



Unlocking Innovation: Advancing the Continuous Improvement of Federal Evidence Funds

By Chase Sackett,
Anthony Covell, and
Xavier Lopez

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Introduction

Since the creation of the first federal evidence fund in 2009, evidence funds have invested more than \$10 billion in innovative, high-impact social programs. Evidence funds provide focused support for practitioner-led development, refinement, evaluation, and expansion of innovative strategies to improve people's lives. Federal policymakers have now created nine evidence funds across policy domains – from PreK-12 education to public health – including the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, and the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). Evidence funds have accelerated innovation in social programs at an unprecedented pace, and today constitute an integral component of a burgeoning public and private innovation ecosystem that supports the growth of evidence-based strategies that drive stronger, more equitable outcomes.

We believe the time is right to take stock of lessons learned across these evidence funds to date, and to support continuous improvement that enables even more effective investments — just as these funds have enabled a wide array of organizations to do for their own programmatic improvement. By taking stock and identifying and implementing strategic improvements, we can ensure that the evidence ecosystem is as inclusive, equitable, and productive as possible, as we strive to achieve meaningful improvements in peoples' lives – from sustainable, well-paying employment to improved maternal and infant health.

Evidence funds have made remarkable progress in elevating effective strategies and enabling proven models to scale, including an impressive cost-benefit ratio of 17:1 from the USAID Development Innovation Ventures program. Unlike the vast majority of federal grants programs, evidence funds enable practitioner-led, intentional improvement and growth that builds the evidence base while improving lives across the world. However, while on the whole these funds are delivering impressive cost-benefit ratios, achieving impressive results, and building the evidence base, some funds have also struggled to identify promising early-stage models and support their expansion, as well as to break down barriers to participation.

In particular, our research shows that evidence funds must do more to address disparities in access to private innovation capital that have slowed progress across policy areas. For example, despite representing about 10 percent of philanthropic leaders in the United States, Black and Latiné/Latinx nonprofit leaders receive only 4 percent of philanthropic funding.¹ In turn, research from Echoing Green and the Bridgespan Group has illuminated how the most highly-qualified, Black-led social innovation organizations have access to revenues 24 percent smaller than White-led organizations – and, even more stark, 76 percent less in unrestricted net assets, which provide essential flexibility for innovation and growth.² These disparities result from a web of inequities, including disparate access to social networks that open fundraising doors. Evidence funds must offer an equitable alternative as we continue to reform practices in the private sector: effective change requires proximate leaders.³

For fifteen years, evidence funds have enabled transformational investments that have shifted our expectations of what is possible by investing in social entrepreneurs and creative, practitioner-driven innovation. We look forward to an even more productive, equitable next fifteen years of learning, development, and growth by building on the successes and lessons of the past decade and a half.

Overview of This Report

In this report, we assess the impacts of federal evidence funds to date and offer recommendations for continuing improvement across three domains: the application process, project selection, and implementation. We call on policymakers to activate inclusive innovation, empower rigorous practitioner-led learning, expand participation among historically underrepresented organizations and leaders, and ultimately strengthen and scale up effective social programs.

Our analysis relies on input from a wide array of practitioners, policymakers, and advocates; analysis of hundreds of evidence fund investments; and recent advances in the science of innovation and scale-up. We emphasize the voices of social entrepreneurs and other proximate leaders, whom evidence funds are intended to empower.

As a starting point, we provide a **brief overview** of evidence funds, including a formal definition of evidence funds, review of the nine funded federal evidence funds to date, and discussion of how the practitioner-centered structure is critical to evidence funds' impacts. We examine the tremendous progress evidence funds have enabled in identifying effective strategies, supporting scale-up of high-impact models, and building promising evidence on long-term impacts among funded programs, as well as continued progress in bolstering implementation and evaluation quality. We then highlight key areas for growth: strengthening accessibility to advance equity and improvement, increasing funds' success rate in identifying the most promising emerging strategies, enabling organizations to grow and move up tiers within funds, and supporting sustainability after grantees exit evidence funds.

Next, as the core of this report, we identify **key steps that federal policymakers should take** to further improve evidence funds moving forward, responding to funds' growth areas and building on their strengths. In each growth area, we propose both improvements to *core components* that evidence funds have generally incorporated in some way as a foundational element (though often with room for improvement), as well as *innovative strategies* drawn from cutting-edge practices – among evidence funds or otherwise – to support transformational progress in effectiveness and equity.

We make recommendations in three areas. First, we propose strategies that federal policymakers should take to **break down barriers in the application process**:

- **Restructure and demystify applications**, including ensuring sufficient time to respond; offering complementary resources such as webinars, Q&As, and FAQs; and using multi-stage applications that involve streamlined threshold applications to reduce burden on applicants and agencies.
- **Eliminate key barriers**, such as eligibility rules that exclude non-governmental organizations; overly aggressive, counterproductive funding match requirements; bureaucratic hurdles to using administrative data to assess outcomes at lower-cost; and challenges to identifying evaluation partners and budgeting for evaluations.
- **Partner with intermediaries** to offer individualized application support, leveraging intermediaries' unique networks and knowledge to complement agencies' limited capacity.

Second, we propose that federal policymakers **enhance policies around project selection**. Policymakers should:

- **Fund formative research**, such as rapid-cycle evaluation, that is essential to identifying, developing, and strengthening high-impact programs – as well as continuing to hone more mature models – and support grantees to clarify core program components and fidelity measures.
- **Shift selection priorities** to emphasize cost-effective, scalable strategies; support equitable investments that leverage proximate insights from the field, and focus on programmatic practices over management plans, as well as to open the door for investment in a wider array of less-expensive, more accessible projects.
- **Critically review and improve selection processes**, including engaging proximate leaders in the grant selection process and adopting a portfolio approach that intentionally pursues a coherent, diverse set of projects.

Third, we call for federal policymakers to **support strong implementation** of evidence fund investments, including to:

- **Implement clear standards and robust technical assistance** to support high-quality evidence-building and implementation, along with supporting grantees' use of funds to build essential data and evidence capacity.
- **Support sustainability post-exit** by supporting market research and testing, adopting aligned incentives across other federal funding sources, and providing ongoing support for the highest-impact models.
- **Leverage agreements and reporting that support innovation**, including using performance-based agreements that emphasize results over bureaucracy.
- **Ensure public reporting** on project funding, activities, and performance to ensure transparency to the public, inform ongoing learning, and support new grantees' applications.
- **Build and disseminate lessons beyond individual projects**, such as meta-research that identifies key program components, contextual factors, and systemic barriers, as well as regular synthesis studies to support program improvement and funding priorities.

We conclude by calling for federal policymakers to ensure evidence funds are afforded sufficient funding to support equitable, transformational, and sustainable change, and to create new funds that support this critical work across a broader set of policy domains. In closing, we emphasize the need for policymakers to engage the voices of practitioners and social entrepreneurs, including proximate leaders, in these conversations, and to ensure evidence funds directly address disparities in opportunity in the social sector.

About America Forward

Our organization, America Forward, is the policy initiative of the national venture philanthropy New Profit. We lead the America Forward Coalition, which unites more than 100 of the nation's most innovative, effective non-governmental organizations to advocate for public policies that advance equity, foster innovation, and reward strong results in economic mobility and education. We and our partners have been deeply involved in the creation and implementation of many federal evidence funds, including a central role in the development of the SIF.

I. Overview of Evidence Funds

As a starting point, we define evidence funds as **sharing three elements**.⁴ We identified nine current and past programs across domestic and international federal agencies that fit these three criteria:

- 1) A focus on practitioners as the lead actors in partnership with researchers;
- 2) Funding program development and scale-up of promising social programs; and,
- 3) Support for evidence-building with an emphasis on causal evaluation (i.e., reliable measures of program impacts).

Table 1: Federal Evidence Funds

Program	Lead Agency	Years Funded	Total Funding to Date	FY2023 Funding	Overview
Investing in Innovation (i3)/Education Innovation & Research (EIR)	U.S. Department of Education	i3: 2009 – 2017 EIR: 2017 – present	\$2.664 billion	\$284 million	Pre-K to K-12 program with 3 tiers, all requiring a causal evaluation: Development/Early-Stage; Validation/Mid-Phase; Scale-up/Expansion
Social Innovation Fund (SIF)	Corporation for National & Community Service (now AmeriCorps)	2009 – 2016	\$377 million	n/a	Supported learning, rigorous evaluation, and scale-up driven by intermediaries that supported subgrantees across policy domains
Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP)	U.S. Department of Health & Human Services	2009 – present	\$1.432 billion	\$101 million	Two-tier program supporting Development and Implementation grants to develop, evaluate, and scale teen pregnancy prevention models
Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	U.S. Department of Health & Human Services/Administration for Children & Families	2010 – present	\$5.081 billion	\$500 million	Formula grants to states, 75% of which must support “evidence-based” models and up to 25% may support promising models that must be rigorously evaluated

Development Innovation Ventures (DIV)	U.S. Agency for International Development	2010 – present	\$222 million	\$40 million	Global development tiered evidence fund supporting three tiers of grants: Proof of Concept/Initial Testing; Testing and Positioning for Scale; and Transitioning Proven Solutions to Scale
Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF)	U.S. Department of Labor	2011 – 2012	\$258 million	n/a	Supporting innovation and evaluation in workforce development strategies across three tiers: New & Untested Ideas, Promising Ideas, Adapting Proven Ideas
First in the World (FITW)	U.S. Department of Education	2015 – 2016	\$137 million	n/a	Postsecondary student success fund modeled on i3 that ultimately funded early (Development) and mid-phase grants (Validation)
Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG)	U.S. Department of Education	2022 – present ⁵	\$50 million	\$44.55 million	As of 2023, new postsecondary student success fund supporting EIR-style innovation, evaluation, and scale-up through an Early-Phase tier and merged Mid-Phase/Expansion tier
Perkins Innovation and Modernization Grant Program	U.S. Department of Education	2019 – Present	\$11 million	Up to \$6 million	Grant program for innovation and evaluation of career and technical education programs

