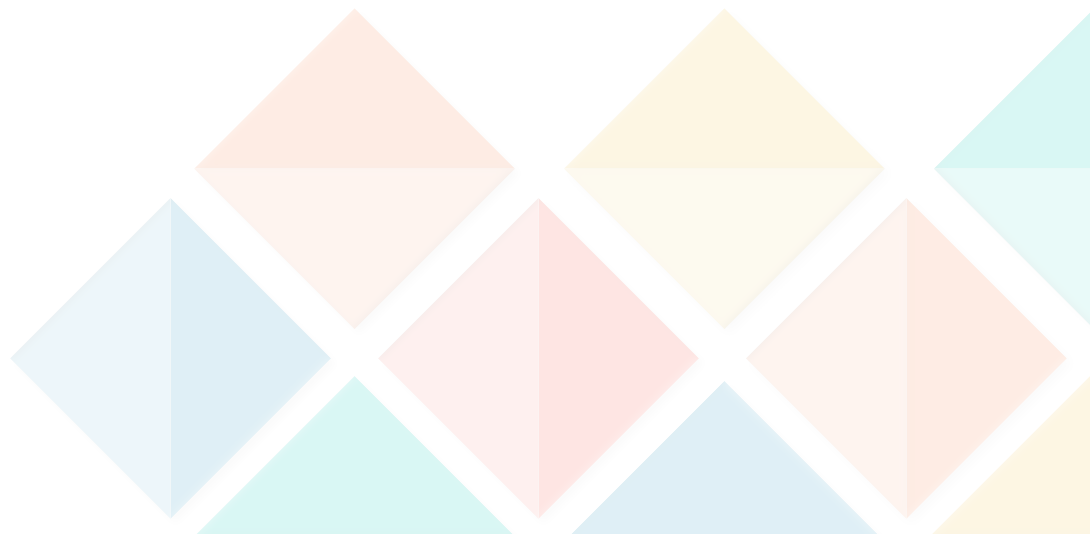
- ◆ A definition of “significant” for GSA evaluations with clear criteria;
- ◆ A final draft GSA Annual Evaluation Plan; and
- ◆ A final draft GSA Evaluation Policy.

Activities Between Meetings

Evaluation 101 virtual session: This was a GSA-wide training - which some members of the EWG attended. EWG discussed the basics of evaluation and how evaluation can help GSA better understand its programs, policies, and operations.

Evaluation inventory: The EO solicited information from GSA staff about any ongoing, planned, or proposed evaluations to consider for GSA’s Annual Evaluation Plan.

Drafting an Evaluation Policy: The EO engaged in cross-GSA conversations to build out the agency’s supplemental evaluation policy and implementation guidance.



Case Study Summary: Evaluation Working Group

Lessons Learned

GSA learned three important lessons from the experience working with an EWG:

- 1. Convening an informal group can help socialize evaluation needs in the agency and support stakeholder engagement.** The EWG was comprised of members familiar with evaluation but who did not necessarily have formal evaluation roles. Bringing them together, with an evaluation expert as a facilitator, helped leverage diverse expertise to facilitate evaluation planning at GSA. The EWG members felt that continuing a similar structure would benefit the agency as an advisory body.
- 2. Offering draft content, rather than starting from scratch, allowed the group to quickly engage with material and make meaningful recommendations.** The EO provided background context and information to give the group the opportunity to apply insights from their expertise within GSA.
- 3. An evaluation working group need not be a burdensome or time-consuming process for participants.** Limiting the necessary time commitment and planning a brief but intensive engagement reduced barriers to joining the EWG for invited participants.

Appendix

The [planning materials for the EWG](#) contains documents and templates that can be used for an evaluation working group. GSA used similar documents to manage and communicate with its EWG. The planning materials contain:

- ◆ Sample timeline and meeting agendas: Use this document to plan the EWG's workflow and agendas for the three meetings.
- ◆ Member invitation letter: Use this template to invite people to join the evaluation working group.
- ◆ Evaluation inventory questions to gather information on planned, ongoing and proposed evaluations.
- ◆ EWG welcome letter, pre-reads, and optional pre-reads: Send these documents to the evaluation working group before the first meeting.

