

Evidence Quality Checklist for Applicants: Pre-Preliminary Tier

In order to qualify for the Pre-preliminary tier, you must show that your program is “evidence-informed”—that is, that you have used either research from other evidence-based programs or data that you collected about your own program to inform your program design. You should provide this information in the Evidence Base section of your application.

Applicants that are in their third funding cycle or later must submit an evaluation report with their application; large applicants (i.e., those with over \$500,000 of CNCS funding) must submit an evaluation report for an external impact study. Applicants in the Pre-preliminary tier should not submit any other studies in addition to their own evaluation report; if an application is rated as Pre-preliminary no additional studies will be reviewed.

If you think you are in the Pre-preliminary tier, before you submit your application you should check the following:

If you are describing research conducted on other evidence-based programs...

- Are you including this description in the Evidence Base section of your application?
- Was at least one of the studies that you cited completed in the past six years?
- Do the studies that you cited describe a program that is similar to yours?
- For each of the studies that you cite, do you describe at least one meaningful positive program effect that the study found?
- Are the positive findings that you describe related to outcomes in your logic model?
- Do you describe how you used the results of the studies that you cited to inform the design of your program—that is, have you connected them to some piece of your logic model?
- If your program will be different than the interventions described in the studies you describe, do you explain how it will be different and why the results of the studies are still relevant despite those differences?

If you are describing how you have systematically collected outcome or other performance measurement data on your program:

- Are you including this description in the Evidence Base section of your application?
- Have you described in detail what data you collected, and what the results were?
- Have you described in detail how you collected those data?
- Do you describe how you used the data that you collected to inform the design of your program—that is, have you connected them to some piece of your logic model?

Evidence Quality Checklist for Applicants: Preliminary Tier

In order to qualify for the Preliminary tier, you must provide at least one outcome evaluation study of the intervention you are planning to implement with positive results. The study must be an outcome evaluation (i.e., an evaluation that measures the effects of an intervention) but does **not** need to be an impact evaluation (i.e., RCT or QED study), and can be an internal evaluation (i.e., one that your own organization conducted) or external evaluation (i.e., one conducted by someone else).¹

Applicants in the Preliminary tier should submit either one or two evaluation studies as attachments to their application. In their narrative for Evidence Base, they should summarize the results of these studies and explain why they represent evidence that their program will work.

Applicants that are in their third funding cycle or later must submit an evaluation report with their application; this evaluation report does not count toward the two-study limit for attachments. Large applicants (i.e., those with over \$500,000 of CNCS funding) must submit an evaluation report for an external impact study.

If you think you are in the Preliminary evidence tier, before you submit your application you should check the following:

- Are you providing at least one (but no more than two) studies as an attachment to your application?
- Do the studies that you provided show positive results?
- Are the positive results in the studies related to key outcomes of interest in your logic model?
- Was at least one (and ideally all) of the studies that you provided completed in the past six years?
- Does your Evidence Base narrative summarize the studies that you are using as evidence, the results of the studies, and why they represent evidence for your program? Have you shown how these studies connect with the logic model for your own program?
- Do the studies you provided evaluate either your own specific AmeriCorps program or an intervention that is the same as the one you are proposing to implement? (see next page)*
- Does at least one of the studies measure outcomes either by (a) comparing pre- and post-intervention measures among program participants or members; or (b) comparing post-intervention measures between participants and a comparison group?
- Do the studies themselves and/or your Evidence Base narrative sufficiently show that the studies have satisfactory methodological quality and rigor? For example:
 - Do the studies describe the research questions they were designed to answer?
 - Do the studies describe the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments and processes that were used?

¹ The exception to these rules is for large grantees, who are required to have conducted an external impact evaluation.

- Do the studies describe the sample size of the study (i.e., the number of participants from whom data were collected), as well as any sampling techniques used?
- Do the studies provide an effect size for the results?
- Do the studies describe the specific statistical analyses that were used, and why they were appropriate to the research questions?

If any of the studies that you provide with your application are of a program other than yours, in order to get credit for this evidence you will need to show that you are planning to implement **the same intervention that is described in those studies. In order to prove that, you need to include the following in the Evidence Base section of your application:*

- Have you shown that the beneficiaries your program will be serving have the **same characteristics** as the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence, in terms of age, income, geography, race/ethnicity, and other attributes? For example, if the participants in the study are low-income urban youth, your proposed intervention should also be serving that same population.
- Have you shown that the **services** that your program beneficiaries will receive are the same as the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the intervention described in the study is clearing trails and eliminating invasive species, then your proposed program should also include those activities.
- Have you shown that the **population delivering the intervention** will be the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the intervention described in the study was carried out by people with specific training or expertise, then the implementers of your proposed program should have that same training or expertise.
- Have you shown that the **dosage** (i.e., the amount or duration of services) that your program beneficiaries will receive are the same as or greater than the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the participants in the study receive 20 hours of tutoring, then your proposed intervention should provide them with at least 20 hours of tutoring.
- Have you shown that the **context** of your program (i.e., when and where the services are provided) is the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the study examined an intervention carried out as an off-site afterschool program, then your proposed intervention should also be delivered as an off-site afterschool program.
- Have you shown that at least some of the **intended outcomes** of your program are the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the study found that an intervention increased civic engagement, then one of your program's intended outcomes must be to increase civic engagement.
- If any of the above will be different in your program than in the studies that you are submitting, have you described exactly how, and why that difference will not negatively impact the effectiveness of the program?

