

# Paths to Being a Psychological Scientist Supporting Evidence-Based Policymaking in Government

APS Student and Early Career Webinar

*May 5, 2021*

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Office of Evaluation Sciences

# Overview

Office of Evaluation Sciences  
*About Us and Our Work*

5 mins

3 Paths to Working with the  
Office of Evaluation Sciences  
*Heather Kappes*  
*Mary Clair Turner*  
*Russ Burnett*

20 mins

Project Examples

5 mins

What is it Like to Work in Government?  
And How do You Get There?

10 mins

Questions and Discussion

20 mins

# Office of Evaluation Sciences

*About Us and Our Work*

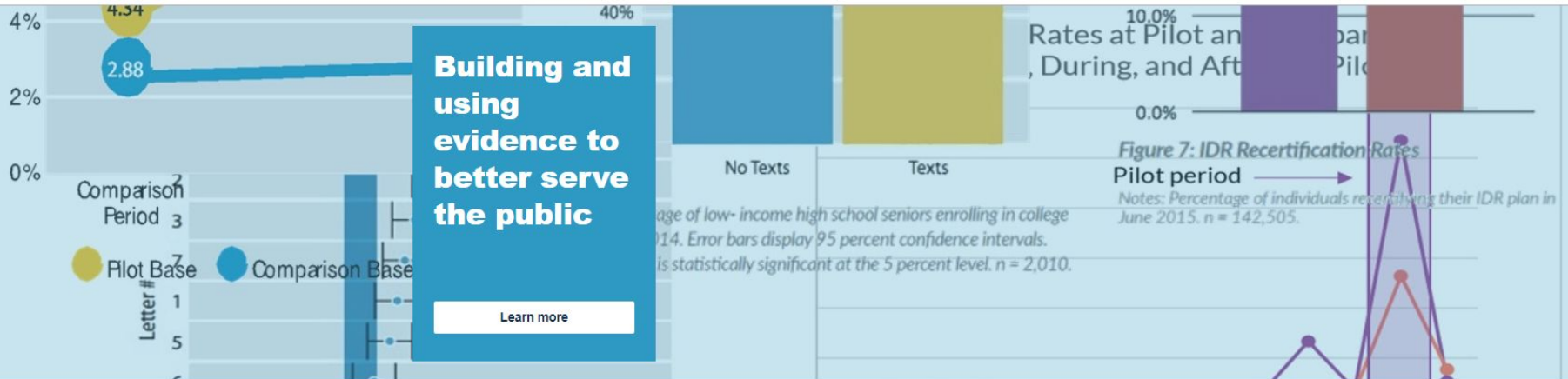
# What is the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)?

Based at the General Services Administration (GSA), OES is a team of interdisciplinary experts that works across government to help agencies build and use evidence

An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know.](#)

OES Office of Evaluation Sciences

About Projects Resources Connect

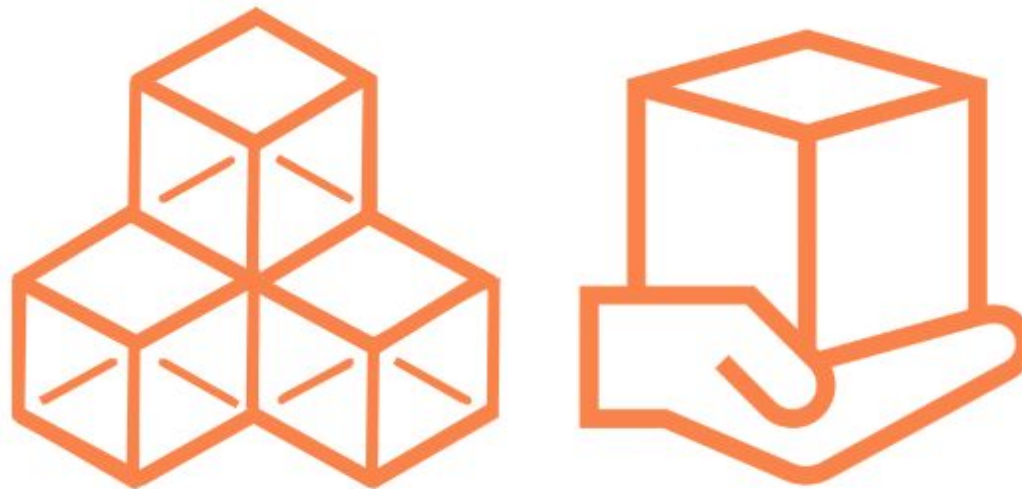


## Learning what works (and what doesn't)

Based at the General Services Administration (GSA), OES is a team of interdisciplinary experts that works across government to help agencies build and use evidence. To date, OES has completed over 70 randomized evaluations with dozens of agency partners. OES follows the best practices in social science research to build evidence in order to be a leader in transparency and accountability.

