SECTION 5

REIMAGINING EVIDENCE TO BROADEN ITS DEFINITION AND USE

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, 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.

—MICHAEL SMITH, "SYSTEMS MUST CHANGE: DISMANTLING, DISRUPTING AND REIMAGINING EVIDENCE"

Empirical data can offer proof points but constitute just one element of the evidence equation. 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, collecting a broader range of data, encompassing participant feedback, practitioner experience, community signs

of change, and more. We must reimagine evidence to allow consideration of context, confidence level, size of impact, speed to insight, and cost of implementation. This is especially critical for state, local, and federal agencies as an influx of federal dollars flows to rebuild U.S. infrastructure.

In this section, author Michael Smith speaks to expanding our classifications of evidence to include a greater range of thought and diversity of contributors, and a broader definition of evidence-based solutions. The latter should include policy reform that disrupts and reinvents failed systems. Co-authors Jennifer Brooks, Jason Saul, and Heather King describe the next phase of evidence-based practice as designed with end users in mind to ensure application, a variation on Scholl's call to work backward. Coauthors Veronica Olazabal and Jane Reisman note increasing use of evidence in policy debates to misinform or disinform, and the need for contextualization that relies on more than mimicking scientific methods. Meanwhile, Brian Komar speaks to building evidence for environmental, social impact, and governance (ESG) efforts.

Focusing on government, Diana Epstein underscores the Evidence act's call to federal agencies to better connect evidence with strategy. Ryan Martin 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." Next, Michele Jolin and Zachary Markovits describe a quiet revolution in cities across the United States as they have embraced data-driven transformation to solve intractable problems like the opioid crisis. Vivian Tseng closes out this collection of essays with calls for a movement to democratize evidence-building away from elite powers that shape it today.

In use cases, the Stanford RegLab-Santa Clara County and Camden Coalition both demonstrate the power of cross-sector collaboration in evidence building in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a funder, United Health Care shares its strategy of partnering with community organizations to address social determinants of health by identifying those committed to outcomes, building evaluation plans with them and providing the funds to execute plans.

Questions raised and addressed in this section include:

1. How can we expand the definition of what counts as evidence?

2. How can we broaden who is included in evidence building to solve problems collaboratively?

3. What intractable problems can we tackle with a broader definition of evidence?