

EXCELLENCE IN EVALUATION AWARD SUBMISSION

The New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee’s (LFC) Program Evaluation Unit is the accountability arm of the New Mexico Legislature. The Unit provides information regarding cost, impact, and effectiveness of government programs to the legislature and the public and recommendations for improvement. LFC’s permanent staff of 11 program evaluators often work with other LFC staff including budget analysts and economists responsible for crafting a legislative budget recommendation for state government (Attachment A). The work of the Program Evaluation Unit informs budget recommendations in a cohesive framework called *Legislating for Results* where the legislature uses the best research available to fund evidence-based approaches to improve outcomes by supporting the overall LFC mission of providing objective analyses, recommendations, and oversight of state agencies.

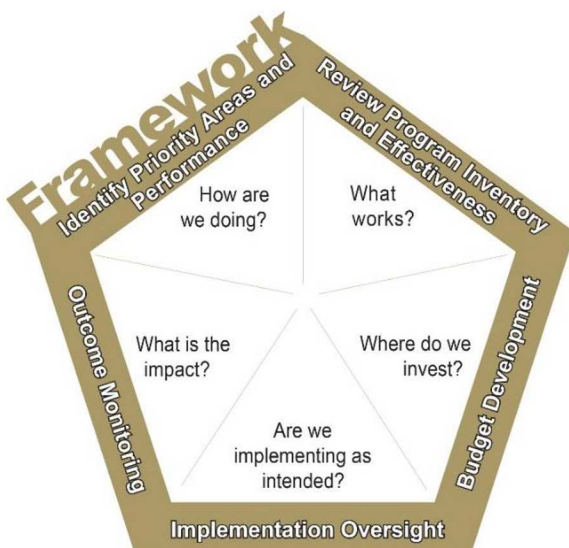
Legislative Finance Committee

Mission: To provide the legislature with objective fiscal and public policy analyses, recommendations and oversight of state agencies to improve performance and ensure accountability through the effective allocation of resources for the benefit of all New Mexicans.

Vision: To be recognized nationally as a leader in fiscal and public policy analysis that is innovative and fiscally responsible.

The Legislating for Results Framework. In the framework, government operations are continually monitored and evaluated with the goal of providing more effective and responsive government services through policy and budget recommendations. Born from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Legislating for Results project (2003), the framework includes five key areas building a continuous quality improvement cycle for all of state government. Program evaluation staff use innovative research methods, cost-benefit analysis, and performance data monitoring to discover how policymakers might direct resources to better serve New Mexicans. These recommendations are often used by in-house budget staff and policymakers, often resulting in changes to policy, law, funding, and expansion or implementation of programming. The approach has also been strengthened by new methodological approaches, including New Mexico’s Results First cost-benefit approach which has led to hundreds of millions of dollars being invested in evidence-based programs. Program Evaluation Unit recommendations also influenced a new law that provides the legislature with authority to ask agencies to provide program inventories as a part of their budget submissions and defines key terms in statute including “evidence-based”. Examining agency performance and the mechanisms responsible for said performance is key to providing the legislature with informed recommendations regarding potential changes in law and funding.

LFC Legislating for Results Framework



Summary of LFC Program Evaluation Unit performance. From 2017 to 2020, the Unit continued to be highly productive, releasing reports resulting in enormous impact exhibited by identified cost savings, civil discourse, and most importantly adopted recommendations changing law, funding, and program delivery. The Program Evaluation Unit was also able to pivot during the challenging time of the COVID pandemic to remain relevant and productive, providing policymakers important information regarding the economy, public schools, and public health. The LFC Program Evaluation Unit also continues further the field of legislative program evaluation with LFC staff participating in NCSL and NLPES activities and sharing innovative information on research methods, project selection, and communicating results with membership. This is further reflected by leadership in those organizations with the LFC Deputy Director serving on the NLPES Executive Committee during the award term, serving as NLPES chair in 2019 and serving on the NCSL Executive Committee starting in 2019. Discussion and evidence regarding impact, body of work, and furthering the field follows.

BODY OF WORK. The Program Evaluation Unit’s body of work during the 2017-2020 review period includes 50 reports, 13 progress reports, numerous committee memos, and over 100 presentations to legislative committees and professional societies. Project selection emanates from the *Legislating for Results* framework where staff use budget, performance, and impact data to prioritize policy questions, and culminates with review and approval of the staff generated work plan from the Committee itself. Each year after the legislative session, LFC has an all-staff meeting to discuss the impact of the session and help set work plan priority for the interim. LFC’s body of work has also been impacted by partnerships resulting in new methods, legislative member priorities resulting in the development of different report series, and the COVID pandemic.

