Evidence Portfolios for State Agencies
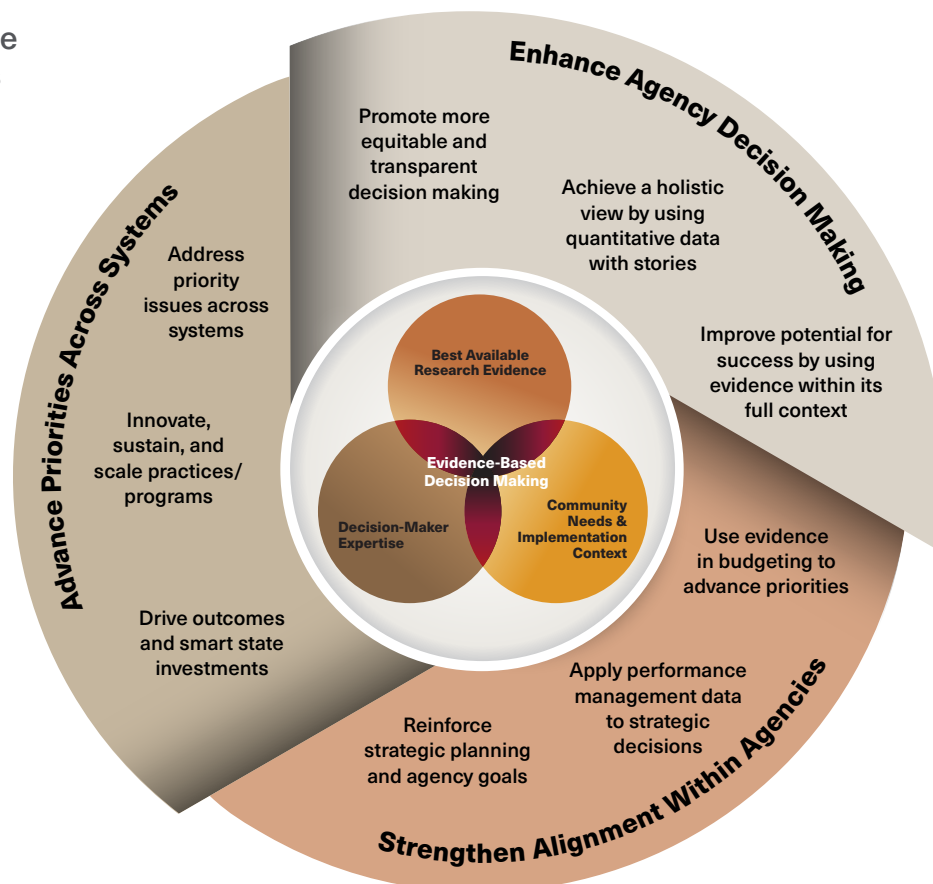
Background

The Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) collaborates with executive branch agencies to develop the Governor's annual budget proposal, which it submits to the legislature's Joint Budget Committee every year on November 1. Colorado is a leader in using data to inform decision making and smart state investments. To accelerate progress and build on the good work that has come before, the Colorado Lab released a *5-year Vision for Evidence-Based Decision Making (EBDM)* in state government (Nov. 2022). The evidence portfolio process was developed to further implementation of this vision by supporting agencies in using and building evidence as part of the state budgeting process.

The Value of Evidence Portfolios

Evidence portfolios can support state agencies in applying evidence to drive outcomes, leveraging data to inform learning and action, and building evidence on what works and for whom, while promoting innovation. Figure 1 shows the benefits of evidence portfolios for agencies and systems.

