



DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION

Enterprise Policy

GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE – EVIDENCE-BASED GRANTMAKING – 2026 GRANTS MANAGEMENT OFFICE

Evidence-Based Competitive Grantmaking Policy

Date of the Last Revision: 04/23/2026

Effective Date: 05/11/2026

1. Purpose

Pursuant to R.I. General Laws § 42-11-2, which authorizes the Department of Administration (DOA) to establish uniform administrative, fiscal, and management practices across executive branch agencies, the purpose of this policy is to ensure that the State of Rhode Island grantmaking process prioritizes programs and interventions that are supported by evidence of effectiveness. This policy requires, where practicable, that, following an initial implementation period, agencies define and prioritize evidence of effectiveness when funding programmatic interventions intended to improve outcomes for Rhode Islanders.

By embedding statewide evidence-based practices, evidence informed strategies, and evidence of impact into competitive subaward issuances, where practicable, the State seeks to direct public resources toward strategies that achieve measurable results for Rhode Islanders, while supporting innovation and continuous learning where evidence is still emerging.

This policy governs how agencies design and evaluate competitive subaward issuances. It does not alter statutory program authorities, federal funding requirements, state funding requirements, or agency discretion over programmatic priorities.

2. Applicability

Unless otherwise specified by the State, this policy applies, where practicable, to all executive branch state agencies, departments, and divisions that issue federal or state competitive subaward solicitations greater than, or equal to, \$500,000 at initial publication through the statewide grant management system administered by the Grants Management Office (GMO). Federal or state competitive subaward solicitations below the \$500,000 threshold are exempt from this policy but remain subject to management at the agency's discretion.

For purposes of this policy, a “competitive subaward” shall mean any federal or state grant funding that is awarded to subrecipients through the statewide grant management system administered by GMO and a competitive selection process based on published programmatic criteria via State of Rhode Island Grant Funding Opportunities (RIGFOs).

For purposes of this policy, competitive subawards that primarily fund capital projects, equipment acquisition, planning deliverables, training/exercises, communications/outreach, direct financial assistance, or reimbursement/cost-share activities are generally not

practicable for evidence prioritization, as they do not primarily fund a defined programmatic intervention.

This policy applies to all eligible solicitation drafts initiated on or after the effective date of this policy.

3. Definitions

- a. **“Competitive Subaward”**: A subaward that is awarded through a selection process where the pass-through entity solicits proposals from multiple sources to select a subrecipient, based on published criteria.
- b. **“Evidence”**: Information demonstrating the effectiveness of a program, practice, or intervention, as defined by the [Rhode Island Evidence Scale](#), including, but not limited to, evaluation findings, peer-reviewed research, or ratings from accredited evidence clearinghouses.
- c. **“Evidence-Based”**: An intervention that is “Promising” or “Proven Effective” on the Rhode Island Evidence Scale.
- d. **“Grants Management Office (GMO)”**: Under R.I. General Laws 35-1.1-5, this office is housed within the Office of Accounts and Control and provides administrative support for the effective and transparent utilization of federal grants, contracts and loans through timely guidance, technical assistance, compliance and reporting oversight to State agencies and their supported organizations.
- e. **“Non-competitive subaward”**: A subaward provided directly to a subrecipient for the subrecipient to carry out a portion of a federal or state award received by the pass-through entity.
- f. **“Office of Management and Budget (OMB)”**: Under R.I. General Laws 35-1.1, this office is responsible for providing ongoing fiscal analysis, management support, and analytical research to the public, the Governor, the General Assembly, and state departments and agencies.
- g. **“Rhode Island Evidence Scale”**: The State’s standardized framework for classifying programs by level of evidence (e.g., Proven Effective, Promising, Theory-based, or No Evidence), as maintained by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- h. **“State of Rhode Island Grant Funding Opportunity (RIGFO)”**: A grant announcement inviting applications that are evaluated and award funding to subrecipients.

- i. **“Subaward”**: An award provided by a pass-through entity to a subrecipient to contribute to the goals and objectives of the project by carrying out part of a federal or state award received by the pass-through entity.^{1,2}
- j. **“Where Practicable”**: To the maximum extent feasible, given the purpose of the funding, statutory, federal or state requirements, the maturity of the service area, and the availability of evidence-based models or practices. For purposes of this policy, “practicable” is generally limited to competitive subawards that primarily fund programmatic interventions intended to improve participant or population outcomes.

