

To: Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking
From: Laura and John Arnold Foundation
Date: December 22, 2016
Re: Docket ID USBC-2016-0003

**Laura and John Arnold Foundation
Letter to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking**

Dear Commissioners,

As Vice Presidents of the Laura and John Arnold Foundation (LJAF) focused on improving evidence-based policymaking by federal, state, and local governments, we are submitting this letter in response to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking's request for comments.

We believe the Commission's statutory charge from Congress presents a critical opportunity to reshape the way governments use data and evidence to improve citizens' well-being. By using modern technology and protocols that protect individual privacy, it is now possible to create a data infrastructure that enables government decision makers, as well as consumers and private sector organizations, to obtain reliable, actionable information that can drive their choices on how to use resources more effectively.

Governments in other countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Estonia are embracing secure data-linkage techniques to help solve problems for their citizens. In the United States, where administrative data from social programs are scattered across programmatic silos in federal, state, and local governments, an optimal data infrastructure requires collaboration among multiple parties. We believe the government agencies that administer programs and thus "own" the associated administrative data should work with research data centers that have the existing infrastructure to link and analyze data while protecting individual privacy. Since the enactment of the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002, federal statistical agencies and academic research data centers throughout the United States have demonstrated the ability to link and manage personally identifiable data for research purposes without breaches of privacy.

We recommend the Commission go beyond offering general recommendations for improving data infrastructure and the evaluation of government programs *as we know them today*. Instead, the Commission should seize the opportunity to call for a modernized data infrastructure that could lay the essential groundwork for transformational reforms in how governments plan, structure, manage, and evaluate programs to yield substantially higher returns on taxpayer investments.

Recommendations

In recent years, LJAF has supported collaborations between governments, researchers, and data scientists across the country in an effort to help to address numerous challenges at the federal, state and local levels. In the appendix, we highlight some of our most impactful projects involving partnerships between governments and universities to enhance evidence-based policymaking. Our projects serve as proof points that demonstrate ways that government programs can be improved through the use of data and evidence. We offer four overarching recommendations for how to strengthen government's evidence-building efforts:

- 1. Develop and apply evidence-focused design principles to all government programs.** Congress and the administration should embed strategies *within* programs that will increase the share of resources that are allocated to evidence-based practices and to rigorous evaluation of promising approaches. Initial design principles can be drawn from existing evidence-based initiatives such as the Department of Education's Education Innovation Research program, pending legislation for Social Impact Partnerships, Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth, and waiver demonstrations that require rigorous evaluations in welfare programs administered by the Administration on Children and Families and the Food and Nutrition Service. The principles should guide all new legislation, reauthorizations, regulatory reforms, and efforts to modernize agency administrative procedures.
- 2. Set an expectation that state and local governments that administer federal programs should conduct ongoing data analysis and rigorous evaluation and require that they make their administrative data accessible to the federal government to facilitate research. Governments should use existing program funds for this purpose.** State and local governments are allocated hundreds of billions of dollars every year to administer federally funded programs and gather data on outcomes. Yet few have strong internal capacity for data analytics or evaluation, and many lack incentives to share their data for research and program improvement, which often requires a cumbersome process of negotiating agreements to link data across jurisdictional boundaries. The federal government should help state and local governments better measure their impact and administer their programs by creating the capacity to link data across jurisdictional silos and providing useful information to state and local governments. The federal government should also provide additional funding to facilitate data transfers. Such an approach would make it easier for academic institutions and innovative government structures to analyze the impact of new programs and policies on local populations.
- 3. Create a network of government and research institutions that facilitates secure data linkages while protecting individual privacy.** To protect the privacy of individuals, there must be a secure and trusted network of access

points to potentially identifiable data. This infrastructure should be built upon the existing university-based Federal Statistical Research Data Centers and include modernized processes to speed approvals of projects that meet federally determined standards for accessing data. Together, these organizations can provide a highly secure data infrastructure to support important information needs of federal, state, and local governments, private sector organizations, and the public. Such a network can produce reliable published research and aggregated statistics to help governments and other decision makers understand the root causes of problems, direct services and benefits to where the needs are greatest, measure performance on important outcomes, and evaluate the impact of alternative strategies.

- 4. Strengthen federal agency evaluation and management capacity.** Congress and the administration should collaborate to refine and expand the successful evaluation practices the Obama administration implemented in agencies such as the Department of Labor. In addition, the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) and the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRMA) should be evaluated to determine how to better help federal, state, and local government agencies gather and use information to improve outcomes for program beneficiaries. Future efforts to assess and rate particular programs—such as a new Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART)—should be guided by specific policy goals that cut across program labels. Review processes should be designed to identify strategies *within and across programs* that are most effective at achieving overarching policy goals and developing ways to scale those strategies.

