William T. Grant Foundation

Statement of
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To the
Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking
Washington, DC

Panel on
"Non-Governmental Demand for Evaluation: Capacity to Support Public Good Activities"

November 4, 2016

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about one of our nation's most vexing challenges: serving the public good by making smart policy decisions using data that our government already collects.[1] The Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking offers a rare opportunity to overcome significant barriers that prevent us from achieving this goal. My aim is to provide a non-governmental perspective on two key issues facing the Commission:

1. What data are needed to support public good activities?
2. What steps are needed to build the capacity to *use* data and create the *evidence* required for better policy decisions?

The William T. Grant Foundation, which I lead, supports social science research to improve the lives of young people ages 5 – 25 in the United States. Within this overall mission, we have two areas of focus. The first is to support research on reducing inequality among young people, and the second is to support research on improving the use of research evidence in policy and practice. These priorities would be greatly aided if the Commission were able to accomplish its goals.

As background to my remarks, I call your attention to the legislation that established the Commission. Your primary charge is to determine how agencies of the federal government can share and link administrative data sets, and accomplishing that aim would be a significant step forward. However, a complete reading of your mandate suggests you need not stop there. The Commission is uniquely positioned to consider how the federal government can use data to create the evidence required to achieve our policy aims, as well as how to create the infrastructure to support the use of evidence in policymaking. In other words, be the *evidence commission*, not just the *data commission*.

This broader approach is fully within your charge, and you can meet the challenge it sets forth by prioritizing its call to show how data "may be integrated and made available to facilitate program evaluation, continuous improvement, policy-relevant research, and cost-benefit analyses by qualified researchers and institutions," and by emphasizing "how data and results of research can be used to inform program administrators and policymakers to improve program design."[2] It is principally these elements of your charge to which my remarks offer a response.

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[1] My remarks draw on recent writing from the William T. Grant Foundation and the Forum for Youth Investment, including the following:
William T. Grant Foundation and Forum for Youth Investment. (2016). *From data to evidence to policy*. New York: William T. Grant Foundation. Available at: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/library/uploads/2016/08/From-Data-to-Evidence-to-Policy.pdf
Gamoran, A., & Ferber, T. (2016). Who would have thought: Bipartisan policymaking through evidence. *The Hill*, August 8. Available at: http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/290684-who-would-have-thought-bipartisan-policymaking-through-evidence
DuMont, K., & Smeeding, T. M. (2016). Using data to produce useful research evidence. *The Digest*, *Issue 1*. New York: William T. Grant Foundation. Available at: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/digest/using-data-produce-research-evidence
[2] See Section 4, "Duties of the Commission," parts (a)(1) and (b)(2)(I), in *Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2016*, H.R. 1831. Available at: https://www.congress.gov/114/bills/hr1831/BILLS-114hr1831eas.pdf

Data Needs: Multiple Purposes of Linked Administrative Data

Sharing and linking administrative data is necessary but will not suffice to achieve the broader goals of the Commission. Rather, data must be deployed in research and evaluation to create research evidence that informs policymaking. This would optimize the use of data we already collect to make smarter policy decisions. By "research evidence" I mean evidence derived from applying systematic methods and analyses to address a predefined question or hypothesis. Examples include descriptive studies, intervention studies and evaluations, meta-analyses, and studies on cost effectiveness. Policy insights can emerge from a variety of types of research studies, and, consequently, linked administrative data has multiple purposes and offers diverse contributions to policymaking. As a private funder of research intended to improve the lives of young people in the U.S., the Foundation has identified a range of cases for which linked administrative data can address critical questions. Among these are rigorous evaluations of program impact, both experimental and quasi-experimental; program improvement efforts, including performance management; and descriptive studies that contribute to policy formation.

