INTRODUCTION

WHY THIS BOOK AND WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

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*N*ext Generation Evidence is about five ideas.

The first set of essays and use cases illuminate the often **overlooked role of public agencies, school districts, and nonprofit organizations** that deliver social and educational services—what we refer to throughout this book as *practitioners*—in systematically gathering, analyzing, and acting on data and evidence to improve and innovate their own programs, what we refer to throughout this book as *continuous evidence building*.

The second section describes the **importance of embedding equity** (i.e., equitable processes and equitable outcomes) throughout the work of gathering, analyzing, and acting on evidence, and the third section addresses the **need to elevate community voice**—listening to and involving the ideas and feedback of people served, and sharing results early and often across evidence building to inform the process with respect and relevance.

In the fourth section, our contributors tackle the power and promise of **embracing a continuous research and development-like approach** to the use of data and evidence across the social and education sectors. They highlight the importance of undertaking more frequent and diverse

5 Principles	Next Generation Evidence
1.	Centers on Practitioners and the Communities They Serve
2.	Connects Equity with Data and Evidence
3.	Elevates Community Voice
4.	Embraces a Continuous R&D-Like Approach
5.	Reimagines Evidence to Broaden Its Definition and Use

activities for learning, testing, and improving outcomes to generate more actionable results, with internal and external validation. And, in the fifth section, the authors speak to **reimagining evidence** to broaden its definition and use.

Together, these five approaches for accelerating social impact are bundled into one concept that Project Evident calls the ***Next Generation of Evidence.*** We are living through a moment that requires thinking and acting more boldly to address this country's deep economic and racial disparities, which are exacerbated by still-raw events of recent years. There is an urgency to get smarter and be more inclusive about how and where data and evidence can help, and where existing approaches perpetuate inequities. These *Next Generation* ideas can strengthen the use of data and evidence to accelerate improvements in social and educational outcomes for the 100 million Americans living today without economic security.[1]

Creating more actionable evidence is critical. By this, we mean evidence that is useful to practitioners and meaningful for program participants. We mean evidence that draws on the voices and experiences of those closest to the problem being addressed to help answer questions related to their needs. And we mean applying such evidence in more robust and consistent ways to improve economic and well-being outcomes for program participants.

We offer this volume of essays by practitioners, policymakers, activists, researchers, and philanthropists as follow-up to a first-of-its-kind convening in 2019 around making continuous evidence building by practitioners a social sector norm. Cohosted by Brookings Institution's Center on Children and Families and Project Evident in Washington, D.C., many ideas in this book surfaced during those discussions.[2] We see this book as a "prequel" to Ron Haskins and Greg Margolis's *Show Me the Evidence*,[3] which focused on the work of the Obama administration in creating tiered evidence initiatives that were useful in bringing up the question: "Where is the evidence pointing us in the social sector?"[4]

But these programs were more focused on one-off, third-party evaluations and less, if at all, focused on building cultures of learning and continuous evidence building among practitioners and their capacity and infrastructure to consistently act on that evidence. Without investing more resources and attention to the latter—the building and use of evidence—we fall short of realizing the promise of the next stage of evidence: to reimagine and rebuild a more equitable society. As coauthor Haskins observed during the 2019 conference and elsewhere, "Social science has been much more effective at showing what does not work than what does work. Thus, program developers, social scientists, and policymakers need to up their game and develop effective solutions to growing problems."[5]

This book is about how to help the field "up its game," via a series of insights and cases addressing the following themes:

1. WHY AND HOW EVIDENCE-BUILDING NEEDS TO CENTER ON PRACTITIONERS AND THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

First and foremost, practitioners "should be active leaders in evidence building, not at the mercy of research and evaluation shops but in partnership with them, their funders, and their program participants, aligning their goals and interests," write Project Evident founder Kelly Fitzsimmons (a coauthor of this introduction) and founding board chair Archie Jones. "No one cares more than nonprofit leaders that their theories of change work as intended," the guiding principle for creating Project Evident (chapter 1.1).

This is because the innovation and testing needed to build effective social and education policies will require investments in the full cycle of evidence building. The cycle begins with early-stage people-and-technology investments (which have been under-resourced to date) to lead and facilitate evidence building. And it ranges to later-stage investments in frequently high-cost, third-party empirical evaluations, including well-designed and implemented randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which require practitioner insights to set useful parameters. A critical element will be investing in this work on a ***continuous*** basis for ongoing learning. Evidence collection and analysis is useful only when followed with evidence take-up; when practitioners play a greater role in all forms of evidence building, greater relevance accrues.

