



# Best Practices in Demonstrating Evidence

AmeriCorps State and National & CNCS Office of Research and Evaluation | November 2019

# Session Outline



- CNCS' approach to evidence
- NOFO evidence base criteria
- Evidence tiers
- Evidence quality
- Tips for applicants
- Q&A

# Why is Evidence Important?

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- Achieve a shared goal of offering communities effective solutions that address their needs
- Ensure that federal dollars are invested wisely
- Inform continuous improvement of programs
  - Change what isn't working
  - Do more of what is working

# Evidence in AmeriCorps Grant Applications

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- Proposed service activities (interventions) must be supported by evidence
  - Threshold requirement for funding
- Evidence-informed:
  - Uses available knowledge, research, and evaluation to guide program design/implementation
  - Specific intervention described in application has not been rigorously evaluated
- Evidence-based:
  - Intervention described in application has been rigorously evaluated and demonstrated positive results

# Building Evidence of Effectiveness

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*Evidence  
Informed*

**Stage 1:  
Identify a  
promising  
program design**

**Stage 2:  
Ensure effective  
implementation**

**Stage 3:  
Assess program  
outcomes**

**Stage 4:  
Obtain  
evidence of  
positive  
program  
outcomes**

**Stage 5:  
Attain causal  
evidence of  
positive  
program  
outcomes**

*Evidence  
Based*

[www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/evidence-continuum](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation/evidence-continuum)

# Same Intervention



- Evidence-based applicants must provide evidence for the same intervention described in the application
- “Same intervention” means all of these areas must match:
  - Characteristics of beneficiary population
  - Characteristics of population delivering intervention
  - Dosage (frequency, duration) and design of intervention, including all key components
  - Setting in which intervention is delivered
  - Outcomes of intervention

# Clarifying Program Design



- To assess the evidence supporting an application, core components of the intervention must be clearly described in both the application and the submitted evaluation report(s):
  - Characteristics of the beneficiary population
  - Characteristics of population delivering the intervention
  - Dosage (frequency, duration) and design of the intervention, including all key components and activities
  - Context in which the intervention is delivered
  - Outcomes of the intervention

# 2020 NOFO: Evidence Base Criteria

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- Evidence Tier (12 points)
  - Based on:
    - the relative strength of each applicant’s evidence base
    - the likelihood that the proposed intervention will lead to outcomes identified in the logic model
- Evidence Quality (8 points)
  - Based on:
    - The quality of the applicant’s evidence
    - The extent to which the evidence supports the proposed program design
  - Exact evidence quality criteria depend on evidence tier

