Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

Colorado Lab Newsletter
December 2023

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Evidence-Based Decision-Making
Building on the national movement to make it the norm for policy decisions to be informed by data, the Colorado Lab is promoting the use of evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) in state government—from creating to actualizing a shared vision. EBDM draws on the best available research evidence, decision-makers' expertise, and community needs and implementation context. It is recognized as an important means to align roles and responsibilities across state government and drive smart state investments and meaningful outcomes. In this month's newsletter, we feature some of the work underway to build an EBDM culture in Colorado and to share this leading-edge work with state and national partners.

CDEC Stimulus Funding Evidence-Building

The Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) received over $700 million in federal and state stimulus funding in 2020-2021, with resources supporting 60+ activities that address pandemic recovery needs and advance the department's strategic goals to strengthen and grow Colorado's early childhood sector.

Nearly half of the stimulus-funded activities are being evaluated, with the Colorado Lab coordinating and overseeing the efforts of multiple evaluation teams through the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub. The Hub approach offers a number of benefits, including reduced administrative/financial burdens for the

state, aligned evaluations that are anchored to a shared vision, and findings that are translated into actionable insights for policy and practice. Additionally, the Colorado Lab provides strategic visioning and consultation to CDEC beyond the stimulus-funded activities.
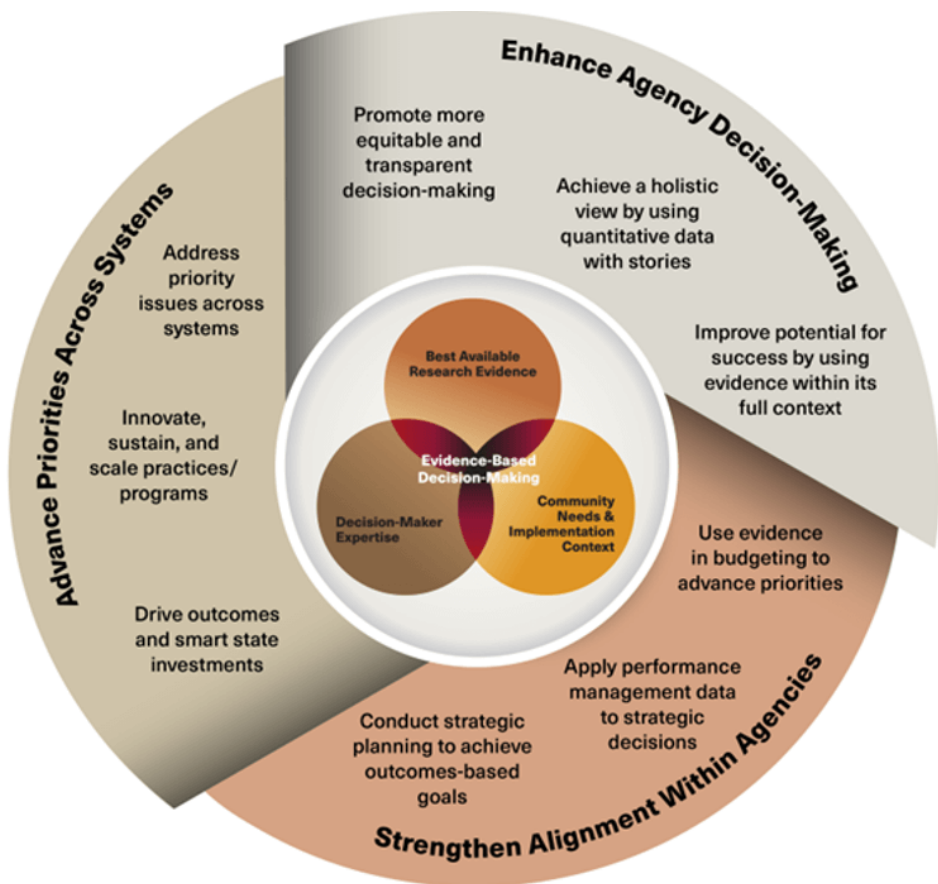
The first major output for the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub is a series of **evidence-building briefs**. Using the Evidence-Based Decision-Making (EBDM) framework, the briefs provide insights from the initial phases of evaluation work to inform policymakers as they head into the 2024 legislative session. Additional insights and findings will be shared as the stimulus-funded activities and their respective evaluations continue to unfold in communities across the state.

