

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105514](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal decision makers need evidence about whether federal programs and activities are achieving intended results. The Evidence Act created a framework for enhancing the federal government’s capacity to build and use evidence in decision-making.

The act includes provisions for GAO to review its implementation at various points. This report (1) assesses the extent to which the Chief Data Officer Council took actions intended to address its statutory requirements to enhance the development and use of evidence in the federal government, and (2) describes examples of actions selected agencies took to improve their use of different types of evidence.

To address these objectives, GAO reviewed documents and interviewed officials from the Chief Data Officer Council and six federal agencies: the Departments of Commerce, Energy, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs; the General Services Administration; and the Office of Personnel Management. GAO selected these agencies to reflect a range of sizes and variability in their evidence-building capacities, as identified by GAO’s past work. GAO assessed the Council’s activities and identified actions it took related to its statutory requirements.

The Chief Data Officer Council, Office of Management and Budget, and six selected agencies had no comments on a draft of this report.

View [GAO-23-105514](#). For more information, contact Alissa H. Czyz at (202) 512-6806 or czyza@gao.gov.

December 2022

CHIEF DATA OFFICER COUNCIL

Progress in Strengthening Federal Evidence-Based Policymaking

What GAO Found

The Chief Data Officer Council—established by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act)—has taken a range of actions intended to strengthen federal evidence-building activities. The act established the Council as an entity within the Office of Management and Budget, and it receives administrative support from the General Services Administration. The Council’s membership includes Chief Data Officers from each agency (82 as of October 2022) and other officials from across the federal government.

GAO’s analysis found that the Council has taken one or more actions related to each of its five statutory requirements. Those requirements outline how it should contribute to federal efforts to generate and use evidence (see figure).

Chief Data Officer Council Requirements and Examples of Related Actions

Statutory Requirements for the Chief Data Officer Council

Establish government-wide best practices for the use, protection, dissemination, and generation of data.	Promote and encourage data sharing agreements between agencies.	Identify ways in which agencies can improve upon the production of evidence for use in policymaking.	Consult with the public and engage private users of government data and other stakeholders on how to improve access to federal data assets.	Identify and evaluate new technology solutions for improving the collection and use of data.
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Examples of Related Council Actions

Recommended practices to help agencies develop data inventories that make their data accessible to the public while ensuring sensitive data are protected.	Recommended creating tools and processes to make data sharing between agencies more efficient.	Released a toolkit to help agencies develop training programs that improve the skills of staff involved in evidence-building activities.	Solicited suggestions from the public to improve how (1) potential users find federal data, and (2) federal websites make those data more accessible.	Evaluated how agencies could use data visualization technologies, such as dashboards, to analyze key human resources data.
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Source: 44 U.S.C. § 3520A(b) and GAO analysis of Chief Data Officer Council actions. | [GAO-23-105514](#)

During a meeting with Council officials in June 2022, GAO shared observations that the Council did not have fully formed plans and performance management activities for meeting its statutory requirements, which could limit continued progress. In response, the Council provided an updated planning document to GAO in August 2022 that identified how the Council’s goals and planned activities now support each requirement, along with related performance measures. Moving forward, these tools will provide the Council with performance information it can use to assess progress and ensure it sufficiently addresses each requirement before its authorization expires in December 2024.

GAO also identified various actions that selected agencies took to improve their ability to use different types of evidence. These include several that reflect the Council’s actions identified above. For example:

- To help agencies make more informed decisions, the Office of Personnel Management is developing tools—expected in summer 2023—to analyze and visualize key government-wide workforce data.
- Based on an assessment that identified gaps in the data skills of its staff, the General Services Administration began offering training courses in February 2022 tailored to its employees’ roles and responsibilities.