Getting Started with Congressionally Mandated Implementation and Evaluation Projects

Things you wanted to know about policy and legislation but didn’t know where to start

Monica M. Matthieu, PhD, LCSW
David A. Adkins, MHA
June 1, 2023
Objectives

Why A Civics Lesson?
Relevance of legislation to VA and HSR&D/QUERI investigators

The Civics Lesson
- How a bill becomes a law
- How to find it
- How to read it
- How to think about it

The Tools of the Trade: Congressionally Mandated Projects, Evaluations, and Reports
- How to prepare an Executive Summary
- How to prepare a Policy Analysis Brief
- How to prepare an Evaluation Design
- How to prepare an Implementation Plan/Proposal
- How to prepare a Congressionally Mandated Report
Why A Civics Lesson?
Why A Civics Lesson?

- Congress holds the power and the purse strings for the entire federal government.

- VAs ability to provide healthcare, benefits, and internment services is derived from federal law.

- Our research and evaluation work needs to have real-world impact.

**Title V—Research**

**Sec. 501. Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

(a) **Report.—** Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The report shall include the following:

(1) The number of medical centers of the Department, institutions of higher learning, non-college degree programs, and student veterans supported by the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(2) The staff and resources allocated to the program, and relevant trends since the program began.

(3) An assessment of the outcomes and effectiveness of...

Public Law 115–435

115th Congress

**An Act**

To amend title 5 and 44, United States Code, to require Federal evaluation activities, improve Federal data management, and for other purposes.

**Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,**

**SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

(a) **Short Title.—** This Act may be cited as the “Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018.”

(b) **Table of Contents.—** The table of contents for this Act is as follows:

3 1. **This Act may be cited as the “Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018.”**

4 2. **Theater of Military Operations” concludes that the available evidence does not allow a definitive determination to be made about any potential association between airborne hazards in the theater and numerous respiratory health outcomes. The report ehamizes existing research as inadequate, and advises that additional research be done, including longitudinal studies that by design take years.

5 3. In the interim, though, some veterans have already been adversely affected by their exposure to burns, pits, and their claims to certain benefits fur-
National Defense Authorization Act & Budget Acts annually provide appropriations for VA programs (no $ for new mandated programs without appropriations)

Bills drive new mandated programs/initiatives VHA has to implement, evaluate, and report on. This may require:

- Evaluation of VHA priorities or Congressionally Mandated Reports – when legislation requires VA to report on a program, topic, renewal, etc.
- Clinical or operational partners tasked with legislative priorities
- HSR&D/QUERI investigators involvement in the implementation and evaluation of legislation

VA policy and evaluation priorities are now shaped by the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act).
How A Bill Becomes A Law

https://youtu.be/OgVKvqTltoo
Legislative Process: How A Bill Becomes A Law

House

Introduced, Clerk Assigned Member → Tabled → Committee Hearing → Sub Committee and Full Committee Mark Up → Reported Out → Calendared → Floor Reading Debate Amendments → Full Vote

Senate

Introduced, Clerk Assigned Member → Tabled → Committee Hearing → Sub Committee and Full Committee Mark Up → Reported Out → Calendared → Engrossed Bill → Conference Committee Vote by Houses → Full Vote

2/3 Vote Congress Override → Veto → Signed by President → Law

Enrolled Bill to President → Engrossed Bill

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA-NC
Role of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees

- House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees (HVAC/SVAC) are often the originators of research related legislation and receivers of CMRs from SECVA,
- Their websites are a source of information about proposed legislation that could potentially impact proposed/on-going research and evaluation projects and renewals of programs, research, or legislation.

https://veterans.house.gov/
https://www.veterans.senate.gov/
Where To Find A Copy Of The Legislation

https://www.congress.gov

• One stop shop for:
  o Bill information
  o Federal Laws dating back to 1799 *(Note: the default is set for 1973 to present unless you change it)*
  o Legislative Publications, such as Committee Reports
  o Other legislative resources
How To Look Up Legislation

On the homepage in the search box, you can enter:

- Bill number, i.e., Public Law (PLAW) 117-37;
- Bill name, i.e., Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act (yes, imagine cute puppy faces here)
- Or a broad search term such as Veteran health care.
Advanced Search Options

- Similar process to literature searches for research articles
- Key words and Boolean logic (e.g., AND/OR)
Tips For Downloading Legislation

• While the Legislative Counsel summary is helpful, be sure to read the actual bill text carefully – the PDF version
• Have the latest version of the bill
• Review the committee analysis, if available for more context
• Check the history of the bill for additions, amendments or both
Public Law 117–37
117th Congress

An Act

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on dog training therapy, and to amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses who do not have mobility impairments.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT-TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers for Veterans Therapy Act” or the “PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act”.

