

MOWAT RESEARCH #155 | SEPTEMBER 2017

Bridging the Gap

Designing a Canadian What Works Centre

BY JOANNE CAVE, KENT AITKEN & LISA LALANDE

MowatNFP

MOWAT'S NOT-FOR-PROFIT POLICY RESEARCH HUB



School of Public Policy & Governance
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Acknowledgements

The Mowat Centre would like to thank key informants (see Appendix C) who generously provided their knowledge and perspectives on the subject. Special thanks are due to Stephen Huddart, Laurence Miall, Jayne Engle, James Hughes, Jonathan Breckon, Michelynn Lafèche, Julie Xuan Ouellet, and Deb Shime for their input and guidance.

Thank you to Andrew Parkin, Scott Perchall, Sunil Johal and Reuven Shlozberg at the Mowat Centre for all comments, feedback and support, and to Elaine Stam for design assistance.

Authors

JOANNE CAVE

Social Policy Researcher

KENT AITKEN

2016-17 Prime Ministers of
Canada Fellow, Public Policy Forum

LISA LALANDE

Executive Lead, Mowat NFP

Contributor

NABEEL AHMED

Policy Researcher

ADAM JOG

Policy Associate

McConnell

Mowat NFP gratefully
acknowledges the support of
the McConnell Foundation to
develop this report.

MowatNFP

Mowat NFP undertakes collaborative applied policy research on the not-for-profit sector. As part of an independent think tank with strong partnerships with government and the sector, Mowat NFP brings a balanced perspective to examine the challenges facing today's sector and to support its future direction. Mowat NFP works in partnership with umbrella organizations to ensure our research and policy recommendations are timely and relevant to the sector and reflect its values.

Mowat Centre

ONTARIO'S VOICE ON PUBLIC POLICY

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy think tank located at the School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Toronto. The Mowat Centre is Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. It undertakes collaborative applied policy research, proposes innovative research-driven recommendations, and engages in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues.

MOWATCENTRE.CA

 @MOWATCENTRE

439 UNIVERSITY AVENUE
SUITE 2200, TORONTO, ON
M5G 1Y8 CANADA



School of Public Policy & Governance
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

©2017 ISBN 978-1-77259-054-8

Contents

1	Introduction	1
	The What Works Centre Concept	3
	What Works in the UK	4
	What Works in the United States	5
	What Makes WWCs Different From Other Evidence Institutions?	6
	Evaluating and Applying Evidence	7
	Do They Work?	9
2	Promising Practices	11
	Mandate and Organizational Structure	11
	Relationship to Government	13
	Resourcing and Sustainability	14
3	Making It Work in Canada	17
	Recommendations	18
	Key Milestones	25
	Key Considerations	26
4	Conclusion	28
	Appendices	29
	Appendix A: Acronyms and Glossary	29
	Appendix B: List of Evidence Institutions	31
	Appendix C: List of Informants	32
	Appendix D: Existing Canadian Evidence Institutions	33
	Appendix E: International Case Studies	34
	Appendix F: Examples of Standards of Evidence	36
	Appendix G: Potential Organizational Structures	38
	Works Cited	40

“There’s a gap between research and practice across public services. They’re still two separate spheres. The more we can integrate – from the creation of evidence for what interventions and programs work, to how that evidence is considered in context and implemented – the more effective governments can be.

We haven’t yet done enough to create connection points with the people and organizations who act as bridges - the convenors and translators.

Evidence can only make a difference for citizens if it’s in the hands of practitioners when the decisions are being made.”

JONATHAN BRECKON

Director, Alliance for Useful Evidence, NESTA

1 INTRODUCTION

While evidence-based policymaking is not new, it has gained particular traction in the last decade. Governments, philanthropic funders and nonprofits, facing fiscal constraints, are under greater scrutiny about how funds are spent and what outcomes are being achieved. This has led to a growing patchwork of results reporting, performance measurement, audits and evaluations. A more comprehensive and structured approach to understanding and proving the real-world impact of policies and programs, however, has remained elusive.

To respond to this, the federal government in 2015 made a series of commitments to evidence-informed policymaking and to instilling a culture of “measuring results, innovation and continuous improvement in how government serves the needs of Canadians.” These commitments included creating a Policy on Results¹ as well as a new Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet responsible for results and delivery;² it is also mandated that departments “be clear on what they are trying to achieve and how they assess success.”

Nevertheless, interviews with leaders from government and the nonprofit sector revealed a common concern that Canada has been falling behind other leading countries in using evidence to improve the impact of public policies and programs, and to efficiently use public dollars. As one senior government executive described, “We [often] don’t have the data, or the evidence, or the experimentation to know what impact we’re having.”

Without a sound evidence base to guide the policymaking process, resources can be misdirected, misused or duplicated. Accessible evidence that incorporates frontline experience can help practitioners better understand what actions are truly having an impact, decide which actions could be scaled up to more communities, and inform how funds can be directed in a more strategic way.

1 The Policy on Results outlines performance management, public reporting, expenditure decision-making and evaluation requirements for federal departments to ensure greater accountability.

2 This role is designed to monitor the targets and timelines for the Liberal government’s policy priorities.

Why Evidence-Based Policymaking Matters

"In my experience with community-based policing in Prince Albert, SK, and as part of the human services delivery system of government, data and evidence are critical but vastly underutilized. There is a wealth of information on the root cause issues of crime at our disposal, but we don't link information or supply the business case to change policy or practice.

Data helps us understand the social issues driving crime from a systemic perspective. Trends and patterns in the data guide toward the predictors of criminal activity (e.g. domestic violence, unstable housing) and the appropriate intervention. There is no question that solutions need to be grounded in these four principles: 1) strategic partnerships, 2) data driven, 3) local solutions, and 4) outcomes focused – with a focus on collective outcomes. The data will further show us the evidence of what works from an upstream, early intervention approach to solving wicked social problems proactively, rather than reactively responding to them."

DALE MCFEE

Deputy Minister Responsible for Justice and Policing, Government of Saskatchewan

Research Process

The key findings and recommendations in this paper are informed by a literature review, selection of international case studies of WWCs and interviews with 24 leading Canadian and international experts in evidence-based policymaking. These experts represent WWCs, existing evidence institutions, academic institutions and research centres, research granting councils, philanthropic organizations, nonprofit organizations and federal and provincial government departments. For a full list of interview participants, see Appendix C.

Globally, evidence institutions known as What Works Centres (WWCs) have emerged as a promising tool to get evidence into the hands of policymakers and frontline practitioners when it is needed most, to better link research with practice, and to build capacity for experimentation in the policy development process. In doing so, they act as an important and effective bridge between those who make policy and those who live with the results of those policies.³

Canada could benefit from the creation of a What Works Centre. This paper outlines what such an organization could look like in Canada, and what steps would be required to create one.

The What Works Centre Concept

What Works Centres are an organizational approach to building capacity for evidence-based policymaking and practice. The term “What Works Centre” originated in the UK in 2011 to describe a government-led initiative to enable public service commissioners to access independent, high-quality evidence for a broad range of social policy issues.³

WWCs synthesize research, conduct systematic reviews, lead demonstration projects and design and execute experiments, quasi-experiments and other tests. They also provide a resource for governments, nonprofit organizations and frontline practitioners to access the available evidence for an issue, and may work to improve the evidence ecosystem: either mobilizing evidence for use in policymaking and program design, or building capacity among policymakers to apply evidence effectively.

FIGURE 1
The Role of a What Works Centre



WWCs are often structured as a collaboration among academic institutions, governments and nonprofit organizations. They typically focus on a subsector or issue area (e.g. crime reduction), although some have a geographic focus and address a large range of policy issues (e.g. What Works Scotland⁴). While some WWCs focus on cross-cutting issues that engage multiple government departments, those that focus on more discrete issues with clear paths for influence in policy and practice tend to be more effective.

³ Economic and Social Research Council (2017).
⁴ Please refer to Appendix E for additional information.

What Works in the UK

In the past decade, the UK has emerged as a leader in establishing organizations focused on building evidence. There are currently seven What Works Centres (with another forthcoming) and two Affiliates:^{5,6}

- » National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
- » Educational Endowment Foundation
- » What Works Centre for Crime Reduction
- » Early Intervention Foundation
- » What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth
- » Centre for Ageing Better
- » What Works Centre for Wellbeing
- » Public Policy Institute of Wales/What Works
- » Centre for Tackling Poverty (Affiliate)
- » What Works Scotland (Affiliate)
- » Children's Social Care (Forthcoming)

The early work of WWCs in the UK focused on identifying data gaps (some known, some revealed by adding additional capacity to a given policy area); future work will shift toward generating and mobilizing data.

The UK What Works Centres are part of a centralized, national network with significant investment in shared infrastructure and resources. They cover policy areas representing \$300B CAD in annual public spending. The UK Cabinet Office leads the stewardship of the Network. There is growing interest in expanding the Network globally given the lack of robust and valid evidence on specific issue areas.

The goal of the global network is to identify and share successful and evidence-based models of crime, education, local growth, health and early intervention worldwide.

UK's What Works Network has several requirements for membership, including operating independently from government, having a clear policy focus, sharing evidence for decision-making and focusing on the needs of evidence users and stakeholders.⁷ It is largely composed of charities, but government departments have played an active role in identifying priorities, funding research activities and mobilizing knowledge.

5 UK Government (2016).

6 The Affiliate members are existing evidence institutions that opted to align with the What Works Network under the guidance of the UK Cabinet Office.

