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MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
FROM: Jon Baron
RE: Update on our work

I'm pleased to report strong progress in the federal movement toward evidence-based policy reform, which may now be at a positive turning point. I've prepared a short update on the major new reforms below. As you'll note, they incorporate the core concepts we have promoted through our work with OMB, Congress, and the federal agencies over the past several years, and our input has helped inform and/or shape many of the specific efforts. We are also working with others to build support for these reforms in Congress and the larger policy community, and ensure high-quality implementation with adherence to strong evidence standards. Any thoughts or advice you have on these developments would be much appreciated.

1. The President's FY11 budget includes over \$100 million in new funding for rigorous evaluations aimed at growing the number of social interventions backed by strong evidence of effectiveness.

First, as part of the Obama Administration's government-wide initiative to advance rigorous impact evaluations, announced by OMB Director Peter Orszag last fall, the budget allocates approximately \$100 million to 17 federal agencies to conduct such evaluations, or to strengthen agency capacity to conduct such evaluations. The evaluations will use "the most rigorous study designs appropriate," and many are likely to be randomized controlled trials. The President's budget contains a [two-page summary](#) of the evaluation initiative, including a list of the specific agency evaluation efforts.

In addition, the budget includes (i) an increase of over \$70 million for research and evaluation at the Justice Department's National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to fund, among other things, field experiments of specific crime-fighting interventions, prisoner re-entry programs, and interventions for children exposed to violence; and (ii) an increase of \$60.5 million for research, development, and dissemination at the Education Department's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), which has been a leading force for scientifically-valid research and evaluation since its establishment in 2002.

The above initiatives will require Congressional approval in the FY11 appropriations bills.

2. Major new federal initiatives, enacted by Congress to expand implementation of evidence-based interventions, are now underway.

- These initiatives generally follow the Administration's "tiered" funding approach, described in the President's budget as follows: "First, more money is proposed for promoting the adoption of programs and practices that generate results backed up by strong evidence [the "top tier"]. Second, for an additional group of programs with some supportive evidence but not as much, additional resources are allocated on the condition that the programs will be rigorously evaluated going forward. Over time, the Administration anticipates that some of

these programs will move to the top tier, but if not their funds will be directed to other, more promising efforts. Third, the approach encourages agencies to innovate and to test ideas with strong potential—ideas supported by preliminary research findings or reasonable hypotheses."

- The largest initiative is the Education Department's \$650 million Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund, to expand the implementation of innovative and evidence-based interventions in K-12 education. We're particularly encouraged by the program's high [evidence standards](#), published in final form last week in the program solicitation. They (i) recognize well-conducted randomized controlled trials as the strongest method for establishing intervention effectiveness, and require those projects receiving the largest grant awards to be evaluated in such trials, where possible; (ii) include high standards for quasi-experimental evidence; and (iii) provide a clear path forward for innovative projects that are not yet evidence-based to build valid evidence regarding their effectiveness.
- Two other important initiatives are: (i) HHS's \$110 million evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention program; and (ii) the \$50 million Social Innovation Fund. Both of these programs were enacted into law last year. The program announcement for the teen pregnancy prevention program is still under development. The Social Innovation Fund, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, provides funding to grantmaking institutions (or other intermediary organizations) that have a strong track record in using evidence-based approaches, which then use the funds to invest in nonprofit organizations working with low-income communities to increase economic opportunities, support youth development, and/or promote healthy lifestyles. The program solicitation is posted [here](#).
- Another major federal initiative -- the evidence-based home visitation program -- has not yet been enacted into law, but is included in both the House- and Senate-passed health care reform bills.

I hope this update is helpful, and I'll continue to keep you posted. We're grateful to the MacArthur, William T. Grant, and Edna McConnell Clark Foundations for their support of our work.