SEC. 2. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PILOT PROGRAM ON DOG TRAINING THERAPY.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of the Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall commence the conduct of a pilot program to provide canine training to eligible veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Aug. 25, 2021
[H.R. 1448]
### Key Questions To Reflect Upon After Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does the policy operate?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is it funded?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is responsible for administering the policy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the objectives of the policy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the value-added of the policy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the expected short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What might be the unintended positive and negative consequences of the policy?</td>
<td>Pro-tip: Policy and legislation are terms used frequently and interchangeably in this presentation when referring to projects or programs that are defined by and/or responsible to report back to Congress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022). Policy Analysis: Key Questions.** https://www.cdc.gov/policy/paeo/toolsandproducts/docs/Table1.pdf
What is the Public Health Impact of the Policy?

How does the policy address the problem or issue (e.g., increase access, protect from exposure)?

What are the magnitude, reach and distribution of benefit and burden (including impact on risk factor, quality of life, morbidity and mortality)?

Will the policy impact health disparities/health equity?

Are there gaps in the data/evidence-base?

Pro-tip: Cite and summarize legislation that affects your project or your clinical and/or operational partners program in grant applications and requests for funding.
Ok, I have the bill. What do I do next?

The Tools of the Trade: Congressionally Mandated Projects, Evaluations, and Reports
Prepare An Executive Summary

1. Start with a blank word document
2. Find the legislative text, to include title and number, from Congress.gov (see slides 9-13) and download PDF
3. Title your document with the Public Law number and section title - this will be your acronym!
4. Find and paste hyperlink to the legislation PDF in the header of the blank word document
5. Outline the legislation by copying the relevant sections and their headings from the PDF version into a word document
   • Create a short outline of all of the major sections – add any editorial comments depending on audience
   • Make note of any timelines in the legislation as this dictates timing of Congressional reports, project start/end dates, etc.

Pro-tip: Ex. Summary is a 1–2-page outline in a Word document that is a high-level summary.
An Example of an Executive Summary

PL 115-435 Evidence Act
Executive Summary for RCS
Monica Matthieu, PhD., LCSW and David Adkins, MHA
January 6, 2020

PL 115-435 – Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. This law has 4 sections organized as Titles and Sections. *Italics are author comments. Title 1 has the most relevance to RCS in that it outlines the requirements for the Agency Evidence Plan in conjunction with the Strategic Plan.*

**Title I: Federal Evidence-Building Activities.**
- Sec. 101. Federal evidence-building activities will apply to the Department of Veteran’s Affairs (VA) in accordance with (IAW), section 311 (1) and 31 USC 901(b)(1)(O).
- **Sec 311. Definitions** - Various definitions offered. *One is relevant to RCS.*
  - “The term ‘evaluation’ means an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of one or more programs, policies, and organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and efficiency.”
- **Sec 312: a. Requirements** - Requires the head of the VA to develop an “Agency Evidence Plan” which must include the following six elements:
  1. A list of policy-relevant questions;
  2. A list of data that will be collected, used or acquired;
Prepare A Policy Brief for Analysis and Planning

1. Start with steps 1-4 of preparing an executive summary from previous slide
2. **Introduction:** overview - could be a “copy and paste” from the full text of the legislation
3. **Key Points of the legislation:** overview of the major paragraphs contained in the legislative text

   i.e., “Eligibility - Pursuant to this section, the Secretary shall— (1) furnish emergent suicide care to an eligible individual at a medical facility of the Department; (2) pay for emergent suicide care provided to an eligible individual at a non-Department facility; and (3) reimburse an eligible individual for emergent suicide care provided to the eligible individual at a non-Department facility”

Pro-tip: For our team, we say Policy Brief to mean a 3-10-page (*dependent on the length of the legislative text*) copy and paste of the full legislation into a Word document and appended with analysis and comments from team-based work with your team and your clinical and/or operational partners on ideas for implementation and evaluation. *This is not a policy brief for publication or external dissemination.*
Prepare A Policy Analysis Brief

3. **Implications**: what changes or actions need to be taken
   - Is there a clear need for implementation and evaluation plans to be developed?
   - Who will you need to partner with?
   - Is there a timeline established for implementation or evaluation of the policy?

