Evidence Job Aid

What is Evidence?

OSBM views "**evidence**" broadly as quantitative or qualitative facts and information that show how likely a belief is to be true. For example, a meta-analysis might show that a training program will likely increase employment rates by five percentage points; or a randomized controlled trial (RCT) might estimate that a service has no meaningful benefit. The strongest evidence generally comes from a variety of high quality, credible sources. Evidence may also include other data and information, such as measurement and statistics, that agencies collect as a basis for reasoning, discussion, or calculation. This internal evidence may show that the average employee can process 20 permit applications per month, indicating that five full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) are required to process 100 monthly applications.

Sources of Evidence

Agencies may use evidence to better understand what contributes to a problem, craft an effective solution to an issue, and/or understand what has or has not worked elsewhere. However, evidence for different budget requests will vary depending on the context. The following scenarios offer examples of how agencies should look for evidence relevant to their request. For more guidance, agencies may refer to this resource for finding evidence.

1. **Where to find research on program effectiveness?** Start with evidence clearinghouses: These clearinghouses collect - and in some cases rate the strength and quality of - research that measures the impact of government programs and policies. If the government program or policy of interest has been well-researched, evidence clearinghouses will save time synthesizing the information needed to inform decision making and assess confidence in the findings. The finding evidence resource linked above provides a list of clearinghouses by topic.
2. **Information found in clearinghouses not relevant?** Use Google Scholar or AI-assisted search: Most evidence clearinghouses are narrowly focused on specific federally funded programs or social policy areas and might not have the information agency staff seek. In these instances, it may be necessary to search for individual research studies directly. Google Scholar and emerging AI search tools such as Elicit and SciSpace can help find research across a wide universe of both free open access and paywall journal publications.
3. **Questions about needs, problem drivers, or implementation?** Leverage NC state data resources: Don't forget about the insights one can glean from descriptive data. State government agency's program and operational data, Open Data Resources collected by other agencies, or new data collected (e.g., monitoring, interviews, surveys) can help identify problems or needs, spot inefficiencies, measure how well current solutions are being implemented, and build intuition and theory about what changes or new solutions might improve outcomes.

Types of Evidence

Evidence may be generated through program evaluations, high quality research (such as systematic reviews and meta-analyses), and RCTs. Figure 1 shows the relative strength of different types of evidence, from weakest at the bottom of the pyramid to the strongest at the top. The strength of evidence increases as levels move up the pyramid. Evidence for causal claims, those typically associated with social policy interventions, gets stronger moving up the entire pyramid (assuming studies and reviews are conducted in an appropriate manner). Evidence for non-causal claims, more commonly associated with non-social, administrative, or operational changes, is typically only associated with the bottom two sections of the pyramid.