Rigorous Evaluations of Program Impact

As is widely discussed, administrative data can be a powerful tool when attached to randomized evaluations of program impact. At an earlier meeting, the Commission heard from Raj Chetty of Stanford University, who obtained tax data that enabled him to test for long-term effects of the Moving to Opportunity Study. His results overturned previous findings, transforming our understanding of how housing voucher program effects may occur. If such federal data were available to a wider range of researchers, we would have more secure answers to many important questions about program impact. Also frequently mentioned is the value of administrative data for short-cycle randomized trials. Because administrative data are already being collected irrespective of whether a program evaluation is taking place, linking existing data to the evaluation study substantially reduces the cost of the study, and may accelerate its completion and lead to more real-time information on whether programs are meeting their aims. For example, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation has stimulated the research community to pursue this course to take better advantage of data already being collected.[3]

Two randomized experiments that our Foundation is funding – one by Joseph Allen at the University of Virginia and the other by David Yeager at the University of Texas-Austin – use administrative data to assess the impact on academic and social-emotional outcomes of interventions designed to improve young persons' social psychological functioning. These investigators face the laborious task of collecting administrative records from each school, one school at a time. Particularly in the case of the Yeager study, which includes nearly 100 schools, this task demands countless hours from both researchers and school personnel, and great expense to the funders. Yet much of the data – notably the academic outcomes – are reported up to the state and even the federal government, and if there were a data linkage system in place, they could be gathered much more efficiently. Indeed, this is one of the reasons we funded the Stanford Educational Data Archive, which includes test scores from all 50 states calibrated on a common scale.[4] But since the National Center for Education Statistics that supplied these data has no provision for releasing individual-level data from state assessments, the data are aggregated to the level of grades within schools, which constrains their utility for some purposes.

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[3] See: http://www.arnoldfoundation.org/laura-and-john-arnold-foundation-announces-expanded-funding-for-low-cost-randomized-controlled-trials-to-drive-effective-social-spending/

[4] See: https://cepa.stanford.edu/seda/overview

Administrative data also have great value for quasi-experimental studies, which can often be conducted without additional data beyond the administrative records. Professor Chetty has already spoken to the Commission about how his analysis of tax records for five million geographically mobile American families revealed the importance of neighborhood quality for economic mobility. In a study funded by our Foundation, Cornell economist Michael Lovenheim and his colleagues were able to connect Texas state administrative data from K12 education, higher education, and employment and, using a difference-in-difference design that permits causal inference, test the effects of two university scholarship programs for high-achieving, low-income youth on college and workforce outcomes.[5] In another study we are currently funding, researchers at Duke University have cleverly used job loss information from North Carolina as a statistical instrument to test the effects of economic and family changes on children's academic development.[6] This research was only possible because the investigators were able to link administrative data from the state education and employment systems.

It is no accident that these two examples come from Texas and North Carolina. Along with Florida, these states have the most efficient systems for external researchers to obtain access to statewide education data. Consequently, much of what we know about federal and state education policy effects, particularly those based on rigorous quasi-experimental methods, comes from these three states, and we cannot be certain about how findings from these states generalize to other states. Ironically, thanks to federal data requirements under No Child Left Behind and subsequent federal incentives to states, all states now collect a large volume of education data, with students linked over time and to their schools and, in most cases, to their teachers. However, in far too many states the data languish unused except for compliance reports under federal law. These data are an untapped treasure the Commission could help uncover by advocating for federal guidelines that would facilitate the research use of state education data while protecting the privacy of personal information as Texas, North Carolina, and Florida have carefully done.

Program Improvement

Many, and perhaps most, experimental and quasi-experimental studies focus on a narrow question: What is the impact of a program on a particular outcome? Increasingly, however, our grantees recognize that the answer to this question is of limited policy value. Although it indicates whether a program is working or not, it does not say what works *for whom* and under *what circumstances*, nor does it say what steps may be undertaken to achieve the desired results. These questions are important because single evaluations rarely suffice to make decisions about program continuation or discontinuation. Instead, they are most useful if they point the way towards improvement. As Ron Haskins and Greg Margolis have explained, "An important part of a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy will be to continue funding programs that initially receive disappointing evaluations. Part of the federal evidence-based culture should be that federal agencies will work with programs and continue funding them as long as they are using evidence to improve their outcomes and are showing some progress."[7]

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[5] Andrews, R. J., Imberman, S. A., & Lovenheim, M. F. (2016). Recruiting and supporting low-income, high-achieving students at flagship universities. *NBER Working Paper No. 17104*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

[6] Ananat, E. O., Gassman-Pines, A., Francis, D. V., & Gibson-Davis, C. M. (2011). Children left behind: The effect of statewide job loss on student achievement. *NBER Working Paper No. 22260*. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.