7 What Works Network (2015).

What Works in the United States

The United States has also been a leader in What Works Centres, although there are no organizations that formally participate in the UK What Works Network. The US What Works initiatives are largely driven by foundations, rather than government, resulting in less centralized coordination. The US federalist political system has also created a more fragmented evidence ecosystem with local, state-level and national institutions. For these reasons, this paper focuses primarily on the UK What Works Network; but there are important lessons to be drawn from the American context.

Think tanks and philanthropic organizations have largely emerged as American leaders in identifying what works. The Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative (established by a consortium of thinktanks), Institute for Education Sciences' online What Works Clearinghouse and Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy⁸ are all examples of how thinktanks and philanthropic organizations have established successful partnerships to build evidence-based policymaking capacity.

The U.S. Government's Commission for Evidence-Based Policymaking, established in 2016, focuses on partnership infrastructure, statistical methods, legal frameworks, data security and privacy issues related to evidence-based policymaking. The Commission is expected to report back to the President and Congress in September 2017.⁹

In 2015, Bloomberg Philanthropies launched What Works Cities, a national initiative to support 100 mid-sized American cities in “using data and evidence to improve services, inform local decision-making and engage residents.”¹⁰ What Works Cities adapts to the needs and emerging issues in each city. In Chattanooga, Tennessee, the initiative used data to identify outreach strategies that would diversify the city's police force; in Mesa, Arizona, the initiative helped the Mayor's Office identify the most blighted neighbourhoods and redirect more than \$800,000 in resources.¹¹

What Works Cities is a partnership between the UK Behavioural Insights Team, Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab, Johns Hopkins University Centre for Government Excellence, Results for America and the Sunlight Foundation.

8 The Institute for Education Sciences' online What Works Clearinghouse and Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy is now integrated within the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.

9 Commission for Evidence-Based Policymaking (2017).

10 Bloomberg Philanthropies (2017a).

11 Bloomberg Philanthropies (2017b).

What Makes WWCs Different from Other Evidence Institutions?

While each What Works Centre takes a unique approach to mobilizing evidence, they generally share the following principles that set them apart from conventional evidence institutions:¹²

- » Incorporating **social value judgment** by soliciting input from end users¹³ and the general public on moral/ethical issues related to mobilizing evidence.
- » Engaging **end users** in defining problems and research questions, setting priorities and designing and producing research.
- » Applying **evidence in practice** through citizen panels, implementation collaboratives, research networks or demonstration projects.
- » Providing a **backbone for the evidence ecosystem**, including centralized infrastructure (e.g. datasets) and resources/tools for training and capacity-building.

What Works Centres differ from other evidence institutions as they act as bridges between the supply and demand of evidence – addressing the gap that often exists between research and practice. They do so by placing the user of the evidence at the centre of their work rather than the funder or researcher. Users can include policymakers, practitioners, nonprofit organizations, academic researchers and the general public. What Works Centres are unique as they consider populations impacted by the policies and programs as their key stakeholders. Some WWCs include the needs and views of impacted populations in their governance models, mandates, and research agendas (see Figure 2).

What Works Centres have different approaches to engaging end users. The table below summarizes several examples of innovative approaches:

FIGURE 2
Approaches to Engaging End Users

Institution	Example
NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH AND CARE EXCELLENCE (NICE)	The NICE Citizen Council is a panel of 30 members of the general public that represent the demographic characteristics of the UK population at large. The Council provides direction on overarching moral/ethical issues that impact NICE's work, and after each meeting the Council submits a report for the organization's leadership to consider. Council members can serve on a term for up to three years, and meet once annually for a two day session facilitated by an independent facilitator. The meetings are open to public observers and the Council's reports are made publicly available.
EDUCATION ENDOWMENT FOUNDATION (EEF)	The EEF's Research Schools Network is a program to fund a network of schools to apply EEF's research findings in their local community. There are currently 22 Research Schools in the Network, and they share their knowledge and expertise with more than 2,000 schools across the UK. EEF incentivizes participation in the Network through grants and funding opportunities.
WHAT WORKS SCOTLAND	What Works Scotland uses a collaborative action research (CAR) methodology to translate research findings in local "learning sites" in partnership with local service providers and practitioners. What Works Scotland currently works with four learning sites across Scotland to pilot projects related to local public service reform. Each learning site has a professional learning community (PLC) to build capacity.
CENTRE FOR AGEING BETTER	The Centre for Ageing Better undertook a major research project and consultation with seniors to inform its research priorities. The research project included case studies/interviews with 24 participants (follow-up interviews with 12, and participatory photographic essays with six) and a face-to-face survey with almost 1,400 participants.

¹² Ruiz and Breckon (2014).

¹³ End users are defined differently by each What Works Centre, but can include members of the general public, nonprofit organizations, practitioners/service providers, research/academic institutions, policymakers or the media.

Evaluating and Applying Evidence

There is an abundance of evidence in social policy, including systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials, studies and evaluation reports. However, not all evidence is robust or useful for practitioners. What Works Centres add value to the evidence ecosystem through two core functions: evaluating the rigour and usefulness of evidence and putting that evidence into practice.

EVALUATING EVIDENCE

Tools that evaluate evidence (e.g. systematic reviews, certification programs, Kitemarks) help users and practitioners make sense of the vast body of knowledge that is available to them. Evaluating evidence can help organizations prioritize, streamline and focus their efforts and provide technical guidance about robustness, rigour and research ethics in a more accessible format. What Works Centres commonly evaluate evidence using an accepted standard of evidence.

How Do Standards and Hierarchies of Evidence Differ?

Standards of evidence are commonly used in scientific research to rank, or compare, types of evidence. Standards of evidence can be used to compare interventions, develop evaluation plans, allocate funding and improve evaluation practices within an organization.

Several What Works Centres have created their own standards of evidence, while others adopt or adhere to existing standards in the scientific community. For example, the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth uses the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale to rank reviews and reports according to their methodological robustness. See Appendix F for several examples of standards of evidence.

Standards of evidence can have a built-in hierarchy that places value on certain types of evidence above others (e.g. randomized controlled trials, which are frequently regarded as the gold standard of evidence).¹⁴

While a hierarchy can be used in a standard of evidence, it is not required. The standards developed by Project Oracle and the Early Intervention Foundation focus more on the process and application of evidence (e.g. relevant for systems change), rather than its rigour. While some What Works Centres embrace a hierarchy of evidence, others (such as NICE) reject stringent hierarchies, emphasizing that the soundness of the methodology cannot be evaluated in isolation. Many types of evidence can be useful to assess a particular intervention, and the methodology must be appropriate for the research question.¹⁵

¹⁴ Puttick and Ludlow (2013).

¹⁵ Ruiz and Breckon (2014).

APPLYING EVIDENCE

WWCs have very distinct mandates in how they apply evidence and influence policy and practice. The UK What Works approach of exploring individual policy issues is just one way of mobilizing evidence. The What Works Scotland model takes a more regional, participatory focus,¹⁶ while American What Works initiatives focus primarily on capacity-building and common approaches to impact measurement across policy areas.

The UK What Works Network indicates that WWCs should apply evidence in multiple ways, including those outlined in Figure 3.¹⁷

The objectives shown in Figure 3 can be achieved through multiple research activities, including mapping the existing evidence base, consolidating existing evidence, commissioning new research in priority areas, informing the development of new pilot or demonstration projects and developing evaluation frameworks to assess new interventions.

Below are several examples of how WWCs have used evidence differently:

- » The **Centre for Ageing Better** applied existing evidence on age-friendly communities to pilot test a project in Manchester to improve the city's age-friendly policies.
- » The **What Works Centre for Crime Reduction** created a user-friendly research map to demonstrate how their body of evidence maps geographically.
- » The **Early Intervention Foundation (EIF)** created a guidebook that summarizes EIF's assessment of the strength of evidence and its relative costs, and can be filtered online in a searchable format.

FIGURE 3
Evidence Mobilization Cycle



16 Coutts and Brotchie (2017).

17 UK Cabinet Office (2013).

Do They Work?

There is growing evidence to suggest that they are working. But due to significant differences in mandate, function and scale, WWCs define success and evaluate their impact differently - some focus on influencing policy, while others prioritize the practice of frontline service providers. Ideally, WWCs are evaluated on their productivity in generating evidence, the use of their research outputs and their impact on practice and key issue area outcomes. Most WWCs incorporate a rigorous measurement and evaluation framework into their own activities and engage external evaluators. For example, Project Oracle had Nesta lead the evaluation for their organization and work, and advisory boards or Boards of Directors oversee many other WWCs' results.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), as one of the UK's most established WWCs, has a mandate to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children and families. Since its founding in 2011, EEF has increased the scale, visibility and utilization of its research publications. In 2016, 60 per cent of schools surveyed indicated that they used EEF's Teaching and Learning Toolkit to improve educational outcomes - an increase from 11 per cent in 2012.¹⁸ WWCs in the UK have also surfaced important findings on everything from domestic violence interventions to crime reduction and employment training, supporting the development of evidence-based policy in their respective ministry;¹⁹ as a result, the UK is now renewing funding for WWCs. What Works Scotland received a fourth year of funding, and is currently developing the proof of concept that is needed to secure longer-term funding.

WWCs can also have an impact on the culture of the public service. Although the US-based Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy is now defunct, it had a significant impact on the American policy landscape by working closely with executive and congressional officials. The Coalition's work informed the creation of several new federal evidence-based policy initiatives, including the \$109M Evidence-Based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program, the \$1.5B Evidence-Based Home Visitation Program and the \$70M Social Innovation Fund.²⁰

Independent evaluations of the Coalition concluded that it was successful in influencing legislative language, increasing funding for evidence-based programs, shaping the development of the Office of Management and Budget's Program and Assessment Rating Tool and "raising the level of debate" in the policy process.²¹ Similarly, the WWC for Crime Reduction evaluation report noted that more than two-thirds of survey respondents indicated that the Centre encouraged the use of evidence-based practices in their everyday work.²²

Canada has the benefit of learning from steps taken in other jurisdictions in deciding how best to support the expansion of this type of evidence-informed decision-making. These learned lessons, which are outlined in the next section, provide a roadmap for the development of a Canadian WWC.

