Evidence-Based Budgeting in Tennessee

Evidence-based budgeting facilitates the use of research and evidence to inform programmatic funding decisions in a way that improves outcomes for Tennessee citizens. Influenced by the [Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative,](#) Tennessee's **evidence framework** allows agencies to demonstrate the evidence of both proposed and existing programs during the program inventory process or the budget process.

Tennessee Evidence Steps and Impact Ratings

Determining whether a program is evidence-based involves examining both the quality of evidence and the demonstrated impact on outcomes (i.e., positive, negative, no impact). For purposes of evidence-based budgeting, evidence-based programs are those with one or more rigorous evaluations (in Tennessee or elsewhere). These programs fall on the Evaluation or Causal Evidence steps (fig. 1) and receive an impact rating (fig. 2).
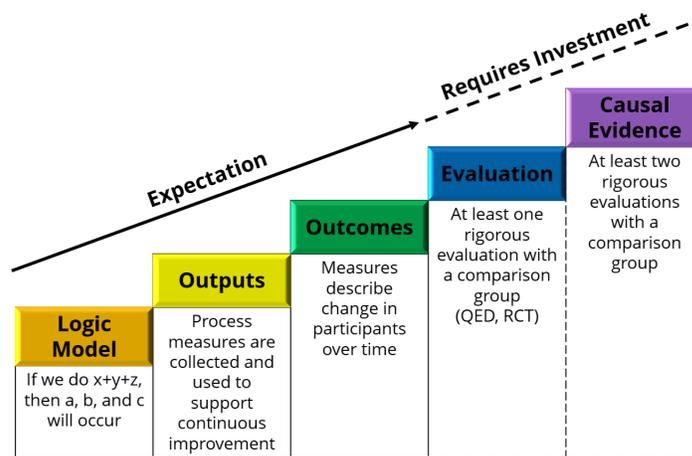

Figure 1: Tennessee Evidence Steps

Symbol	Meaning	Associated Step(s)
🚧	Additional effort needed to move to outcomes step	
✓	No expectation to move from outcomes step	
🔄	Prioritized for rigorous agency-level evaluation	
➕	Impact rated **positive** according to rigorous evaluation	
⊖	Impact rated **negative** according to rigorous evaluation	
⇄	Impact rated **neutral** according to rigorous evaluation	

