

Engaging Sub-Agencies or Bureaus

The information in this handout is designed to supplement the Office of Evaluation Sciences Learning Agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan Toolkits, which can be found at www.oes.gsa.gov/toolkits.

Robust sub-agency or bureau engagement can help agencies meet the requirements of Title I of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) and strengthen an agency-wide culture of learning and continuous improvement. This handout describes how sub-agency or bureau leadership and staff can be engaged to fulfill two Evidence Act requirements – developing an agency-wide learning agenda and Annual Evaluation Plan.

The Office of Management and Budget describes requirements and expectations for sub-agency or bureau engagement in its Memorandum on Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Planning, and Personnel Guidance (OMB M-19-23). Agencies have the flexibility to develop a timeline and use communication methods that fit their unique needs, mission, and structure. Consider these questions when designing your approach:

- ◆ How can sub-agency or bureau engagement contribute to a culture of learning and continuous improvement?
- ◆ How can we align Evidence Act plans with existing sub-agency or bureau processes and reporting?
- ◆ How can Evidence Act implementation support all sub-agencies or bureaus, regardless of mission space or experience with evidence building?

Excerpts from OMB M-19-23

Engaging Stakeholders on Agency Learning Priorities

Agencies should consult with internal agency stakeholders who play a role in, have a stake in, or will use the results of the learning process, including agency staff who oversee the designs, processes, operations, or programs being discussed in the plan.

Management and Leadership of the Process

The Evaluation Officer shall... support efforts to develop evaluation plans at the sub-agency, operational division, or bureau level, particularly as the activities in those plans relate to the agency-wide evaluation plan and learning agenda.

How to Get Sub-Agency or Bureau Buy-in and Participation in the Learning Agenda Process: Tips from the Department of Labor Chief Evaluation Office

The Chief Evaluation Office at the Department of Labor works closely with its operating agencies to develop their own learning agendas. In developing these sub-agency agendas, the Chief Evaluation Office has found success utilizing the following strategies:

- ▶ **Adopt a customer-service mindset.** Through messaging and personal interactions, the Evaluation Officer (EO) and related staff should underscore the goal of encouraging and helping sub-agencies or bureaus to use evaluation and data to better achieve their missions. For example, the EO and related staff may take on a teaching role, when needed, to help programs understand which forms of evaluation would be useful in different programmatic situations.
- ▶ **Establish sub-agency or bureau ownership of learning questions.** The process of developing high-quality and relevant learning agenda questions requires staff to be open and honest about risks, challenges, and unknowns. By giving sub-agencies or bureaus ownership over their learning agenda questions, the EO can create a “safe space” at the sub-agency or bureau level. Sub-agency or bureau leadership can nominate questions to be included in the agency-wide public learning agenda and keep sensitive questions internal.
- ▶ **Identify key decision points in planning, budgeting, and performance cycles.** It is important to understand when key decisions are made and what kinds of evidence would be beneficial to decision makers. At the sub-agency or bureau level, the schedule of these activities and key decisions may differ. Sub-agency or bureau cycles should inform the EO’s cadence of formal meetings (e.g., annual vs. quarterly), types of learning questions asked, and timing for dissemination of results.
- ▶ **Tailor your approach to sub-agency or bureau maturity levels and leadership priorities.** Sub-agencies or bureaus have varying levels of capacity in program evaluation, performance measurement, policy analysis, and foundational fact-finding. Reference the results of your agency’s capacity assessment to set reasonable expectations for each sub-agency or bureau when beginning the learning agenda process. When providing guidance and resources to sub-agencies or bureaus, consider the unique interests of their leadership. If providing templates, include only the core requirements, but encourage sub-agencies or bureaus to build out robust versions to suit their own needs.