18 Education Endowment Foundation (2016).

19 What Works Network (2014).

20 Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2015).

21 Herk (2009).

22 Hunter et al. (2015).

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, is kneeling in a grassy field. She is holding a young tree sapling with both hands. A young child with blonde hair, wearing a blue sweater and red and white patterned gloves, is also kneeling and holding the sapling. The child is wearing sunglasses. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green grass and a blurred background of other people. The text is overlaid on a dark, semi-transparent rectangular area in the center of the image.

The most effective
What Works
Centres create a
culture where pilot
demonstration
projects are used
for rapid prototyping
and ongoing iteration
and feedback.
Experimentation is
seen as a crucial part
of proving long-term
value for money.

2 PROMISING PRACTICES

This section draws on lessons learned from case studies in international jurisdictions and key findings from interviews with both Canadian and international experts in evidence-based policymaking. The case studies are discussed in further detail in Appendix E, and each has demonstrated a significant impact on the policymaking process. While their mandates, organizational structure and relationship to government differ, they offer valuable lessons for the Canadian context.

Mandate and Organizational Structure

Users must be central to the work of a What Works Centre

The users of WWCs can include policymakers, practitioners, nonprofit organizations, academic researchers and members of the general public, and the practical application of evidence should drive a WWC's approach and work.²³ However, the populations that are impacted by policies and programs are ultimately the core stakeholders, and their needs and views should be incorporated in a WWC's governance model, mandate and research agenda. Some WWCs include users in their processes to identify research gaps, prioritize research activities and govern the institution.²⁴

Collaborative partnership models have proven to be most effective for mobilizing evidence

In the UK, WWCs are often a collaboration between academic institutions, government departments and nonprofit organizations. These types of partnership models are strategically designed to encourage information sharing between researchers, practitioners and evidence users and to increase research uptake.²⁵ Project Oracle is one example of a strong collaborative effort between a research granting council, municipal government department and philanthropic foundation.

23 UK Cabinet Office (2013), p.5.

24 Puttick and Mulgan (2013).

25 Nutley, Davies & Walter (2002), p.9.

It is essential to align the Centre’s work against a standard of evidence

Many organizations have developed standards of evidence based on academic best practices.²⁶ Standards of evidence help determine the level of confidence with which research and evaluation findings can be interpreted, developing a common framework for an organization or sector to reference. Nesta’s Standards of Evidence is one of the leading evidence standards in the UK (see Appendix F), but it is one of ten standards currently being used by What Works Centres in UK’s What Works Centres Network. This poses some challenges for comparability and the aggregation of data across different interventions and investments. Canada has a unique opportunity to create alignment on standards of evidence early in the design and development of the Centre.

What Works Centres should make space for innovation

Evidence and innovation are often seen to be at odds: how can a government program simultaneously experiment (which entails uncertain outcomes by definition) while reporting on deliverables and value for money? Existing evidence institutions often focus on assessing or validating existing government programs. However, the most effective WWCs create a culture where pilot demonstration projects are used for rapid prototyping and ongoing iteration and feedback; experimentation is seen as a crucial part of proving long-term value for money. For example, the evidence-based policymaking initiatives under the Obama administration earmarked 75 per cent of their resources to replicate and expand programs with a rigorous evidence base, and 25 per cent of their resources to support innovative projects.²⁷

26 Puttick and Ludlow (2013), p.2.

27 Alliance for Useful Evidence (2015).

A Canadian What Works Centre can bring together Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives and data sources

Since the users of evidence are at the core of the work of WWCs, the What Works approach presents a unique opportunity to engage Indigenous populations directly in the evidence process. The interests of Indigenous governments, organizations and communities are a key consideration for evidence-based policymaking in the Canadian context. In particular, a Canadian WWC could contribute to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls To Action that emphasize data-sharing, reporting and accountability to evaluate our progress toward reconciliation.²⁸ A Canadian WWC that incorporates Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives and data sources will have to address issues related to Indigenous data sovereignty; the OCAP® principles (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) developed by the First Nations Information Governance Centre provide a strong foundation on which to build a standard for how data should be collected, protected, used or shared.²⁹

28 The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action 2, 9, 19, 39, 40, 53 and 55 are relevant to data sharing, measurement, evaluation and accountability.

29 First Nations Information Governance Centre.

Relationship to Government

What Works Centres are most effective when they are supported by, but independent from, government

WWCs have different structures in relation to government - some are directly embedded within the government bureaucracy (e.g. the Australian Government's Productivity Commission), while others are constitutionally independent with points of integration (e.g. the UK What Works Centre Network with a National Adviser in the Cabinet Office). The independence, transparency and credibility of a WWC is paramount, and a non-partisan governance structure has proven to be most effective at preserving a Centre's neutrality and depoliticizing the evidence-based policymaking process.³⁰ For example, the UK Cabinet Office offers support to help the WWC Network evaluate each organization's efficacy, but it does not evaluate the WWCs directly. Independence from government is also a membership requirement for the UK What Works Network.³¹

An independent WWC can be complemented with government resources, evaluation tools and access to data. Government data-sharing arrangements would allow a WWC to work with government administrative data on an ongoing basis, as in the case of Alberta which cemented data access for a social policy nonprofit (PolicyWise) as part of their 2013 *Children First Act*. These types of long-term data-sharing partnerships are common in health policy.

What Works Centres should be clearly integrated in the policy process to build a culture of evidence-based policymaking among public servants

While independence and a neutral perspective are important, a WWC likewise needs an explicit connection to the policy process. The ultimate goal of WWCs is to enable better, more effective public policy decisions. While multi-sectoral partnerships are common among WWCs, the evidence suggests that organizations with close relationships to policymakers and the core public service are better suited at addressing this goal.

WWCs have used several approaches to embed their contributions in the policy process. NICE's success can largely be attributed to legislative changes; for example, the UK Department of Health issued a directive to the National Health Service in 2002 to implement new recommendations if NICE published a positive appraisal of a new intervention.

While there are few examples of these types of legislative mechanisms used in social policy, there are other options for accountability measures that can position a WWC as a key part of the policy development process. The UK Government appointed a What Works National Adviser within the Cabinet Office to advise Ministers on the interpretation and use of evidence in the development of new legislation.³²

Financial incentives can also encourage policymakers to work with evidence institutions. In the United States, \$5.5B in federal grants were allocated from 2009-2014 that included

30 Rutter (2012), p.27-28.

31 What Works Network (2015).

32 UK Cabinet Office (2013).

incentives for the adoption of new evidence in program delivery (e.g. the Investing in Innovation (i3) Fund and the Workforce Innovation Fund).³³

Other WWCs addressed the importance of supporting different stages of government policy cycles. Having only a capacity for long-term, in-depth experiments would rule out a role for WWCs in many decisions. Therefore, it became essential for WWCs to have evidence available on shorter timelines.

A strong network of WWCs could also influence the culture of governance. By way of analogy, the development of the Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO) created capacity in the federal government for cost/benefit analysis. Their analyses quickly became an integral part of the media reporting and decision-making process, such that funding decisions would seem incomplete without consideration of the PBO's review. Ideally, a WWC could have a similar level of institutionalization, instilling a culture of outcomes measurement not only among practitioners and researchers, but throughout Canada's public sector.

What Works Centres are most effective when they can provide direct input into program funding and operations – both what is working and what is not.

Ideally, WWCs are directly connected to decision-making processes to allocate funding and shape program operations. The Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative incorporated these principles in their evidence-based policymaking framework, which outlined how evidence should be used in program assessment, budget development and the oversight of a program's implementation (i.e. fidelity evaluation). While it is very

important for WWCs to encourage innovation (and, occasionally, failure), experts advise that WWCs should have the ability to recommend whether programs should be scaled up or decommissioned based on available evidence.³⁴

As the “gatekeepers” of evidence, WWCs have a responsibility to facilitate prioritization, identify benefits and opportunity costs and assist with the allocation of limited resources.³⁵ However, this requires caution regarding “simplistic binary distinctions between the interventions that ‘work’ and those that ‘do not work’.”³⁶ Furthermore, the process to decommission a program or intervention would require extensive data and multiple pilot tests to determine whether a program requires improvements or should be eliminated entirely.³⁷

Resourcing and Sustainability

What Works Centres are most effective with long-term funding sources

In a strategic review of What Works Centres conducted by the Economic and Social Research Council, two key factors were identified that contributed to their sustainability: demonstrable value to their user base (practitioners, researchers and policymakers) and a longer-term funding model.³⁸ Credibility and partnerships are central criteria for success and can only be fully realized with longevity and a track record of impact. For instance, the data-sharing ecosystem that the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) supports took over ten years to develop.

34 Puttick and Mulgan (2013), p.3.

35 Ruiz and Breckon (2014), p.5.

36 Bristow, Carter and Martin (2015), p.134.

37 Puttick and Mulgan (2013), p.3.

38 Economic and Social Research Council (2016), p.12.

33 Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative (2014), p.3.