[7] Haskins, R., & Margolis, G. (2015). *Show me the evidence: Obama's fight for rigor and results in social policy*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, p. 235.

Program improvement cannot happen without data about when and why a program works well or struggles. Some of our recent grants have supported methodological work to better understand treatment effect heterogeneity, that is, differences in how the same program may work differently for different people or in different places.[8] These technical advances, however, rest on the availability of data to identify conditions that may be related to heterogeneity. If randomized trials are often undertaken as "black box" studies – particularly short-cycle randomized trials – administrative data may allow us to peer into the box to see what is actually going on.

On the government side, many are aware of the need for such administrative data, and this was a topic of discussion in a learning community that our Foundation organized for staff of federal evaluation and research agencies. As one participant commented, "research needs to provide more information about community context, implementation, health equity, and costs, as well as info about what facilitated or impeded success." Another elaborated, "on the grant competition side we have been adding requests for researchers to add more on context, but that leads to questions about what question should be asked across studies, what data is cheaply available." The Commission could encourage this work by providing guidelines for federal grantmakers that would strengthen researchers' access to contextual and implementation data, and by calling for agencies to make administrative data available in response to these needs.

Performance management is a tool used for program improvement that relies substantially on administrative data.[9] To assess the outcomes of a government program, however, a federal agency typically requires administrative data that are gathered elsewhere within the government. While current federal law requires agencies to set performance goals, it does not require them to share the data that are needed by other agencies to assess progress towards those goals. The Commission can bolster federal program improvement efforts by recommending policy changes that will support goal setting with data-sharing requirements. For example, laws that require evaluation could specifically require data-sharing agreements.

Policy Formation

A third purpose of linked administrative data is to understand the nature of the challenges facing our nation and to identify possible programs and policies that may address them. For instance, President Obama has declared that income inequality is "the defining challenge of our time."[10] Data that our government already collects, but which are not currently well used, could help us formulate more effective policies to respond to this challenge. Two examples illustrate this point: Linkages between state education records and national surveys can identify ways to reduce educational inequality; and the American Opportunity Study, a national effort to link census, program, and survey data, can yield ways to increase upward mobility on the ladder of economic success.

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[8] Weiss, M. J., Bloom, H. S., & Brock, T. (2015). A conceptual framework for studying the sources of variation in program effects. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *33*, 778-808; Raudenbush, S. W., & Bloom, H. S. (2015). *Learning about and from variation in program impacts from multisite trials*. Working paper. New York: William T. Grant Foundation.

[9] Metzenbaum, S. H., & Shea, R. (2016). *Performance accountability, evidence, and improvement: Reflections and recommendations to the next administration*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Public Administration and The Volcker Alliance.

[10] See: https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/12/04/remarks-president-economic-mobility

Linkages between state education records and national education surveys. Educational inequality is a fundamental aspect of broader inequities across our nation, so reducing educational inequality is an important goal. Evidence about educational inequality comes from national surveys as well as from state administrative records. Linking the two sources of data would offer an especially powerful tool for crafting effective policies. While state data contain valuable information about the performance of students, teachers, and schools, they typically lack the contextual information needed to understand program and policy effects. Longitudinal surveys, by contrast, often have rich contextual information but lack repeated data on student outcomes, and often lack detailed information on teachers and course enrollment. Linking the two data sources would strengthen the evidence offered by each.[11] In particular, linking state data to in-depth longitudinal surveys carried out by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) would allow a much richer exploration of policy effects within and among states.

