



U.S. General Services Administration

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Capacity Assessment for Evaluation and  
Evidence Building

November 2025

## Executive summary

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) mandates that each federal agency complete a capacity assessment as part of the strategic planning cycle. This assessment systematically identifies agency capabilities to carry out evidence-building activities such as foundational fact-finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation. Given organizational changes within the General Services Administration (GSA), a more streamlined capacity assessment was conducted focusing on program evaluation efforts. We interviewed key leadership stakeholders representing a range of organizational components, and analyzed interview transcripts to identify common themes. In addition, we reviewed policy and process documents (e.g., [GSA Gold Standard Science Implementation Plan](#), [GSA Evaluation Policy](#)) to describe current program evaluation approaches.

There were several main findings with respect to GSA's evaluation capacity. First, there is strong agency support for developing and using evidence for program improvement and decision-making. While there is broad support for evidence, there also is limited capacity in terms of staff availability and expertise. With GSA's restructuring, programs are primarily focused on their mission-critical functions, which may not be focused on evidence-building activities. Second, GSA's program evaluation activities are performed by a central office with complementary evidence-building activities taking place at the program level. Program-level activities focus on data analysis, performance measurement, and financial management tasks. Finally, GSA's data assets are perceived to be of high quality, and there is continued investment in data quality with a new enterprise data platform. Overall, the capacity assessment suggests that GSA has the capacity to generate evidence, although the amount and types depend on how evidence-building activities are balanced with other priorities.

## Introduction

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ([Evidence Act](#)) requires agencies to assess their abilities to carry out evidence-building activities including foundational fact-finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation.<sup>1</sup> Within GSA, this assessment helps identify where the agency has a high level of capacity and where there are opportunities for improvement to strengthen the agency's ability to generate and use evidence.

For this GSA capacity assessment, we gathered input from key stakeholders across the organization to inform GSA's current capacity with respect to the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of our evaluation and analysis efforts.<sup>2</sup> We supplemented information gathered from the interviews with relevant policy and procedural documentation. This assessment reflects the GSA capacity at a specific point in time during which it was undergoing a significant internal reorganization to reflect the new administration's priorities. Due to these organizational changes, this more streamlined capacity assessment was conducted focusing on program evaluation efforts rather than broader evidence-building activities (e.g., policy analysis, performance management, foundational fact-finding). Given these organizational shifts, the findings of this assessment reflect GSA's capacity during the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2025 and may have less applicability in the future. The report includes a description of the methods used, a description of GSA's capacity along each dimension (coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence), a summary of priority evaluation areas, and conclusions.

## Methods

To understand GSA's capacity, we identified individuals in leadership positions who could broadly represent the views of different GSA organizational components and would have the best insight into the evidence-building activities in their organizational component. Individuals were prioritized through their involvement in the strategic planning process (members of the Strategic Plan Working Group) or their Evidence Act responsibilities (Statistical Official and Chief Data Officer). In addition to those key roles, we identified individuals in key GSA service offices and staff offices that support the execution of our mission. The largest offices in terms of staff include the Public Buildings Service, the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS), Technology Transformation Services (which sits within FAS), and the Office of Government-wide Policy (OGP). Multiple staff offices provide support to these components, including the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, the Office of GSA IT, and the Office of Strategic Communication.

We recruited a total of 15 individuals to participate in semi-structured interviews designed to understand evaluation capacity in their organizational component, and 13 either agreed to participate or volunteered other people in their organization to participate. A total of 13 people

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Management and Budget, M-19-23, Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance (2019). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/m-19-23.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Since GSA is not a research or statistical agency, the focus of this report is on evaluation and analysis.

participated in 11 interviews. Most interviews (n=10) were conducted individually, with one interview conducted with 3 people from the same organizational component. Interviews were conducted between March 25 and April 3, 2025, and lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. We determined this was a sufficient sample due to having achieved representation across key offices and roles while balancing resource, scheduling, and timing constraints.