Examples for this book are drawn from practitioners who are relatively advanced in their evidence journeys. Some may speak to mature third-party

evaluations and others may speak to smaller tests or internal analyses. Regardless of the level of the study, they all count as important case examples. We have not drawn examples from practitioners just beginning their evidence work, who tend to be undercapitalized and often left out of the data and evidence discussion. We need to do more as a field to fund and build the capacity of these practitioners so they, too, can participate and contribute use cases of their own in the future.

Essayists in this section include Fitzsimmons and Jones, former Harlem Children's Zone evaluator Betina Jean-Louis, who is a coauthor of this introduction, and University of Pennsylvania professor emeritus Rebecca Maynard, a leader in the design and conduct of RCTs. They all share their journeys to practitioner-centered evidence building.

Use cases include practitioners employing multiyear, randomized studies, like the story of workforce development nonprofit Year Up.[6] A small RCT evaluation showed blockbuster results in improving academic performance for Year Up's Professional Training Corps participants. The project included three partners—Year Up, Abt Associates, and the University of Pennsylvania—who used standard research methods yet novel approaches centered on practitioner needs and realities. For example, the needs of staff informed the research questions, "the usefulness and use of the final products deviate from a typical evaluation, and all parties relied on feedback loops to provide strategic tweaking of plans and timely use of findings."

This section also includes cases of earlier-stage approaches, such as a pre-quasi-experimental evaluation for nonprofit Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP). Here, University of Colorado's David Olds, founder of NFP, Mandy Allison, and Gregory Tung integrate "scientific evidence into practice design" and ground "research in the reality of the practice world" to innovate the nurse home-visiting approach for pregnant women who have had previous live births. They describe the formative development and pilot testing of the innovation, laying out their approach to model innovation (see the first figure in chapter 1.5). The Bail Project, a criminal justice organization, roots continuous learning in its theory of change and collects ongoing evidence of the program's efficacy.

In the case of Baltimore Public Schools, its City School's Office of College and Career Readiness drove the data gathering and analysis to develop a four-year strategy for career and technical training, interrogating existing data sets to set priorities. For technical trainer Per Scholas, which pivoted to remote learning at the onset of the pandemic, Plinio Ayala observes: "For

researchers, especially those focused on mounting gold standard evaluations like the ones that Per Scholas has hosted . . . before, we would suggest that our [COVID] project shows that evidence-building can come in many forms. In this case, a rapidly-constructed and fielded implementation analysis focused on participant and practitioner voices fostered a profound new shift in direction" (chapter 1.8).

We need more examples like these, including practitioners across all stages of the evidence-building continuum. "Everyone has a greater potential to win," writes essayist Jean-Louis, when "practitioners become more active in the evidence space and are strategic in making the best use of tools along the arc of evidence that has historically been the province of classic researchers" (chapter 1.2).

2. CONNECTING EQUITY WITH DATA AND EVIDENCE

At Project Evident, we believe that (1) evidence can be a promising and powerful driver of equity; (2) equitable evidence practices will result in better data and evidence building and use, and, ultimately, stronger outcomes; and (3) equity must be considered both in the way evidence and data are built and used and in the types of outcomes social and educational interventions seek to address. Many of the book's authors share ideas and examples that align with or support these beliefs.

Michael McAfee from PolicyLink calls for creating "a new vision of evidence—evidence as justice, evidence as truth." He says: "If evidence is not leading us inexorably toward justice, we are not maximizing the use of evidence." To create this new paradigm, McAfee continues: "We must first ask ourselves some vital questions: What does it take to reverse 400 years of systemic oppression? What does it take to undertake a truly equitable redesign of a country built upon genocide, stolen land and slave labor? If we don't ask ourselves these questions before we set out to gather evidence, we will miss the destination. Evidence today is a microscope. We need it to also be a telescope" (chapter 2.1).

Heather Krause of We All Count observes that "the worst equity problem we're dealing with in data at the moment is that we're making prejudiced choices but don't understand how." With concrete examples shattering the myth that "data offers an objective, bias-free way to make decisions," Krause offers a roadmap for using data for racial equity by being transparent and intentional about the choices that are made at every single

step of a data project. Carina Wong, a social impact advisor formerly at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, offers six design principles to improve a strategy's equity orientation in her effort to advance more just philanthropy, writing: "Equity will continue to be elusive if we dance around the edges of racism and power dynamics and fail to address these issues in our strategies, organizations, and systems" (chapter 2.3).