# What does OES do?

OES provides government-wide expertise and support on leading practices for evidence-building and evaluations, and partners with Federal agencies to answer priority questions using rapid and rigorous evaluation



## Build and Use Evidence

Apply behavioral insights

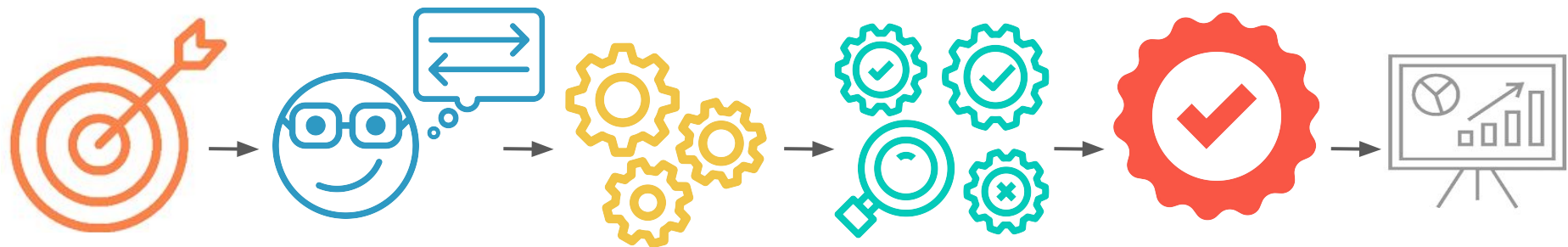
Embed evaluations

Share leading practices

Build skills of the Federal workforce

# What does OES do?

OES team members work alongside agency collaborators to apply behavioral insights, make concrete recommendations for how to improve government, and evaluate impact using administrative data



Partner with Federal Agencies to target priority outcomes

Translate behavioral insights into concrete recommendations

Embed evaluations

Analyze results using existing administrative data

Ensure our work meets evaluation best practice

Measure impact and generate evidence to continuously improve

# What does OES do?

Our portfolio has spanned areas such as retirement security, reducing the cost of government operations, improving public health outcomes, and increasing educational opportunity

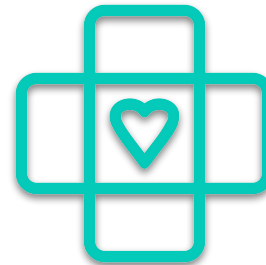
Achieved \$8M+ in  
**cost savings  
and revenue** in  
less than 15 months



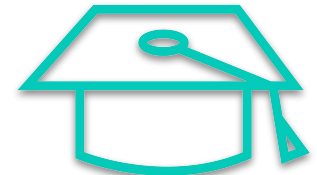
Enrolled more than  
20,000 active duty  
servicemembers into  
**retirement  
savings plans**



Informed more than half a  
million Americans about  
the benefits of  
**getting  
vaccinated**

