Department of Commerce (DOC)
FY 24 Annual Evaluation Plan

Introduction and Background

The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (“Evidence Act”) requires that agency Evaluation Officers coordinate the development of an Annual Evaluation Plan that is published concurrent with the agency Annual Performance Plan. The Annual Evaluation Plan describes “significant” evaluations and related information for the subsequent fiscal year. The list to the right provides the criteria DOC considered when designating projects as significant. All evaluations presented in this draft FY 24 plan are supported by funding in the FY 24 President’s Budget. Revisions in the plan may be made when final appropriations levels are established.

In addition to Annual Evaluation Plans, CFO Act agencies are required to develop multi-year Learning Agendas. The Learning Agenda describes both evaluations and other evidence that will be developed to support effective implementation of the Department’s 5-year Strategic Plan. A Capacity Assessment reporting the agencies resources for accomplishing the Learning Agenda is also required. Both the Learning Agenda and the Capacity Assessment are published with the FY 22/26 Department Strategic Plan.

Plan Development Process

The Annual Strategic Review (ASR) completed in the spring of 2022 was used to propose evaluation questions for the FY 24 Evaluation Plan. The cross-functional, multi-bureau Strategic Objective (SO) Teams that conduct the review on each SO and bureau Evaluation Leads were asked to suggest programs/initiatives/processes for evaluation that support completing the Learning Agenda for FY 22/26.

SIGNIFICANT EVALUATIONS

Significant evaluations meet one or more of the following criteria:

Fundamental to the DOC Mission

Align with leadership priorities.

Have potential to create a major advance in benefits from an investment, efficiency and/or customer experience

Support economic recovery and/or resilience

Support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

Questions were revised and refined based on Administration priorities for new and expanded programming. The Evaluation Plan was also influenced by Congressional interests, as reflected in questions posed during hearings; leadership discussions with community groups and stakeholders; and Executive Orders issued by the White House.

Most notably, Executive Order (E.O.) 13985 is integral to the plan. The E.O. directs Federal agencies to "pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." This plan emphasizes the development of information needed to ensure all American's have full access to the services and products of the Department of Commerce.

Caveat Regarding Methodologies

The questions, methodologies and data sources presented in this plan reflect current knowledge and initial thinking and will be adjusted as evaluation activities get underway. Internal/external experts and/or academics will be engaged to develop the detailed approach to evaluating a program or policy.

Dissemination of Evaluation Findings

At significant milestones in the evaluation process, drafts and preliminary findings will be shared with internal stakeholders and staff of collaborating organizations. When evaluation projects are complete, the reports will be posted on the public-facing websites of the sponsoring bureaus. However, documents will not be posted if there are legal restrictions on access to the information, e.g., for security or privacy reasons.

Significant evaluation findings are often presented at conferences and workshops to the appropriate communities of practices. Some evaluations are published in peer-reviewed journals as an objective measure of quality and to make the results more accessible.

Types of Evaluations

The project descriptions in this Evaluation Plan describe projects as being primarily in one of four categories. The categories are defined below and are excerpted from OMB M 20-12. However, OMB M 20-12 also provides that "evaluations can also examine questions related to understanding the contextual factors surrounding a program, as well as how to effectively target specific populations or groups for a particular intervention. They can provide critical information to inform decisions about current and future programming, policies, and organizational operations. Finally, evaluations can and should be used for learning and improvement purposes, as well as accountability purposes."

Formative Evaluation is typically conducted to assess whether a program, policy, or organizational approach, or aspect thereof, is feasible, appropriate, and acceptable before it is fully implemented. It may include process and/or outcome measures. However, unlike outcome and impact evaluations — which seek to answer whether the program, policy, or organization met its intended goals or had the intended impacts – a formative evaluation focuses on learning and improvement and does not aim to answer questions of overall effectiveness.

Impact Evaluation assesses if a program, policy, or organization, or aspect thereof causes an increase in impact compared to those of a counterfactual. This type of evaluation estimates and compares impacts (e.g., increased jobs, business revenue), with and without the program, policy, or organization, or a feature of the program or policy. Impact evaluations include both experimental (i.e., randomized controlled trials) and quasi-experimental designs (i.e., a comparison group with similar demographics). An impact evaluation can help answer the question, "did the intervention lead to the observed outcome or impact?"

Outcome Evaluation measures the extent to which a program, policy, or organization has achieved its intended outcome(s) and focuses on outputs and outcomes to assess effectiveness. Unlike an impact evaluation, it typically cannot discern causal attribution. For instance, it can report the increase in the number of jobs at a Federally assisted business but cannot conclude that the assistance caused the number of jobs to increase. An outcome evaluation can help answer the question "were the intended outcomes of the program, policy, or organization achieved?"

Process or Implementation Evaluation assesses how the program or service is delivered relative to its intended theory of change, and often includes information on content, quantity, quality, and structure of services provided. These evaluations can help answer the question, "was the program, policy, or organization implemented as intended?" or "how is the program, policy, or organization operating in practice?" Process evaluations are significant because an overly complex or time-consuming service delivery process can undermine the level of outcome/impact achieved even if the basic concept underpinning a program is sound.

FY 24 Evaluation Plan - Table of Contents

How well are Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) being provided to benefit the communities they serve, especially in historically underserved and socially vulnerable communities (HUSVCs), and those communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards? Does the National Weather Service (NWS) have the necessary people, technology, tools, and expertise to support and deliver IDSS to emergency managers and HUSVCs? p.31

What data gathering process revisions will be needed for NOAA fisheries assessments and forecasts to account for the effects of planned offshore energy activities on fishing, fisheries revenues, protected resources, and ecosystem productivity? How can the processes be improved? p.33

What are the data and information challenges for supporting the sustainable development of the U.S. marine and coastal economy? p. 35

National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Formative study to develop an approach(s) to measuring the impact of broadband projects funded under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) p.37

United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)
Which factors enhance or detract from the overall experiences of Patents and Trademarks customers? p.39

FY24 Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of Past Practices to Inform the Design of the 2030 Decennial Census

Strategic Objective Supported: Strategic Objective 4.2 – Modernize economic and demographic statistics to better meet policymaker and community needs.

Lead Bureau: Census Bureau

FY 24 Significant Evaluation/Evidence Questions:
What is the initial design for the 2030 Census, given assessment and testing of past practices and new alternatives?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
Research during FY 21 and FY 22 gleaned lessons learned from the 2020 Decennial Census process, developed undercount and overcount estimates, and developed focus areas for improvement in FY 2030.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The decennial census is the largest civilian mobilization in the nation, comparable in scope only to military mobilizations for war. Planning for such a large effort requires a complex operational design, including processes to ensure well-integrated design components that support the program strategy. The design is used to develop the operational and IT solutions needed to test components and the overall approach and conduct the 2030 Census. Prior to every decennial census, the Census Bureau undertakes rigorous research and testing to inform the development of the operational design for the next decennial census.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, output, impact):
Formative Evaluation and Process Evaluation to assess the feasibility of different approaches.