Evidence funds' focus on practitioner-led change and the infrastructure of scale-up is essential to their impact and differentiates them from other federal research grants.⁶ A growing body of research on program scale-up demonstrates the importance of understanding how programs will actually work in context, and to do so in partnership with practitioners.⁷ As Project Evident attests in its Principles of Next Generation Evidence – signed by over 60 leaders in the field – “With their unique perspective, straddling program and participant, practitioners have valuable insights into what research is critical to improving social sector outcomes and how to use new data and evidence to drive program improvement.”⁸ Evidence on other federal research grants also suggests that centering practitioners, in collaboration with researchers, may be critical to accelerate the pace at which interventions move from early-stage concepts to proven innovations.⁹

As a result, federal evidence funds have empowered practitioners and their research partners to achieve tremendous progress around the world over the past fifteen years:

✚ Evidence funds have demonstrated major success in identifying effective strategies, far higher than the range of 10 to 25 percent of programs typically found to demonstrate positive impacts in rigorous evaluations. Examples include:¹⁰

- Among the first 67 i3 fund evaluations completed by May 2017, an impressive 40 percent of mid-tier projects and 50 percent of top-tier projects demonstrated positive outcomes in replication studies.¹¹
- About half of Workforce Innovation Fund projects with rigorous causal evaluations found positive impacts on key labor market outcomes, such as earnings.¹²
- An early analysis of all USAID Development Innovation Ventures grants estimated that 62 percent of completed grants demonstrated positive causal evidence of impact – and that these projects reached 9.3 million direct beneficiaries while mobilizing nearly five times as many dollars in follow-on funding.¹³
- An assessment of the Social Innovation Fund found that 92 percent of projects with rigorous causal evaluations demonstrated a positive impact on at least some outcomes – and 31 percent had positive effects on *all* outcomes measures.¹⁴

✚ Implementation and evaluation quality has steadily improved. Performance data from the EIR program shows that 90 to 100 percent of grantees across tiers from the last three years of available data are successfully “providing high-quality implementation data and performance feedback that allow for periodic assessment of progress toward achieving intended outcomes.”¹⁵ Before the global pandemic posed unique challenges for evaluation, more than 90 percent EIR evaluations in 2019 were on track to meet What Works Clearinghouse standards, a significant increase from the earlier days of the Investing in Innovation (i3) program, EIR’s predecessor, when only about two-thirds of funded studies met such standards.¹⁶ Similarly, an assessment of SIF grants found that 87 percent of interventions were implemented with fidelity.¹⁷

✚ Evidence funds have been instrumental in enabling high-impact organizations to scale up and demonstrate positive impacts when replicated, especially at the top tier of tiered funds. Just a few stellar examples include:

- The i3/EIR program has enabled proven programs such as Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR), Teach for America, and the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) to dramatically scale up their reach while demonstrating continued strong impacts.¹⁸
- The SIF was integral in building rigorous evidence on and scaling numerous models across program domains, including national sectoral employment programs Year Up and Per Scholas.¹⁹
- The Workforce Innovation Fund supported the creation of the LA:RISE subsidized employment program managed by national intermediary REDF. LA:RISE is now funded by the City of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles at around \$11 million annually and has led to a new \$25 million state-wide program in California.²⁰
- MIECHV has been integral in enabling the highly-effective Nurse-Family Partnership program to scale up to serve more than 385,000 families since the program began replication.²¹
- USAID’s DIV fund has been integral in enabling the Teaching at the Right Level program to reach more than 50 million students and teachers in India, Zambia, and Botswana.²²

✚ **A recent study of the USAID DIV program provides especially compelling evidence on long-term impacts.** Co-authored by Nobel Prize winner Michael Kremer, the study estimates that DIV’s initial investments produced an incredible cost-benefit ratio above 17:1, comparing DIV’s investment relative to disability-adjusted life years saved (a common measure of the impact of development investments) by leveraging programs’ evaluated impacts and data on people served.²³ It also found that these outcomes were driven by a handful of interventions, similar to the model of venture capital: in fact, their analysis ultimately considered only the top five DIV programs that served the most people — all well over 1 million people, and as high as 61 million at the top end.

At the same time, our research reveals significant gaps in the current structure of evidence funds:

△ **Evidence funds must strengthen accessibility to advance equity and improvement.** We found that federal agencies have disproportionately awarded evidence fund grants to larger, higher-revenue organizations. For example, our analysis finds that nearly all of the Early-Stage EIR grantees in 2022 had annual revenues above \$10 million — more than double the revenues for many organizations we would consider primed for such funding opportunities, including those led by proximate leaders with direct experience in the communities they serve.²⁴ Addressing this structural challenge is especially urgent given longstanding barriers to accessing private innovation capital in the social sector, particularly related to race and ethnicity. Many social innovation organizations and other partners reported that they have encountered numerous barriers in applying to evidence funds, and these challenges are particularly keen among organizations led by proximate leaders who often lack direct experience engaging with federal grants and contracts.

△ **Evidence funds could improve their success rate in identifying the most promising emerging strategies.** Our assessment suggests that federal agencies could do better in soliciting, selecting, and supporting the most promising early-stage programs. For example, in contrast to the amazing results among i3 mid-tier and top-tier projects with results published through 2017, very few early-stage projects — only 8 percent — demonstrated positive outcomes in rigorous evaluations.²⁵ At the same time, more than a third of these bottom-tier projects’ causal evaluations failed to meet the agency’s standards for rigor, while stakeholders also noted many of these initial early-stage strategies were less ambitious in scope than the field had anticipated.²⁶ In addition, only one of the initial 24 Teen Pregnancy Prevention evaluations funded from 2010 through 2014 demonstrated sizable, significant impacts on teen pregnancy rates.²⁷ As we discuss in this report, however, over the past few years, an array of new strategies to improve early-stage investments have emerged.

△ **Relatively few organizations and strategies move up tiers within evidence funds.** For evidence funds with a tiered structure, policymakers and advocates often assume these funds are aimed at moving successful programs up tiers to receive more resources, both by identifying programs with a promising evidence base and supporting organizations in building the necessary capacity to move up to the next tier. But this has happened less than we might expect: in 2016, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) identified only two programs that had moved up tiers across evidence funds.²⁸ Our own assessment of the longest-running fund with a three-tiered structure — i3 and its successor, EIR — suggests that while many programs demonstrate positive impacts, relatively few receive a successive grant in the higher tier: despite more than 300 i3/EIR grants since i3 launched in 2009, we identified fewer than 20 interventions that “moved up” tiers.²⁹ Similarly, while the Teen Pregnancy Prevention program supported the development of more than 100 early-stage innovations, the latest notice of funding availability for the

program's innovation hubs grants noted "[m]any of these [innovations] showed early promise, but few successfully received next stage funding for impact evaluation."³⁰

△ Support for sustainability must continue to improve. In our research, several organizations attested that, even after achieving the top tier of an evidence fund, they have faced serious challenges in continuing to scale and sustain their programs given the still-limited incentives for governments to adopt evidence-based approaches. Policymakers must invest in pathways to provide sustainability once models graduate beyond the top level of tiered funds.



II. Breaking Down Barriers in the Application Process

To accelerate the pace of progress in an equitable manner, we must ensure that evidence funds are accessible to diverse communities and organizations. We urge policymakers to prioritize ways to cut red tape and expand access to evidence funds among diverse innovators, including those leading earlier-stage, smaller organizations and advancing community-driven approaches.

Core Components: Application Process

To open the door for equitable access in the application process, policymakers should adopt the following **core components** for all evidence funds:

☑ Demystify applications and ensure sufficient time to respond

Federal agency leaders should ensure evidence fund applications are easily understood by new applicants, including by providing clear explanations of technical terms specific to federal grant applications and evidence-based policy, as well as obvious, streamlined application requirements. As Cassie Taylor with leading nonprofit consulting and design firm ideas42 told us, evidence fund applicants often face a significant “language barrier” when they try to assess whether their program is a good fit for an evidence fund and to write their applications. Agencies should, for example, clearly explain how prior evidence of a program’s impact will be considered and how they define various standards of evidence.

Recognizing the constraints of federal notices, agencies should complement formal notices with more flexible, responsive resources that help applicants “crack the code” to craft the most effective proposals. The Department of Education’s extensive support for EIR applicants provides a model; ED provides an array of webinars, live Q&A opportunities, checklists, and FAQs.³¹ For FY2023 applications, the Department offered such materials as a primer for new applicants; suggestions for organizing and submitting applications; preparing a budget narrative; an overview of evidence requirements; and a review of other key program requirements such as matching and reporting. In addition to up-front resources, even if applicants do not secure funding in the first round, specific feedback and guidance from agencies could help them succeed on a subsequent try.

In addition, agencies should ensure that applicants have sufficient time to respond: three months is the absolute minimum. One recent evidence fund grant notice only provided two months to respond, posing a major challenge for even more mature social innovation organizations to develop applications, write budgets, and confirm evaluator and site partnerships.

