

**U.S. Department of the Interior
FY 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan**



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Introduction

The Department of the Interior (DOI or the Department) plays an integral role in conserving and managing the Nation's natural resources and cultural heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people. The Department is the steward of 20 percent of America's lands, managing national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other public lands. DOI works closely with states, tribes, and other partners to help accomplish shared natural and cultural resources management goals across the country. Its wide-ranging programs create economic opportunities and jobs for the American people. The Department has an important and unique mission to uphold and honor the Nation's trust responsibilities and commitments to American Indians, Alaska Natives, and affiliated indigenous communities. Key to this work are evidence-building activities and the results of evaluations which are used to make critical decisions about program operations, policy, and regulations, and to gain visibility into the impact of resource allocation on achieving program objectives.

DOI is building program evaluation capacity that will improve the Department's implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act). The Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan provides summary information on proposed significant evaluations planned for FY 2023. Evaluations use systematic data collection and analysis to address questions related to the implementation of a program, policy, or organizational factors surrounding a program, and for organizational learning and improvement purposes. The planned evaluations will assist in answering priority evidence-building questions included in the Department's learning agenda, as well as other significant evaluations. These evaluation plans support evidence-building for decision-making to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department as outlined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance [M-19-23](#) and [M-21-27](#).

Building Evidence through Evaluation

Evidence includes fact finding, performance measurement, policy analysis, and program evaluation, and the role of each supports the DOI evidence-building enterprise. While evidence, in general, can be used to answer a wide array of questions, it is the role of evaluation, specifically, to provide insights into questions of effectiveness or efficiency regarding the programs being implemented in carrying out the DOI mission. The Evidence Act emphasizes collaboration and coordination to advance data and evidence-building functions and the DOI Evaluation Policy provides guidance on the conduct of evidence building activities aligned with evaluation standards in OMB [M-20-12](#).

The Department is developing the capacity to support program evaluations and building the knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct these activities at the Department, bureau, office, and field levels. Based on the FY 2022-2026 Capacity Assessment, DOI currently has an underdeveloped evaluation capacity. To provide initial evaluation expertise and lay the groundwork for continuing to build evaluation capabilities, DOI should have a program evaluator to lead and facilitate these efforts. The DOI has requested FY 2023 funds specifically

for program evaluation which will provide resources to coordinate and facilitate evaluation activities. A key success factor to improving DOI's evaluation culture is developing evaluation expertise and capacity within the evidence and evaluation community among bureaus and offices. The evaluations described in this plan will be conducted as DOI continues to build and improve evaluation capacity.

Significant Program Evaluations

The Department's evaluation policy allows latitude for bureaus and offices to define "significant" evaluations based on their own needs. However, DOI generally defines a significant program evaluation as an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of programs, policies, or organizations intended to assess their effectiveness and impacts supporting or connected with one or more of the following.

- DOI Learning Agenda
- DOI Agency Priority or Agency Priority Goals (APGs)
- Cross-DOI or Cross-Government priority or initiative
- Congressional, Government Accountability Office (GAO), or Office of the Inspector General (OIG) high risk or high interest priority

The evaluation plans summarize the DOI's significant evaluation activities for a given year. DOI provided evaluation planning guidance with budget formulation requests sent to bureaus and offices. Significant evaluation plans were provided to DOI's Evaluation Officer for review. For FY 2023, significant evaluation plans address components of the DOI learning agenda. DOI anticipates that program evaluations may also be conducted by bureaus and offices based on factors reflecting significant evaluation to their organization as well as recommendations from the GAO and the DOI OIG.

1. Evaluating the impact of DOI financial assistance on species conservation abroad

Evaluation Question(s)

What is the impact and effectiveness of DOI's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) foreign assistance on species conservation abroad? This evaluation will investigate this question from two perspectives:

1. *Return-On-Investment*: What factors predict highest impact and performance that can be used to inform grant-making decisions and program strategy?
2. *Conservation Effectiveness*: What is the known effectiveness and frequency of conservation interventions supported by FWS financial assistance awards for foreign species conservation in Africa, Asia, and/or Latin America?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

In order to support the implementation of the Foreign Aid Transparency and Accountability Act of 2016 (FATAA), the Evidence Act, and Administration priorities, the FWS's International Affairs Program has been proactively engaged with OMB and partners to pilot new techniques to develop measurable outcomes for the agency's foreign assistance programs and to assess the effectiveness and impact of financial assistance on foreign species conservation. Evidence generated from this evaluation will enable more effectively support the health and recovery of endangered species; leveraging long-term planning and forecasting in planning for climate impacts on species, habitats, and ecosystems; and making evidence-based decisions guided by the best available science and data.