During the Obama administration, NCES officials negotiated with ten state education agencies to prepare to link a national longitudinal cohort study of high school students (a common type of NCES survey) with state education records. NCES did its part by oversampling students in each of the ten states so the linked samples would be representative of each state and large enough to test policy-relevant hypotheses. But as I have written elsewhere, "ultimately not a single state provided its data for linkage with the national survey. Despite agreement at the political level, NCES and its state counterparts were unable to resolve the bureaucratic barriers to linking state and federal data."[12] This unfulfilled promise is ironic because the state longitudinal data sets were largely built with federal grants to states, yet the federal government failed to use its leverage to compel or even encourage states to make their data available for linkage. The Commission could address this challenge by recommending legislative or administrative language that helps states understand the value for their own decision-making, as well as for achieving national goals, of connecting their data systems to national data with in-depth information about family background, students' experiences within schools, school context, and other conditions relevant to policy formation and outcomes.

The American Opportunity Study. As David Grusky, Tim Smeeding, and Matt Snipp have written, given the high importance that Americans attach to equal opportunity, one might expect us to have a robust system for monitoring social mobility and its responsiveness to policy changes.[13] By social mobility, we mean the chances that persons born into disadvantage can rise above their circumstances of origin to achieve educational and occupational success as adults. Despite the salience of this notion, our ability to monitor changes in mobility is weak. The last major survey of U.S. mobility, the second study of "Occupational Changes in a Generation," occurred over 40 years ago. Today, however, a standalone survey is not needed to gauge patterns of mobility across generations. In fact, we can do so even more effectively than in the past by linking data from the U.S. census to federal administrative data and to existing national surveys that are already being conducted. Grusky, Smeeding, Snipp, and others have proposed that a new American Opportunity Study (AOS) can be accomplished without the need for a new survey, by linking existing data. Key components of the AOS include decennial census records,

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[11] Loeb, S. (2015). *Linking NCES surveys to administrative data*. Paper presented at the Workshop to Examine Current and Potential Uses of NCES Longitudinal Surveys by the Education Research Community, Washington, DC. Available at: http://www.naeducation.org/cs/groups/naedsite/documents/webpage/naed_160699.pdf

[12] Gamoran, A. (2016). Towards the next generation of U.S. longitudinal surveys: Ideas from researchers for the National Center for Education Statistics. *AERA Open, 2* (2) 1-8.

[13] Grusky, D. B., Smeeding, T. S., & Snipp, C. M. (2015). A new infrastructure for monitoring social mobility in the United States. *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Science*, 657, 63-82.

federal tax and employment records, state data from federal programs such as food stamps and unemployment insurance, and national surveys that are already being conducted such as the American Community Survey, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and others.

The AOS would carry substantial benefits for those wishing to assess mobility trends and to formulate and assess policies that aim to strengthen equal opportunity processes. As the authors explain,

> The United States has an unassembled panel that is standing unused and that, for a relatively small outlay, could be transformed into a major new infrastructural resource in the social sciences. The AOS comes with substantial cost savings and efficiencies, allows the United States to formulate child development and labor market policy using high-quality evidence, and would lead to a renaissance of labor market and mobility research that would almost surely reestablish the United States as a leader in the field.[14]

The AOS would permit more powerful assessments of conditions that foster and reduce inequality in domains such as neighborhoods, family structure, health, justice, education, and veterans' affairs.[15] These assessments would allow formulation of evidence-based policies. When linked to research study samples, the AOS could also support program evaluation in many areas.

Despite the promise of this approach for meeting the inequality challenge that President Obama has called out, substantial barriers remain. Most important, much of the data about program participation resides at the state level, even for programs supported by federal funding. If we wish to know whether our policies are working, we need to know who is participating and what their long-term and even intergenerational trajectories are. We can accomplish this aim by linking program participation data to census and employment records, but only if states cooperate with federal agencies in data sharing. The federal government ought to have leverage in this regard because the programs are federally funded. The Commission could address this challenge by recommending legislative language that would require states to share data on program participation for purposes of research on policy formation and evaluation.