4. Procedures and Compliance

a. Statewide Evidence Standard

Agencies shall use the Rhode Island Evidence Scale as the statewide standard for defining evidence tiers.

Every applicable solicitation shall include:

- A definition of evidence consistent with the Rhode Island Evidence Scale;
- Instructions for applicants on how to identify, document, and cite evidence supporting the proposed intervention;
- A method for requiring or prioritizing evidence-based interventions.

b. Agency Solicitation Design

Depending on program purpose, an agency must either (1) specify a required evidence-based intervention model within the solicitation, or (2) invite applicants to propose an intervention model and prioritize specific models based on section c below. In all cases, solicitations shall clearly state whether the intervention is prescriptive or applicant-proposed.

c. Application Requirements

Each application subject to this policy, submitted via [Rhode Island Standard Subaward Application Forms](#), requires applicants to identify the evidence tier of the proposed intervention using the Rhode Island Evidence Scale; provide documentation or citations supporting the identified evidence tier (e.g., evaluation studies, clearinghouse ratings); complete a standardized Evidence Template (see Appendix D), describing:

- The target population;
- The target geographic region (i.e., municipality, county, etc.);
- The intervention or strategy;

¹ This does not include payments to a contractor, beneficiary, or participant of a Federal Program.

² 2 C.F.R. § 200.1 (October 2024)

- The clearinghouse or evidence source(s), if applicable; and
- Applicability to the proposed context (including any necessary adaptations).

Applicants proposing interventions ranked low on the evidence scale (RI Scale below “Promising”) must include a theory of change and an evaluation or evidence-building plan appropriate to the scale and risk of the investment.

d. Prioritization of Proven Programs and Services

Evidence of effectiveness shall be a significant factor in subaward decisions.

Upon reviewing [Rhode Island Standard Subaward Application Forms](#), agencies shall:

- Incorporate evidence into application scoring rubrics to require or reward proposals for initiatives that are evidence-based;
- Allocate a defined portion of total points (or percentage of total score) to the strength and quality of evidence supporting the proposed program or service under the Rhode Island Evidence Scale.

Agencies may either require specific programs and services be evidence-based (i.e., requiring “Proven Effective” or “Promising” rating) or award preference points based on evidence tier and documentation quality, where consistent with program goals and authorizing statutes.

e. Requirements to fund evidence-based models

Where practicable, agencies shall fund programs that follow evidence-based models or practices. As such, funded projects are expected to implement interventions with demonstrated effectiveness (e.g. programs vetted in national clearinghouses or proven through research) relevant to the agency’s objectives. Such models should strive to capture data originating in peer states or adapted to fit Rhode Island’s current social, geographic, cultural, and economic conditions with ongoing evaluation to determine efficacy locally.

If a program supports new or innovative approaches that are not yet supported by sufficient evidence, the agency must document why an evidence-based model is not used and ensure the project is designed to collect outcome data for future evaluation.

In all cases, subrecipients with interventions ranked low on the evidence scale (RI Scale below “Promising”) must commit to evaluation and continuous improvement, to build evidence for agency programs. This requirement aligns with Rhode Island’s focus on outcomes and will help prioritize committing funding to programs that demonstrate results.

f. Explicit exemptions

The following are exempt from this policy, subject to GMO approval upon exemption request by the administering agency:

- Federal, state, or other external funding programs where binding statutory, regulatory, or awarding-agency requirements materially limit the State's discretion to define or prioritize evidence of effectiveness in a manner consistent with this policy;
- Time-sensitive³ grant solicitations where compliance would materially delay urgent deployment of funds, and the administering agency documents where compliance is impracticable given program timelines and operational needs;
- Competitive subaward solicitations of de minimis, low-dollar, low-risk competitive subawards where evidence documentation and scoring requirements would be administratively disproportionate to the award size and would materially limit participation, timely deployment, or equitable access.