This evaluation supports DOI Strategic Goal 2 and Strategic Objective 2.2 (Species, habitats, and ecosystems are protected, sustained, and healthy). Also, Strategic Goal 4 and Strategic Objective 4.1 (People, communities, and organizations benefit from DOI data, science, and information). Data to be gathered includes the following.

1. *Return-On-Investment Modeling*:
 - a. Annual population change derived from sites with repeated population survey data;
 - b. Conservation spend data;
 - c. Relevant covariates (e.g., protected area size, government effectiveness, human population density and gross domestic product);
 - d. Species status, including population data, under varying conservation scenarios
2. *Conservation Effectiveness*:
 - a. Frequency of conservation interventions in DOI/FWS financial assistance awards;
 - b. Effectiveness categories for conservation interventions from evidence clearinghouse.

Plan for Evaluation

Through engaging with key stakeholders (including the evidence clearinghouse, relevant subject matter experts and science-based specialist groups within the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission, and, applicants and recipients of DOI/FWS funds for foreign species conservation) an outcome evaluation to identify the results or effects of a program and an implementation evaluation to document what the program is doing, including the known effectiveness and frequency of interventions.

Challenges

Challenges include uncertainty in the population status of foreign species and data sensitivity; limited data on the effectiveness of conservation interventions; interpretation of results in the context of factors outside of Agency or recipient control (e.g., natural disasters, civil unrest).

Dissemination and Use

Results will be disseminated with partners and to the public in agency data repositories (e.g., ServCat), peer-reviewed scientific literature, and through IUCN Species Specialist Groups, which reach a broad network of authorities and officials in foreign countries, subject matter experts in the field, and other key stakeholders.

2. Evaluating the effectiveness of measuring outcomes of invasive species control

Evaluation Question(s)

To what extent are personnel and methodologies effective in assessing whether invasive plant and animals are under control on DOI managed lands and waters?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

As the largest land manager in the United States, DOI has a responsibility to manage invasive species and reduce their threats, adverse impacts, and spread. Congress, partners, tribes, and stakeholders expect DOI to effectively control invasive plants and animals, particularly those on DOI-managed lands and waters. This evaluation would improve DOI capabilities to report on performance measures, improve operations, and build confidence in the data and its use in decision-making.

Invasive species pose a substantial threat to DOI equities and is a cross-DOI/cross-Government issue in which many agencies, including most DOI bureaus and offices, are involved. There is both Executive-level direction (e.g., Executive Order 13751 - Safeguarding the Nation from the Impacts of Invasive Species (2016)) and strong Congressional interest in Federal invasive species management activities. Invasive species management also intersects with the DOI's Learning Agenda priorities (e.g., invasive species can degrade ecosystem resilience, affect adaptation strategies, and diminish carbon sequestration in the face of climate change). This evaluation supports Strategic Goal 2 Conserve, protect, manage, and restore natural and cultural resources in the face of climate change and other stressors. Data collection for this evaluation will involve results of surveys and interviews as well as review of DOI data management processes and reports.

Plan for the Evaluation

The plan for this evaluation includes:

- Field level surveys and interviews;
- Program design/logic model(s) to describe operations on the ground;
- Data gathering and analysis of bureau invasive species data management processes and results from annual reporting of GRPAMA performance measures for invasive species control over time;
- Assessment of monitoring techniques (post-treatment effectiveness, population suppression, meeting resource management objectives); and,
- Policy review (as it pertains to control, data management, monitoring, and associated training).

Challenges

Challenges for conducting this evaluation include adequate resource allocation to complete the analysis. The breadth of the invasive species program is extensive and complex (most bureaus work on invasive species in some capacity, though this evaluation would likely focus on only those bureaus reporting on the control measure). Invasive species management is implemented in various divisions and program areas of a given bureau. Communication with the field varies (e.g., bureaus may not always know who is doing the work or how they are assessing that invasive species are under control). Numerous factors confound the aggregation of data among bureaus. Responsiveness of respondents may be limited.

Dissemination and Use

Results would be disseminated across the Department's invasive species programs at headquarters and field levels for use in staff and contractor training and to inform best practices and methodologies for invasive species data management and for monitoring the effectiveness of control efforts. Results will also be shared with DOI senior leaders for consideration and could be made more broadly available to DOI employees, as appropriate.

