

## Overview of Federal Evidence-Building Efforts<sup>1</sup>

### **I. Executive Summary**

The Federal Government engages in a wide variety of evidence-building activities, or functions. These functions include the collection, compilation, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data to create general purpose, policy- and program-specific statistics and datasets. They also include program evaluation, research, policy- and program-related analysis, performance measurement, and public health surveillance. Finally, evidence-building functions can include setting evidence standards and requirements and providing technical assistance and support for others engaged in building evidence.

Federal evidence-building is highly decentralized, and while many departments and agencies have some capacity to undertake at least some of these functions, not every department and agency currently has the capacity to undertake them all. Similarly, the organizing structure for these functions varies by department and agency. Some departments have established centralized offices that are responsible for implementing one or more of these functions, such as Federal statistical agencies and evaluation offices. In other cases, evidence-building functions are dispersed across program areas. Departments conduct most of these functions within their own mission areas (e.g., health or energy), but the methods applied vary by agency and department.

This white paper begins with a description of the evidence-building functions carried out by the U.S. Government and the primary organizing structures and capacities that are most relevant to the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking (“the Commission”), including principal statistical agencies, Federal evaluation offices, and Federal evidence-building offices that perform multiple evidence-building functions. It continues with a description of the coordination and review functions of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and closes with a summary of themes.

### **II. Federal Statistics and Principal Statistical Agencies**

The ability of governments, businesses, and the general public to make informed choices about budgets, employment, investments, taxes, and a host of other important matters depends critically on the ready and equitable availability of relevant, accurate, timely, and objective Federal statistics. Taken together, the data produced by the Federal Statistical System (FSS) form a robust evidence-base to support both public and private decision-making. Federal statistical programs have been a cornerstone of this evidence-base for many decades, producing fundamental information to illuminate public and private decisions on a range of topics, including the economy, the population, the environment, agriculture, crime, education, energy, health, science, and transportation. These statistics are used in part to describe and increase understanding of the basic condition and performance of our economy and society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This white paper is intended to provide the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking with background information on topics relevant to the Commission’s work. The paper was prepared by staff from OMB, with assistance from staff at other Federal agencies.

<sup>2</sup> “Fiscal Year 2016 Analytical Perspectives of the U.S. Government,” p. 275, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2016/assets/spec.pdf>.

**Principal Statistical Agencies.** Of the nearly 130 agencies and components that compose the FSS,<sup>3</sup> 13 have as their principal mission the collection, compilation, processing, analysis, or dissemination of information for statistical purposes.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 lists these 13 principal statistical agencies and their associated fiscal year 2016 (FY 2016) enacted budgets. These agencies rely on a robust legal, technical, and policy framework that is designed to enable the production of timely, relevant, and unbiased foundational evidence<sup>5</sup> under strong privacy, confidentiality, and data security protections.

Although the underlying microdata that principal statistical agencies collect or acquire are often confidential by law,<sup>6</sup> the agencies sometimes extend the utility of the underlying data by conducting and facilitating analytical work by others while protecting confidentiality. Principal statistical agencies may produce public-use (de-identified) datasets, aggregate statistics, and summary analyses. In addition, many agencies have sustained and successful histories of collecting, linking, protecting, and making available in secure environments some of the Nation’s most sensitive information, including data on personal health status, immigration status, income, and proprietary business data.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1. Principal Statistical Agencies**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Department or Independent Agency</b>	<b>FY 2016 Enacted Budget (in millions \$)</b>
Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)	Commerce	105.1
Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)	Justice	50.2
Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)	Labor	609.0
Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS)	Transportation	26.0
Census Bureau (Census)	Commerce	1368.4 <sup>1</sup>
Economic Research Service (ERS)	Agriculture	85.4
Energy Information Administration (EIA)	Energy	122.0
National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)	Agriculture	168.4
National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)	Education	332.6
National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS)	Health and Human Services	160.4
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES)	National Science Foundation	58.2
Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES)	Social Security Administration	26.1
Statistics of Income Division (SOI)	Treasury	36.9

Note: A principal statistical agency is an agency or organizational unit of the Executive Branch whose activities are predominantly the collection, compilation, processing, analysis, or dissemination of information for statistical purposes.