Learn more about CDEC's lead role in using EBDM for stimulus-funded activities and the Department's ongoing strategic planning, performance management, and budgeting—highlighted in the next article. Please reach out to **Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf** with questions or to learn more about the **Colorado Lab's Early Childhood Evaluation Hub or the evidence briefs**.

Evidence Portfolio Process for Budget and Policy Decisions

A newly created evidence portfolio process supports the consistent application of Evidence-Based Decision-Making (EBDM) by state agencies during budget and policy decision-making. State agencies can use this tool to apply evidence to drive outcomes, leverage data to inform learning and action, and build evidence on what works and for whom, while promoting innovation.

As described in the **latest post** in our EBDM blog series, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC) was the first state agency to use this tool. The Colorado Lab worked together with CDEC to develop the evidence portfolio process and tailor it to their specific needs. Colorado Lab Director, Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein notes, "We simultaneously worked with CDEC to create organizational theories of change. These support CDEC leadership and staff in aligning strategic planning with performance management and budgeting. This positions CDEC to use the evidence portfolio process to make the case for the budget priorities they put forward to the Governor's Office, as well as identify priorities for ongoing evidence-building."

CDEC has begun the work of expanding use of the evidence portfolios beyond stimulus funding to include all Department programs and practices and the full budget.

In addition, the Department of Local Affairs will begin to adapt and pilot the evidence portfolio process within the Division of Housing (DOH). With funding from the Governor's Office of State Planning and Budgeting, DOH will initiate the evidence portfolio process in State Fiscal Year 2025, with capacity-building support from the Colorado Lab starting soon.

To learn more about EBDM evidence portfolios please contact Dr. Courtney Everson.

Colorado Lab Presents on EBDM at NCSL National Conference

In October, Drs. Courtney Everson and Kristin Klopfenstein presented on the development and initial implementation of the Evidence-Based Decision-Making (EBDM) approach in Colorado to state legislators, budget officers, and impact officers from 10 states. The invitation from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to present to their Governing for Results Network in Nashville, Tennessee, provided a timely opportunity to share learnings, resources, and the strong efforts of early champions.

"It was so encouraging to meet folks from other states who are taking a similar approach to driving culture change around data use. We will be following up with legislative and executive branch staff from several

Drs. Kristin Klopfenstein (left) and Courtney Everson (right) at the NCSL Governing for Results Network in Nashville, TN.

states to compare notes and learn from one another to accelerate progress," said Dr. Klopfenstein. "The variety of political perspectives in the room confirmed that the efforts Colorado is taking to integrate EBDM into the everyday work across state government is non-partisan and something everyone can get behind."

During the two-day convening, the Colorado Lab shared about the strategic goals and activities necessary to move the EBDM vision into action over the next five years. One of the key learnings was how critical independent leadership is to realizing the vision in ways that accelerate current progress and push the envelope on what's possible. "Participants were impressed by Colorado's ability to move beyond 'just tools' for evidence-based budgeting, to promoting culture, structure, and capacity for EBDM in all aspects of the work. This includes day-to-day decisions around program improvement to strategic decisions around partnership priorities," Dr. Everson said. "These discussions

Dinner for conference attendees at the Country Music Hall of Fame led to much discussion about the diversity of musical preferences among participants. Kristin and Courtney also broadened their fashion horizons touring the museum before dinner.

underscored the value of a non-partisan policy and research lab to facilitate aligned change across state government."

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