Exemptions are granted by the GMO upon request of the administering agency. Agencies that seek exemptions shall complete a standardized exemption form, via the statewide grants management system, that explains the basis for the exemption request. Exemption approvals shall be retained in the grant file.

g. Noncompliance

Failure to comply with this policy may result in:

- Required revision of solicitation documents prior to issuance;
- Delayed approval to release a solicitation; or
- Additional oversight or corrective action as determined by GMO in relevant consultation with OMB

5. OMB Review and Notification

OMB will be responsible for working in tandem with GMO to guide processes and determine if all eligible grant solicitations have been reviewed.

Accordingly, each agency will provide quarterly reports to OMB that, at minimum, include the following information:

- The number of solicitations issued subject to this policy;

³ Per 220-RICR-20-00-2 section 2.1B, a funding opportunity notice (solicitation) for competitive subawards must be posted on the Grants Management Office Funding Opportunity website for a minimum of twenty-one (21) calendar days, or a shorter period as determined by the Controller, or their designee.

- The distribution of funded projects across evidence tiers (by number and dollar value);
- Any evaluation findings or outcome data collected.

OMB and GMO retain the right to amend the required information for quarterly reporting. OMB shall compile these reports into a statewide summary and may integrate findings into the budget and performance review process.

6. Policy Implementation & Maintenance

OMB and GMO shall facilitate an initial implementation period that informs agencies and subrecipients of the amendments in the grants management process and implications for associated systems via trainings and demonstrations. This initial implementation period shall terminate no later than the beginning of the Federal Fiscal Year, October 1st, 2026. While procedures and requirements outlined in Section 4 of this policy are intended to be suspended during the implementation phase, agencies should strive to adopt procedures and embed necessary practices related to this policy as quickly as possible.

Additionally, OMB shall periodically review and refresh the Evidence Scale and supporting materials to align with contemporary best practices and commonly used clearinghouse ratings, and to clarify documentation expectations, including for theory-driven or practice-based models. OMB and GMO will also be responsible for facilitating additional trainings at the request of agencies.

7. Approval / Review Signature



May 5, 2026

Director of Administration

Date

APPENDIX

- **Appendix A: Rhode Island Evidence Scale**

Proven Effective	5	<p>5: Proven Effective A program or service that is “proven effective” has a high level of research on effectiveness for at least one outcome of interest, determined through multiple rigorous evaluations. Qualifying evaluations include studies such as randomized controlled trials and evaluations that incorporate strong comparison group designs. These programs have been tried and tested by many jurisdictions, and typically have specified procedures that allow them to be successfully replicated. We expect that very few budget requests will be “proven effective”—this is the highest evidence-based standard, and most programs have not yet been studied rigorously enough to achieve it.</p>
Promising	4 3 2	<p>3: Promising A “promising” program or service has some research demonstrating effectiveness, but not as much as would be required for a “proven effective” designation. This could include, for example, a single randomized controlled trial or evaluation with a comparison group design that is not contradicted by other studies, but not confirmed by multiple such evaluations. It could also include the existence of a robust body of outcome data that your agency, or another agency that delivers a similar program, has collected and analyzed about the program over time. We expect that some, but not many, budget requests will be “promising.”</p>
Theory-based	1	<p>1: Theory-based A “theory-based” program or service has no qualifying evaluations on effectiveness or conclusive randomized controlled studies. Typically, theory-based programs have been tested using less rigorous research designs that do not meet the standards outlined above but have a well-constructed logic model or theory of change. Often, theory-based requests are based on anecdotal evidence or expert opinions. We expect that most expansionary budget requests will be in the “theory-based” category. The best and most compelling of these requests will include a plan for study that would theoretically allow the intervention to move up the evidence scale within a designated time period.</p>
Evidence of Insufficient Impact or Unintended Effects	0	<p>0: Evidence of Insufficient Impact or Unintended Effects A program has “evidence of insufficient impact” if quality evaluations have measured no meaningful difference in outcomes between program participants and those in a comparison group. A program that regularly fails to reach its outcomes targets also falls into this category. A program has “evidence of unintended effects” if quality evidence suggests that it has a negative impact on outcomes for program participants. We expect that many constrained proposals will involve programs that fall into this category.</p>

- **Appendix B: Standard Evidence-Based Solicitation Language**

Each agency is encouraged to use their own content-specific solicitation language that follows the requirements of the policy. Specifically, the solicitation must include either:

1. A specification of a required evidence-based intervention model.
 - Solicitation should include the name of the intervention and any specific populations that the intervention is targeting.
 - It is recommended to provide additional details, including information related to a Clearinghouse (name, rating, link) and/or links to previous, rigorous research.