The above recommendations address four core challenges that prevent government programs from realizing their full potential to improve lives:

- 1. Fragmented federal program structures lack the flexibility and incentives to focus state and local resources on improving outcomes.** Today, vulnerable populations are served by multiple programs run by different federal departments and state and local agencies, each with its own bureaucratic apparatus focused on a particular set of activities. Local governments and providers that deliver services lack the flexibility to combine funds and design coordinated interventions that will achieve the best outcomes per dollar spent. Only a handful of federal programs launched during the Obama administration—such as tiered evidence grantsⁱ and Pay for Success initiatives—create strong financial incentives for grantees to use existing evidence of what works and participate in rigorous evaluations to build new knowledge.
- 2. The federal government has poorly communicated the role of data analysis and evaluation in program implementation.** There is a widespread perception across government programs and among grantees that data analysis and evaluation are not core elements of effective program

administration, and little or no program funding is allocated for these purposes. Government has not signaled to grantees that they should integrate data analysis and evaluation into their operations in order to test, learn about, and improve the impact of strategies, nor that they should use a portion of their program funds for this purpose if other funding is not available. State and local governments that seek to test, learn, and improve their public impact are stymied when the people they serve move across jurisdictional lines or when the agencies that serve them in one location lack the necessary relationships to share information. Instead of using reliable data that government already collects to address this problem, each federal grant program sets its own reporting requirements to ensure accountability. However, this reporting, which is often onerous and time-intensive for grantees, rarely generates information that is useful for helping grantees or government program managers improve their programs. Rather, this approach to accountability undermines grantees' confidence in the ability of the federal government to help with data analysis and evaluation.

- 3. Lack of secure access to high-quality and high-coverage data makes it difficult or impossible to measure progress and evaluate impact.** Authoritative sources at various levels, including both governmental and private-sector sources, hold certain data that would be useful to government managers and grantees. However, this data is highly dispersed across sectors and levels of government. Examples include receipt of public benefits, earnings, healthcare usage, criminal justice involvement, and educational attainment—many of the key outcomes that public policies aim to improve. As people move between states and systems, it is extremely difficult to negotiate among all the data “owners” who must cooperate in order to build a complete picture of the individuals served by various systems. In the instances where the federal government currently holds this kind of unified data on outcomes, there is little capacity to provide streamlined access to governments and researchers. Meanwhile, state and local data owners apply inconsistent protections to safeguard the privacy of individuals in their systems.
- 4. Federal agencies lack the internal processes for assessing the impact of their programs and directing funds to use and build evidence.** For the most part, agencies lack the internal structures and routines to unite the management of programs with the evaluation of strategies implemented within programs. Over time, the share of resources allocated to strategies proven to be effective through rigorous research—or to efforts to consciously build evidence on promising approaches—has remained troublingly low. Public outcomes have suffered. Impediments to learning and improvement are sometimes embedded in law. For example, the PRA and GPRMA have created burdensome compliance processes that divert resources from valuable activities. Past efforts, such as the PART, have been overly focused on the performance of individual programs rather than the improvement of public outcomes through strategies that cut across programs.

The attached document, “Detailed Recommendations from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for Improving Government’s Capacity to Use and Build Evidence,” provides specific recommendations around each of these four challenges that are informed by our collective experience and the knowledge we have gained through our network of grantees. We would be happy to provide any additional information upon request.

Sincerely,

Kathy Stack, Vice President of Evidence-Based Innovation

Jon Baron, Vice President of Evidence-Based Policy

Josh McGee, Vice President of Public Accountability

Stuart Buck, Vice President of Research Integrity

Appendix: Detailed Recommendations from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for Improving Government’s Capacity to Build and Use Evidence

Attachment: Proposed Social Spending Innovation Research (SSIR) Initiative: Harnessing American Entrepreneurial Talent to Solve Major U.S. Social Problems

Appendix

Detailed Recommendations from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation for Improving Government's Capacity to Build and Use Evidence

This document builds upon the recommendations in the Laura and John Arnold Foundation's (LJAF's) December 22, 2016 letter to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking. Under each of our recommendations, we provide examples of projects supported by our grantees or activities we carry out directly that serve as proof points that government programs can be transformed to generate higher value for taxpayers through use of data and evidence. These examples, which we consider building blocks for a future evidence infrastructure, have informed our detailed recommendations.