LFC staff have developed skills to use innovative methods through partnerships with other organizations. The LFC worked with multiple partners from 2017-2020, bringing in new expertise and skills to the Program Evaluation Unit. For almost a decade, the Unit has worked with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative developing a cost-benefit analysis approach that is now incorporated into the *Legislating for Results* framework and has proven useful in examining programs impacting behavioral health, healthcare, and education. The approach was recently used to examine job training programming and state-funded prekindergarten, and the value of the analysis was presented to the Society of Benefit-Cost Analysis in 2020. In 2018, LFC staff also partnered with MIT’s J-PAL State and Local Innovation Initiative to conduct a retrospective randomized control trial examining the impact of early college high schools. In-state partnerships have also proven to be valuable as LFC partnered with the Legislative Education Study Committee (LESC) in 2017 to examine the impact of virtual schools in New Mexico, finding subpar academic progress for those attending and inadequate oversight of these schools.¹ LESC and the State Auditor have also been key partners in training and work plan development. LFC evaluation staff also fostered collaboration between LFC, the Center for Government Excellence (GovEx) at Johns Hopkins University, and select state agency administrators that shared a goal of integrating the *Legislating for Results* framework into performance management within their agencies.

LFC staff have developed a series of reports on policy issues and approaches important to LFC members and the public. In addition to traditional program evaluations and progress reports, LFC staff have developed report series that reflect a concentration on issues important to LFC members. *Health Notes* are evaluation briefs intended to improve understanding of healthcare finance, policy, and performance in New Mexico. LFC published 7 Health Notes from 2017-2020. *Accountability Reports* are evaluation briefs focused on system performance and outcomes. LFC published 6 Accountability Reports from 2017-2020. *Results First* reports are evaluation briefs using the Results First cost-benefit approach developed in partnership with the Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative. LFC published three Results First reports from 2017-2020. *Action Plans* are evaluation briefs that examine an outcome and provide research and recommendations on setting a goal and creating a plan to meet that goal. LFC published 2 Action Plans in 2020. Finally, LFC staff conduct a series of *Public School District Evaluations* targeting different regions of the state, most recently LFC staff examined 5 northcentral New Mexico school districts (Attachment C provides examples of a Program Evaluation, a Results First report, and a Health Notes report).

LFC staff have adjusted project selection, methodology, and communication of findings as a result of COVID. New Mexico has had a relatively aggressive response to the COVID pandemic, with much of the state working from home for the last year. The Program Evaluation Unit pivoted much of their work plan to doing shorter rapid response type evaluations on topics often related to COVID referred to as *Policy Spotlights*. These special review projects have the advantage of being less resource-intensive for fieldwork, while still providing staff with the opportunity to provide policymakers with timely high-quality information on issues, including learning loss and returning to school, safely reopening the economy, job losses and resources for recovery, and broadband availability. LFC also identified a number of issues with emergency procurements at the onset of the pandemic

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/4xavzd25>

and worked with the state auditor to issue a joint risk advisory,² and to form a COVID Accountability Workgroup where risks, best practices and lessons learned regarding emergency procurement are shared. The pandemic also forced LFC staff to find new innovative ways to conduct field visits through Zoom and resulted in staff needing to be more resourceful when building qualitative evidence, including the use of meeting minutes, federal reporting, along with surveys and interviews. LFC staff have also had to adapt to presenting reports via Zoom often developing new work products to communicate findings to legislators and the public. These strategies were informed by meetings with staff from the United States Government Accountability Office at the onset of the pandemic and through meetings with other oversight agencies. LFC has also been sharing these experiences through the listserv and a recent NLPES information-sharing call to help other offices make adjustments as well.

The Program Evaluation Unit strives to effectively communicate project results to stakeholders. LFC program evaluations are available on the LFC website and staff presents each project, upon completion, to members of the LFC at public hearings. Staff are routinely called to present reports to other legislative committees and outside groups. In keeping social media use, work products now reach a wider audience through the New Mexico legislative Twitter feed, @nmlegislature. Over the past four years, LFC program evaluation staff have made almost 100 public presentations to committees, professional societies, and other organizations.

IMPACT. The work of the LFC Program Evaluation Unit had significant impact during the review period as reflected by productivity, award recognition, identified cost savings, adopted recommendations, and civil discourse about our work including but not limited to the press and United States Congress.