<sup>1</sup> FY 2016 enacted budget includes preparatory funding for the 2020 Decennial Census.

<sup>3</sup> See OMB’s annual report to Congress, “*Statistical Programs of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2016.*” [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/information\\_and\\_regulatory\\_affairs/statistical-programs-2016.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/information_and_regulatory_affairs/statistical-programs-2016.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See OMB’s annual report to Congress, “*Statistical Programs of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2016,*” pp. 4-5. See also Title V of the E-Government Act of 2002, known as the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA), Pub. L. 107-347, § 502(8).

<sup>5</sup> Foundational evidence includes aggregate indicators; population descriptions, trends, and correlations; and estimated effects of specific treatments that are not policy-specific, all of which inform our understanding of the social, economic, behavioral, and other conditions with which policies and programs interact.

<sup>6</sup> CIPSEA, Pub. L. 107-347, § 512.

<sup>7</sup> For additional detail about how agencies facilitate analytical work by others while also protecting privacy and confidentiality, see the white paper, *Privacy and Confidentiality in the Use of Administrative and Survey Data*. See also “Fiscal Year 2016 Analytical Perspectives of the U.S. Government,” pp. 72-73, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2016/assets/spec.pdf>.

In its statutory role coordinating the FSS,<sup>8</sup> described in further detail under “Role of the Office of Management and Budget in Federal Evidence-Building,” below, OMB issued a framework of fundamental responsibilities of principal statistical agencies in the design, collection, processing, editing, compilation, storage, analysis, release, and dissemination of statistical information.<sup>9</sup> The key features of this framework include:

- *Producing and disseminating relevant and timely data.* The core mission of the principal statistical agencies is to produce relevant and timely statistical information (i.e., foundational evidence) to inform decision-makers in governments, businesses, institutions, and households. This mission requires agencies to develop innovative statistical methods and data sources, allowing them to leverage the advantages and opportunities presented by the evolving data environment. Agencies must be knowledgeable about the issues and requirements of programs and policies relating to their subject domains and communicate and coordinate among agencies and within and across departments when planning information collection and dissemination activities.<sup>10</sup>
- *Ensuring credible and accurate statistical products.* Principal statistical agencies must apply sound statistical methods to ensure statistical products are accurate. Agencies achieve this mandate by regularly evaluating the data and information products they publicly release against the OMB Government-wide Information Quality Guidelines<sup>11</sup> as well as their individual agencies’ information quality guidelines.<sup>12</sup>
- *Conducting objective statistical activities.* It is paramount that principal statistical agencies produce data that are impartial, clear, and complete and that are readily perceived as such by the public. Agencies can maximize the objectivity of information released to the public by making information available on an equitable, policy-neutral, transparent, timely, and punctual basis.<sup>13</sup>
- *Protecting the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses.* Principal statistical agencies collect information under a pledge of confidentiality; it is therefore essential for the completeness and accuracy of statistical information for agencies to maintain and enhance the public’s trust in their ability to protect the

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<sup>8</sup> 44 U.S.C. § 3504.

<sup>9</sup> For additional discussion, see:

OMB, “Implementation Guidance for Title V of the E-Government Act, Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act of 2002 (CIPSEA),” 72 Fed. Reg. 115 (June 15, 2007).

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/fedreg/2007/061507\\_cipsea\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/omb/fedreg/2007/061507_cipsea_guidance.pdf).

OMB, “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1: Fundamental Responsibilities of Federal Statistical Agencies and Recognized Statistical Units,” 79 Fed. Reg. 231 (December 2, 2014). <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-02/pdf/2014-28326.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1,” pp. 71614-15.

<sup>11</sup> See Office of Management and Budget Information Quality Guidelines. (2002).