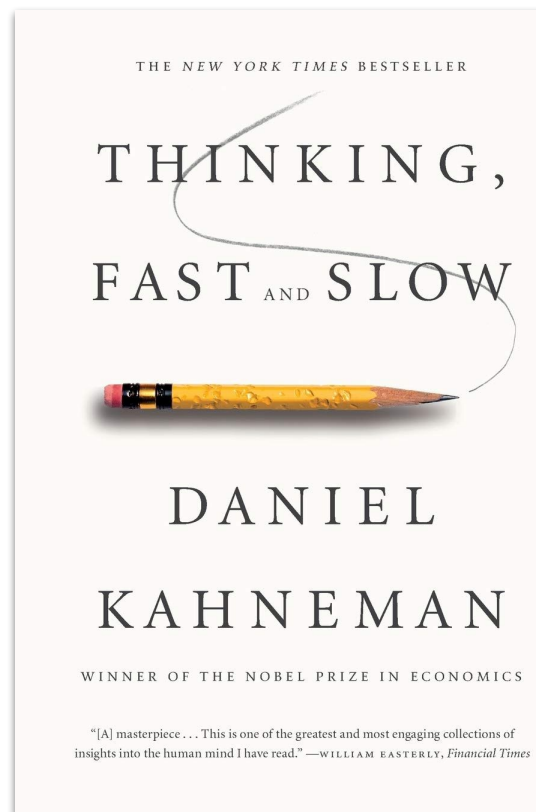
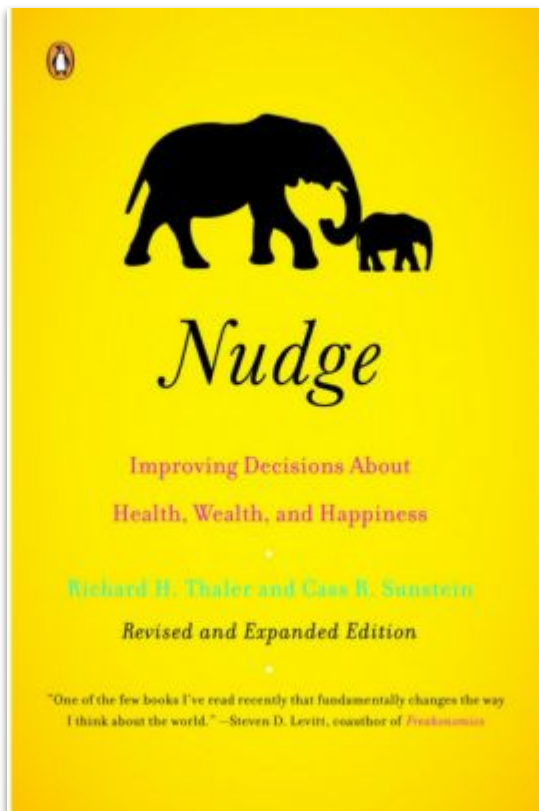


Showed text message  
reminders could  
**increase  
college  
enrollment**  
by 6%



# Translate behavioral insights

Small changes in context or presentation can influence human behavior





# What are examples of behavioral insights?

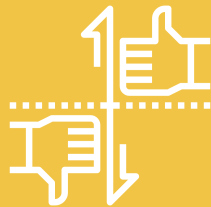
Immediacy



Social Norms



Anchors



Simplification



Feedback



Accountability



Defaults



Loss Aversion



# Who is OES?

Since 2015, OES has recruited over 50 interdisciplinary experts into Federal government, representing a mix of Federal Employees, Fellows and Academic Affiliates

 Int'l Develop.	 Int'l Affairs	 Cost Analyst	 Health Policy	 Economics	 Statistics	 Psychology
 Public Policy	 Global Health	 UX Design	 Economics	 Sociology	 Epidemiology	 Economics
 Int'l Develop.	 Public Policy	 Political Science	 Political Science	 Int'l Develop.	 Behavioral Science	 Statistics
 Cognitive Science	 Economics	 Economics	 Economics	 Public Admin	 Marketing	

Fed. employees

# Heather Kappes

- BS Biopsychology, UC Santa Barbara, 2000
- PhD Social Psychology, New York University, 2012
- Assistant Professor of Marketing, in the Department of Management, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2012-present
- “Fellow” at the Office of Evaluation Sciences, August 2020-present
- Visiting Behavioral Insights Scholar, Association for Psychological Sciences, May 2020-present

# Mary Clair Turner

## Education

- BA Mathematics, W&L, 2008
- PhD Human Development and Social Policy, Northwestern University, 2020

## Career

- Junior Statistician, Office of Personnel Management, 2008 - 2009
- Technical Research Assistant, MDRC, 2009 - 2011
- Research Fellow, UChicago Urban Labs, 2012 - 2020
- Education Pioneers Graduate Fellow, OneGoal, Summer 2015
- Associate Fellow, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2017 - 2020
- Portfolio Lead and Behavioral Scientist, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2020-present

# Russ Burnett

- PhD, Cognitive Psychology, Northwestern University, 2004
- Postdoc, Yale University & Hebrew University, 2005-2007
- Survey researcher for government clients, 2007-2009
- Social Science Methodologist, U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2009-2016
- Methods Lead, Office of Evaluation Sciences, 2016-present

