

Integrating evidence and evaluation

What is evidence?

Where possible, rigorous policy making and analysis will be informed by evidence. Evidence refers to the information used to support an assertion or a position and can include:

- **Research evidence** – derived using empirical methods. It can be one of the strongest forms of evidence to generalise results and demonstrate attribution between a program and its outcomes.
- **Contextual evidence** – information about places, populations, processes or time periods within which programs are implemented. It can help to describe factors that influence what works, for whom, why and under what conditions.
- **Experiential evidence** – perspectives, experiences and knowledge within a context or setting. It can explain program impacts that may not be easily observed through traditional scientific methods.
- **Financial evidence** – information such as monetised values for inputs, outputs and outcomes. It can assist in economic analysis and calculations of a program’s value for money.

How can evidence be gathered?

Evidence for program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation can be gathered from primary (new) or secondary (existing) **quantitative** or **qualitative** data sources. Characteristics of these types of data are shown in the table below.

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
Expressed as numbers	Expressed as words
Helpful for drawing conclusions about aspects of a population	Helpful for obtaining deeper insight into why conclusions are drawn
Collected through primary sources such as surveys of program participants	Collected through primary sources such as interviews, discussion groups and observation
Gathered from secondary sources such as official statistics and administrative databases	Gathered from secondary sources such as media and administrative databases

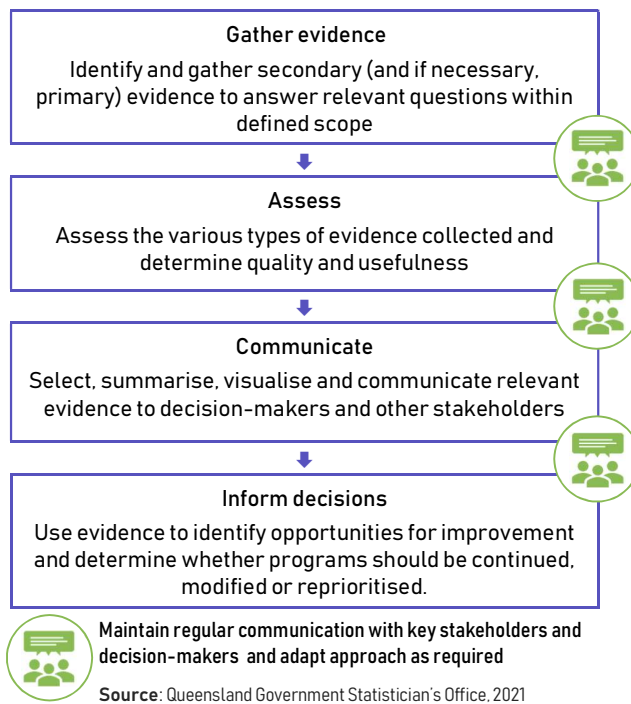
KEY CONSIDERATION

Although quantitative and qualitative data are often presented as mutually exclusive, a mixed method approach (that collects both types) will usually provide more valid and reliable evidence.

How can evidence inform government decision-making?

Evidence is most likely to inform decision-making when it is accessible, relevant and high quality. The pathway from evidence to decision-making typically includes consultation, collection and assessment (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Evidence-informed decision-making process



For example:

In developing the Queensland *Human Rights Act 2019*, policy makers:

- established a need for the legislation (based on evidence and stakeholder consultation)
- set clear objectives
- assessed alternative approaches
- considered key mechanisms for change.

Many governments across the world have established ‘What Works’ centres and evidence labs to improve how evidence is used to inform public policy and practice. Increasingly, those who produce, use and broker evidence work together (in project management offices or research-practice partnerships etc.) to integrate evidence with decision-making.



How does evaluation support evidence-informed decision-making?

Evaluation is one of the most thorough ways to synthesise various types of evidence for decision-making. Decisions on significant government programs increasingly require evaluation frameworks and reporting on outcomes.

