
POLICYMAKING FOR RESULTS: USING EVIDENCE TO INFORM BUDGET DECISIONS

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HOW NCSL CAN HELP

- Customized research
- Technical assistance and training
- Resources and publications
 - Upcoming “Principles of Evidence-Informed Policymaking”
- Connect with other state and national resources—e.g., Pew Results First

Toolbox

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY

5 Questions to Help You Test Evidence

BY IRIS HENTZE

If you haven't yet heard the term "evidence-based policy," you haven't been listening. It was first used in 1992 in medicine and has since spread to other fields, including education, law and public policy. It's now used so often, it's easy to gloss over. But what does it really mean? When your colleagues in the legislature take policy positions, claiming the evidence supports their opinion, here are five questions to ask them.

How is 'evidence' being defined?	Is it causal or correlational?	How strong is the evidence?	What's the goal of the policy?	How will we know the policy works?
1 Often, lawmakers will claim they have evidence to support a policy, but rarely do we stop and ask them to define how exactly they are using the term. In some states, evidence is statutorily defined. Knowing the definition in your state, and clarifying the definition when needed, is important. This will help ensure that everyone is speaking the same language and adhering to the same standards.	2 Causal evidence tells us whether a policy produces its intended outcomes. It's the strongest type of evidence you can use to predict a policy's impact on constituents. When used as part of a well-done study, it can even measure the extent to which a change can be attributed to a given policy. Correlational evidence can tell us that there is a relationship between a policy and its outcomes, but not that the policy caused the outcomes. The results may come from other factors or policies. Be sure to look for these differences.	3 If your colleague's evidence is in fact causal, rather than anecdotal, it's time to dig deeper. The scientific method teaches us that a study's results aren't completely reliable until the experiment has been replicated, producing the same or similar results. Policymaking is no different. The more a policy has been replicated and studied, the stronger the evidence and the more confident you can be that it will have the same effect in your state. Ask whether there is evidence from other states that shows similar, as well as different, results. Better yet, ask if there is a systematic	4 At this point you may know the evidence is scientific, and that studies have been replicated. But does the evidence show that the policy achieves the specific outcomes that you want? It's important to understand what outcomes the evaluations studied since a policy can be effective for many reasons. For example, a policy addressing substance use disorders among offenders may have been evaluated only for its impact on drug use and not on recidivism or employment. When assessing a policy's evidence of effectiveness, it is crucial to ensure the	5 The policy may have a clearly defined goal, but does it include specific measures or benchmarks to track its progress and success? If such measures are laid out, the agencies tasked with implementation will develop their own. Lawmakers can help ensure success by writing benchmarks into the policy and by requiring regular evaluations.

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WHAT'S NEXT: MOVING TOWARDS A CENTER FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICYMAKING

In Summer 2020, NCSL will launch a new Center for Evidence-Informed Policymaking to:


- Serve as a national resource and training hub for state policymakers.
- Raise awareness about evidence resources and how to use them to inform policy and budget decisions.
- Bridge research and policymaking by convening legislative and executive branch, academic research, foundations, and national organizations.
- **Meet states where they are to improve the use of evidence in state policy decisions.**



EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICYMAKING WORK GROUP

In 2019, NCSL convened a bipartisan, cross-branch work group to:

- Develop “Principles for Evidence-Informed Policymaking”
 - Help policymakers use evidence in policymaking
 - Inform the work of NCSL’s new Center
- Advise on strategic direction for the Center



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DEC 20 Evidence-Informed Policymaking Work Group Gathers for First Meeting

By Kristine Goodwin

Phoenix—NCSL took important steps toward developing a new center for evidence-informed policymaking last week at the NCSL Capitol Forum in Phoenix by convening a new evidence-informed policymaking work group of legislators, legislative staff and executive officials to advise on the center’s launch which is planned for next summer.

Keys to Success in Leading States: Collaboration, Champions and Access to High-Quality Data

The bipartisan group members shared what has worked in their states to successfully implement an evidence-informed approach—and identified which factors have paved the way for policymakers to use high-quality research to inform their decisions. For starters, clearly defining terms such as “evidence-based” or “research-based” can ensure that everyone is speaking the same language.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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