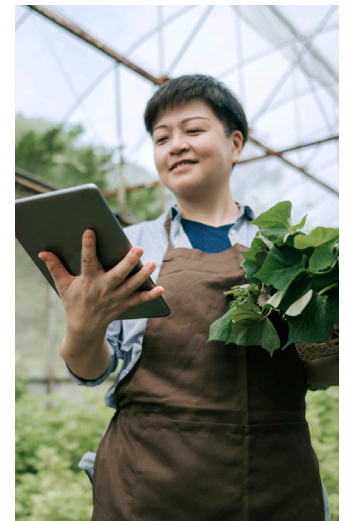U.S. Small Business Administration

FY 2022 Evidence Capacity Assessment for Statistics, Evaluation, Research and Analysis

Helping All Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs Achieve Their Dreams

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Executive Summary

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) aims to improve the availability and use of evidence to make critical decisions about program operations, policy, regulations, and strategy. Building capacity to collect, generate, synthesize, prioritize, disseminate, and use evidence increases the ability of Agency leadership and program managers to make critical decisions. This evidence capacity assessment provides senior officials with information needed to improve the Agency's ability to support the development and use of evidence, coordinate and increase technical expertise within the agency, and improve the quality of evidence available for decision-making.

As a key strategy in building a high-performing organization, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) recognizes the importance of building evidence-related capacities to understand and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its programs and operations. The SBA also acknowledges the complexities of small business environments and that rigorous evidence accumulated over time allows leadership to make more informed decisions. As a result, the SBA has developed this capacity assessment to assess the Agency's coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of its statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis efforts. The SBA developed this assessment through collaboration with its leadership and ensured alignment with the Evidence Act and OMB guidance. The SBA will leverage best practices, tools, and existing processes from program evaluation, performance management, and data practices to promote the use of evidence to inform decision-making and build evidence capacity.

This report reviews the SBA's evidence-building efforts and assesses the Agency's capacity for evidence. The SBA compiled a list of evidence, developed an evidence maturity model and evidence capacity self-assessment, examined findings from the 2017 and 2020 Federal Manager's Survey, and started building the SBA's evidence capacity-building strategy.

As of November 30, 2021, approximately two dozen activities and operations were being or were in the queue to be evaluated, analyzed, or researched. Additionally, the Agency inventoried SBA-produced evidence assets from FY 2018 to the present. More than 55 evaluation, fact finding, and policy analysis evidence assets were produced and used to inform the Enterprise Learning Agenda priority questions or advance the Agency's strategic plan goals and objectives. These evidence assets cover all SBA strategic goals and demonstrate a mix of evaluation, analysis, research, and statistics. Additionally, more than 800 data assets were made publicly available online for use in evidence-building activities.

In summary, the assessment findings indicate that the Agency meets standards, as described in the SBA evidence maturity model, for all evidence practices. Moreover, between 2017 and 2020, the SBA advanced its capacity for performance measurement and program evaluation. Notwithstanding, opportunities for increased capacity building were identified and four strategies to further the Agency's evidence maturity were developed. The strategies include: 1) continue raising awareness and align expectations; 2) continue building employee skills, knowledge, and capabilities; 3) continue promoting and supporting effective evidence practices and evidence-building activities; and 4) continue institutionalizing evidence capacity throughout organizational systems, structures, and policies. The SBA will continue to identify, prioritize, and implement activities, and strategies to address identified evidence capacity needs, monitor and assess emerging capacity needs, and refine capacity building activities.

Background

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act) aims to improve the availability and use of evidence[1] to make critical decisions about program operations, policy, regulations, and strategy. The Evidence Act emphasizes collaboration and coordination in developing and using evidence, better use of existing federal data in evidence-building activities, and open government data. In addition to emphasizing collaboration and coordination to advance data and evidence-building functions, the Evidence Act advances program evaluation as an essential component of federal evidence building and addresses the role of evaluation and evidence-building activities as a component of the Federal Performance Framework.

The Evidence Act requires agencies to establish and use learning agendas, create and issue annual evaluation plans, and conduct a capacity assessment. It also created three new positions at agencies: Evaluation Officers, Statistical Officials, and Chief Data Officers. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance[2] that outlines the roles and responsibilities of these positions, steps to integrate evidence use and evidence-building capacities, and a timeline for regular review and reporting processes. The purpose of this collective effort is to complement and strengthen performance improvement efforts.

Evidence-informed decision-making requires linking sound scientific evidence with pragmatism and governance principles,[3] and the SBA recognizes the importance of evidence and evaluation to understand and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its programs and operations. With the development of the SBA's *FY 2018-2022 Strategic Plan*, the Agency created its first enterprise learning agenda (learning agenda) that identified key research and evaluation questions for each of the SBA's strategic goals. By continually seeking to expand the Agency's capacity to collect, generate, synthesize, prioritize, disseminate, and use statistics, evaluation, research, and analysis, the SBA will be better positioned to answer the priority questions identified in the learning agenda and effectively and efficiently carry out the strategies identified in the Agency's strategic plan. As the Agency moves toward the *FY 2022-2026 Strategic Plan*, the SBA continues to build evidence to bring businesses back, create jobs, and connect all entrepreneurs in America by providing the support they need to start, grow, and be resilient.

The SBA's capacity assessment assesses evidence capacity and identifies opportunities to build capacity to engage with and use evidence to inform decision-making. In developing the capacity assessment, the SBA:

- Conducted a review of the literature and an environmental scan.
- Engaged stakeholders and built awareness.
- Developed and refined the Agency's evidence maturity goals and framework.
- Developed a description of evidence capacity expectations, path of maturity progression, and evidence maturity goals.
- Developed and administered the SBA Evidence Capacity Assessment Survey.
- Developed a data collection plan to expand stakeholder engagement (see Section VII.B. for collected information)
- Analyzed and reported assessment findings.

The Agency broadened its communication for evidence-based policymaking and the development of evidence capacity with each phase of the capacity assessment. Further, the Agency has begun and will continue to use

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1   OMB Circular A-11 defines evidence as the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid.
2   OMB Circular A-11 (2021); OMB Memorandum M-19-23 Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance (2019); Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance (2019); OMB Memorandum M-20-12 Phase 4 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Program Evaluation Standards and Practices (2020).
3   Asgharzadeh, A., Shabaninejad, H., Aryankhesal, A., and Majdzadeh, R. (2019). Instruments for assessing organisational capacity for use of evidence in health sector policy making: a systematic scoping review. *Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice*.

the evidence capacity and maturity rating information to implement capacity-building activities to train, mentor, and recruit an evidence-informed workforce. Although evidence capacity-building continues to be a primary objective of the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice, additional efforts include evidence presentations designed to build capacity, mentorship program pairing, and evidence orientated training opportunities related to data, evaluation, and performance measures.

This assessment restates the SBA's approach to implementing the Evidence Act requirements, which leverage established evidence practices and evidence-building activities at the SBA. Additionally, the assessment emphasizes the use of findings to build greater capacity, identifies the Agency's evidence maturity goals, and discusses the roles and cooperative efforts of the Evaluation Officer, Statistical Official, and Chief Data Officer. The iterative approach promotes evidence-informed decision-making while continually developing, adopting, and implementing best practices.

Purpose and Guidance

The capacity assessment focuses on the Agency's capacity to further evidence practices and evidence-building activities that 1) answer priority questions from the learning agenda and 2) effectively and efficiently implement strategies identified in the Agency's strategic plan. Given the SBA's active engagement in evidence-based activities, the capacity assessment further informs the Agency's ongoing evidence building and supports the Agency's aptitude for continuous improvement.

The capacity assessment is expected to provide a baseline against which the Agency can measure improvements to the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of Agency statistics, evaluation, research, and analyses activities. This approach will inform evidence-based activities by identifying and assessing the capability and infrastructure to implement foundational fact finding, performance management, policy analysis, and program evaluation. It must also include:

(A) a list of the activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed;

(B) the extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency;

(C) the extent to which the evaluation research and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability;

(D) the extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and the corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches;

(E) the extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback; and

(F) the extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations.[4]

The capacity assessment articulates the SBA's specific evidence needs. Furthermore, it seeks to answer the question, "Does the SBA have the capacity to collect, generate, and synthesize evidence to 1) answer the priority questions identified in the learning agenda and 2) effectively and efficiently carry out the strategies identified in the Agency's strategic plan?" The findings, in turn, provide decision-makers "with information needed to improve the Agency's ability to support the development and use of evaluations, coordinate and increase technical expertise available for evaluation and related research activities, and improve the quality of evaluations and knowledge of evaluation methodology and standards."[5] Finally, the assessment affirms Agency priorities by providing leadership with information to more effectively focus resources to generate evidence for decision-making needs.

As discussed in the sections below, a 28-question survey that maps to a 5-level evidence maturity model was used to collect information on the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of statistics, evaluations, research, and analysis (collectively "evidence practices"). The maturity model's five-by-five matrix (See Appendix A) established the evidence capacity baseline and serves as the framework to monitor and assess maturity over time. The assessment findings equip the SBA's senior leaders with data to improve the development and use of evidence, coordinate and enhance technical expertise available for evidence-based activities, and heighten the quality and robustness of evidence practices.

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4   Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, § 315

5   OMB Circular No. A-11, Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget (June 2019), Part 6.

Centralized Evidence Integration Infrastructure

Organizational structure, communication, and leadership are known to influence organizational focus, priority, and attitude toward evidence capacity.[6] Therefore, the SBA has established an integrated infrastructure that advances the Agency's evidence and evaluation needs identified in the learning agenda. The Agency has a centralized office that supports performance management, program evaluation, and program analysis and has a separate independent small business research function (Office of Advocacy) that serves as an independent voice for small businesses within the Federal Government to review impacts of rulemakings on small entities, including small businesses, through the Regulatory Flexibility Act, and develop and communicate small business statistics and research. Operationally, the SBA maintains a learning agenda, an annual evaluation plan, a robust cadre of performance measurement statistics, and small business research agenda (Office of Advocacy). The Agency leverages multiple processes to engage leadership in evidence-building activities, including strategic planning, annual planning, quarterly deep-dive performance reviews, annual evidence and evaluation development and monitoring, and program management.

To ensure effective evidence-building activities, the SBA formalized its program evaluation and analysis functions within the Office of Program Performance, Analysis, and Evaluation (OPPAE) and established the role of the Chief Data Officer. The SBA is not a principal U.S. federal statistical agency[7] in accordance with the Evidence Act; however, it maintains a Statistical Official who serves in a consultatory capacity in accordance with the Evidence Act. The organizational proximity of performance management, program evaluation, performance analytics, and data management within the OPPAE allows for greater collaboration toward common evidence-building goals (see Figure 1). The co-location of these functions also proactively reduces the fragmentation of activities for evidence building. In addition to sitting on the Data Governance Committee, the Evaluation Officer, Statistical Official, and Chief Data Officer play key roles in leading the SBA's evidence activities, evidence assessment, and answering the priority questions outlined in the Enterprise Learning Agenda.

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6   Norton, S., Milat, A., Edwards, B., & Giffin, M. (2016). Narrative review of strategies by organizations for building evaluation capacity. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 58, 1–19.

7   See Statistical Sites on the World Wide Web: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 1. Coordinated Evidence-Building
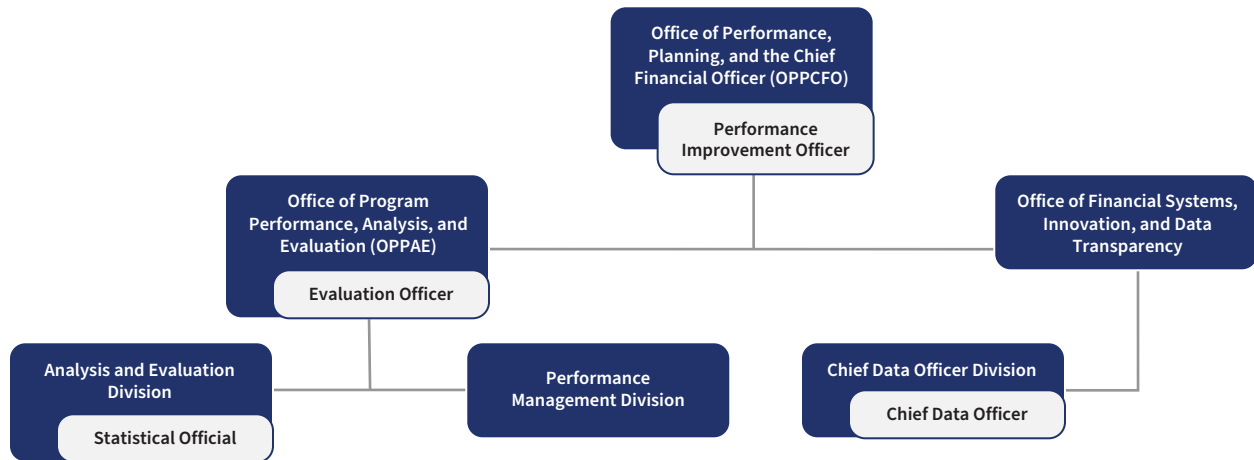
OPPAE oversees the SBA's results-driven management activities, including strategic planning, performance management, annual planning and reporting, dashboard and analytic support, program management, program evaluation, and economic analysis. Additionally, OPPAE regularly engages key stakeholders, including leadership and program managers, to develop and use strategic objectives, priority goals, performance indicators, and priority questions such as those appearing in the learning agenda. These engagements result in prioritized evidence-building activities, support organizational learning, increase transparency, enhance accountability, and promote more effective and efficient building and use of evidence.

