Policy Analysis, Program Implementation, and Evaluation

Performance Monitoring and Impact Evaluation

NORC regularly conducts evaluation research for governmental, nonprofit, and commercial clients. These projects range from formative assessments of innovative practices and policies, to data collection and the development of metrics for ongoing performance measurement and monitoring, to multi-year evaluations of publicly and privately funded social programs.

Evaluating programs, policies, and processes requires in-depth knowledge of our clients’ fields of practice. It also requires knowledge of study design and methodology, data collection and management, analytics and data science, program implementation, and evaluative thinking, best practices, and standards. NORC brings expertise in these areas, leveraging the diverse subject matter and methodological knowledge of staff from across the organization. Our organizational strengths in performance monitoring and impact evaluation include:

- **Evaluation design and implementation.** Evaluations of experimental programs or processes—whether mandated by Congress, government agencies, or developed internally by program managers—are most effective when they gather and synthesize different types of data from disparate sources, focusing analysis around the critical questions identified by the client. NORC works closely with clients to identify study questions and design evaluation studies.

- **Program assessments.** When appropriate, NORC conducts program assessments, rather than full impact evaluations, to satisfying decision-makers’ information needs. We typically analyze secondary data generated by the program or other sources in order to identify accomplishments, success factors, barriers to success, lessons learned, and next steps. In addition to conducting short-term or ongoing program assessments, NORC also serves clients who seek to build grantees’ capacity to conduct program assessments.

- **Performance measurement.** NORC works with clients to develop data collection systems and dashboards designed to monitor and assess their—and their grantees’—performance. We select performance measures that align with program objectives and reporting requirements, and design systems that leverage existing data, ensure the reliability and validity of newly collected data, and enable efficient reporting with minimal effort from our clients.
Sample Projects

Impact Evaluation of the Minnesota Reading Corps K-3 Program.

Between 2011 and 2014, NORC designed and implemented an Impact and Process Evaluation of the Minnesota Reading Corps Program on behalf of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). The core activities of the Minnesota Reading Corps program are training, placing, and monitoring AmeriCorps members in school-based settings to implement reading and emergent literacy interventions to children in both preschool (PreK) and kindergarten through 3rd grade (K-3) programs. NORC implemented a feasibility study, a process assessment, and an impact evaluation to measure the impact of the program on students’ literacy levels.

Development of OMH’s Performance Improvement and Management System (PIMS).

For the United States Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH), NORC developed and implemented a web-based Performance Data System (PDS) for collecting, reporting, and disseminating performance- and results-oriented data and information relative to OMH’s mission. NORC assists OMH and its grantees in adopting evidence-based performance measures and practices and improving the evaluation of program activities to determine their outcomes and impact.

Evaluation of the National Science Foundation’s Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

NORC conducted an evaluation of the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP), a federal fellowship program that supports research-based STEM graduate studies with approximately 2,000 fellowships awarded per year. NORC’s evaluation included a web survey with more than 10,000 current and former Fellows and Honorable Mention (HM) designees and qualitative interviews with more than 150 university faculty, administrators, and departmental staff members from 24 GRFP institutions. NORC used the web survey data to estimate the impact of obtaining the GRFP Fellowship on important career outcomes, and also compared Fellows to national comparison groups. The qualitative data provided critical information on how Fellows affect institutions, how the GRFP is implemented at institutions, and the effectiveness of current GRFP policies and procedures.

Impact Evaluation of the USAID/Uganda School Health and Reading Project (SHRP).

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/Uganda’s (SHRP) is a four-year intervention to improve early grade reading by training teachers in literacy instruction using students’ mother-tongue in Grades 1-3 with transition to English in Grade 4; developing and distributing textbooks and instructional materials in local languages and English; and providing ongoing support to teachers. NORC is responsible for the impact evaluation of the project. The impact evaluation uses a randomized controlled trial design to measure the impact of these interventions on early grade reading outcomes.

Start a conversation. Contact us.

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.