

Title The Obama Administration's evidence-based social policy initiatives

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Also: Show Me the Evidence: Obama's Fight for Rigor and Results in Social Policy by [Ron Haskins](#) & [Greg Margolis](#) 2014

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Key points

1. A key Obama administration goal: to expand social programs that work and eliminate those that don't.
2. Reliable evidence can be effective in both expanding and cutting programs.
3. However, even when programs are demonstrated to be ineffective, it doesn't follow they'll be cut. According to researchers Sawhill and Baron, 10 large-scale federal social programs had been rigorously evaluated by a scientific design since 1990. Nine were shown to have little or no value. Yet only one had been changed.
4. Key components based on interviews with administration:
 - a. Select an important social problem that would make individual citizens and the nation better off if it could be successfully addressed by social policy.
 - b. Identify model programs addressing the problem that have been shown by randomised trials or other rigorous research to significantly reduce the problem.
 - c. Get funds to scale up these evidence-based model programs.
 - d. Make the funds available to government or private entities with good track records to replicate the model programs and develop new ones.
 - e. Continuously evaluate programs' implementation to ensure they are faithful to the model and producing results.
5. To promote the development and use of such programs, the administration undertook six evidence-based initiatives across a range of the USA's social issues, including infant and child health and development, preschool and K-12 education, pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases among teens, student performance, and community college education and job training.
6. The authors concluded there are five central features of the process by which the Obama administration created its evidence-based agenda and policies:
 - stellar leadership by senior officials in the White House, Office of Management and Budget and the executive agencies
 - a relentless focus on using evidence both to select successful programs and to suggest ways to improve programs
 - development of clever and persistent legislative strategies to enact the six initiatives and senior officials' commitment of the time and effort needed to do so
 - use of competitive grants rather than formula grants to distribute federal funds
 - use of review panels to assess grant applications.

How does/could this impact on ways to potentially achieve effective long-term decision-making which earns public trust?

1. Very clear focus on well-defined social issues.
2. A transparent, rigorous process for considering, then testing, prospective solutions.
3. Successful outcomes of programs developed on this basis.