

## Evidence Continuum Video

The Corporation for National and Community Service funds programs that have many different types of evidence.

Evidence is the body of available facts that allows you to determine whether a proposition is true.

Evidence about how your program works is crucial to improving it and to demonstrating its effectiveness.

Evidence runs along a continuum, from promising to proven.

Ideally, your program will progress from:

- identifying and implementing a program design that is informed by evidence;
- to showing the program can meet targeted outputs and outcomes;
- to providing evidence that it causes those outcomes.

Your Evidence Base, which is the body of evidence about your program, places it at a point along this continuum. Knowing where your program is on this continuum helps you decide what evaluation activities you should do now, and what you should plan for in the future.

The farther you progress on the evidence continuum, the more likely it is that you can demonstrate desired changes in your participants, and show that your program causes those changes.

Each step along the evidence continuum builds on information gathered earlier. Evidence building is also an iterative process, so you may repeat steps as you progress.

The first question you'll ask is "What is my program, what is it supposed to do, and what outcomes do I want?"

When choosing program activities and services, make sure that they're related to these outcomes, and that they are based on sound theory or evidence from other programs.

It's also important to clearly define your program so that it can be tested.

New programs should begin by developing a logic model based on a theory of change, grounded in evidence about what has, or has not worked for other programs.

A theory of change can also help existing programs clearly define their purpose.

Next, ask: “Is my program operating as envisioned?” You need to know whether or not your program is conducting the activities that your program theory says will lead to change. This begins with performance measurement.

Performance measurement helps determine if your program is doing the right things, in the ways you planned, in the amounts you targeted, at the right time.

At this point, you should be able to document performance in terms of outputs, such as numbers of clients served or numbers of tasks completed. This will help you know if your program is operating as planned.

Next ask: “How well is my program working?” If you are doing the activities you planned in a way that aligns with your logic model and theory of change, you want to document the changes you expected and measure outcomes to show that your program works.

This will help you decide whether you should expand your services, alter, maintain, or intensify them, or revisit your logic model and theory of change.

At this stage, your program should be able to document the outcomes of its interventions and its processes, such as fidelity with the planned model.

Establishing these impacts can support funding, fuel program expansion, and increase knowledge of programs and strategies that address community needs.

Causal evidence of impact can also help your program measure its cost effectiveness in comparison to similar programs.

The process of building evidence is not always linear, and your program may need to return to earlier steps at any point along the way.

For example, a program that is not meeting its performance-measure or outcome goals in early evaluations may decide to go back and look at evidence for other interventions, or modify its theory of change or logic model.

Evidence at all stages of the continuum is valuable.

Positive findings at any stage build your program’s evidence base. Negative findings, or even findings that show no effect, can still be used to improve the program.

CNCS funds programs at all stages of the evidence continuum, but you should always work to strengthen your evidence and improve your program model over time.