Evidence-Based Practice Models

Understanding & Implementing EBP Models in Your Organization

Best available research evidence

Environmental & organizational context

Decision-Making

Client/Population characteristics, state, needs, values, & preferences

Resources, including practitioner expertise
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Due to vast technological advances, our ability as social service providers to collect and assess evidence has improved dramatically throughout the late 20th and early 21st century. As a result, evidence-based practice models are becoming more widespread.

Furthermore, funders, both private foundations and governmental organizations, are starting to insist more and more on the use of evidence-based practices in social work fields. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for anyone working in the social services sector to have a solid understanding of evidence-based practice models. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) even keeps an Updated Inventory of Evidence-Based, Research-Based and Promising Practices, speaking to the importance of these concepts in the public sector.

Keep reading to learn more about the types and components of evidence-based practice models and how they can affect your organization's work.

What is Evidence-Based Practice?

Before we look at the types of models out there, it is important to first understand what constitutes evidence-based practice. According to the Social Work Policy Institute:

Evidence-based practice (EBP) is a process in which the practitioner combines well-researched interventions with clinical experience and ethics, and client preferences and culture to guide and inform the delivery of treatments and services. (source)

Because our ease of access to information has improved drastically in the past few decades, acquiring evidence is a much simpler process and has certainly prompted the move towards evidence-based approaches.
However, evidence-based practice implies more than simply acquiring data. According to the Council on Social Work Education, there are five important steps involved in any evidence-based practice model.

1. Formulating a client, community, or policy-related question;
2. Systematically searching the literature;
3. Appraising findings for quality and applicability;
4. Applying these findings and considerations in practice;
5. Evaluating the results. (source)

This last step is particularly significant because evidence-based practice models need to continuously improve if they are to be effective. As a result, each new case should be considered additional evidence and should be analyzed along with the pre-existing data. This kind of perspective helps our social service practices continue to keep pace with a changing world.

The Models

While much could be written about evidence-based practice models, we are just going to touch on a few key concepts and models, as well as resources where you can obtain additional information.

- **Stages of Change**: The States of Change model involves progress through a series of stages, and is designed to evaluate an individual’s readiness to change. Like other evidence-based practice models, it allows for evidence to be considered and taken into account regularly throughout the process. There is an inherent feedback loop that considers the patient’s needs and progress.
- **Parents As Teachers (PAT)**: This model is one of the performance starter models that accompanies ETO software. It is designed to meet the needs of those who receive federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program funding.
- **PerformWell**: PerformWell is a website that helps provide information about performance management to nonprofit professionals. The site includes information on a number of different evidence-based practice models that organizations can avail themselves of.

While not a model, per se, there are also numerous tools available to organizations looking to implement Evidence-Based Practice models. For example, the Annie E. Casey foundation’s Blueprints for Healthy Youth
Development is an interactive website that helps organizations identify and fund programs that are scientifically proven. Similarly, TRASI or Tools and Resources for Assessing Social Impact, from the Foundation Center, can help organizations learn what tools are out there to aid them in measuring outcomes and utilizing evidence.

Check out more resources in our Performance Management Resource Library.

**Conclusion**

On a national level, the social services world is just beginning to understand what evidence-based practice models can look like and how they will help our organizations. More models that will offer better standards for implementing evidence-based approaches are sure to emerge over the next few years. Resources like this one from the Promising Practices Network are helping organizations begin to look at how to create evidence-based practice models that meet the highest standards currently set in the industry.

Furthermore, with the widespread use of software like Social Solutions’ ETO software, our ability to collect and analyze data will continue to improve drastically, enabling even better outcomes for clients and constituents through the use of evidence-based case management and other evidence-based practices.
Evidence-based practice (EBP) is becoming an integral part of the social service sector. However, there is also some controversy over whether evidence-based practice models are truly the best ones in which to invest. Funders, particularly governmental agencies, seem to be coming down heavily in favor of EBP, but it is still worthwhile to consider both sides of the issue.

Keep reading to find out why evidence-based practice models are important and what benefit they have to offer your organization.

**The Goal of Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)**

The most commonly cited definition of EBP is from Dr. David Sackett, which says the EBP is “the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of the individual patient. It means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research.” (Sackett D, 1996)

Prior to the advent of evidence-based practice, a more procedural approach was utilized across the social service sector. This was a matter of necessity more than anything else. The ability to aggregate and analyze data as it became available was non-existent at the time. Furthermore, the idea of considering individual experience when determining plans of treatment was practically unthinkable.