# 2020 Evidence Tiers

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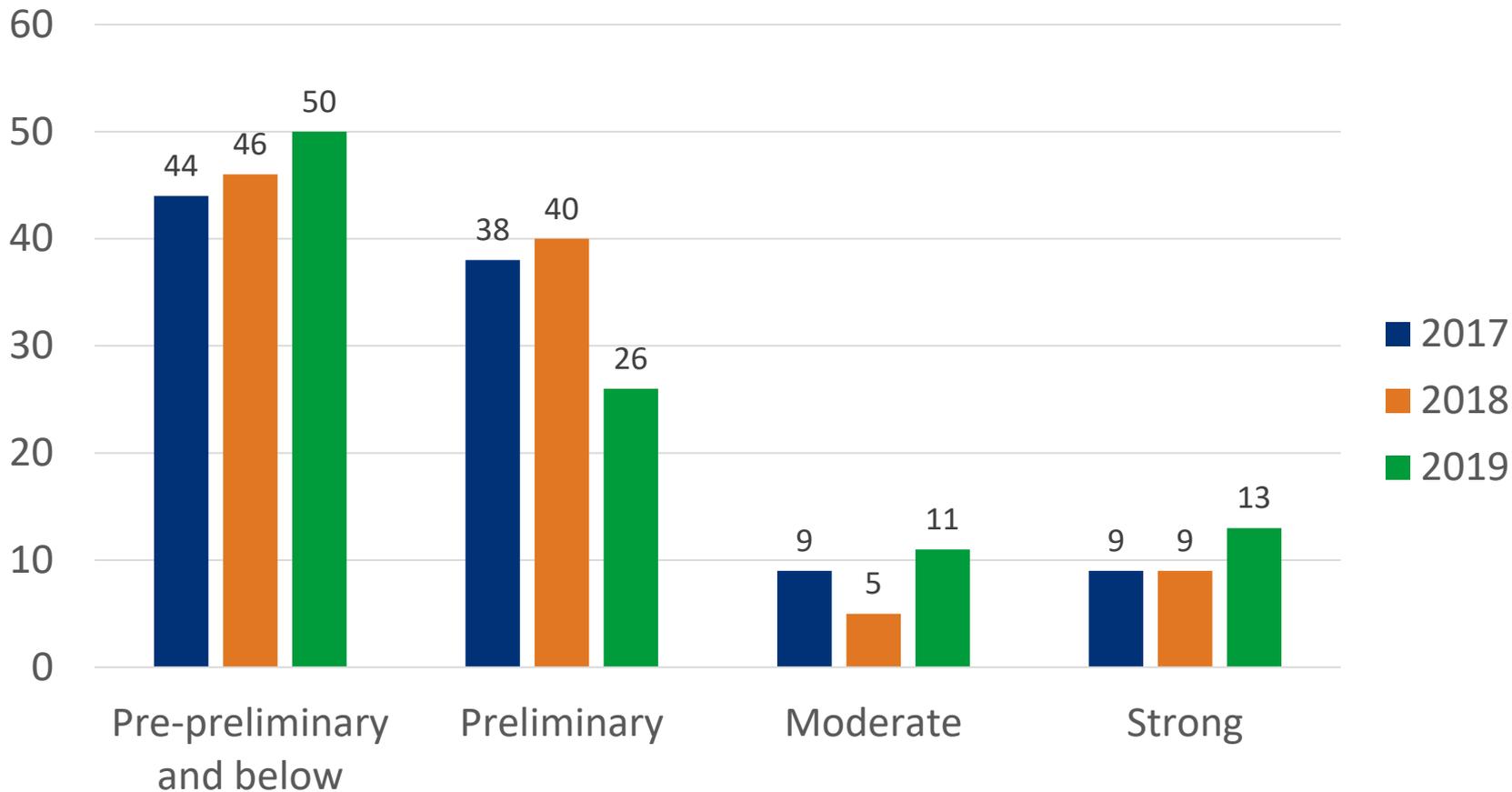
- Pre-Preliminary
- Preliminary
- Moderate
- Strong

Defined in 2020 Mandatory Supplemental  
Guidance:

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2020%20MSG%20FINAL.508.pdf>

# Evidence Tiers: Percent of Funded Applicants, by Year

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# Evidence Tiers: Pre-preliminary

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- Applicant has not submitted any outcome/impact evaluations of the intervention described in the application.
- Applicant must describe in the application narrative how program design is **evidence-informed**.
- Applicants may also cite prior performance measure data.

***\*Threshold requirement:** applicants in this evidence tier must have adequate evidence quality in order to be considered for funding*

# Pre-Preliminary Evidence Tier Example

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Applicant's *Ready to Read* program provides small-group tutoring services to 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students for 30 minutes, twice a week. The program is adapted from Famous Tutoring Program's successful approach, which used the same curriculum to provide one-on-one tutoring sessions for 30 minutes every day. A 2017 randomized control trial found that students in the Famous Tutoring Program increased their scores on standardized tests by 40% more than the control group.

*Additional documents:* none

# Evidence Tiers: Preliminary



- Applicant has submitted **outcome evaluation** report(s) (can be internal or independent evaluations)
  - Comparison group may be present, but is not randomly assigned or statistically matched
- Reports evaluated the **same intervention** described in the application
- Reports show **positive results** on one or more key desired outcomes in the applicant's logic model

# Preliminary Evidence Tier Example

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Applicant's *Ready to Read* program provides small-group tutoring services to 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students for 30 minutes, twice a week. Based on pre- and post-assessments administered by the *Ready to Read* program in 2017, 350 students gained at least 1.5 grade levels in reading mastery. The effect sizes were significant and represent a positive result.

*Additional Documents:* The applicant submitted one internal evaluation report of the *Ready to Read* program describing the results of the pre-post assessment.