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
This evaluation will include research and testing to establish the initial operational design for the 2030 Census, guided by five high-level Enhancement Areas:

- *Enhance data collection to more effectively reach and enumerate the nation, including historically undercounted populations*
- *Modernize group quarters enumeration to address complex and evolving living situations*
- *Integrate data processing with data collection to address anomalies and outliers and improve quality in real-time*
- *Streamline the operational support infrastructure to improve effectiveness*

- *Establish continuous decennial data collection and aggregation processes to support ongoing in-office enumeration and assessment of coverage and quality*

The evaluation will gather information from the 2020 Census lessons learned and quantitative analyses to develop design questions that will drive research and testing. Research and testing initiatives will be implemented to answer the questions and develop design recommendations. Design recommendations will be synthesized to inform the initial operational design for the 2030 Census.

Equity Component of Methodology – The first Enhancement Area has a strong focus on developing enumeration and communication methods that will improve and optimize the ability to ensure coverage of historically undercounted populations. The second Enhancement Area for modernizing the approach to enumerating people in Group Quarters has a strong focus on improving enumeration methods for some of the most underserved populations (e.g., persons experiencing homelessness, transitory populations, etc.).

Contractor/Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
Staff in the Decennial, Research & Methodology, and Demographic Directorates at the U.S. Census Bureau.

Data Sources:
Available – 2020 Census operational assessments, evaluations, and lessons learned. Various administrative and third-party data sources acquired and managed within the Census Bureau.

Need to Find or Create – Additional data sources to support innovations around data collection methodologies for housing units and group quarters.

Challenges:
Resources for conducting the research and testing may diminish as temporary positions for the 2020 Decennial Census expire and staff leave the Decennial Directorate for other opportunities, making it difficult to maintain institutional knowledge from the 2020 Census. Delays around posting and hiring for new positions and backfills further complicate the bureau's ability to maintain adequate staffing resources.

FY24 Evaluation Plan

Census Research on Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes

Strategic Objective Supported: Strategic Objective 4.2 – Modernize economic and demographic statistics to better meet policymaker and community needs

Lead Bureau: Census Bureau

FY 24 Significant Evaluation/Evidence Questions:
Question 1: What are the earnings of graduates after receiving their degree, and how does that differ by institution, field of study, and degree level?
Question 2: How do these earnings outcomes differ by demographic subgroup, and do those differences persist over time?
Question 3: Where are graduates employed after graduation, and in what industries? What Census divisions are gaining or losing graduates?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
See Six States Added to Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (census.gov)

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) is a data product that Census produces that is unique in its ability to measure earnings and employment outcomes for postsecondary graduates. These data are used by students, parents, institutional researchers at universities, and state labor market information offices. The planned data expansion will require additional research and development and will provide additional valuable data to external stakeholders.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Outcome evaluation, i.e., measuring the outcomes of post-secondary education.

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
To generate the PSEO earnings and employment outcomes, the Census Bureau matches national jobs records (UI wage records, W2, and 1099 filings) to graduate transcripts, and publish earnings outcomes 1, 5 and 10 years after graduation by institution, degree level and degree field. Similarly, Census Bureau will generate earnings outcomes by subgroups by matching internal demographic data. All the released data are protected using state-of-the-art confidentiality methods.

Equity Component of Methodology **-** The PSEO data, particularly the earnings data by demographic subgroup, measures earnings outcomes that have not been previously measured using administrative data. These data advance equity by providing consistent data that can spur meaningful conversations on the topic rather than anecdotal evidence.

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
Staff in the Research & Methodology and Economic Directorates at the U.S. Census Bureau.

Data Sources:
Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data; University-provided transcript data; IRS W2 and 1099 records.

Challenges:
Assess the level of detail at which demographic subgroup outcomes will be reported and assess tradeoff between more detailed reporting and more suppressions or additional noise to protect private information.

Dissemination:
PSEO data are disseminated on the Census website using the PSEO Explorer data visualization tool, Census API, and are directly downloadable.

FY24 Evaluation Plan

Outcome of Economic Development Administration CARES and ARP Investments

Note on Cross-Cutting Research, Themes, and Challenges
Certain research, themes, and challenges cut across all of EDA's programming and the evaluations of those programs. These cross-cutting items have been noted in the ***final section*** of the Economic Development Administration (EDA) project descriptions to avoid repetition.

Strategic Objective Supported: Strategic Objective 2.1 – Drive equitable, resilient, place-based economic development and job growth

Lead Bureau: Economic Development Administration (EDA)

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
What outputs and intermediate outcomes have been achieved through EDA's investments funded via either the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) or the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP Act) and to what extent are they influencing the capacities of the people and regions they serve?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:

PROGRAM	TOPIC	RESEARCHER	TIMELINE
CARES	Framework for Measuring CARES Act Program Effectiveness	Argonne National Labs	**Start**: Q1 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2022
ARPA	Build Back Better Regional Challenge - Research Project 1 (Baseline Conditions and Ongoing Grantee Data Collection)	Purdue Center for Regional Development	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q3 FY2025
ARPA	Build Back Better Regional Challenge - Research Project 2 (Case Studies)	The Brookings Institution	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q1 FY2024
ARPA	Equitable Economic Growth specific to Build Back Better and the Good Jobs Challenge	Regents of the University of Michigan	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q2 FY2026
ARPA	Indigenous Community Support - Research and Community of Practice	The Urban Institute	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2025
ARPA	Travel & Tourism - Outdoor Recreation (Baseline Conditions and Case Studies)	National Governors Association Center for Best Practices	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2025
ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge participant survey data collection	U.S. Census Bureau	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024
ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge linked wage, household, and demographic data for descriptive analysis	U.S. Census Bureau	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024

ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge Research Project 1 (Investigating ROI)	Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL)	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024
CARES & ARPA	EDA Infrastructure & Non-Infrastructure GPRA Data Collection	EDA Staff	**Start**: Q3 FY2022 **Expected End**[3]: Q3 FY2035
Please also see ***Cross-Cutting Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research*** *at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*			

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
EDA has launched an unprecedented number of research projects looking at various types and phases of projects funded via either the CARES Act or one of the ARP Act programs. This evaluation will aggregate data across projects and programs to develop a portfolio view of outputs and outcomes and provide an estimate of the overall ROI for all bureau rescue programs.

Further, EDA funded various activities through its CARES Act and ARP Act programs to achieve its mission to establish a foundation for sustainable job growth and durable regional economies throughout the United States. This evaluation will help EDA develop methods for aligning research and data collected across projects.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Outcome Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
In coordination with the identified researcher, EDA expects to develop a methodology that uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses, EDA award data, program level metrics, input from on-going topic specific research, grantee survey responses, and other third-party data.