☑ Designate non-government organizations as eligible applicants

Policymakers should ensure that non-governmental organizations are deemed eligible applicants. Several evidence funds have restricted eligibility to government entities, excluding non-governmental organizations – intentionally or inadvertently.³² This exclusion poses a serious threat to innovation, as non-governmental organizations often have greater freedom and capacity to experiment, as well as

clearer incentives to pursue scale-up of effective strategies. The Social Innovation Research Center's assessment of i3, for example, found that among early-stage grantees, non-profit intermediaries provided critical support to government partners for intervention design and implementation fidelity.³³

☑ Ensure match requirements are appropriate and attainable

Several evidence funds have incorporated matching fund requirements intended to multiply the impact of limited federal dollars through state, local, and private investment while providing proof of a program's sustainability. We urge policymakers to ensure these match requirements are appropriate and attainable, as more aggressive match requirements have had counterproductive results — and to consider selection criteria emphasizing program sustainability as an alternative. The SIF, for example, included stringent match requirements for both intermediaries and subgrantees, intended to enable federal funds to leverage local investments at a rate as high as three-to-one. These requirements proved difficult to meet and forced many participants to drop out of the program or cut key evaluation investment, with particularly large impacts in small, rural communities where organizations competed for match dollars from the same sources.³⁴

☑ Address data barriers to participation

Data access has posed a significant barrier to evidence fund applicants across policy domains — both in terms of burden and cost — particularly among earlier-stage organizations.³⁵ As one leader of an innovative higher education support provider told us, administrative data access has been an “incredible difficulty” that makes it too hard to track outcomes. Another leader attested that too often, available data requires significant time to clean up and to reformat.

Ongoing performance management, continuous improvement, and high-quality evaluations depend on access to reliable, accurate data as well as strong data infrastructure and human capacity to leverage it effectively. Francisco Martinez, Director of Community Partnership for Project QUEST — which has already participated in one large-scale study demonstrating their program's tremendous benefits for economic mobility —³⁶ said regarding his organization's interest in continued evaluation and the use of data, “We are a participant-centered and data-driven organization. We collect metrics on our participants as well as touchpoints along our end-to-end process. For QUEST, we continuously analyze the data and look to incorporate improvements to our participant experience based on insights provided by those metrics. That's the only way you make continuous improvement.”

Policymakers should take advantage of infrastructure developed over the past several years to directly support grantees' access to administrative data — such as data on earnings and employment — ensuring that access is widespread and not dependent on personal relationships with relevant officials. At the state



Career Coach meeting with a new Project QUEST participant
(photo by Project QUEST)

and local levels, agencies can help evidence fund applicants and grantees by connecting them with relevant guidance and technical assistance, such as the Department of Education’s Privacy Technical Assistance Center. At the federal level, agencies should tap into emerging efforts to leverage national earnings data, which is often incomplete or hard to access in many states. We also encourage legislators to explicitly charge federal agency officials with facilitating grantees’ access to such data, like in the authorizing statute for the Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPPRa) pay-for-success demonstration fund.³⁷

Innovative Strategies: Application Process

In addition, we urge agencies to employ **three innovative strategies** to improve the evidence fund application process, on model approaches across agencies:

↑ Incorporate multi-stage applications with threshold reviews to reduce burden

We propose that federal agencies adopt multi-stage application processes involving initial, streamlined threshold applications to reduce the burden on both applicants and agencies. Several federal programs, such as HUD’s billion-dollar National Disaster Resilience Competition, have leveraged multi-stage application processes.³⁸ ED at one point introduced a multi-part threshold review structure for i3, and participants in the SIF suggested that a pre-qualification phase could have improved the application process for that fund.³⁹

Applying to federal evidence funds requires a significant commitment of time and energy that creates significant risk, especially for newer and smaller organizations, as applicants must prepare extensive materials related to their evidence base, evaluation, and scale-up plans. These requirements add on to a federal funding process that is already unapproachable for many organizations – with serious consequences for equity. For example, last year, New Profit engaged an array of BIPOC leaders in workforce development organizations in a peer learning and action community focused on access to federal grants and contracts. These leaders commented that extensive application requirements made them question whether the benefit of funding was worth the cost and risk of applying. A 2022 report by Enterprise Community Partners echoes these concerns, especially among smaller community-based organizations.⁴⁰

A multi-stage process significantly improves the cost-benefit calculation for applicants at each stage of the process, while allowing agencies to focus their time on the applications most likely to be successful. This structure also enables applicants to finalize implementation, evaluation, and funding partnerships after receiving an initial mark of approval, which is particularly helpful for smaller, younger organizations.

We also suggest that agencies take advantage of opportunities to work with applicants to restructure promising projects that could be funded. This arrangement could be particularly helpful for less-experienced or lower-resourced applicants. For example, USAID DIV’s co-creation process enables the agency to work with applicants to move projects to a different application tier, shift funding amounts, or change project activities or scope.⁴¹

↑ Partner with intermediaries for individualized application support

We propose that federal agencies engage intermediary organizations to reach out to and support potential evidence fund participants in the application process. Intermediary organizations have the

unique ability to leverage long, trusted relationships with communities to offer responsive support to social innovation organizations and surface transformative perspectives.

The SIF, which relied on intermediaries ranging from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation to New Profit to the United Way of Central Indiana to identify, fund, and support subgrantees nationwide, demonstrated how intermediaries add significant value to federal agencies by leveraging local knowledge and subject-matter expertise.⁴² Intermediaries are vital to accelerating the scale-up of responsive, effective programs across communities. Margaret Hall, CEO and Co-Founder of SIF intermediary GreenLight Fund, said, "The Social Innovation Fund grant enabled GreenLight to prove out our model, bringing evidence-based nonprofits to communities where they're needed. As a result, after SIF supported our work to scale six nonprofits, we've grown from three cities to 12 and brought an additional 41 programs with measurable results to our cities that are breaking down barriers to economic mobility for children and families."

The SIF similarly provided invaluable support for intermediary REDF, which partners with employment social enterprises (ESEs) that employ, train, and support people breaking through barriers to employment. Through SIF, REDF identified and equipped ESEs to advance responsive solutions in communities nationwide while building groundbreaking evidence on the long-term benefits of these programs.⁴³ Maria Kim, CEO and President of REDF, said, "SIF was the fuel the field needed, and REDF was both the scout and the coach on the ground that directed that fuel where it could gain the most traction. SIF's investment put employment social enterprise on the national map – fueling growth in people employed from 7,000 to over 61,000 – and further entrenched a model for replication across the country."

Intermediary support can also help agencies overcome internal resource constraints. As the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) 2016 report on tiered evidence programs found, agency leads "said that while one-on-one technical assistance would benefit applicants, their agencies lack the capacity to help every single applicant, and it is challenging for those agencies to ensure that similar technical assistance is available to all applications that need it."⁴⁴ Agencies could also consider the model of the Small Business Administration's Mentor-Protégé program, which supports small businesses seeking government contracts by connecting them with experienced government contractors.⁴⁵

Policymakers should make sure to address any potential legal barriers to engaging this kind of support.⁴⁶ ED, for instance, had hoped to leverage intermediary support to identify and select promising innovations for the i3 program, but found it was not possible under their statutory authority.⁴⁷ Agencies could also partner with private philanthropy to offer independent assistance, as when the Rockefeller Foundation funded Resilience Academies to support proposal development for HUD's National Disaster Resilience Competition in 2015.⁴⁸

↑ Support evaluation matchmaking and budgeting

Identifying appropriate evaluation partners for evidence fund projects can be challenging for early-stage organizations. These relationships often develop through common ties, such as with private funders, which can pose equity concerns given the disparities in social entrepreneurs' access to philanthropy. Innovators often lack actionable information on potential partners' strengths and interests; as one education leader commented, their first evaluation partner was much less involved while requiring much

more effort to engage than they had expected. At the same time, successful evaluation partnerships can be integral to organizations' long-term success as they continue their learning and improvement journeys.

Agencies should provide resources to help organizations identify and choose strong, appropriate evaluation partners. Policymakers could build on the model of ED's Open Innovation Portal, which supported partnerships early in the i3 program — reportedly facilitating more than 1,000 connections — and consider developing a list of evaluation providers that have participated in successful evidence fund projects across federal agencies.⁴⁹ In 2007, ED also supported the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy to develop helpful guidance on choosing an evaluator — that guidance should be updated and disseminated.⁵⁰ Agencies could support intermediaries to offer this kind of pre-application support and directly broker connections, as USAID does for the DIV program.⁵¹ We also suggest that agencies share past lessons learned from research-practice partnerships, such as the extensive resources developed by the W.T. Grant Foundation.⁵²

In addition, agencies should help organizations budget for evaluation costs, which is a major challenge for many applicants. AmeriCorps' resources for SIF grantees offer a model: after finding that most SIF grantees and subgrantees struggled with evaluation budgeting, the agency analyzed evaluation budgets across the SIF's first two cohorts and developed detailed guidance for applicants.⁵³ (We also note that policymakers should ensure there is funding set-aside for these costs. In the past, for example, MIECHV provided no dedicated funding for promising-level evaluations; as one research expert testified to Congress, this posed "a substantial barrier to the discovery of the next evidence-based model."⁵⁴) We encourage the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to work with the federal interagency working group on tiered evidence grants to update these resources and leverage examples across evidence funds.