Evidence Quality Checklist for Applicants: Moderate or Strong Tiers

In order to qualify for the Moderate or Strong tiers, you must provide at least one evaluation study showing that the intervention you are planning to implement will cause at least one of your intended outcomes. The evidence must come from a well-designed impact evaluation (i.e., RCT or QED study), and must have been conducted by an external evaluator. In addition, in order to qualify for the Strong tier the study must have tested the intervention nationally, regionally, at the state level, or in multiple locations, or with multiple different populations (for example, in both an urban and rural environment).

Applicants in the Moderate or Strong tiers should submit either one or two evaluation studies as attachments to their application. In their narrative for Evidence Base, they should summarize the results of these studies and explain why they represent evidence that their program will work.

Applicants that are in their third funding cycle or later must submit an evaluation report with their application; this evaluation report does not count toward the two-study limit for attachments. Large applicants (i.e., those with over \$500,000 of CNCS funding) must submit an evaluation report for an external impact study.

If you think you are in the Moderate or Strong evidence tier, before you submit your application you should check the following:

- Are you providing at least one (but no more than two) studies as an attachment to your application?
- Is at least one of the studies that you are providing an external evaluation—that is, was it conducted by an organization other than your own?
- Do the studies that you provided show a meaningful and statistically significant positive effect of the intervention?
- Are the positive findings in the studies related to outcomes in your logic model?
- Was at least one (and ideally all) of the studies that you provided completed in the past six years?
- Does your Evidence Base narrative summarize the studies that you are using as evidence, the results of the studies, and why they represent evidence for your program? Have you shown how these studies connect with the logic model for your own program?
- Do the studies you provided evaluate either your own specific AmeriCorps program or an intervention that is the same as the one you are proposing to implement? (see next page)*
- [*Strong Tier Only*]: Do the studies that you provided show consistently positive results across multiple locations or with different populations of beneficiaries?
- Does at least one of the studies include a comparison or control group so that it is a valid impact evaluation study?
- Do the studies themselves and/or your Evidence Base narrative sufficiently show that the studies have satisfactory methodological quality and rigor? For example:
 - Do the studies describe the research questions they were designed to answer?
 - Do the studies describe how comparison or control groups were formed, and show that the two groups

have baseline equivalency (i.e., that they are similar in all ways except the intervention)?

- Do the studies describe the validity and reliability of the data collection instruments and processes that were used?
- Do the studies describe the sample size of the study (i.e., the number of participants from whom data were collected), as well as any sampling techniques used?
- Do the studies provide an effect size for the results?
- Do the studies describe the specific statistical analyses that were used, and why they were appropriate to the research questions?

If any of the studies that you provide with your application are of a program other than yours, in order to get credit for this evidence you will need to show that you are planning to implement **the same intervention that is described in those studies. In order to prove that, you need to include the following in the Evidence Base section of your application:*

- Have you shown that the beneficiaries your program will be serving have the **same characteristics** as the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence, in terms of age, income, geography, race/ethnicity, and other attributes? For example, if the participants in the study are low-income urban youth, your proposed intervention should also be serving that same population.
- Have you shown that the **services** that your program beneficiaries will receive are the same as the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the intervention described in the study is clearing trails and eliminating invasive species, then your proposed program should also include those activities.
- Have you shown that the **population delivering the intervention** will be the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the intervention described in the study was carried out by people with specific training or expertise, then the implementers of your proposed program should have that same training or expertise.
- Have you shown that the **dosage** (i.e., the amount or duration of services) that your program beneficiaries will receive are the same as or greater than the beneficiaries in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the participants in the study receive 20 hours of tutoring, then your proposed intervention should provide them with at least 20 hours of tutoring.
- Have you shown that the **context** of your program (i.e., when and where the services are provided) is the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the study examined an intervention carried out as an off-site afterschool program, then your proposed intervention should also be delivered as an off-site afterschool program.
- Have you shown that at least some of the **intended outcomes** of your program are the same as in the study you are using as evidence? For example, if the study found that an intervention increased civic engagement, then one of your program's intended outcomes must be to increase civic engagement.
- If any of the above will be different in your program than in the studies that you are submitting, have you described exactly how, and why that difference will not negatively impact the effectiveness of the program?