Linking ongoing national surveys to administrative data represents another challenge. I understand that for Census Bureau surveys such as the American Community Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation, such linkages are already occurring and data can be analyzed in the secure Federal Statistical Research Data Centers. The Commission may wish to urge other federal agencies and non-governmental research groups to collaborate with the Census Bureau to add additional surveys to this infrastructure.

More broadly, the Commission should aim to standardize and streamline procedures to facilitate linkages among these disparate sources of data, and encourage a bureaucratic/legal environment in which such linkages are viewed as assets. To accomplish this goal, the Commission should provide a framework that articulates the technical requirements, legal standing, and accepted procedures for linking and sharing data across federal agencies and with willing state partners. The framework should specify the different types of data that may be linked, including administrative, survey, and experimental data, and the different purposes of such linkages, including program continuation decisions, program improvement plans, and policy formation.

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[14] Ibid, p. 79.

[15] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2016). *Using linked census, survey, and administrative data to assess longer-term effects of policy*. Proceedings of a workshop in brief. Washington, DC: National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

The Commission might further recommend a pilot that would begin with specific agencies that, based on the investigations of the Commission, seem best prepared to implement a standardized procedure for linking data and making data accessible to researchers inside and outside of government. With support from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation and in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago is sponsoring a series of studies to demonstrate innovative approaches to linking administrative data, and the Commission could look to these studies as examples.

Building Capacity for Using Linked Data to Conduct Research and Inform Policies

Thus far I have discussed the value of administrative data for rigorous evaluations of program impact, program improvement, and policy formation, and I outlined a series of recommendations for improving the linkages among, and access to, these data while protecting privacy. I could choose to conclude my remarks now, and indeed, the Commission could choose to limit its focus to the tasks of linking and sharing administrative data while protecting privacy.

But doing so would not take full advantage of the opportunity at hand. As I noted at the outset, the Commission is uniquely positioned to advance the capacity to support the use of evidence in policymaking. By capacity I am referring to the technological structures, human capital, organizational arrangements, and fiscal investments needed to create and use evidence. These considerations are often an afterthought and therefore under-resourced. Because they are fundamental to the creation of evidence, they demand attention at the outset.

Over the course of my career, I have thought a lot about the capacity required to support the production and use of evidence. Prior to my current role, I directed the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, the oldest and largest university-based education research center in the country. My job was to ensure that we had the structures in place both to generate evidence and connect with those who might use it. In my current role as president of a foundation that funds studies to identify and test strategies to improve the use of research evidence at the federal, state, and local levels, I am learning continually about the conditions needed to facilitate evidence use. This knowledge has been deepened by my observations of the learning community we facilitated for federal research and evaluation staff. These experiences make clear that capacity is critical for supporting the production of evidence and its use.

Yet the current capacity to accomplish this goal is limited. In a government-wide survey conducted by the General Accountability Office, only eleven agencies reported "committing resources to obtain evaluations by establishing a central office responsible for evaluation of agency programs, operations, or projects, although only half these offices were reported to have a stable source of funding. Seven agencies reported having a high-level official responsible for oversight of evaluation."[16] The relative scarcity of evaluation offices and funding has consequences: The General Accountability Office reported that "studies of organization or government evaluation capacity have found that it requires analytic expertise and access to credible data as well as organizational support both within and outside the organization to ensure that credible, relevant evaluations are produced and used."[17]

[16] General Accountability Office. (2014). *Program Evaluation: Some Agencies Reported that Networking, Hiring, and Involving Program Staff Help Build Capacity*. GAO-15-25. Washington, DC: General Accountability Office.
[17] Ibid, p.8.

Based on my experiences outside government and my interactions with those in government, I encourage the Commission to respond to the findings from the General Accountability Office as well as to similar concerns raised in a background paper prepared for the Commission.[18] The Commission can make an essential contribution to the advancement of evidence-based policymaking by recommending specific steps (a) to build the capacity of researchers inside and outside of government to use administrative data to answer policy questions, and (b) to establish partnerships between researchers and policymakers that will increase the likelihood that research evidence permeates the policymaking process.