Data are a strategic asset and serve as a central element for building and using evidence. They play a fundamental role in evidence practice and assessment, and the SBA collects data to administer its programs, monitor contracts and grants, and assess and enforce regulations. Therefore, coordination with the Chief Data Officer and consideration of the data literacy assessment findings is essential to developing evidence capacity and maximize opportunities to generate evidence and improve programs.

Capacity Assessment Concepts and Principles

Evidence accumulates over time through an evidence-building cycle that assesses, prioritizes, generates, and uses analysis, statistics, research, and evaluations to develop a comprehensive body of knowledge. The accumulation of rigorous, theoretically grounded evidence links scientific and governance principles. Once the availability and quality of existing evidence are assessed, gaps can be identified, and new evidence-building activities to address them are conducted.

The SBA uses evidence to justify resource requests, communicate progress toward outcomes, and inform decision-making, further emphasizing that where evidence is available, it should be used and where evidence is absent, it should be sought. The SBA is intentional in its approach to mature its evidence practices, enhance the rigor of its evidence-building activities, and support evidence-building. The Agency continues to integrate evidence into strategic planning, operational decision-making, and policy and program development. The SBA recognizes that evidence-building occurs over time through rigorous and repeated data collection and analysis and has established a multi-year evidence capacity timeline to address this need.

Evidence Practices and Dimensional Attributes

The SBA assessment of evidence practices (evaluation, analysis, research, and statistics) considered the attributes of coverage, quality, method, effectiveness, and independence. In addition to OMB guidance and professional association (e.g., American Evaluation Association, the American Statistical Association) standards and practices, evidence assessments must consider Agency context. The four evidence practices are not mutually exclusive, but there are distinguishing elements.

For contextual relevancy and application within the SBA, the evidence practices are described below.

- **Evaluation.** Evaluation refers to the individual, systematic collection of data to assess program, policy, project, or operational effectiveness, efficiency, or implementation fidelity. Evaluation types may include but are not limited to formative evaluations, which can consist of design or descriptive studies, process or implementation evaluations, outcome evaluations, or impact evaluations. The purpose of evaluation is to make recommendations to improve, advance, or modify existing programs, policies, projects, or operations. Evaluation is intended to provide information for decision-making about current and future programming, policy, projects, or operations. Evaluation evidence practices are used when conducting program evaluation and process evaluation evidence-building activities.

- **Analysis.** Analysis refers to a process of breaking a concept, proposition, fact, complex topic, or substance into its simple and constituent parts so that its logical structure can be displayed. Analysis is broad in scope and has numerous categories, including but not limited to policy analysis, cost-benefit analysis, break-even analysis, regulatory impact analysis, regulatory flexibility analysis, and other analysis-related activities. Analysis is also used in both evaluation and research, and, depending on the method and purpose of the research or evaluation, analysis overlaps with statistics. The purpose of analysis is to uncover interrelationships and gain a better understanding of information or data. Analysis evidence practices are used when conducting policy analysis, cost-benefit analysis, break-even analysis, regulatory impact analysis, and regulatory flexibility analysis evidence-building activities.

- **Research.** Research refers to the systematic use of scientific methods for the creation of new knowledge to describe, explain, predict, and

control an observed phenomenon. Research can also use existing knowledge in a new or innovative way to generate new concepts, methodologies, and understandings. Research can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. Research uses inductive (qualitative) and deductive (quantitative) methods. The purpose of research is to generate new knowledge or advance knowledge or theory. Research is intended to prove a theory or hypothesis. Research evidence practices are used to create economic reports, conduct foundational fact finding, and prepare literature review evidence-building activities.

- **Statistics.** Statistics and statistical activities refer to the collection, compilation, processing, or analysis of data for the purpose of describing or making estimates concerning a group (not an individual). Statistical evidence is produced from statistical activities for the purpose of describing, estimating, or analyzing the characteristics of a group. The purpose of statistics is to describe or make meaningful and accurate conclusions about a population based on a value computed from a sample. Statistical evidence practices are used with program and performance metrics and are frequently used in conjunction with all other evidence practice and evidence-building activities. Although not a statistical agency, the SBA produces performance measurement, operational, and administrative statistics, and partners with federal statistical agencies to provide essential statistical information (e.g., Census Bureau Statistics of U.S. Businesses and Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics).

The dimensions, also referred to as dimensional attributes, are as follows.

- **Coverage.** Coverage considers what evidence practices are occurring and where within the Agency they occur. The assessment also considers the extent to which evidence practices support Agency strategic goals and objectives and if the evidence-practice is used for operational, management, and policy decision-making.

- **Quality.** Quality considers ethics, scientific integrity, and quality of data of evidence produced. Quality is specific to the evidence-practice being assessed, reflecting standards such as relevancy, accuracy, timeliness, credibility, objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.

- **Method.** Method references the techniques, systems, and processes used in evidence generation. Methods vary by evidence practice. However, appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches are systemic, empirically grounded, and best support the definitive answers to the questions under investigation.

- **Effectiveness.** Effectiveness indicates that evidence practices and evidence-building activities support the Agency's intended outcome. Additionally, effectiveness considers the balance of organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination.

- **Independence.** Independence denotes that evidence practices and evidence-building activities are free from bias and inappropriate influence. Independence also considers internal and external oversight with identified accountabilities and controls.

Evidence-Building Activities

Evidence is generated through several activities. The SBA capacity assessment focuses on four evidence-building activities: program evaluation, performance measurement, policy analysis, and foundational fact finding (See Figure 2). The four evidence-building activities are interdependent. The credibility and merit of evidence practices and the level of maturity associated with these dimensions influence the evidence produced.

Figure 2. Evidence-Building Activities

The SBA routinely conducts in-house evidence-building activities and contracts for or collaborates in third-party evidence-building activities. In-house evidence-building activities are performed internally and serve as a useful and complementary approach to assess progress toward strategic goals and objectives. The SBA's internally conducted activities typically provide enhanced programmatic insight but may be perceived as less independent. Conversely, the SBA's third-party evidence activities engage external experts with no personal interest in the findings. However, externally conducted activities lack first-hand programmatic knowledge and may require internal subject matter experts to assist with the interpretation of the results. Whether done internally or externally, individuals involved in evidence-building activities are expected to be qualified, adhere to evidence practice principals and standards, and have no undisclosed conflict of interests. The development of meaningful, accurate, and objective evidence plays a crucial role in evidence-informed decision-making.

Similar to evidence practices and dimensional attribute assessments, the four evidence-building activities are unique but do not operate independently. Although described in the section above as evidence practices, analysis and statistics are typically used in or are a result of the SBA's evidence-building activities described below. Finally, coordinated evidence-building activities lead to a more robust evidence base.

- **Program Evaluation.** The SBA conducts program evaluations to examine Agency activities (program and initiative) and operations (administrative and support). Further, program evaluation seeks to ensure that programs have clear goals and objectives, logic models have documented program outcomes based on established theory, and program operations support intended outcomes. The SBA focuses evaluation activities on priority questions identified in the Agency's learning agenda, thereby playing a critical role in the development of a body of evidence used to inform policy, process, and program decision-making. Additional detail on the SBA's evaluation standards and practices is available in the *Framework and Guidelines for Program Evaluation*.[8] In addition to a dedicated team of evaluators in OPPAE, program offices may independently engage in evaluation activities.

- **Performance Measurement.** Effective performance measurement plays a critical role in the realization of strategic goals and objectives. The regular and ongoing collection, monitoring, and reporting of established performance measures offer opportunities to identify, coordinate, and execute evidence-based action within the Agency. Implementing the performance management framework emphasizes goal setting, prioritization, and the review of performance data to make decisions and improve outcomes. SBA performance measurement includes systematic assessment, organizational collaboration toward goal attainment, and data quality documentation and improvement that contributes to building a portfolio of evidence. The SBA's Performance Management Division is located within OPPAE. The SBA tracks approximately 100 key performance

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8   U.S. Small Business Administration (2019) Framework and Guidelines for Program Evaluation.

indicators annually in the Annual Performance Report.[9]

- **Policy Analysis.** Evidence-informed policymaking relies on rigorous, objective evidence. SBA policy analysis activities inform decision-making with empirically grounded analysis of policies that affect Agency programs. Although not exhaustive, policy analysis activities estimate regulatory impact, consider direct and indirect effects, and, where possible, account for outside influence to develop and evaluate policy. OPPAE and the Office of Advocacy generate evidence through policy and economic analysis activities.

- **Foundational Fact finding.** Foundational fact finding evidence-building activities play a vital role in the SBA's evidence-building cycle, and activities include, but are not limited to, descriptive statistics, aggregated indicators, literature reviews, exploratory studies, and research. The resulting foundational facts inform decision-making and often serve as inputs to other evidence practices and evidence-building activities. The Office of Advocacy uses economic research and various fact finding activities to advance the views and concerns of small businesses.

Evidence Capacity Building

Evidence capacity building is an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills and a deliberate process to enhance a group or organization's ability to conduct or use evidence as part of routine practice.[10] It requires tailored strategies based on capacity assessment needs, organizational commitment, training, experiential learning, practical application, and technical support within the workplace.[11] While the capacity assessment is used to analyze the gap between a current and goal state, enhanced capacity for evidence is built over time through intentional efforts that targets evidence knowledge, skill, and ability development at both the organizational and individual levels. The Agency currently seeks to build capacity through the Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice, internal and external training, the use of OPPAE program liaisons, and the integration of evidence discussions into planning and reviews.

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9   www.sba.gov/document/report--congressional-budget-justification-annual-performance-report.

10   Labin, S. N., Duffy, J. L., Meyers, D. C., Wandersman, A., & Lesesne, C. A. (2012). A Research Synthesis of the Evaluation Capacity Building Literature. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 33(3), 307–338.

11   Norton et al. (2016).

Method and Approach

To ensure the capacity assessment is thoroughly understood and correctly framed, the SBA reviewed literature,[12] assessed best practices, and engaged stakeholders. Successful capacity building, and by proxy this capacity assessment, requires context relevancy, tailored strategies, practical application, experiential learning, and ongoing leadership support. The SBA used a phased process to build capacity for evidence and evaluation. This approach required that the Agency routinely assess, diagnose, and produce actionable results that inform evidence practice and evidence-building activities to inform decision-making. The development of the SBA's capacity assessment is outlined below and is followed by an overview of stakeholder engagement, the capacity assessment framework, and barriers to capacity. A detailed timeline appears in Section VIII.

Phase 1 Interim Evidence Capacity Assessment (September 2020): Assess the evidence capacity literature and landscape, inventory agency evidence assets, and conduct a baseline assessment.

- Review capacity-building literature and conduct an environmental scan.
- Engage stakeholders and build awareness.
- Develop the Agency's evidence maturity goals and framework.
- Pilot data collection where the concentration of evidence activities occur.
- Analyze and report assessment findings.

Phase 2 Initial through Final Draft Evidence Capacity Assessment (June through December 2021): Continue evidence data collection and analysis while formulating capacity-building strategies.

- Collect data and re-assess the Agency's evidence capacity.
- Formulate an evidence capacity development plan and capacity-building strategies based on findings from the baseline capacity assessment.

Phase 3 Final Evidence Capacity Assessment (February 2022): Publish Evidence Capacity Assessment.

Phase 4 Ongoing: Continue to evaluate, re-assess, revise, and build upon existing capacity to sustain change and embed continuous learning into the SBA culture.

Stakeholders Engagement

Stakeholders are critical to the success of capacity assessment and capacity-building activities. Stakeholder engagement supports the development of evidence champions,[13] evidence buy-in,[14] and ultimately capacity for agencies to engage with and use evidence.[15] Stakeholder engagement and the integration of their feedback should occur regularly. Internal stakeholders include agency executives, program managers, and program staff, including other evaluators, analysts, and data professionals. External stakeholders include small businesses, Congress, OMB and other federal agencies, grantees, lenders, researchers, consortiums, and think tanks.

Several forms of stakeholder input informed the development of the capacity assessment. First,

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12   A select list of reviewed literature appears in Appendix C.
13   UNDP Capacity Assessment Methodology User's Guide (2008).
14   Bremault-Phillips, S. C., Parmar, J., Friesen, S., Rogers, L. G., & Pike, A. (2016). An Evaluation of the Decision-Making Capacity Assessment Model. *Canadian Geriatrics Journal*, 19(3), 83–96.
15   Brennan, S. E., McKenzie, J. E., Turner, T., Redman, S., Makkar, S., Williamson, A., … Green, S. E. (2017). Development and validation of SEER (Seeking, Engaging with and Evaluating Research): a measure of policymakers' capacity to engage with and use research. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 15(1), 1.

feedback from the learning agenda development and annual updates were considered in the design and the timeline. Second, the quarterly deep-dive reviews and annual evaluation planning meetings were used as listening sessions to understand better how to conceptualize and use evidence. Feedback from the learning agenda development informed the evidence maturity matrix, and information from the deep-dive reviews and evaluation planning provided input into the evidence maturity rating. Finally, a small sample of SBA program managers pretested the survey used to collect data on the SBA's evidence maturity. Based on pretest feedback, questions were reworded and contextual information was added, as appropriate.