1. Develop and apply evidence-focused design principles to all government programs.

During the Obama administration, a number of significant outcomes-focused, evidence-based program initiatives were launched that created strong financial incentives for grantees and providers to use existing evidence of what works and to participate in rigorous evaluations to build new knowledge. These included tiered evidence grants (*e.g.*, the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation Fund and the Department of Health and Human Services' Home Visiting program), Pay for Success pilots, Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth, and waiver demonstrations in welfare programs.

LJAF is committed to helping policymakers and researchers refine these models and expand their use in order to improve government effectiveness. As examples of this work, members of the foundation are having discussions with stakeholders about how to enhance the impact and cost-effectiveness of evidence-based program initiatives by using the following approaches:

- *Adopting a standard approach to tiered evidence grantmaking in social programs modeled on the successful Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.* The attachment to this appendix is a short concept paper that outlines our proposed approach and provides a template that could be used to apply the approach across a range of social spending programs. This program model was developed for federal competitive grants with a matching requirement to incentivize state and local governments to use funds they control (including federal formula funds) for evidence-based approaches. A similar model could be used by state governments to allocate funds to localities and other grantees.
- *Increasing the use of low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs).* Low-cost RCTs are a powerful new tool for building scientific evidence about "what

works” to address major social problems. Well-conducted RCTs are widely regarded as the most credible method of evaluating whether an intervention model is effective, but they are often assumed to be too expensive and burdensome for practical use in most areas. However, researchers have recently shown that in many instances, high-quality RCTs can be conducted at a low cost and minimal burden, addressing a key obstacle to their widespread use. The low cost is achieved by:

- Embedding random assignment in initiatives that are already being implemented as part of usual program operations. RCTs can be embedded in many new or ongoing programs, for example, by using a lottery process (*i.e.*, random assignment) to determine who among those eligible will be offered a particular service model (since available funds are often insufficient to serve everyone who qualifies).
- Measuring key study outcomes with administrative data that are already collected for other purposes (*e.g.*, student test scores on state exams, criminal arrest records, and health care expenditures), rather than engaging in original—and often expensive—data collection through interviews or testing.

Such studies make it possible now as never before for policy officials to use scientific evidence about what works to increase government effectiveness. LJAF is funding numerous low-cost RCTs (costing between \$50,000 and \$300,000) that have large samples, strong designs, long-term follow-up, and outcome measures of self-evident policy importance. For examples, see: <http://www.arnoldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Request-for-Proposals-Low-Cost-RCT-Competition-FINAL-9.30.16.pdf>.

The U.S. Department of Education and National Institutes of Health have also recently launched low-cost RCT funding initiatives.

We believe the Commission’s recommendations should include program design principles for social programs that aim to increase the share of resources that are allocated to evidence-based practices over time. If the incoming administration adopts a diagnostic tool such as the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) to assess program effectiveness, the tool should also assess a program’s capacity to use and build evidence about what works. The following program design principles should guide all new legislation, reauthorizations, regulatory reforms, and agency administrative practices:

- *Focus on outcomes.* Define the primary and secondary outcomes that programs will be accountable for achieving. Avoid prescriptive requirements for how those outcomes should be achieved.
- *Use and build rigorous evidence.* Ensure that programs have requirements and incentives for decision makers at every level of a program to:

- Use existing evidence about what is likely to work best to improve outcomes for program participants;
- Build new evidence using rigorous and cost-effective research methods about what works best for different populations in different contexts;
- Adopt consistently high standards for what constitutes rigorous evaluation; and
- Enable measurement and evaluation of long-term outcomes after participants are no longer receiving services, with a focus on outcomes related to education, employment, criminal justice involvement, and health.
- *Encourage innovation.* Reward entrepreneurial innovation, provided there is rigorous testing and learning about which strategies are most effective.
- *Leverage state and local funds.* Require or incentivize state and local governments to allocate an increasing share of the funding they control (including federal formula funds) to scale-up evidence-based practices.
- *Consolidate programs while targeting services.* Reduce the number of programs that are serving similar populations by combining funding streams so that program administrators and practitioners have greater flexibility to deliver the best mix of services using the most effective strategies. Any restructuring should include strong safeguards to ensure that services and benefits are targeted to vulnerable populations most in need.
- *Improve use of high-quality data.* Maximize production of, access to, and use of high-quality data. Limit reporting to those data elements that are most important for assessing progress, measuring outcomes, and evaluating impact. Wherever possible, enable state and local governments and service providers to measure progress and evaluate results by linking participant data to reliable administrative and survey data held by third parties in secure data facilities.