While noting that the social sector typically uses "data to define, limit and control programs and organizations rather than to interrogate, explore and empower them," Chris Kingsley at Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights initiatives in Los Angeles, New York City, and Cuyahoga County, Ohio, that take seriously the needs of agency and nonprofit practitioners and their clients "that use data as a flashlight and not as a hammer." Similarly, AMP Health's Robert Newman, Dylan Edward, Jordan Morrisey, and Kiribakka Tendo propose alternatives to the enduring tendencies in field evaluations in sub-Saharan Africa to extract data. Georgetown University Massive Data Institute's Amy O'Hara and Stephanie Straus describe work that also addresses participant agency and inclusion: the Civil Justice Data Commons[7] seeks to increase equitable access to data by applying the best practices of data governance to civil courts. This discussion is part of a broader essay emphasizing the need to build *social license*, which "exists when the public trusts that data will be used responsibly and for societal benefit" (chapter 2.6).

Equity and inclusion are often considered in conjunction with data ownership. Tatewin Means and coauthors Dallas Nelson and Dusty Lee Nelson, with South Dakota's Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation, in their essay on Lakota data sovereignty, describe a "new and emerging idea to all of the Indigenous communities around the world and specifically in the United States." They quote Liz La quen náay Kat Saas Medicine Crow: "Information, data, and research about our peoples—collected about us, with us, or by us—belong to us and must be cared for by us" (chapter 2.7). This essay is about inclusion and agency, emphasizing the importance of communities having ownership over their own data, a concept embraced in Project Evident's Actionable Evidence Framework.[8] In this vein, when describing her work to advance racial equity in King County, Washington, Carrie Cihak pushes back on the myth "that local governments need to set aside data and evidence to work with community." Rather, she calls on metropolitan areas to do the hard work of challenging our data and evidence practices to be "more driven by, inclusive of,

and responsive to communities." She posits that King County and other local governments "cannot become anti-racist organizations that contribute to building a pro-equity future without co-creating and innovating with community, and that includes how we use data and evidence."

Across the federal government, there is a renewed focus on racial equity in evidence building as part of an unparalleled commitment to "an ambitious whole-of-government equity agenda" with the "Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," 1/20/21.[9] This order builds on the existing requirements of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policy-Making Act of 2018 (the "Evidence Act").[10] Together, the Evidence Act and the Executive Order create a new directive to strengthen use of data and evidence by explicitly considering racial equity.

From a funder perspective, Tracy Costigan and Raymond McGhee of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation share learnings over time on centering evaluation norms on equity, underscoring that "centering equity does not mean abandoning rigor." Lola Adedokun, formerly with the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and now with the Aspen Institute, calls for supporting the next generation of leaders to advance equity. "Just as we recognize physician scientists as practitioner scholars—with academies in place to recognize and preserve their leadership (for example, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine), the same standards and expectations should be set for practitioners leading the way in building evidence in the social service sector."

Among use cases, Nisha Patel from Washington University in St. Louis flips the lens from eradicating child poverty to achieving guaranteed minimum income levels, citing cases and evidence where practitioners' cash distributions make a difference. Notably, the monthly federal child tax credit payments during the pandemic reduced monthly child poverty by nearly 30 percent. Meanwhile, COVID-19's disproportional toll on low-income communities of color highlighted deep inequities. Consider ParentCorps, a nonprofit that engages parents as partners to strengthen early childhood education. ParentCorps, like many organizations, went into crisis management mode in March 2020 when COVID-19 engulfed New York City and forced school closures. Almost overnight, staff transitioned ParentCorps's programs and evidence building to virtual activities, considering each point of contact with families as an opportunity to assess need and inform rapid adaptation.

We applaud these directions to strengthen data and evidence with equity, and Project Evident offers its support in helping bring this body of work forward. With insights from and in partnership with field leaders across the nation, including BCT Partners, Equitable Evaluation Initiative, leadership from Seattle, Washington's King County, We All Count, Erika Van Buren, Amy O'Hara, Peak Grantmaking, Spectrum Health, Hopelab, and others, we are refining Project Evident's *Data Equity and Evidence Guide* to offer much-needed support in building staff capacity to strengthen evidence building by integrating equity.[11,12]

3. ELEVATING COMMUNITY VOICE

One important way to advance equity, which merits its own set of essays and use cases, is to involve community members across every step of evidence building, from defining questions to gathering, interpreting, and applying data, to sharing results, an approach that will contribute to a stronger evidence process.

