



Knowledge WORKS!

Child Support Evidence-Based Evaluation Continuum

Resources for child support-led employment programs

About the continuum

This evaluation continuum provides child support administrators and practitioners a framework for measuring results and reviewing evidence of program improvements associated with child support innovations. It provides a table that describes the terms best practice, promising practice, and emerging practice, and gives examples of how to categorize innovations within those terms. These terms are used widely in other settings and may be defined differently in each of those settings.

This tool also provides a common set of terms that child support program administrators and practitioners can use when referencing program practices. It categorizes program innovations based on evidence from formal evaluation(s). Therefore, a practice or innovation that is identified as an emerging or promising practice may have significant positive impacts even though there is no rigorous evaluation data to conclusively link the practice to those impacts. A practice or innovation not labeled with the best practice designation does not mean it doesn't work. It simply means the practice is not subjected to the type of evaluation required to establish a causal relationship between intervention and outcomes.

A child support agency implementing an emerging or promising practice may want to consider including further testing and more rigorous evaluation during implementation. As stated in PIQ-12-02, research, evaluation, and analysis activities are allowable child support expenditures. These activities are important to build the child support evidence base, inform the development of new practices, and assess the effectiveness of new partnerships and strategies in improving child support outcomes.

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Evidence-Based Evaluation Continuum	Emerging Practice	Promising Practice	Best Practice
Does the practice work?	Can share results, but cannot draw broader conclusions. Study may identify outcomes (or outputs) but not impacts (causal connection).	Can suggest impacts and causal relationships, but cannot make definitive statements about impacts.	Can measure impacts and assess causal relationships. Study will indicate strength of findings. May include cost-benefit analysis.
How do you know the practice works?	Anecdotal information. Participant tracking. Assessment to determine if the intervention is ready for evaluation. Case studies. Qualitative studies. Somewhat real-world informed, expert intuition.	Single-site experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation. Non-experimental statistical analysis (e.g. pre-post statistical analysis, performance analysis). Real world (tied to program practices) informed.	Multi-site experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation. Multiple single-site experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations. Quasi-experimental evaluations include matched groups and controls for group differences.
Has the practice been replicated?	Has had limited or no replication beyond initial study site.	Has been implemented as a multi-site evaluation using promising evaluation design. Single-site promising evaluation design has been replicated.	Has been implemented as a multi-site evaluation. Single-site experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations have been replicated.
Is implementation guidance available?	Has limited or no implementation materials or guide.	Some implementation guide development and materials available to support replication or elements of replication.	Comprehensive implementation guide developed and available to support replication.
Child support examples		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennessee Parent Support Program (NCP Employment) • Arapahoe County, CO Parents To Work! • NY Strengthening Families Through Stronger Fathers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents Fair Share • Texas NCP Choices (Job Services) • CSPED

Definitions

(Excerpts from OMB Circular A-11 Section 200.21: Overview of the Federal Performance Framework)

Evaluation – Individual, systematic studies to assess how well an entire program or some specific strategy or an aspect of a program is working to achieve intended results or outcomes.

Examples of major types of evaluations:

- The first type, which includes process, implementation, and formative evaluations, is focused on assessing how effectively programs or aspects of programs deliver services relative to program design, professional standards, or regulatory requirements.
- The second type, impact or outcome evaluations, is focused on assessing the impact of a program or aspect of a program on outcomes, typically relative to a counterfactual, meaning some estimate of what would have happened in absence of the program or aspect of the program.

Evidence – Evidence is the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid. Evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and may come from a variety of sources, including performance measurement, evaluations, statistical series, retrospective reviews, and other data analytics and research. Evidence has varying degrees of credibility, and the strongest evidence generally comes from a portfolio of high-quality evidence rather than a single study. (For the purposes of OMB A-11 Part 6.)

Five Key Elements of Evaluation

(Excerpts from Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Evaluation Policy, November 2012)

- Rigor
- Relevance
- Transparency
- Independence
- Ethics

A learning organization with a culture of continual improvement requires many types of evidence, including not only evaluation but also descriptive research studies, performance measures, financial and cost data, survey statistics, and program administrative data. Further, continual improvement requires systematic approaches to using information, such as regular data-driven reviews of performance and progress.

Access the full [ACF Evaluation Policy](#).