2. Set an expectation that state and local governments that administer federal programs should conduct ongoing data analysis and rigorous evaluation and require that they make their administrative data accessible to the federal government to facilitate research. Governments should use existing program funds for this purpose.

State and local governments administer hundreds of billions of dollars of social program funding every year, most of which is provided by the federal government. Through partnerships with strong researchers, state and local governments can use data, evidence, and innovative experimentation to learn what works and improve program delivery. LJAF-funded projects that demonstrate the types of activities that federal dollars could support include the following:

- Established in 2015, the Rhode Island Innovative Policy Lab (RIIPL) at Brown University built a linked longitudinal database from Rhode Island's government agencies and private vendors. Researchers are using this

database to inform real-time policy decisions, educate policymakers in their pursuit of improving economic and social outcomes, and increase the supply of experimentation and rigorous evaluation in Rhode Island. RIPL is currently working with seven agencies on 17 projects that span areas such as juvenile recidivism; foster care; supplemental nutritional assistance; Medicaid; maternal, infant, and early childhood home visitation; labor training; debt-related incarceration; tax incentives; the Earned Income Tax Credit; and policing.

- The Government Performance Lab at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government (GPL) has been working in jurisdictions across the country to facilitate Pay for Success projects, results-driven contracting, and performance improvement activities. A complete list of projects is available here: <http://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/our-projects>.
- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (J-PAL), through its State and Local Innovation Initiative, is supporting randomized policy evaluations at the state level in Pennsylvania and South Carolina, at the city level in Philadelphia and Rochester, N.Y., and at the territory level in Puerto Rico. These evaluations aim to address significant social problems facing state and local leaders. For example, these evaluations examine approaches to increase employment and economic mobility and to find more effective treatments for substance use disorders.

The projects described above have demonstrated cost-effective ways for state and local governments to partner with research institutions to solve important problems that could be carried out on a larger scale without legislative change. We believe the Commission should recommend that federal agencies take administrative actions that:

- *Set clear expectations for state and local grantees regarding data analysis and evaluation.* The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and federal agencies should clarify that state and local grantees (1) are expected to analyze data and evaluate the impact of their program strategies using rigorous methods; (2) are encouraged to partner with strong researchers in academia to carry out these activities; and (3) are allowed to use programmatic funds for these purposes.
- *Ensure accessibility of grantee data.* The federal government should require that states and localities make key data needed to measure progress and outcomes accessible to the federal government for research purposes. The federal government should collaborate with states and localities to develop standard language for procurements that require contractors to make data accessible to state and local governments for program analysis and to the federal government for research purposes.

When legislative barriers prevent federal agencies from implementing these policies through administrative action, Congress should remove the barriers through legislation.

The LJAF-funded projects described above rely on high-quality administrative data to conduct rigorous low-cost evaluations. However, these projects are limited by their lack of access to national datasets, which would allow them to measure outcomes for participants who move across state lines.

To facilitate the development of similar high-value projects, and to improve projects like these, the federal government should require that state and local data generated for the administration of federally funded programs be accessible for research purposes. Once the data from local and state programs is linked with federally held data, useful information can be provided to state and local governments in ways that will greatly enhance what these governments can learn about their programs.

To be scalable and sustainable, partnerships like those described above, or other efforts to improve the research capacity of governments, should not rely entirely on philanthropic funding. Instead, government should recognize the value of such efforts and provide financial support. The federal government could spur this shift by clarifying that (1) state and local governments that administer federal programs are *expected* to analyze data and conduct evaluations to improve program impact and (2) programmatic funds may be used to finance data infrastructure and evaluation activities. To avoid placing a burden on states and localities without providing commensurate resources, the federal government should provide additional funding for data sharing activities.

3. Create a network of government and research institutions that facilitate secure linkage of data while protecting individual privacy. LJAF supports a number of projects with research institutions that are pioneering innovative strategies for linking personally identifiable information while protecting privacy. Most of these projects benefit state and local governments that are seeking to link data across programs or levels of government in order to answer important policy questions.

- Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy (AISP) is an initiative that focuses on the development, use, and innovation of integrated data systems (IDS) for policy analysis and program evaluation. The goal is to make it easier for state and local governments to establish and evaluate effective programs by linking privacy-protected data across agencies and standardizing IDS practices. In 2009, AISP formed a network of county agencies, city agencies, state agencies, and universities around the country to address the lack of national standards for IDS. The AISP network now has 13 sites that engage in multi-site research projects and share best practices for maintaining and developing an IDS.

- In the summer of 2016, LJAF provided support to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to release an RFP titled “[Using Linked Data to Advance Evidence-Based Policymaking](#),” which solicited research projects that could benefit from securely linking state or local-level data with federal data held at the U.S. Census Bureau. The data linking services offered by Chapin Hall could support a range of analyses including impact evaluations, long-term follow-up studies of prior RCTs, outcome measurement studies, needs assessments and descriptive studies, and multi-generation studies. The projects identified through the RFP include a long-term follow up of welfare demonstration projects in the 1990s, an evaluation of a higher education student aid program, and an analysis of the effect of birth weight and perinatal services on a population in California. None of these projects could have been accomplished using un-linked federal or state data alone.
- LJAF provided a planning grant to the Virginia Tech Social and Decision Analytics Lab ([SDAL](#)) to develop a strategy to increase the use of data analytics to answer pressing policy problems in small- and medium-sized jurisdictions around the country. The grant resulted in a plan to use the national land-grant university system, which is comprised of research universities with a public service-based mission, and the associated Cooperative Extension Service, which has a presence in most counties across the country, to bring together local policymakers and researchers supported by the analytics capacity at the university. The collaboration will allow different state university systems to focus on different issues. For example, land grant universities in Virginia may develop analytic capacity around youth development and opioid use and their counterparts in Iowa may focus on early childhood development. All of those topics require linking data across agencies and levels of government to measure relevant outcomes.

In addition to these grant projects, LJAF staff are investigating new privacy-preserving technologies employed in the United States and other countries. A number of modern cryptographic and statistical techniques are making it possible for researchers to study and learn from data while preserving privacy for individual records. Indeed, a relatively recent development known as secure multi-party computation allows two sources of data to be merged and analyzed while remaining completely encrypted the entire time so that even the researchers themselves never see an individual’s data.

In 2015, researchers in Estonia [engaged in a large demonstration project](#) in which they matched 500,000 education records with 10 million tax records to study whether working during college increased the risk that students would fail to graduate on time. Thanks to secure multi-party computation, both the tax and education datasets remained cryptographically secure throughout the analysis, thus allowing the research to take place even though sharing tax data was otherwise illegal under Estonian law. In the United States, secure multi-party computation has been

largely confined to defense and intelligence applications funded by DARPA, but could prove transformational if extended to other government programs' data.

We believe the Commission recommendations should include:

- *Create an intergovernmental network of data hubs.* The U.S. Census Bureau should become a central hub in a federated network of state and local governments and other research entities that hold high-value data. The U.S. Census Bureau should lead efforts to develop common standards and protocols for managing and linking data in ways that protect privacy and produce rigorous statistical and evaluation products.
- *Harness new privacy-preserving technologies.* Standards and protocols for data-linkage should be updated periodically to take advantage of evolving technology such as secure multi-party computing, which safeguards the privacy and security of data during analysis.
- *Finance data-linkage and analysis.* The federal government should create permanent, predictable funding for data-linkage and analysis activities carried out by federal statistical agencies and research data centers. Legislation and administrative procedures should clarify that a portion of these costs can be paid from appropriations for the agency programs that are benefiting from the data analysis.

4. Strengthen federal agency evaluation and management capacity. A number of federal agencies have made significant advances in evaluation capacity in recent years, setting examples that are highlighted by Results for America's [What Works Index](#), the [Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative](#), and Andy Feldman's [GovInnovator](#) podcast. These successful efforts pave the way for the next administration to refine these approaches and expand them at other agencies. In addition, there are other opportunities to tackle issues that the Obama administration has not adequately addressed. We believe the Commission recommendations should include:

- *Encourage coordinated agency learning agendas.* Agencies should implement learning agendas in coordination with other actors pursuing knowledge on the same subject. For example, learning agendas and evaluation strategies can be enhanced through collaboration with philanthropies and academic researchers. Coordinating investments on shared priorities will ensure that separate studies build toward common, policy-relevant aims. Maximizing access to and use of administrative data to produce high quality studies at low cost is a key component of widespread learning.
- *Create Chief Evaluation Officers across federal agencies.* Federal agencies should establish or designate Chief Evaluation Officers to lead the

development of learning agendas reflecting important research questions and to help agencies improve their effectiveness. Evaluation activities can be financed through line-item appropriations or through set-asides, such as those at the Department of Labor. Agencies should adopt and continually update rigorous standards for their research and evaluation activities, taking into account the findings of the National Academy of Sciences Workshop on “Principles and Practices for Federal Program Evaluation.”