Dan Cardinali, formerly of Independent Sector, in chapter 3.1 calls on evidence builders to "agree upon and accept ways in which people in communities, especially those that are structurally marginalized, define what individual and collective human and environmental flourishing looks like for themselves, their loved ones, and their neighborhoods," and then build evidence in service of those goals. In this way, the institutions designated to serve communities earn the trust of people in them. Building trust, says Cardinali, "is one of the most pressing adaptive challenges of our day."

Marika Pfefferkorn's subsequent chapter (3.2) tells a story of data justice in the Twin Cities as "the opposite of what many governmental bodies, non-profit agencies, private companies and technical assistance providers put forth as 'community engagement.'" It is the story of a school district and police district that pivoted to better, transparent consultation with community constituents in response to initial community outrage that an agreement to share data would lead to racial profiling. The case demonstrates that if community partners are involved when technological solutions are brought into the mix, fair and just data practices can result. Says Pfefferkorn of Midwest Center for School Transformation: "Data fixes generated by systems built on injustice will most likely replicate those injustices.

Communities disproportionately injured by bad data practices need to be at the center of discussions and designing any use of technology that purports to address those injuries."

Trust is key, and respecting communities' agency builds such trust. John Brothers of T. Rowe Price Foundation calls on philanthropy to "find evaluative approaches that help communities use their own data for their own self-determination while at the same time building the capacity of our under-resourced community-based organizations to measure and grow their impact." Rhett Mabry of The Duke Endowment writes about unintended consequences when philanthropy fails to listen to community, describing a disappointing evaluation of a program to increase kinship placements for foster youth: "In our zeal to test this new, promising approach . . . we failed to adequately engage caseworkers to capture their input, before subjecting the approach to rigorous trial." In contrast, the Duke Endowment and partners deeply engaged practitioners and community members when making decisions about how to scale the Rural Summer Literacy Initiative, an unusual multiyear collaboration designed to help United Methodist congregations improve early childhood literacy in North Carolina's rural communities. For example, one early childhood education site intentionally adjusted some of their teaching practices to meet the tactile learning styles preferred by their Native American students (chapter 3.5).

New York University's Criminal Justice Lab also focuses on trust in a case about developing a health diversion tool to address the large intersection between public safety and public health (54 percent of arrestees made five or more visits to the emergency room during the study timeframe). The lab was careful to use language that would encourage people to answer honestly—placing all the questions in a framework of health rather than criminal behavior—in a tool that law enforcement would be comfortable using. The tool garnered promising results from initial testing in Indiana and Illinois.

And the case of Pace Center for Girls, which tracks participatory research back to its roots with W.E.B. Dubois, demonstrates how involving Pace girls and their communities in identifying and pursuing research questions, and seeking feedback as a regular part of evidence building, has increased both the relevance of Pace research and speed to findings. At the same time, it has seeded a culture of deep listening throughout the organization that has boosted girls' self-advocacy and efficacy.

4. EMBRACING AN R&D-LIKE, CONTINUOUS USE
OF DATA AND EVIDENCE

This book will suggest how to be intentional in continuously using data and evidence to innovate, improve program implementation, and assess impact, thinking of it as an R&D function that informs and is informed by strategy. With increasing demand for more relevant, rapid-cycle evidence; the confluence of data science and evaluation; and calls for more frequent testing and learning, it is time to think of evidence as a core process—like an R&D function. In CEO Brian Scholl's wide-ranging chapter on the unfinished business of evidence building, he articulates the promise and pitfalls of evidence building, extolling the need for researchers to "work backward" from practical outcomes to design worthwhile studies.

Working backward from practical and intended outcomes means starting with a **logic model or theory of change** and interrogating assumptions with data to frame test questions. Implementing this testing approach requires **a practice of continuous, disciplined data collection**, guided by the theory of change or logic model. Quality data collection gathers facts and feedback across populations in a given program, including vulnerable and underrepresented groups, to understand respective barriers to participation and success. Supporting strong data collection and use calls for **reliable information architecture** that makes it easy to develop and test hypotheses, develop solutions, and "play back" insights to frontline staff and communities providing the data.