Equity Component of Methodology[2]**:**
Please see the ***Cross-Cutting Equity Component*** *section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
This research will be conducted by an as-of-yet undetermined third-party research entity who will be selected based on the merit of their proposal through a competitive process.

Data Source(s):
Available:
- Universe of all EDA awards (including those in Persistent Poverty Counties) funded by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)
- Universe of all EDA awards (including those in Persistent Poverty Counties) funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP Act)
- Applicable projects identified as meeting EDA's equity investment priority

- County and tract level poverty estimates via U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). County and tract level poverty viewer[1] for ACS 19 data available with planned update for ACS 21 by Q2 FY2023.
- Grantee responses to EDA's required GPRA questionnaires, as collected and where applicable

Need to Create or Find:
- Modeled, tract level, poverty estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau
- Baseline economic conditions data for up to five-years prior to award
- Other program specific data collections by external research partners (beginning in FY2023).
- Executive Order 13985 was issued on January 20, 2021. Therefore, a dataset of CARES Act awards that are relevant to underserved communities per this E.O. needs to be created.

Challenges:
- Alignment of various programs with disparate objectives, award types, and unique research projects into a single, cohesive methodology.

*Please also see **Cross-Cutting Challenges** section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Dissemination:
Dissemination will be primarily via third-party research reports and products. Additional channels of dissemination will be formed as EDA's programs progress and will include but not be limited to communities of practice, webinars, public-facing tools (ex. Interactive maps and datasets).

Strategic Objective Supported: Strategic Objective 2.2 Build sustainable, employer-driven career pathways to meet employers' need for talent and to connect Americans to quality jobs

Lead Bureau: Economic Development Administration (EDA)

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
How did regional workforce development systems identify and train participants?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:

PROGRAM	TOPIC	RESEARCHER	TIMELINE
ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge participant survey data collection	U.S. Census Bureau	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024
ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge linked wage, household, and demographic data for descriptive analysis	U.S. Census Bureau	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024
ARPA	Good Jobs Challenge Research Project 1 (Investigating ROI)	Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL)	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Through At Least**: Q4 FY2024

*Please also see **Cross-Cutting Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research** at the end of this document*

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
EDA's Good Jobs Challenge aims to get Americans back to work by building and strengthening regional workforce systems and partnerships that bring together employers who have hiring needs and other key entities to train workers with in-demand skills that lead to well-paying jobs. The program has an innovative edge with a research component that allows for near real-time analyses of data collected from programs leading to opportunities for mid-stream course correction to ensure the best possible outcome. For instance, data will be available to assess if target populations are being served (see E.O. 13985) and, if not, prompt additional actions needed to bring the training opportunity to them.

This process evaluation will allow EDA and its research partner to develop leading practices for how successful regional workforce development systems identify and train participants which will then be shared across program grantees. This shared research provides program grantees with an opportunity to review and implement new approaches during implementation of their own award.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Process Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
EDA expects to use a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses using EDA award data, program level metrics, and participant survey responses. Additionally, EDA has partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau to access wage, household, demographic, and other data for program participants to be used for descriptive analysis.

Equity Component of Methodology[2]:
*Please see the **Cross-Cutting Equity Component** section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
EDA has partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau for data collection using a participant survey and data linkage to other Census datasets. Additionally, EDA is funding, via grant, Research Improving People's Lives (RIPL), an expert research organization in this field, to collaborate with Census on data analysis and program evaluation.

Data Source(s):
Available
- Universe of all EDA awards made as part of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funded Good Jobs Challenge

Need to Create or Find:
- Good Jobs Challenge participant survey responses – to begin collection April 2023 and continue through FY 24
- Good Job Challenge participant placement and PII data – to begin collection April 2023 and continue through FY 24
- Anonymized participant wage, household, and demographic information – to match with Census data once Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is collected from job training participants.

Challenges:
- Data usage agreement with U.S. Census for PII is for descriptive analysis only. Any additional data usage will require further agreements with both U.S. Census and, the Internal Revenue Service or participating states.
- Developing the IT infrastructure to collect PII data securely, both at EDA and for each of its grantees.

Additionally, please also see ***Cross-Cutting Challenges*** *section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Dissemination:
Dissemination will be primarily via third-party research reports and products. EDA also plans to make a specific quarterly report to the Secretary on this program and question, given her interest. Additional channels of dissemination will be formed as EDA's programs progress and will include but not be limited to communities of practice, webinars, public-facing tools (ex. Interactive maps and datasets).

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 2.3 - Advance entrepreneurship and high-growth small and medium-sized enterprises

Lead Bureau:
Economic Development Administration (EDA)

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
To what extent are Economic Development Administration (EDA) efforts to enable entrepreneurs to design and scale companies around new technologies effective?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:

PROGRAM	TOPIC	RESEARCHER	TIMELINE
Regional Innovation Strategies/Build to Scale	Evaluation of the EDA Regional Innovation Strategies Program 2014 to 2017	Fourth Economy	Published in FY2019
ARPA	Build Back Better Regional Challenge - Research Project 1	Purdue Center for Regional Development	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q3 FY2025

	(Baseline Conditions and Ongoing Grantee Data Collection)		
ARPA	Build Back Better Regional Challenge - Research Project 2 (Case Studies)	The Brookings Institution	**Start**: Q4 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q1 FY2024
*Please also see **Cross-Cutting Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research** at the end of this document*			

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
EDA's Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship leads the Build to Scale program which includes a portfolio of national grant competitions that further increase the capacities of regions to plan and implement ecosystems that support innovators, entrepreneurs, and startups that are growing technology-driven businesses, creating high-skill, high-wage jobs and building industries of the future. EDA's Revolving Loan Fund and Build Back Better Regional Challenge programs also support projects that focus on providing financing to businesses, developing an ecosystem conducive to entrepreneurial, new venture and small business growth. This evaluation will help EDA assess the effectiveness of its current efforts, highlight leading practices, and make improvements as needed.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Impact Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
In coordination with the identified researcher, EDA expects to develop a methodology with a counterfactual component that uses a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses, EDA award data, program level metrics, input from on-going topic specific research, grantee survey responses, and other third-party data.

Equity Component of Methodology[2] **-**

- The Build to Scale competition, which is run out of EDA's Office of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, requires that 10% of awards benefit counties that are identified as persistently poor in that 20% or more of their population has been in poverty for at least the last 30 years. Additionally, entities such as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are eligible and have been awardees in the past. CDFIs specialize in lending to individuals, organizations, and businesses in under-resourced communities. *Please also see the **Cross-Cutting Equity Component** section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
The research related to this "significant evaluation question" will be conducted by an as-of-yet undetermined third-party research entity who will be selected based on the merit of their proposal through a competitive process. Necessary data is being collected as part of program implementation. However, the evaluation is scheduled to begin in FY24.