The staff offices represented in interviews were the following:

- Public Buildings Service
- Federal Acquisition Service
- Technology Transformation Services
- Office of Government-wide Policy
- Office of the Chief Financial Officer
- Office of GSA IT
- Office of Mission Assurance
- Office of Strategic Communication

We used a semi-structured interview guide for the conversation, which covered the following topics:

- Experience with evaluation
- Organizational evaluation capacity (their service or staff office)
- Leadership support for evaluation
- Current evaluation activities
- Priority programs that will need evidence in the near future

Interviews were recorded with the participants' approval. Based on a synthesis of interview notes and transcripts, we identified and summarized emergent themes. We also reviewed internal policies and processes to supplement the information from the interviews. These materials include the [GSA Evaluation Policy](#) and program evaluation development and implementation process documents used by the Evaluation Sciences Division (ESD, which is more commonly known as [OES](#)), which is in the Office of Evidence and Evaluation in OGP, and serves as the central office responsible for conducting program evaluation at GSA.

## **Evidence and evaluation capacity**

This section describes findings related to organizational capacity for the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of GSA's evidence-building activities. The findings are based on insights from the interviews and review of relevant program evaluation policies and procedures.

### **Coverage**

GSA's evidence-building activities include both program evaluation supported by a central office, and non-evaluation activities, which are often conducted by individual program offices. OES is

an agency-wide resource that provides program evaluation support. OES collaborates with programs to conduct cross-cutting evaluations or to provide additional capacity where program staff lack the expertise or bandwidth to conduct program evaluation themselves.

The program evaluations supported by OES are complemented by evidence-building activities that take place at the program level. Stakeholders described these activities as less formal and more ad hoc. Program activities were primarily focused on activities such as policy analysis, descriptive data analysis, financial data analysis, survey questionnaire design, robotic process automation, and performance measurement. Since program activities focused on their specific needs, stakeholders saw OES as the resource for supporting cross-cutting organizational questions or responding to specific leadership priorities.

OES remains the division with staff who have specific program evaluation expertise. This expertise in program evaluation is complemented by expertise with other types of evidence-building activities throughout the organization. While the skill sets specific to each office generally reflect the office's core mission, staff with analytic and data-specific skill sets are dispersed across the agency (e.g., data engineers, data scientists, analysts). Stakeholders discussed that non-evaluation activities needed to answer their program's short-term needs are typically completed at the program level, although the majority of program staff's work currently is focused on statutory obligations. Reductions in staffing have contributed to the view that while generating evidence is valuable, and while staff may have the skills to conduct the activities, evidence-building activities are less of a priority relative to their office's primary statutory obligations.

In addition to analytic expertise, the program-specific knowledge of program staff is an important element to support evidence-building activities. Program staff are the subject matter experts whose knowledge complements OES staff's methodological expertise. They help OES staff to better understand how programs are implemented, what data are available, what known barriers are, and other contextual information that strengthens evidence-building activities and makes the use of findings for program and policy improvement more likely.

Key staff augment the capacity of staff who conduct the evidence-building activities by providing strategic direction. The stakeholders interviewed view one of their main roles in the evidence-building process as being able to guide the direction of evidence-building activities so they better align with the information that leaders need to make decisions or fill a specific need. For program evaluations, they are the ones who are able to translate leadership priorities into evaluation questions that are likely to lead to evidence use and are able to connect OES staff to relevant program staff who are more knowledgeable about local context. They also have a high-level view of their respective organizational components and are able to make connections across program offices, which can help to generate cross-cutting knowledge and prevent the duplication of effort.

## Quality

Maintaining and improving data quality to support evidence-building activities was noted as a priority by multiple stakeholders. These stakeholders noted that GSA's data assets were generally of high quality. To maintain and improve data quality there is a focus by GSA IT and the Chief Data Officer to update and unify GSA's enterprise data platform to make the cataloging, discovery, and use of data more efficient and authoritative for analysts across the organization. Combined with data governance, the goal is to have a unified solution that will improve data systems and quality.

## Methods

GSA is committed to ensuring scientific activities adhere to the highest standards to enhance the rigor, transparency, and reproducibility of scientific research and reporting, as outlined in GSA's [Gold Standard Science Implementation Plan](#) (GSS) and [Evaluation Policy](#). All program evaluation activities adhere to the principles of rigor, relevance and utility, transparency, independence, and objectivity. Additionally, OES program evaluations follow a [standard process](#) to align the conduct of the activities with the principles. The steps in the procedure include:

- Identifying the evidence and evaluation questions that will produce actionable evidence.
- Integrating knowledge of best practices.
- Pre-specifying the details of the evaluation, including writing an analysis plan that specifies the analyses to be conducted. The methods are reviewed by a team not directly involved in the evaluation before being finalized.
- Analyzing data and conducting reanalysis by an independent analyst to ensure reproducible results.
- Share all findings—positive, negative, and null.