As many WWCs in the UK approach the end of their initial funding commitments, many are indicating that longer funding cycles are required to effectively build capacity, gain trust with key stakeholders while being insulated from political pressure, establish reputations as an evidence institution and contribute meaningful research to the policy process. As a result, many UK WWCs are recommending a five-year funding cycle rather than the conventional three-year funding cycle for a pilot project.

When WWCs do receive significant government funding contributions, they often include mechanisms to ensure continuity. The UK's Office of Budgetary Responsibility has a five-year budget (instead of annual allocation) to demonstrate the commitment to independence; similarly, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is funded with an endowment from a ten-year grant from the Department of Education.³⁹

39 Rutter (2012), p.27.



“It’s paramount
that What Works
Centres include
communities, and
organizations which
are already active in
those communities.”

JEAN-MARTIN AUSSANT
Directeur général, Chantier

3 MAKING IT WORK IN CANADA

While evidence institutions have existed in Canada for decades, Canada's evidence-based policymaking ecosystem is less developed than some international counterparts, particularly in social policy. Organizations like the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) are contracted by the federal and provincial governments to conduct research and evaluation activities, but there are few centralized national evidence institutions. Health policy fares better, as institutions like the Cochrane Collaboration or the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) have proven effective at collecting evidence, sharing data and validating findings.

Examples of Canadian Evidence Institutions

Ontario's **Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)** has access to a vast and secure array of Ontario's health-related data, including population-based health surveys and anonymous patient records, as well as clinical and administrative databases with which it can perform rigorous studies that evaluate health care delivery and outcomes.

PolicyWise is an evidence institution that mobilizes research and evidence related to child, family and community wellbeing in Alberta. PolicyWise conducts research related to five core themes, and manages several databases for province-wide longitudinal studies and research collaborations. The organization collaborates with many government, community and academic partners, and frequently works with the Government of Alberta to develop research and evaluation strategies that align with policy priorities. PolicyWise's primary funder is the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Community and Social Services (formerly Human Services), alongside contributions from other government departments and philanthropic organizations on a project-specific basis.⁴⁰

The **Social Research and Development Corporation (SRDC)** has been a leader in experimenting and testing what works in different policy areas in Canada. It was initially set up within the former Human Resources and Development Canada. It is now a nonprofit that continues to develop, field test and evaluate social programs in Canada via the use of demonstration projects, randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental methods.

40 PolicyWise (2016).

When compared to the US and UK, Canada has limited capacity to generate experimental evidence for social interventions. Interviewees described a low level of demand from government organizations, for two reasons: limited networks between government and sources of external expertise, and difficulty funding or contracting with evidence institutions. Budget cuts and changes to funding governance within the last decade were identified as root issues in the latter case.

Despite these challenges, there is a strong foundation in Canada upon which a WWC can be built. Canada is considered a world leader in open data, the practice of governments proactively releasing machine-readable data to the public for free, including for social policy and national statistics.⁴¹ The existing open data practice creates a solid base for the data availability and sharing required for partnerships between governments and evidence institutions; however, more work is required to make data available in real or near-real time. In other cases, customized and consent-based data-sharing agreements will often be necessary to supplement open data.

The forthcoming National Strategy on Social Innovation and Social Finance will provide recommendations to scale up Canada's social finance sector, and this will require additional impact measurement capacity to successfully execute on future outcomes-based funding agreements. The Government of Ontario's recently released Social Enterprise Impact Measurement Task Force report calls for a common, sector-wide approach to impact measurement (which is distinct from a common methodology, in that it is less prescriptive about the evaluation questions, tools and outcomes

organizations must measure).⁴² While this shift is specific to the social enterprise sector, it sets a strong precedent for common approaches to measurement impact of interventions with support from evidence institutions.

Recommendations

We recommend a pilot approach be undertaken by the federal government along with other key stakeholders on a specific, highly focused social policy issue that has a clear path already in place to influence policy and practice. This approach could be expanded into a network similar to that in the UK. The nonprofit sector will be a particularly important partner for identifying possible issue areas and research priorities, gathering evidence and testing assumptions.

There are some downsides to creating organizations that are so narrowly focused, as many policy areas are cross-cutting (e.g. health and poverty), and the skillsets required for experimentation and trials specific to a particular issue area may be in short supply. However, a narrow focus would allow the Canadian WWC to refine its research mandate and demonstrate success before broadening its scope.

41 Open Data Barometer (2015).

42 Social Enterprise Impact Measurement Task Force (2017).

ISSUE AREAS

The issue areas we are proposing were informed by interviews and a preliminary scan of the gaps in the existing evidence ecosystem in Canada. The interests of key stakeholders and gaps in the evidence ecosystem will largely inform the issue area for a Canadian What Works Centre. We propose the following selection criteria be used to determine the issue area(s) for a Canadian What Works Centre pilot project:

- » Funder interest and funding availability
- » Political commitment
- » Existing evidence base
- » Political and sector leadership

Internationally, our research indicated that the choice of issue area was largely opportunistic, rather than strategic. If a Canadian WWC is part of the UK Cabinet Office's Global Network, it may be prudent to identify an issue area that remains an evidence gap at the international level. Further stakeholder mapping is required to determine which issue area would be most strategic and impactful in the Canadian context.

The following issue areas emerged as possible options:

FIGURE 4

Issue Area	Potential Foci	Rationale	Key Considerations
EMPLOYMENT, SKILLS AND TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Changing nature of work (e.g. risk of automation) » Unemployment » Job creation » Economic diversification » Re-skilling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Canada’s capacity to attract and train skilled employees is fundamental to our productivity and wellbeing » Mowat Centre’s research on the future of work examined estimates ranging from 1.5 million – 7.5 million Canadian jobs at risk in the next 10-15 years⁴³ » Automation, re-skilling due to economic diversification and changes to the social security landscape are emerging issues in the Canadian context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A What Works Centre in this area would need to consider how to involve the provinces and territories given they are the primary policy actors in skills training and development⁴⁴
POVERTY REDUCTION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Income inequality » Access to education » Intergenerational poverty » Social security » Marginalization (child poverty, seniors poverty) » Homelessness and affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Forthcoming Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy will require evidence capacity for successful implementation » Few evidence institutions in Canada that focus on poverty reduction issues with the dissolution of the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) and the National Council on Welfare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Poverty reduction encompasses a wide range of social policy issues; WWC could have a broad or narrow focus » Opportunity to develop/expand evidence base for emerging concepts (e.g. basic income)
INDIGENOUS WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Physical and mental health » Spiritual wellness » Trauma and healing » Access to cultural supports » Issues facing Northern communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » A significant policy priority for Canadians » Existing evidence ecosystem in this area is limited/underresourced » Several of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls To Action make explicit reference to applying data and evidence to improve wellbeing indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Indigenous organizations could have an important leadership role in this process, identifying research priorities and opportunities to collaborate with existing Indigenous evidence institutions (e.g. the First Nations Information and Governance Centre) » A WWC on Indigenous wellbeing could focus on questions of data sovereignty, governance and incorporating Indigenous worldviews/ research methodologies

43 Sunil Johal and Jordann Thirgood (2016).

44 For further information on this refer to [How to Build a Skills Lab - A New Model of Institutional Governance in Canada](#). Andrew Parkin, Erich Hartmann and Michael Morden (2017).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Organizational structure is one of the most significant decisions for a Canadian WWC and will largely depend on its mandate, funding sources and key partners. The text box below outlines several examples of organizational models for existing evidence institutions:

Evidence Institution Organizational Models

This paper provides several examples of organizational models for evidence institutions, including What Works Centres. Several common approaches emerged:

Collaboration With A Partner Organization

Example: What Works Scotland is “a joint project between the University of Glasgow and the University of Edinburgh, with partners from voluntary and public sector organisations.”⁴⁵ It is funded by the Scottish Government and the Economic and Social Research Council.⁴⁶

Standalone What Works Centre

Example: The Educational Endowment Foundation (EEF) is an independent charitable organization and standalone What Works Centre that was founded by Sutton Trust and Impetus Trust. EEF is funded through a £125 million endowment from the Department of Education.

What Works Unit Within Government

Example: The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) was initially set up within a federal department (then Human Resources Development Canada). It is now an independent nonprofit organization working on a fee-for-service basis.

For additional case studies of organizational models, see Appendix E.

45 What Works Scotland.

46 Bristow, Carter and Martin (2015), p.132.

Interviewees expressed a clear preference for a WWC external to government, with strong participation from public servants, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations and a clear link to the policy development process. While access to government data is an important consideration, the Centre would be more nimble and innovative outside of government and less susceptible to political pressure.

A Canadian WWC could also be situated as an expansion of an existing evidence, research or policy institution. This would require clear role definition and increased capacity to generate and mobilize evidence that complements the organization’s existing mandate. This may be a consideration depending on the issue area identified.

Regardless of where the WWC is situated, federal and provincial public servants should participate in the governance of the Centre and contribute to its design, mandate and research agenda. Public servants could be seconded as Centre staff, in addition to other individuals with academic, research and nonprofit expertise. Successful WWCs have diverse teams with a wide range of skills, including policy, research and practitioner expertise.

For further detail on potential organizational structures of a Canadian WWC, see Appendix G.

ROLES

Developing a new What Works Centre requires leadership from all sectors, not just government. The section below discusses potential roles for federal and provincial governments, academic institutions, the nonprofit sector, philanthropic organizations, research granting councils and existing evidence institutions.

Federal and Provincial Governments

A Canadian Centre must consider the extent of alignment with federal, provincial/territorial, or municipal governments. Impact measurement and experimentation capacity is a pressing issue for the federal government, but most social spending and programming is delivered at the provincial/territorial and municipal levels. A Centre with strong federal support and partnership would require the capacity to engage across the country and across jurisdictions. This could mean incorporating a direct and determinant role for provinces. Additionally, in order to mobilize evidence, involve stakeholders and

inform practice in all areas of the country, the Centre would also need to operate in both English and French.