[https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/iqg\\_oct2002.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/iqg_oct2002.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> “Statistical Policy Directive No. 1,” p. 71615.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

confidentiality and integrity of the information provided. Providers of information, such as survey respondents, must be able to rely upon statistical agencies to uphold their confidentiality pledges and promises of intended use for exclusively statistical purposes.<sup>14</sup> Principal statistical agencies follow strict protocols to minimize direct access to identifiable information, even by their own staff and contractors. Before publishing or releasing any data, these agencies require expert review of any findings to protect against the inadvertent disclosure of confidential information.<sup>15</sup> Finally, these agencies must implement a comprehensive set of physical and technological security practices that protect data throughout their lifecycle.<sup>16</sup>

### **III. Program Evaluations and Federal Evaluation Offices**

Program evaluation involves the use of systematic scientific and social science methods for collecting, analyzing, and using valid information to answer questions about how a program or approach works and what it achieves. By rigorously and systematically evaluating which programs, program features, and interventions are most effective at achieving important goals and why, the Federal Government can improve its programs, scaling up the approaches that work best and modifying or discontinuing those that are less effective.<sup>17</sup> It is for these reasons that evaluating Federal programs to understand their impact, and developing the infrastructure within agencies to support a sustained level of high-quality evaluations, remains a Federal priority.<sup>18</sup>

The Federal Government generates program evaluations both directly, through evaluations that the government sponsors or procures, and indirectly by establishing evaluation requirements for program grantees. Similar to the work of statistical agencies, evaluations that are sponsored or initiated by the Federal Government may be implemented by Federal staff or, as is common with evaluations, by contractors or grantees. Funding for these evaluations may either be tied to the program that is to be evaluated or to the evaluation office. In cases where the government requires grantees to conduct program evaluations, the Federal Government may establish evaluation standards and/or provide technical assistance to grantees and their associated third-party evaluators. In such cases, the program office typically works with an evaluation office to establish these standards and provide technical assistance. However, the funds dedicated to evaluation may not be systematically tracked by the program office.

Evaluation Offices. Evaluation offices play a key role in building evidence, providing findings relevant to programs and policy that can aid in decision-making, planning, management, and oversight. Specifically, these offices facilitate a systematic analysis of programs and policies by applying appropriate social science methods to address evaluation questions tailored to agency needs. The results of these activities can ultimately shape Federal policy-making, budget priorities, policy decisions, and agency management practices.<sup>19</sup> A recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that Federal agencies with a

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., National Center for Education Statistics Standard 4-2-8, [https://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/std4\\_2.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/statprog/2002/std4_2.asp).

<sup>16</sup> 44 U.S.C. § 3554.

<sup>17</sup> See Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-13-17, "Next Steps in the Evidence and Innovation Agenda" (July 26, 2013), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/memoranda/2013/m-13-17.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> See "Fiscal Year 2016 Analytical Perspectives of the U.S. Government," p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> See "Fiscal Year 2016 Analytical Perspectives of the U.S. Government," pp. 76-77.

centralized evaluation authority reported greater evaluation coverage (i.e., full coverage of their performance goals and an increased likelihood of using evaluation results in management and policy-making). However, the GAO report also found that only half of the existing centralized evaluation offices reported having a stable source of funding.<sup>20</sup>

Many government functions (e.g., performance management, statistical functions) have a formalized statutory structure that enables interagency exchange of information and best practices, and coordination and collaboration on areas of common interest. Federal evaluation offices currently have no such formalized statutory mechanism for coordination, in part because evaluation functions have evolved more slowly and have historically had a variety of structures within agencies. Some evaluation offices were created by statute, such as the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance in the Institute of Educational Sciences at the Department of Education.<sup>21</sup> Others have emerged in response to demand for evidence to inform policy, such as the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) at the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

**Table 2.** Select Federal Offices or Components with Program Evaluation as their Predominant Function

Office or Component <sup>1</sup>	Department or Independent Agency	FY 2016 Enacted Budget for Statistical Activities (in millions \$) <sup>2</sup>
Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL)	U.S. Agency for International Development	20.0
Chief Evaluation Office (CEO)	Labor	30.7
National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE)	Education	19.9 <sup>3</sup>
Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)	General Services Administration	1.5 <sup>4</sup>
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF)	Health and Human Services	103.3 <sup>5</sup>
Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support (ORDES)	Social Security Administration	141.7
Office of Research and Evaluation (R&E)	Corporation for National and Community Service	11.9

<sup>1</sup> The listed office or subcomponent is a primary evaluation office within its parent department or agency. It may not be the sole evidence-building entity within its parent department.