Good evaluation enables ongoing learning about programs, beneficiaries and the implementation context. Evaluation is particularly important for new programs, trials and pilots to help determine whether they should be continued, modified or reprioritised.

For example, when evaluating a program where information is just emerging, early **experiential evidence** from a small selection of participants can inform initial program improvements.

Research evidence (commonly drawn from experimental or quasi-experimental evaluations) can be collected about outcomes over time to assess effectiveness, determine value for money and help inform decisions around the program.

Figure 2 shows examples of common evaluation approaches for collecting different types of evidence and what can be assessed by each.

How can the quality and usefulness of evidence be strengthened?

To support decision-making, evidence collected should be fit-for-purpose. Ensure that it:

- matches your measurement purposes
- meets stakeholder and decision-maker expectations or standards for evidence
- integrates multiple types of data (as appropriate)
- manages relevant threats to its validity
- reflects resourcing constraints and timeframes.

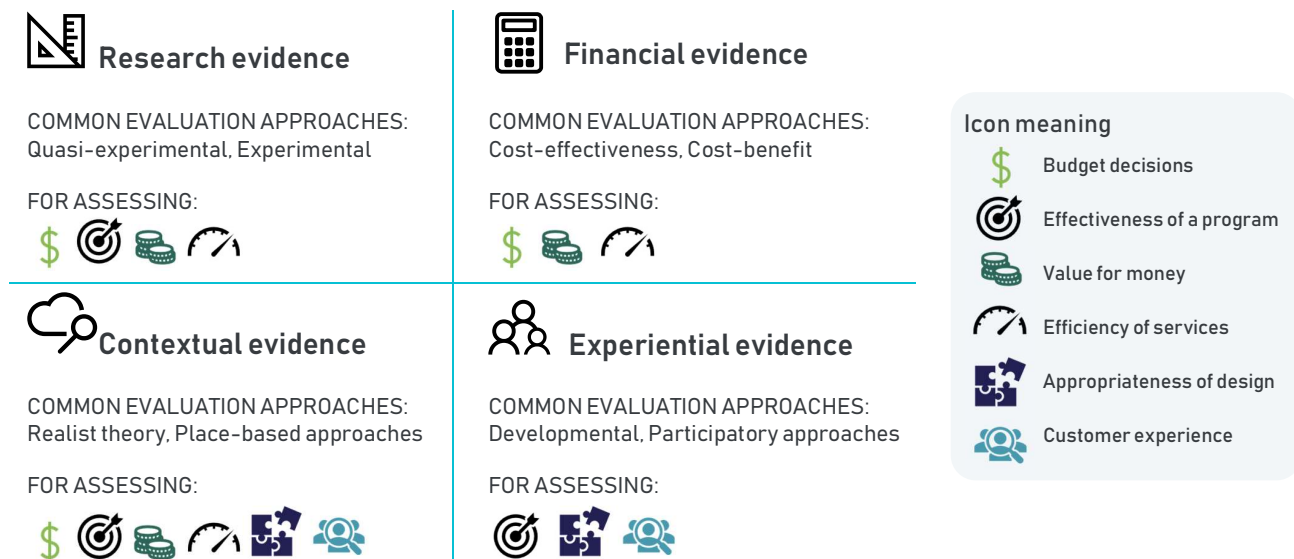
To assess the quality and usefulness of evidence, consider whether data are:

Valid	an accurate reflection of reality
Reliable	can be measured consistently
Credible	representative and trustworthy
Available	current and accessible
Sensitive	reflective of context in place and time

The type, quality and usefulness of evidence collected can also be influenced by:

- the skills and competencies of those collecting, analysing and reporting data
- how and where the program fits within the policy cycle
- the burden of data collection on respondents
- the dynamic nature of the program, context, participants or stakeholders.

Figure 2: Informing decision-making with different types of evidence



Source: Queensland Government Statistician's Office, 2021