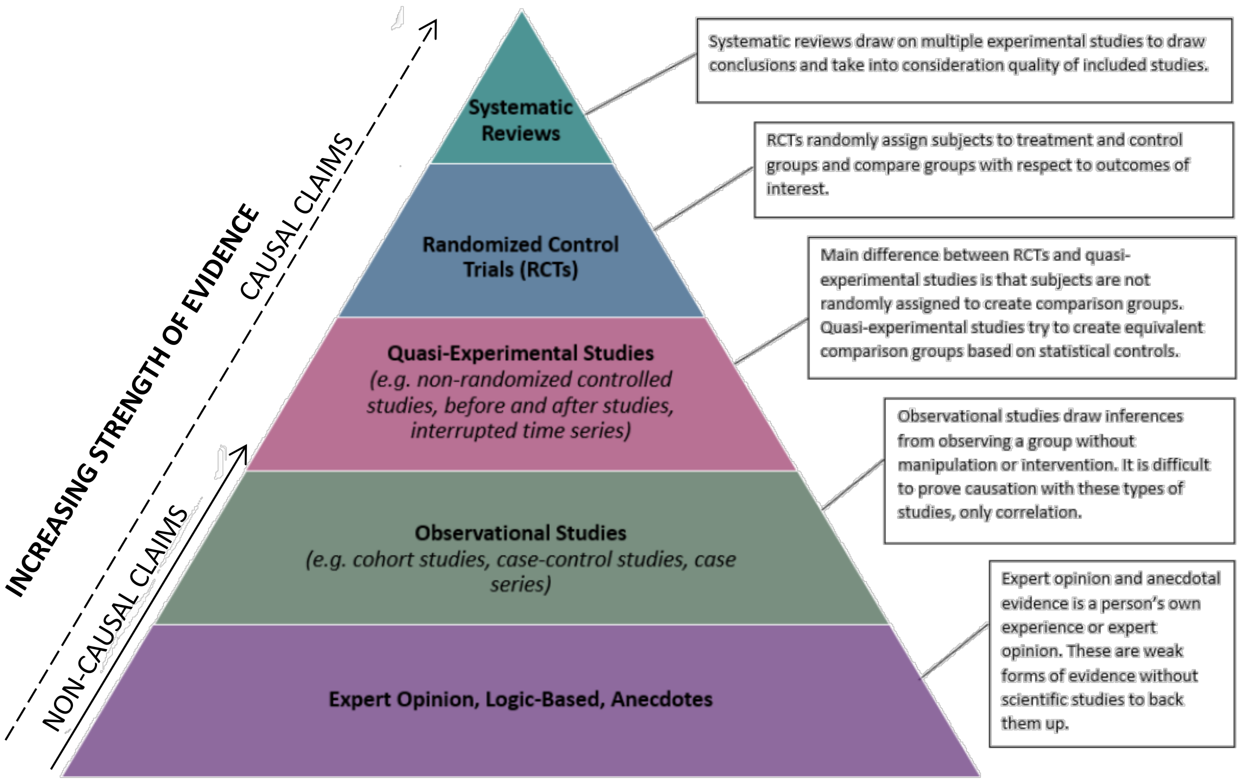

Figure 1: Evidence Hierarchy Pyramid

The presence of evidence does not always signify a program's effectiveness, since the evidence may show the program to have harmful effects or be ineffective.

OSBM's evidence continuum (Figure 2) details the levels of evidence that might support a change in services or practice. Note that there may be limited or no causal evidence supporting a proposal, especially if the change has never been attempted. In such cases, agencies should present their theory of how it will work, and they should strongly consider allocating funds to evaluate the change and build evidence to inform future decisions. Agencies can leverage internal or external data, potentially from their administrative processes, other government entities, trade associations, surveys or focus groups, and program performance or monitoring data. OSBM budget development analysts are available to collaborate with agencies on how to identify and leverage evidence to support change budget requests.

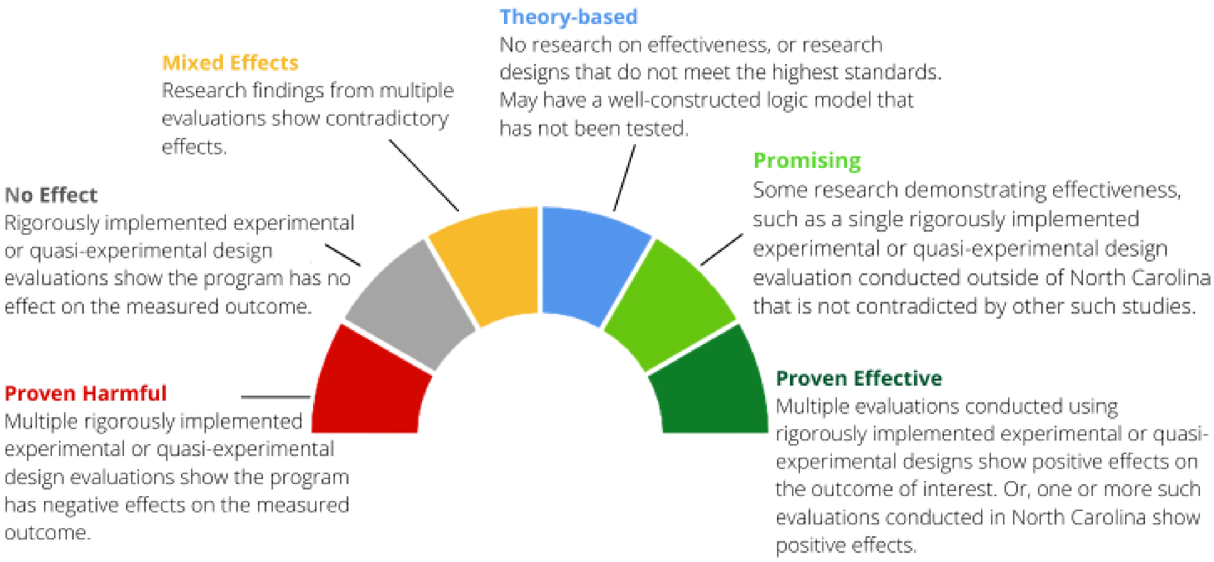

Figure 2: OSBM's Evidence Continuum

Incorporating Evidence into Budget Requests

Evidence in ABC Lists

The ABC List only asks for a short description of the request. However, agencies should prepare to discuss the evidence behind their requests in ABC List review meetings with OSBM and share the sources that support these claims. If agency staff would like assistance with finding or determining which evidence supports their requests, they may ask OSBM analysts for assistance in those meetings.