Case Study:

Braven's Learning and Evaluation Journey

Braven is a prominent example of an earlier-stage organization with robust evidence that is at the point of leveraging causal evaluation as they refine and scale their program. Launched in 2013 by Aimée Eubanks Davis to address education-to-employment gaps in higher education, Braven partners with large public universities to deploy a one-semester course to build career education into the undergraduate experience for low-income and first-generation college students. Through semester-long coaching, one-to-one mentoring, skills building, and practical career-building experiences, Braven has been able to serve 3,300 students at five universities through and beyond the completion of their degrees.

Braven's emphasis on continuous improvement and robust data collection has been integral to their success, allowing Braven to launch smaller pilots that help them decide whether to scale such programs and evaluate them summatively. The organization sees formative evaluation as a critical precondition for deeper causal analysis. During the organization's first two years, for example, it piloted several programs, including offering its model through a college course in partnership with San José State University, a partnership and model that has lasted to this day.

Braven has demonstrated highly promising outcomes so far, which set it up for both expansion and further learning and evaluation. In 2021, of the 680 Braven Fellows who graduated from college, 4 out of 5 secured quality roles (bachelor's-required, full-time employment with benefits and market-competitive salary) or pathway roles (not bachelor's-required, but financially sustainable, career interest aligned, and skill developing), despite entering into a national labor market that was still in recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Braven Fellows also outpace their peers nationally



Participants celebrate their completion of the Braven Leadership and Career Accelerator program (photo by Braven).

As Braven undergoes the process of a readiness assessment to move to the next stage of evaluating outcomes, their team is considering organizational, data, and program readiness. This process of iterative data collection, analysis, and assessment of the organization's overall capacity will inform their pathway to scaling and summatively assessing Braven's model. Braven's Research and Evaluation Director, Quiviya Eldridge, identified capacity constraints as a major impediment to their progression to longer-term causal research, which evidence funds could address.

At this stage, Braven is poised to leverage an evidence fund's support to scale and continue assessing their program to achieve their vision of the next generation of "leaders emerging from everywhere." Funding for capacity building, scaling, and technical assistance would be transformative for an organization like Braven. In addition, investments in summative evaluations that allow for flexibility and innovation in ways to assess causality and rapid-cycle evaluations that allow for iteration and consistent data collection would be catalytic as Braven takes its evidence journey to the next level.



III. Enhancing Project Selection

Agencies should critically assess the types of projects eligible for evidence funds, the criteria they use to score proposals, and the process by which they assess and select grantees. Building on the tremendous results to date, we believe there are significant, untapped opportunities for policymakers to create a more robust, equitable, and ultimately impactful ecosystem through evidence funds. Updated strategies will enable agencies to improve their success rates in identifying promising programs — especially more nascent strategies — that will ultimately demonstrate positive, scalable impacts. The recommendations below will empower agencies to support ongoing learning and refinement, enabling impactful programs to scale their services to diverse populations and communities in a sustainable way.

Core Components: Project Selection

We propose that policymakers begin by adopting the following **core components** in project selection:

☑ Clarify core program components and fidelity measures

Evidence funds have increasingly emphasized the importance of identifying core program components and related fidelity measures as an essential foundation for improvement and learning. For example, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program’s 2023 grant notice for entry-tier projects includes an explicit requirement that participants fully document and package the intervention, including “the delivery mechanism and format... the dosage of the intervention... and features of the group intended to receive the intervention.”⁵⁵

This approach aligns with lessons from a growing body of research on program scale-up, which emphasizes the importance of identifying core components — or “non-negotiables” — to support effective scaling from the start.⁵⁶ Focusing on a well-defined set of core components can also improve flexibility and efficiency as organizations scale in new contexts, leaving space for practitioners to adapt other aspects.⁵⁷ In the past, too many deeply promising strategies have stumbled when moving to scale because the program did not have a clear core “formula” and aligned fidelity measures that new sites and staff could readily adopt.⁵⁸ Fidelity has been a major challenge for evidence funds in the past, and struggles defining fidelity measures and target levels for key components likely contributed to lesser-than-anticipated impacts among early-stage i3 projects.⁵⁹ In fact, only 73 percent of the bottom-tier i3 projects were implemented with fidelity, while nearly all of the middle and top-tier projects were.

National sectoral employment provider Per Scholas’ experience demonstrates the importance of centering core components and fidelity measures. “Upfront investments of time and resources into even the most proven models cannot be underestimated, and may be instrumental to achieving cost and service efficiencies in the long run,” comments Plinio Ayala, President and CEO at Per Scholas, which has twice participated in randomized control trials that demonstrated their technology training programs’ substantial impacts on economic mobility among learners. As Per Scholas has expanded, they have relied on specific, frequent fidelity touch points with staff and partners during each cohort’s recruitment and 12

weeks of training. Ayala notes, “This ‘handholding’ is a necessary cost of ensuring model fidelity and the identification of valuable lessons to inform our future program cohorts and partnerships.”

☑ Focus on programmatic practices over management plans

In the past few years, agencies have increasingly shifted evidence fund selection criteria to emphasize the promise of applicants’ programmatic approach, as opposed to process or structural aspects like management and evaluation plans. This includes the most recent EIR and Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG) notices, and USAID DIV, which devotes half of its six equally-weighted criteria to questions regarding the core intervention: innovation and impact; cost-effectiveness; and potential for scale and financial sustainability.⁶⁰ In the past, by contrast, many evidence funds allocated a surprisingly small portion of grant scores to strategies’ “significance” or “promise”— potentially explaining why some early-stage evidence fund projects were less ambitious and ultimately less impactful than stakeholders would have expected.⁶¹

We believe this shift is more likely to support transformational change and reduce inequities facing earlier-stage, lower-resourced organizations. By contrast, overemphasizing criteria like present organizational capacity, rather than the promise of the actual programmatic strategies, risks further disadvantaging these organizations, especially when agencies could support grantees in both the application and implementation stages. These kinds of process and structural questions would be better addressed as threshold issues. We also believe that process and/or structure-focused criteria have sometimes led reviewers to conflate the packaging of application materials with the underlying promise of the approach.

☑ Prioritize equitable strategies and proximate insights

We encourage policymakers to build on an array of evidence fund policies that explicitly prioritize equitable strategies that serve diverse populations and contexts, including:

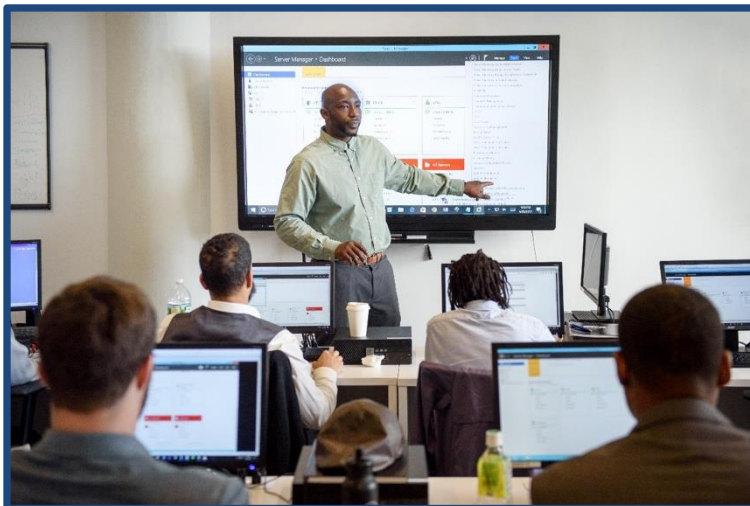
- *Centering equitable, diverse investments.* The SIF statute requires the agency to support intermediaries “that propose to provide subgrants to serve communities (such as rural low-income communities) that the eligible entities can demonstrate are significantly philanthropically underserved,” as well as a “a geographically diverse set” of intermediaries.⁶² The EIR program statute specifically requires that, in most cases, 25 percent of program funds should go to rural areas.⁶³
- *Prioritizing equity among program participants.* The 2022 PSSG notice included a criterion on “the quality and sufficiency of strategies for ensuring equal access and treatment for eligible project participants who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability.”⁶⁴ We also suggest adding language that opens the door for a broader range of demographic characteristics, such as veteran status, gender identity, for students who are caregivers, “or other demographic characteristics that may affect student success.”
- *Advancing equitable evaluation.* To advance equitable evaluation, the authorizing legislation for the Perkins Innovation & Modernization Fund specifically requires reporting on subgroup impacts,⁶⁵ while the 2023 Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program Tier 2 grant notice emphasized the importance of evaluating promising interventions “in populations and settings with great need and with significant health disparities” and across a broad range of settings.⁶⁶

This kind of support is essential to advance the growth of effective, equity-focused organizations that realize significant social return on investment. For example, Sandee Kastrul is the co-founder and CEO of the groundbreaking, Chicago-based i.c.stars, which provides underserved young adults with technology-based workforce development, community leadership training, internships, and job placements. As Kastrul commented, “Nonprofits are not typically afforded access to innovation dollars, even though these dollars can ultimately help us steward our resources more effectively.” Her organization has recently launched an innovation lab to house pilot programs, new market expansion, and other growth-related activities, expanding their potential for immediate and long-term impact. Kastrul attested, “Investment in our innovation lab will pay dividends now and down the road – removing folks from benefits dependency to paying into the system. Building on our nearly 25-year track record, the innovation lab will enable us to re-imagine and test new delivery methods, new access points, and new partnerships to create more technologists and community leaders from overlooked neighborhoods.”



i.c. stars participants engage in a weekly learning studio with their peers (photo by i.c. Stars).