Data Source(s):
Available
- Universe of all EDA awards, particularly those funded via the various Build to Scale programs

Need to Create or Find:
- Additional metrics that best capture community entrepreneurial capacity

Challenges:
Consistent with its statutory requirements, EDA does not support entrepreneurs or small businesses directly; instead, EDA funds intermediary organizations that provide that support, increase access to capital, grow workforce development pipelines, and otherwise build the systems and infrastructure on which entrepreneurs thrive. Because EDA does not engage with entrepreneurs directly, they rely on secondhand reporting from grantees, statistical data, and proxy measures.

*Additionally, please see **Cross-Cutting Challenges** section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Dissemination:
Dissemination will be primarily via third-party research reports and products. Additional channels of dissemination will be formed as EDA's programs progress and will include but not be limited to communities of practice, webinars, public-facing tools (ex. Interactive maps and datasets).

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 2.3 - Advance entrepreneurship and high-growth small and medium-sized enterprises

Lead Bureau:
Economic Development Administration (EDA)

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
To what extent have EDA's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) activities, funded via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, influenced the capacities and outcomes of the regions and businesses they serve?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:

PROGRAM	TOPIC	RESEARCHER	TIMELINE
CARES	Framework for Measuring CARES Act Program Effectiveness	Argonne National Labs	**Start**: Q1 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2022
RLFs	*RLF Policy Brief* from Understanding Impact: An Investigation of the U.S.	Urban Institute	**Start**: Q3 FY2022 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2023

	Economic Development Administration		
RLFs	Program recommendations for promoting equitable lending strategies and outcomes	Institute for Local Self Reliance (ILSR) and Recast City	**Start**: Q4 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q3 FY2023
*Please also see **Cross-Cutting Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research** at the end the EDA project descriptions.*			

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
EDA provides Economic Adjustment Assistance grants to eligible participants to establish Revolving Loan Funds (RLFs), which are lending programs that make loans and service businesses that can demonstrate a lack of access to traditional bank financing. These loans provide access to capital as gap financing that enables businesses to grow and lead to new employment opportunities with competitive wages and benefits. This financing also helps support minority and women-owned businesses. As part of its strategy for deploying CARES funding, EDA focused awards to its RLF networks so that businesses could have easily deployable capital at the ready when capital became tight during the COVID-19 crisis. While EDA has data on general outcomes on the performance of RLFs, this evaluation will help EDA assess more specifically, the impact on the capacities of the regions and businesses served, especially during the coronavirus pandemic, address identified gaps and make improvements to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Outcome Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
In coordination with the identified researcher, EDA will assess the feasibility of methodologies with a counterfactual component. Regardless, the research will use a mix of quantitative and qualitative analyses employing EDA award data, program level metrics, input from on-going topic specific research, grantee survey responses, and other third-party data.

Equity Component of Methodology[2] -
RLFs service businesses that cannot otherwise obtain traditional bank financing. This financing is often used to support minority and women-owned businesses, and small businesses that are in underserved geographies such as persistent poverty counties, rural areas with demonstrated historical underservice, tribal lands, etc. The evaluation will investigate how such financing has influenced the capacities and outcomes of businesses that fall within these categories.

*Please also see the **Cross-Cutting Equity Component** section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
This research will be conducted by an as-of-yet undetermined third-party research entity who will be selected based on the merit of their proposal through a competitive process.

Data Source(s):
Available:

- Universe of all EDA Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) awards made under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), complete data set available by end of FY2022.
- Grantee responses on EDA's Non-Infrastructure Metrics questionnaires for outputs (ED-916) and outcomes (ED-917/918)
- Grantee responses to Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) financial reporting and lending activities

Challenges:

- Output and outcome information will be gathered on a self-reported basis from grantees. This analysis can therefore suffer from positive bias wherein underperforming RLFs simply do not respond to survey requests.
- Geographical need must be factored into this analysis, as reliance on financial data regarding lending can be misleading if the raw financials are not appropriately weighted against need and relative impact.
- Consistent with its statutory requirements, EDA does not support entrepreneurs or small businesses directly; instead, EDA funds intermediary organizations, such as revolving loan fund providers that offer increased access to capital. Because EDA does not engage with entrepreneurs directly, they rely on secondhand reporting from grantees, statistical data, and proxy measures.

Additionally, please see ***Cross-Cutting Challenges*** *section at the end of the EDA project descriptions.*

Dissemination:
Dissemination will be primarily via third-party research reports and products. Additional channels of dissemination will be formed as EDA's programs progress and will include but not be limited to communities of practice, webinars, public-facing tools (ex. Interactive maps and datasets).

Cross-Cutting Research, Themes, and Challenges

Cross-Cutting Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
The completed and ongoing strategic evidence and research compiled below will be important inputs for research into any EDA programming during the period of the Learning Agenda.

PROGRAM	TOPIC	RESEARCHER	TIMELINE
All	*Innovative Metrics for Economic Development and Toolkit for Economic Development Evaluation*	SRI International	Completed in FY2018
All	*Impact Policy Brief* and *Geography Policy Brief* from *Understanding the Economic Development Administration's Investments and Impacts*	Urban Institute	**Start**: Q1 FY2019 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2023
All	Modeled, tract-level, poverty estimates that reduce current ACS margins of error	U.S. Census Bureau	**Start**: Q1 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q4 FY2023

All	*Advancing Economic Development in Persistently Poor Communities*	Economic Innovation Group (EIG)	**Start**: Q4 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q3 FY2023
All	*Economic Development Readiness Index*	Argonne National Labs	**Start**: Q1 FY2021 **Expected End**: Q1 FY2023

Cross-Cutting Challenges:

- EDA funds evaluations through competitive grants as EDA appropriations sufficient for such purposes legally are available only for making grant awards. An appropriate, competitive application must be received, reviewed, and awarded prior to FY24.
- Any research with a grantee survey response component relies on reporting requirement compliance. Grantee non-response on these reporting requirements could pose a serious challenge to our evaluation plans and could potentially delay or bias available data for evaluation.
- Evaluation activities may be hampered by legacy grant administration and data management systems.
- The life cycle of an EDA grant includes a time lag between project development, grant award, project completion, and data collection.
    - Infrastructure Investments – In most cases, construction projects have up to 5 years to complete project construction. Data collection on grantee outcomes then happens at 3, 6, and 9-year intervals after the completion of the project. This means a construction award made in 2022 may not have initial long-term job creation data until 2030.
    - Non-Infrastructure Investments* - While the reporting cadence for non-infrastructure awards is more frequent, there still exists a time lag from the grant administrative processes and data collection. Non-infrastructure grantees are reporting on a semiannual and annual basis from the start of their period of performance, for the duration of the period of performance. For example, a grantee with a period of performance starting in June 2022 will receive their first semiannual output questionnaire in December 2022, with the report due 30 days later in January 2023. They would receive their first outcome questionnaire in June of 2023, with reporting due 30 days later in July 2023.

* Data collection for some ARP Act programs, such as The Good Jobs Challenge, may have a different cadence than the above.