# Project examples

# Reducing Overprescribing of Quetiapine in Medicare Part D

## *A collaboration between OES and HHS*

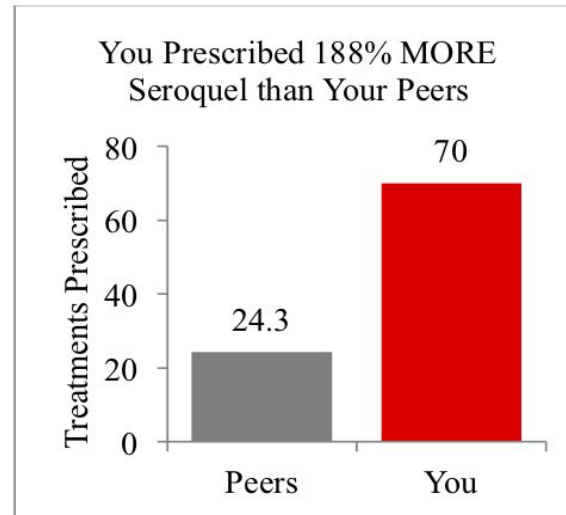
### **Re: Your Seroquel prescribing is under review by the Center for Program Integrity.**

Dear Dr. Provider,

The figure to the right displays your prescribing of Seroquel treatments (Seroquel, Seroquel XR, or generic quetiapine) compared to other general care practitioners in Maryland.

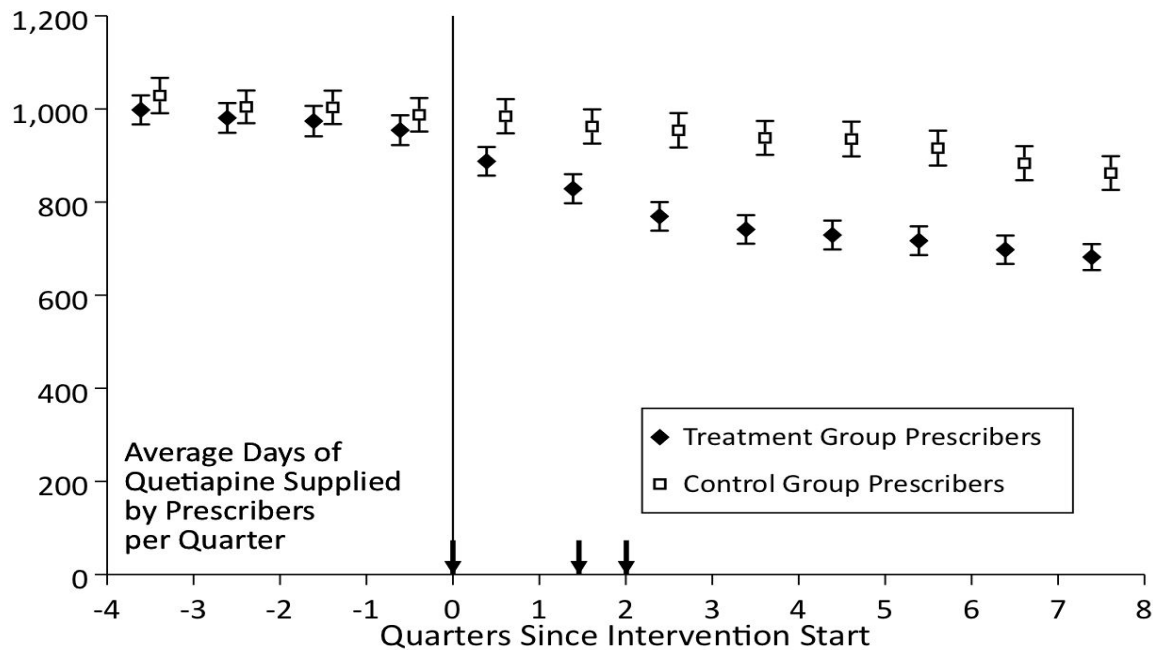
As can be seen, **you prescribed far more treatments – 188% more – than similar prescribers within your state.** In turn, you have been flagged as a markedly unusual prescriber, subject to review by the Center for Program Integrity.

We recognize that some flagged practitioners have appropriate reasons for this pattern. However, we have seen that other practitioners may drift into prescribing patterns that would be considered medically unjustified or abusive. Abusive prescribing can lead to extensive audits and even revocation of Medicare billing privileges.