3. Evaluating the effectiveness of Wildland Fire Management recruitment strategy

Evaluation Question(s)

How effective and efficient are the DOI Wildland Fire Management (WFM) recruitment efforts for fire management positions? What are the most effective methods to recruit an adequate quantity and quality of applicants? What are the attrition rates for newly hired employees and why? What are barriers or deterrents for potential applicants?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

In the past few years, the Wildland Fire Management program has experienced challenges in workforce recruitment. At all organizational levels, and in external constituent groups, discussion surrounding perceived issues and potential solutions is occurring. To provide clarity to the extent practical, and efficiently utilize appropriated funds, an evidence-based evaluation is needed to inform new and ongoing efforts to recruit quality candidates to meet critical vacancies. This evaluation will assess current recruitment practices and processes from recruitment planning through the first year of employment across the DOI Wildland Fire Program. This evaluation supports Strategic Objectives 2.1 (Lands, waters, and heritage are conserved for present and future generations) and 2.2 (Species, habitats, and ecosystems are protected, sustained, and healthy).

Plan for the Evaluation

The plan for conducting this evaluation includes:

- Surveying human resources staff at multiple organization levels;
- Surveying fire managers and supervisors at multiple organization levels;
- Surveying applicants and new hires;
- Analyzing data from staffing databases and other systems which support recruitment and onboarding;
- Conducting focus group follow-up based on outcomes of surveys and data analysis;
- Reviewing relevant research findings regarding effective best practices for recruitment;
- Consolidating findings;
- Making recommendations for actions needed; and
- Presenting report and briefing fire management leadership on findings and recommendations.

Challenges

Challenges for conducting this evaluation include adequate resource allocation to complete the analysis, challenges of multivariate complex social issue understanding and low to moderate level of cultural bias to accept findings.

Dissemination and Use

Results of this evaluation will be disseminated to OWF leadership, Bureau Fire Leadership and HR personnel as well as the Office of Human Capital within the DOI. Results of this evaluation will be used to support recommendations that improve recruitment strategies for fire management positions. Results will also provide an assessment at a program level of the health of recruitment efforts and identify areas where efficiencies may be gained across the wildland fire program.

4. Evaluating the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration's pilot Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk

Evaluation Question(s)

Are the pilot Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks effective at providing service to beneficiaries as intended? Does the design of the pilot Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk allow for beneficiaries of various ages, geographic locations, and other attributes to access information about their trust accounts more easily? How cost effective are the pilot Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks at meeting beneficiary needs?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

The Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks pilot project was created to extend the Bureau of Trust Funds Administration's (BTFA) customer service capabilities throughout Indian Country. The pilot program was developed to determine if the use of kiosks allows BTFA to provide assistance to beneficiaries in remote and underserved areas. In FY 2021, BTFA initiated the pilot program and went through a lengthy and thorough design process to maximize the usability of the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks.

The Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks were designed specifically to meet the needs of a wide range of beneficiaries. There was extensive research performed as part of the pilot program to ensure that Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks would allow for access to information without barriers for the beneficiaries. The Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk evaluation will serve to determine how the service provided by the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks during the pilot program is delivered relative to its design. This evaluation supports Strategic Goal 1: Promote well-being, equity, and justice for Tribes, American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and insular communities.

Plan for the Evaluation

This evaluation will be an implementation evaluation that looks at the interactions using the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk as part of the pilot program and will collect metrics about the type of request made, the duration of the interaction, and the location where the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk was used. The Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk pilot users will be included in BTFA's survey of call center users and that data will be included in the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk Evaluation. The evaluation will also compare costs of installing kiosks in remote locations with costs to provide additional customer service staffing to beneficiaries in the same geographical areas.

Challenges

If, due to lack of funding, the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosk pilot program is not able to be implemented in the planned locations, the data collected for the evaluation may not produce a large enough population to determine if the Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks are delivering services as intended. It is also uncertain whether users will take the additional time to respond to survey questions at the end of their interaction.

Dissemination and Use

Results of this evaluation would be disseminated to BTFA senior leaders, program managers. Results will also be shared with DOI senior leaders for consideration as part of decision-making processes that affect beneficiaries. The results will inform the future Interactive Beneficiary Kiosks implementation and/or improvements.

5. Evaluating the Earth Mapping Resources Initiative of the Minerals Resources Program

Evaluation Question(s)

How effective are the Earth Mapping Resources Initiative (MRI) activities, data, and products in providing value to stakeholders and end users?

