

# Evaluation in the Age of Evidence-Informed Policymaking: Opportunities, Challenges & Paths Forward



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# Is this The Golden Age?

- “Evidence-Based Policymaking uses the best available research and information on program results to guide decisions at all stages of the policy process and in each branch of government... By taking this approach, governments can:
  - Reduce wasteful spending;
  - Expand innovative programs; and
  - Strengthen accountability.”
    - **The Pew Charitable Trusts**



# The key questions

- What has driven the rise of Evidence-Based Policymaking? Is it hype or reality?
- What challenges must it overcome?
- What does this mean for evaluators?

# We all want to change the world\*

- Desire to improve policymaking is not new
  - Many reforms in addition to evaluation have sought this goal
    - PPBS, zero-based budgeting, performance budgeting, Performance-Stat, LEAN...
- Each requires output & outcome reporting
- Based on expectation that policymakers will use this info
- \*The Beatles of course

# Competing reforms' impact were limited

- Reforms focused on outputs, not outcomes
- Data was often poorly communicated
- Limited mechanisms to use information in policy process
- Policymakers made little use of data

# Factors supporting rise of EBP

- Critical mass of *What Works* data
- Policymaker interest across political spectrum (for differing reasons)
- New mechanisms for using data in budgeting
- New evaluation tools



# Critical mass of evaluations

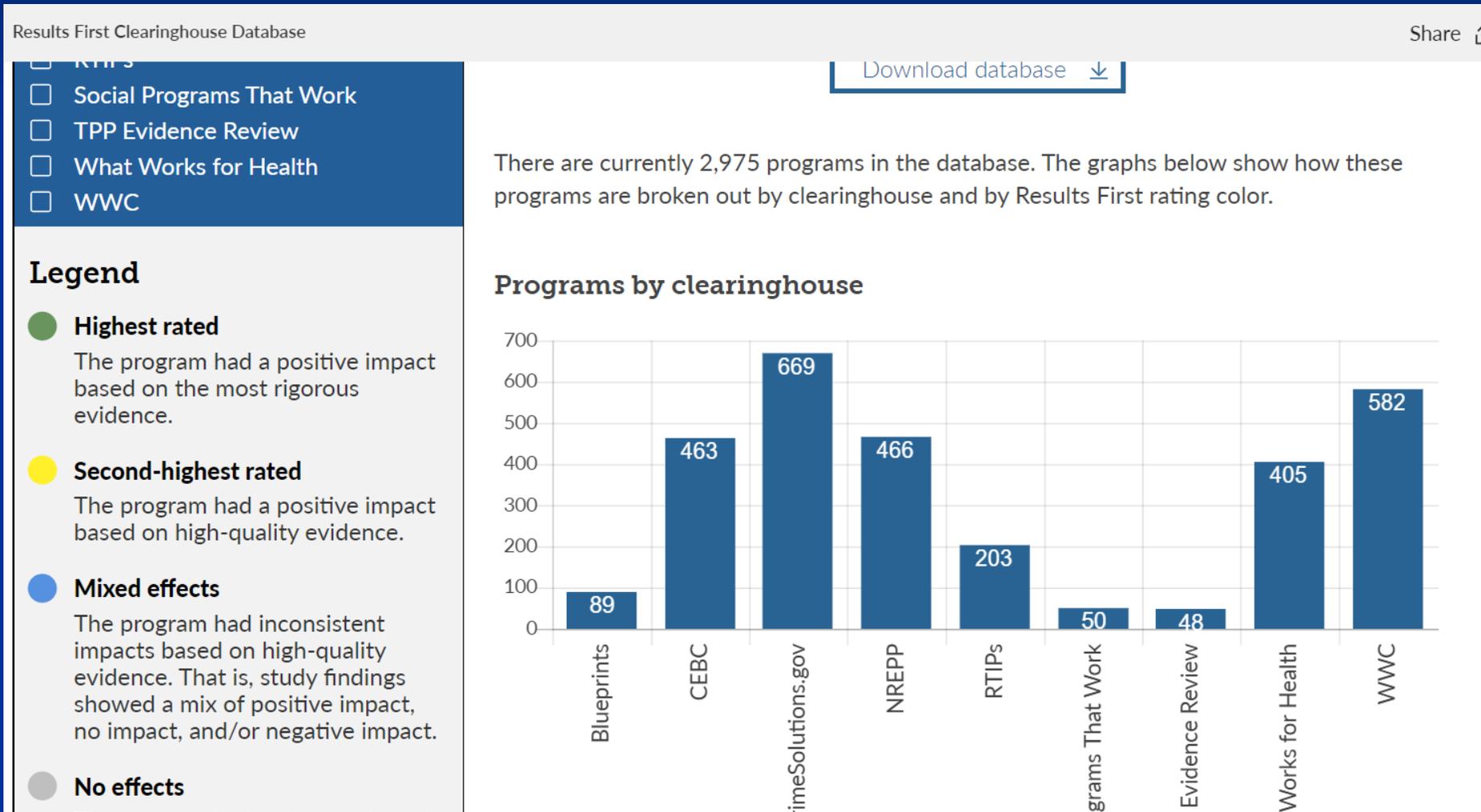
- We've done tons of evaluations over the years
  - Finding them was always a challenge for policymakers
- Research clearinghouses are aggregating & curating findings to reach conclusions about programs' effectiveness
- Recent study found over 50 clearinghouses