# Reducing Overprescribing of Quetiapine in Medicare Part D

## *A collaboration between OES and HHS*



### Quarterly Quetiapine Prescribing in Treatment and Control Groups

Each point is the average days of quetiapine supplied by prescribers in the quarter. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Arrowheads denote when letters were sent to prescribers.

### Publications

Adam Sacarny, Michael L. Barnett, Jackson Le, Frank Tetkoski, David Yokum, and Shantanu Agarwal. "Effect of peer comparison letters for high-volume primary care prescribers of quetiapine in older and disabled adults: a randomized clinical trial." *JAMA Psychiatry* 75 no. 10 (October 2018): 1003-1011.

Adam Sacarny, Michael L. Barnett, and Shantanu Agrawal. "New Evidence on Stemming Low-Value Prescribing." *NEJM Catalyst*, April 10, 2019, <https://catalyst.nejm.org/new-evidence-stemming-overprescribing/>



# Reducing Self-reporting Errors by IFF Form Users

*A collaboration between OES and GSA*

I promise that the information I am providing is true and accurate: **Doug Powell** (type signature)

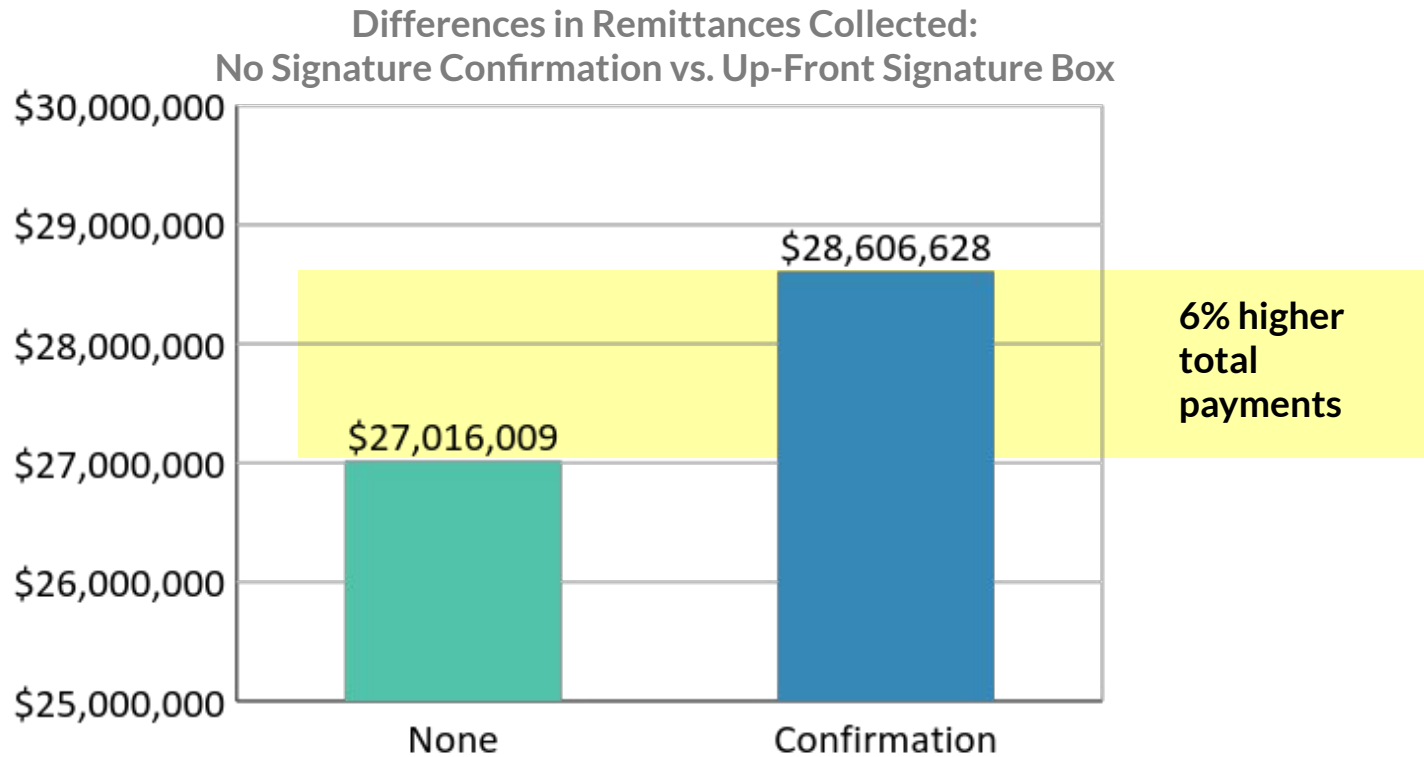
I promise that the information I am providing is true and accurate:  (typed signature)