Prior to data collection phase for the interim capacity assessment, SBA performance analysts, program evaluators, and members of the Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice provided feedback on the assessment framework and planned implementation process. More than 25 individuals received briefs and represented 12 of the SBA's program offices. Since that time, evidence capacity discussions with SBA and program leadership occur regularly, and efforts have been made to better understand factors influencing perceptions of evidence maturity. The SBA also consulted with external federal agencies on the design and development of the revised maturity model and data collection approach.

Five individuals from the three SBA offices most engaged in evidence-building activities provided the information to assess evidence maturity. The key designated officials (evidence leaders) identified in the Evidence Act—the Evaluation Officer, Statistical Official, and Chief Data Officer—reside in two of the three offices. The Director of Performance Management and the Director of Economic Research within the Office of Advocacy, an office that develops and aggregates research and data on small businesses, also provided input. These evidence leaders helped to determine the baseline maturity of the SBA's evidence capacity as reported in the interim evidence capacity assessment and Section VII below.

Following the baseline assessment, the SBA broadened internal stakeholder engagement. In addition to collecting existing evidence (prior studies, reports, analyses, data, and other evidence) held at the program level, non-career senior executives, career senior executives, senior leaders, and program managers across the SBA were invited to complete the SBA Evidence Capacity Assessment Survey. Focus group discussions were offered to those wishing to participate by alternate means. As presented in Section VII below, the perspective of SBA office and program leaders offers a more comprehensive assessment of evidence maturity and offers insight into evidence capacity-building activity needs.

Future iterations may also engage external stakeholders and independent experts. In addition to publishing a "Request for Information" on key learning agenda topics in a Federal Register Notice, the SBA will interview external stakeholders. It is expected that the information exchange with external stakeholders will inform the evidence-practice gap and guide future evidence capacity-building efforts.

Capacity Assessment Framework

The SBA capacity assessment framework uses a utilization-focused investigation to understand Agency perceptions of capacity for evidence practices. Additionally, before initiating the Agency's evidence capacity baseline assessment, the SBA developed its evidence capacity maturity model with structured levels and descriptive behavioral anchors that tie to the Evidence Act requirement discussed in Section III Purpose and Guidance. The three components of the assessment are:

1) **Evidence Maturity Model.** The evidence maturity model establishes the evidence baseline, defines the desired goal-state, and provides an analysis of the gap between a current state and goal-state. The model describes the present state of the SBA's evaluations, research, analysis, and statistical evidence practices across the dimension attributes coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence described in Section V.A. above, directly addressing the requirement outlined

Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, § 315 (c)(3)(9) (B through E). The structure of the model provides a rubric to measure capacity growth over time. The model outlines a path for continuous improvement that moves the SBA toward full implementation of OMB-defined evidence practices and standards and an enhanced capacity to generate and use evidence. See Appendix A for the full maturity model.[16] The SBA's long-term maturity goals are identified in Level 5, *Above Average*.

A 28-question assessment, SBA Evidence Capacity Assessment Survey, was used to collect evidence capacity data. Questions 1 through 7 collect rater demographic, individual knowledge, and technical expertise data. Questions 8 through 27 use a 5-point Likert scale and have a *Don't Know/No Basis to Judge* option.

2) **Evidence Asset Inventory.** In addition to meeting the statutory requirement[17] to list the activities and operations currently being evaluated or analyzed, the evidence asset inventory establishes a one-stop repository for evidence-building activities that advance the goals and objectives identified in the strategic plan or are used to answer priority questions outlined in the learning agenda. OPPAE and the Office of Advocacy provided the initial list of evidence assets. The list was analyzed, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion as an evidence asset or planned evidence-building activity has been developed. The list of current and planned activities and operations being evaluated and analyzed has since been expanded to offices throughout the SBA. See Appendix B for the list of work completed since FY 2018. Future iterations of the evidence capacity assessment will update current and planned evidence activities.

3) **Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues[18] (FMS).** The FMS collects agency data on evidence, evaluation, and performance management practices. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) administers the FMS periodically,[19] providing agency-specific data related to perceptions of performance measures, progress toward agency goals, quarterly performance reviews, and program evaluation. A random sample of career managers and supervisors, including employees at General Schedule or equivalent schedules at levels comparable to GS-13 through GS-15 and career Senior Executive Service, or equivalent, receive the survey. The FMS results are used, in part, to inform the requirement outlined Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, § 315 (c)(3)(9).

4) **Staff Capacity.** The SBA's OPPAE supports a centralized evidence and evaluation team with technical and applied knowledge to use evaluation, analysis, research, and statistical approaches and data in day-to-day operations. OPPAE staff work with program offices to plan and undertake evidence-building activities. Work continues post-evaluation to develop courses of action and integrate evaluation findings into implementation and performance management plans. The evidence and evaluation team also works to extend knowledge throughout the organization via the Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice, peer-to-peer learning sessions (such as Introduction to Using PowerBI for Data Analysis), targeted capacity building (such as Regulatory Analysis Review), and mentorship program matching. Finally, identification of evidence capacity needs and competencies have been included in the SBA's 2021 Talent Development Needs Survey and the Competency Assessment. Collectively, this information informs addressing the requirement outlined Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, § 315 (c)(3)(9)(F).

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16   As the Agency works toward the final capacity assessment, evidence practice descriptions may be updated to reflect best practices and lessons learned.

17   Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529, § 315 (c)(3)(9)(A).

18   Formerly known as Survey of Federal Managers on Organizational Performance and Management Issues.

19   GAO has administered the FMS in 1997, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2013, 2017, and 2020. The 2017 and 2020 surveys are available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp and https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp, respectively.

Barriers and Mitigation Strategies

Four of the SBA's most pressing capacity assessment, evidence practice, and evidence-building execution barriers include 1) system complexity, 2) data limitations, 3) FMS limitations, and 4) evidence expectations. The capacity-building plan, in part, addresses the limitations and develop targeted mitigation strategies.

1) **System complexity.** SBA staff focus primarily on service delivery and increasing staff attention to evidence and evaluation capacity requires buy-in and allocated time. Additionally, legislative and regulatory requirements can limit both the method and type of evidence-based inquiry undertaken, as well as the ability to dedicate personnel to evidence-based activities. Such regulations may also constrain the use of evidence in decision-making. Proactive stakeholder engagement, centralized evidence-building activities, organizational commitment, communication, feedback loops, and evidence dissemination strategies mitigate the above barriers.

2) **Data limitations.** Specific challenges related to data exist, and the concurrent development of the SBA's Data Strategy identifies data quality, machine readability, and prohibited data access limitations. These limitations impact the Agency's ability to identify, collect, and analyze evidence, which directly influences the Agency's evidence capacity. Coordinated efforts with the Chief Data Officer to foster the Agency's evidence assessment and capacity goals and mitigate identified data issues serve to reduce the impact of data limitations.

3) **Survey limitations.** The FMS provides insight into evidence barriers faced by the SBA, such as difficulty determining meaningful measures, challenges in obtaining valid or reliable data, and commitment to using performance information to make program decisions. However, only aggregated responses are available,[20] and the survey itself has sampling and response limitations that affect the interpretation. Although these limitations are outside the Agency's control, the SBA has taken steps to mitigate survey barriers by creating and communicating definitions, standardizing terminology, and embedding discussions of evidence in everyday dialogue. Additionally, the FMS topics were relatively constant from one version to the next, and the SBA intended to use the 2017 results as the baseline for the SBA's evidence maturity. GAO released the 2020 survey with updated and expanded data to account for relevant statute changes and OMB guidance. The 2020 survey results have been used to measure progress in this assessment.

4) **Evidence expectations.** The use of five raters to establish the Agency's capacity baseline is an additional limitation. However, the five raters were purposively selected for the breadth and depth of their knowledge of evidence practices and their exposure across the Agency. Additionally, the sample of SBA program managers completing the SBA Evidence Capacity Survey was not random, and therefore limits generalizability. Finally, potential rater bias or differing expectation levels may be contributing to the identified maturity model rating differences between the SBA's evidence leaders and program managers. Capacity-building strategies that target this gap in expectations will be developed.

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20   The government-wide results presented in this report may vary from those presented in GAO-21-536, available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-536, which used raw data and excluded instances where a respondent did not answer a question when calculating estimates. Seventy-eight SBA managers completed the survey (weighted response rate 53) completed the 2020 FMS.

Evidence Capacity Assessment Findings and Recommendations

Evidence Maturity Model

A team of SBA evidence leaders provided input on the Agency's baseline evidence maturity for the initial assessment. Each evidence leader oversaw the SBA's evidence-based practices and evidence-building activity portfolio, including performance management, program analysis, program evaluation, research, statistics, policy analysis, and foundational fact finding. SBA evidence leaders participating in the development of the baseline assessment include:

- Director, Office of Program Performance, Analysis, and Evaluation
- Director, Analysis and Evaluation Division
- Director, Performance Management Division
- Chief Data Officer
- Director, Office of Economic Research (Office of Advocacy)

The above experts completed the Evidence Capacity Assessment survey, which examined five dimensional attributes (coverage, quality, method, effectiveness, and independence) across four evidence practices (evaluation, analysis, research, and statistics). The survey questions were mapped to the evidence maturity model (see Appendix A), and the findings were used to rate evidence maturity on a five-level scale,[21] ranging from 1 (*Unacceptable*) to 5 (*Above Average*) with a *Don't Know/No Basis to Judge* option. The findings are presented in aggregate in the column labeled SBA Evidence Leaders.

After establishing the evidence maturity baseline, more than three dozen program managers across the SBA were invited to complete the Evidence Capacity Assessment survey. The survey attained a 39.5 percent response rate, and the findings are presented in aggregate in the column labeled SBA Program Managers. Given the response rate, the findings may not be generalizable to the broader SBA leadership and program manager population, and due to the nonresponse error, the findings should be interpreted cautiously.

Individuals completing the survey are well versed in the SBA's programs, contributing their wealth of knowledge and experience to the assessment. Approximately 55 percent of all survey respondents were Career Senior Executive or Senior Leaders, 35 percent were GS-15 program managers, and 10 percent were GS-14 program managers. Half of all respondents had between 4 and 20 years of work experience at the SBA, and 30 percent had 20 or more years' experience at the SBA. Most (80 percent) were very familiar or extremely familiar with the Agency's Strategic Plan. In contrast, approximately 35 percent were very familiar or extremely familiar with the Agency's Enterprise Learning Agenda. Finally, 90 percent of respondents identified as having advanced or authoritative knowledge in one or more evidence practice and evidence-building activity.

Collective Evidence Maturity

The collective maturity of the SBA's evidence practices is *Satisfactory*. See Figure 3. However, SBA program manager respondents consistently related the maturity attributes higher than the SBA's evidence leaders. The rating disparity between the two groups suggests a first step in capacity building is to align expectations throughout the Agency. The method and coverage attributes display the largest gap at 0.4 and 0.5, respectively. Coverage is of particular interest as the evidence leaders rated the attribute as *Improving to Satisfactory*, but the program managers rated the attribute as *Satisfactory*. Developing an evidence capacity-building plan addressing organization and human capital activities such as scalability, training, evidence quality, intra-agency coordination,

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21   SBA Evidence Maturity Model scale: 1 = Unacceptable, 2 = Marginal, 3 = Improving, 4 = Satisfactory, and 5 = Above Average.

and evidence dissemination strategies will set the framework for future evidence activities. Additionally, as discussed at the end of this section, the rating disparity of all attributes warrants further investigation and should be a focus of initial capacity-building efforts.

Figure 3. Overall Evidence Maturity

Evidence Maturity (Evaluation, Analysis, Research, Statistics)			
	Total Average	SBA Program Managers	SBA Evidence Leaders
Overall Score	4.3	4.4	4.1
Attribute	Level	Level	Level
Coverage	4.0	4.2	3.7
Quality	4.4	4.5	4.3
Methods	4.5	4.6	4.2
Effectiveness	4.2	4.3	4.1
Independence	4.4	4.5	4.3
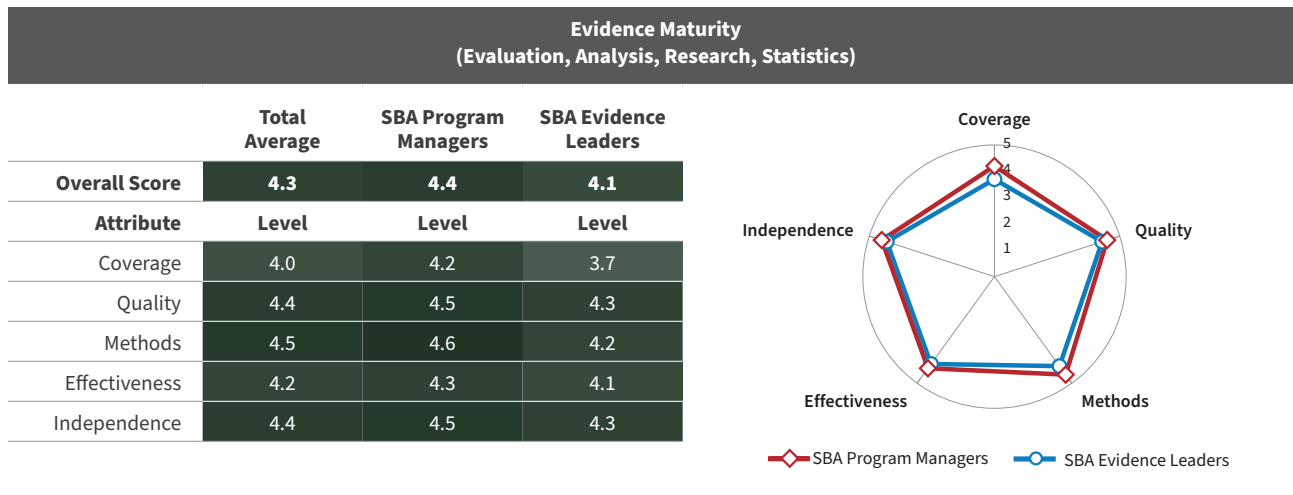
Maturity of Individual Evidence Practices

SBA program manager respondents and evidence leaders rated evaluation, analysis, and research as Satisfactory. See Figures 4 through 6. As noted above, a consistent theme throughout the rating is that SBA program manager respondents believed that the Agency had a more mature evidence capacity than the evidence leaders indicated when they responded to the survey.