The federal government is typically engaged as a funding and priority-setting partner for arms-length organizations. This relationship is most effective to address concerns about partisan motivation surrounding questions of policy and program impact. But the benefits to the federal government could be significant; one interviewee suggested that a WWC would “cost a drop in the bucket and be a complete game-changer.” With that in mind, a central agency (e.g. Privy Council Office or Treasury Board Secretariat) may be interested in supporting a general WWC (similar to the US model and What Works Scotland) that would have expertise in outcomes measurement and running experiments, and many line departments may be interested in funding policy area-specific WWCs like in the UK example.

Provincial governments have adopted different approaches to incorporate evidence in the policy development process. Depending on the issue area that is selected, representatives from

FIGURE 5
Institutional Roles



relevant provincial government ministries should not only participate but also play the lead role in the planning and governance of the Centre and, where possible, share data.⁴⁷

Government should establish processes and governance to maximize their capacity to engage with external institutions, including paying for services. A recurring theme in the research was the inability to fund projects with existing evidence institutions on timelines that aligned with policy cycles.

Philanthropic Organizations and Research Granting Councils

Philanthropic organizations and research granting councils are not limited to roles as funders. They are well positioned to steward evidence-based policymaking networks, facilitate collaborative initiatives and support a Centre's capacity in research, evaluation and strategy. While philanthropic organizations and research granting councils often contribute to individual research streams within WWCs, it is also important to diversify general startup funding for the Centre and incentivize other contributions.

The following examples demonstrate how philanthropic organizations have had multiple roles in the emergence of What Works Centres internationally:

- » **Convenors:** The US-based Laura and John Arnold Foundation convened the Evidence-Based Policymaking Collaborative (a network of thinktanks and foundations engaged in evidence-based policymaking).
- » **Funders:** The Early Intervention Foundation is funded by several philanthropic organizations, including the Garfield Weston Foundation and Barrow Cadbury Trust.

- » **Partners:** The Sutton Trust partnered with another foundation (Impetus Trust) to create the Education Endowment Foundation.

- » **Leads:** The Big Lottery Fund was one of the lead partners/funders for the Centre for Ageing Better.

Academic and Evidence Institutions

Existing evidence and research institutions (both academic and non-academic) can contribute their expertise to the development of a Canadian WWC. These institutions (e.g. universities, external organizations and internal government resources, such as Policy Horizons, the Privy Council Office's Innovation Hub, or the Ontario Government's Centre of Excellence for Evidence-Based Decision Making) should be consulted early in the process and actively engaged in the Centre's governance, organizational design and resourcing.

Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofit organizations provide an essential frontline perspective to the development of a WWC and are well positioned to connect practitioners with evidence and contribute data to the Centre's activities. In other jurisdictions, nonprofit organizations have used WWCs to validate their evaluation findings, build their research and evaluation capacity and adapt their programs and services based on available evidence to maximize their impact. Representatives from nonprofit organizations should also be actively involved in the Centre's governance and organizational design.

47 Andrew Parkin, Erich Hartmann and Michael Morden (2017).

RESOURCING

WWC annual budgets typically range from \$1M and \$100M; in contrast, Canadian thinktanks and evidence institutions typically operate on \$3-5M in revenues, with fewer than 20 staff. A Canadian WWC could start small and scale up as it builds credibility, especially if the funding model entails both core funding and supplemental fee-for-service contracts.

Many WWCs are at least partially funded by government organizations, though some have multiple long-term funding sources. Granting foundations, charities, and endowments also contribute to, or in some cases fully fund, other WWCs. The UK Government maintains an arms-length oversight role over the UK What Works Network organizations, and others report to independent Boards of Directors or a similar governance body.

Research granting councils and philanthropic organizations have emerged as the two most significant non-government funders for What Works Centres. The Economic and Social

Research Council (ESRC) in the UK is one of the most significant funders for the What Works Centre Network.

In Canada, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) is an existing evidence institution that functions somewhat like a WWC. SRDC uses a fee-for-service model that relies on contracts with government departments and nonprofit organizations to fund its activities. Project Oracle is an international example of a fee-for-service WWC, in which youth-serving organizations, funders and academic researchers pay for training on how to gather, interpret and use evidence. Fee-for-service models require a business development orientation, but provide a useful metric of user demand.

The table below summarizes the benefits and challenges of three different funding sources: endowments, project-based grants and fee-for-service contracts. While these funding sources are not mutually exclusive, they provide several important considerations for the establishment of a Canadian WWC:

FIGURE 6

	Benefits	Challenges
ENDOWMENTS (Government or Other Funder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Longer-term sustainability » Independent of government budget cycles » Potential for greater independence/autonomy » Funding stability allows for more proactive research activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Difficult to secure (limited funding sources) » Less flexibility if funding is earmarked for a specific issue area/purpose
PROJECT-BASED GRANTS (Government or Other Funder)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Flexibility; allows WWC to be responsive to emerging issues » Multiple project-based grants can diversify WWC's research scope; easier to expand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Can be precarious and unpredictable; difficult to estimate resources for longer-term strategic planning » Can shift with government budget cycles » Shorter funding cycles increase pressure to demonstrate impact quickly
FEE-FOR-SERVICE CONTRACTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Incentivizes funders and partners to work with WWCs » Can increase WWC's focus (engaged to address specific research questions) » Potential for significant growth if demand for evidence is high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Can be precarious and unpredictable » Limited potential to fund WWC startup costs (requires credibility and demonstrable results) » Difficult to sustain as a sole revenue source

Alignment with the Global Network

The Government of Canada should explore opportunities to align with the UK What Works Network to identify opportunities to share evidence internationally. The UK-based Education Endowment Foundation is one such example of a WWC that is actively seeding international partnerships in exchange for information sharing.

The UK's Network has several requirements for membership. There is an opportunity to design a Canadian Centre that meets these international requirements, including that the Centre must:

- » Operate independent from government
- » Have a clear, relevant policy focus
- » Use consistent metrics to assess the efficacy of interventions
- » Disseminate evidence for decision-making
- » Contribute to the process of commissioning programs, services and interventions
- » Focus on the needs and interests of evidence users and key stakeholders⁴⁸

Key Milestones

The process of starting a WWC should include the following milestones. While many of these tasks will occur simultaneously, it is likely that the startup process for a new WWC would require 12-18 months:

FIGURE 7

Milestone	Task
CONVENE POTENTIAL PARTNERS/FUNDERS	Determine mandate/issue area of WWC
	Identify the lead partner/host of the Centre and additional collaborators. Account for respective roles of federal and provincial governments
	Draft partnership agreement(s) that outline roles, responsibilities and funding commitments
UNDERTAKE ANY ADDITIONAL RESEARCH	Undertake a sector mapping exercise based on the issue area identified
DEVELOP BUSINESS CASE/ IMPLEMENTATION PLAN	Confirm funding model and funding commitments
	Outline 3-year workplan and critical path
CONVENE GOVERNANCE/ ADVISORY BOARD	Develop governance model (e.g. leadership group, advisory committee, panel)
	Draft terms of reference for governance/advisory body
	Appoint chair & vice-chair
	Prospect & recruit members
DEFINE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	Develop organizational structure in consultation with existing WWCs
	Prospect & recruit WWC leadership and senior staff
DEVELOP RESEARCH AGENDA	Consult with stakeholders about research priorities/gaps
	Draft research agenda with proposed research streams and activities
DEFINE IMPACT	Develop measurement & evaluation framework to assess impact
LAUNCH PILOT	Hire/second WWC staff
	Launch

48 What Works Network (2015).

Key Considerations

The following questions will be important to consider as the opportunity for a Canadian What Works Centre is further explored:

- a) Who will lead the development of a Canadian WWC?
- b) Which issue area(s) should be selected?
- c) How will end users be engaged?
- d) How can WWC funders collaborate for maximum impact?
- e) Which organizational structure is needed given issue area selected and funding sources?
- f) How will the roles be defined for governance, advisory and implementation?
- g) Which government ministries and departments are well positioned (or required) to support this work?
- h) How will the WWC's success be evaluated? Will funding be contingent on these indicators and, if so, what timeframe will be used for assessment?



This is the time for serious consideration of the evidence infrastructure in Canada, and for high-return investment in understanding what works — and what doesn't.

4 CONCLUSION

The impact of WWCs is very dependent on the issue area, existing stakeholders and legal and policy environment. Even within a particular policy area, the use of evidence was described by several interviewees as being variable over time and dependent on the context in which a particular policy question was surfaced. A strong evidence base does not guarantee the mobilization of that knowledge. Therefore, organizations (such as What Works Centres) that facilitate connections between experts, practitioners and policymakers are vital. Government capacity to understand the best available evidence, and to ask the right questions of external experts, is also essential.

The WWC model is designed to support both the supply of and demand for evidence, to create a neutral, professional body to nudge governments, philanthropic organizations and nonprofit organizations toward greater use of evidence in policymaking, and to foster networks around methodologies and policy areas. Governments and nonprofit organizations have always sought a better understanding of the impact of their work, and this drive has been increasingly prioritized, and formalized in the case of the Government of Canada, in recent years.