<sup>2</sup> The FY 2016 enacted budget reflects those statistical activities that the office or component implements and thus may include funding that the office or component implements on behalf of other offices or components. It may not include other funds that the office or subcomponent receives for other evidence-building purposes, such as research, performance measurement or providing external support. It may also not include funds for evaluations that the office or subcomponent indirectly oversees.

<sup>3</sup> A portion of the FY enacted 2016 budget includes research being performed by the National Center for Education Research and the National Center for Special Education Research.

<sup>4</sup> OES has a number of externally-funded staff who work with agencies to use their own administrative data for rigorous evaluations.

<sup>5</sup> The FY 2016 enacted budget is for statistical activities implemented by ACF, including OPRE.

<sup>20</sup> Government Accountability Office Publication No. 15-25, "Program Evaluation: Some Agencies Reported that Networking, Hiring, and Involving Program Staff Help Build Capacity" (November 13, 2014), available at <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-25>.

<sup>21</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 9561.

Some departments and agencies have established centralized offices that are responsible for overseeing and implementing evaluations, and such evaluation work is their primary responsibility. Table 2 lists several of these offices. As discussed further in the next section, “Other Federal Evidence-Building Functions and Offices,” departments or agencies in other cases have tasked a centralized office with multiple activities related to building evidence, or have integrated these evidence-building activities into program implementation. The budget figures in the following tables cover the statistical activities that the office implements<sup>22</sup> and thus may include funding that the office implements on behalf of other offices or components. It may not include other funds that the office receives for other evidence-building activities such as research, performance measurement, or providing external support. It may also not include funds for evaluations that the office or subcomponent indirectly oversees.

Multiple evaluation offices have established agency-specific statements of evaluation policy, including ACF<sup>23</sup> and the Department of Labor.<sup>24</sup> These agency-specific statements have generated useful conversations and agreements within agencies about their evaluation-related practices and principles. While individual agencies have developed their own policies and practices for evaluation activities, establishing a common set of government-wide principles and practices could help to ensure that Federal program evaluations are more comparable, meet scientific standards, are designed to be useful, and are conducted and the results disseminated without bias or undue influence. Establishing these standards would be an important building block in furthering agencies’ capacity to routinely build and use high-quality evidence to improve program performance and help evaluation offices maintain standards for their programs across administrations and changes in personnel. While the process for developing such a set of standards is ongoing, a few fundamental principles emerge as common themes in established U.S. and international frameworks: rigor, relevance, independence, transparency, and ethics.<sup>25</sup>

#### **IV. Other Federal Evidence-Building Functions and Offices**

In addition to statistical programs and program evaluations, the Federal Government builds evidence through a variety of functions, including research, performance measurement, policy and program analysis, and the provision of external funding and other support.

##### **1. *Research***

Some Federally-funded research will ultimately be useful in designing formal evaluations of the effectiveness of Federal policies and programs.<sup>26</sup> Numerous Federal scientific agencies support research

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<sup>22</sup> As included in OMB’s report to Congress, “*Statistical Programs of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2016.*”

<sup>23</sup> Administration for Children and Families, *Evaluation Policy* (November 2012). <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/evaluation-policy>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, *U.S. Department of Labor Evaluation Policy* (November 2013). <http://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/EvaluationPolicy.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> See *Building the Capacity to Produce and Use Evidence*, FY 2017 Analytical Perspectives, p. 71, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2017/assets/ap\\_7\\_evidence.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2017/assets/ap_7_evidence.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.* at 74-75; “Fiscal Year 2016 Analytical Perspectives of the U.S. Government,” pp. 65-66, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2016/assets/spec.pdf>. For example, the Federal Government may both report on the level of employment among housing assistance recipients (research) and report on the success or failure of particular initiatives to raise the level of employment (evaluation).