Figure 4. Evaluation Maturity

Evaluation Maturity			
	Total Average	SBA Program Managers	SBA Evidence Leaders
Overall Score	4.4	4.5	4.3
Attribute	Level	Level	Level
Coverage	4.1	4.2	3.7
Quality	4.5	4.6	4.7
Methods	4.5	4.6	4.4
Effectiveness	4.3	4.5	4.3
Independence	4.6	4.7	4.6
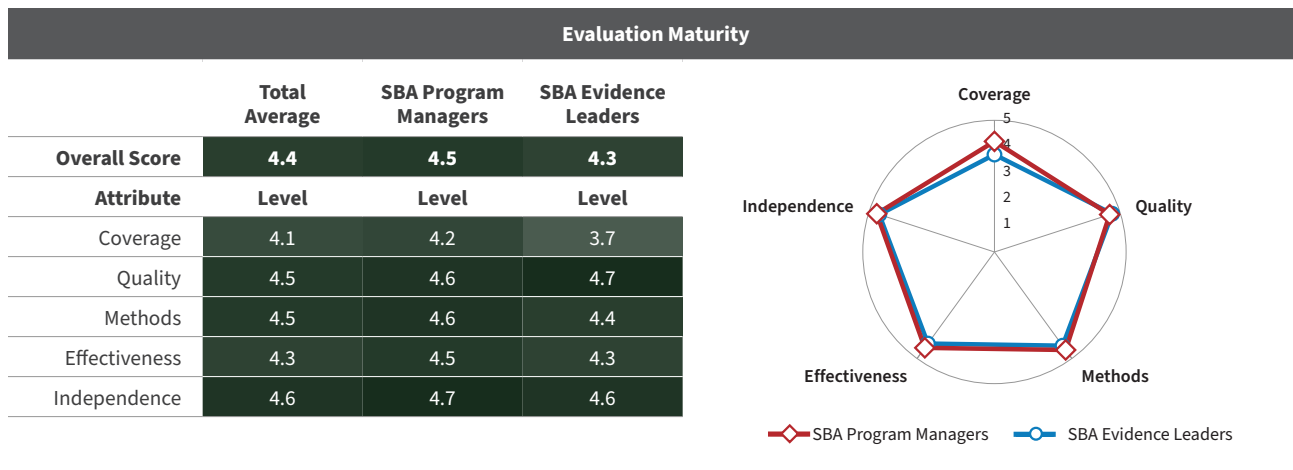
Figure 5. Analysis Maturity

Analysis Maturity			
	Total Average	**SBA Program Managers**	**SBA Evidence Leaders**
Overall Score	**4.3**	**4.4**	**4.0**
Attribute	**Level**	**Level**	**Level**
Coverage	4.1	4.1	4.0
Quality	4.4	4.6	4.0
Methods	4.3	4.5	3.9
Effectiveness	4.2	4.4	4.0
Independence	4.3	4.4	4.1
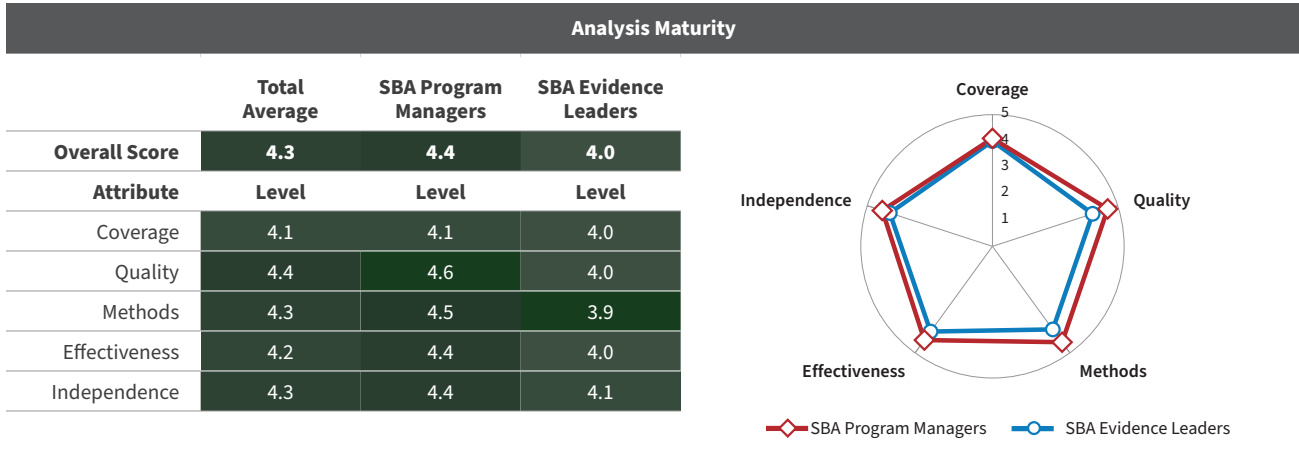
Figure 6. Research Maturity

Research Maturity			
	Total Average	**SBA Program Managers**	**SBA Evidence Leaders**
Overall Score	**4.3**	**4.3**	**4.3**
Attribute	**Level**	**Level**	**Level**
Coverage	4.0	4.2	3.6
Quality	4.4	4.4	4.4
Methods	4.6	4.5	4.6
Effectiveness	4.2	4.2	4.1
Independence	4.3	4.2	4.7
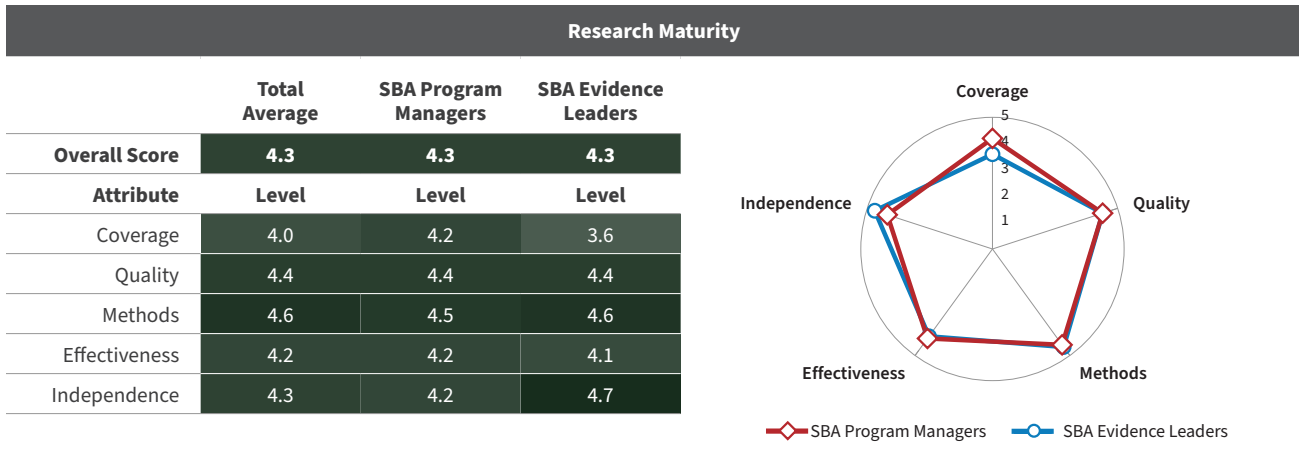
Although rating gaps exist in the above evidence practices, the discrepancy is particularly notable for the statistical practices. See Figure 7. Where evidence leaders perceive statistical activities and practices to range between *Improving and Satisfactory*, SBA program managers rated all attributes as *Satisfactory* and above. Statistics and statistical activities also received the largest number of (24 percent) *Don't Know/No Basis to Judge* responses. The findings suggest that additional clarity and communication regarding statistical practices and activities is warranted. Although to a lesser extent, between 10 and 15 percent of all possible responses for evaluation, analysis, and research were also *Don't Know/No Basis to Judge*, providing additional opportunities to increase awareness and knowledge across the SBA's evidence practices.

Figure 7. Statistics Maturity

Statistics Maturity (statistical activities and statistical evidence)			
	Total Average	**SBA Program Managers**	**SBA Evidence Leaders**
Overall Score	**4.3**	**4.4**	**3.8**
Attribute	**Level**	**Level**	**Level**
Coverage	4.0	4.2	3.4
Quality	4.3	4.3	4.2
Methods	4.4	4.6	4.0
Effectiveness	4.2	4.4	3.8
Independence	4.4	4.6	3.8
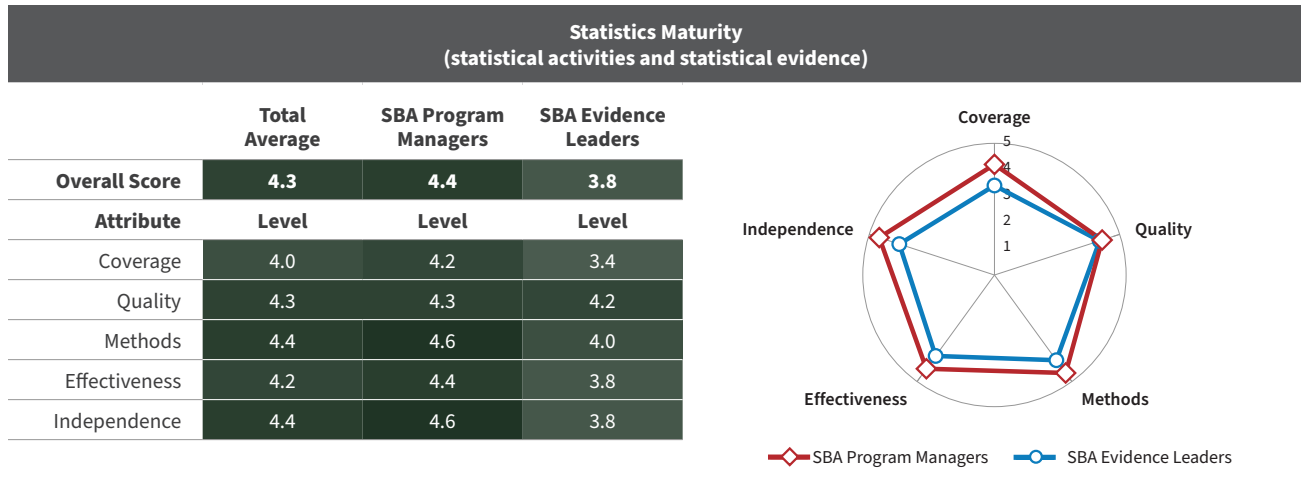
Extending beyond evidence practices, examining dimensional attributes across evidence practices provides additional opportunities to identify and target capacity-building activities. Figure 8, Dimensional Attribute Maturity, further illustrates perceived maturity gaps. Understanding when and what evidence is sufficient are key considerations when collecting, generating, synthesizing, prioritizing, disseminating, and using evidence. The marked difference of perceptions between the SBA's program managers and the SBA's evidence leaders suggests that training, technical assistance, and experiential learning opportunities that target evidence literacy and expectation alignment should be part of the Agency's evidence capacity-building strategy.