However, as the technology began to change and service providers began to think about their purpose in new ways, it became clear that there were better methods for ensuring that they were using the most up-to-date information for making care decisions. This kind of thinking led to the advent of evidence-based practice, the use of which is still growing today.
The Benefit of Evidence-Based Practice

1. **Improved Information** – In the medical field, the meaning of evidence-based practice is clearer than in the social services because treatments are much more cut-and-dry, and what constitutes evidence is somewhat clearer. However, this does not mean that the practice isn’t applicable or important in the social service sector.

   While it may not always be entirely clear what evidence is relevant in any particular situation, the utilization of evidence-based practice models forces service providers and organizations to think in terms of constantly seeking out new information and analyzing their pre-existing assumptions. Rather than stagnating in a “this is how it’s always been done,” mindset, programs and practices are encouraged to evolve and to constantly be questioning the best way to serve constituents.

2. **Additional Funding** – There is no question that funders are looking for organizations that are working with evidence-based practice models. The United States governmental agencies, in particular, now have elaborate requirements for funding that often entail the collection of evidence and demonstrations of how that evidence is being used to improve program quality. If for no other reason than continued funding, it is important for social service organizations to assess how they are currently using evidence and whether there are more opportunities for them to embrace this new trend.

3. **Advanced Technology** – We’ve talked before about how technology has truly been the catalyst for enabling evidence-based practice models to come into existence. And yet, many organizations are still working with sub-par technological systems for case management, service delivery and client tracking.

   By switching their thinking to an evidence-based approach, organizations also need to look at how they are using technology and often need substantial upgrades or improvements. While this
can result in a certain amount of hassle during the time of change, encouraging organizations and service providers to use the available technology in the broadest way possible can often help them substantially improve their outcomes, often with significantly less effort. For this reason, re-evaluation, which is essentially the basis for EBP, helps all of us stay relevant in a time when things are changing frequently.

**Conclusion**

It seems clear that while there are still kinks to be worked out, evidence-based practice models are here to stay. If the social service sector can maintain a focus on why this new approach is useful and all of the benefits it can provide, we will certainly all be able to reap many benefits from this change.
With more and more federal programs requiring evidence-based approaches in order for continued funding, it is becoming increasingly important for social service organizations to have a strong grasp on evidence-based practice (EBP). So we thought it would be helpful to examine how the principles of EBP are currently being applied throughout the industry, along with some ideas on how we can expand our usage of this concept with the ultimate goal of improving service delivery and outcomes.

Continue reading for examples of what funders are looking for and how other organizations across the social services sector are using evidence-based practice models to produce better outcomes for their clients.

Examples of Evidence-Based Practice Models in the Social Services

Many organizations in a wide variety of sectors are using evidence-based practice models to improve service delivery and outcomes, and we can't hope to touch on all of them in one article. However, we've selected a diverse offering of our favorites to help you get a sense of how a focus on evidence and outcomes can help your organization as well.

1. Teen Outreach Program and BUILD Chicago: Both of these organizations have gone through the process of becoming evidence-based and shared their experiences in this webinar. The presentation features these two renowned evidence-based organizations exploring some of the performance management issues related to adopting evidence-based practice models. The Teen Outreach Program (TOP) is referenced on SAMHSA’s National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices and BUILD was chosen as a required replication model by in an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) grant program.
2. **Native American Youth & Family Center (NAYA):** Increased attention to *youth outcomes in the field of child and family services* is welcome, but how can agencies handle the pressure to adopt evidence-based practices when no such practices have been proven for – or are culturally appropriate for – the populations they serve? This was the question facing NAYA when the state of Oregon passed legislation requiring that 75% of funds go to evidence-based programming.

Using the approach of practice-based evidence – NAYA, the [National Indian Child Welfare Association](https://nica.org) and the University of Portland involved service providers, service recipients and families in identifying culturally appropriate and strength-based outcome measures and examining youth outcomes in education and other areas. Results include improved academic outcomes and improvements in outcomes rarely discussed in mainstream research but highly valued by Native American youth. More information on their process is discussed in this webinar from Social Solutions.