4. **Reporting Requirements**
   - Does the legislation require a Congressionally Mandated Report (CMR)?
   - If so, when are the CMRs due and does the legislation require more than one
An Example of a Policy Analysis Brief

Hollows, Juliana
CMRT – 30 days before NOFO publication

Hollows, Juliana
We should have in place by this time a centralized system for data capture of these metrics and the data flow into this system that is easily something to report out.

Currently, not sure if VSOIC will be able to capture this through the CPM. But the PSCIC do do this and can be captured through contract.

Hollows, Juliana
Dr. Albanez – how was this done within SIV7?

Hollows, Juliana
HSR&D QUIER project: estimate $300K/year for two years can this be coordinated with SIV75A?

CMRT on Study – Variables include:
1. Success of Outreach to Veterans
2. Increase in engagement in suicide prevention services
3. Department Referral

Hollows, Juliana
Process based report on outcomes to grants implementation that connects to grants

HOLLOWED OUT

Hollows, Juliana

[CONFIDENTIAL]

IN GENERAL — The term “Indian tribe” has the meaning given that term in section 4 of the title American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 (25 U.S.C. 4103).

RISK OF SUICIDE —

IN GENERAL — The term “risk of suicide” means exposure to, or the existence of, any of the following (to a degree determined by the Secretary pursuant to regulations): Health risk factors, including the following:
- Mental health challenges.
- Substance abuse.
- Serious or chronic health conditions or pain.
- Traumatic brain injury.
- Environmental risk factors, including the following:
- Prolonged stress.
- Stressful life events.
- Unemployment.
- Homelessness.
- Recent loss.
- Legal or financial challenges.
- Historical risk factors, including the following:
- Previous suicide attempts.
- Family history of suicide.
- History of abuse, neglect, or trauma.

DEGREE OF RISK — The Secretary may, by regulation, establish a process for determining the degree of risk of suicide for use by grant recipients to focus the delivery of services using grant funds.

RURAL — The term “rural”, with respect to a community, has the meaning given that term in the Rural-Urban Commuting Areas coding system of the Department of Agriculture.

SECRETARY — The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

SUICIDE PREVENTION SERVICES —

IN GENERAL — The term “suicide prevention services” means services to address the needs of eligible individuals and their families and includes the following:

Outreach to identify those at risk of suicide with an emphasis on eligible individuals who are identified as having elevated risk for suicide, and assist those individuals in obtaining appropriate care.

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Prepare An Evaluation Design

• Policy implementation and evaluation can have multiple aims or purposes, including:
  • Identifying critical differences between planned and actual implementation
  • Identifying barriers to and facilitators of implementation
  • Developing metrics for how the program will be evaluated
  • Collecting information to support interpretation of future evaluations of policy impact
  • Documenting the relationships between logic model components and external influences
  • Improving the implementation process
  • Informing future policy development

Pro-tip: An evaluation design is akin to a grant; it is a plan for what you would do and when.
How To Prepare An Evaluation Design

1. Identify the core components and activities of implementation for a specific policy.

2. Identify potential methods, metrics, and key performance indicators to assess whether each of the core components has been implemented as planned.

3. Identify key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the evaluation. What is the optimal method for obtaining information from each of the stakeholders?

4. Identify the stakeholder responsible for monitoring implementation of the policy (if any) to find out if a process for tracking the implementation already exists or is under development.

Develop Program Logic Models

- Policy implementation and evaluation may focus on different parts of the project,
- Use a logic model to outline inputs, activities and their related outputs, and outcomes
- Integrate stakeholders’ knowledge, perspectives, and inform of impacts
- Consider facilitators of and barriers to implementation and evaluation

Pro-tip: Simpler is better, brevity is expected, any format is fine, color helps with groupings.

SAMPLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INPUTS</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES</th>
<th>OUTPUTS</th>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Receipt of Application Data</td>
<td>Review and extraction of application data for</td>
<td>Formative Evaluation Results</td>
<td>Short-term (6 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing/Assets</td>
<td>evaluation/monitoring</td>
<td></td>
<td>Established infrastructure and capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMHSP</td>
<td>Maintaining Training/TA Logs</td>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of Training and TA on Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSG Fox SPGP Staff: 6 FTEE</td>
<td>Support implementation strategies for</td>
<td>Formative Evaluation</td>
<td>Medium-term (12 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Contracts (FFRDC, Training/TA, and 3rd</td>
<td>consistency of delivery, time, cost, quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>party assessment)</td>
<td>(Training/TA + External Facilitation, Audit and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VA Evaluation and Clinical SP Staff</td>
<td>Feedback)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BH GUIRI and other VHA OMHSP / SPC</td>
<td>Data Sharing Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>CRI SP 0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed staff)</td>
<td>Project management</td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved engagement and retention among</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriated budget for SSG</td>
<td>Financial audit</td>
<td></td>
<td>Veterans seeking care (in VA and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox SPGP (costs)</td>
<td>Contract oversight of 3 contracts</td>
<td></td>
<td>community care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection, Communication and Evaluation</td>
<td>Review of Grantees reports and compilation of</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased referrals from multiple sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>summary quarterly reports for trends</td>
<td></td>
<td>(formal and informal) during and pre-elders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drafting of congressional report for</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced gaps in community-based suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interim and final report</td>
<td></td>
<td>prevention systems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| SAMPLE SAMPLE |

Prepare An Implementation Plan in a MOU or SOW

• Implementation Questions
  • Does the policy clearly identify the critical implementation steps?
  • Was the policy implemented according to the policy requirements?
  • What inputs and resources are required to implement the policy?
  • Are all of these inputs and resources available?
  • What key activities need to be completed during policy implementation?

Pro-tip: MOUs are used to outline the essential elements of the program, roles and responsibilities, non-research language, financial commitments, and deliverables for your team or center and is executed between their operational partners and funders.

However, a Scope of Work may be needed to further outline functions of various entities involved in a very large project so that you can identify the intersections and potential overlaps of roles, responsibilities, deliverables, etc. especially needed for contracts.

Develop A Congressionally Mandated Report (CMR)

1. Copy and paste the required reporting elements for the CMR *(see slide 18)*
2. Outline what is specifically required to complete the CMR
3. Collect, analyze, and summarize data and findings
4. Prepare the data you think you need *(save this for a full report that you give to your partners)*
5. Now, edit down to only the data/information needed to answer the specific aspect of the legislation

Pro-tip: Co-write the CMR with your clinical and/or operational partners
- to help you contextualize the findings to a policy audience and
- to make sure you include recent policy impacts/drivers on their program
Reporting Impacts for HSR&D/QUERI

HSR&D COIN Renewal

Research Into Policy and Practice Impacts (list of national, regional, and local impacts)

Congressionally Mandated Evaluation Projects & VA Reports to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees

Department of Veterans Affairs. (2022). Section 201 Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program Evaluation Plans. DVA: Authors.

With our operations partners in OMHSP and evaluation team members, we developed two evaluation plans to guide the implementation of the first ever community-based grant program for suicide prevention among veterans. The project began as a Behavioral Health QUERI Rapid Response Team request and after 6 months, we were hired to provide ongoing evaluation, implementation and dissemination consultation across all 5 years of the SSG Fox SPGP. Finally, we are commissioned to write the interim and final congressionally mandated evaluation reports.

In 2022, the SSG Fox SPGP transitioned from policy operationalization to program planning. Following the development of program criteria, distribution of the Request for Applications, and grant review, in September, 80 sites were chosen as the inaugural community partners, with the post-award conference delivered to all new sites in December 2022. Data collection began in November, with our team remaining instrumental partners in the design, delivery, implementation, analysis, forecasting, and reporting on the impacts of this national program.
Welcome to the Office of Healthcare Transformation Legislative Implementation Team Site!

Resources

Videos on Congress.gov

https://www.congress.gov/legislative-process

https://vagov.sharepoint.com/sites/vhalit

PEPREC Evidence Act Checklist

https://www.peprec.research.va.gov/PEPRECERESEARCH/docs/Policy_Brief_12_EBP_Checklist.pdf