Figure 8. Dimensional Attribute Maturity

Evidence Maturity

Coverage

Quality

Method

Effectiveness

Independence
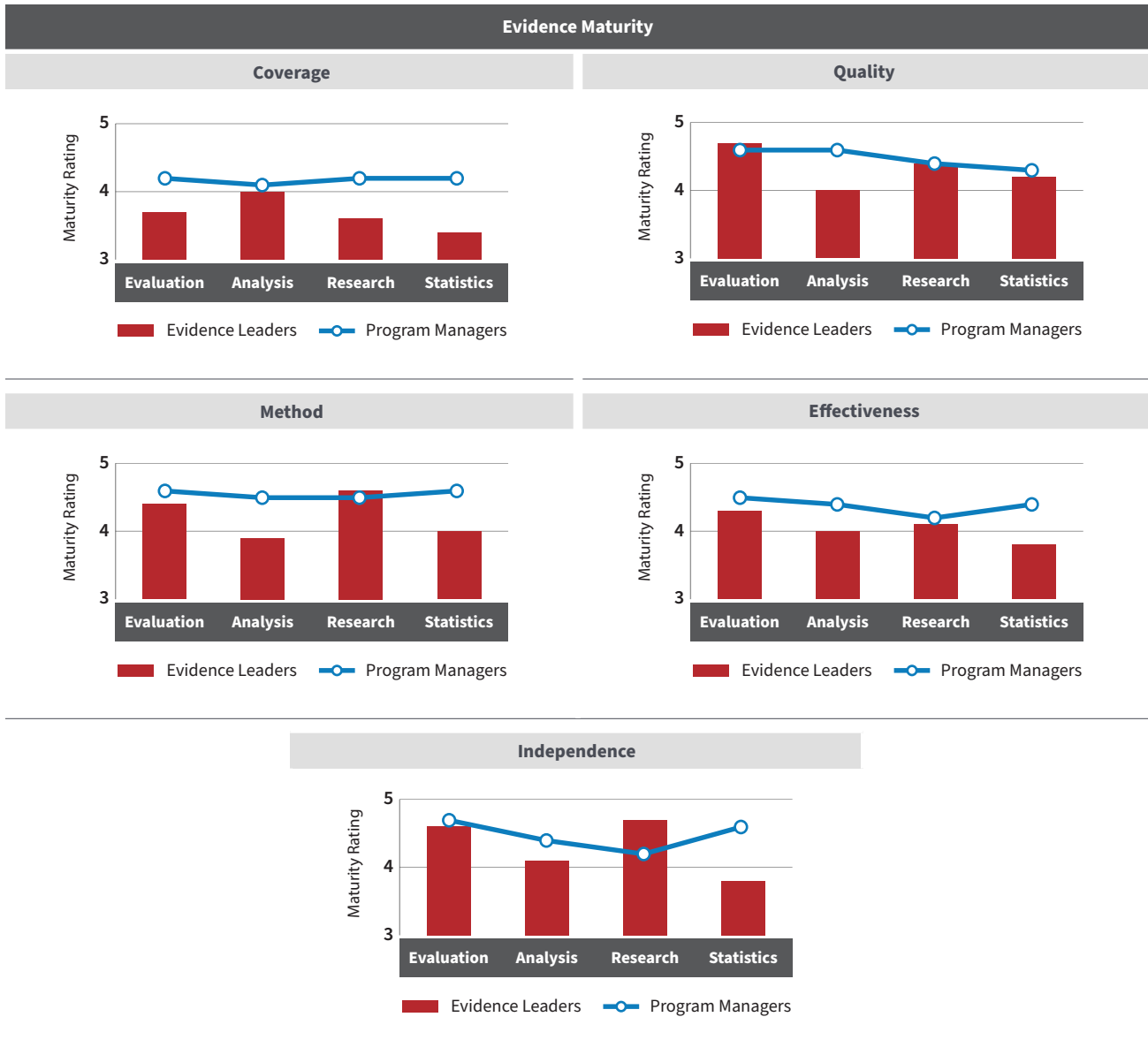
Evidence Asset Inventory

The inventory compiles evidence assets (evaluations, foundational fact finding, and regulatory analysis) beginning in fiscal year 2018, which coincides with the passage of the Evidence Act, and extends through the fiscal year 2021 planned activities. As the primary offices responsible for program evaluation, analysis, performance management, and research within SBA, asset inventory data collection efforts for the assessment were limited to documents and reports issued from OPPAE and Office of Advocacy, and data collection is now expanded throughout the Agency.

Collected information included report name, activity initiation year, project status, primary evidence practice, evidence-building activity, and program office. Data used to determine the evidence's priority status included:

- support of strategic goal and objective,
- relationship to learning agenda priority questions, and
- support in addressing a legislative requirement, regulatory need, or audit recommendatio.

The Agency recognizes that a broad body of empirical evidence on small business and related topics exists. However, listing all potentially significant external work extends beyond the scope and intent of the SBA's inventory of evaluated or analyzed activities and operations. Evidence assets should be included if the evidence-building activity will be used to support program improvement with a meaningful impact. The inclusion criteria are:

- The evidence-building activity is undertaken with the intended use for decision-making.
- The evaluation, analysis, research, or statistics are produced by an SBA employee, contractor, or interagency partner to inform SBA programs, policies, or processes;

- The Agency actively participated in an evidence-building project (evaluation, analysis, research, statistic) with an external researcher or other federal agency;
- A regulatory impact analysis was conducted as required by Executive Order 12866,[22] or if SBA is unable to certify that the regulatory action does not have a significant impact on a substantial number of small entities; or
- The analysis uses publicly available data or performance metric reports, including Annual Performance Reports, Priority Goal reports, or performance dashboards.

In addition to the routine and cyclical production of performance measures and the Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics, the SBA has created more than 55[23] evidence assets through the evaluation, analysis, and research of activities and operations since FY 2018. Additionally, there are approximately two dozen planned or in-process evaluation, analysis, and research projects in FY 2022 (see Appendix B). The SBA's publicly available data assets are also available online.[24] As of June 30, 2020, more than 800 data assets were available for use in evidence-building activities.

The review of activities and operations evaluated or analyzed revealed a mix of program evaluation, foundational fact finding, policy analysis, and performance management evidence-building activities that extend across the Agency. This evidence can be used to inform priority questions from the learning agenda and contribute toward the effective and efficient implementation of strategies identified in the Agency's strategic plan. Although progress has been made, additional support for the CDO's data quality efforts, including the full development of a comprehensive list of SBA data systems and information, along with data quality ratings, will further the SBA's evidence-building activities. Additionally, removing statutory restrictions that prevent the SBA's access to certain resource partner data will advance the SBA's program and client

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22   Available at https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12866.pdf.
23   As of November 30, 2021.
24   www.sba.gov/about-sba/sba-performance/open-government/digital-sba/open-data/open-data-sources.

knowledge. In turn, access to resource partner data will further the Agency's ability to use existing data for evidence-building activities and, ultimately, promote informed decision-making.

Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues

As discussed above in section VI.B.3, GAO periodically administers the FMS, which reports federal managers' observations on and perceptions of results-oriented management topics, such as performance measures and program evaluation. Questions are periodically updated between survey administration. While revisions made to the 2020 FMS affected the ability to compare results to the 2017 FMS survey, the 2020 FMS allows the SBA to examine its evidence capacity more fully by

expanding the performance information and evaluation components and adding data, research, and analysis questions.

Relevant questions from the FMS were coded by evidence type and category (organizational, human capital, individual, external influence, or system, structure, governance). The categories identified in Table 1 influence evidence integration and capacity[25] and provide further opportunity to target evidence capacity-building strategies. Where possible, the SBA used the change in results for questions appearing in the 2017 and 2020 versions of the FMS to assess the Agency's evidence capacity progress. Additionally, the SBA 2020 FMS results were compared with the government-wide estimates. The 2020 FMS now serves as the new baseline, and the next FMS, which occurs approximately every three years, will be used to continue monitoring progress over time.

Table 1. Capacity Categories and Federal Managers Survey Questions

Category	Example FMS questions
Organizational—includes leadership, culture/climate, strategy, communication, evidence integration	Are there performance measures for the program(s) that you were involved with?
Human capital—includes recruitment, retention, training, experiential learning, practical application	During the past three years, has your agency provided, arranged, or paid for training that would help you accomplish the following tasks?
System, structure, governance—includes infrastructure, resources, technical support	Managers [at my level] can easily access my agency's performance information.
Individual—includes knowledge, skills, abilities, and other attributes, engagement with and use of evidence	For those program(s) that you are involved with, to what extent, if at all, do you use the information obtained from performance measures when participating in the following activities?
External influences—includes policymakers, media, public opinion, customers, and researchers	To what extent do you agree with the statements [Congress supported the use of evaluations] about evaluations of your program(s)?

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25   Brownson, R. C., Fielding, J. E., & Green, L. W. (2018). Building Capacity for Evidence-Based Public Health: Reconciling the Pulls of Practice and the Push of Research. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 39(1), 27–53. Norton, et al. (2016); Preskill, H., & Boyle, S. (2008). A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 29(4), 443–459. Taylor-Ritzler, T., Suarez-Balcazar, Y., Garcia-Iriarte, E., Henry, D. B., & Balcazar, F. E. (2013). Understanding and Measuring Evaluation Capacity: A Model and Instrument Validation Study. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 34(2), 190–206.

Evidence Capacity Improvements (2017 to 2020)

The 2017 FMS findings suggested that the SBA's evidence-building activities focus on increasing the overall capacity for program evaluation. Although the 2017 and 2020 FMS results revealed perceived capacity differences between performance measurement and program evaluation remain, the capacity gap has reduced. Additionally, as demonstrated in Figure 9, the external evidence capacity estimates for evaluation are greater than the performance measurement estimates. In 2016, the SBA began investing resources into program evaluation activities. Given the increased focus on evaluation-related activities, and the evaluation maturity ratings discussed in the previous section, the SBA anticipates continued capacity development with higher ratings of program evaluation capacity in the next FMS. Because the 2017 FMS did not collect information about other evidence activities, there is no comparison for data, research, and analysis.

Figure 9. SBA Managers Reporting Capacity to Performance Measurement and Program Evaluation Activities[26]
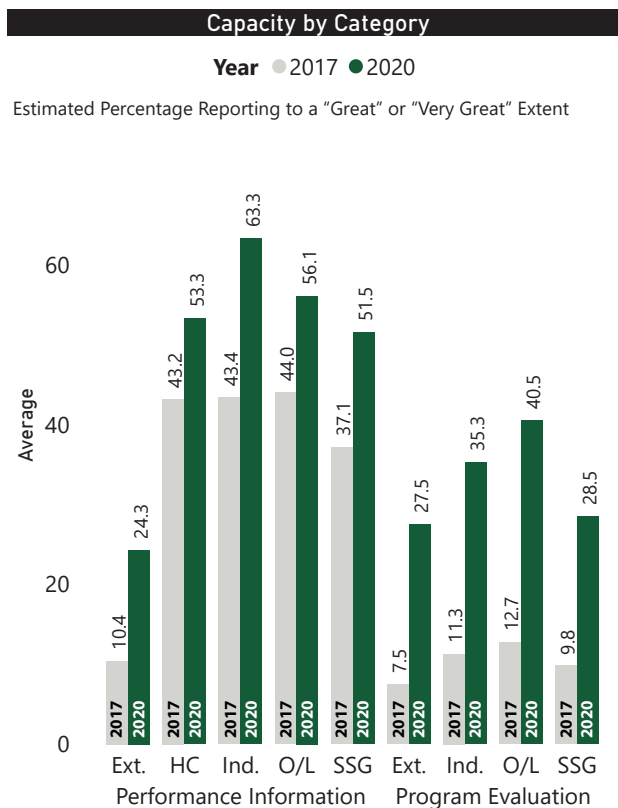
Capacity by Category

Year ● 2017 ● 2020

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Notes: Ext. = External. HC – Human Capital. Ind. = Individual. O/L = Organizational/Leadership. SSG = System, Structure, and Governance.

The SBA's efforts to enhance evidence-based communications and integrate evidence into decision-making have advanced the Agency's evidence capacity. Figure 10 demonstrates the increase in evidence capacity across all five categories, with individual capacity estimates now exceeding organizational capacity efforts. The findings suggest that the SBA's focus on developing employees' evidence-related competencies is contributing to evidence capacity growth in the individual category. Although progress in the human capital capacity category is evident, the

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26   Sources – Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 5a-e, 6a-g, 7a-n, 9a-m, 10a, 10c, 11c-d, 12c-d, 19a-l, 19p, 22a, 22c, 22e-g, 22j, 24a-c, 24e, 24l and Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 4b-e, 4g, 6a-g, 6i-n, 7a-b, 8d-e, 9a-d, 11a-j, 12a-b, 12e, 13b-c, 13e, 14a-b, 16a-j, 16l-n, 19a, 19c-f, 22a-b, 22e-f, 22i.

SBA's efforts related to recruitment, retention, training, experiential learning, and practical application lag the capacity development of other categories. However, this finding is likely attributed to a lack of comparable human capital capacity related to program evaluation. As seen in Figure 9 above, there were no matching program evaluation human capital questions present in the 2017 and 2020 FMS.

Figure 10. SBA Managers Reporting Capacity by Category[27]

Growth in Capacity by Category: 2017 to 2020

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Legend:
- Ext.
- HC
- Ind.
- O/L
- SSG

2017	2020
Organizational/Leadership — 56.7	Individual — 98.6
Individual — 54.7	Organizational/Leadership — 96.6
System, Structure, and Governance — 46.9	System, Structure, and Governance — 80.0
Human Capital — 43.2	Human Capital — 53.3
External — 17.9	External — 51.8

Notes: Ext. = External. HC – Human Capital. Ind. = Individual. O/L = Organizational/Leadership. SSG = System, Structure, and Governance.

In summary, while the 2017 FMS findings suggested that evidence-building activities should focus on increasing the overall capacity for program evaluation, the availability of the 2020 FMS findings demonstrate rapidly increasing capacity for evaluation evidence and evidence-building activities. Moving forward, the SBA will continue developing the Agency's capacity for performance and program evaluation evidence capacity.

SBA and Government-Wide Evidence Capacity Estimates (2020)

In addition to assessing capacity across evidence activities, the SBA agency-level capacity was examined against the government-wide estimates. Where available, comparisons to the SBA's 2017 FMS estimates are introduced.