OES evaluations use a range of program evaluation approaches to match the most appropriate method to the priority question. Between fiscal years 2022 and 2025, 21 evaluations of GSA programs were completed by OES, including 13 descriptive evaluations, 2 formative evaluations, 2 process or implementation evaluations, and 4 outcome or impact evaluations. The breakdown of the evaluation types shows that in many cases the evidence questions prioritized by GSA involve descriptive evaluation, though there is a need for various evaluation types.

## Effectiveness

Stakeholders perceived agency leadership as being receptive to feedback gathered through evaluations and other evidence-building activities. They noted that evidence is particularly likely to be used when it aligns with leadership priorities and is delivered in time to influence program improvements and overall effectiveness. While stakeholders generally appreciated the rigor of the OES project process described above, some raised concerns about the possibility of the process adding time to the delivery of results. They noted that longer timelines for evaluation

and other evidence-building activities risked missing the relevant window of opportunity to meet leadership's needs, and highlighted the need for rapid evidence.

All participants mentioned strong support across their team and from their leadership for evidence and evaluation activities. Leaders across GSA recognize the value of evidence and evaluation. While there is some ability to enable their own staff to produce evidence, there is a gap between leadership support and their capacity to provide resources for evaluation efforts. Current efforts around restructuring the organization, staff reductions, and a rapidly evolving environment affect their ability to focus on evidence and evaluation in the near term. However, multiple stakeholders noted that they would like to see evidence-building activities built into normal processes and become a part of the business-as-usual culture while continuing to rely on OES for additional program evaluation support.

## Independence

In terms of organizational structure, OES is a quasi-independent program evaluation unit. Although it is a GSA internal office, the OES team is less familiar with the nuances of program operations across the agency, allowing the team to provide an outside perspective on evidence activities. An additional source of independence is the OES project process, which creates several points of internal peer review. At these points, OES evaluators who are not involved with the specific evaluation can review and provide feedback on the evaluation design and methods. Two specific examples of internal peer review are the OES requirements to complete analysis plans for all projects, and to have an analyst who is not working on the project complete a reanalysis of the data. Analysis plans are a best practice to help to clarify in advance the analysis choices that could affect the independence of evaluation findings, and are aligned with GSS best practices. Reanalysis is a process for having a second person redo the analysis based on only the pre-analysis plan and raw data. This procedure helps to confirm the reliability of the results by making sure two people arrive at the same conclusion or are able to identify and reassess choices that led to different results. The organizational structure and internal peer review process help OES to provide quasi-independent evaluation support.

Stakeholders generally perceived OES as being independent. However, stakeholders also mentioned some challenges for OES that came from being viewed as independent. One stakeholder observed that there is some reluctance to work with OES because there is a fear of bringing in a new team and having them pass judgement on the program. There was also a concern that trying to work with an independent team could imply additional time and effort to engage with the evaluation team when people are already stretched thin with decreased staff and additional duties.

## Conclusion

GSA continues to have a strong culture of evidence, even as it undergoes a reorganization to more closely align to its mission-critical activities. This commitment is demonstrated by the strong support for evidence from key agency stakeholders and the ongoing investment in data

quality and an enterprise data platform. GSA has some underlying capacity both to conduct program evaluation and to support other evidence-building activities. OES leads program evaluation activities that are focused on leadership priorities or cross-cutting questions, and data scientists and analysts within individual program level lead non-evaluation activities to answer their ad hoc evidence-building needs. These program-level activities encompass a range of functions including policy analysis, descriptive data analysis, financial data analysis, survey design, robotic process automation, and performance measurement. While stakeholders are supportive of evidence-building activities and advocate for their integration into standard practices, they acknowledge that staffing reductions during GSA's reorganization have shifted focus away from these activities. Future assessments should seek to understand how the underlying capacity to generate evidence can be integrated with mission-critical activities.