ARPA Evidence and Evaluation Guide

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and related compliance and reporting guidance place a heavy emphasis on investing in evidence-based interventions and generating a policy knowledge base through rigorous program evaluation. To assist state agencies in complying with federal requirements, the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) has created a procedural framework to assist state agencies in integrating robust evidence and learning agendas into their ARPA-funded programs.

Performance Indicators

All ARPA projects, regardless of expenditure category, are required to set and track performance indicators over the lifetime of the project. These metrics will help program managers, federal and state leaders, and the public identify concrete benefits from ARPA expenditures. Agencies are encouraged to set performance indicators that include both output and outcome measures, are disaggregated by demographic data (race, ethnicity, gender, income, and other relevant categories), and reflect a focus on equity and inclusion. Logic models are useful tools to assist project managers define appropriate performance indicators.

Projects under certain expenditure categories have mandatory performance indicators, see Pages 29 and 33 of the Compliance and Reporting Guidance. To ensure compliance with federal guidance, performance indicators will be reported quarterly in the Project and Expenditure Report.

Federal Compliance Guidelines

In addition to ongoing performance indicators, the U.S. Treasury has selected additional expenditure categories that are required to report on their use of evidence. These projects are required to report on:

- The dollar amount of total project spending that is allocated towards evidence-based interventions

  AND/OR

- Whether a program evaluation is being conducted.

If ARPA funds are used to create a new or pilot program, administrators are expected to design the intervention using existing evidence-based models of service delivery. If ARPA funds are used to fund a pre-existing program, administrators are expected to compare and adjust interventions as needed to align with existing evidence-based models.

When there is no existing evidence base for the planned intervention, there is an opportunity to generate additional policy learning by conducting a program evaluation. If the evaluation shows that the intervention meets the standard of strong or moderate evidence (as described below), program funding will be counted towards the total dollar amount of project spending allocated towards evidence-based interventions.

Review the SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance Appendix 1 for a list of expenditure categories that require use of evidence reporting.

Determination of Evidence Base

Under federal definitions, a program is considered "evidence-based" for the purposes of ARPA reporting if the project has strong or moderate levels of evidence, which can be met by fulfilling one of the following three options:

- One experimental study (strong evidence base), OR
- One quasi-experimental study (moderate evidence base), OR
- Two non-experimental studies (moderate evidence base).

Experimental studies require tracking both a control and experimental group that have been randomly assigned. Quasi-experimental studies mimic random control trials by comparing two groups, one receiving the intervention and a matched comparison group, through well-designed statistical analysis. Non-experimental studies include pre-and-post studies of the group receiving the intervention through surveys or regression analysis, implementation studies that conduct a process evaluation of the intended program, and cost-benefit analysis studies.

A program can qualify as evidence-based by matching its model with evaluations of similar program models found in evaluation clearinghouses or through its own program evaluation. Projects with only one non-experimental study meet the standard for preliminary evidence base and cannot be counted toward project spending allocated towards evidence-based programs. ARPA investments in educational programs require compliance with a modified standard for use of evidence per Appendix 2 of the SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance.

OPM ARPA Evidence and Evaluation Procedures

OPM proposes the following framework to assist commissioners and project leads to incorporate federal guidance on use of evidence into ARPA-funded programs.

For individual projects <u>without</u> evidence reporting requirements (all expenditure categories):

1. *Performance indicators must be included with allotment request.*
2. *Logic models are strongly encouraged but not required.* Logic models help program managers define concrete policy goals, understand how project elements contribute towards policy objectives, and build targeted program evaluation plans.

For individual projects <u>with</u> evidence reporting requirements:

1. *Create logic model and set performance indicators.*
3. *Determine if program is evidence-based.* For new programs, you may use project clearinghouses to design the program according to evidence-based practices. For existing programs, you may use evidence clearinghouses to find and compare program to similar models.
4. *Determine if program is good candidate for program evaluation*. Programs with no substantially similar comparison programs with a strong or moderate evidence base may be a good candidate for a program evaluation.
5. *Create an implementation and/or evaluation plan(s).* If project relies on external program evaluations of similar models to justify evidence-based determination, project manager will create a plan to ensure implementation of ARPA program aligns with successful external model. If the project is selected for a program evaluation, project manager will create a program evaluation plan. The OPM ARPA Evidence and Evaluation Unit can assist in the development of implementation and evaluation plans.
   a. The ARPA Evidence and Evaluation Unit is anticipated to be operational by Fall 2022.
6. **Within 90 days of receiving allotment**, *share with OPM ARPA administrators an evidence narrative.* The narrative will include: (i) a program logic model, (ii) use of evidence findings for each program, including evidence-based determination (strong, moderate, preliminary) and brief description of study(ies) used

to justify evidence-based determination (iii) total dollars allocated towards evidence-based programs, and (iv) implementation and/or evaluation plan(s).