# Research Clearinghouses

- Run by governments, nonprofits & universities:
  - **US:** *What Works Clearinghouse, CrimeSolutions.gov, etc.*
  - **Nonprofit:** *California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, What Works in Re-Entry, etc.*
  - **Academic:** *Include Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development, Campbell & Cochrane Collaboratives*
  - **International:** *UK's What Works Centres – address crime, health care, aging, etc.*
- One ring to rule them all: ***Results First Clearinghouse***  
aggregates 9 clearinghouses

# Results First Clearinghouse Database



# Clearinghouses are a killer ap

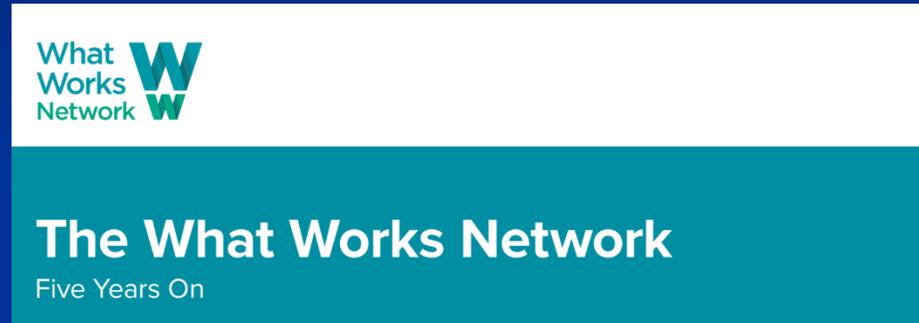
- We should consult clearinghouses during our studies
  - What are the key elements in program design?
  - What methods have been used to evaluate it?  
(design, instruments)
  - What is known about its effectiveness?
  - What effect sizes has it achieved across outcomes?

# Policymaker support

- Diverse policymakers are supporting EBP
- Bipartisan support for US Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission & Foundations for 2018 Evidence-Based Policymaking Act
- Both 'red' and 'blue' US states implementing EBP approaches
  - Conservatives to eliminate ineffective programs; progressives to identify & expand effective ones

# International Initiatives

- UK's *What Works Network* identifies effective programs, supports evaluations & works with national & local policymakers



- EU has implemented EBP initiatives
- Australia has taken EBP steps, particularly in public health & education
  - NSW considering steps

# New budgeting approaches

- Funding preferences for EBPs
  - Governments targeting funds to programs meeting evidence requirements; often ratchet up mandates over time
  - Private foundations increasingly doing same
- Used by US govt, all states
  - Example – Oregon initially required 25% of criminal justice funding to be EB, growing to 50% in 2 years and 75% after 4 years