OR

2. An invitation to applicants to propose an evidence-based intervention model and prioritize evidence-based interventions in the scoring criteria.
 - Applicants will fill out the evidence information as part of the Rhode Island Standard Subaward Application Form.

- Applicants will need to provide information on the evidence-base of their proposed intervention, including:
 - Target population (if any)
 - Intervention or strategy name (as it appears in clearinghouse/evidence source)
 - Clearinghouse or evidence source name(s)
 - Link(s) to clearinghouse(s) or evidence source(s)
 - Rating based on Rhode Island Evidence Scale (Appendix A)
 - Applicability to proposed context (including adaptations to the target population)

In the effort to assist in crafting the evidence-base language for the solicitation, please see below for examples of best practices and examples that do not meet the definition.

Examples of Language That Meet the “Best Practice” Standard

Example 1 – Required Use of an Evidence-Based Model

Applicants must implement [Intervention Alpha] or [Intervention Beta] as part of the scope of work. These interventions are designated as “Well Supported” by the [Insert Credible Evidence Clearinghouse] and as “Effective” by the [Another Reputable Clearinghouse].

This example specifies a required, clearinghouse-verified practice consistent with the Rhode Island Evidence Scale.

Example 2 – Rewarding the Use of Evidence-Based Approaches

Applicants are encouraged to propose programs, strategies, or interventions that are “proven effective” as defined by the [Rhode Island Evidence Scale](#). Up to 10 points may be awarded based on the strength of supporting evidence. Applicants should identify relevant studies or clearinghouse listings that verify that the program meets this definition and briefly describe how the evidence applies to the target population.

This example defines evidence, references an accepted framework, and ties scoring to the strength of the evidence.

Examples of Language That Would Not Meet the “Best Practice” Standard

Example 1 – General Reference Without Definition

Applicants are required to include evidence-based approaches.

This would **not** meet the best practice standard because it does not define “evidence,” reference a recognized framework, or link evaluation criteria to evidence quality.

Example 2 – Implicit Use of Evidence Without Citation

Applicants must use practices that have been shown to be effective for the target population.

This would **not** meet the best practice standard because it refers to effectiveness generally but lacks citation to clearinghouses or a defined evaluation mechanism.

Example 3 – Evidence Recommended but Not Scored or Required

Applicants are encouraged to describe the evidence supporting their program.

This would **not** meet the best practice standard because evidence is not clearly defined and is not integrated into evaluation criteria, diminishing its influence on funding decisions.

To learn more and see examples from other states, see Results for America’s [State Evidence-Based Grantmaking Guide](#).

- **Appendix C: Sample List of Approved Evidence Clearinghouses**

The following table and accompanying content provides information on a sample list of approved evidence clearinghouses, and how to count research not found in a clearinghouse.

Approved Clearinghouse Information:

The following table provided a list of pre-existing approved clearinghouses, which list evidence-based programs that satisfy the requirement of “Promising” or “Proven Effective” as per the Rhode Island Evidence Scale.

In cases where an evidence-based program or intervention has multiple studies cited in a clearinghouse that demonstrates effectiveness, a “Proven Effective” score can be provided.

Issue Area	Clearinghouse Name	Rating that meets the definition of “evidence-based” (must also have an informed rationale)
Clearinghouses Across Issue Areas	Results for America Economic Mobility Catalog	Proven and Strong meet definition <i>(Promising does not meet definition)</i>
	The Results First Clearinghouse Database	Green/Highest Rated and Yellow/Second Highest Rated meet definition <i>(Blue, Gray, and Red do not meet definition)</i>
	Arnold Ventures’ Social Programs that Work	Top Tier, Near Top Tier, and Suggestive Tier meet definition
Early Childhood	U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition <i>(No Tier Assigned does not meet definition)</i>
	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services HomVee Clearinghouse	Meets U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Criteria meets definition
	Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition

Issue Area	Clearinghouse Name	Rating that meets the definition of “evidence-based” (must also have an informed rationale)
K-12 Education	<u>U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse</u>	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition. <i>(No Tier Assigned does not meet definition)</i>
	<u>Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA</u>	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition
Post-Secondary Education and Workforce Development	<u>U.S. Department of Education What Works Clearinghouse</u>	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition. <i>(No Tier Assigned does not meet definition)</i>
	<u>U.S. Department of Labor Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research</u>	High or Moderate meet definition if the intervention shows positive impact on important outcomes <i>(Low does not meet definition; Interventions that show a negative impact on importation outcomes do not meet definition)</i>
	<u>Center for Research and Reform in Education Evidence for ESSA</u>	Strong, Moderate, and Promising meet definition

Issue Area	Clearinghouse Name	Rating that meets the definition of “evidence-based” (must also have an informed rationale)
Health and Well-Being	Institute of Behavioral Science Blueprints for healthy youth development	All interventions listed meet definition.
	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Teen Pregnancy Prevention Evidence Review	Favorable Evidence and Potentially Favorable Evidence meet definition <i>(Indeterminate evidence, Conflicting Evidence, Potentially unfavorable evidence, and Unfavorable evidence do not meet definition)</i>
	CA Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare	Well-Supported, Supported, and Promising meet definition <i>(Evidence Fails to Demonstrate Effect, Concerning Practice, and Note Rated do not meet definition)</i>
Housing	Results for America Economic Mobility Catalog - Housing and Community Development	Proven and Strong meet definition <i>(Promising does not meet definition)</i>
	The Results First Clearinghouse Database - use search option to search for “Housing”	Green/Highest Rated and Yellow/Second Highest Rated meet definition <i>(Blue, Gray, and Red do not meet definition)</i>

Issue Area	Clearinghouse Name	Rating that meets the definition of “evidence-based” (must also have an informed rationale)
Justice/Public Safety	US Department of Justice Crime Solutions	Effective and Promising meet definition <i>(No Effects does not meet definition)</i>

Other Source Information:

Some research into interventions and programs may not appear in these clearinghouses. Therefore, qualifying evaluations (such as randomized controlled trials or evaluations with strong comparison group designs) from reputable sources can be used to satisfy the evidence requirements.

Please recall that the following are necessary for each evidence rating:

Proven Effective:

- Two or more rigorous studies (randomized controlled trial or evaluations with strong comparison group designs) that show causal link between participation and positive outcomes; OR
- Proven successful in Rhode Island through a rigorous casual evaluation (between participation and positive outcomes) AND there is evidence from other geographic areas that the program is effective.

Promising:

- One rigorous study (randomized controlled trial, quasi-experimental methods, or other evaluation with strong comparison group designs) that shows causal link between participation and positive outcomes; OR
- If an existing initiative, a robust amount of internal data for the State of Rhode Island demonstrates that the program/intervention is associated with positive outcomes for the public. [Note: Information from additional states may be used to supplement this information, but are not a replacement for internal data from Rhode Island.]

Theory-Based (not considered evidence-based):

- There is at least one example of a pilot program showing the success of the program/intervention, but it was not rigorously studied; OR

- There is a reasonable argument of how this program/intervention should lead to positive outcomes for participants or the general public; OR
- There is a reasonable argument of why this program/intervention should be tested; OR
- Studies or evaluations that demonstrate that a lack of resources in this area are leading to reduced outcomes.
- **Appendix D: Evidence Form**

Applicants will be required to fill out an evidence form via the statewide grant management system as part of their application for grant solicitations greater than, or equal to, \$500,000. The questions in the form are to include:

Instructions:

The questions in this form are required by the State of Rhode Island for applicants applying to grant programs with solicitations of \$500,000 or above.

Please refer to the Evidence in Grantmaking Training Guide (*to be created for implementation*) for additional information, including a list of Clearinghouses that can assist in evidence identification and additional information on each question.

For questions about completing this form, submit a User Support Form: <https://controller.admin.ri.gov/grants-management/user-support>.

Questions:

- Project Title (as it appears in the main application):
- Evidence rating, using the Rhode Island Evidence Scale: *(dropdown)*

Questions appear if rating is “Proven Effective” or “Promising”

- Name of the intervention, as it commonly appears in clearinghouses and previous research:
- Source of the evidence information (clearinghouse, rigorous research/program, or other source):
- Name of the clearinghouse or publication that the evidence information is located in:
- Link(s) to the clearinghouse or applicable research:
- Target population served (specific groups served):
- Changes from cited evidence to support proposed target population or service context