Per Scholas has iterated on its high-impact program after close review of the lived experiences of its participants. In 2021, Per Scholas partnered with the SkillUp Coalition to test the impact of one-time, \$1,000 stipends to learners across the United States, responding to concerns among field leaders that participants’ financial constraints threatened sustainable onramps to recruitment and retention. “Our local teams sometimes have access to emergency funding should a learner face an extenuating circumstance while training, but for many years, we didn’t have a standardized approach,” commented Caitlyn Brazill, Chief Revenue Officer at Per Scholas. Their research found that learners who received stipends experienced significantly better career training outcomes than similarly-situated peers. As Per Scholas graduate Jane Chen commented, “The stipend from SkillUp gave me funding to push through and graduate...It helped with groceries, my bills, my rent. It really set me up to graduate from the course, get my certificate, and start working towards becoming a full-blown IT support person.”



Instructor guides Per Scholas students through the tuition-free IT training course (photo from Per Scholas).

We also urge policymakers to prioritize funding strategies that will integrate proximate experience among project teams. The history of evidence-based policy is rife with examples of promising strategies that failed to consider realities that were obvious to those closer to the ground.⁶⁷ Agencies should consider a selection criteria similar to USAID DIV's, which emphasizes "A strong understanding of local contexts, current implementation challenges and barriers to success."⁶⁸ We also encourage agencies to adopt language elevating project teams with relevant lived experience, such as new language in the 2022 EIR notice that values "the

extent to which the applicant encourages applications for employment from persons who are members of groups that have traditionally been underrepresented based on race, color, national origin, gender, age, or disability."⁶⁹ Given the importance of engaging leaders with proximate experience, in order to understand local context and overcome potential barriers to success, we encourage officials to also include language stating, *"...including those persons with proximate, lived experience relevant to the context and delivery of the proposed project."*

In addition, agencies should emphasize proximate insights in the grant selection process, both as peer reviewers and at a more strategic level. We encourage agencies to engage proximate leaders as staff and advisors on evidence funds, leveraging tools such as Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) placements, which can support non-governmental leaders and other government staff at the federal, state, and local levels. We also encourage agencies to leverage their administrative funding to appropriately compensate such leaders, ensuring that a full range of leaders can participate.

☑ Emphasize cost-effective, scalable strategies

We strongly encourage agencies to support and incentivize cost-effectiveness research from early-stage projects onward, as evidence funds such as EIR and PSSG have recently provided.⁷⁰ Cost barriers are one of the major reasons that effective strategies have not scaled as quickly as the evidence would warrant, and the field generally lacks in-depth evidence on cost drivers for various strategies. This is especially true when it comes to evidence on how costs shift as programs move to scale and organizations experience cost efficiencies, as well as long-term benefits that accrue over time (e.g., as in many workforce programs). This work is also integral to enabling organizations to scale up their programs. For example, Social Finance's groundbreaking work with Lorain County Community College demonstrated that, as the college continued to scale-up their adaptation of the evidence-based CUNY ASAP model, the college's marginal per-student costs substantially decreased.⁷¹ And, as one leading education social entrepreneur told us, proof of cost-effectiveness is critical to build sustained, bipartisan support for evidence-based investments.

Aligned with cost-effectiveness, we also encourage agencies to consider the scalability of program strategies for higher-tier, larger-scale evidence fund investments. In comparison to cost-effectiveness, scalability means considering potential obstacles or assets to expanding adoption – such as requirements for staff or potential dedicated public funding streams. Ideally, as we discuss below, agencies will support organizations to develop and refine their scaling approaches early on, including conducting market research and developing national offices.

Innovative Strategies: Project Selection

In addition to these core components, we urge agencies to adopt **the following innovative strategies for project selection**:

↑ Support formative research, including rapid-cycle evaluation

We strongly encourage agencies to expand support in evidence funds for earlier-stage, formative research, such as pilots, feasibility studies, implementation research, and rapid-cycle evaluation. These strategies are essential to developing and strengthening effective programs, including enabling organizations to fully understand the needs of key populations and then refine their strategies to address those needs. In particular, rapid-cycle evaluation can support quicker, intentional testing, building on decades of experience from the business world and increasing support from federal agencies.⁷² Investing in this work is crucial to building a stronger, broader, and more equitable evidence ecosystem.

As Kelly Fitzsimmons, Founder and CEO of leading research and policy firm Project Evident, has said, policymakers must support continuous efforts across evidence fund tiers to “help organizations keep testing and learning in order to avoid a ‘one-and-done’ mentality.”⁷³ This approach will ensure evidence remains relevant to communities, meets emerging needs, and is seen as credible “not just in the eyes of researchers, but also in the eyes of those who are most proximate to the challenges being addressed and often the ones providing the data.” As Fitzsimmons points out, “rigor” in research appropriately applies not only to randomized controlled trials, but throughout evidence fund tiers, “from early-stage evidence gathering to large-scale evaluation design and implementation.” Lack of support for formative work to advance causal evaluation has likely contributed to past challenges in identifying promising models – wasting time, energy, and funding. For example, the evaluation of the Workforce Innovation Fund noted many early-stage interventions “seem to not have been quite ready for implementation, or at least implementation within the time frame offered through the WIF grant.”⁷⁴

Practitioners have increasingly embraced the role of rigorous formative research in refining and expanding effective strategies. As Claire Dennison, Chief External Affairs Officer of innovative jobs-first higher education organization Propel America,



A Propel Fellow takes notes while earning Healthcare tuition-free credentials in the Propel America Program (Photo by Propel)

commented, “We have done multiple rapid-cycle experiments and early-stage research to prepare for potential scaling and investment moving forward. As part of this work, we learned key lessons about recruitment and program fidelity that have set us up for further learning and expansion.” Similarly, national systems-change organization UpTogether has leveraged implementation research as an essential strategy in their work to expand long-term, unrestricted direct cash transfer policies. As UpTogether's Chief Data and Learning Officer Ann Kovalchick commented, “We are keenly aware that randomized controlled trial methodologies hold a gold standard position in terms of research significance and outcomes. However, because we are a member-informed and member-focused organization, our interest is in understanding how individuals and households use cash, community, and choice to meet their goals, and how the level and nature of engagement within and across communities leverages strengths for individual and household mobility.

Moving forward, agencies should build on a few strong examples, including:

- USAID's DIV offers funding up to \$200,000 for pilot-testing to establish real-world viability and conduct user testing.⁷⁵
- EIR has explicitly supported formative research. EIR early-phase projects regularly incorporate pilot years to prepare the intervention for rigorous evaluation, to assess feasibility measures, and adjust program strategies, following a clear invitation to do so in ED's grant notices (though all early-stage projects do still require causal evaluations).⁷⁶ A growing number of EIR projects also incorporate early-stage development of promising interventions or components, as well as intentional continuous improvement steps to incorporate feedback to strengthen the intervention, such as plan-do-study-act (PSDA) processes.
- The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program has supported more than 100 unique, early-stage innovations in adolescent health, working in partnership with 15 intermediaries to elevate diverse voices, and recently released a new notice to accelerate progress for such projects to subsequent impact evaluations.⁷⁷

We urge agencies to support this work for more mature models as well. Support for formative research for more mature interventions has happened through evidence funds to date — as our case study on page 24 regarding the national sectoral training provider Year Up details — but typically without explicit encouragement and support. For example, we were pleasantly surprised to find that in i3/EIR, several programs have moved “down” tiers to test new adaptations and approaches. We suggest that agency officials directly encourage this approach.

↑ Open the door for less-expensive, more accessible projects

Alongside more formative research — which is also often less costly than full-scale causal evaluations — we encourage agencies to take steps to open the door for less-expensive, more accessible projects. Broadening the scope of support will increase the odds of identifying transformative strategies and empower research in a wider range of contexts and settings. Doing so will also enable smaller organizations to participate: in our experience, many early-stage organizations are not prepared to develop and take on a multimillion-dollar grant and are very cognizant of the significant requirements to participate in federal projects.

First, we encourage agencies to establish selection criteria that explicitly prioritize *project-level* cost-effectiveness. Without accounting for project-level cost-effectiveness (distinct from the cost-effectiveness of the intervention itself), agencies create strong incentives for applicants to pursue the full amount —

and, in fact, create barriers for lower-dollar projects, as more expensive projects tend to score better because they promise to do more even if the marginal investment is not high-value. For example, nearly all Early-Phase EIR projects today receive exactly or just under the \$4 million cost cap.⁷⁸ As a model, USAID DIV's cost-effectiveness criterion considers both intervention- and project-level costs.⁷⁹

That said, we also encourage agencies to ensure organizations receive the full capacity-building support necessary to succeed, recognizing the need to address past inequities in funding that is especially pressing for organizations led by people of color. Agencies can also allow grantees to make a compelling case for higher capacity-building costs because of historic underinvestment, drawing on the model of the SIF.⁸⁰

Second, we encourage agencies to explicitly support smaller, more targeted early-stage investments, including formative research, as a separate tier or competitive priority. Two potential models are the First in the World fund's past competitive criterion for low-cost, high-impact strategies⁸¹ and USAID DIV's support for up to \$200,000 for pilot-testing.⁸²

We also suggest that agencies empower their staff to issue small-dollar grants through a streamlined process, recognizing that a growing body of evidence demonstrates peer review grant processes tend to encourage more conservative decision-making — a serious threat for evidence funds seeking to support transformative approaches.⁸³ Agency leadership should clearly prioritize such small-dollar, directly-funded projects. Stuart Buck of the Good Science Project has explored how National Science Foundation (NSF) programs offered agency staff the authority to directly fund small, short-term grants to support groundbreaking, innovative opportunities and reduce bureaucracy and internal vetoes.⁸⁴ Buck found that, critically, NSF staff leveraged only a very small portion of available funding for these grants — likely because they were nervous to actually use this authority.