Logic Model Template

Resources

"Resources," sometimes referred to as inputs, include the programmatic resources that the recipient/sub-recipient have at their disposal as well as the resources that are needed to carry out the program. Common types of resources include program budget, personnel, data systems, physical space or equipment, existing training programs or implementation manuals, contractors and consultants, technical assistance, community partnerships and relationships, and other categories specific to your program or organization. The "Resources" section answers the questions: **What do we have? What do we need?**

Activities

"Activities" refer to the day-to-day operations needed to run the program. These activities will be highly individualized, not only by industry or project area, but by each specific program. For example, an employment program may conduct outreach and marketing, job training, childcare and transportation services, individualized coaching, and placement activities. Including more details into the activities section will make it easier to determine appropriate output and outcome metrics to measure your progress. The "Activities" section answers the question: **What are we doing?**

Outputs

"Outputs" include metrics you select to track the activities that are occurring as part of the program. Outputs are generally straightforward quantitative metrics that can be easily tracked and measured. For an employment program, outputs may track number of applications received for program, number of individuals enrolled in training, number of collective hours spent job seeking each month, etc. The "Outputs" section answers the question: **How do we measure and track our program activities?**

Outcomes

"Outcomes" include metrics you select to track the impact of your program. Outcome metrics typically are more difficult to collect than output measures (sometimes requiring both quantitative and qualitative data) but more accurately represent the success of a program. For an employment program, outcomes may measure job retention 6 months out of the program or hourly income increase over previous employment income. The "Outcomes" section answers the questions: **What are we trying to achieve? How will we know if we've achieved it?**

Note: This is an example template only. Other logic models may include additional sections, including space for long-term vs short-term outcomes, details on additional external factors that may impact the success of your program, or an explicit Theory of Change. You can find other examples here, here, and here (slides 43-46). A logic model is a tool to assist in program planning and outcome tracking, not a prescribed format, and should be adapted to meet your needs.

Example: After School Tutoring Program

Target Population: *50-60 at-risk youth from XX school district based in Qualified Census Tract XX grades 6-8. Students will be selected base on criteria including low grades, disciplinary record, and teacher recommendation.*

Resources

Budget: $XX

- *$XX ARPA*
- *$XX General Fund*

XX university students as tutors/mentors

- *Tutors should be in at least 3rd/4th year in an education or related degree program*

Relationships with xx school district administrators

Access to "xxx Nonprofit's" evidence-based tutoring curriculum and training for tutors

One program administrator at xx% time

Activities

After-school tutoring for each enrolled student

- *1 hour, 2x week*
- *4 month duration (1/2 of one school year)*

Mentor and/or group socializing activities

- *2 hours, 1x month*
- *4 month duration (1/2 of one school year)*

Training for tutors/mentors according to selected curriculum

- *3 days prior to beginning of tutoring program*

Outputs

Number of youth enrolled in program

Attendance record of youth enrolled in program

Number of mentoring/group socializing activities held over course of program

Fidelity and implementation checks provided by "xxx Nonprofit's" evidence-based tutoring curriculum

Outcomes
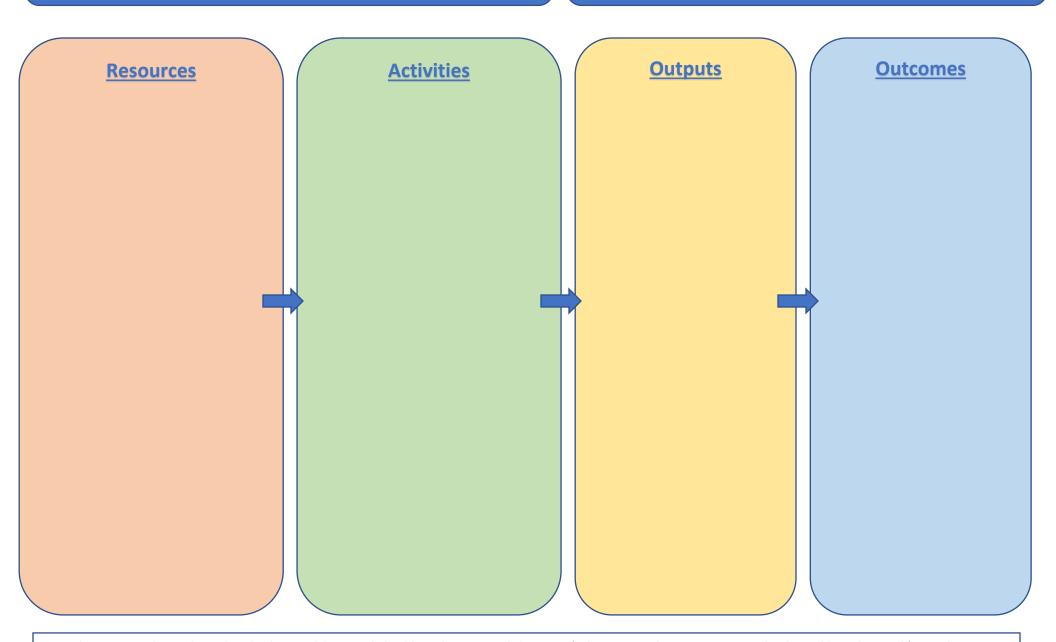
At an individual level:

- *Grade improvements compared to previous year/semester.*

- *Decrease in school disciplinary action.*

- *Student confidence/well-being, as measured by pre- and post-program surveys*

At a district level

- *Decreased rate of students asked to repeat a grade*

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Target Population:

Resources	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes

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