# Social Impact Bonds

- Many governments experimenting with approach
- Programs funded by private capital & repaid only if outcome targets are met
- Results are uneven; likely will have limited use

# WSIPP Benefit-Cost Model

- Based on meta-analysis; computes programs' effect sizes applied to state-specific population & cost data
- Allows return on investment comparisons in 11 policy areas
- Many governments customizing approach
  - Over 30 US states & local governments; UK; NSW is testing

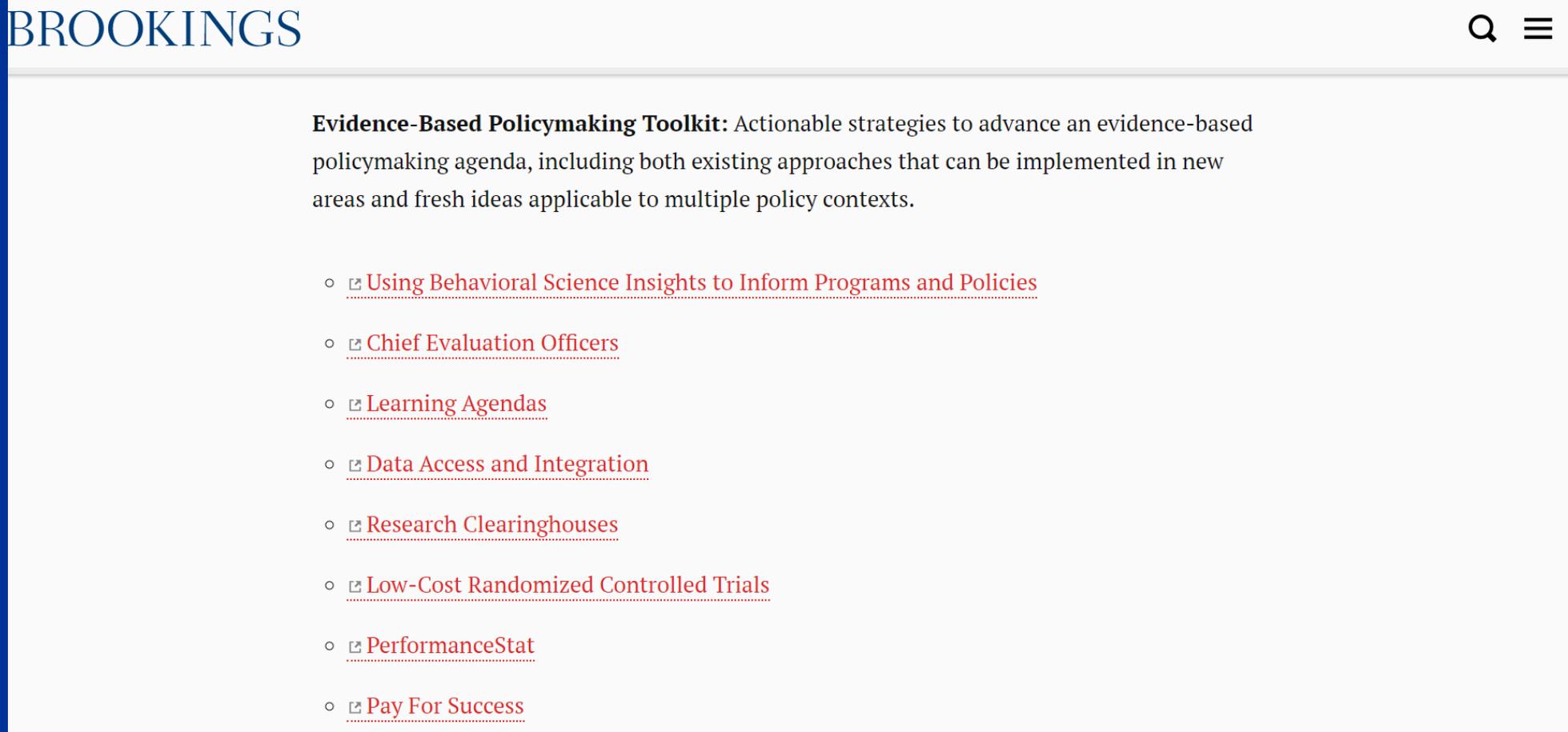
# WSIPP Benefit-Cost Results

Program name <small>(click on the program name for more detail)</small>	Date of last literature review	Total benefits	Taxpayer benefits	Non-taxpayer benefits	Costs	Benefits minus costs (net present value)	Benefit to cost ratio	Chance benefits will exceed costs
Employment counseling and job training (transitional reentry from incarceration into the community) <b>UPDATED</b>	Aug. 2016	\$45,330	\$13,358	\$31,972	(\$2,476)	\$42,854	\$18.31	89 %
Offender Reentry Community Safety Program (for individuals with serious mental illness)	Apr. 2012	\$70,943	\$24,273	\$46,670	(\$37,369)	\$33,574	\$1.90	96 %
Circles of Support and Accountability	Nov. 2016	\$29,355	\$7,122	\$22,234	(\$3,977)	\$25,378	\$7.38	93 %
Correctional education (post-secondary education)	Jul. 2016	\$25,151	\$6,867	\$18,284	(\$1,270)	\$23,881	\$19.80	100 %
Drug Offender Sentencing Alternative (for persons convicted of drug offenses)	Nov. 2016	\$23,174	\$6,885	\$16,289	(\$1,657)	\$21,517	\$13.98	99 %
Vocational education in prison	Jul. 2016	\$18,196	\$5,040	\$13,156	(\$1,522)	\$16,674	\$11.95	97 %