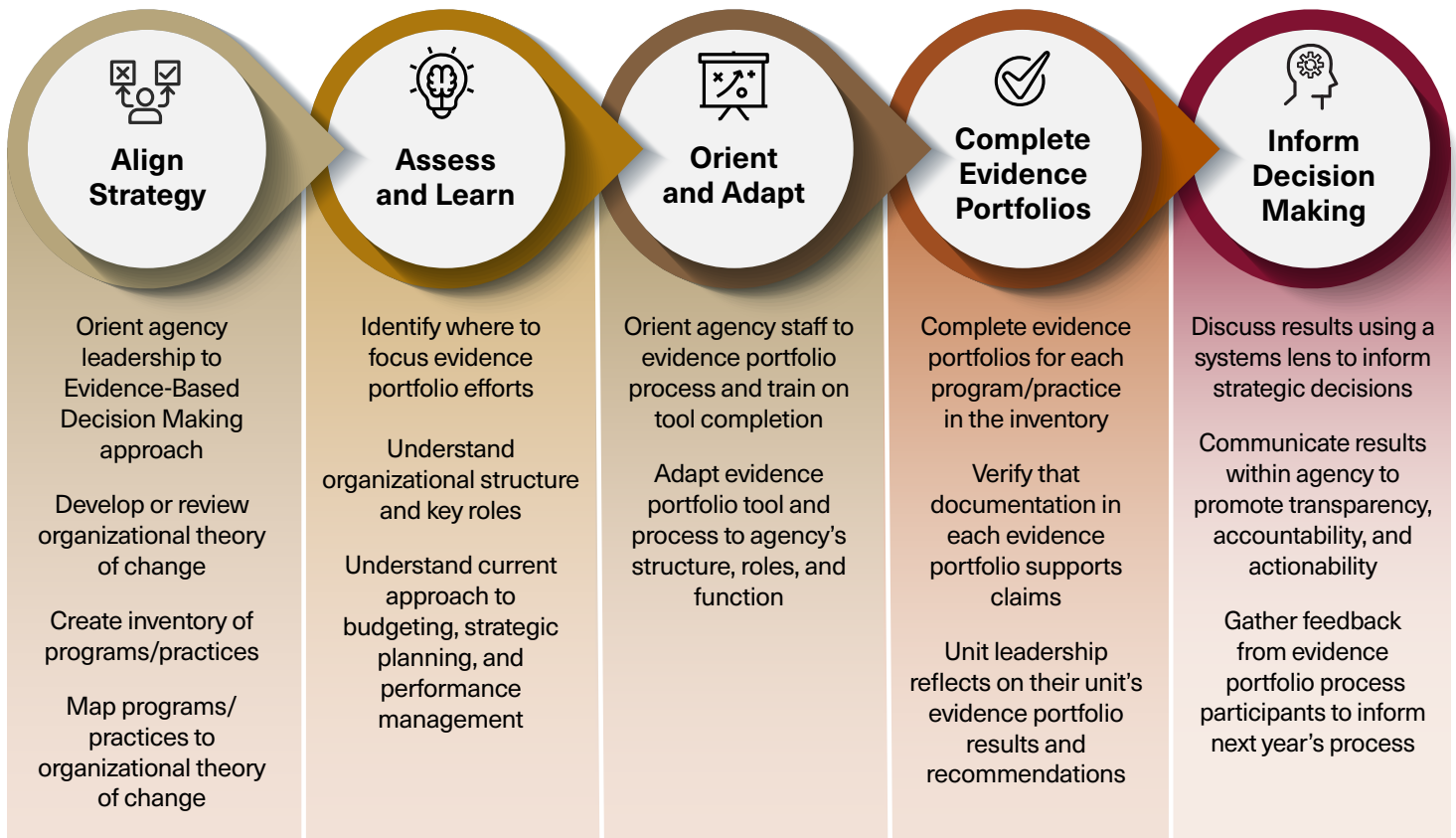Figure 1. Evidence Portfolio Benefits

Evidence Portfolio Principles and Structure

The evidence portfolio process is anchored in the following principles:

- *EBDM:* the process will align with the **defining features** of a successful EBDM culture.
- *Proactive:* the process will help state agencies take a proactive approach to innovating, sustaining, and scaling practices/programs and infrastructure needs.
- *Learning Mindset:* the process will inform state agencies as learning organizations, to facilitate decision making today and tomorrow.
- *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI):* the process will embed EDI considerations into the process and make transparent how the decision may affect different communities.

Evidence portfolios use a set of criteria tied to the three major domains in evidence-based decision making: best available research evidence, community needs and implementation context, and decision-maker expertise. The tool intentionally blends guiding questions for reflection with a numeric scoring approach. Figure 2 illustrates the process an agency undertakes to develop evidence portfolios and apply insights for action.

Figure 2. Evidence Portfolio Process

Align Strategy

Orient agency leadership to Evidence-Based Decision Making approach

Develop or review organizational theory of change

Create inventory of programs/practices

Map programs/practices to organizational theory of change

Assess and Learn

Identify where to focus evidence portfolio efforts

Understand organizational structure and key roles

Understand current approach to budgeting, strategic planning, and performance management

Orient and Adapt

Orient agency staff to evidence portfolio process and train on tool completion

Adapt evidence portfolio tool and process to agency's structure, roles, and function

Complete Evidence Portfolios

Complete evidence portfolios for each program/practice in the inventory

Verify that documentation in each evidence portfolio supports claims

Unit leadership reflects on their unit's evidence portfolio results and recommendations

Inform Decision Making

Discuss results using a systems lens to inform strategic decisions

Communicate results within agency to promote transparency, accountability, and actionability

Gather feedback from evidence portfolio process participants to inform next year's process

To have your agency participate in the evidence portfolio process, contact admin@coloradolab.org.

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