Being intentional about data use and the questions we want to test or evaluate is critical for better and more equitable decision making, for innovation, improvement, and the development of new solutions and to assess impact—all of which should inform and be informed by strategy. Building on elements of continuous learning and classic R&D, this practice includes activities such as developing and testing hypotheses more rapidly, understanding differential impacts on the population served, and grounding test questions in the theory of change or logic model (i.e., How do we know this activity will lead to this desired outcome?).

A range of R&D-like evidence-building activities are illustrated in essays and practitioner use cases throughout this book, including those of criminal justice nonprofit Center for Employment Opportunities, a later-stage organization, that illustrate the value of establishing and staffing internal R&D capacity. Children's media innovators at Noggin (chapter 4.9)

believe the future of education progress lies in giving children access to "digital teachers and role models that [they] truly love." Noggin uses multiple strategies to quickly iterate on content and ensure it continually improves. The case of First Place for Youth highlights their continuing journey to generate knowledge and impact that catalyzes programmatic and system-level impact on one "north star" outcome: life sustaining, living wage employment for youth aging out of foster care.

Meanwhile, the case of Gemma Services, a youth-oriented psychiatric care program, demonstrates how insights were gained to improve student outcomes through their work with BCT Partners. Building on algorithms commonly used by organizations like Netflix or Amazon, Gemma designed recommendation engines sensitive to inherent bias in order to help practitioners make better decisions related to student's needs. This approach produced more precise and contextualized information for practitioners.

Among essayists, Brian Scholl also emphasizes that evidence comes in many forms and the key is "to find the highest quality research appropriate to the question, circumstances and problem, but not shy away from tackling questions that add value even if the research methods aren't the cleanest" (chapter 4.1). Chris Spera, formerly of Abt Associates and now of Arbor Research Collaborative for Health, calls for a shift from evaluating program information for compliance purposes to engaging in a "tug-of-war" between using evidence for learning and program improvement versus accountability (chapter 4.2). University of Chicago's Kevin Corinth and Bruce Meyer offer a research tool that can advance both learning and accountability goals, discussing how the new Comprehensive Income Dataset can better measure poverty by overcoming the limitations of any single data source that measures income or well-being (chapter 4.3).

Meanwhile, coauthors Gary Glickman and Kathy Stack of Tobin Center for Economic Policy at Yale University speak to the need to fund data access, integration, and use across local, state, and federal governments to assess real problems and progress (chapter 4.4). This work is underway with the new federal appetite for a more systemic approach, particularly in education research,[13] as demonstrated by the 2018 evidence act and the Biden administration's related executive orders and guidance,[14,15] and as noted in section 5, with major new federal investments available to fuel more of this work. These combined federal initiatives will help deepen and implement strategic directions, including a focus on connecting strategy with evidence.[16] We also see a need for greater investment in infrastructure to

enable more systemic use of data and evidence across all sectors to increase learning and knowledge. For example, governments should include dollars for continuous learning, research and development, and evidence building as a core part of grants across education and social sector programs.

Remaining essayists zero in on research approaches, some refined in the crucible of COVID-19 response. Neal Myrick, reflecting on Tableau Foundation's grantmaking, observes: "When encouraged and funded well, we saw that research and development (R&D) and the real-time use of data could help nonprofits solve our world's most complex challenges—even during the toughest of times . . . This model for supporting and driving continual learning and change isn't just suitable for a pandemic response—it's a best practice for future social impact work" (chapter 4.5). David Yokum and Jake Bowers, from Policy Lab at Brown University, discuss the power of a pre-analysis plan to ensure the right questions get asked (chapter 4.6). Industry leader Jim Manzi, of Applied Predictive Technologies and Foundry AI, offers insights to guide better use of RCTs in the social sector, highlighting the dangers of drawing conclusions from a single RCT or trying to generalize proof of benefits that are specific to a context. At the same time, he asserts that RCTs may be underused where they can helpfully demonstrate impact and potential for replication (chapter 4.7).