Schedule	SIN	Control No	Quarter Ending	Sales Amount
072	722 05RC Disaster Recovery	200929888491	09/30/2013	<input type="text" value="\$500"/>
072	722 08	200929888721	09/30/2013	<input type="text" value="\$400"/>
072	722 08RC Disaster Recovery	200929888490	09/30/2013	<input type="text" value="\$200"/>
072	722 98	200929888720	09/30/2013	<input type="text" value="\$3111"/>
072	722 98RC Disaster Recovery	200929888489	09/30/2013	<input type="text" value="\$250"/>

[Submit Sales](#)

# Reducing Self-reporting Errors by IFF Form Users

*A collaboration between OES and GSA*



# Increasing Return of Unused Opioids for Cash

(Project in Progress)

We frame a cash incentive so as to invoke the endowment effect or loss aversion



**Important: If you have unused opioid pills, bring them back to the VA pharmacy for cash!**

**YOU HAVE  
UP TO \$50  
WAITING  
FOR YOU**



**All you need to  
do is return  
your unused  
opioid pills**

You are receiving opioid pills to help manage any pain you might have in the next few days. **Opioid pills have a risk of addiction and misuse, so it's important to properly dispose of them!**



Read the pink letter with instructions in this packet.



Put a reminder on your calendar for one week from now — that will be a good time to take stock of unused opioid pills.



As another reminder to think about this one week from now, fill in the date below — then save this card on your fridge, or in another place where you'll see it every day.

**One week from now is** \_\_\_\_\_



Keep opioid pills in the original prescription bottle.

**What is it like to work in government?  
And how do you get there?**

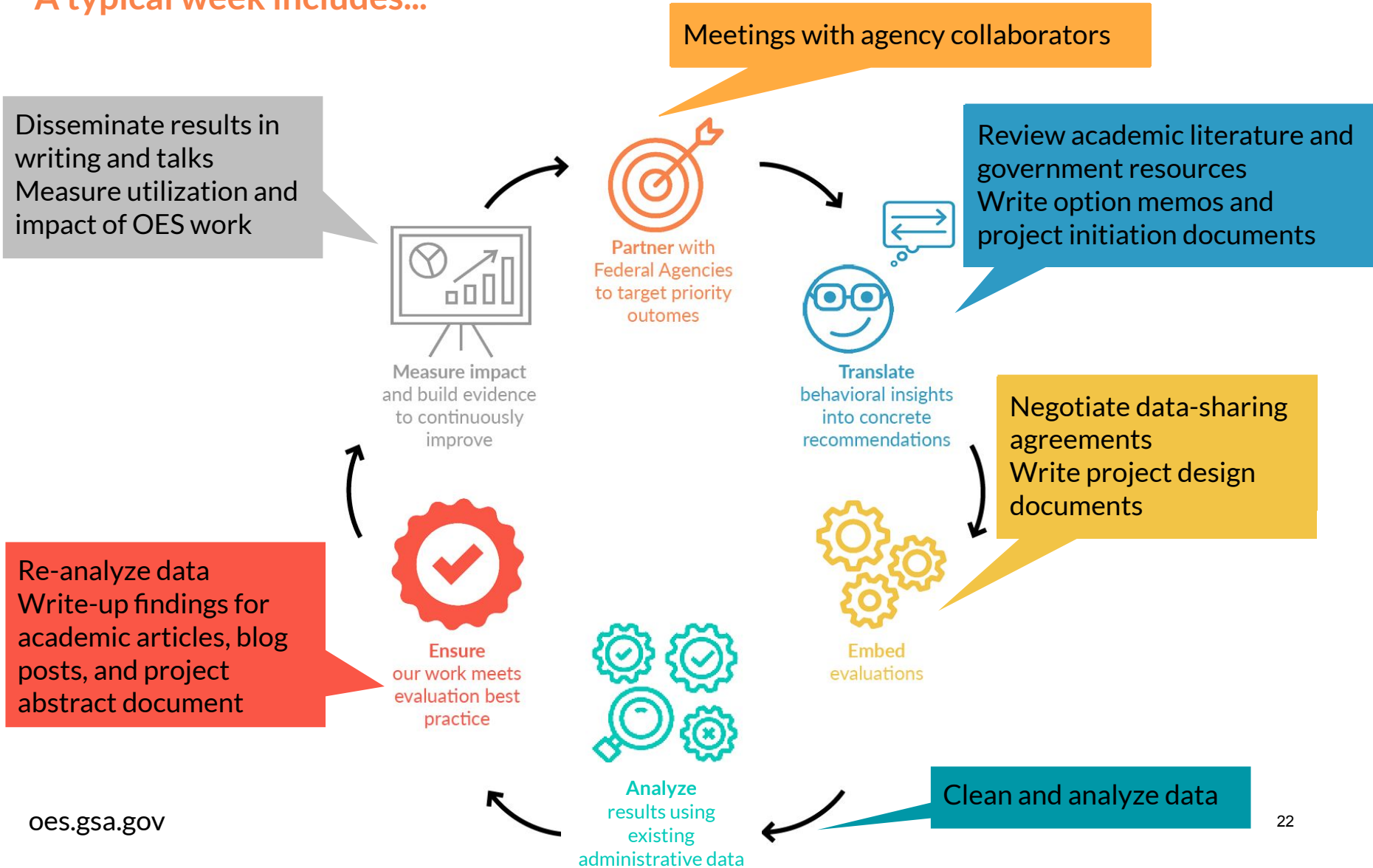
# How does OES build evidence?