3. **Children’s Services Council of Palm Beach County:** Evidence Based Associates [released a report](https://www.csctexas.org/) from the Children’s Services Council (CSC) on their process to becoming evidence-based. In the report, the CSC explains its decision to investigate evidence-based practice models by saying, “According to researchers, implementing evidence-based programs helps ensure that a program is based on a proven or tested theory of change. The results or client outcomes are directly related to the services received from the program.” They go on to explain the steps they will take in becoming evidence-based, the expected timeline and the benefits they anticipate. The report is an excellent resource for any other organization starting to consider utilizing an evidence based approach.

**Conclusion**

While these particular organizations are great examples of how organizations have improved their programs through the integration of an evidence based approach, they represent only a small subsection of the many ways in which evidence-based practices are reshaping the social service sector. For individuals in social work, for examples, there are resources such as the [Partnership to Promote Evidence-Based Practice](https://www.socialworkpolicy.org/) from the [Social Work Policy Institute](https://www.socialworkpolicy.org/), which offer countless other resources.

The more we can understand how these evidence-based practice models are helping other organizations in our field, the more we will learn about how to apply them to our own work, helping us meet the ultimate goal of providing the best services possible to better the lives of our clients and the communities we serve.
In the United States, it is becoming increasingly clear that social policy is moving in the direction of evidence-based practice models. Applying evidence-based ideals to your operations can be difficult. However, government organizations as well as private foundations--many of which are primary funding sources for other social service organizations--are forcing the hands of smaller organizations to make the transition.

In many cases, proof of the use of evidence-based approaches is now required in order to receive funding. As a result, it is becoming increasingly important for anyone in the social service sector to understand how to integrate evidence into their own work.

Keep reading to find out more about how evidence-based practice (EBP) models are changing social policy and how your organization can stay on top of the latest EBP models and developments.

**Leading the Charge towards EBP**

We've mentioned a few times that government agencies, federal programs and other public and private funders are using their financial clout to nudge social service organizations towards evidence-based practice models, but you may be wondering who these agencies and foundations actually are.

While not comprehensive, we've assembled a list of some of the most notable organizations championing the evidence-based practice charge. This does not take into account funding organizations at the state or municipal level that may be using the same tactics to encourage evidence-based approaches.

- **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)** – “Fostering Evidence-Based Practice and Innovation”
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC)** – “Tools for Implementing an Evidence-Based Approach in Public Health Practice”
While these are just a few of the many agencies which are shifting their focus and their funding to evidence-based practice models, the list is indicative that this trend looks to be widespread and long-lasting. Furthermore, in July of 2013, the Office of the President released a memorandum that asks the heads of agencies to utilize an evidence-based approach in formulating their budget proposals and performance plans.

How to Move Towards Evidence-Based Practice

Once you’ve accepted that an evidence-based approach is the way to go, how does a social service organization begin to bring their programs and services into compliance with funder criteria? Here are some fundamental steps:

1. **Assess outcomes** – While we often tend to think of outcomes as the last step in any process, the point of evidence-based practice models is ultimately to improve outcomes. Therefore, by starting with an assessment of current outcomes and setting a goal for how we would like our outcomes to improve, we can use evidence in a strategic manner to help our organizations reach those goals.

2. **Research** – The next step of the process is two-fold. If there is are already evidence-based practice models approved for use in your organization’s area of expertise, then exploring these and finding one that is a good fit could be the easiest and most effective way of adopting an evidence-based approach. If none of the current models fit your organization’s needs, it is possible to create your own approach. For more information on how the Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) did just that, take a look at this webinar.

3. **Update technology** – Finally, when working with new evidence-based practice models, it’s important to have the right technology to aid your organization in collecting and analyzing new evidence as it becomes available. Programs like Social Solutions Efforts to Outcomes software are uniquely designed with the challenges of the modern day social service sector in mind and are invaluable partnerships when first adopting an evidence based approach.
Conclusion

Based on the number of government agencies and funding organizations currently supporting the use of evidence-based practice models, it seems that EBP is here to stay. As a result, social service organizations hoping to stay relevant into the 21st century need to seriously consider how they can make the move towards evidence-based approach, whether that means utilizing a pre-existent model or developing their own.

One thing hasn’t changed though: the ultimate goal of the social service sector is still to improve the quality of life in our communities. We just have new and hopefully stronger tactics with which to approach this outcome.