

Board of Advisors

January 16, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Advisors of the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
(distribution list below)

FROM: Jon Baron

RE: Update - Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

We're pleased to report important new progress in our work and in evidence-based policy:

1. Low-cost randomized controlled trials (RCTs)

- The Coalition's new [competition](#) to fund low-cost RCTs was covered in an excellent [New York Times piece](#) by David Bornstein, and in an earlier piece on the [White House website](#) on "Building the Evidence Base for What Works." For prospective applicants: the deadline to submit a letter of interest (three pages) is February 14.
- Andy Feldman's popular [Gov Innovator blog](#) focuses its latest post on low-cost RCTs, and includes in-depth discussion of a recent Coalition [report](#) on the topic.
- New York State's recently-announced Pay for Success [initiative](#) – which will provide training and employment services to ex-offenders – is using a low-cost RCT to measure the initiative's impact on recidivism and employment, and cites the Coalition's work on this topic. As the first state-initiated Pay for Success (PFS) effort to be announced, the project's use of a low-cost RCT is a promising step forward that could help set a precedent for other, forthcoming PFS efforts.
- The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has issued a funding [announcement](#) for low-cost, pragmatic RCTs of health care delivery and medical interventions. The fact that NIH – a government agency with great scientific credibility – independently recognizes the value of low-cost RCTs as a policy innovation, and is going ahead with a funding announcement, provides important validation of the approach and could help greatly to build interest in the larger scientific community.

2. Congressional funding

The FY 2014 omnibus spending bill, which Congress is expected to pass this week, provides exceptionally strong support for evidence-based reform. For example, the bill provides an \$86 million (24%) increase in funding for the "tiered evidence" programs in the federal agencies. Such programs make building and using rigorous evidence of effectiveness a central criterion in the grant selection process – an approach that the Coalition helped developed. This funding increase

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includes establishment of a new tiered-evidence program ("First in the World") in postsecondary education at the Department of Education. The bill also continues a new evaluation set-aside at the Department of Labor (DOL), first initiated in FY 2012, which authorizes DOL to allocate up to 0.5% (roughly \$60 million) from certain program funds, to carry out evaluation activities. And the bill includes a related provision at the Department of Education that, according to an earlier National Board for Education Sciences estimate, gives the Department flexibility to allocate up to \$12 million in additional funding for evaluation activities. That these provisions were included at a time when the budget climate is extremely tight is a noteworthy development, and hopefully a good sign for the future.

3. Open online workshop in evidence-based policy

The Coalition's workshop has attracted strong usage, with viewers in 55 countries and 43 U.S. states since its launch one year ago. Entitled [*How to Read Research Findings to Distinguish Evidence-Based Programs from Everything Else: User-Friendly Tools for Policy Officials and Stakeholders*](#), the workshop consists of two brief video series (available [here](#) at no charge, 90 minutes total), followed by eight optional weekly conference calls providing hands-on experience reviewing actual studies (costing \$150 for all eight sessions). The next set of conference calls starts the week of April 21. To participate, please contact David Anderson (danderson@coalition4evidence.org, 202-239-1248).

We hope this update is helpful. Any thoughts or suggestions you have on our work would be much appreciated.

Jon

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