OES team members work alongside agency collaborators to apply behavioral insights, make concrete recommendations for how to improve government, and evaluate impact using administrative data



# How does OES build evidence?

A typical week includes...



# What is next in the Federal efforts?

The Evidence Act puts the role of policy-relevant research front and center

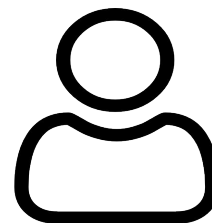
## What do agencies do?

**Learning agenda:** Identify priority questions and activities to address those questions.

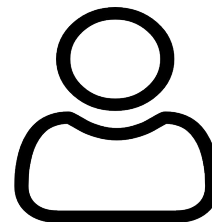
**Evaluation plans:** Describe significant evaluations, with methods, information needed, and dissemination.

**Evidence-building capacity:** Lists activities being evaluated and capacity for research and evaluation.

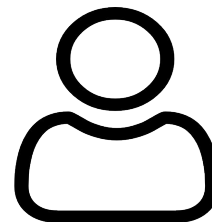
## Who is involved?



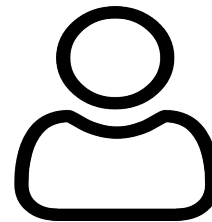
Evaluation Officer



Statistical Official



Chief Data Officer



Performance Improvement Officer

# Ways of working with the federal government

## As a federal employee

See USAJobs.gov

- Occupational series: 0100 – Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare
- Useful search terms include: *social science, behavioral science, evaluation*

## Via the Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA)

- Enables agencies to reimburse academic and other institutions for part- or full-time collaborations
- Various pathways exist for finding collaborations
- Find more info in the [OES IPA Toolkit](#)

## With offices or organizations that position academics to support agencies

- OES is one of these
- There are a variety of others



# Are you interested in working with OES?

## Annual Fellowship Program

Full-time OES team members are selected annually, with applications often opening in early Fall. These individuals come to the team for one year, are based in Washington, D.C., and are often on loan from a variety of home institutions such as a university or another Federal agency.

- Join our mailing list at the bottom of our homepage ([oes.gsa.gov](https://oes.gsa.gov)) to be notified of our next recruitment cycle, opening up in September 2020
- You can also learn more about the position and what we look for at [oes.gsa.gov/opps](https://oes.gsa.gov/opps).

## Academic Affiliates

We often require specific subject matter expertise as we identify opportunities to work with agencies on an ongoing basis. As an Academic Affiliate, you will be able to apply your work to improve government, and have the opportunity to publish results.

You can tell us about your area of expertise at [oes.gsa.gov/contact](https://oes.gsa.gov/contact) and we may reach out to you to collaborate on a specific project.

Questions?

# Thank you!

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[oes.gsa.gov](http://oes.gsa.gov)