Cross-Cutting Equity Component:

EDA awards must be responsive to one or more of EDA's investment priorities, including the Equity investment priority. For an applicant to meet the Equity investment priority, they must demonstrate their economic development planning or implementation project "advances equity across America through investments that directly benefit 1) one or more traditionally underserved populations, including but not limited to women, Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders or 2) underserved communities within geographies that have been systemically and/or systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic prosperity such as Tribal Lands, Persistent Poverty Counties, and rural areas with demonstrated, historical underservice."

A key component of this research will be to determine the extent to which EDA's American Rescue Plan funded projects met this investment priority. Projects that meet the equity investment priority, per the definitions above, are tagged to enable further analysis. Additional questions pertaining to this "significant evaluation question" which could also be addressed through this research may include:

- Did the Equity investment priority increase projects and funding into underserved communities compared to previous funding streams?
- What were the tangible outcomes these communities realized as a result of ARPA or CARES funded projects (e.g., jobs created or retained)?

Additionally, ongoing research in FY2022 and FY2023 (i.e., focused on economic development in persistently poor communities; and identification of poverty at lower levels of geography through modeled data) will better equip EDA to be able to assess impact on underserved populations and geographies.

FY24 Evaluation Plan

International Trade Administration Effectiveness of Digital Transformation

Strategic Objective Supported:
- Strategic Objective 1.3: Increase International Cooperation and Commerce.
- Strategic Objective 5.3: Equitably Deliver Exceptional Customer Experience.

Lead Bureau: International Trade Administration (ITA).

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
- To what extent has ITA's digital transformation helped businesses from underserved communities overcome the challenges associated with exporting and attracting inward investment?

- How satisfied are ITA customers with their interaction with the bureau's digital points of engagement? Would these customers recommend ITA to their peers?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
Scheduled research in the FY 2023 Evaluation Plan for Strategic Objective 1.3.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
Research on the first evaluation question continues ITA's emphasis on a "digital transformation" to extend ITA services to more and more diverse businesses. (See FY 2022-2023 Agency Priority Goal). The Findings from this evaluation will provide insight into how new digital capabilities have affected the reach of ITA and business actions.

In support of the President's Management Agenda and Executive Order 14058, the second evaluation question advances progress toward ITA's broader efforts on customer and employee experience. Findings from this evaluation will provide insight into how ITA can improve its customer and employee experience delivery.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Process Evaluation and Outcome Evaluation (e.g., target businesses reached).

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
Examination of standing ITA processes, methodologies, and practices using data on process performance and customer feedback. Data collected through Q1 of FY 2024 will be used with target completion of the evaluation by Q 4 of 2024.

Equity Component of Methodology -
The first evaluation question is designed to build on the equity component of ITA's FY 2022-2023 Agency Priority Goal with a focus on measuring website use by businesses from underserved communities. The second evaluation question directly supports Priority 2 of the President's Management Agenda on "Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience."

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research: Executive Administration of ITA.

Data Source(s): Internal programmatic data and website analytics.

Challenges: Competing priorities and funding uncertainty.

Dissemination: Upon finalization of findings, the results of both evaluations will be socialized throughout ITA via announcement, scheduled presentation to staff, and dissemination of documentation.

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

Resiliency of Minority Business Enterprises

Strategic Objective(s) Supported:
Strategic Goal 2 – Foster Inclusive Capitalism and Equitable Economic Growth
Strategic Objective 2.1 – Drive equitable, resilient, place-based economic development and job growth.
Strategic Objective 2.3 – Advance entrepreneurship and high-growth small and medium-sized businesses

Lead Bureau: Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), U.S. Department of Commerce

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Questions:
To what extent are minority business enterprises (MBEs) resilient when facing economic shocks? Are MBEs beneficial to their respective communities in times of economic shock?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
See Research | Minority Business Development Agency (mbda.gov)

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The Minority Business Development Act of 2021 Section 100103, Research and Information, directs MBDA to (A) collect and analyze data, including data relating to the causes of the success or failure of MBEs; (B) conduct research, studies and surveys of (i) economic conditions generally in the United States; and (ii) how the conditions described in clause (i) particularly affect the development of MBEs. The results will be used to (i) respond to the Act, (ii) improve advocacy and awareness among private and public stakeholders, (iii) inform regulatory agencies, and (iv) influence the development and design of future MBDA program concepts, pilots, and programs to better address the needs of MBEs.

Type of Evaluation: MBDA shall use a Foundational Fact-Finding (formative) methodology to systematically describe what is happening among a particular population (i.e., MBEs) using quantitative and/or qualitative data. The study will contribute to existing bodies of work related to what happens to MBEs when economic shocks occur (e.g., the "Great Recession," "COVID," and recently "Inflation"). The study will help MBDA determine demographic and other key business characteristics that are most vulnerable to economic shock(s), as well as what it is about these characteristics that make MBEs vulnerable to reducing their work force, maintaining operations while losing money, needing capital under dire circumstances, and shuttering.

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
This evaluation will build on publicly accessible data including (but not limited to) the Federal Reserve Bank Small Business Credit Survey data, anticipated Consumer Financial Protection Board data, Office of the Comptroller data, and Small Business Administration data. This data will help shape elements of the methodology that may include a combination of the following: community-based participatory research, journey mapping, survey data, qualitative interviews and focus groups, document reviews, longitudinal and administrative data. Data comparisons will allow for review of industry and firm-specific characteristics (e.g., value of capital assets, employees, firm age, financial condition, demographics, locations, size, export destinations, and industry presence) overlayed with time sequence of economic shock(s) and resiliency of MBEs during and after economic shock(s).

The results will suggest further research and/or policy recommendations on effective ways of supporting MBEs prior to, during and post economic shocks. The results may impact governmental lending programs to minimize the impact disparity between MBEs and other businesses during the times of economic shock(s).

Equity Component of Methodology -
The study supports Executive Order 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The study will help identify factors that support the resiliency of businesses owned by socially or economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDI). A SEDI includes any individual who is: Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders and Subcontinent Asian Americans.

Contractor/Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
This study will be conducted through collaboration with the US Census Bureau and with the support of academics engaged directly through an IPA and/or in cooperation with the GSA Office of Evaluation Sciences or Library of Congress Federal Research Division.

Data Source:
Available – The study will use data from the Federal Reserve Bank, Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Small Business Administration, General Services Administration, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and MBDA’s Customer Relationship Management system, which is the repository for the MBDA’s Business Center and Specialty Center client data.

Need to Find or Create – Additional data may be available through organizations such as minority chambers of commerce, minority serving academic institutions, and other entities serving minority businesses. Research on options is part of this project.

Challenges:
Availability of information on race and ethnicity, which can be overcome by using imputation algorithms. Sample-selection bias may require two-step estimators or similar techniques. Additionally, a Department working group, that includes Census Bureau staff, is studying alternative approaches and data sets that may provide options.

