

FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan



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I. Introduction

The SBA recognizes the importance of evidence and evaluation to understand and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its programs and operations in pursuit of the Agency’s mission. To support evaluation planning, the SBA has established an Annual Evaluation Plan (AEP) in alignment with the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act*.¹ The AEP identifies the evaluation questions the Agency plans to complete through the next fiscal year.

New program evaluations are selected annually through consultations with SBA program leadership, review and development by internal program evaluators and management, and coordination with external stakeholders, including the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The evaluations are designed to meet SBA priorities, answer research questions in the Enterprise Learning Agenda (ELA), and build a suite of evidence to inform decision-making. Evaluations highlighted in this AEP reflect the most significant planned evaluations for FY 2024. The SBA defines evaluations as “significant” based on how they align with its mission, as reflected in its *FY 2022–2026 Strategic Plan* and their ability to fill important knowledge gaps that, when addressed, will most strongly support program improvement and impact small businesses and other Agency stakeholders.

Agency program evaluations follow the *SBA Framework and Guidelines for Program Evaluation at the US Small Business Administration*.² They include a broad range of evaluation types, from evaluability assessments to impact evaluations, to best answer the questions posed. To ensure actionable results, the SBA’s evaluations follow the principles of ethics, independence, rigor, relevance, and transparency. These principles reflect standards in OMB Memo M-20-12.³

After the SBA completes an evaluation, it conducts pre-dissemination review with the Evaluation Officer, Performance Improvement Officer, and Associate Administrator of the evaluated program’s respective office. The SBA takes actions to help programs transform processes and activities through the evidence gathered by creating recommended action plans, where appropriate. To promote transparency, the SBA publishes its evaluations on its Program Evaluation and Evidence Registry website and presents results to internal and external stakeholders (e.g., presentations to the SBA’s Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice, interagency committees and councils, trade associations, and grantees).⁴

The following sections, organized by strategic objective, provide an overview of the programs to be evaluated, their connection to the SBA’s ELA, the specific evaluation questions for the study, key methods and data, anticipated challenges and remedies, and plans for using and disseminating results in alignment with OMB guidance. The evaluations identified below advance the Agency’s cross-cutting equity and customer-centric design and delivery priorities and build on prior-year and ongoing evidence-building activities. As a result, many of this year’s activities are expected to produce Government- or Agency-wide evidence insights.

¹ www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/4174

² www.sba.gov/document/policy-guidance--framework-guidelines-program-evaluation-us-small-business-administration

³ www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/M-20-12.pdf

⁴ <https://www.sba.gov/about-sba/organization/performance#section-header-6>

II. Program Evaluation: Equity in Procurement

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 1.4: Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all Federal procurement opportunities.

Overview. In FY 2020 the Federal Government awarded \$145.7 billion in contracts to small businesses. Of this amount, 11.01% went to Small Disadvantaged Businesses (SDBs), 4.63% to Women-Owned Small Businesses (WOSBs), 4.41% to Service-Disabled Veteran Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs), and 2.53% to businesses in Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones). These spending levels highlight the opportunity for the Federal Government to award contracts more equitably. Responding to historic spending levels, President Biden has announced the goal of increasing SDB spending to 15% by 2025.

This evaluation will study agency practices that contribute to equitable Federal spending and build government-wide evidence. The study will assess best practices of agencies that successfully contract with a diverse pool of small businesses and strategies that have the potential to increase equity in Federal procurement.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA question:

- How can the SBA advance equitable contracting policies and streamline small business certification to help more underserved small businesses win Federal contracts?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. What activities support equitable Federal procurement spending with socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses?
2. Which activities could be more broadly adopted by Federal agencies to promote equity in Federal procurement?

Data. Interviews, surveys, or focus groups with Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU) heads and senior procurement officials, combined with literature review, will uncover agency practices that promote equity in contracting. Existing administrative records, including Federal contracting spending data from SAM.gov and the SBA, may also be used for quantitative analysis linking agency activities to spending outcomes.

Methods. A literature review, combined with qualitative analysis of interviews or focus groups with agency OSDBU directors and procurement officials will uncover policies and procedures that promote equity in procurement. Additionally, quantitative analysis of past agency awards to diverse small businesses may also contribute to identifying which agencies and practices promote the most equitable spending.