SBA managers have access to a range of evidence and information. Figure 11 illustrates that a higher percentage of SBA managers report having access to performance and program evaluation information than
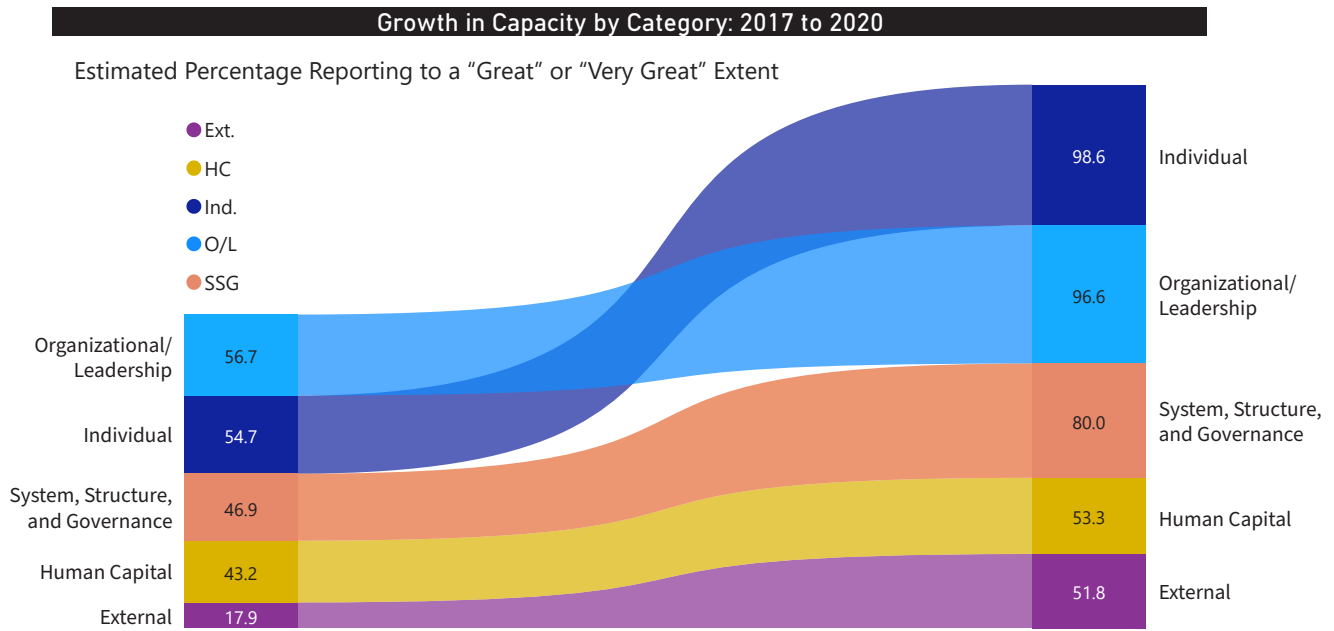
27   Sources – Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 5a-e, 6a-g, 7a-n, 9a-m, 10a, 10c, 11c-d, 12c-d, 19a-l, 19p, 22a, 22c, 22e-g, 22j, 24a-c, 24e, 24l and Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 4b-e, 4g, 6a-g, 6i-n, 7a-b, 8d-e, 9a-d, 11a-j, 12a-b, 12e, 13b-c, 13e, 14a-b, 16a-j, 16l-n, 19a, 19c-f, 22a-b, 22e-f, 22i.

is reported by federal managers government-wide. However, access to administrative data, statistical data, and research and analysis lags. Access to output, quality, process, customer service, and outcome measures for performance information items appear in the 2017 (estimated range 29.1 to 69.1 percent) and 2020 FMS (estimated range 45.2 to 79.8 percent)

demonstrating improved estimates in all measures. SBA managers reporting they had customer service measures to a "great" or "very great" extent achieved the largest gain (18.5 percent), followed by outcome, quality, and output measures. Process measures experienced the smallest gain at 7.5 percent.[28]

Figure 11. Managers Reporting They Had Specific Types of Evidence for Their Programs[29]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Performance Management

Data, Research and Analysis
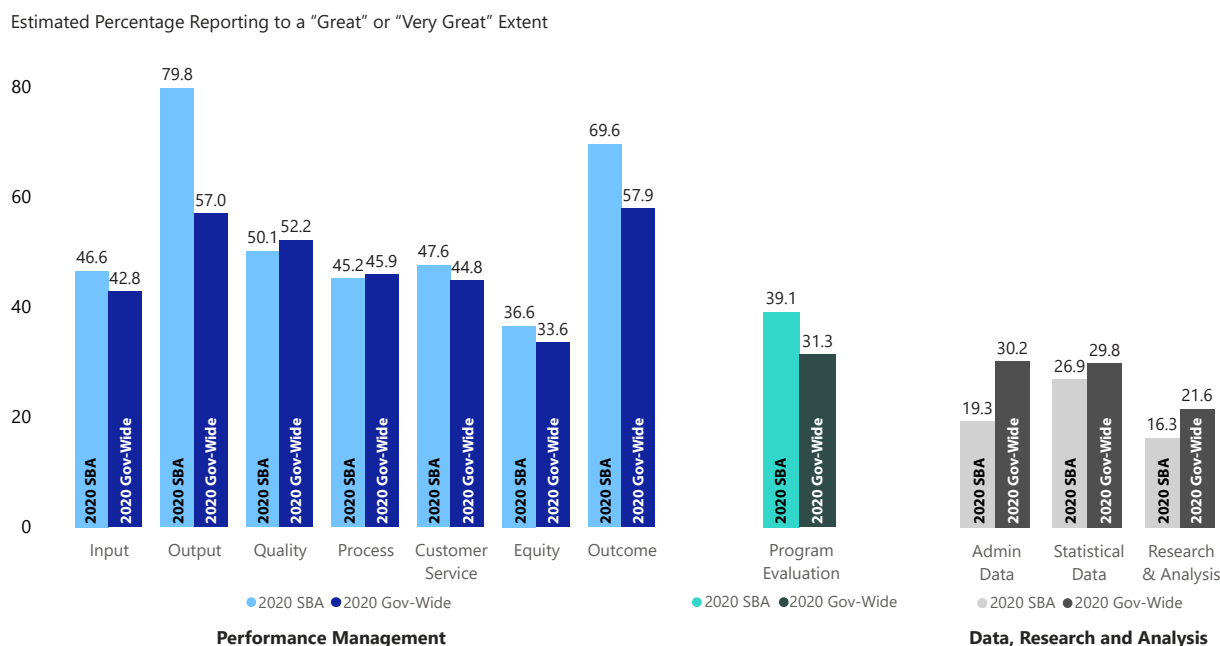
SBA managers' perception of performance and evaluation evidence exceeds the government-wide estimates. Figure 12 shows that when asked about the quality of performance evidence, approximately 66 percent of SBA managers reported that evidence was of sufficient quality (a "great" or "very great" extent) for their program but about 53 percent for the Agency. The

lower perception of performance evidence quality at the agency level was also observed in the government-wide results. When asked about the quality of program evaluation, approximately 42 percent of SBA managers reported that evidence was of sufficient quality (a "great" or "very great" extent).

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28 Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 5a-e.

29 Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 4a-g, 17b, and 24a-c. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

Figure 12. Managers Reporting They Had Evidence of Sufficient Quality[30]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

My Program | **My Agency**
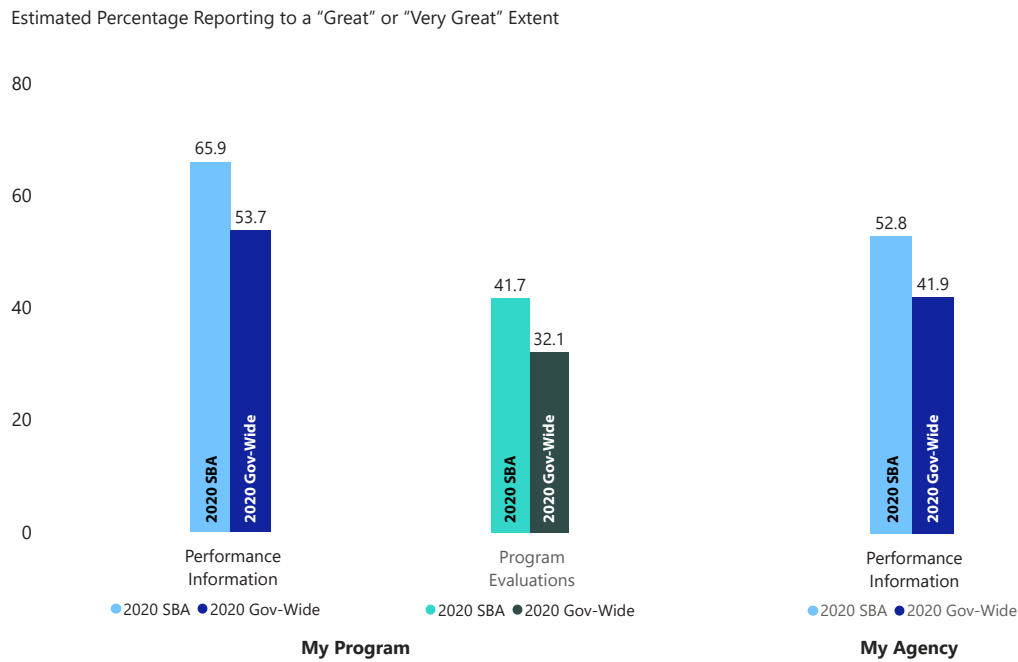
As illustrated in Figure 13, SBA managers reported using evidence for various decision-making activities such as program management and information, managing crosscutting activities, and communicating information. Further examination reveals that performance information is most used and data, research, and analysis are least used in the scenarios presented. The recently completed data literacy gap assessment revealed that capacity gaps existed in seven of nine identified data skills, which may explain the reduced use of data in decision-making activities examined. When compared with government-wide results,[31] the SBA's usage of program information and evaluation evidence for decision-making exceeds the government-wide estimates.

30　Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 7c, 12d, and 20. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

31　Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 6b-e, 6g-l, 19a-f, 25b-k.

Figure 13. SBA Managers Reporting They Used Various Types of Evidence for Selected Management Activities[32]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent
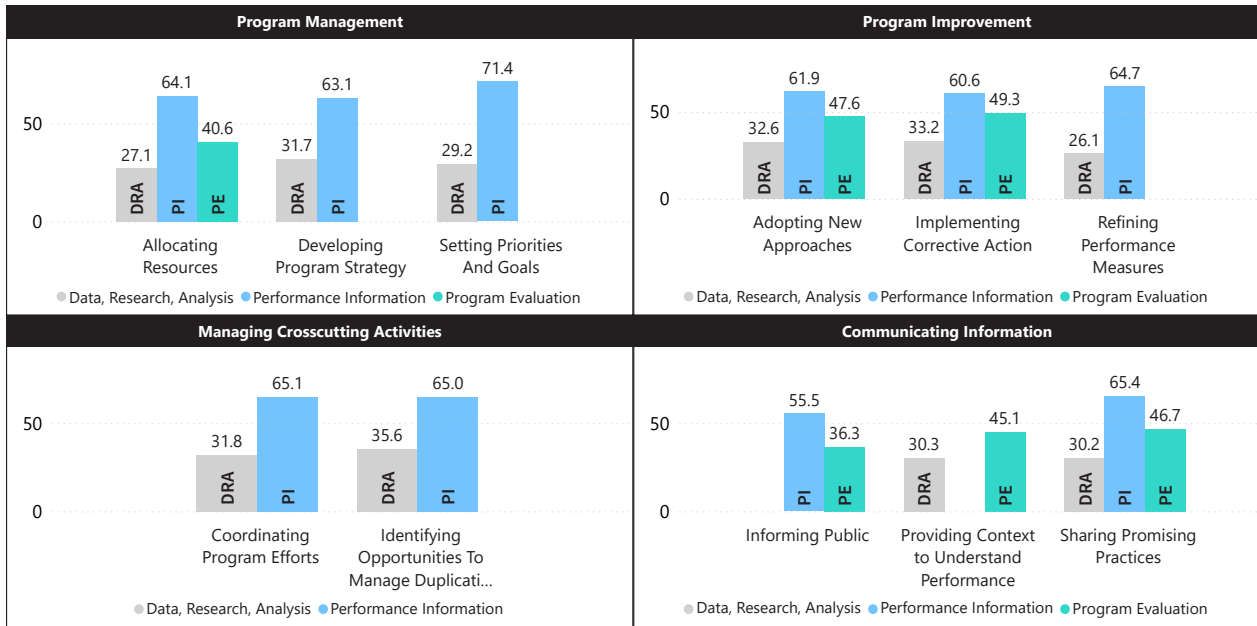
When compared with the 2017 FMS results, SBA managers in 2020 reported increases in their use of performance information and program evaluation. SBA managers agreed using program evaluation evidence for providing context to understand performance from a "great" or "very great" extent increased 32.6 percent from 12.5 to 45.1 percent. The use of program evaluation evidence for resource allocation, sharing promising practices, and informing public also increased 30.9, 29.6, and 25.7 percent, respectively.