- *Promote purposeful testing of ways to increase savings and cost-effectiveness.* Federal agencies, as well as state and local partners, can improve their return on investment by evaluating strategies designed to generate savings and cut unnecessary costs. This process should include evaluations that identify what activities can be stopped or streamlined without diminishing program impact.
- *Create interagency working groups on cross-cutting evaluation issues.* Federal agencies that operate similar programs, such as regulatory enforcement and federal credit programs, should collaborate to develop evaluation strategies and tools that can benefit multiple agencies. These working groups should collaborate with outside researchers and philanthropy to leverage non-governmental expertise and funding to conduct evaluations.
- *Strengthen human capital for evaluation activities.* Agencies should strengthen their internal evaluation expertise through training of federal executives and staff. For example, the United Kingdom has developed competency standards related to evidence and evaluation that senior officials are expected to meet, and outside organizations such as Nesta offer training based on those standards. Federal agencies should create more opportunities for highly qualified researchers to work inside government to help agencies design and conduct evaluations, and clean and produce data sets that can be reused to answer multiple questions. To accomplish this, the administration should consider establishing an Evidence-Based Policy Fellows program to recruit top researchers to work at agencies for one or two years on high-priority research projects.
- *Reevaluate the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRMA).* In its current form, Government Performance and Results Modernization Act (GPRMA) creates a significant reporting burden for federal agencies without generating reliable and meaningful information to evaluate and improve programs. To meet federal accountability requirements for specific programs, state and local governments and non-profit grantees devote substantial resources to reporting data of dubious quality on inputs, outputs, and processes without receiving useful information in return. GPRMA should be reevaluated to minimize unnecessary reporting by agencies and grantees and to maximize the use of high-quality administrative data, leveraging new capacities to link data across programs. GPRMA should make state and local

governments central partners in helping to develop streamlined accountability systems focused on outcomes, which can help all levels of government produce useful data for performance measurement and rigorous program evaluation.

- *Integrate performance management and evaluation activities to generate reliable, actionable information.* In too many federal agencies, including OMB, performance management and evaluation activities are poorly coordinated. This creates confusion for senior agency officials and program managers who need useful information about what is working and what should be improved or stopped. OMB should improve its internal coordination of these functions and call upon agencies to focus performance management activities on improving data quality and access; using rigorous evaluation to learn what strategies are most effective within and across programs; and fine-tuning performance metrics to ensure they are correlated with programmatic impact. In recent years, the Department of Labor has been an exemplar of this approach. The President's management agenda, which might include an updated Program Assessment Rating Tool, could set standards that encourage better coordination of these functions.
- *Implement data-use agreements that allow long-term follow-up studies.* Currently, most data-use agreements for federal evaluations do not provide an option to re-use the data for long-term follow-up studies after the initial evaluation ends. This makes it very difficult to learn about long-term impacts of government policies. Federal agencies should update their standard data-use agreements to facilitate long-term follow-up studies. Federal agencies should further standardize any individual consent forms such that study subjects are routinely asked to consent to the preservation and sharing of data (e.g., test scores) for future research purposes, rather than be limited only to one particular purpose or particular set of researchers.
- *Update the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA).* OMB's clearance requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) create long delays and bottlenecks for agencies seeking approval of evaluations and have stymied efforts by agencies to increase the number of high-quality studies of important research questions. Congress and OMB should work to identify ways to streamline the PRA approval process for evaluations when agencies have other means to ensure evaluation studies use rigorous designs, address important questions, and minimize burden on the public by using administrative and survey data when feasible.
- *Research clearinghouses and other resources on evidence-based practices.* Congress and the administration should expand federal research clearinghouses and their capacity to deliver information in user-friendly ways that help state and local decision makers learn which strategies are most likely

to be effective for different communities. To improve transparency and reproducibility of research and evaluation findings, clearinghouses should adopt standards requiring researchers to preregister studies and make the underlying data available, in de-identified form, to other researchers.

¹ *Tiered Evidence Grants: Opportunities Exist to Share Lessons from Early Implementation and Inform Future Federal Efforts*, Government Accountability Office, GAO-16-818, September 2016.