Reviewing What Works—Program Effectiveness Tool

Description

This tool is the second step in the Reviewing What Works process to assess the relative effectiveness of existing programs. Program managers use this tool to report on the effectiveness of their program and its contribution to common goals across a policy area (such as reducing homelessness). They should respond to the questions in clear, concise narrative (roughly 200 words per response) and attach additional details as appendices. One program effectiveness tool should be completed for each program on the policy area's policy strategy tool. An interagency panel on the specific policy area considers the information in this form to assess the program's effectiveness relative to other federal programs in that area.

Program: ____________________ **Reference #:** ____________________

Agency: ____________________ **Bureau:** ____________________

Author: ____________________ **Approved by:** ____________________ **Date:** ____________________

A. Program description and goals

1. Describe the program and when it was launched.

2. What have the program's annual costs for federal government been for the last four years?

3. Lay out specific policy outcome goals (such as ending homelessness among veterans in five years) the program is contributing to, referring to the information on the policy strategy tool.

4. Are there any other outcome goals the program seeks to accomplish? If so, list them briefly. Include only goals that relate to what the program is seeking to achieve for the American people. Do not include expected outputs or expenditures.

B. Program performance

5. Is the program working?

5A. Describe in brief how the program works. How does it seek to alter the ways of working or behavior of stakeholders or beneficiaries to achieve the outcome goals above?

5B. What evidence do you have that the program is effective at achieving the goals above? If possible, describe the precise contribution you believe that the program has made to the outcomes (such as reduced chronic homelessness by 2,500 across 17 states) and over what time period.

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5C. How confident are you that the contribution of the program mentioned in question 5B does not result from other programs or tax and regulatory measures? Why?

5D. Has there been an independent evaluation of the program and its effectiveness? If so, what was the methodology? In particular, was there a randomized control trial or similarly rigorous independent evaluation?

6. How does the program work alongside other programs?

6A. In addition to programs listed on the accompanying form, what other federal, state, local, and other programs seek to accomplish similar outcomes? What tax and regulatory measures seek to accomplish these outcomes?

6B. How does the program leverage or coordinate with other programs to minimize duplication and maximize collective impact?

7. What does benchmarking show about the costs and effectiveness of the program?

7A. Have you benchmarked the costs and effectiveness of the program with other programs that seek to achieve similar aims (including at the federal, local, or state level)? If so, what does the benchmarking show? How can you be sure that the comparison is fair and does not compare different types of beneficiaries or effectiveness (for example, short-term unemployed with long-term unemployed)?

7B. Have you benchmarked the costs and effectiveness of the program internally or across different geographical areas that the program operates in, across different groups the program works with, or using different program models? Do you have a strong understanding of the drivers of differences in cost and effectiveness? What have you done to ensure that the program maximizes learning from these cost comparisons?

8. Is the program well run?

8A. Has the program been implemented in line with the expected timeline? If not, describe the nature of delays and whether any delays are likely in the future.

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8B. Does the agency responsible for administering the program have the necessary staff, skill base, and IT infrastructure? Discuss any issues the program is experiencing in these areas and how you are dealing with them.

8C. Who is responsible for implementing the program at the state or local level? Are they fully committed to and working toward the program's goals?

8D. Does the program have an up-to-date risk management plan? How was it developed? And has it been good at predicting what might go wrong and how to mitigate risks?

8E. How accurate have the program's estimates of likely costs been over the last four years?

8F. Have there been any issues with obligating funds? Does the program display a year-end peak in spending?

8G. Are procurement costs incurred to date in line with expectations? Are the necessary contract staff and review structures in place to ensure that procurement costs are minimized and terms are closely monitored?

8H. How does the program seek to minimize fraud? What instances of fraud have occurred and what has been done to manage the risk in the future?

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9. Has the program sought to learn from experience?

9A. How do you monitor whether the program has any unintended consequences or whether there are ways to cheat the system? What evidence is there of unintended impacts or ways to cheat the system? What have you done in response to them?

9B. How does the program seek to improve? Is there a way for beneficiaries of the program or those who are involved in its administration to submit feedback and suggestions for improvement? How has the program been reformed to take account of this feedback?

9C. How does the program keep abreast of developments at the state level, internationally, or in the private sector that might help to identify ways the program could be improved? Has the program been reformed and improved in light of this learning?

9D. Is the data being collected an accurate and timely reflection of the program's performance toward achieving the outcomes? To the extent possible, are you coordinating data collection with other programs?

9E. Discuss the process for evaluating the program's progress toward achieving its goals. How often do performance assessments take place and to whom is progress reported? What improvements have been made to the program as a result of the performance assessment process?