

An Automated Evidence-Based-Policy Clearinghouse for Researchers, Practitioners, Federal Agencies, and Policymakers: A Proposal to the New Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission

We are aware of your new [Evidence-based Policymaking Commission](#), recently created by Congress and signed into law by President Obama. The bipartisan members who conceived of the need for this Commission are to be congratulated—a recognition of the need to infuse scientific evidence into the decisions of policy-makers is the first step to effectively designing policies that improve our lives while not wasting tax-payer money on unproven strategies.

Our understanding is that Commissioners have been charged with three general tasks: (1) to improve the federal data infrastructure while respecting privacy and security concerns; (2) to incorporate outcomes measurement, cost-benefit data, evaluation, randomized controlled trials (RCTs), and rigorous impact analysis into federal program design; and (3) to consider the value and nature of a clearinghouse that would facilitate access to data by various constituencies and enable the research community to judge what works and what does not.

The Commission will focus on ways to incentivize the rigorous evaluation of programs and policies that aim to reduce the problems associated with detrimental prevailing conditions and promote more healthful and productive outcomes. Until now, many programs we invest in do not possess stringent indicators of their effectiveness and, thus, there is no justification for their continuation.

There is a wealth of data already collected by the federal government and other agencies and organizations reflective of a broad range of phenomena, from physical health to juvenile and criminal justice to climate change. Existing data reserves are currently not well organized and thus an infrastructure is needed to increase the utilization of these data.

To facilitate the process of organizing and fully utilizing the data, we recommend a means to directly and expeditiously improve policy decisions. Our proposal is highly compatible with the law by incorporating federal agency and other data, as well as methodological components that will be readily accessible and understandable to those who stand to benefit. And we believe there will be widespread support from Congress, the White House and a number of organizations which have an interest in evidence-based policy-making.

We propose that the federal government (and expert contractors) develop an automated clearinghouse—perhaps called the “National Evidence-Based Toolkit for Intuitive Navigation” (NETIN)—that will provide comprehensive information regarding evidence-based programs and policies (EBPs) to users; e.g., researchers (who can populate the database), policy-makers (who need to know what to legislate and fund), and community organizations, practitioners and government agencies (that need to identify best practices). The data populating this toolkit will provide parameters needed to readily map available EBPs to existing needs, whether that be to identify best violence prevention practices for any given community or to determine which policies to fund to reduce poverty. Also needed is flexibility to include innovative and/or promising programs that have yet to be subjected to rigorous evaluation but are in the database denoted by their stage of development and need for further study (as per the #2 mandate above).

Parameters will be intuitively searchable and fields will be delineated by relevant characteristics; e.g., outcome of interest (e.g., diabetes, violence, contaminated water); setting (e.g., school, family, community, national); target population (e.g., special needs children, parents, community stakeholders, minorities); implementation protocols and frameworks (costs, timeline expectations to achieve impact, strategies to shift resources from existing to promising or evidence-supported approaches); pertinent literature and resources on assessing and utilizing research; cost-benefit analyses; and other information deemed helpful. The goal is to provide a comprehensive, one-stop resource that is more user-friendly and searchable on dimensions that are not currently available,

providing an efficient and valid method to guide evidence-based policy-makers and others who might benefit from the resource.

The system would be both iterative and interactive; e.g., a search for a category of programs may elicit a notation about the need for extra diligence or a particular protocol for implementation. Or reference materials may be recommended if using certain interventions. At all stages of **navigation**, weblinks would lead to relevant information.

Finally, the Clearinghouse would provide a searchable methodology section for researchers who want to fill in gaps in the Clearinghouse database. There would be guidance on design, methods, statistical techniques, evaluation protocols, and strategies for translation.

We realize this will be a very large and complex undertaking that will take years to complete and will require continual updating. There will also be a need to establish criteria and thresholds for designating programs and policies as evidence-based, not only relative to the statistical findings from RCTs, but the population significance of those results (e.g., how broadly are effects achieved?). Fortunately, there are a number of existing registries that evaluate programs; they can be utilized and integrated as best seen fit. The Commission and their advisors will also want to make decisions about what policy areas to cover (from human behavior and health to security, the economy, and the environment). These objectives for a clearinghouse can be accomplished with sufficient funding and commitment, as well as by calling upon the expertise of evidence-based policy-making organizations, academics, researchers, current registry experts, federal government database keepers, implementation scientists, methodologists, policymakers, computer scientists, and statisticians.

This proposal is reflective of what policy-makers, practitioners, stakeholders and others need to make informed, adequately justified, and effective decisions when identifying programs and policies that will serve communities and the nation. We have outlined a general roadmap for the creation of a clearinghouse—the Commission’s 3rd consideration—with details to be fleshed out after thorough discussion and consultation. Our hope is that the Commission will include such a plan that will bring to fruition their charge to design a data infrastructure and incorporate results from existing and newly conducted studies. There is potential to greatly improve the operations of government, the services provided to citizens, and their financial impact.

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