



What Is the Role of States in Evidence-Based Policymaking?

Evidence-based policymaking is relevant for all levels of government. State agencies play an important role in creating and using evidence as they implement policies and collect data while operating programs. Often, effective evidence-based policymaking requires a healthy partnership between the federal government and states, with some federal programs relying on state-level actions and support. For example, many social services and environmental programs are operated by states on behalf of the federal government, with states collecting data, making eligibility determinations, and conducting enforcement activities. The data collected through these normal operations can be analyzed to ensure programs operate as intended. The federal government can also help support and enable activities at the state-level. In some cases, data may be needed to analyze activities conducted across many states and to generate comparisons for determining what implementation strategies are most effective for a given program.

Just as many programs operate through a collaboration between the federal government and state governments, evidence-based policymaking activities can occur as partnerships between different government jurisdictions. Below are opportunities that states can consider to ensure an effective evidence-based policymaking foundation:

- 1. Provide Sustained Leadership:** Elected officials, political appointees, and career civil servants should establish the expectation that evidence can and will be used in informing policy debates, making it clear that resources need to be allocated to generate useful data. The championing of an evidence-based approach drives the development of the data infrastructure, researcher access, and basic capacity needed for evidence-based policymaking.
- 2. Enable Secure Data Access:** Policymakers need secure access to data from multiple agencies or jurisdictions to answer questions about government policies and to assess effectiveness. Enabling secure data access to link different datasets can help researchers, both in and outside government, to develop valuable evidence that is useful for policymaking. States can help mitigate challenges that often arise in enabling data to be combined for evidence generation across states and which would benefit national research and evaluation.
- 3. Establish Privacy-Protective Data Infrastructure:** Data collected by government must be kept confidential and secure. States can establish strong privacy protections that enable the secure use of data while maximizing the value of that data to inform program operations. If infrastructure does not exist or laws do not allow for the sharing of protected data, the ability for a state to gather key information, such as employment outcomes, is limited, as individuals routinely cross state lines for employment.

State policymakers, in recognizing the value and contributions of evidence-based policymaking, can build out initiatives that support evaluation efforts by ensuring the state infrastructure exists—from data to personnel. The federal government should provide funding and resources to facilitate and encourage the move towards increased data sharing and evaluation activities, while maintaining rigorous privacy and security standards. This foundation enables the private sector and academia to employ mechanisms they have worked to establish that ensure the privacy and security of data, while allowing researchers to conduct rigorous studies.