Anticipated Challenges. Quantitative data will be useful in identifying which agencies successfully contract with diverse small businesses but will not be likely to uncover all of the specific strategies that lead to equitable procurement. The SBA will bridge this gap by combining a literature review with quantitative and qualitative data.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. This evaluation presents an opportunity to assess and promote best practices in Federal contracting to drive long-term, meaningful changes that increase equity. Findings will be published online, shared with SBA and OMB leadership and with the Small Business Procurement Advisory Council, and presented to the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

III. **Program Evaluation:** Assessment of SBA's Efforts to Advance Equity

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 1.4: Build back an inclusive and proficient small business contracting base ready to compete for all Federal procurement opportunities.
- Strategic Objective 1.5: Build an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through tailored training and counseling.

Overview. In April 2022, the SBA developed its first Equity Action Plan. The SBA is taking measures to improve access to resources for entrepreneurs and owners of underserved small businesses as directed by Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. The plan outlines key actions for improving access to capital, Federal procurement, disaster assistance, and counseling, training, and service programs. The aim of this evaluation is to gather qualitative and quantitative data to inform ongoing analyses, and assess alignment of interventions, progress measures, and key actions. The SBA will also assess and refine the key actions for improving access to SBA's resources for underserved communities.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA questions:

- Are there barriers that prevent underserved small businesses from accessing SBA programs, and if so, how can the SBA address these barriers to increase equitable distribution of services?
- How can the SBA increase awareness of, ease of access to, and improved outcomes for its programs across the entire demographic makeup of its customer base?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. How effective are the SBA's efforts to reduce barriers, improve access, and create an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem inclusive of underserved communities, through its disaster assistance, training, counseling, and service programs?
2. Which key actions and goals and objectives could be refined to meet the objectives of reducing barriers and improving access to disaster assistance, counseling, training, and service programs for underserved communities?
3. What additional data or performance metrics across key actions could provide evidence to demonstrate progress?

Data. The SBA will assess administrative records and data relevant to the plan's key actions, across SBA offices and programs.

Methods. This evaluation will employ analyses of administrative data from across the Agency.

Anticipated Challenges. The central activity of this evaluation is data gathering across SBA offices and their programs, so this evaluation is dependent on effective data sharing. Administrative data may not be available or of sufficient quality to answer the questions. Additionally, this evaluation requires timely stakeholder participation in several of its dependent components: data gathering, data analysis and interpretation, and communication.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. The findings of this evaluation will result in an improved design of SBA's Equity Action Plan, and a logic model for its use across the Agency. These deliverables will facilitate the Chief Diversity Officer's coordination of the Equity Action Plan, including its monitoring and long-term measurement. Findings will be shared with SBA leadership, program staff, stakeholders, and the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

IV. **Program Evaluation:** Community Navigator Pilot Program Outcomes

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 1.5: Build an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through tailored training and counseling.

Overview. The SBA launched the Community Navigator Pilot Program, authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act, to strengthen engagement with businesses that have historically been underserved. In December 2021, 51 hubs and more than 400 spokes received grants to implement the program, which is designed to facilitate access to and participation in Federal small business aid programs, supporting entrepreneurs in starting and growing their businesses, and recovering from the pandemic. A formative evaluation launched in July 2022, estimated to end in February 2024, will further refine the program's logic model, identify barriers and facilitators to implementing program activities (such as outreach events and training sessions), and inform implementation and process improvement efforts as hubs and spokes move toward meeting short-term outcomes. This outcome evaluation builds on the formative evaluation's initial findings and seeks to understand the extent to which all intended outputs and outcomes (short-, medium-, and long-term) were met. Lessons learned from this evaluation are expected to inform Agency-wide counseling and training programs.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA questions:

- How do participant outcomes and experiences differ for new community-based programs (e.g., the Community Navigator Pilot Program), and what strategies from these programs can be adopted to promote equity in the SBA's other training and counseling programs?
- How can the SBA's counseling, training, and outreach programs and services best contribute to the development of an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem?
- How can the SBA increase awareness, ease of access, and satisfaction in its programs across the entire demographic makeup of its customer base?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. How did the Community Navigator Pilot Program support intended outcomes (e.g., increased SBA program participation from business owners within targeted communities, and increased applications to SBA and other Federal government assistance programs) in the short, medium, and long term?
2. How did the Community Navigator Pilot Program hub and spoke model facilitate

- connections between business owners and entrepreneurs in targeted communities to SBA programs and services?
3. How did outcomes vary based on hub, spoke, and business characteristics (e.g., owner demographics, geography, type of engagement model, partner type, entity type, customer reach)?
 4. What are the characteristics of business owners who participated in Community Navigator Pilot Program and business owners who did not? How do outcomes vary for participants and non-participants?

Data. This evaluation will use administrative and program records, including performance data from the COMNAV's data management system, to assess completion of logic model outputs and outcomes. Additional administrative data for a comparison group and data matching efforts may also be requested to gather information on participant and non-participant financial and business outcomes. The SBA will also collect qualitative data from key stakeholders, such as the Office of Entrepreneurial Development and Community Navigator Pilot Program hub and spoke staff. If necessary to assess completion of outcomes, additional performance data may be collected from hubs and spokes.

Methods. This is a mixed-methods evaluation which will employ quantitative analyses of performance metric data as well as qualitative analyses of data collected from key stakeholders.

Anticipated Challenges. Variations among hubs and spokes include entity-type (e.g., business development centers, chambers of commerce, and colleges and universities), geographic reach, and funding tier. These variations may impact evaluation sampling strategies and generalizability of findings. The Community Navigator Pilot Program was tailored to allow hubs to establish and demonstrate progression toward specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound (SMART) goals related to outreach and engagement activities, specific community groups served by the hub and their spokes, and client satisfaction. In addition to these standardized SMART goals, hubs may also have tailored metrics related to their specific projects, which may be difficult to standardize.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. The findings will inform the utility of the Community Navigator Pilot Program model to increase SBA participation by underserved business owners and may provide insight into customer-centric design practices and equitable service delivery. Findings will be shared with SBA senior leadership, program offices, partners, Community Navigator staff, and the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

V. **Program Evaluation:** Outcome Evaluation of the ARP Outreach and Education Campaign for SBA Programs and Services

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 1.5: Build an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through tailored training and counseling.
- Strategic Objective 2.1: Help small businesses recover from the pandemic and become more resilient.

Overview. The SBA has supported the development of a mixed-media Outreach and Education Campaign through the American Rescue Plan. It promotes all SBA resources and services, which may include training and counseling, disaster assistance, capital, and certification programs, among eligible business

owners and prospective entrepreneurs in target communities across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. Campaign activities include improvement of the Community Navigator Pilot Program web pages, marketing using promotional videos, graphic treatments, and audio clips in media. The outcomes of the campaign's marketing, education, and outreach activities are not known; the aim of this evaluation is to provide insights on logic model outcomes such as an increase in awareness of the SBA among the targeted, generally underserved audience during and after promotion campaign activities, views/reach of promotional materials, and increases in unique visitors to the SBA webpages. Lessons learned from this evaluation are expected to inform Agency-wide outreach efforts to support an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA questions:

- How can the SBA's counseling, training, and outreach programs and services best contribute to the development of an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. To what extent did the marketing and outreach activities reach the target populations?
2. Did visits to SBA webpages, online searches, and digital advertisements yield new clients for SBA services and programs?
3. How did the campaign influence awareness for SBA services and programs, broadly and by target audience?

Data. The SBA will use administrative records and data of marketing and media performance metrics for each activity. The SBA will also collect data from key stakeholders.

Methods. This outcome evaluation will use administrative data and data collections to quantitatively examine effectiveness of outreach and marketing activities in increasing participation in SBA programs and services.