Manzi's observation underscores that we also face a crisis of replication, including challenges with scale and sustainability.[17,18,19] Replication issues may be exacerbated by evaluations focused on research priorities with less input from practitioners and stakeholders. In a 2005 synthesis of the research literature on implementation science, the National Implementation Research Network observed: "All the paper in file cabinets plus all the manuals on the shelves do not equal real world transformation of human service systems through innovative practice."[20] We see an opportunity to better leverage practitioner-level insights throughout this work, from developing, scaling, and sustaining evidence-based interventions to newer approaches that emphasize scaling *impact* rather than programs.[21]

5. REIMAGINING EVIDENCE: EXPANDING ITS DEFINITION AND USE

Our final cluster of essays and use cases speak to expanding both the definition of evidence and approaches to creating it, as well as increasing **use** of evidence by engaging with end users to find out how to make evidence more

actionable. Our authors' ideas aim to help organizations accelerate to insight, collaborate on evidence creation, and increase transparency, what coauthors Jennifer Brooks and Impact Genome Project at University of Chicago's Jason Saul and Heather King call "breaking open the black box" (chapter 5.2).

In chapter 5.1, AmeriCorps's Michael Smith reflects on his experience championing the role of evidence in the past decade, saying: "We must demand that governments, businesses, nonprofits and philanthropies do more to shift the massive amount of dollars to solutions that have measurable evidence of impact." But he wants to see those dollars support a much broader, more inclusive definition of evidence. "We have to also expand our understanding of what constitutes evidence, grow our tent so more diverse voices and perspectives are included and evolve our concept of what classifies as an evidence-based solution from solely programs that meet immediate needs to policy reform that dismantles, disrupts and reimagines the broken systems that have failed far too many."

To build evidence that is more relevant, timely, and cost-effective, we must broaden its definition to include not only statistical but also practical significance, and include input from multiple stakeholders. We must reimagine evidence to consider context, confidence level, size of impact, speed to insight, and cost of implementation. "We have seen [discourse around] evidence play out in many ways recently—from climate change debates, to disinformation/misinformation around COVID-19, to the U.S.'s story on racial justice," say coauthors Veronica Olazabal, BHP Foundation, and the American Evaluation Association's social impact advisor Jane Reisman (chapter 5.3). "Evidence in these broader debates shows that evidence-based decision making is about more than generating proof through credible research efforts . . . it's about diverse perspectives, mindsets, uptake, use and management." Meanwhile, Brian Komar speaks to building evidence for environmental, social impact, and governance (ESG) efforts, identifying four steps for improving the quantity, quality, and interoperability of the information we use as evidence of impact (chapter 5.4).

Companion essays in this section speak to reimagining of evidence building by a variety of actors in multiple fields. The Office of Management and Budget's Diana Epstein observes that the alignment of evidence with strategy "is an opening to bring the evidence-builders and the strategic planners together from the outset. This has typically not been done in Federal agencies, but the Evidence Act offers a new framework within which

evidence-building priorities are aligned with strategy and envisioned together from the start" (chapter 5.5).

Ryan Martin, with the National Governor's Association, speaks to the need for more small-sample studies to find dependent variables—"needles in haystacks"—in the spirit of fostering "a climate in Congress and elsewhere where failure is acceptable, evidence building is prioritized and those running programs adapt based on what has been learned" (chapter 5.6). Meanwhile, Results for America's Michele Jolin and Zachary Markovits describe how evidence is fueling a quiet revolution in cities across the United States that have embraced data-driven transformation, noting that the new infusion of trillions of dollars from the Federal American Rescue Plan,[22] Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act,[23] and Inflation Reduction Act[24] can be used to build the necessary "test, learn and improve infrastructure" we need to address the most intractable problems of tomorrow. Cincinnati and Tulsa are two examples of cities able to use their earlier investments in data infrastructure to respond quickly when the pandemic struck (chapter 5.7).

And Vivian Tseng, formerly of the William T. Grant Foundation and now at the Foundation for Child Development, calls for incorporating the basic principles of democracy into evidence initiatives to give communities meant to benefit from government policies and programs "access to the evidence, a say in identifying which problems require more evidence, and . . . a seat at the table in interpreting the evidence and determining what it means for government action and spending" (chapter 5.8).

The Stanford RegLab case relays the benefits of collaboration in evidence building. It shows how the Santa Clara County Public Health Department teamed across sectors, with academics at Stanford University, to develop the people, health, and information processes for rapid evidence building to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic (chapter 5.9). A second case in this vein shows how collaboration between the Camden County Health Department and nonprofit Camden Coalition, a multidisciplinary nonprofit working to improve care for people with complex health and social needs, advanced the region's pandemic response. The Camden Coalition put their Health Information Exchange (HIE), which connects siloed data across health systems, in the service of the county's COVID-19 response. The positive results have spurred conversation about HIE's broader use to support non-COVID-19 programming and to create a more robust ecosystem of regional care (chapter 5.10).

