

Evidence Act at EPA: Grant Commitments Learning Agenda

ECOS Spring Meeting
Breakout Option #3

March 16, 2021



Presentation Goals

- Give an overview of the ‘Evidence Act’ and its current implementation at EPA
- Review the ‘Learning Agenda’ development process and opportunities for stakeholder engagement
- Share information about the “Grants Commitment Met” learning priority area

Background

- Foundation for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ([Evidence Act](#)) is bipartisan, bicameral legislation passed by the 115th Congress and signed on January 14, 2019.
- Provides a new federal framework for agencies to work with stakeholders to **promote a culture of evaluation, continuous learning, and decision making using the best available evidence.**
- Presidential Memorandum on [scientific integrity and evidence-based policymaking](#) affirms the Biden Administration's commitment to the Evidence Act.

Evidence Act asks federal agencies to:

- Identify **priority questions** for a learning agenda that spans the period of the Strategic Plan
- Assess **capacity for implementing** the Evidence Act, with a view toward developing our longer-term structure for evidence-building activities and EPA's roadmap for an evaluation culture
- Produce data (measures, indicators) of enough **quality and rigor for use in statistics, analyses, research, and evaluation**
- Provide **open access** to underlying datasets and metadata, share data with **other researchers** where feasible
- Engage experts in **gathering, synthesizing and evaluating** evidence

EPA's key activities to date

1. Named the three 'designated officials'
 - Chief Data Officer – Dr. Richard Allen, OMS
 - Statistical Official – Dr. Alex Marten, OA-OP
 - Evaluation Officer (Acting) – Katherine Dawes, OCFO
2. Established the Evidence Act Workgroup as standing advisory body
 - Co-chaired by the three designated Evidence Act officials
 - All Headquarters offices and key Lead Regions are represented
3. Established the Data Governance Council to guide improvements to access and governance
 - Cross Agency representation
 - Developing a data skills assessment
 - Modernizing Information Collection Request
4. Developed required interim deliverables for OMB's review
 - Learning Agenda
 - Capacity Assessment
 - FY2022 EPA Evaluation Plan

EPA's Evidence Act focus areas

1. Workforce Succession Management
2. Drinking Water Systems out of Compliance
3. Grant Commitments Met

Learning Agenda

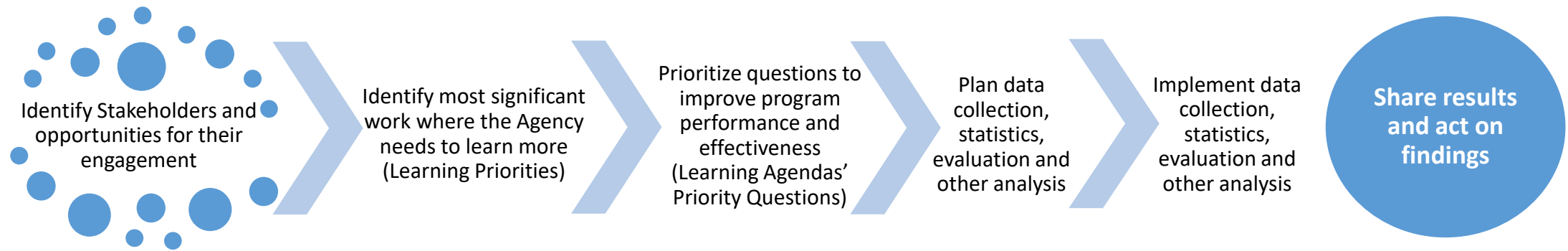
➤ Process

- Engage senior policy leaders in the overall direction of the draft Learning Agenda
- Work with stakeholders to develop priority questions that are linked to the Agency's core mission
- Plan data collection, statistics, evaluations and other evidence-building that address priority questions for the Agency
- Partner with other government organizations and external researchers on evaluations and other empirical studies

➤ Document

- Living document that provides a roadmap for addressing priority questions with high quality data, statistics, evaluation, other analysis
- To be published with the FY 2022- 2026 Strategic Plan

Stakeholder Engagement



Learning priority area: Grants Commitments Met

Goals:

- Increase EPA's understanding of, and ability to track, how our many grant programs are delivering the intended human health and environmental results.
- Identify best practices for tracking and reporting grant program results and applying them to other grant programs as appropriate.
- Increase transparency and accessibility for the results of EPA's grant programs for the Agency, Congress, and the public.

