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Roundtable on the President's Management Agenda as part of the 'Year of Evidence for Action'

An event co-hosted by the McCourt School of Public Policy and the White House

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Event Background and Synopsis

The Roundtable on the President's Management Agenda (PMA), held at the [McCourt School of Public Policy](#), Georgetown University, on November 16, 2022, brought together federal officials responsible for implementing the PMA with public management researchers from around the country. The forum was part of the White House's Year of Evidence for Action, and was co-sponsored by the McCourt School's [Better Government Lab](#) and the [Public Management Research Association](#), as well as the [U.S. Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\)](#) and the [Office of Science and Technology Policy \(OSTP\)](#).

This in-person, half-day event sought to present the PMA and its learning agenda to public management researchers. It also explored research opportunities, especially as they related to questions of how the Federal government can strengthen its workforce, deliver programs and services effectively, and advance equity and support underserved communities.

Key Insights

- 1. There is a need for ongoing federal government and researcher relationships*
- 2. The PMA and the Evidence Act, offer focal points for academic-government co-operation*
- 3. Multiple types of evidence are needed*
- 4. Data access matters*
- 5. IPAs offer a source of research connection*
- 6. There is a need for ongoing federal government and researcher relationships*

The Dean of the McCourt School of Public Policy, Dr. Maria Cancian, noted the importance of in-person exchanges to build bridges between researchers in academia and Government leaders tackling management challenges at the Federal level. Opportunities to further build these connections include:

- **Building ongoing relationships:** Federal officials encouraged researchers to find and build connections with career employees who work across administrations.
- **Responding to public comment requests:** Public comment periods are a real and useful way for researchers to engage with the government, such as comments that raise questions about what type of research is needed.
- **Electronic learning opportunities:** Interested researchers can subscribe to Evaluation.gov and Performance.gov, and communicate using the PMALA inbox: PMALearningagenda@omb.eop.gov and Evidence inbox evidence@omb.eop.gov.
- **Future events:** Participants called for additional in-person events to build bridges on research opportunities.

The PMA and the Evidence Act, offer focal points for academic-government co-operation

Cristin Dorgelo, Senior Advisor for Management at OMB, noted the PMA values of equity, dignity, accountability and results. The three basic priorities identified in the PMA are a) strengthening and empowering the federal workforce, b) improving customer experience, and c) managing the business of government to build back better. Diana Epstein, the Evidence Team Lead at OMB, also pointed to the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act* and its associated Federal agency Learning Agendas as a complement to the PMA and another means to connect researchers and federal staff.

Multiple types of evidence are needed

While randomized control trials are the gold standard for internally-valid evidence, they are not the only type of relevant or helpful research. Government leaders value a range of evidence, including qualitative and descriptive research about program or management changes. As an example, Carolyn Barnes of Duke University presented qualitative research on how 200 qualitatively interviewed WIC and SNAP recipients understood their experiences of receiving benefits and the accompanying administrative burdens.

Data access matters

A recurring theme of discussion was the potential for researchers to help explore PMA issues with better access to federally-housed administrative data. Expanding the use of

federal data is a priority of the Evidence Act, and a single point of entry for data access would help.

John Marvel of George Mason University illustrated the value of detailed data for questions of workforce development and equity. Using years of OPM data on employee location and bonus awards, he illustrated that employees who were not geographically co-located with team leads were less likely to win bonus awards, with the negative effects being larger for employees of color and women.

IPAs offer a source of research connection

Some public management researchers who were present also work as federal employees temporarily or on a part-time basis via the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) mobility mechanism. IPAs offer a promising means to build ongoing and substantive connections between researchers and government, and help to address data access issues.

Topical Breakout Sessions

Breakout session #1: Insights on strengthening and empowering the federal workforce

Federal leadership and researchers compared notes about research priorities in workforce issues. Particular issues from a federal perspective are barriers to hiring, pay for workers, understanding employee belonging and the employee lifecycle. Discussion also included motivation in the context of evidence that purpose and impact matter more for Gen Z employees, and forms a basis for recruitment and retention. Researchers expressed interest in helping in studying these and other topics by providing validated survey instruments.

Breakout session #2: Insights on customer experience

Executive Orders on [customer experience](#), and [revised guidance](#) to the Paperwork Reduction Act have created a legal infrastructure and high-level political support to reduce burdens that people experience in their interactions in government. This has occurred at the same time there has been a growth in research interest on the topic within the field of public management. The increased salience of the topic creates an opportunity to communicate to the public about changes that can meaningfully improve citizen-state interactions.

Breakout session #3: Insights on the business of government and equity

The [equity executive order](#) focuses on the external ways that federal agencies deliver services, policies and programs to the American people and pushes all management efforts in the administration to consider issues of equity.

Key questions include:

- How to advance equity in design, delivery, and evaluation in Federal services?
- What organizational tools and management structures advance equity?
- What larger organization changes in agencies are needed to identify and address underlying barriers to advancing equity?

Academics can play a role by documenting the impact of federal programs or program redesigns in terms of achievable equitable outcomes, and offering evidence of changes that advance equity without damaging program integrity.