Anticipated Challenges. The SBA will rely on data triangulation from multiple databases, including data from vendors contracted for mixed media advertising, EDMIS and possibly other sources that may have varying recordkeeping practices or be of insufficient quality to comprehensively answer the evaluation questions. In addition, there may be difficulty in collecting demographic and geographic data for all 17 populations of interest across all 50 states and Puerto Rico due to low representativeness in some regions, and limited options for identification in programs' client information forms.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. The findings of this evaluation will provide insight into design and delivery of outreach practices to the underserved groups that the SBA and other Federal agencies can integrate into its other programs. Findings will be published on the SBA website and shared with SBA senior leadership, partners, Community Navigator staff, and the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

VI. **Program Evaluation:** Field Operations Performance

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 1.5: Build an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem through tailored training and counseling.

Overview. The SBA Office of Field Operations (OFO) manages a network of 68 district offices that serve as the point of delivery for many agency-wide programs and services. Field operations play a key role in the sustainment of the entrepreneurial ecosystem by providing entrepreneurs access to information, resources, and capital needed to start or grow their businesses. Although district offices support customers through tailored approaches that assess business's needs and curate the appropriate sources of information, resources, and programs, the SBA wants to better understand how its field operations contribute to the success of SBA's capital and contracting programs. This evaluation will explore the role of the district offices within the SBA and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. Additionally, the evaluation will develop a set of performance indicators to align and link strategic-level performance metrics with program offices. This evaluation builds on the 8(a) Business Development Service Delivery Evaluation and other internal service delivery evidence-building efforts.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA questions:

- How can the SBA's counseling, training, and outreach programs and services best contribute to the development of an equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem?
- What are the business outcomes (including access to capital/financing) and impacts of the SBA's counseling, training, and outreach programs and services?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. How do district offices leverage resources to strengthen local small business ecosystems?
2. How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's capital deployment and servicing goals and performance metrics?
3. How do district office efforts contribute to the SBA's small business contracting goals and performance metrics?
4. How can district offices' administrative data be used to demonstrate direct and indirect contributions to the SBA's capital access and contracting programs goals and performance metrics?

Data. The SBA will collect qualitative data from the SBA's Office of Field Operations, SBA supporting offices, and key stakeholders. The SBA will also use program documentation and administrative records, including data from the Goals and Measures Activity Tracking Tool system, various field office and program-specific reporting tools, and performance information reported in the Congressional Budget Justification.

Methods. The evaluation will use a mixed method approach, relying on administrative data and qualitative data collection to document and understand the role of the district offices' efforts in the SBA's capital deployment and small business contracting goal attainment.

Anticipated Challenges. The matrix organizational structure between SBA program offices and the district offices and the absence of centralized customer relationship management and program tracking platforms make it challenging to document and align strategic-level performance metrics across offices. Additionally, the district offices work with and through SBA resource partners, other partners and intermediaries, and SBA offices to promote and provide access to their programs and services. Therefore, active participation and data sharing will be needed to realize the evaluation objectives fully. Finally, variation among district office activities and services is anticipated, which could further complicate the standardization of metrics to be used for ongoing monitoring and continuous improvement efforts.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. Findings from the evaluation will increase the SBA’s ability to monitor and communicate contributions for its capital and contracting goals and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem and measure impact. The evaluation will promote continuous improvement, enable strategic decision-making, and support communication and collaboration between SBA offices. The evaluation findings may also inform future unified platform and customer relationship management efforts. Finally, the findings will be presented to SBA senior leadership, program offices, field staff, and the SBA’s Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

VII. **Program Evaluation:** Disaster Assistance Customer Experience

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 2.2: Help prepare small businesses and rebuild communities affected by natural disasters.

Overview. In 2022, the SBA’s Office of Disaster Assistance was reorganized as the Office of Disaster Recovery & Resilience (ODRR) with an expanded focus on recovery through enhanced coordination among all SBA programs to improve outcomes of recovery and build economic resilience. In line with the Administration’s focus on improving government service delivery and its new role, ODRR seeks to refine how it measures customer experience (CX) across its core interactions with customers. The SBA aims to complete a multi-year assessment of the disaster survivor experience to identify areas of strength and potential improvement in its service delivery. For this first effort, the study will culminate in creating a new customer experience survey tool that will be used to continuously assess and improve disaster survivors’ experience.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA’s understanding of the following ELA questions:

- How do SBA customers feel about their experience with SBA programs and services, and how can the SBA improve this experience, especially for small businesses that are underserved?
- How can the SBA increase awareness of, ease of access to, and improved outcomes for its programs across the entire demographic makeup of its customer base?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. How and when do customers learn of disaster assistance?
2. As customers apply for and gain SBA disaster assistance loans, what are their current experiences?
3. How can the SBA best measure and improve disaster survivors’ customer experience?