that can directly inform government programs, and some may provide essential related information on trends, patterns, and conditions. Some Federal agencies have internal research offices that often respond to queries of interest to agency leadership and program operators. Research using Federally-held data may be conducted directly by Federal employees, by visiting external researchers who are brought within the agency on a temporary basis, or by external researchers. In the latter case, Federal agencies (e.g., the National Institutes of Health) still award contracts or grants and provide oversight of non-Federal researchers in academia, institutes, and other entities. Research offices can also partner with external researchers through the provision of data, modified with appropriate privacy and confidentiality protections, without financing the project. For example, the data licensing structure at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) allows approved researchers and research projects to access HUD administrative, survey, and evaluation data with privacy and confidentiality protections.<sup>27</sup> As discussed in the accompanying white paper, *Using Administrative and Survey Data to Build Evidence*, the research function can generate both foundational evidence and policy-specific evidence.<sup>28</sup>

## **2. Performance Measurement**

Performance improvement is an important Federal Government goal for every agency. With the passage of the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010,<sup>29</sup> each agency head is required to name a Performance Improvement Officer (PIO) to advise and assist agency leadership to ensure that its mission and goals are achieved through strategic and performance planning, measurement, analysis, regular assessment of progress, and the use of high-quality performance information and other evidence to improve results. This includes driving performance improvement efforts across the organization by using goal-setting, measurement, analysis and other research, data-driven performance reviews on progress, cross-agency collaboration, and personnel performance appraisals aligned with organizational priorities.<sup>30</sup> Some agencies have a dedicated performance improvement staff work with the PIOs to support data-driven reviews.<sup>31</sup> This staff can have analytic and evaluation capacity to strengthen the performance improvement culture and practices that improve outcomes and cost-effectiveness.<sup>32</sup> For example, the HUD Office of Strategic Planning and Management (OSPM) developed HUDStat, an agency-wide performance management process that fosters data-driven discussions of progress towards key agency outcome goals and the operational and policy actions needed to reach and surpass HUD targets.<sup>33</sup> It is modeled on real-world successes like CompStat in New York City and CitiStat in Baltimore. Through HUDStat, OSPM is leveraging data to improve performance management reporting and accountability, increase transparency, and create an outcome-focused culture.

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<sup>27</sup> See the white paper, *Privacy and Confidentiality in the Use of Administrative and Survey Data*, for additional discussion of the licensing model. See also the HUD Data License Agreement, available at [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/research/pdr\\_data-license.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/research/pdr_data-license.html).

<sup>28</sup> Policy-specific evidence is used to provide metrics and evaluate policy or program effectiveness.

<sup>29</sup> 31 U.S.C. § 1124 (a).

<sup>30</sup> OMB Circular A-11, "Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget," sec. 200.16, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/a11\\_current\\_year/a11\\_2016.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/a11_current_year/a11_2016.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.* at sec. 200.13.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> HUD Performance Management Division, [http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program\\_offices/spm/pmd](http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/spm/pmd).

### **3. Policy/Program Analysis**

Policy and program analysis use a variety of evidence types, such as research and evaluation, to inform proposed policies and program design, often summarizing results in a manner accessible to policy audiences. All Federal agencies employ some level of policy or program analysis in supporting decision-making. For example, in the Department of Education, the Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development (OPEPD) oversees planning, evaluation, policy development, and budget activities.<sup>34</sup> In support of this mission, OPEPD develops long term cost estimates of Federal student aid programs, using such data as the Pell Grant applicant file, the National Student Loan Data System, Census Bureau data, and a range of longitudinal surveys conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics.<sup>35</sup>

