

Reviewing What Works—Program Evaluation Tool

Description

This tool is the third step in the Reviewing What Works process to assess the relative effectiveness of existing programs. An interagency panel uses this tool to evaluate the program's effectiveness compared to other programs in the same policy area (such as reducing homelessness). The panel evaluates each program listed on the policy strategy tool, probing individual program managers on the contents of the program effectiveness tool. The panel then assesses each key effectiveness factor on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is very weak and 10 is very strong), and provides a brief explanation of each assessment. One program evaluation tool should be completed for each program on the policy area's policy strategy tool. The final program evaluation tool, the validated program effectiveness tool, and the completed policy strategy tool are submitted to the relevant agency, the OMB, and Congress for consideration during the annual budget and appropriations process.

Program: _____ Reference #: _____

Agency: _____ Bureau: _____

Policy area: _____ Interagency panel: _____ Date: _____

A. Program description and goals

1. Describe the program and when it launched.

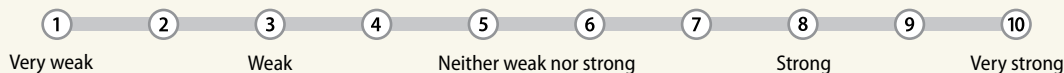
2. What has the program's annual costs for federal government been for the last four years?

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

4. Are there any other outcome goals that 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?



Weak program performance

Unsuccessfully seeks to alter ways of working or behavior of stakeholders or beneficiaries; no evidence that the program is effective, or that the program contributes to observed outcomes; no independent evaluation of the program's impact, or research shows no positive effect

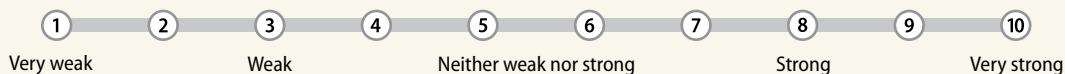
Strong program performance

Successfully alters ways of working or behavior of stakeholders or beneficiaries; reliable evidence the program is contributing to observed outcomes; impact validated by rigorous independent evaluation

Reasons for evaluation

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6. How does the program work alongside other programs?



Weak coordination with other programs

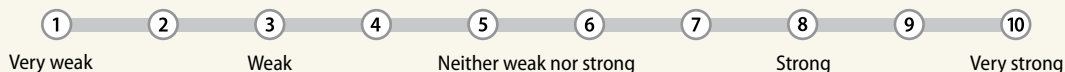
High duplication of activities or services with other federal programs; program does not leverage or coordinate with similar programs

Strong coordination with other programs

Little or no duplication of activities or services with other federal programs; where overlap exists, program leverages and coordinates with similar programs whenever possible

Reasons for evaluation

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



Weak cost effectiveness

No attempt to benchmark the costs and effectiveness of the program with other programs, or costs are excessive compared to similar programs with similar beneficiaries; no attempt to benchmark costs internally (across geographical areas, program groups, etc); weak understanding of drivers of cost and effectiveness, with no attempt to learn from comparisons

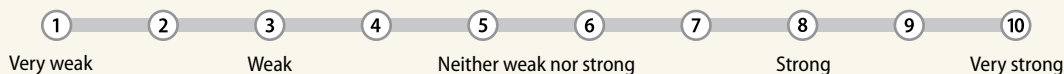
Strong cost effectiveness

Costs are reasonable relative to similar programs with similar beneficiaries; managers have a strong understanding of drivers of cost and effectiveness, and have taken actions to learn from comparisons

Reasons for evaluation

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8. Is the program well run?



Weak program management

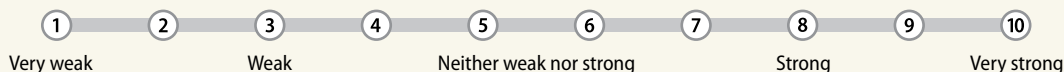
Significant delays in implementation; administering agency lacks necessary staff, skill base, or IT infrastructures, with insufficient plan to fix the problem; those in charge of implementing the program not committed to and working toward the program's goals; risk management plan either does not exist or is insufficient; actual costs much higher than initial cost estimates; significant issues with obligating funds; spending much higher near the end of the year relative to the rest of the year; procurement costs substantially higher than expected, or contract staff an review structures insufficient; high instance of fraud with insufficient strategy to mitigate these risks in the future

Strong program management

Implemented in line with the expected timeline; All necessary staff, skill base, and IT infrastructures are in place, or still on pace to attain them as expected; those in charge of implementing the program fully committed to and working toward the program's goals; strong risk management plan that has proven effective at predicting mitigating risks; actual costs less than or consistent with initial cost estimates; no issues obligating funds, with reasonably consistent spending throughout the year; procurement costs less than or consistent with expectations; necessary contract staff and review structures in place; low instance of fraud with a strong strategy to mitigate these risks in the future

Reasons for evaluation

9. Has the program sought to learn from experience?



Weak learning process

No effort to monitor or respond to unintended impacts or ways to cheat the system; no way for beneficiaries or administrators to submit feedback and suggestions for improvement; managers do not keep abreast of relevant developments at the state level, internationally or in the private sector; insufficient data collected, or data do not reflect program performance toward achieving outcomes; no effort to coordinate data collection with similar programs; insufficient process for evaluating program progress

Strong learning process

Unintended impacts and ways to cheat the system closely monitored; effective steps have been taken to respond to unintended consequences and cheating; system in place for beneficiaries or administrators to submit feedback and suggestions for improvement, and managers take feedback into account; managers keep abreast of relevant developments at the state level, internationally or in the private sector, and improve the program accordingly; accurate and timely data being collected that reflects program performance toward achieving outcomes; coordinates data collection with similar programs where possible; effective process for evaluating program progress, and improvements are made based on the results

Reasons for evaluation