Data. The SBA has quantitative data from its prior American Customer Satisfaction Index (ASCI) survey, and program administrative data to support this evaluation.

Methods. To understand disaster survivors’ current experience, the evaluation will involve quantitative analysis of past survey data and administrative records. The study will also consider the past survey tool for CX measurement, OMB’s best practices for CX measurement, findings from the SBA’s prior CX evaluations, and industry best practices for CX measurement. The SBA will develop a questionnaire for

future data collection. The evaluation will also develop recommendations for key touchpoints at which to deploy the survey, and methods of survey deployment.

Anticipated Challenges. Data collection from disaster survivors has been difficult in the past with around a 6% response rate in prior research. The SBA will develop a plan to gain input from this hard-to-reach group, including a sampling strategy and efforts to reduce burden for customers who are undergoing immediate home or business emergencies.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. The SBA will use the results of this study to measure year-to-year CX progress to improve service. Findings will be published online, shared with SBA leadership, and presented to the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.

VIII. **Program Evaluation:** Fraud Mitigation Oversight

Strategic Plan Linkage.

- Strategic Objective 3.1: Strategically manage resources by integrating quality data, evidence, and risk in decision-making processes.

Overview. The SBA continues to strengthen its programs to meet the needs of small businesses while also managing fraud, waste, and related risks. In 2022, the SBA established the Fraud Risk Management Board, a designated anti-fraud entity composed of agency executives and responsible for the oversight and coordination of agency-wide fraud risk prevention, detection, and responsive activities. The Agency also adopted a multi-year strategic plan to implement and sustain a mature fraud risk management program. This formative evaluation will examine fraud prevention, detection, mitigation, and response policies and processes for programs and operations. In addition to documenting changes in fraud response, the evaluation will identify opportunities to strengthen the SBA's communication around the fraud risk framework, assess program office contributions to SBA Fraud Risk Management Strategic Plan goals and objectives, inform fraud risk prevention and detection, and track progress toward any outstanding audit findings.

Enterprise Learning Agenda. This evaluation supports the SBA's understanding of the following ELA question:

- How can the SBA minimize fraud and manage fraud risk within its programs?

Evaluation Questions. The SBA seeks to answer the following evaluation questions in this study:

1. To what extent do the SBA's policies and processes align with leading fraud risk prevention, detection, and response practices?
2. To what extent have the SBA's Fraud Risk Management Board and internal controls contributed to fraud risk prevention, detection, and response?
3. How can existing infrastructure and technology be leveraged to proactively prevent, detect, and control fraud within the SBA's loan and government contracting programs in SBA's current state?

Data. Fraud and risk policies, standard operating procedures, fraud risk training available to staff, desk review (SBA fraud risk artifacts, fraud assessments, etc.), performance metrics, and interviews.

Methods. This mixed-method evaluation will examine the implementation and operational effectiveness of the SBA's fraud/risk management efforts.

Anticipated Challenges. The SBA's Economic Relief Programs are susceptible to fraud risks and vulnerabilities. Given the size of the Economic Relief Programs, resources may be diverted to those efforts.

Evidence Use and Dissemination. The SBA will use the findings to 1) make recommendations for policies and processes that improve fraud prevention, detection, mitigation, and that build an Agency culture of fraud risk awareness by identifying and seeking out continuous fraud risk training opportunities; 2) inform the multi-year Fraud Risk Management Strategic Plan to incorporate more data analytics and more closely align practices with recommendations in the GAO Fraud Risk Framework; and 3) communicate SBA's progress in addressing outstanding audit findings. The evaluation will also identify best practices the SBA can integrate throughout the Agency. The findings will also be presented to SBA senior leadership and program staff, published on the SBA website, and shared in the SBA's Evidence and Evaluation Community of Practice.