### **4. Public Health Surveillance**

Public health surveillance refers to the collection, analysis, and use of data to foster public health prevention. It is the foundation of public health practice. Actions informed by surveillance information take many forms, such as policy changes, new program interventions, public communications, and investments in research. Local, state, and Federal public health professionals, government leaders, public health partners, and the public are dependent on high quality, timely, and actionable public health surveillance data. For example, the National Healthcare Safety Network (NHSN) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in HHS is the Nation's most widely used healthcare-associated infection tracking system.<sup>36</sup> NHSN provides facilities, states, regions, and the Nation with data needed to identify problem areas, measure progress of prevention efforts, and ultimately eliminate healthcare-associated infections.<sup>37</sup> NHSN also allows healthcare facilities to track blood safety errors and important healthcare process measures such as healthcare personnel influenza vaccine status and infection control adherence rates.<sup>38</sup> In addition to NHSN, CDC is strengthening and modernizing the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS) to provide more comprehensive, timely, and higher quality data for public health decision-making.<sup>39</sup>

### **5. Providing External Support**

Many Federal programs execute their missions by administering grants for programs, services, research, or other activities to external entities, including states, tribes, local governments, non-profits or other community-based organizations, academic researchers, or research institutes. In some cases, Federal grant or other program rules require these entities to collect data, conduct evaluations, or integrate evidence-based practices into program implementation. These partners often have flexibility in the design and administration of programs to fit local needs and circumstances. Some Federal agencies provide guidance, technical assistance, or data infrastructure-related grants to support entities, such as states, in meeting their evidence-building requirements and expanding their evidence-building capacity. An example of an agency that executes its mission by administering funds is the Health Resources and

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<sup>34</sup> Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/opepd/index.html?src=oc>.

<sup>35</sup> See OMB's annual report to Congress, "Statistical Programs of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2016," pp. 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Healthcare Safety Network, <http://www.cdc.gov/nhsn/>.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System, <https://wwwn.cdc.gov/nndss/>.



Services Administration (HRSA) at HHS.<sup>40</sup> HRSA, in partnership with OPRE at ACF, provides information, technical assistance, and tools to its grantees and other stakeholders to advance evidence-based, evidence-informed, and innovative practices that have the potential to reduce health disparities. In particular, HRSA, ACF, and OPRE work closely to implement and provide evidence-building support for the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program, which is administered by HRSA, and the Tribal Home Visiting Program, which is administered by ACF.

Administrative data produced and maintained by state and local governments are an important source of information for generating evidence at the Federal level as well as through state and local analytic efforts. In many cases, Federal programs provide at least partial funding for these data systems and collection efforts and set data definitions and standards for at least some of the data fields collected and maintained in these systems. But as with Federal agencies, these non-Federal entities have varying capacities to create and use evidence to support decision-making.

## **6. Other Evidence-Building Offices**

Beyond the principal statistical agencies and evaluation offices, many other Federal programs conduct evidence-building activities. Some centralized offices conduct more than one evidence-building function, including descriptive statistics, program evaluation, research, performance measurement, policy and program analysis, public health surveillance, and external support. For example, in addition to conducting evaluations and demonstrations and providing statistical data like the American Housing Survey, the Office of Policy Development and Research at HUD also conducts research on priority housing and community development issues and provides reliable and objective data analysis to help inform policy decisions.<sup>41</sup> Table 3 lists select centralized Federal offices or components that perform multiple evidence-building functions.

Several Federal offices perform multiple evidence-building activities by integrating them more comprehensively within the direct program administration offices. This integrated approach frequently results in multiple small decentralized units or staff within an agency involved in building evidence.<sup>42</sup> For example, in addition to the public health surveillance work implemented by NHSN and NNDSS at CDC, the Program Performance and Evaluation Office (PPEO) sets standards and expectations for CDC-wide evaluation activities; delivers tools, technical assistance and resources to enhance evaluation efforts; and provides support for evaluation capacity-building across CDC programs.<sup>43</sup> The divisions within CDC have primary control and responsibility for planning and implementing evaluation activities for their programs in accordance with the PPEO-established standards. Table 4 lists select Federal offices that have dispersed evidence-building functions.