Now is the time for serious consideration of the evidence infrastructure in Canada, and for high-return investment in understanding what works - and what doesn't.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Acronyms and Glossary

ACRONYMS

CIHI	Canadian Institute for Health Information
CIHR	Canadian Institute of Health Research
CPRN	Canadian Policy Research Networks
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
NICE	National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCIE	Social Care Institute for Excellence
SRDC	Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
WWC	What Works Centre

GLOSSARY

End User: End users are defined differently by each What Works Centre, but can include members of the general public, nonprofit organizations, practitioners/service providers, research/academic institutions, policymakers or the media.

Evidence: The results of systematic investigation toward increasing the sum of knowledge; research that can be independently observed and verified.⁴⁹ Evidence can be classified into three general categories:

1. Theoretical evidence (ideas, concepts or models, often developed in an academic context)
2. Empirical evidence (data about the actual use of an intervention)
3. Experiential evidence (insight from service users, practitioners or experts in the field).

Evidence can be qualitative or quantitative and collected from a range of sources, including government, independent research organizations, think tanks, service provider organizations and service users.

Evidence-Based Policymaking: The “best available research and information on program results to guide decisions at all stages of the policy process and in each branch of government. It identifies what works, highlights gaps where evidence of program effectiveness is lacking, enables policymakers to use evidence in budget and policy decisions, and relies on systems to monitor implementation and measure key outcomes.”⁵⁰

49 Davies, Nutley & Smith (2000).

50 Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative (2014).

Evidence Institution: Organizations designed to possess the technical expertise to review and produce robust policy research as a resource to the public and policymakers.⁵¹ What Works Centres can be considered a type of evidence institution.

Hierarchy of Evidence: Largely popularized in evidence-based medicine, a hierarchy of evidence is an approach to structuring evidence by the level of methodological rigour. Randomized controlled trials (RCTs), systematic reviews and meta analyses are commonly placed at the top of a hierarchy of evidence as the gold standard.

Impact Measurement: Methods for understanding and reporting on the social, environmental or economic effect or change (either positive or negative, inclusive of outputs and outcomes) that happens to people and communities as a result of an activity, project or policy undertaken.⁵²

Implementation Collaborative: Used by NICE, an implementation collaborative is a group of experts/researchers that focus on applying evidence and translating it into technical guidance for practitioners. The NICE implementation collaborative focuses on system-level barriers that prevent the uptake of sound evidence in the medical field.

Knowledge Mobilization: The “flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers and knowledge users—both within and beyond academia—in such a way that may benefit users and create positive impacts.”⁵³ Knowledge mobilization is also referred to more generally as moving academic knowledge into practical use.

Standard of Evidence: A framework for evaluating and organizing evidence based on pre-determined criteria (e.g. relevance to systems change, methodological rigour). A standard of evidence may be organized as a hierarchy of methods, but it is not required.

51 Mowat Centre (2015).

52 GECEs (2013).

53 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Appendix B: List of Evidence Institutions

The following list, while not exhaustive, outlines the What Works Centres and evidence institutions profiled in this paper. Other evidence institutions were included in our analysis, where appropriate, to illustrate a range of approaches to mobilizing evidence.

UK WHAT WORKS NETWORK

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)
Educational Endowment Foundation
What Works Centre for Crime Reduction
Early Intervention Foundation
What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth
Centre for Ageing Better
What Works Centre for Wellbeing
Public Policy Institute of Wales/What Works
Centre for Tackling Poverty (Affiliate)
What Works Scotland (Affiliate)
Children's Social Care (Forthcoming)

UK EVIDENCE INSTITUTIONS

Project Oracle
Alliance For Useful Evidence

US EVIDENCE INSTITUTIONS

What Works Cities
Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy

INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE INSTITUTIONS

Government of Australia Productivity Commission

Appendix C: List of Informants

CANADIAN INFORMANTS

Jean-Martin Aussant, Chantier de l'économie sociale
Mark Cabaj, Tamarack Institute
Jean-Marc Chouinard, Chagnon Foundation
Blair Dimock, Ontario Trillium Foundation
Stephen Gaetz, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Rodney Ghali and Chad Hartnell, Innovation Hub, Privy Council Office
John Giraldez, Policy Horizons Canada, Government of Canada
Jeremy Grimshaw, Cochrane Canada
John Lavis, McMaster University
Rt. Hon. Paul Martin, Canadians For A New Partnership
Michel Perron, Canadian Institutes for Health Research
Jay Porter, Policy Innovation Hub, Ontario Cabinet Office
Lee Rose, Community Foundations of Canada
Mark Schaan, Government of Canada
Cathy Taylor and Ben Liadsky, Ontario Nonprofit Network
Paul Thoppil, Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Government of Canada
Jean-Pierre Voyer, Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
Brent Wellsch, Government of Alberta
Bruce Lourie, Ivey Foundation

INTERNATIONAL INFORMANTS

Jonathan Breckon, Alliance For Useful Evidence (UK)
David Halpern, UK Cabinet Office (UK)
Tris Lumley, New Philanthropy Capital (UK)
Sarah Morton, What Works Scotland (UK)
Sasha Tregebov, Behavioural Insights Team (US)

Appendix D: Existing Canadian Evidence Institutions

The organizations listed below are examples of existing Canadian evidence institutions or organizations that serve to bolster the existing evidence-based policy ecosystem. The list below is not exhaustive, as there are many collaborations between government departments, academic institutions and nonprofit organizations in Canada that contribute to evidence-based policymaking.

FIGURE 8

Name of Organization	Issue Area	Description
BC Centre for Employment Excellence	Labour & Employment	The Centre acts as a single coordination point for the generation, dissemination of employment research and innovation. It provides support and training on best practices and proven models for the employment service sector as well as the employer community with the goal of improving employment outcomes for all unemployed job seekers in the province.
Canadian Energy Information Organization	Energy	This organization is currently in development under the leadership of the Ivey Foundation, Trottier Foundation and Canadian Energy Research Institute, working with the federal government, to gather and mobilize data and evidence specific to energy in Canada.
Government of Canada Privy Council Office Innovation Hub	Multiple	The Hub is designed to experiment with new approaches to complex policy and program challenges to meet the government's commitment to measurable outcomes, experimentation and evidence-based decision-making.
Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)	Population Health	ICES uses Ontario's health-related data (including population-based health surveys, anonymous patient records, clinical and administrative databases) to perform rigorous studies to evaluate health care delivery and outcomes.
Ontario Centre for Evidence-Based Decision Making Support	Multiple	The Centre exists to build capacity to assess how programs are performing, using evidence to inform choices and lead change in critical public services. The Government of Ontario's new Behavioural Insights Unit will support the Centre.
PolicyWise	Children & Youth	PolicyWise manages several databases for province-wide longitudinal studies and research collaborations and mobilizes research related to child, family and community wellbeing in Alberta.
Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)	Multiple	Initially set up within the former Human Resources and Development Canada, SRDC has been a leader in testing what works in different policy areas in Canada. It is now a nonprofit organization that develops, field tests and evaluates social programs in Canada through randomized controlled trials or quasi-experimental methods.

Appendix E: International Case Studies

The case studies selected below represent a range of evidence institutions (not just What Works Centres). These case studies were selected to demonstrate different organizational structures that may be relevant for the Canadian context.

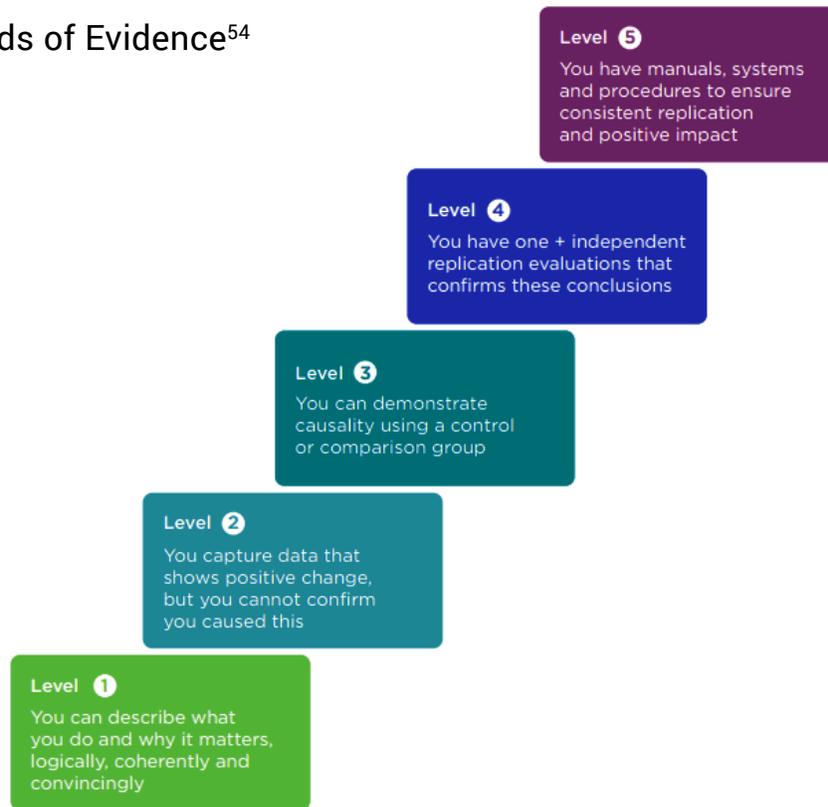
FIGURE 9

Name	Project Oracle	What Works Scotland	Productivity Commission	What Works Cities
Location	London, UK	Glasgow, UK	Canberra, Australia	United States
Founding Year	2011-2012	2014	1998	2015
Issue Area	Children & Youth	Community Planning	Economic Growth	Government Innovation
Mandate	To support youth organizations and funders to produce, use and share high-quality evidence.	To improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.	To provide independent research and advice to Government on economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians.	To support 100 mid-sized American cities in using data and evidence to improve services, inform local decision-making, and engage residents
Organizational Structure	Independent Registered Charity	Academic Collaboration	Independent (Arms-Length) Government Body	Founded by Bloomberg Philanthropies, a Charitable Foundation. Program Partners include: The Behavioural Insights Team; Harvard Kennedy School of Government Performance Lab; Johns Hopkins University Center for Government Excellence; Results for America; and the Sunlight Foundation
Relationship to Government	Government as Funder	Government as Funder	Government as Regulator/Funder (Legislative Mandate)	Government as Client
Number of Staff	5	17	33	--
Operating Budget	£381,000 (2015-2016)	£3.7M (2014-2017); £2.95M contributed from ESRC and Scottish Government (remainder from universities)	\$33.5M (2015-2016)	\$42M (2015-2018)