Case management ("swift, certain, and fair") for drug-involved persons	Nov. 2016	\$15,321	\$4,457	\$10,864	\$388	\$15,709	n/a	99 %
Electronic monitoring (probation)	Dec. 2014	\$14,002	\$3,958	\$10,044	\$1,159	\$15,161	n/a	93 %
Mental health courts	Oct. 2016	\$17,532	\$5,084	\$12,449	(\$3,160)	\$14,373	\$5.55	95 %
Intensive supervision (surveillance and treatment)	Dec. 2016	\$13,444	\$3,984	\$9,460	(\$827)	\$12,617	\$16.25	100 %
Reentry courts	Aug. 2016	\$17,227	\$5,247	\$11,981	(\$5,016)	\$12,211	\$3.43	95 %
Inpatient or intensive outpatient drug treatment during incarceration	Nov. 2016	\$13,284	\$3,708	\$9,576	(\$1,312)	\$11,972	\$10.12	98 %
Therapeutic communities (in the community) for individuals with co-occurring disorders	Nov. 2016	\$16,688	\$4,924	\$11,764	(\$5,179)	\$11,509	\$3.22	65 %
Drug Offender Sentencing Alternative (for persons convicted of property offenses)	Nov. 2016	\$12,834	\$3,932	\$8,903	(\$1,657)	\$11,177	\$7.74	71 %

# EBP Resources Are Available

## ■ Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative

- Toolkit of key EBP components: <https://www.evidencecollaborative.org/toolkit>



The screenshot shows the Brookings website header with the logo on the left and search and menu icons on the right. The main content area features a heading for the 'Evidence-Based Policymaking Toolkit' followed by a descriptive paragraph and a list of eight toolkit components, each with an external link icon and a red underline.

**BROOKINGS** Q ☰

**Evidence-Based Policymaking Toolkit:** Actionable strategies to advance an evidence-based policymaking agenda, including both existing approaches that can be implemented in new areas and fresh ideas applicable to multiple policy contexts.

