

# Strengthening the Field of Evidence-Informed Policymaking

## Brief Overview of Feedback to Date

### November 29, 2018

The goal of the Hewlett Foundation's Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIP) strategy is that governments systematically use evidence to improve social and economic policies over time. No single set of actors or funder can achieve this ambitious goal alone. Nor can they make significant progress by simply filling a series of individual gaps in evidence or capacity to use it.

Therefore our EIP grantmaking has aimed to help solve practical problems in the near term in a way that creates lasting institutions, networks, practices, and knowledge that can address similar problems in the long term. This includes employing some nuts-and-bolts tools for fortifying the field like helping strengthen institutions, providing catalytic support to new initiatives, making connections to foster learning and collaboration, and working with other funders. These are things the Hewlett Foundation EIP team can do through our own grantmaking, and we will continue to do. But are there opportunities to go beyond these nuts-and-bolts approaches to strengthening the field?

In August 2018 we gathered EIP leaders and champions to inquire if there is anything we can do together as a broader community to improve the conditions for evidence to be used in government decision-making in a more systemic and routine way. Is there anything we, as a global community of evidence practitioners and champions, could do to further strengthen the field and reduce the systemic constraints that we all individually face? The convening held at the Bellagio Conference Center yielded four ideas toward this end.

We and the other participants have consulted with more than a hundred people (at varying levels of detail) about these ideas since August, seeking candid feedback and fresh ideas about how to advance the field. This document synthesizes the major take-aways from the feedback received to date, and describes some possible next steps.

## Major take-aways from the consultations

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1. With some notable exceptions, it is not intuitive for individual experts or representatives of organizations to think of themselves as part of a field with a shared goal of evidence-informed policymaking. Rather, people and their organizations tend to affiliate with more specific communities – be they defined by sector, type of evidence (e.g. impact evaluation or official statistics), geography, or type of intervention they practice (e.g. do policy research, conduct capacity-building of government officials). Producing and sharing knowledge about EIP, developing common frameworks, advocating broadly for the integration of analysis into government decision-making seems peripheral to many; to a few, it seems detrimental.
2. While there was a diversity of responses, the synthesis view suggests aversion to new globally coordinated initiatives to promote evidence use. For example, the idea of a high-level commission that would develop a common framework for conceptualizing the field, or a coordinated global effort to solicit government commitments for evidence use, were regarded by many as likely to have more costs than benefits. Although a few people saw value in aligning on fundamentals, more thought this work would be counter to individual institutions' incentives, too divorced from political realities, too unlikely to succeed, or too associated with the privileged values of elites. Rather, there

appears to be more appetite for mid-level approaches such as leveraging existing platforms for global commitments (such as the Open Government Partnership) to integrate EIP principles, and pursuing discrete entry points to advance the evidence agenda within specific sectors, policy processes or capacity building efforts.

3. Many observed that actors in the EIP community are not particularly good at describing the importance of evidence in achieving societies' aims. While respondents agree that no single set of messages will work everywhere, many saw value in creating a better narrative, including a messaging framework that could be tailored to resonate with political elites and with citizens in various contexts. The idea of public engagement campaigns caught the attention of some, but most respondents viewed this skeptically, seeing the idea as unrealistic or potentially contributing to the politicization of evidence
4. Quite a few respondents found the idea of helping institutionalize the use of evidence through routine government mechanisms to be tractable and appealing. Within this, there seems to be most appetite for a modest and non-directive approach: more learning about existing government mechanisms and how they work, possibly through case studies or a repository of resources for use by government officials and those that support them.
5. Several of the funders included in the consultation expressed interest in being part of an ongoing conversation about the challenges and opportunities around EIP. It is now clear that there is a set of funding organizations interested in light coordination, at the very least are interested in sharing learning, keeping tabs on each other's strategies and grantmaking, and maybe eventually co-creating some type of coordinated effort.

## Potential Next Steps

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Based on the feedback we received on the original Bellagio ideas, and the new ideas respondents shared during consultations, the following seem to merit additional discussion and feedback:

1. Developing a messaging playbook to describe and highlight the value of EIP-related work. The messaging playbook could be designed to help evidence champions and allies advocate for institutionalizing EIP practices. Communications professionals – such as global communications firms – could lead this work. The messages would be informed and tested in a diverse range of contexts, and the messaging playbook would contain advice about how to further tailor to fit the context.
2. Documenting and learning about how governments already institutionalize evidence use, and exploring ways to strengthen or expand these efforts. A useful starting point could be an inventory and/or analysis of the existing government mechanisms to institutionalize the use of evidence (which range from government entities such as evaluation units to policies and practices, such as incorporating evidence use into civil service evaluation criteria). It may also be worth landscaping what routine decisions/processes governments use (e.g. audits), and opportunities to incorporate more evidence into this.
3. Exploring ways to strengthen governments' commitment to evidence-informed policy and concrete work to advance EIP within existing initiatives such as Open Government Partnership action plans

and/or global summits. (The Open Government Partnership provides governments an opportunity to work with civil society organizations to make pledges and create action plans designed to make them more inclusive, responsive and accountable).

4. Exploring how to influence existing global funds like GAVI, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, the Global Partnership for Education, and others could provide both resources and incentives for systems of evidence production and use. For example, GAVI offers significant funding for health systems strengthening; it's possible that some of these funds could support governments' work to strengthen their own systems and capacities to use evidence.
5. Encouraging bilateral and multilateral donors that fund major government programs to support those governments in building the governments' own capacity to use evidence to deliver quality programs. This could complement or replace traditional models of technical assistance under which the donor's staff or consultants provide advice.
6. Helping governments use evidence to deliver on a specific priority, in way that showcases the power of evidence, unlocking demand, building capacity, and/or increasing political support. For example, IDinsight's partnership with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Monitoring and evaluation is designed not only to help the president deliver on a key campaign promise before his term ends, but also to help the nascent Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation develop and prove its value.
7. Rallying the evidence community – or independent civil society voices- to speak out against threats to evidence-informed policy, ranging from the public cherry-picking or misuse of facts, to ways that donors undermine governments' efforts to build their own evidence systems.
8. Sharing examples of previous campaigns for evidence by citizens and activist groups around evidence (e.g. by Evidence for Democracy and Sense about Science) with audiences in low and middle income countries, to assess if there is appetite and capacity for similar work.
9. Convening a funders' circle of donors interested in advance evidence-informed policy. This would likely start with sharing information and learnings, and might evolve into more active collaborations.

## Questions for discussion

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1. To what extent do the takeaways summarized above dovetail with your own consultations, or personal reflections, on the original Bellagio ideas?
2. Do you (or those you've consulted with) have other promising new ideas?
3. Among the ideas above, what do you see as the most promising, considering both the potential for impact and where we are likely to gain traction? The least promising and/or most risky?
4. If we move forward with these ideas, what opportunities or risks should we bear in mind? Are there examples of similar ideas succeeding (or failing) should we learn from?
5. Are you interested in actively helping advance any or all of these ideas? If so, what are you most excited about working on, and what role would you like to play?
6. Who else should we engage with on these ideas?