<p>Primary Funders</p>	<p>Economic and Social Research Council, Greater London Authority, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, Paul Hamlyn Foundation</p>	<p>Economic and Social Research Council, Scottish Government, Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow</p>	<p>Australian Government</p>	<p>Bloomberg Philanthropies</p>
<p>Examples of Projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Evidence Champions training program for policymakers to improve their use of evidence » Validation program for youth-serving organizations » Training programs for youth-serving organizations to improve their evaluation capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pilot projects in local communities based on a regional planning issue (e.g. participatory budgeting, community welfare hubs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Public inquiry on national water reform » Research project on shifts in trade policy » Performance monitoring of Australia's commitments to improve outcomes for Indigenous communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » GovEx at Johns Hopkins University worked with Las Vegas to overhaul performance management system to align departmental goals with City's four priorities » BIT worked with more than ten cities to use RCTs to determine most effective recruitment messaging for police departments to increase applications from people of color and women » Government Performance Lab at Harvard Kennedy School worked with Seattle to pilot new contracting model that restructured \$8.5 million worth of contracts around goal of placing people in permanent housing
<p>Policy Impact</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Engaged with 148 service providers by 2014, and trained 88 providers » Developed a Standards of Evidence that was used to validate 49 different youth-serving projects (as of 2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conducted an evaluation of Scotland's police and fire rescue services, resulting in a shift in priorities and reallocation of resources » Reviewed the evidence on participatory budgeting to inform Scotland's first participatory budgeting process (resulting in at least 58 participatory budgeting processes across Scotland in 2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provided a research report on gambling that influenced legislative changes (Interactive Gambling Bill) » Developed an indicator framework on Indigenous disadvantage that initiated a "whole of government" inquiry into Indigenous issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Since 2015 has engaged 80 mid-sized American cities » What Works Cities partners have trained over 2,500 city leaders on practices and policies to improve their cities' effectiveness

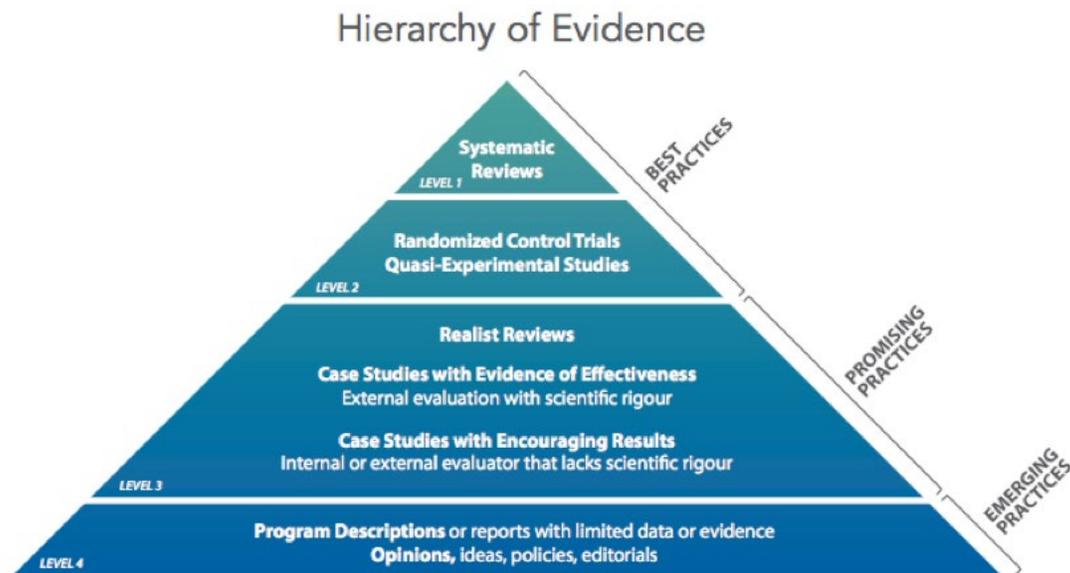
Appendix F: Examples of Standards of Evidence

Nesta Standards of Evidence⁵⁴



Source: Puttick, R. and Ludlow, J. (2012) 'Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing.' London: Nesta.

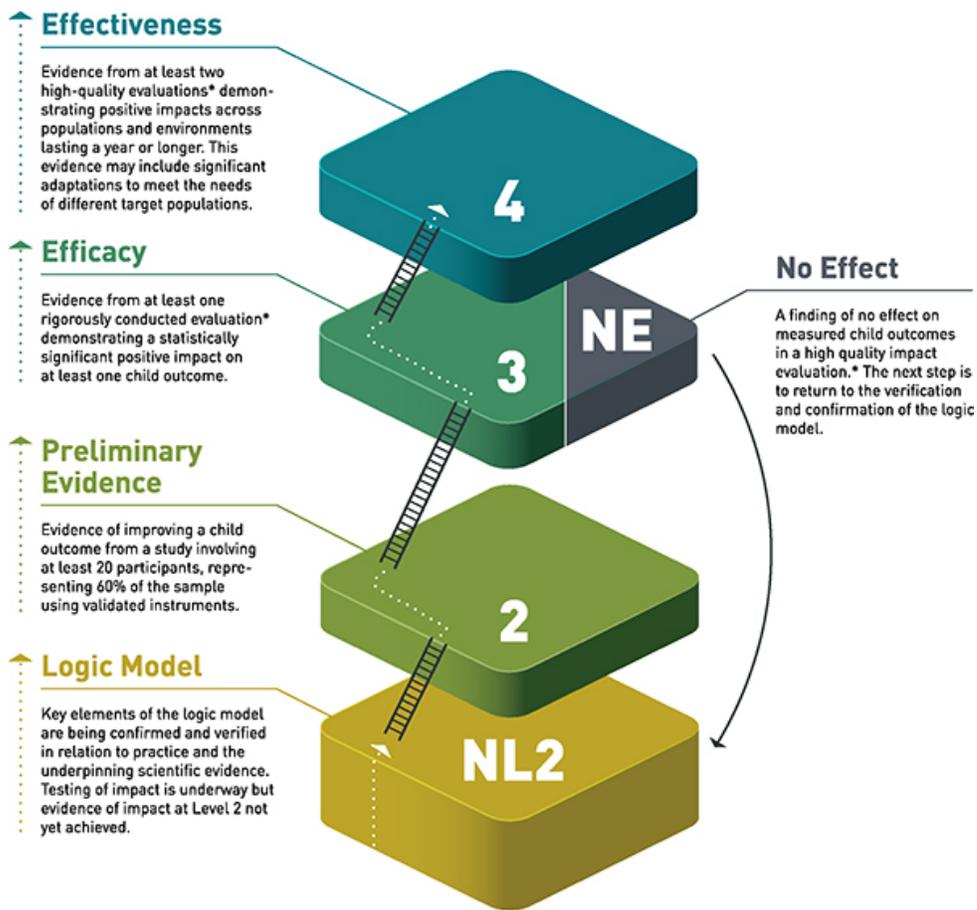
Canadian Homelessness Research Network⁵⁵



54 Puttick and Ludlow (2013).

55 Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2013).

Early Intervention Foundation Standards of Evidence⁵⁶



*High quality evaluations do not need to be randomised control trials if a relevant and robust counter-factual can be provided in other ways.

Project Oracle Standards of Evidence⁵⁷



⁵⁶ Early Intervention Foundation (2017).

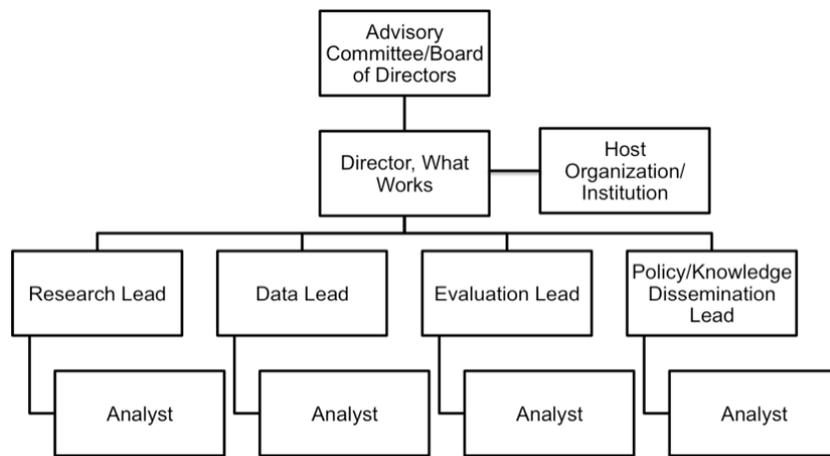
⁵⁷ Project Oracle (2017).

Appendix G: Potential Organizational Structures

The following models were informed by the organizational structures of existing What Works Centres and evidence institutions. These models are intended to be an illustration of the possible design of a Canadian WWC.