Dissemination:
The research report and findings will be available on the MBDA website and will be presented to stakeholders at workshops/conferences and in newsletters. Personally identifiable and business identifiable information/data will be protected and not disclosed. Relevant statistical data will be published for public consumption.

FY24 Evaluation Plan

Minority Business Development Agency's Capital Readiness Program

Strategic Objective(s) Supported:
Strategic Goal 1 – Drive U.S. Innovation and Global Competitiveness
Strategic Objective 1.2 – Accelerate the development, commercialization, and deployment of critical and emerging technologies
Strategic Goal 2 – Foster Inclusive Capitalism and Equitable Economic Growth
Strategic Objective 2.1 – Drive equitable, resilient, place-based economic development and job growth
Strategic Objective 2.3 – Advance entrepreneurship and high-growth small and medium-sized businesses

Lead Bureau: Minority Business Development Agency (MBDA), U.S. Department of Commerce

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Questions:
Based on preliminary results, to what extent does MBDA's Capital Readiness Program support new venture formation? Is the program leading minority founders and entrepreneurs to generate business growth, job creation and wealth?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
See: Research | Minority Business Development Agency (mbda.gov); National Bureau of Economic Research Working paper 30682, "Funding Black High-Growth Startups"; National Association of Investment Companies, "Engaging with Diverse Investment Managers: The Value proposition," 2018; and other private sector sources including (but limited to) the Knight Foundation, McKinsey & Company, The Kauffman Foundation, Alliance for Entrepreneurial Equity, Third Way, and works from institutes of higher education.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 reauthorizes and expands the State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) Program to encourage jurisdictions to set up public-private partnerships to increase capital for underserved firms and democratize venture capital investments nationally. One-hundred million dollars has been set aside for MBDA to provide SSBCI Technical Assistance (TA) through the Capital Readiness Program (CRP) to help close the gap between socially and economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDI) and non-SEDI. The CRP will provide technical assistance for SEDI entrepreneurs starting or scaling their businesses who are seeking various forms of capital. Access to capital is a major barrier to SEDI formation and growth. The focus of this evaluation is to determine the impact of MBDA assistance toward alleviating capital barriers.

The CRP is new to MBDA and is anticipated to operate approximately four years. This study would provide valuable preliminary insight by determining if the intervention/program works, for whom it works, how does it work compared to the alternatives, and did the program lead to observed outcomes. The preliminary results will help the MBDA program entities learn from evidence and make mid-course corrections (if needed).

Type of Evaluation:
MBDA will use an Outcome Evaluation methodology in FY2024 to determine if the program is achieving its intended outcomes. This approach best aligns with the timing of the program (4 years). MBDA anticipates the CRP will generate important program data including (but not limited to): identification of SEDI participants, SEDIs that graduate from the program, capital raised through the assistance of the CRP. The data will help benchmark SEDI market demand at a national level. This approach will set the groundwork for a future Impact Evaluation whereby randomized controlled trials can be conducted between SEDI firms served through the CRP versus firms not served.

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
The research will include a statistical analysis of participant data and intended outcomes. MBDA anticipates it will be able to identify and create data linkages among participants, capital source providers, business formations and employment over time. This data will support future quasi-experimental design. MBDA will be able to compare changes in outcomes over time between a population enrolled in the CRP (the treatment group) and a population that is not (the comparison group).

The Outcome Evaluation will inform mid-course corrections in the program (if needed) for performance improvement. Data comparisons will allow for review of industry and firm-specific characteristics (e.g., value of capital assets, employees, firm type, financial condition, demographics, locations, size, export destinations, and industry presence) overlayed with time sequence of leading and lagging outcomes (e.g., investment size, business growth, and wealth creation). The results may suggest further research and/or policy recommendations on effective ways of supporting MBEs to access venture and equity capital. The results may impact governmental technical assistance programs in venture and equity capital.

Equity Component of Methodology -
The study supports Executive Order 13985 Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The study will help identify factors that support the resiliency of businesses owned by socially or economically disadvantaged individuals (SEDI). A SEDI includes any individual who is: Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders and Subcontinent Asian Americans.

Contractor/Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
This study will be conducted through collaboration with academics engaged directly through an IPA and/or in cooperation with the GSA Office of Evaluation Sciences.

Data Source:
Available – The study will use data from MBDA's, Customer Relationship Management system, which will be the repository for the MBDA CRP data. This evaluation will build on unique data sets captured by approximately 46 service providers (e.g., incubators and accelerators) in different national geographies. The CRP will require service providers to capture SEDI contact, demographic, and business information; services provided; business related outcomes (e.g., capital awarded, and jobs created).

Need to Find or Create – Additional data may be available through organizations such as the National Venture Capital Association, Community Development Venture Capital Alliance, Small Business Administration Small Business Investment Companies, and other venture capital entities.

Challenges:
Availability of information pertaining to the number and size of investments issued/capital awarded may be limited due to non-disclosure agreements and/or other negotiated covenants between founders/entrepreneurs and venture capitalists.

Dissemination:
The research report and findings will be used to inform program management teams for mid-course corrections. Some data may be available on the MBDA website and will be presented to stakeholders at workshops/conferences. MBDA anticipates preliminary findings will shape final program evaluation and impact evaluation upon completion of the four-year program. Personally identifiable and business identifiable information data will be protected and not disclosed. Relevant statistical data will be published for public consumption.

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

Increase Equitable Delivery of NOAA Products and Services

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 3.1 - Increase the impact of climate data and services for decision makers through enhanced service delivery and improved weather, water, and climate forecasts

Lead Bureau: NOAA

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
Do NOAA's services meet the needs of underserved communities impacted by climate change?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
In FY 21, in collaboration with GSA's Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES), NOAA identified needs and opportunities to support and evaluate the equitable delivery of products and services, including ones that help communities better prepare for climate change impacts. In FY 22-23, NOAA is using tools such as surveys and journey maps to identify potential intervention points to improve the equitable service delivery of products and services.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
NOAA's mission is to understand and predict changes in climate, weather, the ocean, and coasts; share that knowledge and information with Federal agencies, states, and the public; and conserve and manage coastal and marine ecosystems and resources. NOAA provides climate information that helps safeguard communities from hazardous natural events, and it helps businesses make decisions to operate more efficiently. NOAA's management programs for oceans and coastal areas help enhance both the current and future productivity of these economically vital resources. NOAA is investigating how barriers to access to its products and services could be addressed to ensure the needs of vulnerable and underserved communities are met.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Formative and Process Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
As part of the requirements of E.O. 13985, NOAA identified high impact programs for a Service Equity Assessment (per OMB Guidance) and assessed these programs to identify access barriers faced by underserved communities. NOAA developed plans to further assess and address barriers to access, and it is identifying potential intervention points to improve the equitable service delivery of products and services. In FY24, and contingent on funding, NOAA will assess what interventions are feasible, appropriate, and acceptable to address barriers to achieving greater climate resilience.

