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# Foundational Activities for Evidence-Based Policymaking in Postsecondary Education

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Evidence-based policymaking represents an organizational shift toward prioritizing and integrating research findings and data in policy decisions. Decision-makers in postsecondary education have increasingly emphasized the importance of evidence-based policymaking in reaction to the factors that otherwise hinder data- or evidence-driven reform, such as the sometimes fast-paced environment in which policymaking takes place. This second supplement to MDRC's brief [Evidence to Action: A Policy Perspective from Three States](#) synthesizes five foundational activities for setting up the organizational systems and practices required to support evidence-based policymaking. These activities are based on frameworks described in [Blueprint for Delivering Results in State Government](#), produced by Results for America; [The ABCs of Evidence-Informed Policymaking](#) report issued by the National Conference of State Legislatures; [Evidence-Based Policymaking: A Guide for Effective Government](#), by the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative; [Research and Practice, Meet the State Education Agency](#) in *Phi Delta Kappan*; and interview findings from the [Evidence to Action](#) project.

**Activity 1: Bring together a diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders to develop a shared vision and goals.**

- Use input from a diverse group of stakeholders, including representatives from colleges at various levels, students, and community members, to create a strategic plan with a clear vision, priorities, and goals. As an example of the importance of representation in decision-making, see the literature review [When and Why Minority Legislators Matter](#), which explores the effect that racial and ethnic representation in legislatures has on policymaking.
- Determine the primary outcomes of interest, ways to measure them, and their leading indicators.

**Activity 2: Build or expand the policies, systems, and practices to collect, analyze, and communicate institutional or state data.**

- Regularly assess data to set the policy agenda, measure institutions' progress with policy implementation, and track outcomes resulting from the implementation of the policies. Disaggregate data by important characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity, and income.
- Use outcomes data, focus groups, and small-scale experiments to determine the applicability and appropriateness of promising innovations from outside the state.
- Identify best practices to communicate the data and its relevance to your audience.
- Link data across departments and agencies to promote shared learning while maintaining privacy and confidentiality.

**Activity 3: Increase the capacity for stakeholders within your organization or across the state to use research and data.**

- Create a learning agenda centered on the priorities and goals shared by the diverse group of stakeholders in the strategic plan you created. Take inventory of the existing programs in your organization and assess the evidence backing them. For more information, see [Creating the Foundation for Building an Agency Culture That Values Evidence](#).
- Hire and designate staff to regularly access research related to your state priorities and assess its value and relevance.
- Provide training and professional development to other staff members and stakeholders to increase their data and research literacy.
- Maximize connections with local academics, peer networks, and external researchers.

**Activity 4: Create processes that emphasize [continuous improvement](#), assessment, and data-informed revision.**

- Establish standards for strong policy implementation and provide needed resources and support. See [Sustainable Change: Upping Your Staff Training Strategy](#).
- Track, share, and critically discuss implementation progress and early outcomes.
- Partner with researchers to set up rigorous evaluations to test promising strategies.

**Activity 5: Incentivize further research by aligning it with the relevant policy levers in postsecondary education, such as budgeting and legislation.**

- Offer incentives for using data and research in policy design.
- Prioritize investments in effective, evidence-based innovations and strategies.
- Create a feedback loop where experiences and results from previous policies or initiatives systematically inform policymaking.

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