Advisory Committee on Data for Evidence-Building

Perspectives from Federal Evaluation and Performance Improvement Officers on Administrative Data Needs

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Introduction

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Getting lucky

- Evaluations of programs that serve people need:
  - Patience
  - Longitudinal data
- Surveys are:
  - Expensive
  - Suffer from non-response risk
- Administrative data can be superior:
  - Currency of the information,
  - Completeness of coverage,
  - Cost.
- Getting Lucky
  - Getting administrative data is always a new effort for each study
Example 1. Moving To Opportunity

- Randomized Control Trial. Impact of neighborhood on poor families
- Three surveys: Baseline; 5-years; 12-years
  - Safer Neighborhoods and Big positive health effects for the adult women
  - No employment effects on adults or education effects on children. End of story.
- A series of lucky events changed the story.
  - A bureaucrat allowing academic use of the MTO data after the study ended
  - A consent form for unlimited data matching with no end date
  - Two Harvard professors having coffee
  - Access to IRS data
Example 2. NDNH Data

- Longitudinal data on employment and earnings is evaluation gold.
- National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) is a gold mine.
- This mine takes a lot of paperwork
  - An IAA (a contract) to pay HHS
  - MOU that needs a lot of signatures
- The gold is not perfect
  - Deidentified data set
We need to make it easier to get a few variables from a few places

- Employment – if and when employed, hours, pay
- Education – academic achievement
- Income – amount and source
- Health – insurance coverage and amount used
- Housing – if subsidized renter, if homeowner
- Justice – arrests and incarcerations
North Star for Program Evaluation

*Using administrative data to understand the impact of federal public programs on the target population(s)’ outcomes of well-being so that –*

- Individuals, families, businesses, and communities benefit from government investments intended to improve their conditions.
- Policymakers can enact effective policies and programs.
- Taxpayers and the public appreciate strong government stewardship over public programs.
- Other funders (philanthropy/private investors) can align their resources to maximize public benefit.
Evaluation with Administrative Data

*To understand the impact* of federal public programs on the target population(s)’ outcomes of well-being.

- Comparable individual-level information on both ‘Treatment’ and ‘Comparison’ group members.
- Longitudinal data structure spanning pre-program, program, and post-program time frames.
Evaluation with Administrative Data

To understand the impact of federal public programs on the target population(s)’ outcomes of well-being.

• Breadth of evaluation reflecting breadth of the federal investment.

• Comparable data to capture variations in program model, fidelity, and environment.
Evaluation with Administrative Data

To understand the impact of federal public programs on the target population(s)' outcomes of well-being.

Large, representative samples in order to-

• Detect impacts on subgroups.
• Increase generalizability of findings.
• Expand social equity in who benefits from research.
Evaluation with Administrative Data

To understand the impact of federal public programs on the target population(s)' outcomes of well-being.

Linkable outcome information across vertical and horizontal data collection systems:

• Education, Housing, Employment, Wages & Earnings, Health, Criminal Justice, Self-Sufficiency.
Barriers (1 of 2)

What’s impeding our progress in the status quo

In general, it’s *process* not technology

- Poorly understood patchwork of statutory barriers to sharing/linking
  - OMB is working on a list of those barriers as we speak
- Risk aversion among GCs and other critical gatekeepers
  - Compounded by turnover among deciders in key roles
- Hyper-vigilance among data stewards to ensure high-quality use
- Inconsistent expectations and practices for informed consent
Barriers (2 of 2)

What’s impeding our progress in the status quo

Sometimes, it’s data-ish ...

- Concerns about sharing data assembled via probabilistic matches
- Inconsistencies in metadata and metadata standards, within and across agencies
- Concerns about sharing linked, deidentified data at the individual level
  - Reproducibility ... how does “open science” work in this context?
Opportunities
A Longer-Term Vision (1 of 2)

- A common federal evidence-building requirement follows this pattern:
  1. Congress or an agency institutes a new program;
  2. Annually, they’ll expect quarterly monitoring of performance targets;
  3. In two years, they want some form of interim report describing the program’s implementation; and
  4. In five years, they want a final report, perhaps focused on:
     - Outcomes, which we typically interpret as some form of non-causal analysis;
     - Effectiveness, which we typically interpret as requiring causal analysis.
Imagine: Congress launches a program requiring ED to distribute funds to colleges to support students and institutions during a national emergency.

Challenge: What data collection and analysis system would provide ED timely performance, outcomes, and efficacy data when:

- Grantees are 7000 colleges and universities across the country
- Beneficiaries are 21 million college students nested within those colleges
- Performance and short-term outcome data for students (e.g., persistence, completion) lives in privacy-protected student information systems at colleges
- Long-term outcome data for students (e.g., benefit use, employment, wages) lives multiple potential systems, including state UI systems and federal wage and/or benefit systems.

Extending this example: What if this wasn’t a one-time program, but one that continued in perpetuity—and so you wanted this example to operate, effectively, automatically?
Opportunities

Quick wins to accelerate ACDEB’s progress

- Smooth administrative barriers through the development of:
  - Standard operating procedures;
  - Common data-sharing agreements; and
  - Common consent forms that protect privacy and support reuse.

- Test procedures on matching activities that leverage high-value data sets with known/knowable statutory barriers (e.g., LEHD, IRS, NDNH).
Evaluation & Performance Administrative Data Needs

• Both require that administrative data are:
  - High-quality
  - Linkable
  - Timely
  - Comparable across different data collection systems
  - Longitudinal
  - Comprehensive
Performance-Evaluation Logic Model

Performance Management
Assess whether activities produce desired outputs; and meet service level standards; are a dashboard to keep operations on track.

Evaluation
Assess whether outputs produce desired outcomes/impacts; assess if the system achieved the intended benefit.
About Performance Management

• Uses performance metric data to track implementation of the **Strategic Plan**
  • Commerce Examples: jobs retained; new jobs supported; $ exports facilitated; cycle time for patents; time from lab to commercialization; accuracy of hurricane tracking
  • Need updates three times a year

• Uses data for dashboards that help **steer operations**
  • Commerce Examples: mix and volume of intended impacts; cycle time; customer satisfaction; leading indicators (deals in progress); backlog
  • Need monthly/quarterly updates

• Uses data for **budgeting and planning**
  • Commerce Examples: economic impact; supply vs demand; cost trends; cost/benefit of alternatives; compliance with service standards
  • Need annual information (early)
Challenges Regarding Statistical & Admin Data
(most can be addressed through evaluation)

• Attribution – If a location is reaching its economic development goals did a Commerce project influence the progress

• Point of Failure – If a program is underachieving, is it because of a flaw in the theory of change; problems with the delivery system; the level of resources provided; an externality

• Timeframe – If impacts are expected in 2 to 5 years (or more), how can policies and funding be assessed short term

• Leading Indicators – If the relationship between leading and lagging indicators are based on assumptions, following the data could lead to poor decisions
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In sum

• We have used administrative data successfully
• It can help us answer critical questions that original data can’t do, and it can answer the questions faster and cheaper
• Many of the barriers are administrative, and that is the low-hanging fruit for this group; once those are solved there are some technological barriers to resolve
• This opens up the data for more people to answer questions around programs; the data needs to be more of a public good to accelerate learning
• Solving the problems will help us steer more accurately toward the impacts we are trying to create and result in more cost-effective impacts