Learning priority area: Grants Commitments Met

Questions:

- How do EPA's existing grant award and reporting systems identify and track grant commitments? (**~FY21**)
- What practices or tools should the Agency use to better track grant commitments and resulting environmental outcomes? (**~FY22**)
- Are the commitments established in EPA's grant agreements achieving the intended environmental results? (**~FY23**)



Appendix

EPA Evidence Act Workgroup membership

- Chief Data Officer (OMS)
- Statistical Official (AO/OP)
- Evaluation Officer (OCFO)
- Learning Priority Lead (OECA)
- Learning Priority Lead (OMS)
- Learning Priority Lead (OCIR)
- OAR
- OCSPP
- OECA
- OGC
- OITA
- OLEM
- OP
- ORD
- OW
- Region 1
- Region 8
- Region 9
- Scientific Integrity Official (ORD)

Richard Allen
Alex Marten
Katherine Dawes
Christopher Knopes (Drinking Water Systems out of Compliance)
Lynnann Hitchens (Workforce Planning)
Robin Richardson (Grant Commitments Met)
John Shoaff
Richard Keigwin
John Dombrowski
Andy Simons
Mike Weckesser
Kent Benjamin
Al McGartland
Alice Gilliland
Benita Best-Wong
Arthur Johnson
Deb Thomas
Deborah Jordan
Francesca Grifo

Evidence Act Deliverables FY 2021/22

- Jun 4, 2021: Annotated Outline of Learning Agenda and Initial Draft Capacity Assessment due to OMB
- Sep 13, 2021: Full Draft Learning Agenda and Full Draft Capacity Assessment; and Draft FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan due to OMB
- Dec 23, 2021: Final Draft of the new Strategic Plan including Final Draft Learning Agenda and Final Draft Capacity Assessment due to OMB
- Jan 14, 2022: Final FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan for OMB clearance
- Feb 2022: Final Learning Agenda and Capacity Assessment issued with FY 2022-2026 EPA Strategic Plan



Evidence Act Provisions

- Title I, Federal Evidence-Building Activities: (1) develop and issue a Learning Agenda (i.e. evidence-building plan) and Capacity Assessment as part of the 4-Year Strategic Plan; (2) publish an Annual Agency Evaluation Plan; (3) designate an Evaluation Officer and Statistical Official.
- Title II, Government Data Act: (1) issue a Strategic Information Resources Management Plan and conduct a Comprehensive Data Inventory and (2) designate a Chief Data Officer.
- Title III, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act: (1) meet confidential information protection requirements and (2) make data assets available, as practicable, to any statistical agency and external researchers.

Key Evidence Act Requirements

§ 312. Agency evidence-building plan (i.e., Learning Agenda)

(a) REQUIREMENT... the strategic plan...shall contain the following:

- (1) A list of policy-relevant questions
- (2) A list of data the agency intends to collect, use, or acquire
- (3) A list of methods and analytical approaches that may be used to develop evidence to support policymaking
- (4) A list of any challenges to developing evidence to support policymaking
- (5) A description of the steps the agency will take to accomplish paragraphs (1) and (2)

(b) EVALUATION PLAN...describing activities the agency plans to conduct... Such plan shall—

- (1) describe key questions for each significant evaluation study
- (2) describe key information collections or acquisitions

(c) CONSULTATION—In developing the plan required under subsection (a), the head of an agency shall consult with stakeholders, including the public, agencies, State and local governments,