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<sup>40</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Early Childhood Development, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/home-visiting>.

<sup>41</sup> Office of Policy Development Research, About PD&R, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/about/pdrabout.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Government Accountability Office Publication No. 11-176, "Program Evaluation: Experienced Agencies Follow a Similar Model for Prioritizing Research," pp. 6-7 (January 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Program Performance and Evaluation Office, <https://www.cdc.gov/program/overview/index.htm>.

**Table 3.** Select Centralized Federal Offices or Components that Perform Multiple Evidence-Building Functions

Office or Component <sup>1</sup>	Department	FY 2016 Enacted Budget (in millions \$) <sup>2</sup>
Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality (CBHSQ), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)	Health and Human Services	156.2 <sup>3</sup>
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)	Health and Human Services	50.9
Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)	Defense	20.1
National Center for Statistics and Analysis (NCSA), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)	Transportation	43.1
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE)	Health and Human Services	18.9
Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development (OPEPD)	Education	1.9
Office of Policy and Support (OPS), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	Agriculture	39.9 <sup>4</sup>
Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R)	Housing and Urban Development	44.8

Notes: The evidence-building functions of the offices or components in this table include descriptive statistics, program evaluation, research, performance measurement, policy and program analysis, public health surveillance, and providing external support.

<sup>1</sup> The listed office or subcomponent is a primary evidence-building component within its parent department or agency. The listed subcomponent or component may not be the sole evidence-building entity within its parent department.

<sup>2</sup> The FY 2016 enacted budget reflects those statistical activities that the office or component implements and thus may include funding that the office implements on behalf of other offices or components. It may not include other funds that the office receives for other evidence-building purposes, like research, performance measurement, or external support. It may also not include funds for evaluations that the office or subcomponent indirectly oversees.

<sup>3</sup> The listed FY 2016 enacted budget is for statistical activities implemented by SAMHSA, including CBHSQ.

<sup>4</sup> The listed FY 2016 enacted budget is for statistical activities implemented by FNS, including OPS.

**Table 4.** Select Federal Offices or Components that have Dispersed Evidence-Building Functions

Component or Independent Agency	Department	FY 2016 Enacted Budget (in millions \$) <sup>1</sup>
Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)	Health and Human Services	165.8
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Excluding NCHS)	Health and Human Services	382.6
Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)	N/A	17.4
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	N/A	36.8
National Institutes of Health (NIH)	Health and Human Services	1035.1

Notes: The evidence-building functions of the components or independent agencies in this table include statistics, program evaluation, research, performance improvement, policy and program analysis, public health surveillance, and external support. These offices and components have highly decentralized evidence-building functions, and they are frequently implemented as a part of program administration, rather than through a centralized office.

<sup>1</sup> The FY 2016 enacted budget reflects those statistical activities that the office or component implements. It may not include other funds that the office or component receives for other evidence-building purposes, like research, performance measurement, or external support. It may also not include funds for evaluations that the office or subcomponent indirectly oversees.

Other Federal evidence-building is carried out by components executing a single evidence-building function, such as performance measurement, or is executed as a secondary function by a program agency or office whose primary function is program administration or regulatory enforcement objectives. While many departments and agencies have some capacity to undertake at least some of these functions, not every agency currently has the capacity to undertake them all.

## **V. Role of the Office of Management and Budget in Federal Evidence-Building**

Located within the Executive Office of the President, OMB serves the President in implementing the President's vision across the Executive Branch and carries out a variety of coordination and review functions related to evidence-building, including developing the President's Budget and supervising the administration of the enacted budget in Executive Branch agencies. Of direct relevance to the Commission, OMB, through the Administrator of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), is charged by statute with ensuring the quality of Federal information and coordinating the nearly 130 agencies and components that make up the FSS.<sup>44</sup> These missions are accomplished by ensuring budget proposals are consistent with system-wide priorities, establishing standards and guidance for data collection and dissemination, assessing agency compliance with those standards, coordinating interagency and international statistical activities, and reviewing Federal statistical programs. OIRA is also generally required to review and approve any Federal collection of information from 10 or more people.<sup>45</sup>

