


FOUNDATIONS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING ACT 2018

ISSUE SUMMARY:

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act (Evidence Act) provides a federal framework to promote a culture of evaluation, continuous learning, and decision making using the best available evidence. Early decisions from the Administrator and policy team on agency priorities and preferred approach to fulfilling the Evidence Act requirements are critical given tight deadlines for issuing required deliverables.

UPCOMING MILESTONES:

-  Nov. 2024: Publish initial draft FY 2026-2030 Learning Agenda in Federal Register.
- Nov. – Dec. 2024: Senior Leader briefings on Phase II Capacity Assessment Maturity Model results and Agency dissemination of reports.
- Early Dec. 2024: Agency submits comprehensive summary of Capacity Assessment methodology to OMB.
- Dec. 2024: Final awards made for second Cooperative Agreement supporting underserved communities.
- Dec. 2024 – Feb. 2025: Public comment and stakeholder consultation on initial draft of FY 2026-2030 Learning Agenda.
- Feb. 2025: Agency submits FY 2026 President's Budget, Congressional Justification, and Annual Evaluation Plan.
- May 30, 2025: Agencies submit to OMB for review – initial components of FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan including initial draft Learning Agenda questions and high-level summary and Capacity Assessment Outline.
- Sept. 2025: Agencies submit final draft of FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan including full draft Learning Agenda; full draft Capacity Assessment to OMB.
- Dec 2025: Final draft of Capacity Assessment due to OMB.

BACKGROUND:

- The Evidence Act was bipartisan legislation signed by President Trump on January 14, 2019. The law implements half of the recommendations from the bipartisan U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking report [The Promise of Evidence Based Policy Making](#). Provisions of the law include the following agency requirements:
 - Title I, Federal Evidence-Building Activities: (1) develop and issue a Learning Agenda (i.e., evidence-building plan) and Capacity Assessment as part of the 4-Year Strategic Plan; (2) publish an Annual Agency Evaluation Plan; (3) designate an Evaluation Officer and Statistical Official. The Evaluation Officer is responsible for Title I deliverables, which OMB publishes on [Evaluation.gov](#), the website for federal program evaluation and the Evaluation Officer Council.
 - Title II, Government Data Act: (1) issue a Strategic Information Resources Management Plan and conduct a Comprehensive Data Inventory and (2) designate a Chief Data Officer. The Chief Data

Officer leads the implementation of enterprise scale data policy, chairs EPA's Data Officer Council established to advance enterprise data governance implementation plans and coordinate across the agency, and represents EPA on the [Federal Chief Data Officer Council](#).

- Title III, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act: (1) meet confidential information protection requirements and (2) make data assets available, as practicable, to any statistical agency and external researchers. The Statistical Official serves as the agency's senior advisor on statistical policies, techniques, and methods and represents EPA on the Interagency Council on Statistical Policy, which develops guidance, policies, and tools to support the Federal Statistical System, which are available at www.statspolicy.gov.
- In FY 2022, the agency published its first Learning Agenda at the same time as the *FY 2022-2026 EPA Strategic Plan* and established the policy framework for the Agency's evaluation program. The current Learning Agenda addresses priority questions focused on workforce planning, drinking water systems out of compliance, and grant commitments met with high quality data, evaluation, statistics, and other analysis.
- The EPA currently is developing its second Learning Agenda, which will be published alongside the Agency's FY 2026-2030 Strategic Plan. The new Learning Agenda will strategically address the Agency's highest priorities, strengthen its culture of continuous improvement, and enhance the design and implementation of policies, procedures, programs, and regulations.
- OCFO, in partnership with OP/OA and OMS, is leading the implementation of an agency-wide capacity assessment to better understand the state of existing evidence-building skills, resources, and capabilities needed to achieve EPA's mission, organizational goals, and objectives. In November 2023, the Agency completed phase I of its Capacity Assessment and began phase II in May 2024. Phase II of the Capacity Assessment is a deeper dive to help understand the Agency's maturity level in using evidence-building activities. In August 2024, the agency completed Phase II of its Capacity Assessment Maturity Model surveys and is preparing the data for senior leader review and agency dissemination of the reports.
- In FY 2024, the agency began offering cooperative agreement awards in small, disadvantaged, and tribal communities to help develop tools, strategies, and technical assistance that builds knowledge and skills in the evidence-building process. The cooperative agreement awards enhance communities' evidence-building capacity to generate high-quality information that supports learning and improvement of outcomes. A second round of cooperative agreement awards will be made in December 2024.
- The EPA's Evidence Act Workgroup is a standing advisory body co-chaired by the three designated Evidence Act officials to provide leadership and coordination and to promote consistency and quality in agency implementation activities and deliverables. All Headquarters offices and key Lead Regions are represented.
- The Evidence Act specifically advances program evaluation as an essential component of Federal evidence building. Agencies are expected to follow OMB guidance outlining program evaluation standards in developing and implementing evaluation activities, evaluation policies, and in hiring and retaining qualified staff.

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- In FY 2024, the agency established a Short-Term Evaluation Program (STEP) which leverages administrative and other readily available data to conduct evaluations to support leadership decision making and continuous improvement. OCFO is currently working with programs that submitted proposals requesting funding.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

Please check which stakeholder(s) are likely to reach out to the incoming political team about this issue.

- ☐ Congress ☐ Industry ☒ States ☒ Tribes ☐ Media ☒ Other Federal Agency ☒ NGO
☐ Other (name of stakeholder) _____

Please describe key concern(s):

- Several OMB offices are highly involved in the implementation of the Evidence Act; they have been actively engaging the EPA on questions about the implementation of, and deliverables for, the Evidence Act.
- Several national think tanks, academic institutions, and associations follow federal Evidence Act implementation closely, including the American Evaluation Association, The Data Foundation, and the Partnership for Public Service, among others.
- In developing the FY 2026-2030 Learning Agenda, EPA officials are engaging with relevant external experts and stakeholders, especially with states and tribes, to formulate priority questions and to plan and implement the activities designed to answer them.

MOVING FORWARD:

- Led by OCFO, the Evidence Act designated officials, along with the Learning Priority leads, can provide a briefing on the second Learning Agenda, Capacity Assessment, and other deliverables/activities.
- Since most major Evidence Act deliverables in FY 2024 fall under the approach to the Strategic Plan, OCFO and the three designated officials will work with the Administrator's policy team to obtain decisions on the approach to the Final Learning Agenda, Capacity Assessment, and Evaluation Plan. OCFO and the designated officials will then engage with the agency and stakeholders to implement the approach.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OCFO

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: OMS & OA/OP

OCFO – Evaluation Officer

OMS – Chief Data Officer

OA/OP – Statistical Official