Where opportunities for comparison of the usage of performance information existed, increases ranged from 15 to 29.5 percent (see Table 2). As further evidence of the SBA's increased capacity for performance information, a recently released GAO report noted that the SBA usage of performance information index score, which approximates the reported use of performance information in decision-making and engagement in practices that promote the use of performance information increased significantly between 2017 and 2020.[33] The report also concluded that the SBA estimates exceeded the government-wide estimates on 3 of 11 questions related to the use index and 9 of the 15 questions related to leading practices that can promote the use of performance information

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Table 2. SBA Managers Reporting Use of Performance Information for Selected Management Activities, 2017 and 2020[34]

	Performance Information (estimated percent)		2017–2020 (percent)
	2017	2020	
Allocating Resources	46.8	64.1	+17.3
Developing Program Strategy	45.9	63.1	+17.2
Setting Priorities And Goals	43.6	71.4	+27.8
Adopting New Approaches	46.8	61.9	+15.1
Implementing Corrective Action	45.6	60.6	+15.0
Refining Performance Measures	36.6	64.7	+28.1
Coordinating Program Efforts	44.3	65.1	+20.8
Informing Public	26.6	55.5	+28.9
Sharing Promising Practices	35.9	65.4	+29.5

SBA managers' estimates of program staff evidence-building capacity exceeded the government-wide estimates. As shown in Figure 14, approximately 60 percent of SBA managers reported that program staff had evidence-building capacity for performance information to a "great" or "very great" extent, but only 35.6 percent of managers reported evidence-building capacity for data, research, and analysis. Aspects of program evaluation evidence-building capacity ranged from 46 to 47.7 percent.

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34   Sources – Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 7a, 7c. 7e-l, 7m-n. Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 6b-e, 6g-l.

Figure 14. Managers Reporting Program and Agency Staff Had Evidence-Building Skills[35]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Program staff have the skills needed to…

Collect, analyze, and use these types of evidence
- 2020 SBA: 60.4
- 2020 Gov-Wide: 50.5

Performance Information ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Collect, analyze, and use these types of evidence
- 2020 SBA: 35.6
- 2020 Gov-Wide: 27.1

Data, Research, and Analysis ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Undertake the following program evaluation activities:

Conduct evaluations
- 2020 SBA: 47.2
- 2020 Gov-Wide: 32.7

Implementing resulting recommendations
- 2020 SBA: 47.7
- 2020 Gov-Wide: 35.3

Understand methods, results, and limitations
- 2020 SBA: 46.0
- 2020 Gov-Wide: 33.0

Program Evaluation ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Approximately 52 percent of SBA managers reported that Agency-wide evidence-building skills for performance information existed to a "great" or "very great" extent, with 43 percent of managers reporting evidence-building skills for data, research and analysis. Figure 15 shows that although the reported capacity gap between the two evidence activities remains, it is reduced at the Agency level.

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35   Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 8b, 21a-c, 26a. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

Figure 15. Managers Reporting Program and Agency Staff Had Evidence-Building Skills[36]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

My agency has staff with the skills needed to…

Collect, analyze, and use these types of evidence

2020 SBA — 52.1
2020 Gov-Wide — 46.2

Performance Information ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Collect, analyze, and use these types of evidence

2020 SBA — 43.0
2020 Gov-Wide — 40.4

Data, Research, and Analysis ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide
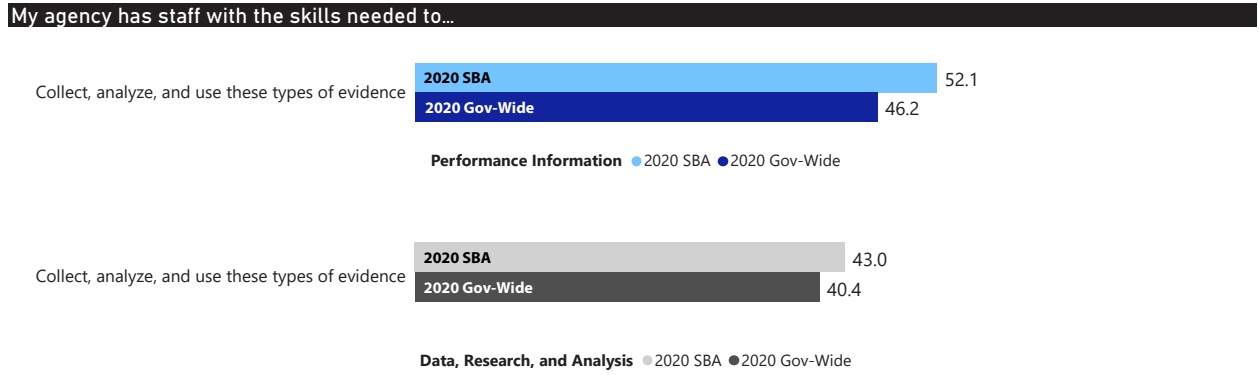
Managers were asked about program and Agency access to analytical tools to collect, analyze, and use performance information and data, research, and analysis. As illustrated in Figure 16, approximately 49 percent of SBA managers reported having performance information at the program and agency levels to a "great" or "very great" extent.[37] SBA managers reported greater agency-wide access to analytical tools (37.8 percent) than at the program level (20.7 percent) for data, research, and analysis.

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36   Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 13d and 26c. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

37   SBA managers reporting My agency has the tools needed to collect, analyze , and use performance information to a "great" or "very great" extent in 2017 was 34.5 percent. See Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp, survey item 6e.

Figure 16. Managers Reporting They Had Tools to Collect, Analyze, and Use Evidence[38]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Managers have the tools to collect, analyze and use…

Performance Information
2020 SBA — 48.7
2020 Gov-Wide — 44.2

● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Data, research, and analysis
2020 SBA — 20.7
2020 Gov-Wide — 25.7

● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

My agency has the tools to collect, analyze and use…

Performance Information
2020 SBA — 48.8
2020 Gov-Wide — 47.8

● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Data, research, and analysis
2020 SBA — 37.8
2020 Gov-Wide — 39.2

● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

More than half of SBA managers (an estimated 55.7 to 72.0 percent) reported the availability of training to develop, assess, or use performance information. Slightly more than one-third of SBA managers reported that program staff received training in program evaluation, but less than one-third of SBA managers reported availability of training related to data, research, and analysis. Figure 17 illustrates that this trend is consistent with the experience of managers government-wide.

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38   Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 8a, 11f, 26b, 27b. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

Figure 17. Managers Reporting They or Their Staff Received Training to Conduct Various Evidence-Building Activities[39]

Estimated Percentage Reporting "Yes"

In the past 3 years, my agency provided training to…

Activity		Value
Assessed the quality of performance data	2020 SBA	55.7
	2020 Gov-Wide	52.6
Conduct strategic planning	2020 SBA	58.5
	2020 Gov-Wide	54.8
Develop program performance measures	2020 SBA	69.9
	2020 Gov-Wide	57.5
Link the performance of program(s)/operation(s)/project(s) to the achievement …	2020 SBA	65.0
	2020 Gov-Wide	57.7
Set program performance goals	2020 SBA	72.0
	2020 Gov-Wide	61.7
Use program performance information to make decisions	2020 SBA	67.2
	2020 Gov-Wide	56.8

Performance Information ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Activity		Value
Analyze administrative and statistical data, and research and analysis to draw co…	2020 SBA	26.7
	2020 Gov-Wide	30.8
Assess the credibility of data, research, and analysis	2020 SBA	26.9
	2020 Gov-Wide	27.2
Assess the quality of data, such as administrative or statistical data	2020 SBA	33.5
	2020 Gov-Wide	30.4
Identify and collect additional types of information, such as administrative or sta…	2020 SBA	25.3
	2020 Gov-Wide	30.7

Data, Research, and Analysis ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

Program staff have received training on…

Activity		Value
Program evaluation (e.g., formal classroom training, conferences, on the job trai…	2020 SBA	37.1
	2020 Gov-Wide	25.3

Program Evaluation ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

It is also worth noting that training on performance information has substantially increased over the past three years. As illustrated in Table 3, SBA manager reporting that the Agency provided, arranged, or paid for training to help use of performance measures to conduct various evidence-building activities to a "great" or "very great" extent has increased since 2017. Most notably, training related to the use of performance information in decision-making increased by nearly 30 percent.

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39   Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 10a-f, 21d and 28a-d. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

Table 3. SBA Managers Reporting The Agency Provided Training to Conduct Performance-Related Evidence-Building Activities[40]

	Performance Information		Change 2017–2020
	2017	2020	
Assess the quality of performance data	36.1	55.7	+19.6
Conduct strategic planning	41.1	58.5	+17.4
Develop program performance measures	46.1	69.9	+23.8
Link the performance of program(s)/operation(s)/project(s) to the achievement of agency strategic goals	40.2	65.0	+24.8
Set program performance goals	47.7	72.0	+24.3
Use program performance information to make decisions	38.6	67.2	+28.6

Similar to the government-wide trend, Figure 18 illustrates that approximately one-third of SBA managers reported that the Agency is investing resources to improve data, research, and analysis capabilities. Nearly half of SBA managers reported
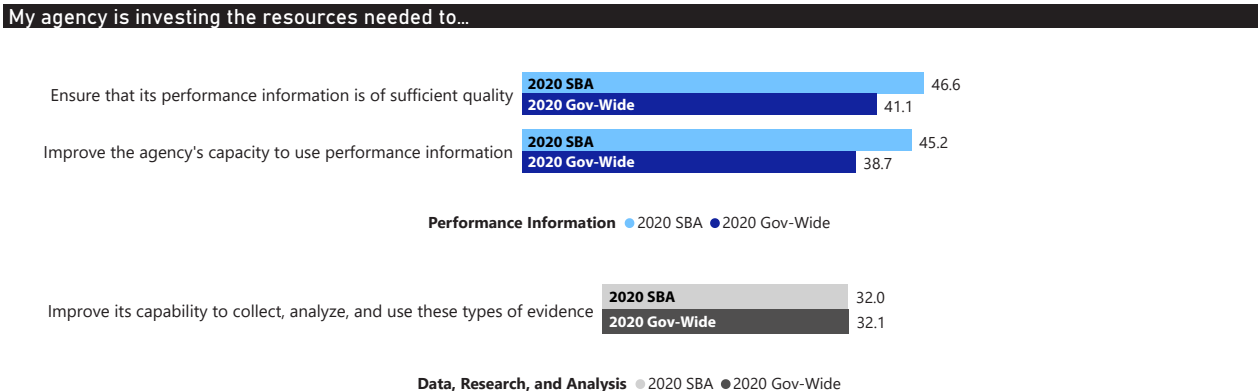
Agency investment in improving the quality of and capacity to use performance information, which is up from approximately one-quarter reported in the 2017 FMS.[41]

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40 Sources – Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 13a-f. Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 10a-f.

41 Supplemental Material for GAO-17-775: 2017 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-17-776SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-776sp. See survey items 13c and 13e.

Figure 18. Managers Reporting Agency Resource Investments in Evidence-Building Capacity[42]

Estimated Percentage Reporting to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent

My agency is investing the resources needed to…

Ensure that its performance information is of sufficient quality	2020 SBA	46.6
	2020 Gov-Wide	41.1
Improve the agency's capacity to use performance information	2020 SBA	45.2
	2020 Gov-Wide	38.7

Performance Information ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

Improve its capability to collect, analyze, and use these types of evidence	2020 SBA	32.0
	2020 Gov-Wide	32.1

Data, Research, and Analysis ● 2020 SBA ● 2020 Gov-Wide

In summary, performance-based evidence continues to outperform other SBA evidence activities and capacity. However, the SBA's evaluation evidence-capacity is a leader among its government-wide peers, and program evaluation capacity has substantially improved in three years. As the SBA continues program evaluation evidence-building, the gap between performance and evaluation is expected to further decrease. Finally, the 2020 FMS introduced additional types of evidence (data, research, and analysis), reflecting new activities as required in the Evidence Act.

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42   Source – Supplemental Material for GAO-21-536: 2020 Federal Managers Survey: Results on Government Performance and Management Issues (GAO-21-537SP), available at https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-537sp. See survey items 13c, 13e, 27d. Gov-Wide = Government Wide.

Recommendations and Capacity-Building Plan

This capacity assessment identified and analyzed the gap between the SBA's current evidence capacity and the goal state. Recommendations have been summarized into four overarching strategies: 1) raise awareness and align expectations; 2) build employee skills, knowledge, and capabilities; 3) promote and support effective evidence practices and evidence-building activities; and 4) institutionalize evidence capacity throughout organizational systems, structures, and policies.

Strategy 1: The SBA should continue raising awareness of and align expectations around evidence-based decision-making, evidence capacity, and evidence building. The findings from this assessment demonstrate growth in awareness and use of evidence but also found a misalignment of understanding and expectations between the Agency's evidence leaders and program managers. The SBA may consider broadly disseminating the results of this assessment among Agency leadership, continual integration of program staff in the evidence building process, and communicating the results of evidence building activities at all staff levels.

Strategy 2: The SBA should continue building employee skills, knowledge, and capabilities for evidence building and use. The assessment notes that individual employee capacity has grown. However, individual capacity can vary across the organization and requires constant effort to maintain sufficient levels. The Agency may consider offering evidence related trainings, developing specific capacity-building curriculums, and identifying a way to track and monitor staff capacity.

