



The Pew Charitable Trusts

To Overcome Challenges to Evidence-Based Policymaking, States Need Outside Help

Philanthropies, research institutions, and others provide critical resources and expertise

Over the past decade, states have increasingly relied on evidence to help ensure that relevant data informs their budget and policy decisions. But states still encounter significant barriers to embedding evidence in government decision-making processes, in part due to capacity constraints. To identify ways that other entities can help states overcome these issues, the Results First initiative gathered input from philanthropies, research and policy organizations, associations for public officials, and state government staff members. The resulting report¹ details the types of support that state governments need as they work toward more consistent use of evidence, particularly through their budget offices, and the ways nongovernmental entities can help address capacity concerns.

What emerged from this research are three key challenges facing states' evidence-based policymaking efforts as well as some potential solutions.



The challenge—Insufficient staff time and capacity for research, analysis, and the application of evidence. States need personnel with specialized training in research, program evaluation, and data analysis to carry out functions such as interpreting evidence, managing external evaluations, and drawing critical connections between research and policy.



The solution—Build and supplement state governments' research capacity by:

- Supporting state leaders' investment in their research workforce.
- Fostering deeper partnerships between state governments and nongovernmental experts.
- Clarifying and advocating for capacity-building opportunities that leverage federal funds.

For example, Arnold Ventures supports an evidence advisor in North Carolina's Office of Strategic Partnerships to increase the development of high-quality evidence and its use in agency spending decisions.²



The challenge—Inadequate availability of and access to relevant and timely evidence. State governments require greater access to evidence that illuminates whether their programs are effective at improving outcomes, how effective they are, and how they can be improved to better assist local communities. Yet states often lack data that addresses their specific needs and target populations.



The solution—Encourage and facilitate better production and distribution of relevant research by:

- Incentivizing institutions and researchers to create more applied research.
- Providing support for broader interpretation and communication of evidence.

For example, the William T. Grant Foundation funds the Institutional Challenge Grant program, which encourages higher education institutions to generate more research that supports public agencies and to expand academic norms and incentives—such as making changes to tenure and promotion systems.³



The challenge—Difficulty cultivating champions and peer networks. State stakeholders want to learn from other states' examples and speak directly with the staff members involved in the work. States also need to build a stable base of support from legislative and executive leaders who can ensure that the work gets funded and succeeds.



The solution—Foster knowledge-sharing and support for evidence work by:

- Helping states learn from one another.
- Cultivating and maintaining evidence champions.

For example, the National Governors Association and Results for America have hosted What Works Bootcamps, which bring together senior executive branch officials from states throughout the country to learn, from national leaders and one another, how to increase results-driven governing.⁴

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Endnotes

- 1 S. Dube, K. Lyons, and P. Singh, "How Nongovernmental Groups Can Support States in Evidence-Based Policymaking" (The Pew Charitable Trusts, 2022), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2022/09/how-nongovernmental-stakeholders-can-support-states-in-advancing-evidence-based-policymaking>.
- 2 Arnold Ventures, "North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management," accessed April 11, 2022, <https://www.arnoldventures.org/grantees/north-carolina-office-of-state-budget-and-management>.
- 3 William T. Grant Foundation, "Institutional Challenge Grant," accessed April 11, 2022, <http://wtgrantfoundation.org/grants/institutional-challenge-grant>. The William T. Grant Foundation funds these grants in collaboration with the Spencer Foundation, the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the American Institutes for Research.
- 4 Results for America, "What Works Bootcamps," accessed April 11, 2022, <https://results4america.org/what-works-bootcamps/>.

For further information, please see the full report:
pewtrusts.org/resultsfirst

Contact: Esther Rege Berg, communications officer **Email:** eberg@pewtrusts.org **Project website:** pewtrusts.org/resultsfirst

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