Evidence in WS-IIs and WS-II-EZs

The WS-II Justification Documentation form and the IBIS Narrative Tab asks questions about each change budget request. The WS-II-EZ has only two questions, while the WS-II includes additional fields to justify these requests. These prompts will help the agency answer four basic questions about their requests:

- What is the need, and why is it a problem or opportunity?
- How will this request address that need?
- Why does the agency believe this request will address the problem?
- What performance measures will be used to measure efficiency and/or effectiveness?

Budget staff should coordinate with division directors, program managers, and other subject-matter experts to respond to the prompts about their requests. Agencies should use the WS-II Justification Documentation Form on the Job Aids page of OSBM's website to provide information about and evidence for WS-II requests for increased funding. Agencies will attach the form to the WS-II, as they would other reports and documents that support the business case for the request.

WS-II-EZs have the two narrative questions (shown below) in IBIS, where agencies must include the answers in a text field as they complete the form. Agencies requesting reductions in funding should also answer the evidence questions in the Narrative Tab in IBIS, listed below for reference.

WS-II-EZ IBIS Expansion Prompts

1. What problem or need is being addressed?

- Why is this a problem? When and how did this become a problem?
- How is the issue affecting workload or service delivery?
- Why is this expansion request necessary? What could result if the problem is not addressed?
- *Note inflationary or cost pressures that inhibit maintaining current service or operations levels.*

2. Describe your request, including the specific activities, functions, and services provided and a timeline for expenditures and positions (if any).
   - For pilot programs, how will the pilot sites be selected?
   - For existing program expansions, describe the current program status, including current budget and staffing information.
   - If equipment or vehicles are requested, describe the need. Do more cost-effective alternatives exist? If so, why are they inadequate? Attach any necessary supporting documentation.
   - *Document agency cost estimates and explain the methodology for reaching those totals.*

WS-II IBIS Reduction Prompts

1. Summary of proposed reduction
   - What specific activities, functions, or programs will the agency reduce, eliminate, or shift to receipt-supported?
   - How were these activities identified for reduction, elimination, or a shift in funding source? Is this reduction in accordance with the priorities in your agency's strategic plan?
   - Does this request require statutory changes or special provisions? If yes, provide an explanation of what statutory changes or special provision components may be needed.

2. If the activity has been identified for reduction based on program outcomes or inefficiencies, describe any past efforts to increase the efficiency or effectiveness of the activities or program.
   - Have there been prior attempts to improve or eliminate the program? If so, please describe.
   - Are there existing programs within the department or in another state agency that could be redeployed or leveraged as partners to achieve these outcomes?

3. How will the request affect outcomes for the public, the quality of government services, or government efficiency?
   - What are the anticipated outcomes of the proposed reduction?
   - Who will be affected by this reduction?
   - Does the reduction result in increased costs to individuals, other state agencies or units of local government?

Examples of Evidence in Budget Requests

1. Non-Causal Data Example: An agency could support a $75,000 R request for an application specialist with the following evidence:
   - The agency expects 50 more applications per week in FY 2023-24 due to a change in law and growing program demand.
   - An internal agency analysis found that the five current application specialists process an average of 50 applications per week per person.
   - Without the additional position, the agency will not meet program requirements.
   - The agency budgets similar positions at $75,000 per year.
   - *Note*: The agency uses evidence at the "operational studies" level of the evidence pyramid to support this request, which would be considered theory-based on the evidence continuum.

2. Causal Evidence Example: An agency could support a request for a professional development program by citing a thorough and sound meta-analysis that finds similar training programs increase employment rates by 5%. It could then show how the proposed program is significantly similar to those in the meta-analysis.

   Note: The agency uses evidence at the top of the evidence pyramid, systematic reviews, and is considered proven effective on the evidence continuum.