Figure 2: Impact Ratings

Rigorous Evaluations

For the purposes of evidence-based budgeting, rigorous evaluations are those that use high-quality experimental or quasi-experimental designs. The graphic below provides further information. Note: It may not be possible or appropriate for some programs to undergo rigorous evaluation.
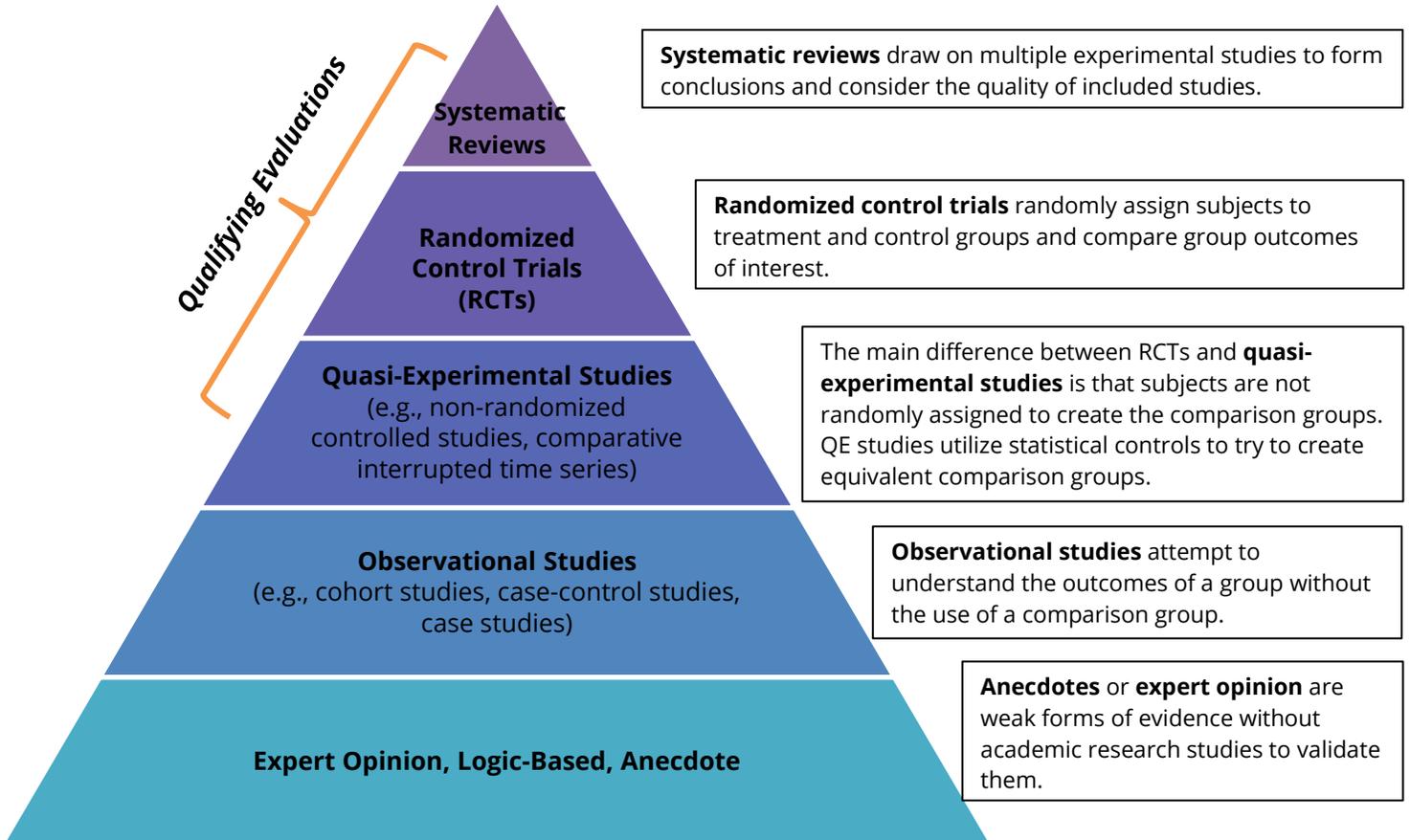

Qualifying Evaluations

Systematic Reviews

Randomized Control Trials (RCTs)

Quasi-Experimental Studies
(e.g., non-randomized controlled studies, comparative interrupted time series)

Observational Studies
(e.g., cohort studies, case-control studies, case studies)

Expert Opinion, Logic-Based, Anecdote

Systematic reviews draw on multiple experimental studies to form conclusions and consider the quality of included studies.

Randomized control trials randomly assign subjects to treatment and control groups and compare group outcomes of interest.

The main difference between RCTs and **quasi-experimental studies** is that subjects are not randomly assigned to create the comparison groups. QE studies utilize statistical controls to try to create equivalent comparison groups.

Observational studies attempt to understand the outcomes of a group without the use of a comparison group.

Anecdotes or **expert opinion** are weak forms of evidence without academic research studies to validate them.

Figure 3: Evaluation Pyramid

Evidence clearinghouses collect research on various topics and programs, assigning evidentiary ratings. The [Results First Clearinghouse Database](#) identifies thousands of programs that have been rigorously evaluated by one or more of nine national clearinghouses. Departments may also submit rigorous studies which have not been vetted by clearinghouses for panel review.

Types of Programs

If a systematic activity has participants or recipients and has its own name, it is likely a program. Terms often used in place of *program* may include *service*, *intervention*, or *practice*. Here are some examples of what is and is not considered a "program" for the purposes of evidence-based budgeting in Tennessee.

Programs	Not Programs
• Program, service, intervention, or support • Disbursed grant, fund, or scholarship • Direct benefit to individual or family who meet qualifications at a set frequency (e.g., SNAP, WIC) • Education, communication, or marketing campaign overseen by the agency (e.g., training, class, awareness campaign) • Requests for positions that manage or are directly tied to a program	• Regulatory functions • Most internal operations • IT functions/projects • Advisory committees • Facility or building establishment or maintenance • Requests for positions that serve general department management or operations
Examples • Tennessee Early Intervention System • Safe Baby Court • Tennessee Promise • Tobacco Quit Line • Launch TN • SNAP • ACES grants • Lottery scholarship • Tourism or safety awareness campaign	**Examples** • Professional licensure, permits • Legal, budget, purchasing, procurement • Warehousing/logistics • Accreditation • Oversight • General communications • IT improvement • Boards or advisory councils or committees • Internal staff training

Building Evidence

Programs not yet meeting the criteria to be considered "evidence-based" fall on the Logic Model, Outputs, or Outcomes steps (fig. 1) based on the stage of program implementation and the documentation and collection of program data. All Tennessee programs are expected to build evidence through at least the Outcomes step. Programs at the Outcomes step may be prioritized for rigorous evaluation by the department or designated to stay at the Outcomes step due to the inability for rigorous program evaluation.