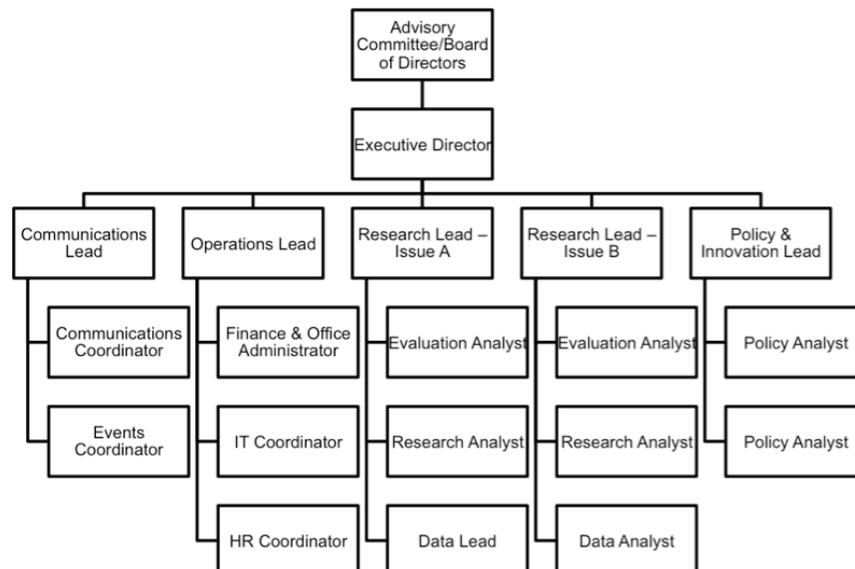
Model 1: Collaboration with Partner Organization

The following organizational chart is based on What Works Scotland and What Works in Tackling Poverty (a collaboration with the Public Policy Institute for Wales) and assumes that core organizational functions (finance, operations, IT and HR) would be housed within the partner organization. This model structures the WWC as a department or unit of the established partner organization.



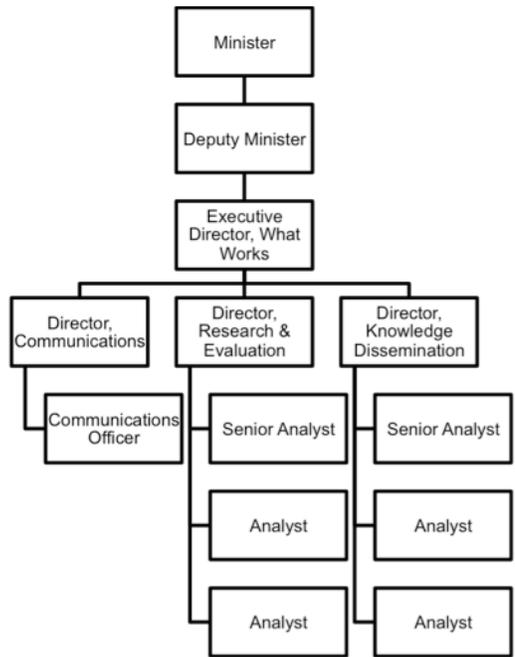
Model 2: Standalone What Works Centre

The following organizational chart is based on the Early Intervention Foundation and Centre for Ageing Better (both mid-sized standalone What Works Centres), and includes multiple research streams within an issue area (Issue A and Issue B).



Model 3: What Works Unit in Government

The following organizational structure is based on Australia’s Productivity Commission as a standalone unit within government and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as a government regulatory authority. This organizational model is accountable to a Deputy Minister and Minister rather than a Board of Directors or Advisory Committee.



WORKS CITED

- Alliance for Useful Evidence (2015). "What is Evidence-Based Policymaking? A View From the U.S." <http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/what-is-evidence-based-policy/>.
- Andrew Galley, Jennifer Gold and Sunil Johal (2013). "Public Service Transformed: Harnessing The Power of Behavioural Insights." Toronto: Mowat Centre. https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/78_public_service_transformed.pdf.
- Andrew Parkin, Erich Hartmann and Michael Morden (2017). "How To Build A Skills Lab." <https://mowatcentre.ca/how-to-build-a-skills-lab/>.
- Bloomberg Philanthropies (2017a). "What Works Cities." <https://whatworkscities.bloomberg.org>.
- Bloomberg Philanthropies (2017b). "2017 Annual Report." https://www.bbhub.io/dotorg/sites/26/2017/05/May_2017_Annual_Report.pdf.
- Canadian Homelessness Research Network (2013). "What Works and For Whom? Part 1 – Hierarchy of Evidence for Promising Practices Research." Homeless Hub. http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/PPFramework_Part1.pdf.
- Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy (2015). "Our Mission." <http://coalition4evidence.org>.
- Commission for Evidence-Based Policymaking (2017). "About." <https://www.cep.gov/about.html>.
- Dan Bristow, Lauren Carter and Steve Martin (2015). "Using Evidence to Improve Policy and Practice: The UK What Works Centres." Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2015.1061688>
- Early Intervention Foundation (2017). "EIF Evidence Standards." <http://www.eif.org.uk/eif-evidence-standards/>.
- Economic and Social Research Council (2016). "ESRC What Works Strategic Review: Report of Stakeholder Survey and Documentary Analysis." <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/collaboration/what-works-strategic-review-report/>.
- Economic and Social Research Council (2017). "What Works Centres." <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/collaboration/collaboration-opportunities/what-works-centres/>.
- Education Endowment Foundation (2016). "Annual Report 2015/2016." https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Annual_Reports/EEF_Annual_Report_2015-16.pdf.
- Francis Ruiz and Jonathan Breckon (2014). "The NICE Way: Lessons for Social Policy and Practice From the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence." London: Nesta. http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/nesta_a4ue_and_nice_paper.pdf.
- GECES (2013). "Proposed Approaches to Social Impact Measurement in European Commission Legislation and in Practice Relating to EUSEFs and the EaSI." European Commission.
- Gillian Hunter, Alexandra Wigzell, Tiggey May and Tim McSweeney (2015). "An Evaluation of the 'What Works Centre for Crime Reduction' Year 1 Baseline." Birbeck University College London. http://whatworks.college.police.uk/About/Documents/WWCEvaluation_Year_1.pdf.
- Huw Davies, Sandra Nutley and Peter Smith (eds.) (2000). *What Works? Evidence-based Policy and Practice in Public Services*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Jill Rutter (2012). "Evidence and Evaluation in Policy Making." London: Institute for Government. http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/evidence%20and%20evaluation%20in%20template_final_0.pdf.
- Michael Morden and Reuven Shlozberg (2016). "Canada Needs A What Works Centre. Here's How We Can Build It." Toronto: Mowat Centre. <https://mowatcentre.ca/canada-needs-a-what-works-centre-heres-how-we-can-build-it/>.
- Monica Herk (2009). "The Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy: Its Role in Advancing Evidence-Based Reform, 2004-2009." <http://coalition4evidence.org/wp-content/uploads/Indep-assessment-of-Coalitions-work-2009.pdf>.
- Mowat Centre (2015). "What Works? Operationalizing Federal Evidence-Based Policymaking."
- Open Data Barometer (2015). "Rankings and Data." http://opendatabarometer.org/data-explorer/?_year=2015&indicator=ODB&lang=en.

Pew-MacArthur Results First Initiative (2014). "Evidence-Based Policymaking: A guide for Effective Government." Washington: Pew Charitable Trusts.

Pippa Coutts and Jenny Brotchie (2017). "The Scottish Approach to Evidence: A Discussion Paper." London: Alliance For Useful Evidence.

PolicyWise (2016). "Annual Report 2016." <http://ar2016.policywise.com>.

Project Oracle (2017). "Validation Against The Standards." <https://project-oracle.com/support/validation/>.

Ruth Puttick and Joe Ludlow (2013). "Standards of Evidence: An Approach That Balances The Need for Evidence with Innovation." London: Nesta. http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/standards_of_evidence.pdf.

Ruth Puttick and Geoff Mulgan (2013). "What Should The 'What Works' Network Do?" London: Nesta. http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/what_should_the_what_works_network_do_0.pdf.

Sandra Nutley, Huw Davies and Isabel Walter (2002). "Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Cross Sector Lessons from the UK." ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice Working Paper 9.

Social Enterprise Impact Measurement Task Force (2017). "Amplifying the Impact of Ontario's Social Enterprise Community: An Action Plan Towards a Common Approach to Impact Measurement." Government and Ontario and KPMG. <https://carleton.ca/3ci/wp-content/uploads/IM-TF-Action-Plan-Report-ENGLISH.pdf>.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. "Definitions of Terms." Government of Canada. <http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#km-mc>

Sunil Johal and Jordann Thirgood (2016). "Working Without a Net: Rethinking Canada's Social Policy in the New Age of Work." Toronto: Mowat Centre. https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/132_working_without_a_net.pdf

The First Nations Information Governance Centre. "The First Nations Principles of OCAP." <http://fnigc.ca/ocap.html>

UK Cabinet Office (2013). "What Works: Evidence Centres for Social Policy." https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136227/What_Works_publication.pdf.

UK Government (2016). "Nicky Morgan Unveils Plans to Transform Children's Social Work." <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nicky-morgan-unveils-plans-to-transform-childrens-social-work>.

What Works Network (2014). "What Works? Evidence for Decision Makers." https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/378038/What_works_evidence_for_decision_makers.pdf.

What Works Network (2015). "What Works Network Membership Requirements." <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-works-network-membership-requirements>.

What Works Scotland. "People." <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/the-project/people/>