- [Using Behavioral Science Insights to Inform Programs and Policies](#)
- [Chief Evaluation Officers](#)
- [Learning Agendas](#)
- [Data Access and Integration](#)
- [Research Clearinghouses](#)
- [Low-Cost Randomized Controlled Trials](#)
- [PerformanceStat](#)
- [Pay For Success](#)

# EBP Resources Are Available

- **Pew MacArthur Results First Initiative, guides & case studies:**  
<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2018/12/18/evidence-based-policymaking-resource-center>

## Evidence-Based Policymaking Resource Center

A collection of resources and promising state and county examples

ARTICLE December 18, 2018 Topics: [Fiscal & Economic Policy](#) & [U.S. State Policy](#) Projects: [Pew-MacArthur Results First](#) Tags: [Local policy](#) Read time: 1 min

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Read Mode

In 2014, the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative developed a framework for state and county leaders interested in evidence-based policymaking. This framework consists of [five key components](#) to help governments use rigorous evidence and data to guide policy and funding decisions.

### DOWNLOADS

[Key Elements of Evidence-Based Policymaking \(PDF\)](#)



# New Evaluation Tools Are Available

- Big Data has potential to transform rigorous evaluations & identify *What Works*
- Matching client data across administrative databases can cut costs of tracking outcomes & randomized control trials
  - E.g., Florida Education Data Warehouse

# The Challenges - *We have all been here before\**

- The EBP field faces critical challenges:
  - Political distrust of data
  - Leaks in the evidence pipeline
  - Replication failures

*\*Crosby Stills & Nash*

# Political Polarization

- EBP assumes policymakers want to make more rational choices
  - This is debatable these days
- Some political leaders seek to control information & suppress inconvenient facts
  - Evaluation units have been thrown under bus, downsized or eliminated

# Leaks in Evidence Pipeline

- *What Works* limited to programs that are rigorously evaluated
  - Most aren't, particularly impacts of multiple programs
- Much government activity is process-oriented and *What Works* doesn't apply
- Thus, EBP scope is limited

# Leaks in Evidence Pipeline

- Many evaluations aren't used by Clearinghouses
  - Often cannot be located (provided only to funding source)
  - Reports exclude critical information needed for meta-analysis
  - Analysis are too flawed – errors in constructing control/comparison groups, underpowered designs

# Leaks in Evidence Pipeline

- Clearinghouses hard to locate & use
  - No central listing & lack resources to publicize work
  - Often don't report 'What Doesn't Work'
  - No standard nomenclature
    - Highest rated programs variously designed as 'Model Plus'; 'Model', 'Effective' '1' on scale of 1-5; 'Strong', 'Positive Impacts'

# The Planet-killer: Replication Failures

- Many EBPs fail when replicated in new settings
  - US Teen Pregnancy projects failed to deliver positive outcomes in 66% of replication trials
- Strikes at heart of EBP – if identified programs don't work in new settings, what's the point?
  - Also threat to evaluation, as shows external validity to be weak

# Replication Failures

- Problem results from at least 2 problems:
  - Treatment models often aren't implemented with fidelity
  - Program models exclude elements that contribute to positive results
    - Services received by clients from other sources (*What Works* in combination)

# Paths Forward

- Plug leaks in evidence pipeline, advocating for
  - Wider report distribution, including open evaluation portals
  - Create standards for research clearinghouse including uniform nomenclature and links to other sites
  - Raise level of evidence for designations

# Paths Forward – Where do we go now?\*

- Ensure studies document program elements & external services – what works in combination
- Ensure studies assess fidelity issues
- Support Big Data warehouses
  - \*Gun & Roses

# Paths Forward

- Train students with broader analysis toolset, addressing
  - Big Data applications
  - Low-cost RCT methodologies
  - Uses of research clearinghouses
  - Benefit-cost modeling of outcomes
  - Knowledge of policy environment & effective communication, networking & negotiation skills

# Paths Forward

- Get involved with & support evidence-based policymaking initiatives that promote evaluation use in policy & budget processes



# Paths Forward

- Get involved with & support evidence-based policymaking initiatives that promote evaluation use in policy & budget processes
- Get ready for the day when evaluators are recognized for the value we provide to society!!!

# Why Not The Evaluator Movies?