Reporting Evidence

A program description is paired with the evidence step, symbol, and reported logic model or data. In some cases, a program delivers multiple interventions with their own associated evidence. Initial evidence steps for all department programs are determined through the program inventory process or as part of the annual budgeting process if a cost increase or reduction plan is submitted for that program.

The interactive program inventory is available on OEI's website. This publicly available dashboard contains information on each program's background, evidence step, and impact rating.
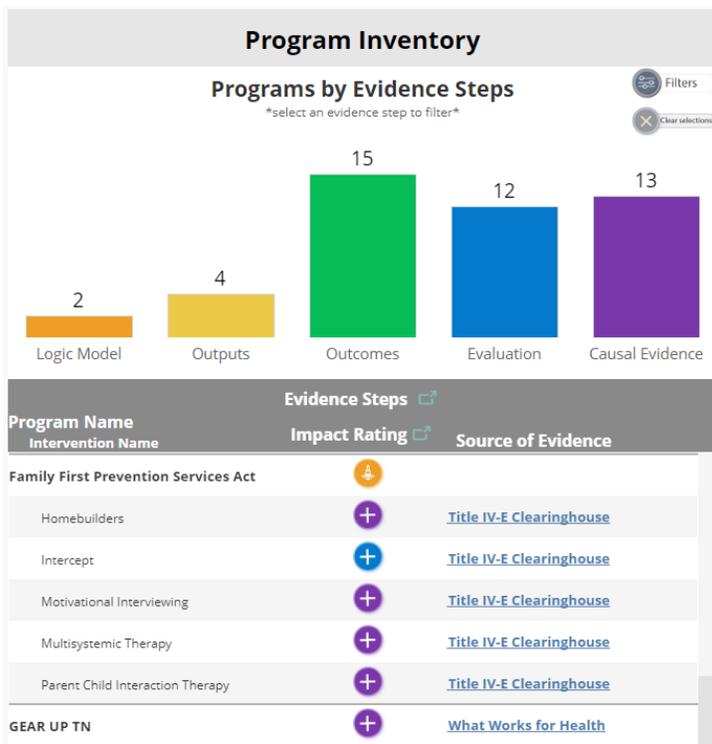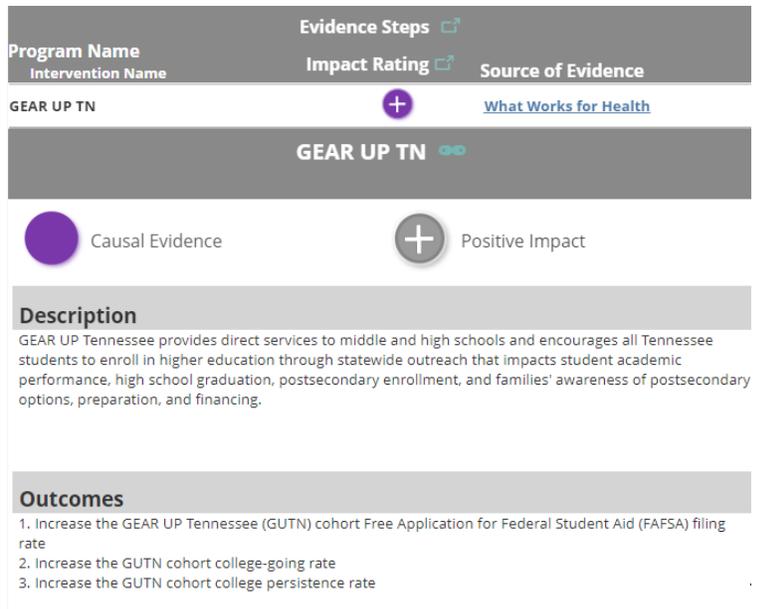

Figure 4: Public Program Inventory Dashboard

Figure 5: One Program Inventory Listing