Equity Component of Methodology -
Journey maps, surveys, and other tools of customer experience (CX) are identifying constraints to service access faced by underserved and vulnerable communities. The feasibility of implementing program changes to address these constraints will be evaluated in FY24.

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
GSA’s Office of Evaluation Services, or another organization/contractor specialized in evaluations (contingent on funding) and customer experience.

Data Source(s):
Journey maps
Surveys of users of NOAA products and services
Web analytics
Other tools of customer experience (CX)

Challenges:
NOAA may need approval of new Information Collection Requests, as required under the Paperwork Reduction Act, to conduct necessary customer surveys within the timeframe.

Dissemination:
The information will be disseminated to the public and NOAA’s stakeholders via webinars, workshops, and/or roundtable discussions.

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

NOAA's Impact-based Decision Support Services

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 3.1 - Increase the impact of climate data and services for decision-makers through enhanced service delivery and improved weather, water, and climate forecasts

Lead Bureau: NOAA

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Questions:
- How well are Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) being provided to benefit the communities they serve, especially in historically underserved and socially vulnerable communities (HUSVCs), and those communities that are particularly vulnerable to climate hazards?
- Does the National Weather Service (NWS) have the necessary people, technology, tools, and expertise to support and deliver IDSS to emergency managers and HUSVCs?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
FY22 and FY23 Evaluation Plans (multi-year research on the same questions)

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The Nation is facing fast-growing societal needs and demands for new and expanded weather, water, and climate products and services across all sectors of communities. Impact-based Decision Support Services (IDSS) are needed from and for all government levels. Concurrently, under the influence of climate change, the nation continues to experience a growing number of record-breaking extreme weather and water events throughout the entire year. Emergency managers tell NOAA that the NWS's improved impact-based forecasts, communicated through trusted relationships, have more effectively supported their life-saving work. This customer service-based approach helps emergency managers and communities make better decisions when responding to extreme weather and water events.

Against this backdrop, NWS needs to enhance relationships with communities and organizations to ensure that products and services reach everyone in the country, regardless of socio-economic status, race, language, or other factors that might lead to inequitable access. In FY 21, NWS conducted a Service Equity Assessment in response to E.O. 13985. The assessment identified the need for an in-depth review of access to IDSS by all HUSVCs.

The NWS will utilize new tools, developed with funding from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), to record and evaluate which partners are being reached, how information is used, and whether services reach vulnerable communities. Additionally, NWS will utilize IIJA funding to begin developing requirements and use cases for the NOAA Social and Behavior Observation Database. This research will bolster understanding required to improve how life-saving decision support services are delivered and meet the needs of these communities. Every community should be responsive and resilient in the face of extreme weather and water events.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Process Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
Utilizing key findings from the Initial Service Equity Assessment, the NWS will employ multiple methods to evaluate access to IDSS by all HUSVCs. The NOAA Social and Behavior Observation Database will highlight whether services are reaching HUSVCs. Additionally, NWS will conduct two surveys of customers to evaluate its IDSS efforts:

1) IDSS Core Partner survey that covers the full breadth of NWS services provided and specific weather, water, and climate events while incorporating service equity information to identify partners serving a vulnerable population;
2) University of Oklahoma Center for Risk and Crisis Management, Weather and Society Survey will provide additional information on related topics.

Equity Component of Methodology:
The NWS surveys will be part of a preliminary review of how NOAA services are supporting HUSVCs and what improvements are needed.

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
NWS headquarters, field offices, and contractors.

Data Source(s):
Available – 1) IDSS Core Partner survey, 2) Initial Service Equity Assessment, 3) University of Oklahoma Center for Risk and Crisis Management, Weather and Society Survey, 4) NOAA Social and Behavior Observation

Challenges:
Assessing IDSS message consistency among partners and forecast offices with different structures and staffing. Developing a methodology that specifically measures the effect on vulnerable communities with varying needs. Additionally, the ability to increase IDSS to HUSVCs and emergency managers serving vulnerable populations remains a challenge.

Dissemination:
Findings will be published on NOAA's public facing website.

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

Offshore Wind Energy Effects on NOAA Fisheries Assessments

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 2.1 **-** Drive equitable, resilient, place-based economic development and job growth

Lead Bureau: NOAA

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Questions:
What data gathering process revisions will be needed for NOAA fisheries assessments and forecasts to account for the effects of planned offshore energy activities on fishing, fisheries revenues, protected resources, and ecosystem productivity? How can the processes be improved?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:

- NOAA Fisheries scientists and colleagues have started a three-year study of Atlantic cod and other commercial fish species in Southern New England. Their goal is to gather baseline data to address how offshore wind development in the region could affect these animals.

- NOAA is using fine-scale fishery data to evaluate and predict the potential impact of offshore wind energy.

- NOAA is studying how black sea bass at different life stages respond to offshore wind pile driving and other marine construction noise.

- The Survey Simulation Experimentation and Evaluation Project (SSEEP) is being supported by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), and the Cooperative Institute for the North Atlantic Region. This effort is evaluating changes in the Federal bottom trawl survey due to offshore wind development.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
Offshore wind energy development requires NOAA to engage in numerous environmental reviews, including Essential Fish Habitat consultations under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), Section 7 consultations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and incidental take authorizations under the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). NOAA's expertise in managing ocean species and habitats is critical to supporting the Administration's priority of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030, by facilitating responsible renewable energy development while considering fishing interests and protecting species and ecosystems.

Offshore wind energy development is expected to have significant adverse impacts on NOAA scientific surveys because NOAA aircraft and vessels will not be able to safely operate within wind energy areas following current survey designs and protocols. New survey designs and methods will be required to address the anticipated changes in habitats in and around offshore wind developments.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Process Evaluation of data gathering protocols

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
New fish stock survey designs and methods will be tested and evaluated using simulation models and actual pilot tests. Fish stock surveys measure the population and trends in the population of different species of fish.
Equity Component of Methodology: NA

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
NOAA Fisheries Science Centers and the Headquarters' Office of Science and Technology

Data Source(s):
Existing studies of European wind energy projects, and their effects, will inform consultations and forecasts for equivalent U.S. areas. Existing oil rig infrastructure in the Gulf of Mexico also provides a reference for anticipated effects of infrastructure on fisheries and protected species. Surveys of U.S. Exclusive Economic Zones in areas of proposed offshore wind energy projects will also provide baseline data on fisheries and endangered species for comparison as projects are proposed in U.S. waters. As offshore wind energy projects are added, research will be expanded to include studies of the new areas.

Challenges:
NOAA will conduct and partner internationally on reviews of existing studies of impacts from offshore wind farms that compete with other blue economies and involve conservation concerns. Providing economic analyses on implications of offshore wind farm operations on commercial and recreational fisheries, aquaculture, and endangered species is important in determining the best approaches to supporting the Administration's priority of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind while protecting ecosystems.