# Evidence Tiers: Moderate



- Applicant has submitted **impact evaluation** report(s) (must be independent evaluations)
  - Experimental (RCT) or quasi-experimental (QED) study designs
  - Ability to generalize the findings beyond the study context may be **limited** (e.g., single-site)
- Reports evaluated the **same intervention** described in the application
- Reports show **positive results** on one or more key desired outcomes in the applicant's logic model

# Moderate Evidence Tier Example

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The applicant's *Ready to Read* program uses the same curriculum, program design, and dosage as the Famous Tutoring Program and is serving similar students. Based on a 2017 quasi-experimental evaluation conducted by Famous Tutoring Program at one of their program sites, students gained on average 1.3 grade levels on the Famous Standardized Literacy Assessment, compared to just 0.8 grade levels for the comparison group. The study was conducted by an independent (external) evaluator. The results were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

*Additional Documents:* The applicant submitted one independent evaluation report from the Famous Tutoring Program describing the results of the QED study.

# Evidence Tiers: Strong



- Applicant has submitted **impact evaluation** report(s) (must be independent evaluations)
  - Experimental (RCT) or quasi-experimental (QED) study designs
  - Results are attributable to the intervention and can be **generalized beyond the study context** (e.g., multi-site evaluation or multiple evaluations from different sites/populations)
- Reports evaluated the **same intervention** described in the application
- Reports show **consistently positive results** on one or more key desired outcomes in the applicant's logic model

# Strong Evidence Tier Example

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Applicant's *Ready to Read* program provides tutoring services in 25 states across the country. The program hired an independent evaluator to conduct a randomized controlled trial in 16 states, including both rural and urban sites as well as student populations with different ethnic/racial backgrounds. The evaluation found that students in the *Ready to Read* program outperformed students in the control group on 3 specific literacy skills addressed by the program. The results were statistically significant with Moderate effect sizes. Subgroup analysis showed positive impacts in both rural and urban settings and across multiple ethnic/racial groups.

*Additional Documents:* The applicant submitted one independent evaluation report from the *Ready to Read* program describing the results of the RCT study.

# Submitting Evaluation Reports/Studies



- Who should submit reports or studies?
  - In order to be considered for Preliminary, Moderate or Strong evidence → Submit up to 2 reports/studies (or 3 if evaluation report required)
  - Any applicant required to submit an evaluation report to meet evaluation requirements → Submit evaluation report
- Required evaluation report can be submitted in addition to the 2 other studies (up to 3 total)
- Reports or studies submitted for evidence tier **MUST** be of the same intervention proposed in the application

# Evidence Quality Criteria: Pre-Preliminary Evidence Tier

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- The applicant uses **relevant** evidence, including past performance measure data and/or cited research studies, to **inform** their proposed program design
- The described evidence is relatively **recent**, preferably from the last six years
- The evidence described by the applicant indicates a **meaningful positive effect** on program beneficiaries in at least one key outcome of interest

*\*Based on content of application narrative\**

# Evidence Quality Criteria: Preliminary/Moderate/Strong Evidence Tier

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- The submitted reports are of **satisfactory methodological quality and rigor** for the type of evaluation conducted (e.g., adequate sample size and statistical power, internal and/or external validity, appropriate use of control or comparison groups, etc.)
- The submitted reports describe evaluations that were conducted relatively **recently**, preferably within the last six years
- The submitted reports show a **meaningful and significant positive effect** on program beneficiaries in at least one key outcome of interest

*\*Based on submitted reports/studies\**

# Data Collection Plans and Evaluation Plans



Additional evaluation-related items that must be submitted in the grant application:

Type of Plan	Who Submits
Data Collection Plan	New Applicants
Evaluation Plan	Recompeting Applicants

- Not reviewed until after funding decisions are made
- Evaluation plans must be approved by CNCS within the first year of the grant



- **Read the NOFO and Mandatory Supplemental Guidance carefully**
- In the application narrative, describe the full body of evidence that exists for your program:
  - Summarize the study design and key findings from any submitted reports
  - Describe other supporting evidence, for example, past performance measure data or other research
- Describe how the intervention in the submitted report(s) is the same as the intervention proposed in the application
- Do not submit more than the allowable number of studies (either 2 or 3 depending on applicant's evaluation requirements)
- Select high quality evidence: rigorous, relevant, recent, meaningful



- AmeriCorps State and National FY2020 Notice of Funding Opportunity
  - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/build-your-capacity/grants/funding-opportunities/2020/ameri-corps-state-and-national-grants-fy-2020>
- Evaluation Resources on the Knowledge Network:
  - <http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/evaluation>
- CNCS Evidence Exchange
  - <https://www.nationalservice.gov/impact-our-nation/evidence-exchange>