A Federal Infrastructure for Evidence

The Commission can meet its full mandate by providing guidance on ways that data may be used to create evidence that can inform and shape policy. A stronger infrastructure within the federal government would help build the capacity needed to meet this charge. Such an infrastructure could help ensure that the production and use of evidence remains a high priority for our nation's decision-makers. It could also increase the capacity of individual agencies to produce and use evidence. Moreover, a strong infrastructure could help align efforts across agencies, leading to greater consistency and creating opportunities to take on challenges that require cross-agency collaboration.

The Commission may wish to examine infrastructure supports that are found in various agencies, identify best practices, and recommend their wide adoption. One of our grantees is currently conducting a scan of the existing federal infrastructure for statistics, data, performance improvement, behavioral analytics, and evaluation, and has identified a number of supports that could be strengthened for federal evaluation agencies. Examples of such infrastructure elements include:

- Leadership positions focused on evidence use

Leadership positions such as the special advisor for evidence-based policy in the Office of Management and Budget, and the chief technology officer in the White House Office of Science and Technology policy, serve to focus attention on the use of research evidence and are positioned to align efforts across agencies. One role of such leaders can be to foster collaboration between program and evaluation offices within government agencies to establish trust and make joint decisions about what research and evaluation is to be conducted and how the findings may be used.

- Interagency collaborative bodies

An interagency group that regularly convenes staff members from across government agencies offers opportunities for learning and collaboration. Examples include the federal Chief Information Officers' Council, the Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy, and the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academies. In addition to supporting and formalizing such bodies, more could be done to align efforts across the collaboratives focused on data, statistics, and evaluation.

[18] Office of Management and Budget. (2016). *Barriers to Using Administrative Data for Evidence Building*. Background paper for the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking. Washington, DC: Office of Management and Budget. See: https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/mgmt-gpra/barriers_to_using_administrative_data_for_evidence_building.pdf

- A dedicated office for research and evaluation within each agency

The capacity for building and using evidence is highly varied across federal agencies. Some agencies have dedicated research offices, such as the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within Health and Human Services, the Chief Evaluation Office in the Department of Labor, the Office of Policy Development and Research within Housing and Urban Development, and the Institute of Education Sciences within Education. While establishing such offices is important, they must be accompanied by systems that foster communication between research and program offices. As one research leader who participated in our learning community of federal agency staff explained, "When I think about the program offices I collaborate with, and what makes them successful, I think about finding mutual goals, how to help those offices achieve their goals, maintaining regular communication throughout and, most importantly, assuming that there will be different cultures."

- A codified set of principles and practices

As another participant in our learning community of federal agency staff noted, "There isn't much of a blueprint for how federal agencies conduct evaluation." Individual agencies have responded to this need; for example, both the Department of Labor and the Administration on Children and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services have developed policies for evaluation, which is one type of research evidence. A broader set of principles and practices for the creation and use of research evidence is needed, analogous to *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*, which has been influential in setting standards and approaches that statistical agencies across policy domains have adopted. Likewise, the *Common Guidelines for Education Research and Development* have helped the Institute of Education Sciences and the National Science Foundation take similar approaches in understanding and supporting different types of research evidence. Moreover, just as there needs to be an investment in the skills and guidelines for conducting impact evaluations, similar supports should be established for program improvement efforts. The Commission could recommend the development and adoption of principles and practices for evidence creation and use that could become widely shared across federal agencies.

Partnerships for Building and Using Evidence

All too often, evidence about effective or ineffective policies or programs has little bearing on decisions, even when the evidence is rigorous, timely, and accessible. Sustained partnerships between researchers and policymakers can improve the use of research evidence by offering a basis for trust, incentivizing researchers to ask questions that really matter and creating a culture of evidence in the decision-making body. This requires an ongoing dialogue between researchers and decision-makers.

