

Key Finding #2—Demand: A Diverse Group of Users and Needs

Several different types of users

The end users of evidence on effectiveness are ultimately **decision makers**. We define decision makers as the policy makers, funders, and practitioners who decide which interventions to fund and implement.

However, we were surprised to find several other types of users—namely, the **intermediaries** who are also providers of some evidence on effectiveness. They include:

- **Advisers** who use information from clearinghouses and other sources to guide decision makers in the appropriate selection and use of interventions.
- **Researchers and synthesizers** who contribute to clearinghouses through their evaluations. Researchers also use evidence on effectiveness in their work to expand the pool of effective interventions. They reference these sources as they determine where new interventions are required to fill gaps, and where additional evidence is required to demonstrate effectiveness for a given intervention. Synthesizers sometimes use clearinghouses as sources for interventions and studies that they use in their own syntheses, which are often aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of interventions.
- **Purveyors** who are primarily interested in seeing whether their interventions are listed on clearinghouses. Purveyors also sometimes use these repositories as learning platforms, seeing what other information on evidence on effectiveness is available in their domains.

Occasionally, even the general public uses clearinghouses to access existing research and best practices for issues of particular concern (e.g., parents of children struggling in school).

In interviews, the clearinghouses acknowledged that they do not target a single audience, although a few do have a more narrow focus. One clearinghouse described its audience as, “Anyone who is in a position to influence how social spending is allocated—anyone in a position to decide how evaluation resources are used. Could be federal, state, local level; could be a philanthropic foundation.”

Even among decision makers, the users of evidence on effectiveness vary, as the level and type of decisions vary significantly by domain and location. For example, in child welfare key decision makers are generally state or county administrators. On the other hand, decision makers in education are often district or school administrators.

A variety of needs for different users, but some key consistencies

Across all user types and domains, our interviews identified that certain evidence is widely sought. Everyone is interested in understanding whether certain interventions are effective. In addition, several users across domains and levels expressed their need for synthesized findings and best practices, as well as information and support that could help guide selection of interventions and next steps.

Yet, decision makers in different domains also engage with evidence on effectiveness in different ways and value different information and supports. Market dynamics and characteristics of decision makers shape how certain domains search for and utilize evidence on effectiveness.

For example, in child welfare, decisions can be bucketed into two types: 1) policies or principles around practices in the interactions with children and families (e.g., decisions about removal from the home, caseload); and 2) contracts with third-party providers for services (e.g., case management, foster care). Generally, decisions to change policies or providers are infrequent due to long bid cycles and are constrained by existing programs and services. As a result, implementation of new interventions and search for evidence on effectiveness are rare. We also found that many of the decision makers have research backgrounds and are looking for detailed scientific information, including raw data and underlying studies.

In education, on the other hand, decisions are made frequently around school and district management (e.g., hiring, schedules, accommodating special populations), and programs and services (e.g., curriculum, teacher professional development, student support services). Hence, the likelihood of searching for evidence on effectiveness and implementing new interventions is high. Additionally, teachers and administrators have little time to spend reviewing in-depth research on interventions, so they highly value synthesis reports and extractions of best practices over detailed studies. They also have strong peer networks that share their experiences with specific interventions and offer more general counsel.