In addition, agencies could recognize the limitations of the peer-review process and leverage a lottery process to fund small-dollar projects that meet a reasonable quality bar, reducing burden and potential biases.⁸⁵ A lottery model in Nigeria, for example, has had surprisingly impressive results for high-growth entrepreneurs, resulting in significant improvements in firm success among the winners.⁸⁶

↑ Adopt a portfolio approach in the selection process

We propose that agencies adopt a portfolio approach to the grant selection process, enabling them to balance independent input and supporting a coherent, complementary, diverse set of projects, as opposed to simply funding the highest-scoring projects. We believe that this approach is essential to empower federal officials to take risks and engage diverse perspectives, recognizing that the ultimate success of any fund rests not with one grant, but with the fund's long-term impact as a whole. As the USAID DIV program's past program lead put it, "Taking a portfolio approach to its impact has enabled the agency to embrace failure."⁸⁷

We believe that this approach can be applied across a range of structures. For example, ED relies on peer reviews as the core of their process, while the SIF and USAID's DIV have involved much more engagement from agency staff and external experts. We suggest that agencies adopt two key steps:

First, agencies should provide reviewers with critical background context. Too often, evidence fund application reviewers lack sufficient background about the existing evidence base and pressing needs.⁸⁸ As the National Academies' recent report on the IES peer review process commented, this gap makes it

“challenging for review panels to track whether a set of funded proposals coherently maps onto the needs of the field.”⁸⁹ One way to reduce burden and avoid inserting bias is simply to provide reviewers with the relevant background resources that are already available — for instance, in the context of Postsecondary Student Success Grants, IES has already developed numerous practitioner-friendly resources that assess the evidence base on issues like developmental education and student advising. Agencies should also share relevant components of their learning agendas, as now required under the Evidence Act.

Second, agencies should set clear, transparent priorities for diverse project selection across aspects such as populations served, geography, intervention types, and cost/scale, aligned with selection criteria that prioritize equitable strategies and with the agency’s learning agenda. As the National Academies paper noted regarding the IES peer-review process, forcing reviewers to consider proposals only on their own merits as opposed to as part of a cohort makes it challenging to address the field’s needs coherently.⁹⁰ With a cohort approach, agencies can balance investments across categories, taking into account the quality of applications relevant to each priority. In addition, agencies should be sure to invest in an array of potential approaches, not just lifting up a single approach that has shown promise so far — leaving the door open for a wide range of innovative strategies.

Case Study:

Year Up's Professional Training Corps

Year Up's efforts to develop its adaptive Professional Training Corps (PTC) program, in collaboration with its evaluation partners at Abt Associates and the University of Pennsylvania, provide a standout example of the progress that is possible when evidence funds and other research funders enable practitioner-led formative learning.⁹¹ Through a series of "mini-studies" drawing on design-based implementation research, improvement science, and rapid-cycle experimentation supported by



Year Up participants speak with their instructor (photo by Year Up).

the SIF, the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), and philanthropy, Year Up and their partners iteratively developed and refined strategies to improve retention and completion rates in the college setting. Ultimately, their efforts identified invaluable lessons to support the scaling of Year Up (and sectoral employment programs in general) while expanding services to participants across the country — demonstrating that, as Year Up Chief Research Officer Garrett A.R. Yursza Warfield has declared, "We do not have to choose between generating evidence through research and taking action in practice."⁹²

Year Up is a national sectoral employment training program that has operated since 2000 and boasts one of the strongest evidence bases in terms of employment and earnings impact of any workforce development program yet evaluated.⁹³ Since 2010, Year Up has operated the PTC model in partnership with colleges — as opposed to the "classic" Year Up freestanding programs — to leverage colleges' instructional, space, and financial aid capacity to reduce costs and enhance education and employer connections.⁹⁴ In 2014, Year Up received a SIF grant through the GreenLight Fund to evaluate and build the PTC program, followed by an IES award, and eventually a grant from Arnold Ventures to support longer-term follow-up. Year Up's work with its research partners, federal agencies, its practitioners, and participants are notable in several ways.

First, Year Up and their evaluation partners took a truly formative approach to improvement that emphasized engagement with practitioners, supported by the practitioner-led structure of their SIF funding. As the Abt team later recounted, this project differed from the typical approach to an IES grant since it did not begin with a "pre-specified focal intervention" and instead engaged practitioners to prioritize needs and solutions, seeking "to better identify critical improvement needs, mobilize experienced staff to generate more effective solutions, and promote ownership of, and commitment to,

improvements.” As evaluation leads David Fein of Abt Associates and Rebecca Maynard of the University of Pennsylvania noted, learning, not summative evaluation, was the goal.⁹⁵ In turn, while the small summative impact test of the PTC resulted in a null finding, it was only intended as a temperature test. More critically, this research identified extremely promising completion and earnings outcomes among a subgroup that received enhanced academic coaching, setting the stage for further testing and scaling.⁹⁶

Second, this effort demonstrated the Year Up team’s exemplary commitment to continued learning and transparency. Year Up and their partners have published a series of resources with candid, detailed lessons learned around topics like financing, retention, and the logistics of college partnerships. As Warfield’s recent recap of the PTC research effort describes, Year Up has also built on the PTC work by piloting an additional set of “nimble, shorter-term adaptations” that “push against a long-held orthodoxy at Year Up” in favor of a year-long model, in order to serve a “greater diversity of participants” as the program scales.⁹⁷

Third, SIF’s program officers afforded critical flexibility. Originally, Year Up’s SIF grant through the GreenLight Fund intermediary was structured as a classic impact evaluation of the PTC model in Philadelphia. However, early hurdles with implementation and recruitment led the Year Up team to pursue a more formative approach to refine elements of the program, as well as add more sites to strengthen the research’s generalizability and sample size. The SIF office ultimately agreed to restructure the project in alignment with the IES funding which the Abt team and Year Up had secured.



IV. Strong Implementation to Support Excellent Results

Evidence funds are complex programs that require intensive, intentional effort by federal agencies to implement effectively. We encourage policymakers to build on progress over the past 15 years and invest in the resources and structures that will enable top-quality implementation across evidence funds, including strong evaluation technical assistance; more flexible, effective award agreements; and stronger public reporting of funded activities and outcomes.

Core Components: Strong Implementation

We recommend that policymakers adopt the following **core components** to support strong implementation of evidence funds:

☑ Set clear standards for evidence-building

As a starting point, agencies should incorporate clear standards and goals for evidence-building and implementation, learning from early challenges across several evidence funds.⁹⁸ Agencies should consider examples like the i3/EIR fund’s well-specified “evidence-based” framework, which addresses key issues including the relevance of the original study’s population and setting.⁹⁹ We also encourage agencies to consider the Colorado state evidence continuum, which the Colorado Equitable Economic Mobility Initiative (CEEMI) has successfully codified into state law and used as a benchmark to assess evidence regarding Colorado workforce programs and providers.¹⁰⁰ CEEMI CEO Roger Low noted that this framework allows the state and providers “to more precisely define what it means to be ‘evidence-based,’ and to meet programs wherever they are in their evidence journey.”

For instance, after early stumbles with evaluation in the SIF program’s first cohort, AmeriCorps instituted explicit, detailed evidence standards and expanded its support for grantees, improving the quality of evidence-building moving forward.¹⁰¹ AmeriCorps’ more recent work with Mathematica to develop in-depth rubrics of evidence-based grantees’ scale-up capacity (e.g., fidelity monitoring, organizational readiness) as a basis for appropriately-timed TA and joint learning offers a model for other agencies.¹⁰²

☑ Invest in high-quality technical assistance

Evidence funds have continuously improved their technical assistance (TA) models over the past 15 years, improving outcomes from evidence fund projects while building participants’ long-term capacity for evidence-building and use.

Evidence-building TA is essential to helping evidence fund grantees achieve the difficult combination of completing a high-quality impact evaluation while also refining their programs, maintaining fidelity, and scaling up.¹⁰³ As we heard from many social entrepreneurs, this balancing act is especially challenging when many early-stage grantees have limited experience with rigorous evaluation at the outset.¹⁰⁴ Timely support is also key: AmeriCorps staff have emphasized the importance of delivering evaluation assistance “in time” to meet organizations where they are and when they are ready to take it up.¹⁰⁵ Moving forward, we encourage agencies to expand support for organizations to develop broader strategic evidence plans

that are grounded in organizations’ operational realities and learning agendas.¹⁰⁶ Project Evident, for example, supported groundbreaking early learning organization AppleTree in building a plan to create systems, tools, and capacity that ultimately resulted in a critical administrative data agreement and a federally-funded evaluation of the organization’s expansion.¹⁰⁷

Support on the programmatic and organizational side is similarly critical to support effective implementation as organizations scale — for example, as organizations develop a national office — and it is helpful to do so from the start, as EIR and PSSG offer.¹⁰⁸ For example, a rigorous study found that the SIF’s scale-up assistance led to significant growth in organizational capacity among grantees.¹⁰⁹ We also encourage agencies to support learning communities, which grantees have highly valued. These spaces are particularly powerful when they afford organizations the opportunity to engage with each other and facilitators in a more private, candid way.¹¹⁰

We urge policymakers to ensure sufficient funding for these critical TA investments, as agencies are often unable or reluctant to dedicate funding to TA that could otherwise go to grants on the margin. For many evidence funds, statutory language has set a ceiling on funding available for TA and administration (often 5 percent of all funds). We believe that strong technical assistance can make a tremendous difference in evidence funds’ impacts and encourage legislators to set a floor for agency investments — say, 5 percent of funds — as well as a higher ceiling, such as 10 percent of appropriated dollars.