LFC’s Program Evaluation Unit is highly productive and award-winning. From 2017-2020 LFC released 50 program evaluations with a staff of 11 evaluators. This rate of approximately 4.5 reports per staff position over the review period compares favorably with the last three Excellence in Evaluation Award winning offices. Additionally, LFC staff released numerous other types of reports over the four-year period including 13 progress reports, 6 memos, and risk advisories, and made numerous presentations of our research to legislative committees and professional organizations (Attachment B). LFC staff reports received five awards from 2017-2020 with three Impact Awards (2017, 2019, and 2020), and the Excellence in Research Methods Award from NLPES (2020), along with the Notable Document Award from the Legislative Research Librarians (2017). This year’s impact award submission for a 2019 broadband report we conducted cites the implementation of report recommendations creating a new Office of Broadband and steering of \$110 million toward expanding broadband services³.

Reports Per Staff Member
(four-year period of award submission)

	NM	VA	LA	CO
Reports/Evaluations	50	27	80	61
Evaluation Staff	11	30	28	33
Reports Per Staffer	4.5	0.9	2.9	1.8

Source: NLPES Past Award Winners and LFC files



LFC program evaluations identified over \$1 billion in cost savings from 2017-2020. In 2020 the LFC Program Evaluation Unit identified \$276.7 million in cost savings through program evaluations. The amount of cost savings identified was over \$200 million for each year from 2017-2020, with the amount identified by LFC staff growing at a rate outpacing typical inflation. A number of recommendations to capture these cost savings were also made and implemented.

² https://www.saonm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Risk-Advisory_OSA_LFC_Emergency-Procurements-061520.pdf

³ <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Legislation/Legislation?Chamber=S&LegType=B&LegNo=93&year=21>

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

Senator Heinrich On 2020 LFC Game & Fish Evaluation

"Recently, a report from New Mexico's Legislative Finance Committee confirmed a very serious problem that has been brought to me by constituents across New Mexico. From Silver City to Crownpoint to Taos and all corners of the state over my time serving in office, I have heard from local hunters who rely on hunting for food and tradition about a serious problem: the Department of Game and Fish's system of allocating elk hunting on public lands is fundamentally flawed and tilted against resident hunters when compared to other Western states."

Senator Martin Heinrich, December 2, 2020.

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/Senator-Heinrich-on-LFC-Report>

ALBUQUERQUE
JOURNAL

On 2020 LFC Evaluation on Learning Loss

"The LFC report calls for a "complete and transparent road map" for K-12 school reentry. The education crisis demands the governor's and lawmakers' attention now; the bottom line is that parents need to be assured that for parents wanting in-person learning for their children, schools will reopen in January-even if it is a hybrid approach."

ABQ Journal Editorial-Nov 4, 2020

Source: <https://www.abqjournal.com/1514171/leaders-districts.html>

SANTA FE  NEW MEXICAN

On 2018 LFC Reporting on Early Childhood Programs

"The Legislative Finance Committee has estimated a need for another \$111 million statewide for home visiting, prekindergarten and a program that extends the school year — that's on top of \$306 million projected to be spent next year. We can't afford to waste one dollar, or to return one federal dollar unspent."

SF New Mexican-April 28, 2018

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/rd98k34s>

Hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in evidence-based programs from evaluation work. Pew identified more than \$400 million being targeted toward what works from LFC's Results First Work (see Attachment D). Additionally, over half (56 percent) of LFC Program Evaluation Unit recommendations were adopted within a year from 2017-2020. As time goes on, typically this proportion increases. For example, in 2019, the LFC found that the state does not have a definition for school readiness and recommended that the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) work to develop such definition. After resisting the recommendation initially, the ECECD reached out to LFC in 2020 to state they would be working on a definition and invited LFC to participate. The impact of these adopted recommendations is key as a number of LFC reports have led to major reform. A few examples of high impact areas follows:

- Early Childhood-General Appropriations Act (multiple years): LFC evaluations informed a \$200 million (80 percent) increase in program investment from 2017-2020 targeting dollars to what works with LFC showing investments in provided up to a \$6 to \$1 ROI (see Attachment E for video on impact in this area).
- Public Education-General Appropriations Act (multiple years): LFC evaluations on the value of extended learning time education led to the establishment of multiple programs and informed a \$567 million (21 percent) increase in program investment from 2017-2020.
- Child welfare-HB376 (2019): Implements a differential response system in child welfare. The bill was based on numerous LFC reports.
- Evidence-based policymaking-SB 58 (2019): Defines evidence-based and provides the legislature with the authority to require program inventories from agencies. The bill was based on work from the LFC Results First Initiative.