Strategy 3: The SBA should continue promoting and supporting effective evidence practices and evidence-building activities. The evidence capacity survey noted areas where these could be expanded to provide more coverage throughout the Agency. The SBA may consider organizing opportunities for various offices to discuss evidence activities, identify ways to use data integrating evaluation, analysis, research, and statistical evidence to inform decision-making, and establish mechanisms to procure capacity-building support.

Strategy 4: The SBA should continue working to institutionalize evidence capacity throughout organizational systems, structures, and policies. An Agency with a mature evidence capacity will have an organizational culture that supports the routine use of evidence practices and evidence for decision making. The SBA may consider incorporating evidence use in appropriate templates and policies, developing indicators to measure capacity-building activities and progress, aligning position descriptions and workforce need statements to ensure adequate human resources, and re-administer the SBA Evidence Capacity Survey in subsequent years to measure and reassess SBA's evidence capacity and progress toward the level 5 goal state outlined in the maturity model.

Appendix A: Evidence Maturity Model

Evaluation

	Level 1 (Unacceptable)	Level 2 (Marginal)	Level 3 (Improving)	Level 4 (Satisfactory)	Level 5 (Above Average)
Coverage	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **NEVER** support the agency's strategic goals and objectives and are **NEVER** available for operational, management, and policy decision-making.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **RARELY** support the agency's strategic goals and objectives and are **RARELY** available for operational, management, and policy decision-making.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **SOMETIMES** support the agency's strategic goals and objectives and are **SOMETIMES** available for operational, management, and policy decision-making.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **TYPICALLY** support the agency's strategic goals and objectives and are **TYPICALLY** available for operational, management, and policy decision-making.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **ALMOST ALWAYS** support the agency's strategic goals and objectives and are **ALMOST ALWAYS** available for operational, management, and policy decision-making.
Quality	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **NEVER** ethical and **NEVER** meet evaluation quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **RARELY** ethical or **RARELY** meet evaluation quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **SOMETIMES** ethical and **SOMETIMES** meet evaluation quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **TYPICALLY** ethical and **TYPICALLY** meet evaluation quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **ALMOST ALWAYS** ethical and **ALMOST ALWAYS** meet evaluation quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.
Methods	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **NEVER** employ appropriate or rigorous methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **RARELY** employ appropriate or rigorous methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **SOMETIMES** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **TYPICALLY** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities **ALMOST ALWAYS** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches that best support the definitive answers to the evaluation questions under investigation.

	Level 1 (Unacceptable)	Level 2 (Marginal)	Level 3 (Improving)	Level 4 (Satisfactory)	Level 5 (Above Average)
Effectiveness	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **NEVER** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **NEVER** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **NEVER** disseminated.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **RARELY** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **RARELY** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **RARELY** disseminated.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **SOMETIMES** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **SOMETIMES** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **SOMETIMES** disseminated.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **TYPICALLY** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **TYPICALLY** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **TYPICALLY** disseminated.	Evaluation activities and evidence developed through evaluation activities are **ALMOST ALWAYS** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **ALMOST ALWAYS** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **ALMOST ALWAYS** disseminated.
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Analysis

	Level 1 (Unacceptable)	Level 2 (Marginal)	Level 3 (Improving)	Level 4 (Satisfactory)	Level 5 (Above Average)
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Research

	Level 1 (Unacceptable)	Level 2 (Marginal)	Level 3 (Improving)	Level 4 (Satisfactory)	Level 5 (Above Average)
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Statistics

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Quality	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **NEVER** ethical and **NEVER** meet quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **RARELY** ethical or **RARELY** meet quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **SOMETIMES** ethical and **SOMETIMES** meet quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **TYPICALLY** ethical and **TYPICALLY** meet quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **ALMOST ALWAYS** ethical and **ALMOST ALWAYS** meet quality standards (relevant, accurate, timely, and credible) and standards of objectivity, utility, integrity, and transparency.
Methods	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence **NEVER** employ appropriate or rigorous methodological approaches.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence **RARELY** employ appropriate or rigorous methodological approaches.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence **SOMETIMES** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence **TYPICALLY** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence **ALMOST ALWAYS** employ appropriate and rigorous methodological approaches.
Effectiveness	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **NEVER** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **NEVER** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **NEVER** disseminated.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **RARELY** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **RARELY** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **RARELY** disseminated.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **SOMETIMES** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **SOMETIMES** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **SOMETIMES** disseminated.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **TYPICALLY** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **TYPICALLY** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **TYPICALLY** disseminated.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **ALMOST ALWAYS** directed at outcomes and issues that matter to the agency and **ALMOST ALWAYS** balance organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic decision-making, interagency, and private sector coordination. Reports and findings are **ALMOST ALWAYS** disseminated.

	Level 1 (Unacceptable)	Level 2 (Marginal)	Level 3 (Improving)	Level 4 (Satisfactory)	Level 5 (Above Average)
Independence	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **NEVER** free from bias and inappropriate influence and **NEVER** have appropriate levels of internal and external oversight. Policies **NEVER** identify accountabilities and controls related to statistical activities and statistical evidence.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **RARELY** free from bias and inappropriate influence and **RARELY** have appropriate levels of internal and external oversight. Policies **RARELY** identify accountabilities and controls related to statistical activities and statistical evidence.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **SOMETIMES** free from bias and inappropriate influence and **SOMETIMES** have appropriate levels of internal and external oversight. Policies **SOMETIMES** identify accountabilities and controls related to statistical activities and statistical evidence.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **TYPICALLY** free from bias and inappropriate influence and **TYPICALLY** have appropriate levels of internal and external oversight. Policies **TYPICALLY** identify accountabilities and controls related to statistical activities and statistical evidence.	Statistical activities and the development of statistical evidence are **ALMOST ALWAYS** free from bias and inappropriate influence and **ALMOST ALWAYS** have appropriate levels of internal and external oversight. Policies **ALMOST ALWAYS** identify accountabilities and controls related to statistical activities and statistical evidence.

Appendix B: List of Activities and Operations Evaluated or Analyzed[43]

	Year	Program Evaluation	Foundational Fact Finding	Performance Management	Policy Analysis
SO 1.1: Ensure all entrepreneurs have access to capital to start and grow their business					
Financing Patterns and Credit Market Experiences: A Comparison by Race and Ethnicity for U. S. Employer Firms	2018		✓		
How Did Bank Lending to Small Business in the United States Fare After the Financial Crisis?	2018		✓		
One Year of Equity Crowdfunding: Initial Market Developments and Trends	2018		✓		
Small Business Lending in the United States, 2016	2018		✓		
Microloan Program Logic Model and Lender Performance	2019	✓			
Office of Credit Risk Management Logic Model	2019	✓			
Do Banks Lend Where They Borrow? A Study On Local Small Business Lending In The U.S.	2020		✓		
Minority-Owned Employer Businesses And Their Credit Market Experiences In 2017	2020		✓		
Research From Advocacy: Bank Lending To Rural Vs Urban Firms In The United States, 2007-2016	2020		✓		
Small Business Lending In The United States, 2017	2020		✓		
Small Business Lending in the United States, 2019	2020		✓		
Evaluation of Surety Bond Guarantee Program	2020	✓			
Evaluation of Microloan Program Outcomes	2021	✓			
Streamlining and Modernizing the 7(a), Microloan, and 504 Loan Programs To Reduce Unnecessary Regulatory Burden	In-Process				✓
Census Joint Statistical Project: OCA 7(a) and 504 Loan Programs	In-Process		✓		
Census Joint Statistical Project: OCA COVID-EIDL outcomes	In-Process		✓		
Reducing the Documentation Burden to Improve Equity in Access to COVID-19 Small Business Relief Funding	In-Process	✓			
Community Development Financial Institution and Minority Depository Institution Lender Participation in SBA Loan Programs Evaluation	Planned	✓			
SO 1.2: Build a thriving national innovation ecosystem that promotes investments in all small business communities					
How Accelerators Promote Regional Entrepreneurship (Regional Accelerators Report)	2019		✓		
SBIC Examinations Evaluation	2020	✓			
SBIC Rural Investments Environmental Scan and Evaluability Assessment	2020	✓			
SBIR/STTR Women in STEM	Planned		✓		

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43   Reflects the goals and objectives identified in the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

	Year	Program Evaluation	Foundational Fact Finding	Performance Management	Policy Analysis
SO 1.3: Grow exporting opportunities to help small businesses across the country expand into new markets					
Section 502 Small Business Report on NAFTA-USMCA report	2018		✓		
Evaluation of Federal and State Technology (FAST) Grantees	2019	✓			
Contributions Of Small Business Indirect Exports To U.S. International Trade	2020		✓		
Express Loan Programs; Affiliation Standards	2020				✓
Evaluation of SBA's State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) Outcomes	2021	✓			
SO 1.4: Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all federal procurement opportunities					
Census Bureau Statistics of U.S. Businesses (SUSB)	2018		✓		
Examining Small Business Impacts in the Regulatory Development Process: The Drawbacks of Averaging	2018		✓		
Small Business HUBZone Program; Government Contracting Programs	2019				✓
7(j) Training Program for 8(a) Participants Evaluation	2019	✓			
An Investigation Of Women Business Owners, Industry Concentration, And Family Composition	2020		✓		
Consolidation of Mentor Protégé Programs and Other Government Contracting Amendments	2020				✓
Evaluation of Withdrawals and Terminations from SBA's All Small Mentor-Protégé Program	2020	✓			
Women-Owned Small Business and Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Small Business Certification	2020				✓
HUBZone Economic Impact Report	2021				✓
Small Business Procurement Scorecard Evaluation	2021	✓			
Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Logic Model and Measures Development	2021	✓			
WOSB NAICS Analysis	2021		✓		
Evaluation of 8(a) Certified Firms	2021	✓			
HUBZone Early Engagement Evaluation	In-Process	✓			
Evaluation of Small Business Procurement Set-Aside (Government Contracting) Surveillance Reviews	In-Process	✓			
Census Joint Statistical Project: GCBD	In-Process		✓		
Past Performance Ratings for Small Business Joint Venture Members and Small Business First-Tier Subcontractors	In-Process				✓
National Defense Authorization Act of 2020, Credit for Lower Tier Subcontracting and Other Amendments	Planned				✓

	Year	Program Evaluation	Foundational Fact Finding	Performance Management	Policy Analysis
Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Certification	Planned				✓
GCBD Certification Program Access Evaluation	Planned	✓			
8(a) Business Development Program Evaluation	Planned	✓			
SO 1.5: Build an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through tailored training and counseling					
Latino Business Ownership: Contributions and Barriers for U.S.-Born and Immigrant Latino Entrepreneurs	2018		✓		
Women's Business Centers Survey	2018	✓			
Accessing the Internet in Rural America	2019		✓		
Office of Women's Business Ownership: Women's Business Center Program	2019				✓
OED SBDC, WBC, and SCORE Program Logic Models	2019	✓			
Job Characteristics and Transitions Among Older Self-Employed Individuals With Work-Limiting Health Condition	2020		✓		
Research from Advocacy: An Investigation of Women Business Owners, Industry Concentration, and Family Composition	2020		✓		
SBA Office of Field Operations Customer Experience Data Evaluation	2020	✓			
Millennial Veteran Entrepreneurship: Research on the Next Generation of Veteran Entrepreneurs	2021		✓		
Boots-to-Business Virtual Training Evaluation	In-Process	✓			
SCORE Program	Planned				✓
Community Navigator Pilot Program Evaluation	Planned	✓			
SO 2.1: Help small businesses recover from the pandemic and become more resilient					
Report on the Regulatory Flexibility Act FY 2017	2018		✓		
Small Business Economic Data by Congressional District	2018		✓		
Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics (NES-D): Exploring Longitudinal Consistency and Subnational Estimate	2019		✓		
Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics (NES-D): Using Administrative and Census Records Data in Business Statistic	2019		✓		
Report on the Regulatory Flexibility Act FY 2018	2019		✓		
Small Business GDP, 1998-2014	2019		✓		
Change in Small Business Loans Outstanding During the COVID-19 Pandemic, December 31, 2019 to June 30, 2020	2020		✓		
Measuring the Small Business Economy	2020		✓		

	Year	Program Evaluation	Foundational Fact Finding	Performance Management	Policy Analysis
The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Small Businesses	2021		✓		
Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics (NES)	Ongoing		✓		
Small Business Size Standards	Ongoing				✓
Pandemic Impact on Small Business Concerns: CARES Act Evaluation and Effectiveness	In-Process		✓		
SBA Small Business Recovery Needs Assessment	Planned	✓			
SO 2.2: Help prepare small businesses and rebuild communities affected by natural disasters					
National Defense Authorization Acts of 2016 and 2017, RISE After Disaster Act of 2015, and Other Small Business Government Contracting Amendments	2019				✓
Evaluation of Characteristics and Perceptions of Disaster Assistance Mitigation Loan Option Borrowers	2021	✓			
Disaster Loan Assistance - series	In-Process		✓		
Disaster Assistance Mitigation Loan Communication Strategies Evaluation	In-Process	✓			
Census Joint Statistical Project: ODA	In-Process		✓		
SO 3.1: Strategically manage resources by integrating quality data, evidence, and risk in decision-making processes					
Evaluation of SBA Acquisition Planning	2020	✓			
Performance Measures	Ongoing			✓	
SO 3.2: Build an inclusive and high-performing workforce					
Succession Planning Evaluation	2021	✓			

Appendix C: Select Literature

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