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Statement on the Role of Independent State Evaluation Offices

The following is a statement issued by the American Evaluation Association President in response to recent efforts to limit the independence of evaluation activities and offices in multiple states across the country:

Evaluating government programs and services is an important strategy for improving efficiency and outcomes for the people government serves. In recent years, many states have opted to expand capacity in evaluation and evidence building, particularly with a focus on independence and increasing rigor. The American Evaluation Association recognizes the important role evaluation can play, and salutes the activities at the state level.

The American Evaluation Association’s “[Evaluation Roadmap](#) for a More Effective Government” provides a framework for federal, state, local, and tribal governments to consider in designing effective evaluation functions. In most cases, robust evaluation capacity in multiple branches of government is optimal for addressing the variety of policy-relevant questions that may emerge from elected officials and program managers. Among the principles recommended by the American Evaluation Association for governmental evaluation is independence, meaning the evaluation organization, unit, and staff must retain control of evaluation questions, design, methods, and findings. Evaluation activities can and should be independent even when political processes identify potential topics, establish budgets, and guide priorities.

Efforts to formalize evaluation practice across many states align with activities in the federal government to expand capacity for evidence-based policymaking. With the unanimous recommendations from the U.S. Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking in 2017 and the enactment of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act; P.L. 115-435), evaluation capacity building and infrastructure has proceeded across the country on a recognized bipartisan and professional trajectory.

The members of the American Evaluation Association are available to support the establishment and growth of evaluation capacity in Executive Branch and Legislative Branch operations.

The American Evaluation Association is a professional association of evaluators. Evaluation involves assessing the strengths and weaknesses of programs, policies, personnel, products and organizations to improve their effectiveness. AEA’s mission is to improve evaluation practices and methods worldwide, to increase evaluation use, promote evaluation as a profession and support the contribution of evaluation to the generation of theory and knowledge about effective human action.