- Who uses or benefits from Earth MRI activities, data, and products?
- How are the Earth MRI data being used?
- Does Earth MRI data deliver any unanticipated benefits to existing stakeholders, such as raising and or answering new questions of importance?
- Are there other potential end-users or stakeholders for Earth MRI that the program could serve?
- What is necessary to ensure long-term value and continued use of Earth MRI data and products beyond current activities?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

The program evaluation seeks to understand who is using Earth MRI data and if it meets the stakeholder needs, and to identify additional uses and users for Earth MRI data and how their needs can be served. Given the early maturity level of this activity, the results of this evaluation are expected to be extremely useful for refining the program as investments increase.

The evaluation will focus on the value and use of Earth MRI-generated science, data, and information to stakeholder communities. The evaluation will focus on the types of data that support the goals of the Mineral Resources Program and their stakeholders: specifically, geologic, geophysical, and geochemistry data. Initial stakeholder focus will include other Federal agencies involved in the Federal Strategy to Ensure Secure and Reliable Supplies of Critical Minerals and the State Geological Surveys who are key partners in Earth MRI data acquisition. Stakeholders considered and consulted as part of this evaluation may expand based on input from the initial set of contacted stakeholders. This evaluation supports Strategic Goal 3: Sustainably balance the use of resources while supporting communities and the economy.

Plan for the Evaluation

Stakeholder groups will be interviewed or surveyed, using standard social science methods, and following appropriate guidance for collection of data from human subjects. The evaluation will:

- Identify current and potential “use cases” for Earth MRI data and products, using both internal subject matter expert input and selected stakeholder input.
- For current use cases, interviews and surveys will focus on identifying what Earth MRI products are being used, how beneficial that information is, and whether different types of data or products that the program could produce would be more useful.

- For potential use cases, cases where scientists or stakeholder believe Earth MRI data should be useful but where it is not yet being used, interviews and surveys will focus more on “bottom up” descriptions of what data would be helpful for those use cases.

The evaluation results will be independent conclusions of the researchers conducting the evaluation. The data collection will be cooperative and iterative, including evaluators, stakeholders, and program staff.

Challenges

The main challenge in this evaluation is the number of steps between the program’s foundational data collection and the outcome-oriented goals of the program. The program has easily measured intermediate outcomes such as “the percentage of the Nation mapped.” Measuring more value-focused outcomes such as “communities and stakeholders have the information needed to make informed decisions about nationwide critical mineral potential” is a new challenge for the program. There are many steps between data collection and decision-making. It is also important that the evaluators understand the Congressional and other constraints on the Program, so that recommendations for improvement can be implemented.

Dissemination and Use

To ensure that the evaluation is a learning experience for the program, significant discussion of the evaluators’ results and conclusions will be planned into the schedule. Results from this evaluation will be communicated to the program, to the Energy and Minerals Mission Area, to the USGS, and to the DOI through a formal report and through presentations as requested.

6. Evaluating Bureau of Indian Education Data and Student Achievement

Evaluation Question(s)

How effectively is the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) data being used to support improving student achievement?

- What organizational processes and data most affect education service delivery?
- What processes and data are being used for decisions affecting education service delivery and what are the outcomes?

Background Information, Strategic Alignment, and Data Planning

The BIE conducts an annual assessment for academic performance (mathematics and reading/language arts), graduation rates, and attendance. However, a mechanism to manage data associated with this assessment and use that information to improve student achievement remains a challenge. To obtain better student outcomes, the BIE structure should include identification of best practices, needs assessments, prioritization of those needs, and data-driven decision making on a consistent basis.

An evaluation would determine the capacity of the program to analyze data associated with management activities, setting priorities, efficient and effective utilization of staff and resources, and effective management of relevant data. This would inform future investments, processes, and data gathering to support student achievement. This evaluation supports Strategic Objective 1.4: Bureau of Indian Education students have the education necessary for future success.

Plan for the Evaluation

This evaluation will employ a process evaluation to identify what processes and data exist and their potential connections to supporting student outcomes. This will inform providers and stakeholders of the connections with current decisions from data and the connection to program goals and objectives. Understanding this, the process evaluation method would identify the extent that program activities have been implemented based on previous data-informed decisions and results related to academic performance.

Challenges

BIE has limited capacity for conducting evaluations and identifying relevant processes and improving efficient data analysis and management.

Dissemination and Use

Results of this evaluation would be disseminated to BIE senior leaders, program managers, BIE schools and Tribes. Results will also be shared with DOI senior leaders for consideration as part of decision-making processes that affect Tribes and students. Results will be published to the public. The results will inform the future processes, data management, and investments at BIE to support improved student achievement.