Evidence-Based Decision Making at the State Level: Overcoming Preconceived Partisan Ideology

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Factors that Influence Policy Decisions

- Agencies
- Lobbying Groups
- Budget
- Committees
- Committee Chairmen
- Committee Staff
- Congressional Staff
- Research/Evidence
- Media
- Policy Continents
- The Administration
- Political Parties
- Constituents
The Growing Evidence-Based Movement

- Obama Tiered-Evidence Initiatives
- Leadership from OMB
- Institute of Education Sciences
- White House Social and Behavioral Sciences Team
- Evaluation by Federal Agencies
- Research and Evaluation Companies
- J-Pal
- Pay for Success Programs
- Results First
- Clearinghouses
- Foundation Support
- Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission
Failure Rates of Social Intervention Programs

• 90% of ten respected and popular social programs failed when evaluated by rigorous designs (Baron and Sawhill)

• Nearly 90% of the first 90 experiments funded by the Institute of Education Sciences produced modest or no impacts (Baron)

• Jim Manzi, author of *Uncontrolled* (2012), states that in business experiments, “80-90% of programs fail when tested.”
But Some Programs Succeed

• Career Academies
• Boston pre-K
• Behavioral Cognitive Therapy
• Success for All
• KIPP
• Reading Recovery
• Small Schools of Choice
• Teen Options to Prevent Pregnancy
Consequences of High Failure Rates

- “Investments” are wasted
- Program operators might try to avoid evaluation in the future
- Policymakers don’t like it; would rather not know
- Policymakers & their allies might try to reduce or eliminate the program’s funding
Obama’s Tiered Strategy for Grant Making

• Spend most federal grant dollars on evidence-based programs
• Spend some grant dollars on innovative programs
• More money for more evidence
• States could follow this strategy of spending on evidence-based programs
Features of Obama’s Tiered-Evidence Approach

• Multiple social issue domains
• Identifying evidence-based programs:
  ▪ Administration-conducted literature reviews
  ▪ Applicant-conducted literature reviews
  ▪ Clearinghouses
• Evidence-based vs. innovative programs
• Continuous evaluation & program improvement
• Competitive vs. formula grants
Federal Grant Programs that Do or Could Fund Evidence-Based Model Programs

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (especially Title I)
- Higher Education Act
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention programs
- Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)
- Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers and Project-Based Rental Assistance
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
- Community Health Centers
- Maternal and Child Health
- Child Welfare Programs
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Community Services Block Grant
Four Steps to Fighting Social Problems

1. Program evaluation; randomized controlled trials and replication
2. Inventorying state programs by program area
3. Measuring costs and benefits of current and possible programs
4. Targeting funds to evidence-based programs
Implementing Evidence-Based Policy: The Big Issue

- Getting programs authorized and funded vs. implementing good programs after the money has been appropriated
- Tiered funding focuses on implementing good programs; i.e., spending money on evidence-based programs & improving them
- Virtuous cycle of implementing evidence-based programs, continuous testing, improving outcomes, getting additional funds