Civil discourse helps inform and promote report findings and recommendations. LFC Program Evaluation Unit recommendations tend to be adopted as a function of time and through the mechanism of said discourse. Attention and reporting from the press, state agencies, and United States Congress are all examples of LFC work in discussion that help inform and potentially promote responses to staff findings and recommendations. In 2020, a LFC evaluation identifying inequities in the state's elk hunt drawing system was identified by Senator Martin Heinrich as confirming constituent reports of the issue (see Attachment F). Senator Heinrich called for action on the issue of the state favoring wealthy out of state hunters stating, "It is wrong, it is killing the hunting tradition in New Mexico, and it is high time to reform a system that effectively allows a wealthy few to outbid an average hunter's opportunity to hunt on public lands." Recent examples of such impact in the media are evident from LFC staff reports examining learning loss as caused by remote learning in the COVID pandemic. The report called for a number of measures to mitigate learning loss and help students make up for lost time. The Albuquerque Journal's editorial board took notice calling for the administration to follow report recommendations. Attachment G provides additional examples of LFC reports having media/public impact.

FURTHERING THE FIELD OF LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION. The Program Evaluation Unit continues to further the field of legislative program evaluation as exhibited by continued participation in NCSL and NLPES, providing of training, and service to the field.

LFC staff participate in professional society committees, trainings, and activities.

Since 2017, LFC staff have presented or moderated panels ten times at the NLPES PDS, presented at the NCSL Summit three times, and have contributed to virtual events in place of in-person meetings. LFC staff have also participated in NLPES webinars on methods, the remarkable research methods webinar, and a webinar on confidential data access issues (all available on the NLPES professional development page). In 2019 LFC Program Evaluation Manager Micaela Fischer participated on NCSL’s Evidence-Informed Policymaking Work Group. LFC Deputy Director Jon Courtney, has been on the NLPES Executive Committee since 2017, currently serving as Immediate Past Chair and Chair of the Elections Committee (2021), Chair in 2020, Vice-Chair in 2019, Chair of the Advancing the Field Subcommittee from 2018-2019, and Chair of the Awards Subcommittee in 2017. He has served on the Legislative Staff Coordinating Committee since 2019 and was recently appointed to the NCSL Executive Committee. While he was Chair of the NLPES Executive Committee, he helped pivot the Committee’s work to respond to the COVID pandemic, including providing more virtual professional development opportunities. During this time the Executive Committee also established performance measures for subcommittees, finalized the NLPES audit report library, established information sharing calls, established a methodologist list/workgroup, established a rapid response COVID subcommittee to identify and promote virtual professional development opportunities for members monthly, and helped update the NLPES logo (see Figure). Additionally, LFC staff have written content for the NLPES newsletter and have served as judges for the Outstanding Achievement Award, the Excellence in Evaluation Award, the Excellence in Research Methods Award, and Certificate of Impact Awards during the review period 2017-2020. Staff also presented information regarding how the LFC evaluation unit uses data to impact budgetary decisions at the NALFO seminar in 2018 and to the larger NCSL Legislative Summit in 2019.

New NLPES Logo (2020)



Locally, LFC staff work with the University of New Mexico’s Master of Public Policy (MPP) program students, serving on their Community Advisory Board and presenting to them about potential careers as evaluators while also engaging students in some of LFC’s ongoing evaluation’s through the programs policy lab. One MPP student recently completed an internship with LFC and was hired on as permanent staff. Program evaluation unit staff have also presented at the New Mexico State Bar Association’s Public Law Section on a number of different topics including procurement practices in 2019, and at a regional Children’s Law Institute conference in 2018. LFC evaluators also attend the American Evaluation Association (AEA) meetings, hold memberships in the local AEA chapter, and work to improve communication between state and private evaluators throughout New Mexico.

LFC staff works with other states. Working with other offices has proven to be a valuable asset for LFC staff. In 2020 LFC staff participated in a peer-review of the Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee. The review highlighted the impressive shop in Washington and provided LFC staff with ideas for improving processes at home. In late 2019, the LFC hosted staff from Alabama’s newly created Commission on the Evaluation of Services. The representatives from Alabama were developing practices and standards for how they would perform program evaluation work in the future and LFC was able to share our manual and methods for performing evaluations, as well as our experiences in approaching different kinds of evaluations. Additionally, LFC staff have been providing guidance to the Oklahoma Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency, another newly-created office. The Oklahoma office recently successfully presented its first report in committee.

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