5th Annual NCSL/Pew Incentive Evaluators Roundtable

Thanks to everyone who attended our fifth annual Evaluators Roundtable in October—with over 60 attendees, this was our largest conference yet! We were thrilled to see many new faces interacting with our more seasoned attendees. States and cities are now publishing more evaluations than ever and are using creative techniques to showcase evaluation results, including the use of podcasts in Kansas and YouTube videos in Washington. This was the first roundtable with the evaluators network advisory group, who helped set the agenda in consultation with NCSL and Pew. Following the conference, the advisory group provided feedback, discussed ideas for future sessions, and brainstormed strategies to provide additional resources to new and experienced evaluators.

Click here to access the agenda and presentations.

Evaluating Geographically Targeted Incentives
States employ a variety of geographically-targeted economic development programs. However, these programs frequently miss their intended goals by not adequately targeting the correct areas or populations. This session provided examples of questions to consider when evaluating how well programs are targeted and highlighted two evaluations that incorporate different methodologies to determine the effectiveness of place-based programs (click here for the Maryland evaluation, and here for the Vermont evaluation).

Recent Applications of a New Model for Assessing the Benefits and Costs of Incentives
Dr. Tim Bartik continues to develop a model to evaluate the cost and benefits of incentives to more accurately calculate their economic and fiscal impacts. This presentation included two real-world examples: one study uses the model to calculate return on investment using two alternative methods for estimating “but for” while another applied the model concepts to qualitatively analyze one of the most high-profile incentive deals in U.S. history—Amazon’s search for a second headquarters location. Dr. Bartik provided an overview of this model and also discussed its methodology and mechanics in depth during a pre-conference webinar.

Alternative Evaluation Approaches
In some instances, it is not practical or technically feasible to use complex analysis techniques to evaluate tax incentives. During this session, panelists discussed a variety of different methods that can be employed instead including using simple descriptive measures and hypothetical scenarios. Panelists described how the results can be used as indicators of incentive effectiveness or impact, to identify pitfalls or problems, and to inform strategies for future successful evaluations.

Managing an Incentive Evaluation Process
There is no one-size-fits-all approach for designing or managing an evaluation process. Evaluators from states with highly varied processes and levels of experience shared the nuances in their states on topics including: cultivating relationships with other agencies, managing staff time, calibrating legislator expectations, managing competing priorities, starting an evaluation, and lessons learned from completing an evaluation cycle.
Approaches to Methodology: An Interactive Discussion on Fitting Research Methods to Research Questions

Evaluators must make a series of choices when developing their methodologies: what data are available? What are the time constraints? What are the statutory requirements? Evaluators presented recent evaluations and walked through the various considerations that informed their evaluation approach.

Evaluation Workshop

Prior to the Roundtable, attendees participated in a survey to rank discussion topics. Based on these results, teams of four or more were assigned to discuss their experiences in those areas, share lessons-learned and brainstorm how to address challenges for upcoming evaluations.

Please email taxevalnetwork@pewtrusts.org to provide suggestions for future offerings or session topics, or to be connected with an advisory group member.