☑ Support the use of funds to build data and evidence capacity

Alongside technical assistance, practitioners must have access to resources to build their capacity to use data and evidence — such as investments in data infrastructure and internal capacity — and to respond to related requirements of evidence funds — such as central data collection — that often pose significant capacity burdens. As Claire Dennison of Propel America noted, “As we grow, dedicated internal support for research management and coordination, as well as accessing administrative data, has become increasingly important for us.” Too often, agency officials are not willing or able to reimburse grantees for these essential expenses in response to direct requests. In other cases, agencies have not clearly specified in grant notices or other guidance that such expenditures are allowable.

As Data Quality Campaign’s Kate Tromble wrote regarding the Postsecondary Student Success Grant program, “Grantees shouldn’t have to guess how they can use dollars and are more likely to apply funds toward [data] infrastructure and capacity with clarity from [the Education Department],” while “[a] common-sense application of both the Government Accountability Office’s ‘necessary expense’ rule and the Office of Management and Budget’s interpretation of what constitutes evaluation activities supports this approach.”¹¹¹ Policymakers should explicitly clarify that these uses of funds are allowable under evidence funds, ensuring equitable, effective investments that enable successful projects and build long-term capacity.

☑ Provide transparency regarding project funding, activities, and performance

Policymakers should set clear standards for transparency that supports ongoing assessment and improvement efforts. First, policymakers should require that agencies publicly post program documents — such as successful applications and evaluation results — to ensure transparency for the public, inform ongoing learning, and support new grantees’ applications.

We suggest that policymakers take the following steps:

- *Post successful application materials.* The EIR program provides a useful model: ED’s website provides a wealth of resources on funded grants, including full applications, scores, project abstracts, and reviewer comments.¹¹²
- *Require pre-registration.* Pre-registration of evaluation plans before beginning research has become commonplace across public and private funders. Pre-registration can increase the transparency and rigor of research, disincentivize cherry-picking results, and provide applicants with insight into successful projects.¹¹³
- *Publish accessible summaries of projects and results.* The Department of Health and Human Services provides helpful, concise summaries of the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program’s projects.¹¹⁴ Agencies should also prioritize adding results from evidence fund projects to evidence clearinghouses, such as the IES What Works Clearinghouse. It has too often taken several years for agencies to report on publications in clearinghouses, slowing progress in the field and frustrating evidence fund participants.¹¹⁵
- *Maintain public records.* Ensure that federal agencies maintain public availability of evidence fund materials in perpetuity. For too many funds, these materials are no longer publicly available – even within just a few years. We are also concerned that assigning this responsibility to grantees, as many funds have, places burden on organizations and runs the risk of a “file drawer” effect to bury less favorable results. The 2018 assessment of i3 found, for instance, that only 69 percent of completed evaluations were publicly posted as required.¹¹⁶

Second, agencies should set and publicly report on coherent program performance measures in an accessible manner. One strong example is the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program’s annually-reported performance measures, which are readily available on the Office of Population Affairs site.¹¹⁷

Agencies should consider such measures as:

- *Basic project requirements.* Agencies should report on whether grantees met such basic requirements as implementing their planned programs with fidelity and meeting the targeted standard of evidence, following the model of the EIR fund.
- *Impacts.* We encourage agencies to report on measures of demonstrated program impacts, particularly cost-effectiveness (and not simply cost-per-participant), where available. This data is available for surprisingly few programs – the First in the World program is an exception.¹¹⁸
- *Participant satisfaction.* Agencies should consider the extent to which evidence fund grantees believe participation advanced their own goals. New Profit, for example, regularly surveys grantee-partners to ensure our support meets the needs of their teams and communities. We encourage agencies to actively consider and respond to this feedback.

Innovative Strategies: Strong Implementation

We recommend that policymakers take advantage of the following **innovative strategies** to support strong implementation of evidence funds:

↑ Support sustainability post-exit

In addition to implementation and scale-up TA that is common across evidence funds, we encourage policymakers to invest more deeply in organizations’ sustainability planning to support continued strong results after the organizations exit evidence funds.

Policymakers should:

- *Invest in market research and testing.* From the start, evidence funds should help organizations plan for costs and revenue models, as well as ensure community needs and interest in the planned program at scale. USAID DIV's support for market research and testing that builds long-term organizational sustainability is a model.¹¹⁹
- *Provide exit counseling.* Agencies should help programs identify other potential sources of government funding once they exit evidence funds. This could include identifying other potential federal funding sources. KIPP, for instance, secured significant funding from the federal charter schools grant after exiting i3.¹²⁰ Agencies could also support consulting on sustainability and provide examples of how other programs have transitioned and grown.
- *Adopt aligned incentives across federal grants.* Policymakers should incorporate evidence-based priorities in other federal grants that support implementation of evidence funds, while encouraging and supporting the use of these grants alongside evidence fund investments. Ideally, grantees could draw on these dollars up-front, providing a sustained funding source for programmatic funding and enabling more evidence fund dollars to support learning and capacity-building. The initial \$10 million home visiting program that led to MIECHV, for example, went to states that pledged to scale-up successful programs by leveraging existing federal grant funds such as Social Services Block Grants. A new evidence-building grant announced in 2023 will build on the Family First Prevention Service Act's evidence-based programmatic funding.¹²¹
- *Provide ongoing support for top-impact models.* Policymakers could also consider allowing evidence funds to continue supporting the highest-impact programs with sustained, strong outcomes on critical metrics to scale and develop their models, including repeated top-tier grants, while potentially waiving requirements for causal evaluation. MIECHV, for example, has provided ongoing, critical support for evidence-based models such as Nurse-Family Partnership.

↑ Leverage agreements and reporting that support innovation

Evidence fund grantees consistently raise concerns about the significant application and reporting burden of these programs.¹²² Agency officials too often adopt a compliance-driven approach, and an array of federal funds' requirements seriously slow progress. We urge agencies to adopt a more flexible approach that aligns with the intent of evidence funds to support innovation.

First, we suggest that agencies leverage performance-based agreements. Evidence fund project agreements are often too rigid and fail to promote flexible solutions to achieve core goals — and research shows this rigidity can stifle innovation among federal funding recipients.¹²³ We believe the mission of evidence funds makes them an ideal venue to demonstrate the potential of more structures that balance the uncertainty of innovation with the need for clarity around core objectives. In fact, OMB's government-wide grants administration rules already include a provision providing that "Federal awarding agencies may request exceptions in support of innovative program designs that apply a risk- based, data-driven framework to alleviate select compliance requirements and hold recipients accountable for good performance."¹²⁴

USAID DIV, for example, uses pay-for-performance milestones that the agency believes "serve not only as useful evaluation tools for DIV, but also provide significant added value for grantees in thinking through their growth strategies, cost projections and evaluation approaches."¹²⁵ Similarly, the federally-funded synthesis report on the Workforce Innovation Fund recommended setting "specific standards or

benchmarks” to support and encourage participants to complete key project components such as cost studies.¹²⁶

Second, we encourage agencies to streamline their application and reporting requirements across the board to focus on innovation and outcomes, not audits and compliance. One major area for improvement is budgeting: evidence funds typically require applicants to submit and report on extremely detailed, line-item budgets years out, even though the very structure of evidence funds makes it difficult to project such costs so specifically. We heard from multiple evidence-based organizations that budget requirements are a serious barrier to applying and participating in evidence funds, and we strongly encourage agencies to adopt more appropriate approaches.

↑ Build and disseminate lessons beyond individual projects

We encourage agencies to leverage opportunities to build and disseminate broader lessons from evidence funds beyond individual projects, aligned with a portfolio approach, to fully realize the power and potential of these investments.

Agencies should fund meta-research comparing results across investments in similar areas, lifting up lessons learned from implementation research and regarding key program components, contextual factors, and systemic barriers. The Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, for example, has published a meta-analysis of federally-funded teen pregnancy prevention models that assessed factors that influenced the effectiveness of various models.¹²⁷ Funded by IES and philanthropy, research firm MDRC’s The Higher Education Randomized Controlled Trial (THE-RCT) project considers lessons learned from more than 25 studies involving over 50 institutions and 65,000 students by leveraging original individual-level data, such as post-program effects and the most effective program components.¹²⁸ This research is invaluable to help inform the design of the next generation of transformative programs and to refine existing models.

Policymakers should set the stage for this work from the start, including the design of evaluation plans, while working to minimize burden on grantees. As former Commissioner of the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and leading innovation researcher Rebecca Maynard asserted, “An emphasis on learning from all studies suggests designing impact evaluations at the outset to illuminate why effects often vary across outcomes and studies. We argue for the latter approach because it builds knowledge to explain why some strategies work and others do not.”¹²⁹ This means, for example, setting clear, common standards for key data fields (e.g., college completion, job placement) that grantees can use, as well as taking an intentional approach to identify key subgroups.