The U.S. Chief Statistician, located within OIRA, also promotes integration across the FSS by chairing the statutory Interagency Council on Statistical Policy (ICSP), which includes the heads of the 13 principal statistical agencies. The ICSP provides advice and counsel to OMB on relevant statistical matters and is a primary vehicle for coordinating cross-cutting statistical work and information exchange about agency programs and activities.<sup>46</sup>

The Evidence Team in OMB's Office of Economic Policy leads complementary efforts to better integrate evidence and rigorous evaluation in budget, management, operational, and policy decisions across government, including:

- Helping agencies make better use of already collected data;
- Promoting the use of high-quality, low-cost evaluations and rapid, iterative experimentation in addition to larger evaluations examining long-term outcomes;
- Adopting more evidence-based programs and policies across government; and
- Fostering agency evidence-building capacity, including for program evaluation, and developing tools to better communicate what works, for which populations, and in what contexts.<sup>47</sup>

In support of these efforts, the Evidence Team co-chairs the Interagency Council on Evaluation Policy.

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<sup>44</sup> 44 U.S.C. §§ 3503-3504.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Evidence and Evaluation, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/evidence>.

OMB's Management Team oversees and coordinates Federal policy on financial management, information technology (E-Government), performance and personnel management, and procurement. In this capacity, OMB oversees agency management of programs and resources to achieve legislative goals and Administration policy. In particular, the Office of Performance and Personnel Management (PPM) leads the effort to drive mission-focused performance gains across the Federal Government.<sup>48</sup> PPM coordinates the Administration's goal-setting and performance review process for agencies' high priority performance goals and guides agency strategic and annual planning, performance reviews and performance reporting.<sup>49</sup>

OMB also provides government-wide leadership on privacy, confidentiality, and data security.<sup>50</sup> Recently, the President issued an Executive Order establishing a Federal Privacy Council,<sup>51</sup> the principal interagency forum to improve the privacy practices of Federal agencies and entities acting on their behalf and support the work of agency privacy officials. Its responsibilities include developing recommendations for OMB on Federal Government privacy policies and requirements; coordinating and sharing ideas, best practices, and approaches for protecting privacy and implementing appropriate privacy safeguards; assessing and recommending how best to address the hiring, training, and professional development needs of the Federal Government with respect to privacy matters; and performing other privacy-related functions, consistent with law.<sup>52</sup>

## **VI. Summary of Themes**

Federal evidence-building activities aim to produce and use a broad range of survey and administrative data to inform policy across the Federal Government. Principal statistical agencies are a strategic resource in this effort because they build evidence as their primary mission, strengthened by a statutory and policy framework designed to produce and disseminate relevant and timely information; conduct credible, accurate, and objective statistical activities; and protect the trust of information providers by ensuring confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses. Federal evaluation functions increase understanding of how programs and approaches work, generate evidence of program effectiveness, and use experimentation to test new policies and new approaches to program delivery. Although Federal evaluation offices have developed office-specific policies and practices, work on a coordinated overarching framework for coordination, collaboration, and standard principles and practices has begun. Currently, however, there is not a statutory framework for these government-wide efforts, and more can be done. Many other Federal programs support the building and use of evidence, often in concert with another primary mission such as program administration. Federal agencies also support evidence-building activities of states, tribes, territories, local communities, external researchers, and other parties. Taken together, the many decentralized elements of the Federal evidence-building approach yield important information for policy-makers, but there are opportunities to bolster evidence-building capacity.

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<sup>48</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Performance & Personnel Management, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/performance>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> See 44 U.S.C. § 3504; 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

<sup>51</sup> Establishment of the Federal Privacy Council, 81 Fed. Reg. 29 (February 12, 2016) <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-02-12/pdf/2016-03141.pdf>.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*