CONCLUSION

Each of us brings a different perspective to our shared focus on how to achieve better, more meaningful, and more equitable outcomes for communities. Together, we feel a sense of urgency and optimism that, as a nation, we can and will do better. To get there, we will need to turbocharge investments in practitioner-centric evidence building and use, and focus on continuous learning and R&D practices. Many of these practices have taken root in the commercial sector, yet they have not become standard and supported practice in the social and education sectors. It is time for funders to help establish a new norm. They should support practitioner-generated evidence, both for their own use in learning and funding decisions and to help close the data and evidence divide.

In the words of Scholl in section 4: "Evidence, for the most part, is an exercise in innovation: how to make processes work better, how to develop better products or combinations of services." But too often, we lose our way in the process. "When we in the evidence community talk about building evidence, so often our conversation goes to the math and the statistics of it all: experiments, treatment effects, causal estimates, randomization protocols, and so on. Those are so important in so many ways, but also so unimportant in so many other ways."

"In my mind," Scholl continues, "it is the organizations, the institutions and the people that really matter . . . [not] as some kind of easy lip service—the people really do matter. The wrong people at the top (leadership) can dead-end any efforts to generate evidence. Wrong people generating evidence get to all the wrong questions and all the wrong answers using all the wrong methods. Wronged people at the bottom (beneficiaries or constituents) bear the consequences of getting policies and programs wrong. . . . Evidence is critical to getting our work to work."

We agree with Scholl that "marginalizing evidence generation can create distortions that hurt people and society, and can undermine trust." It eats at the core of a functioning democracy. So, we applaud funders, policymakers, researchers, evaluators, and technical assistance providers who are embracing new partnerships with practitioners to create actionable evidence, evidence that is equitable and useful to those closest to problems being addressed. We encourage more to join in this work. And, as AMP Health's Robert Newman notes, "Practitioners, for their part, must recognize their own role: *Our data. Our evidence. Our decisions*" (chapter 2.5).

We hope this book, full of insights, experience, and expertise, will give voice to practitioners and move readers to help advance the *Next Generation Evidence* for greater social impact.

NOTES

1. For Love of Country: A Path for the Federal Government to Advance Racial Equity, *PolicyLink*, July 2021.

2. More details on the convening, including the full agenda, can be found at https://www.projectevident.org/next-gen-evidence-convening.

3. *Show Me the Evidence: Obama's Fight for Rigor and Results in Social Policy*, Haskins and Margolis, Brookings Institution Press (2014).

4. By examining the evidentiary foundations for social and educational programs, and tying more dollars to programs with the most rigorous evidence that they succeeded, these tiered evidence efforts redirected public dollars to programs with greater evidence of impact. See, for example, The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program (US DHHS), Investing in Innovation Fund (i3) (US Ed), two of the thirteen Obama tiered evidence initiatives in Show Me the Evidence.

5. Ron Haskins, "Evidence-Based Policy: The Movement, the Goals, the Issues, the Promise," in Evidence-Based Social Policy: The Promise and Challenges of a Movement, Special Editor Ron Haskins, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676 (July 2018): 36.

6. Britt et al., "Improving Academic Success and Retention of Participants in Year Up's Professional Training Corps.," *Project Evident* (July 2021).

7. Amy O'Hara and Stephanie Straus, "The Civil Justice Data Commons," *Georgetown University Law School.*

8. "Actionable Evidence Framework," Project Evident, 2021.

9. Executive Order 13985, "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government," DCPD-202100054, January 20, 2021.

10. U.S.C 115-435, "Foundations for Evidence Based Policy Act of 2018," United States House of Representatives, January 14, 2019.

11. Project Evident, "Comments to the Office of Management and Budget on Methods and Leading Practices for Advancing Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through Government," United States Office of Management and Budget, July 6, 2021.

12. The updated DEEG will more fully integrate equity into guidance for all aspects of the data pathway, from theory of change creation through data collection and use to data sharing and communication.

13. Adam Gamoran and Kenne Dibner, "The Future of Education Research at IES," *National Academies Press*, 2022.

14. Office of the President of the United States, "Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking," DCPD-202100096, January 27, 2021.

15. Executive Order 14007, "Executive Order on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology," DCPD-202100094, January 27, 2021.

16. Kelly Fitzsimmons, "Supporting Effective Policymaking through the Development of Strategic Evidence Plans," *Project Evident*, September 3, 2020.

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