We also urge policymakers to support regular synthesis studies of the long-term impacts of evidence fund investments to support program improvement and priorities. In particular, we encourage policymakers to ensure these studies incorporate data on program impacts and capacity beyond the scope of evidence fund grants, as did Kremer and his co-authors’ long-term cost-benefit study of the USAID DIV fund.¹³⁰ Similarly, a 2020 study supported by the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program considered post-exit capacity among grantees, finding that most grantees continued to operate their programs, and, interestingly, that about a third of funded programs were now sustained through other organizations.¹³¹ As the USAID DIV long-term impact study comments, failing to consider these outcomes “risk[s] systematically underestimating the return on supported innovations,” and “will especially understate

returns to innovations designed to be adopted by others (early-stage innovation and innovations by researchers)."¹³²

Ideally, agencies would align these investments with their overall learning agendas and evaluation plans, potentially leveraging a larger pool of funding. Our partners at Results for America (RFA), for example, have called for Congress to invest at least 1 percent of discretionary grant funding in evidence-building. As David Medina, Co-Founder and COO of RFA commented, "Sustained, increased government funding for evaluation and learning is essential to significantly expand the amount and quality of evidence that ultimately results in more effective programs and impactful spending."

Case Study: BARR's Ascent through i3

The Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) school improvement program was the very first to have progressed through all three tiers of the i3 tiered evidence fund. BARR has demonstrated tremendous impacts on student outcomes – ranging from academic test scores to attendance – while scaling to serve more than 270,000 students across the nation.¹³³ BARR's engagement with i3 exemplifies how evidence funds are invaluable to support the development of groundbreaking, evidence-based models developed by community leaders, as well as how more intentional and earlier support for scaling can help accelerate progress for similar programs.



Educators utilizing the Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) system's evidence-based strategies to build intentional relationships with students (photo by BARR).

BARR emerged in response to on-the-ground experience. Founder Angela Jerabek, now the BARR Center's Executive Director, was serving as a high school counselor in Minnesota when she sought to build strategies that would help students complete their courses, graduate on time, and thrive academically.¹³⁴ Today, the BARR model involves eight interlocking strategies “that build intentional relationships, utilize real-time data, and enable schools to achieve concrete academic, social and emotional outcomes for each and every student,” ranging from a focus on the whole learner to a cohort-driven approach to relationship-building.

For more than a decade, Jerabek and her colleagues rigorously tested and honed the BARR model in a single high school, supported by a series of grants from private philanthropy and the state of Minnesota. In 2010, a Development grant from i3 enabled the first scale-up and external causal evaluation of the BARR program through a quasi-experimental study. In turn, BARR's effectiveness resulted in an i3 Validation grant in 2013 and then a Scale-up grant in 2017 to demonstrate the program's validation in a range of settings throughout the nation.

Support from i3 was also integral as BARR built scale-up infrastructure to serve more than 67 times as many students within a decade under their Scale-up grant. This work included a framework to adapt the model to schools with a range of needs, including shifting the cadence for schools facing different barriers, such as staff turnover.¹³⁵ Critically, the team built the BARR Center as a free-standing nonprofit to provide sustainable organizational infrastructure after partnering with other organizations who served as fiscal sponsors. Essentially, the creation of i3 provided a pathway to harness BARR's potential – achieving the same pace of expansion is difficult to imagine otherwise, and BARR should be considered one of i3's greatest success stories.

The BARR team's experience also demonstrates how evidence funds can do even more to accelerate improvement and support post-exit sustainability. Until their Scale-up grant, the BARR team received limited federal support for the infrastructure elements of scaling, even though both the earlier Development and Validation grants required major organizational changes to expand their service delivery and performance management. BARR's Scale-up grant also provided more intensive support for their evaluation work than their efforts to build the national BARR Center to support long-term scaling. The BARR Center's creation required considering how, for instance, to establish a nonprofit organization or launch a board of directors. After exiting i3, BARR initially navigated a challenging financial environment before ultimately achieving organizational sustainability through hard-won philanthropic and government support. While BARR has successfully persevered to achieve tremendous scale and ongoing sustainability, its example raises a question: how many more BARRs could we have today, if only we invested in the complementary advising and support necessary to help these groups realize their vision and accomplishments at scale?

Conclusion

We are grateful for the efforts of practitioners, advocates, policymakers, and other stakeholders to build and implement evidence funds that have supported the development and expansion of groundbreaking programs across a range of policy areas over the past fifteen years. As we look ahead, we are excited for the opportunity for the field to build upon the lessons learned and ultimately create more equitable, effective structures that empower proximate practitioners. Just as federal agencies have increasingly focused on elevating evidence-based practices across funding streams, policymakers should adopt the same lens to assess the impacts and gaps in these underlying policies and programs.

We call on policymakers to ensure that evidence funds are afforded sufficient funding to support equitable, transformational change. As we discuss throughout this report, federal agencies should invest in expanded support – ranging from more robust outreach to effective technical assistance for formative learning and evaluation. At the same time, we think that agencies could make even better use of existing dollars, such as supporting more smaller-dollar, early-stage grants and leveraging performance-based contract structures.

We also advocate for policymakers to ensure that evidence funds support innovation and scaling across a broader set of policy domains, and to do so with an open-ended focus on programmatic goals that leaves room for innovation. For example, advocates have noted the need for more dedicated evidence-building to support the groundbreaking evidence-based funding provisions in the Family First Act related to child welfare.¹³⁶ We are grateful for the fiscal year 2023 funding of the PSSG as an evidence fund – finally realizing years of collective advocacy – and are encouraged by the incorporation of the Workforce Development Innovation Fund (WDIF) in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) reauthorization bill that passed the House of Representatives in 2022.

Finally, we emphasize the need for policymakers to engage the voices of practitioners and social entrepreneurs, including proximate leaders, in these conversations, and to prioritize the growth and development of these leaders' organizations. Inequities at every stage of the broader innovation process in the United States — from education and training of innovators through scale-up and commercialization of new approaches — have slowed improvement in productivity and economic growth.¹³⁷ We must ensure that evidence funds directly address these disparities in opportunity in the social sector by elevating diverse, proximate voices to achieve even more transformational investments and ultimately strengthen outcomes across policy domains.

¹ New Profit (2020), *Transforming the Social Sector: The Opportunity and the Need for Action*, https://issuu.com/newprofit/docs/inclusive_impact_concept_paper.

² Dorsey, Bradach, & Kim (2020), *Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table*, Echoing Green & The Bridgespan Group, <https://www.bridgespan.org/getmedia/05ad1f12-2419-4039-ac67-a45044f940ec/racial-equity-and-philanthropy.pdf>.

³ Jackson, Kania, & Montgomery (2020), "Effective Change Requires Proximate Leaders," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/effective_change_requires_proximate_leaders.

⁴ We use the term “evidence funds” as opposed to “tiered evidence funds” to incorporate the full scope of funds the field generally considers as related. While many evidence funds use tiered structures that direct more dollars to programs that demonstrate a higher level of causal evidence, other key evidence funds, such as the Social Innovation Fund, have not used such explicit tiers (though these programs often refer to similar language for evaluation requirements, such as “strong evidence” or “moderate evidence”).

⁵ Program was funded at \$5 million in 2022 but did not include a tiered structure.

⁶ For example, Institute for Education Sciences (IES) funding is oriented towards, and almost exclusively goes to, researchers as the lead recipients: A recent analysis found that program developers received only 3 percent of IES grant funding over the past two decades. See Klager & Tipton (2022), “Summary of IES Funded Topics,” Northwestern University, commissioned by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, https://nap.nationalacademies.org/resource/26428/READY-KlagerTipton_IES_Topic_Analysis_Jan2022v4.pdf.

⁷ Banerjee et al. (2017), “From Proof of Concept to Scalable Policies: Challenges and Solutions, with an Application,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 31(4): 73-102; Granger & Maynard (2015), “Unlocking the Potential of the ‘What Works’ Approach to Policymaking and Practice: Improving Impact Evaluations,” *American Journal of Evaluation* 1-12.

⁸ Project Evident, “Principles of Next Generation Evidence,” <https://projectevident.org/principles-of-next-generation-evidence/>.

⁹ National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022), *The Future of Education Research at IES: Advancing an Equity-Oriented Science*, available at <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26428/the-future-of-education-research-at-ies-advancing-an-equity>.

¹⁰ See Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2013), “Randomized Controlled Trials Commissioned by the Institute of Education Sciences Since 2002: How Many Found Positive Versus Weak or No Effects,” <http://coalition4evidence.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/IES-Commissioned-RCTs-positive-vs-weak-or-null-findings-7-2013.pdf>; Or (2018), “The Role of Evaluation in Building Evidence-Based Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 687: 51-59. Research also demonstrates that medical findings in high-profile journals replicate at a similar rate. See Begley & Ioannidis (2015), “Reproducibility in Science Improving the Standard for Basic and Preclinical Research,” *Circulation Research* 116: 116-126, as discussed in Granger & Maynard (2014).

¹¹ Boulay et al. (2018), *The Investing in Innovation Fund: Summary of 67 Evaluations Final Report*, Abt Associates & Rob Olsen, LLC, prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20184013/pdf/20184013.pdf>.

¹² Kean et al. (2022), *The Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF): A Synthesis Report on Evaluation Findings and Experiences*, Abt Associates, prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies/Workforce-Innovation-Fund-Evaluations>.

¹³ Peña & Behrens (2019), *Evidence-Based Approaches for Improving Federal Programs and Informing Funding Decisions*, Institute for Defense Analyses Science & Technology Policy Institute, <https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/e/ev/evidence-based-approaches-for-improving-federal-programs-and-informing-funding-decisions/d10703final.ashx>.

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¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education (2023), “Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request: Department of Education, Innovation and Improvement,” <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget24/justifications/f-ii.pdf>.

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- ¹⁸ BARR (undated), “BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks) - Investing in Innovation (i3),” <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L5TJ6Vj4BNkPmDu7GjIdOVpR1wbvdtUT/view>; Boulay et al. (2018).
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- ²⁶ Boulay et al. (2018).
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