

Reviewing What Works

Budgets will be tight in Washington for the foreseeable future, and the federal government urgently needs a systematic process to evaluate program effectiveness. Otherwise, there is a risk that budget cuts fall on programs that work well while programs that achieve little are left untouched.

The **Reviewing What Works** tools set out in our report “The Secret to Programs that Work” provide a way for the federal government to evaluate programs across a policy area such as homelessness.

How do the tools work?

There are **three** tools:

- A **policy strategy** tool defines common goals across a policy area and lists programs that contribute.
- A **program effectiveness** questionnaire that program managers should fill out for every program across a policy area. This includes 25 detailed questions.
- A **program evaluation** questionnaire completed by a neutral party that summarizes and assesses the effectiveness of a program.

Six key questions to ask of all existing programs

- What **goals** across government is the program contributing to?
- What **impact** does the program have on achieving those goals?
- Does the program work well with other programs to **maximize collective impact** and **minimize duplication**?
- How **cost effective** is the program compared to others?
- Is the program **well run**? Have there been delays or cost overruns?
- Does the program **learn** from experience and improve in response?

(Turn over for a full list of questions)

Step 1

Form an interagency panel for a policy area (such as homelessness)



Step 2

Interagency panel defines goals across the policy area and lists programs using the Policy Strategy tool



Step 3

Program managers fill out the Program Effectiveness tool for each program



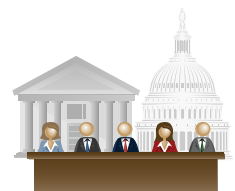
Step 4

Interagency panel considers all Program Effectiveness tools and fills out Program Evaluation tools for each program



Step 5

Decision makers in executive and legislative branch use information to decide which programs merit expansion, reform, or elimination



Reviewing What Works: Key Questions

A: What goals across government is the program contributing to?

- 1. Clear understanding of the outcome goals that the program is contributing to ☐
- 2. Goals are a high priority for the government ☐

B: Is the program working?

- 3. Program successfully alters ways of working or behavior of stakeholders or beneficiaries ☐
- 4. Reliable evidence the program is contributing to observed outcomes ☐
- 5. Impact validated by rigorous independent evaluation ☐

C: How does the program work alongside other programs?

- 6. Little or no duplication of activities or services with other federal programs ☐
- 7. Where overlap exists, program leverages and coordinates with similar programs whenever possible ☐

D: What does benchmarking show about the costs and effectiveness of the program?

- 8. Costs are reasonable relative to similar programs with similar beneficiaries ☐
- 9. Managers have a strong understanding of drivers of cost and effectiveness, and have taken actions to learn from comparisons ☐

E: Is the program well run?

- 10. Implemented in line with the expected timeline ☐
- 11. All necessary staff, skill base, and IT infrastructures are in place, or still on track to be in place as anticipated by timeline ☐
- 12. Those in charge of implementing the program are fully committed to and working toward the program's goals ☐
- 13. Strong risk management plan that has proven effective at predicting mitigating risks ☐
- 14. Actual costs less than or consistent with initial cost estimates ☐
- 15. No issues obligating funds, with reasonably consistent spending throughout the year ☐
- 16. Procurement costs less than or consistent with expectations ☐
- 17. Necessary contract staff and review structures in place ☐
- 18. Low instance of fraud with a strong strategy to mitigate these risks in the future ☐

F: Has the program sought to learn from experience?

- 19. Unintended impacts and ways to cheat the system closely monitored ☐
- 20. Effective steps have been taken to respond to unintended consequences and cheating ☐
- 21. System in place for beneficiaries or administrators to submit feedback and suggestions for improvement, and for managers take feedback into account ☐
- 22. Managers keep abreast of relevant developments at the state level, internationally, or in the private sector, and they improve the program accordingly ☐
- 23. Accurate and timely data being collected that reflects program performance toward achieving outcomes ☐
- 24. Coordinates data collection with similar programs where possible ☐
- 25. Effective process for evaluating program progress, and improvements are made based on the results ☐