

# Funding What Works

*Tiered evidence grants reward approaches backed by rigorous evidence*

AN OVERVIEW OF GAO-16-818

**THE CHALLENGE:**

Targeting federal grants to fund projects that work while encouraging innovative new approaches.

**\$600+ billion/year** awarded in federal grants

Do agencies always know how well the projects they're funding are working?

Tiered evidence grants can help agencies target grant funds more effectively

by directing more funding to projects that show evidence that they work

and less to projects that have not shown supporting evidence through rigorous evaluation.



**AN EXAMPLE:**



**Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program at the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services**

Goal: To provide resources and skills for at-risk families

States, tribal entities, and nonprofit organizations can apply for two types of awards:



to replicate an existing home visiting service (for applicants with strong supporting evidence)



to develop a promising but untested home visiting service (for applicants with less supporting evidence)

Total program funding in FY 2015: \$400 million

## What are tiered evidence grants and how do they work?



Applicants provide evidence of how well they expect their project to address a problem.



Agencies make funding decisions based on that evidence.



### Tiered Evidence Grant Model

(The size of grant awards is linked to the strength of the evidence provided in the application.)

**Preliminary Evidence Tier**

Test promising practices

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**Moderate Evidence Tier**

Build on practices with moderate supporting evidence

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**Strong Evidence Tier**

Replicate practices with strong supporting evidence

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Tiered evidence grants can spur innovation by funding the development of new projects and practices at the lower tiers.

The highest tier allows large-scale implementation of the most promising projects.

Several federal agencies have used a tiered evidence grant model, including:



## What kind of evidence do grant applicants need to provide?

According to a 2013 OMB memo, evidence includes:

evaluation results

performance measures

other relevant data analytics and research studies

## How do these grants change the federal grantmaking process?

Tiered evidence grants require evidence and evaluation requirements as part of the federal grant life cycle.



Grantees submit evidence as they apply, which builds the evidence base.



This evidence base can inform future efforts.



Clearinghouses—agency repositories of evaluation findings—can make research easier to access.

## What are some factors for successful tiered evidence grantmaking?

### Agencies

- Capacity to comprehensively oversee and provide technical assistance to grantees throughout the grant life cycle
- Evaluation and program offices that collaborate with each other
- Top leadership support and commitment

### Grantees

- Capacity to fulfill evidence and evaluation requirements, such as:
  - Implementing the project as planned
  - Conducting rigorous evaluations