Throughout my remarks I have emphasized the value of administrative data for research and evaluation, and I gave several examples where this approach has been the case. These situations were fortunate; the existing administrative data happened to be what researchers and evaluators needed for their studies. To maximize the use of administrative data for research and evaluation, however, we can be more deliberate in what data are collected. When researchers act as partners to program and policy staff, they can collaborate on decisions about what administrative data to collect. These partnerships can improve the odds that programmatic and policy changes will be informed by the research evidence.

Since 2009, the William T. Grant Foundation has supported studies of the conditions that promote the use of research evidence in policy and practice. Partnerships between researchers and decision-makers emerged as a key finding from this scholarship as a mechanism for getting evidence produced and used. Most common in the domain of education, a research-practice partnership is a sustained structure for facilitating relations of trust and shared goals among university-based researchers and government-based practitioners or policymakers, such as school district officials.[19] The partnership carries two essential benefits. First, because the research agenda within the partnership is co-constructed by researchers and practitioners, the questions pursued in the research are ones whose answers are important to the practitioners. Second, the partnership creates a culture of evidence within the agency, such that looking to evidence before making decisions becomes normative practice. Fundamental to the partnership is the sharing of administrative data that allows researchers to address policy questions of interest to school district decision-makers. Most education partnerships are between universities and school districts, but the state of Tennessee is leading the way by creating a new partnership between Vanderbilt University and the state education agency.

The Commission can improve the use of research evidence by identifying effective partnership models and promoting them across the federal government. Many models of partnership exist, such as those laid out on the website of the William T. Grant Foundation: http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/.

Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

The Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking can help researchers outside government contribute more useful research that informs policy by recognizing the variety of purposes for sharing and linking administrative data, and by recommending tools and relationships that strengthen the capacity of policymakers to collaborate with researchers inside and outside of government. A number of recommendations emerge from this account:

Multiple Purposes of Linked Administrative Data

- Advocate for federal guidelines that would facilitate the research use of state data while protecting the privacy of personal information.

- Provide guidelines for federal grantmakers that would strengthen researchers' access to contextual and implementation data, and call for federal agencies to make administrative data available in response to these needs.

- For federal performance management systems, recommend policy changes that support goal-setting with data-sharing requirements.

- Recommend legislative or administrative language that helps states understand the value for their own decision-making as well as for achieving national goals of connecting state data systems to national survey data with in-depth background information.

- Recommend legislative language that would require states to share data on program participation for purposes of research on policy formation and evaluation.

[19] Turley, R. N. L., & Stevens, C. (2015). Lessons from a school district-university research partnership: The Houston Education Research Collaborative. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *37*, 6S-15S.

- Urge federal agencies and non-governmental research groups that conduct national surveys to collaborate with the Census Bureau to add additional surveys to the Federal Statistical Research Data Center infrastructure.

- Provide a framework that articulates the technical requirements, legal standing, and accepted purposes or linking and sharing data across federal agencies and with willing state partners.

- Recommend a pilot data-sharing effort, perhaps building on the examples of innovative approaches to linking administrative data.

Building Capacity of the Production and Use of Research Evidence

- Examine existing infrastructure supports found in various agencies, identify best practices, and recommend their wider adoption. Examples include leadership positions focused on evidence use; interagency collaborative bodies; dedicated offices for research and evaluation; and codified sets of principles and practices.

- Identify models of partnerships between researchers and policymakers, and promote their use across the federal government. Consider local and state examples as models for the federal level.

These recommendations are ambitious, but the Commission is such a unique opportunity that lofty goals are warranted. As my colleagues have written, "research evidence can improve public policies and programs, but fulfilling that potential will require honest assessments of current initiatives, coming to terms with outsized expectations, and learning ways to improve social interventions and public systems."[20] The Commission is well positioned to drive this work forward, especially if it focuses on the full continuum of activity from sharing and linking data, to using those data to create research evidence, to using that evidence to inform policymaking.

[20] See: http://wtgrantfoundation.org/tag/evidence-at-the-crossroads