Dissemination: Input, review, and decisions will be shared through the One Federal Decision process, a cooperative relationship among Federal agencies for timely processing of environmental reviews and authorizations decisions on proposed major infrastructure projects.

FY24 Evaluation Plan

Sustainable Development of the U.S. Marine and Coastal Economy

Strategic Objective Supported:

Strategic Objective 2.1 **-** Drive equitable, resilient, place-based economic development and job growth

Lead Bureau: NOAA

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:

What are the data and information challenges for supporting the sustainable development of the U.S. marine and coastal economy?

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
Development of the Marine Economy Satellite Account (MESA) statistics in collaboration with BEA, NOAA Ocean Enterprise Study (2021)

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:

- To efficiently support the growth and emerging opportunities of the marine economy, offshore and coastal renewable energy, and other blue tech industries, data is needed to provide a baseline benchmark. Data is also needed to monitor the growth trends and help inform targeted investments by government agencies and the private sector.
- State and local level marine economy data are required by the Coastal Zone Management Act, the Magnuson Stevens Act, and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act to support sustainable and resilient coastal and ocean development. Marine and coastal data are also an essential part of the White House Office of Science and Technology's long-term plan to incorporate natural capital (ecosystem services) into national accounts.
- Evaluating the data and information needs, and their uses and gaps, will guide the improvement of the current Marine Economy Satellite Accounting (MESA) and set priorities for plans.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):

Formative Evaluation of data needs to understand whether the approach is feasible and appropriate.

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:

- Surveys and stakeholder consultation, including discussions among government agencies and private sector representatives. This will help to answer the following questions: 1) what industries need to be tracked? 2) what indicators are most helpful for policymakers, investors, businesses, and ocean and coastal resources managers? 3) what local details are needed to support sustainable economic development and coastal resilience? 4) how can NOAA expand/improve the current MESA to meet the data needs?
- Examples of usage of international ocean accounts and other satellite accounts, especially by the private sector and the public.

Equity Component of Methodology -

- Consultation will include small and vulnerable, and under-resourced communities

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:

- NOAA, BEA, Census and Economic Contractors

Data Source(s):

- Marine Economy Satellite Account (MESA) (NOAA)
- Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW) (NOAA)
- BEA's industry account input-output model
- Census Bureau's Business Register and Longitudinal Business Database (LBD)
- BLS Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)
- Fisheries Economics of the United States
- Employment in Coastal Inundation Zones (NOAA)

Challenges:

- MESA is new so there is a lack of information on the usage and feedback to generate a quantitative analysis on the impacts.
- It is difficult to prove a definite causal relationship between the provision of data and the growth of sectors of the marine economy that use the data.

Dissemination: Findings will be published on NOAA's public facing website and reports

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

Formative Evaluation of IIJA Broadband Expansion

Strategic Objective Supported: Strategic Objective 2.4: Expand affordable, high-quality broadband to every American

Lead Bureau: National Telecommunication and Information Administration

FY 24 Significant Evaluation Question:
No evaluation questions to answer in FY 24 – NTIA will be preparing to define impact/evaluation questions and determining data needed to support impact/evaluation questions

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
Evaluation Study of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP)

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided NTIA with over $48 billion to extend and improve internet services and support broadband adoption and use nationally. Most of the impact of this investment will not occur for several years. However, in FY 24 NTIA will identify the information necessary to conduct impact evaluations.

Type of Evaluation (formative, process, outcome, impact):
Formative Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
NTIA will leverage the State Broadband Plans and Digital Equity Plans, which will be based on various data collection methods, including interviews with key stakeholders, particularly the historically underserved, as well as empirical data on broadband availability, adoption, and use from national, State, and locally sourced data sets. This information will be used to understand anticipated critical impacts of the program and develop related evaluation questions. Various research techniques will be employed to understand anticipated critical impacts of the program and to develop related evaluation questions. NTIA will use these inputs in designing the grant award/project performance and progress data collection/reporting efforts to support downstream program evaluation efforts.

The work of the DOC-wide Data Governance Working Group and the Metrics Working Group supports NTIA's evaluation efforts by defining Department-wide metrics for measuring key program impacts common to several Department programs, including IIJA funded programs.

Equity Component of Methodology:
This formative work will include developing an approach to measuring equity in the distribution of program benefits.

Contractor, Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research: TBD

Data Source(s):
Maps documenting the existing reach of broadband and tracking improvements in reach are being developed in collaboration with the Census Bureau.

Challenges:
The impacts may not be realized for several years after grant funds have been dispersed.

Dissemination: TBD

FY 24 Evaluation Plan

Patent & Trademark Customer Experience

Strategic Objective Supported:
Strategic Objective 5.3 – Equitably deliver exceptional customer experience

Lead Bureau: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO)

FY 24? Significant Evaluation Questions:
Which factors enhance or detract from the overall experiences of Patents and Trademarks customers? Trademarks will examine the factors that contribute to customer satisfaction scores on initial application forms. Patents will examine the factors that enhance and detract from the first-time website visitor experience to identify potential improvements.

Related Strategic Evidence/Evaluation Research:
See Improving the experience for trademark customers | USPTO
A robust customer experience map has been developed for the patent process.

Rationale for Topic's Priority and How the Evaluation Findings will be Used:
The customer journey for all trademark filers funnels through the initial application forms. Understanding and improving the initial application forms will benefit all customers, particularly those who are new to the process or not assisted by an attorney.

The USPTO website has received over 41 million unique pageviews through three quarters of FY21. Preliminary findings indicate that first-time patent users have greater trouble navigating, understanding terms, and knowing where to go to file for a patent compared to return users. Examining the factors for these challenges and improving them would improve their experience and encourage filings from the underserved populations.

Type of Evaluation:
Process Evaluation

Methodology/Approach for Evaluation:
The approach will utilize human-centered design methodologies, which place end users, or customers, at the center of the research question and problem-solving approach. The USPTO collects, analyzes, and reports on customer attitudes, sentiment, and behavior based on surveys, interviews, focus groups, and user testing. USPTO is an OMB designated High Impact Service Provider.

Equity Component of Methodology - Receiving feedback directly from a representative sampling of our customers gives voice to all customers and prospective customers, including those from underrepresented groups.

Contractor/Academic or Unit Who Will Do the Research:
The research will be completed by USPTO staff with contractors providing the customer feedback survey tool.

Data Source:
Available: USPTO's customer feedback surveys on the website, login, and trademark filing system. Customer behavior data on the website. Usability testing results on the website.

Need to Find or Create: None.

Challenges:
Challenges include (1) collecting, combining, and analyzing datasets from multiple sources, (2) replacing current CX survey vendor with modern CX management platform, (3) maintaining skillsets necessary for collection, analysis, and dissemination of data across business units and offices.

Dissemination:
Findings, recommendations, and improvement actions will be posted on the PTO website.