M-21-27 - Evidence-Based Policymaking:
Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans

Section	Synthesis
Opportunities from the Evidence Act	• Creating learning agendas and evaluation plans -- required under the Evidence Act -- requires working across silos with internal and external stakeholders.
Strategic Evidence Building	• Agency leaders and diverse stakeholders can identify needs and gaps when building a learning agenda by asking "what is it that our agency needs to do, what do we need to know to do it best, and what do we wish we knew?"
	• The process of developing a learning agenda -- including engaging stakeholders – may be as beneficial as the final product.
	• Agencies should meaningfully engage diverse stakeholders when developing learning agendas and annual evaluation plans to shape the priority questions being asked or the study design. Stakeholder engagement provides innumerable benefits.
	• Agencies are expected to engage with internal stakeholders.
	• The Evidence Act requires agencies to engage with the public, state and local governments, and non-governmental researchers on their learning agendas.
	• Other stakeholders include OMB, federal award recipients, Tribal and territorial governments, Congress, industry and trade groups, academics, NGOs, communities and individuals served by the agencies, and more. Agencies are expected to systematically consider why engagement is important for both the agency and stakeholders through stakeholder mapping exercises and other methods.
	• Benefits of stakeholder engagement include identifying the most relevant and urgent questions, generating information, advancing equity, and meeting the needs of underserved communities. It can only be accomplished through intentional interactions with diverse stakeholders.
	• Different agencies will have different engagement priorities. For some, engaging with state, local, tribal, and territorial governments will ensure that ground-level problems are surfaced and addressed. For others, engaging with external researchers can help agencies understand existing research and create alignment on research priorities moving forward.
	• Stakeholder engagement should be transparent, build trust, and advance equity. RFI's in the Federal Register are not adequate to encourage a rich exchange of ideas and engage diverse stakeholders. Other methods to consider include community engagement, participatory research, listening sessions/focus groups, technical working groups, bilateral consultations, and other methods that consider the lived experiences of those affected by policies.
	These activities may require clearance under Paperwork Reduction Act, but agencies can leverage flexibilities like those outlined in the OMB memo [Flexibilities under the Paperwork Reduction Act for Compliance with Information Collection Requirements.](#)

- Agencies should consider the following, among other methodological approaches to evidence-building: pilot projects, randomized controlled trials, quantitative survey research and statistical analysis, qualitative research, ethnography, research based on data linkages, and established community engagement processes.

  Other methods to be considered consistent with OMB guidance include risk assessments and inclusive methodologies including participatory, emancipatory, community-based, user-led, and partnership research.

  Community engagement can promote equity and lead to better research and evidence.

- Equity must be considered throughout the evidence-building lifecycle. Early, active, and consistent engagement with diverse stakeholders will lead to high-quality insights and lower the chances of perpetuating underlying biases. Engagement should start at the beginning when priority questions are being identified.